

Fostering Active Learning: An Investigation of Strategies to Enhance Student Participation in Pre-Intermediate EFL Classrooms at the English Training Center

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Abstract

This research examined the techniques used by Pre-intermediate English instructors at the English Training Center (ETC) in Khan Chbar Ampov, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, to boost student engagement in their classrooms. Employing an explanatory research approach, the study collected primary data through structured interviews with six Pre-intermediate teachers at the ETC, alongside secondary data from pertinent literature. The objective of the research was to pinpoint specific strategies that teachers utilize to encourage students to participate actively in listening, reading, and speaking tasks during their English lessons. The results showed that a variety of tactics were used to encourage students to learn, such as utilizing real world materials, introducing enjoyable and participatory activities, and providing lots of encouragement. The survey also emphasized the difficulties teachers have in encouraging more student engagement in reading, speaking, and listening. The article ends with suggestions for additional research based on these findings. To provide a more comprehensive knowledge of classroom dynamics and teacher effectiveness in this context, future research may examine the efficacy of these particular strategies using quantitative approaches or look into how students perceive motivational techniques.

Keywords: Active Learning, Enhance, Participation, Strategies

1.Introduction

For teachers, encouraging pupils to engage in class activities is a constant problem, especially when teaching second languages (L2) (Brophy, 2004). According to Cheng and Dornyei (2007), motivation is a complex, dynamic process that starts, guides, and maintains the cognitive and physical processes necessary to achieve desired results. Research highlights the crucial role that motivation plays in L2 learning. For many teachers, however, converting this theoretical knowledge into effective teaching techniques continues to be a major challenge.

Teachers must inspire students to learn because research has shown that they struggle to get students to participate (Wentzel, 2020). For example, Harmer (2007) found that passive and unenthusiastic learners were common in Hong Kong and attributed this to a number of factors, including a poor foundation in English, insufficient training in elementary school, and student traits like shyness and reluctance to talk. Similarly, Wang (2007) said that her first experiences instructing listening classes at a Chinese university were characterized by disengaged students, with some showing signs of tiredness and inattention. Some pupils appear to have a genuine passion for studying (Davis, 1999). Teachers must, however, encourage students to study by providing them with encouraging remarks (Jonhson, 2017).

Teachers at the English Training Center (ETC) in Khan Chbar Ampov, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, have similar experiences

to these difficulties. Teachers there have noted that, in spite of their best efforts, pre-intermediate level pupils frequently show little desire to participate fully in speaking, reading, and listening exercises in class. This has made it imperative to investigate practical methods for raising student involvement in this particular setting. Teachers should therefore attend professional development sessions and engage in peer sharing in order to learn from one another (Sey, 2023).

Teachers usually struggle to encourage students, particularly those at the pre-intermediate level, to actively participate in speaking, reading, and listening activities, despite the well-established significance of student involvement in second language (L2) learning. This problem is especially noticeable at the English Training Center (ETC) in Khan Chbar Ampov, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where teachers have noticed a persistent lack of student motivation despite their best efforts and where English proficiency is becoming more and more important for academic and professional advancement. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the methods employed by Pre-intermediate teachers at the ETC to increase student engagement in their classes, pinpoint the challenges they face, and compile their suggestions for enhancement.

Giving a thorough grasp of how pre-intermediate English teachers at the English Training Center in Khan Chbar Ampov, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, tackle the problem of student motivation and involvement is the main goal of this study. This will be accomplished by outlining the precise tactics they use to motivate students to read, speak, and listen in their English classrooms, pointing out the challenges they have in inspiring student involvement, and providing examples of their suggested fixes for raising student engagement.

This study adds to a more comprehensive and nuanced knowledge of L2 motivation by offering insightful context-specific information on successful motivational techniques in the little-studied setting of a Cambodian English Training Center. The results will guide teacher practice at the ETC and in other institutions by highlighting effective tactics and enduring difficulties, providing helpful suggestions for raising student engagement and maximizing educational opportunities. The results of the study may also help create focused and pertinent professional development programs for English instructors in Cambodia, which would ultimately improve the country's educational system's efficacy and equity.

2.Literature Review

2.1 Enhancing Students' Confidence in Speaking English

For English language instructors, teaching speaking in a second language (L2) is usually regarded as a difficult task, especially in places like Hong Kong where Chinese is the primary language. As a result, teachers actively look for ways to help pupils become more proficient in speaking (Sellinker and Grass, 2008). In fact, instructors in Hong Kong see teaching the next generation to speak English well as a critical goal that is necessary to preserving the region's reputation abroad. Additionally, in order to progress, educators need to be open to learning new things (Sey, 2021).

Many Hong Kong students, according to Harmer (2001), are passive and unenthusiastic about speaking English. Personality traits like shyness and a reluctance to talk even when urged by teachers, as well as a weak foundation in English and inadequate training at the primary school level, are all blamed for this. Because of this, it is typical to observe that very few kids are able to confidently and correctly answer inquiries from teachers. Effective communicative

teaching is a persistent problem since the goal of creating a student-centered and negotiated learning environment for English instruction sometimes remains elusive (Ortega, 2014). A teacher-centered learning environment in English classes may result from the ensuing lack of student participation. Do educators in Cambodia encounter comparable difficulties? How may the situation be different in Cambodia? To learn how to inspire pupils to learn, teachers must participate in professional development (Sey, 2023). Sey (2023) observed that teachers are unable to improve students' learning outcomes in the absence of professional development.

2.2 Motivating Students to Engage with Reading

The literature highlights a number of tactics to improve students' reading engagement. These include giving students reading assignments well in advance to help them prepare and pique their interest (Lowman, 1984), giving them specific study questions to help them focus and guide their comprehension (Carrell, 1989), and using "survival cards" to have students summarize important ideas for use on tests (Daniel, 2006). Additionally, the use of one-word journals or sentences can promote critical thinking and facilitate class discussion (Bately, 1991), while posing non-threatening questions can encourage participation and reduce anxiety (Carrell, 1989). Furthermore, teachers must set high expectation for students to learn and keep motivating until they want to learn (Sey and Soriya, 2023). Teachers' readiness is important for students. If teachers are not ready to use new things, they cannot transfer their knowledge to the students (Sey, 2021).

3. Method

Using an explanatory research approach, this study examined the methods pre-intermediate teachers at the English

Training Center (ETC) employed to increase student participation by combining primary and secondary data sources. Six pre-intermediate instructors at the ETC participated in structured interviews to gather primary data. In order to offer background information for the study and set the stage for the analysis of interview data, secondary data included a review of pertinent literature, including books, journals, and internet sources.

The participants consisted of six Pre-intermediate teachers at the English Training Center. Selection of participants was based on their experience teaching at the Pre-intermediate level.

A structured interview questionnaire was developed to guide the data collection process. The questionnaire consisted of two sections:

- Section 1: Participant Background: This section gathered demographic information, including gender, age group, and years of experience teaching English.
- Section 2: Open-Ended Questions: This section explored the research questions through three open-ended questions:
 1. What strategies do you use to motivate your students to listen, read, and speak in your English classes?
 2. What difficulties do you encounter in motivating your learners to participate in listening, reading, and speaking activities?
 3. What suggestions do you recommend to increase the level of student participation in listening, reading, and speaking activities?

To increase face validity and guarantee question clarity, the interview questionnaire was piloted with one seasoned ESL teacher who was not involved in the study. All participants received information about the study's goals, methods, and withdrawal policies prior to data collection. All participants gave their informed consent. Three interviewees participated daily in the

director's office over the two days of interviews at the English Training Center. The goal of the data analysis method was to gain a thorough understanding of the participants' common meanings and experiences. The audio recordings of each interview were verbatim transcribed as soon as possible. Depending on the interviewee's option, transcripts were first prepared in either Khmer or English and then translated into English as necessary. A thematic analysis approach was then used to examine the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to find recurrent themes and patterns in the interview transcripts, the researcher used iterative coding. The original codes were honed and arranged into more comprehensive, overarching themes and sub-themes pertaining to the tactics, challenges, and recommendations regarding student participation in speaking, reading, and listening through a process of comparing and contrasting the data.

4. Findings and discussions

4.1 Findings

Research Question 1: What are strategies used by the teachers in the Pre-intermediate level at the ETC to motivate students to speak, read and listen in their English classes?

Based on the interview with the 6 English teachers at the English Training Center, we found the following answers:

For listening, the following strategies were used:

a) Explain key words and phrases – the teachers explain key words or phrases that found in the text before the listening and then the teachers read the text two times and while the students listen carefully.

b) Read the text – after the teachers read the text, the teachers ask the students to volunteer to read the text, and read around the class if the number of the students in the class is small.

c) Play the cassette – after the students finish reading the text, the teachers play

the cassette two times and the students listen to the cassette carefully to make sure that they understand the meaning and information that imply in the text.

d) Give the comprehension questions – after the students finish listening to the tape, the teachers give some questions to the students to check the students' understanding to make sure that the students understand the story or the text. The teachers give limited time to the students to work out the answers and the students work in pair or in group to find out the answers.

e) Act as a monitor – while the students are working in groups or in pair, the teachers are acting as monitors to control the students to find out the answers to the questions. The teachers are walking around the classes to correct or answer the questions which are raised by the students while they are working.

f) Students write the answers – after the students find out the answers, the teachers ask a representative of the group to come to the board and write the answers or stand up and say their answers at their tables.

g) Teachers' comment – finally, the teachers correct some mistakes that the students make and give the right answers and the teachers give the students enough time to copy into their notebooks.

For reading, the following strategies were used:

a) Explain new vocabulary and read – first, the teachers teach the new vocabulary by writing it on the white board that contain in the text or in the passage. Then, the teachers read the new words clearly at least two times and quite aloud to make sure that the students can pronounce and hear it clearly. And then the teachers ask the students who volunteer to read.

b) Do the matching – next, the teachers ask the students to do matching the meaning between English and Khmer, then, the teachers correct some mistakes.

c) Read the text – the teachers read the text or the passage two times to make sure that the students can read the text or the passage and after the teachers read, the teachers allow the students read individually and ask the students who are volunteers to read. If the passage is a long one, the teachers will ask the students to read as paragraph.

d) Comprehension questions – the teachers give the students some questions that are raised from the passage to make sure that the students understand the passage or not. Sometimes, the teachers use skimming techniques to get the information from the passage, in this case, the teachers give some questions before the reading activities and the students find the answers while they are reading the text or the passage.

e) Act as a monitor – at this point, the teachers play a role as a monitor to control the class while students are working in pairs or individually.

f) Students write the answers – the teachers ask each representative in each group to write their answers on the board.

g) Teachers' comment – finally, the teachers correct the mistakes and give the right answers and explain why they are right answers or wrong answers and the teachers give the students enough time to copy into their notebooks.

For speaking, the following strategies were used:

In this point, it would be divided into two parts:

• First part

a) Talking in general – the teachers talk in general situations that relate to their lives or their interests to warm up before the main activity starts, if the topic interests them they really want to speak

b) Dividing groups and discuss – the teachers divide the students into small groups of three or five members and the teachers get the students to choose the topic that they want to talk and the

teachers give the students time to discuss in their groups and think about some words will be used in their topic, if they don't know any words they can ask the teachers.

c) Group presentation – after the teachers give the students enough time to discuss in their group, then, the teachers give a chance to each group to come to the board to talk about their topic. At the end of their presentation, the teachers ask other groups to make some comment if they want to, so this activity allows the students to talk freely.

d) Teachers' comment – finally, the teachers make some comments and some ideas about each topic more detail and correct some mistakes that they made.

• Second part

Another strategy that is in relation with speaking activity, that is, the teachers practice speaking in the course book is in listening and speaking activities, so this is another technique that teachers use:

a) Giving direction – the teachers divide the students into small groups of three or five according to the number of the students in the class and give the students some questions and tell them to work in group and look at the article in the course book and read it, and one more activity students do the listening activity, it means that the teachers give the students some questions before listening to the tape to make sure that students have some clues in their mind before they listen to the cassette.

b) Reading or playing the tape – after that the teachers give the students time to read the article or prepare them to listen to the tape to get more certain information.

c) Discussion – the teachers give the students enough time to work out their answers in groups.

d) Act as a monitor – while the students are working, the teachers move around the class to control the class, in case the students need some help and the students

are working or speaking freely in their groups.

f) Presentation – then, the teachers ask each group or choose a member in the group to present in front of the board. During the presentation, the teachers encourage the students to speak freely, don't think about any grammatical mistakes, but to get real information or real answers to the questions is important.

g) Teachers' comment – finally, the teachers make some comments and correct some mistakes and praise them that they can show their ability in this activity.

Research Question 2: What difficulties encountered by the teachers at the ETC in motivating their learners to participate more in terms of speaking, reading and listening?

Based on the interview with the 6 English teachers at the English Training Center, we found the following answers:

For listening, the following difficulties encountered by the teachers at the ETC:

Most of the students are bored of the listening and some of them complain about the speakers in the tape who speak so fast that make them difficult to understand or follow the pronunciation, and some students cannot pronounce like the speakers in the tape because it is difficult to pronounce. Some students think that listening is not important to them because they speak too fast and sometimes not clear.

Students always want to look at the tape scripts when they are listening because they think that if they don't look at the tape scripts, they won't understand or they can't pronounce those words. Students feel bored of listening with the stress and intonation of the words and some make much noise while they are listening to the tape because they think that it is difficult for them to understand or listening.

Last but not least, the learners don't like listening because the sound in some cassettes are not clear since they are copies, not the origin.

For reading, the following difficulties encountered by the teachers at the ETC:

This is another difficulties encountered by the teachers who teach the students at Pre-intermediate level at the English Training Center. They say:

The learners don't want to read because they think that the texts are difficult to read and some learners don't want to read because they are feel shy when they pronounce the difficult words wrong, their classmates will laugh at them. Some learners are lazy to read, they come to class just listen to the teachers explaining the lessons and other learners when they are asked to read, they read in low voice, can hardly hear.

Some learners don't like reading because there are a lot of words that they don't know how to pronounce because some learners don't learn the phonetic symbols before they start to learn when the class begins Unit 1, so when they read they just guess. They say the article in the course book is not related to the real life.

For speaking, the following difficulties encountered by the teachers at the ETC:

This is another difficulties encountered by the teachers who teach the students at Pre-intermediate level at the English Training Center.

They say: Some students don't want to speak because they feel shy and other students do not know how to speak, this is because of their poor in grammar and vocabulary and some don't like speaking in front of the whole class, because they think that when they speak wrong their friends will laugh at them, and one more thing, they don't enjoy working in group to share some ideas.

The teachers always speak in English but the learners reply in Khmer or they won't answer the questions, most of them are shy because they don't understand the useful of speaking they act as passive learners, and when the teachers force them to speak

they feel sad and sometimes next day will be absent. Some of the students don't like role play because they don't like sharing ideas, they keep in their mind.

Research Question 3: What suggestions do the teachers recommend to increase the level of students' participation particularly in speaking, reading and listening?

The findings revealed that:

For listening, the following suggestions were made by the teachers at the ETC:

This is some suggestion that the teachers who teach the students at Pre-intermediate level suggest to their students to motivate their learners to participate in their teaching listening:

a) Listening to the radios – the teachers tell their students try to listen to the radios, especially, BBC, Australian or VOA radios because they are available in Cambodia.

b) Watching Videos – the teachers tell their students they should watch the movies or videos that speak in English, especially DVDs because they have subtitles, so when the students watch the videos they can hear and see the words. On the other hand, the teachers tell their students that they should watch or listen to English program, so the students can improve their listening by doing these activities.

c) Listening to the cassettes – the teachers tell their students they should try to listen to the tapes because they can listen to them every day when they come to class, so the students can improve their listening what they hear again and again can also improve their pronunciation because they can hear what the native speakers pronounce or say. And another suggestion is that the students should listen to English songs that can interest them.

For reading, the following suggestions were made by the teachers at the ETC:

a) Reading course books – the teachers tell their students that they should try to read the articles or passages in the course books when they teach them, do not be shy or do not think that their classmates will laugh at them when they speak wrong, but if they do not practice reading, they will not pronounce correctly. When they enjoy reading they can improve their vocabulary and pronunciation and they should read aloud when they read, do not read quietly because it cannot help them pronounce correctly.

b) Reading other materials – when the students come back home, the teachers tell their students to try to spend more time reading novels, magazines, newspaper in English when they read a lot, it can make our tongue speak fluently and pronounce those words correctly. All these points will help students to improve their knowledge and lead them to tend to read in the future.

For speaking, the following suggestions were made by the teachers at the ETC:

These are some suggestions that the teachers who teach the students at Pre-intermediate level suggest to their students to motivate their learners to participate in their teaching speaking:

a) Speak it every time – the teachers tell the students that speaking is very important in our study of a foreign language if they do not try to speak it every day, they will not speak it fluently in communication in their work or social life. The teachers always tell their students to practice in English with their friends or their classmates when they meet each other in the everyday life. The teachers tell the learners that they should try to speak in English all the time because it can improve their speaking and help them speak fluently.

b) Asking and replying in English – the teachers tell their students that they should try to ask and answer the questions in English when they are working in pairs, in groups or in classroom.

4.2 Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate the difficulties that students encounter when reading, especially with regard to vocabulary and pronunciation. Reading as a psycholinguistic activity, as defined by Kenneth Goodman in 1967, emphasizes the significance of linguistic expertise in deciphering an encoded message. Strong memory abilities, the ability to link different cues within the text, a firm grasp of the language, and the ability to make educated judgments are all necessary for efficient reading, according to Goodman (1967). The findings of this study are comparable to those of Bernhardt (2003). Fang (2012) and Snow (2012) also discovered that pupils' lack of motivation is causing them to struggle with reading. According to the ETC's pre-intermediate teachers, some students complained that they didn't enjoy reading because of their new vocabulary and pronunciation issues. Additionally, several students relied on guesswork when reading because they did not have any prior knowledge of phonetic symbols. This implies that in order to improve reading comprehension, more precise teaching of vocabulary and pronunciation is required. Additionally, instructors observed that students occasionally felt the course book's readings were unrelated to actual circumstances, which could have decreased their desire and interest.

These results are consistent with previous studies on the challenges experienced by language learners. Reading comprehension difficulties are sometimes attributed to a lack of familiarity with the target language as well as a lack of clarity on word meanings and pronunciation. Furthermore, anxiety can be induced and active involvement inhibited by the fear of being mocked for mispronouncing words. A comprehensive strategy that incorporates vocabulary and pronunciation training, contextualizes reading materials, and

creates a safe space in the classroom where students feel free to take chances is needed to address these issues.

Several suggestions can be made to improve student engagement in pre-intermediate speaking, listening, and reading activities based on the difficulties noted in the literature and the experiences of the English Training Center's (ETC) teachers. These suggestions include teaching students how to pronounce words clearly, incorporating relevant and authentic materials into the curriculum, encouraging risk-taking in a safe and relaxed classroom setting, and providing chances for meaningful communication and group projects to boost students' self-esteem and motivation. Teachers may establish a more stimulating and productive learning environment that encourages active student participation and speeds up language acquisition by focusing on these important areas.

5. Conclusions

In summary, this study determined the methods, challenges, and recommendations pertaining to students' engagement in speaking, listening, and reading exercises among pre-intermediate EFL teachers at the ETC. The teachers mentioned a variety of strategies, such as reading aloud, playing audio recordings, giving comprehension questions, and clarifying important vocabulary. However, they also faced obstacles like pupils' disinterest in listening exercises, their inability to comprehend speakers, their hesitancy to read, their shyness, and their vocabulary and grammar difficulties. The teachers suggested using real resources, such as movies and radio broadcasts, encouraging students to read widely from a variety of sources, and encouraging regular speaking and Q&A practice to help students utilize the English language consistently in order to increase student participation. These results highlight the necessity of a comprehensive strategy that strikes a

balance between organized activities, chances for real-world language exposure, and individualized instruction in order to promote student engagement in EFL classes.

The study's conclusions and goals are taken into account when making the following recommendations: In order to raise awareness of practical methods for improving student engagement, the results should first be shared with the English Training Center's teachers, especially those who teach at the Pre-intermediate level. Second, the study's findings ought to be communicated to the administrators of the English Training Center so that they can use them as baseline information for the ongoing improvement and growth of the English curriculum while guaranteeing that it adheres to pedagogical best practices. Lastly, it is advised that these topics be thoroughly investigated in future studies, with an emphasis on developing and carefully assessing particular teaching methods intended to improve student engagement in second language learning settings.

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