SOME IDEAS TO MOTIVATE STUDENTS TO USE ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

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1. Introduction

English is supposed to be one of the most important subjects in University of Economics, HCM city (UEH). However, our students are with us every week for just a limited number of hours. What happens when they leave class? How can they use English outside the classroom? From my teaching experience and my analysis of students' needs and interests, I have come up with some ideas to motivate the students to use English outside class and help them to acquire as much practice as possible. Those ideas are to get the students to do the sort of good homework (some kind of homework but isn't like homework and often isn't even called homework), that encourages them to use English on their own in their own way. The ideas may be diversified, but all of them are oriented by task-based approach, which the author believe really generates students' own language and creates an opportunity of natural language acquisition.

2. Literature Review

The following review of literature will present briefly an array of studies on guided learning in order to determine how exactly language teachers can provide motivation and guidance outside the classroom for the students to be able to practice within a scaffolded learning environment. In addition, motivation in language learning is also mentioned as it contributes to theoretical background of this research.

2.1. Teacher-directed Learning; Self-guided Learning and Directed Self-guided Learning in language acquisition

Teacher-directed learning (TDL) and self-guided learning (SGL) are common terms in education. While TDL is most essential when the learning process involves exposure to an unfamiliar and complex environment, SGL is often noted as being an appropriate learning approach of the twenty-first century. There is cultural shift within education field as autonomy is increasingly transferred to students' self guided language learning outside the classroom (Benson, 2011). However, it is not easy at all to hand over control to students hastily. Actually, SGL is a double-edge sword; while students may be able to exert their autonomy in such a way as to prepare them to become life-long learner, the facts show that students do not take advantages of their learning opportunities when left with poor guidance. King (2011) asserts that the provision of "effective support for learners, be it from a classroom teacher or a learning advisor, is critical to the success of self-access learning" (p.258)

To make use of the positive aspects of both TDL and SGL, Brydges *et al,* (2010) developed a concept termed Directed self-guided learning (DSGL) where educators use "validated learning principles" to create a scaffolded learning environment where students are "given control of an element of practice and therefore are metacognitively, behaviourally and motivationally active in their learning" (p. 1833). In other words, DSGL is the approach in which an increased level of teacher-based guidance is needed from the beginning in order to help students to develop to the point where they have the knowledge and experience to effectively guide their own learning.

2.2 Motivation in second language learning:

Motivation in second language acquisition refers to the attempt and desire to learn a language and positive attitudes toward learning it. It has been widely accepted by both teachers and researchers as one of the key factors that influences the rate and success of second/foreign language learning. As emphasised by Dornyei (2001), "teacher skills in motivating learners should be seen as central to teaching effectiveness" (P. 116)

Motivation in SLA has been extensively investigated. Oxford and Shearin (1994) have examined a number of motivational theories and six variables that influence motivation in language learning (Al-Bustan & Al-Bustan, 2009, S454):

- Attitudes (i.e. sentiments towards the target language).
- Beliefs about self (i.e. expectations about one's attitudes to succeed, self-efficiency, and anxiety).
- Goals (perceived clarity and relevance of learning goals as reasons for learning).
- Involvement (i.e. extent to which the learner actively and consciously participates in the learning process).
- Environmental support (i.e. extent of teacher and peer support).
- Personnel attributes (i.e. aptitude, and language learning experience).

Lambert (1963) has developed a 'social psychological model' where he has underlined cognitive aspects like intelligence and language abilities, and affective variables like motivation and attitudes. In his theory, he argues that the level to which a person effectively learns a foreign language will rely on motivation, attitudes towards the foreign language, and ethnocentric predispositions. Gardner (1985), another early advocate in this discipline, identifies motivations as "the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity" (p. 63); in particular, motivation is believed to include three elements: attitude towards language learning, willingness to learn the language, and level of motivation.

Today, research in language learning motivation is broad and vibrant with increasing interest being paid to such issues as: cultural differences; language learning as a dynamic process; and autonomy.

3. Suggested activities

Whenever talking about English teaching situation in UEH, we always mention to limited time in class as the first problem. We certainly do not want our students to restrict themselves to using English in class. We want them to get as much practice as possible. One solution can be come up with easily, that is assigning homework activities. However, I question how much learning actually takes place. Do they really try to do their homework by themselves? Are they interested or not? Can they actually get something from those homework activities? …

Having experienced failures in piling on homework, I decided to try some other ideas, something easier, more interesting and more inspiring to both my students and me. Some of them have been used in my classes and they really work; some still need improving to be able to keep students

motivated; and some are just ideas I think of when working on this research paper. However, all the assigned tasks are applied the following principles:

1. They must be within our students' linguistic reach.
2. They must be meaningful so that the students can use English outside of class to get particular goals
3. They must be able to exploit the power of enthusiasm, which means they can keep the students interested.

Idea 1: USE SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is something obvious in this era and it is exerting great attraction to young people. It is here to stay. We can ignore it or embrace it. But why don't we if it is a great tool we can use to make our classes more engaging and our students use more English outside; and if you don't have to be a tech-savvy teacher to share things through social media? A Twitter account, a Facebook page or a Google class seem to be the most popular ways. In this scientific paper, I would like to recommend you **edmono.com**. It is often referred as "a Facebook for schools". It is absolutely a user-friendly site allowing you to create digital classrooms where you can post assignments, announcements, share interesting video clips, create quizzes… You can also interact easily with your students, as well as other ESL teachers.
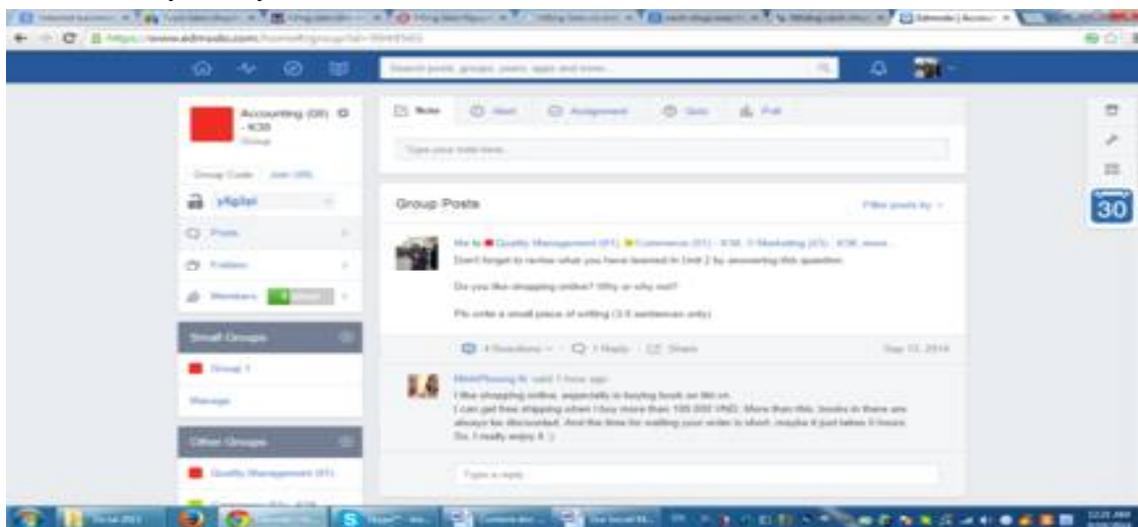
It takes you only about 3 minutes to have an account on **edmono.com** and create your digital classes. Each class has its own group code, just share this code with your students and you already have a free participatory environment that brings safe and secure collaboration between you and your students.

Idea 2: GROUP PROJECT

This is an assignment that students have to perform at class but it requires a lot of work outside class. I usually assign my students this task when they are in the fourth module and their average English level is quite good. The students are supposed to dream up some mock products such as *magic pen* (a pen to give right answers to any questions), *seasonal hair* (a tonic to encourage hair growth for balding men), and *I-helmet* (an advanced helmet to avoid traffic police)…., give the products names, slogans and descriptions, and design radio, television and/or magazine advertising. The students imagine that they are entrepreneurs and try their best to launch the product successfully. The project is assigned at the beginning of the semester and in week 9 or

week 10, we organize a mock expo. On expo day, each group chooses an area of the room for their product's presentation display. Posters need to be put on the wall, and cassette players and videos need to be set up. I have even had students bring tablecloths, candies and balloons to entice people to visit their booths. Each group has 10 minutes to show their commercials and introduce briefly about their products. Then, the students can go to each booth, asking and commenting, joking, and trying these special products. There is a little bit inconvenience with the traffic but there is always so much fun.

Idea 3: 5 MINUTES FOR NEWS

I inherit this technique from one of my teachers at college. Students are required to prepare a short news story, lasting just about 1 minute before they go to English class. Teachers can choose 4 or 5 students at random to report their news in front of the class.

Teachers should provide their students with some easy English news websites and students are encouraged to report news concerning their class, their student life, their school, or anything catching their interest and attention.

Idea 4: EMAIL BUDDIES AND LANGUAGE EXCHANGE PARTNERS

It just came out when I was pondering on the subject matter of this research paper. Teachers can help to establish an email correspondence between students in a class or from different classes. Though teachers are not involved in such student online dialogues, we can suggest topics to stimulate these emails. Hopefully, through those email exchanges, students can develop their relationship as well as their English writing.

Looking for language exchange partners is also a suggestion teachers can make to students. On the Internet, there are many trustful penpal websites such as *mylanguageexchange.com, italki.com or lingzone.com*… In addition to helping people find a partner to exchange languages and culture, these websites are usually wonderful environments to learn target languages by providing a designed system of lessons, a forum for users to give and take help and useful resources of the languages you are learning. However, the suggestion is totally optional and we need to remind our students of internet security.

Idea 5: 7 DAYS: USING ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

I got this idea from George Chilton's ESL lesson plan on the website http://designerlessons.org. Actually, his lesson plan was inspired by Matt Cutts' famous talk titled "Try something new for 30 days". It is awesome advice of taking 30-day challenge to do whatever we want, so it will be an incredible experience in our life. If not, the next 30 days will pass whether we do something or not. This lesson plan aims to help students become motivated in their use of English out in the real world. They will start to plan and track their use of English and reflect upon their progress with other students in the class in what will hopefully become part of the weekly routine. The period of 30 days, I myself think is too long for our students to take a shot at. Therefore, I have created a version of *"7 days: Using English outside the classroom"* with the hope to help our students to change their attitude and habit of using English.

Step 1: *(This is a warmer but you can extend the activity if your students enjoy the discussion.)*

- Ask the students to think of things they could realistically do for a period of 7 days and that would have a real impact on their lives. Give them examples and encourage them to think of ways together: *Change hair colors; Take a photography course; Do a language exchange with someone online; Stop using the internet; Start a blog...*
- Put the students in groups. Ask them a question: ***"How would your life be impacted if you made changes for 30 days?"***

Step 2: *(Optional)*

This is when you play the video "Try something new for 30days" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnfBXjWm7hc) and step 2 can be used to teach listening skill while checking the students' video comprehension. You can show your students some questions concerning the video before playing it. I am quite sure that it is an amazing and fantastic video and that the students will love it.

Step 3: *(English out of the classroom)*

Ask your students to think of particular activities they can do to use more English outside of the classroom for the next 7 days, and decide how much time they dedicate to each activity. They can construct a table similar to the one below.

Activity	Time to dedicate per week	Completed
Read the news in English	**2 hours**	**Yes**
Listen to a podcast once a week	**30 minutes**	**No**
Speak to my partner in English	**1 hour**	**Yes**
Watch a series in English	**2 hours**	**No**
Go to the cinema	**2 hours**	**No**
Set my phone to English	**0**	**Yes**
Write emails in English	**1 hour**	**Yes**
Set my Facebook to English	**0**	**Yes**

After 7 days, the students meet each other again in their English class; they can compare their accomplishment, and discuss the impact these activities have on their life for the last 7 days. Hopefully, they can continue doing those and turn them into their routines.

4. Conclusion

Once again, I would like to emphasize that the students who try to use English outside the classroom, for sure, do the most improvement. Obviously, motivation is the key here and I also believe that *"fun homework"* is an important tool for more English exposure. However, when reading the ideas in this research paper, some of you probably doubt their effectiveness or some of you probably wonder whether they work for lazy or low level students. I do not deny that when trying to realize those ideas, the results I got were below my expectations many times. When I shared group code on *edmono.com* with a class at the first time, I had only 4 students out of 40 on board. When I asked my students to prepare for their news in the first week, most of them looked indifferent and the next week, they came back with very poorly-prepared news stories, some even did not remember to do it. Nevertheless, things can be changed. Interesting videos and quizzes caught the 4 initial students' fancy and the number of participants in my first digital class got bigger. Reporting news became a fixed part of our lesson and most of my students came to the class with some cool news to talk about. Actually, my effort still cannot have any impact on some particular students; they keep their own way and do not want to give it a go. That, for me, is not a big failure. The thing here is as a teacher, I have tried to offer ways to help my students who really want to get better at English to use their target language when they are not in the class, to motivate and change their learning routines in a positive way.

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