

# Sustaining an Interest in Learning English and Increasing the Motivation to Learn English: An Enrichment Program

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A persistent problem faced by many English teachers, especially the non-specialists, is the attempt to sustain genuine interest in continuing to learn English and to use the English language once the examinations are over. Teachers have to create a healthy balance between preparing students for the standardized examinations and for life-long language skills. One solution is to develop a continuous program which includes an integrated in-class and out-of-class language activities that help nurture student language skills. Within the program, an environment, which is rich with language input, is thus provided. The program requires the retraining of in-service teachers who are provided with a framework within which they can apply new techniques in language teaching. The presenters will draw upon their experience in conducting a retraining of 77 teachers in Pahang whereby an enrichment program was introduced. Feedback received from the training group supports the use of enrichment programs, which make use of on-going activities within the school English language curriculum.

## Introduction

The famous proverb "Don't give your students fish, but teach them how to fish" is perhaps true in language teaching. But how do we go about teaching them the language skills so that they become more interested in learning the language? Also how do we maintain their interest in language learning when English is not seen as important for their immediate needs other than to pass the examinations?

Often, English language teachers who subscribe to the behaviorist approach to language teaching adopt the Audiolingual Method (ALM) or Direct Method which focus on forms and accuracy of the students' output or performance. Thus, many teachers are found drilling the students with continuous grammatical exercises especially at the primary school level. Despite exposure to training in the communicative approach, many teachers still avoid practicing the approach because the communicative component, i.e. oral communication makes up only ten percent of the exam score on the English test. In other words, many teachers are more interested in training students how to read and write well in addition to teaching students to master the grammar component of the language.

Although the drill-and-practice approach has some advantages in language teaching, it however does not help the students to master the language in the long run. Often, we find students who become good test-takers, and yet they are not able to speak and write competently when they graduate from high schools. What is more important is that teachers realize that given an environment (in rural areas) where the English language input is limited and non-conducive to learning the target language, teachers need to find creative ways to teach the language and increase the student's motivation to learn the language and to eventually appreciate the language. Undoubtedly, possessing some knowledge about various language teaching methodologies (e.g. ALM, Direct Method, Grammar-Translation, Suggestopedia, Community Language Learning, Natural Approach, Total Physical Responses,

Communicative method) is crucial, but it is more important for teachers to know what the most appropriate approach to teaching the language in that particular environment is and what activities are suitable for a given group of learners.

Based on our general observation of language teaching in schools, at least in the Maran District schools where we conducted our language teaching workshops, teachers tended to ignore the importance of such factors as positive self-concept, high self-esteem, positive attitude, clear understanding of the goals for language learning, continuous active participation in the language learning process, and the relevance of a conducive environment that could contribute to the success of language learning. In most cases, teachers are worried about how to drill the students to obtain high scores on the English paper in the national examination. The problem for many English teachers, especially the non-specialists, is how to encourage genuine interest among students to continue to learn and use the English language once the examinations are over. The question that needs to be addressed is how do teachers create a healthy balance between preparing students for the standardized examinations and for life-long language skills.

## Motivation

Gardner and Lambert (1972) introduced the notions of instrumental and integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation refers to the learner's desire to learn a language for utilitarian purposes (such as employment or travel or exam purposes) in the context of language learning. On the other hand, integrative motivation refers to the desire to learn a language to integrate successfully into the target language community. In later research studies, Crookes and Schmidt (1991), and Gardner and Tremblay (1994) explored four other motivational orientations: (a) reason for learning, (b) desire to attain the learning goal, (c) positive attitude toward the learning situation, and (d) effortful behavior.

Many theorists and researchers have found that it is important to recognize the construct of motivation not as a single entity but as a multi-factorial one. Oxford and Shearin (1994) analyzed a total of 12 motivational theories or models, including those from socio-psychology, cognitive development, and socio-cultural psychology, and identified six factors that impact motivation in language learning:

- Attitudes (i.e., sentiments toward the learning community and the target language)
- Beliefs about self (i.e., expectancies about one's attitudes to succeed, self-efficacy, 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 language learning process)
- Environmental support (i.e., extent of teacher and peer support, and the integration of cultural and outside-of-class support into learning experience)
- Personal attributes (i.e., aptitude, age, sex, and previous language learning experience)

Based on this brief discussion, we believe that teachers are able to drive the students to learn the language and to sustain students' interest in language learning if they can provide activities that are:

- interrelated between in-class and out-of class language activities
- communicative (game type) integrative (short/small activities form larger activities)
- pleasant, safe and non-threatening
- enthusiastic
- group-based
- meaningful or relevant
- challenging

These activities help promote:

- self-confidence
- experiences of success
- learning satisfaction
- good relationships among learners and between teacher and students

## An Enrichment Program

Research has shown that factors such as positive learner and teacher attitudes, which are interrelated to motivation, must be sustained for successful transfer of language learning (Finocchiaro, 1982; Ngeow, 1998). To foster positive attitudes and to motivate learning, in particular, the learning of English as a Second Language, an environment conducive to learning must be created. Factors that help create such an environment include:

- a learning situation that has a "low affective filter" (Krashen, 1987) whereby the learners learn to use the language in a non-threatening and fun environment. Otherwise, learners will feel uncomfortable and insecure which will further induce a "psychological barrier" to communication and learning (Littlewood, 1995)
- providing various types of input which are auditory, visual, sensory, verbal and non-verbal in nature and input which is comprehensible or a little beyond the level of the learner ( $i + 1$ )
- providing a continuous and consistent exposure to the language being learned
- an environment where the teachers and the students are supportive and encouraging
- having access to situations wherein students are able to use the language as a "natural means of communication" (Littlewood, p. 58, 1995)

These factors should be present in any language learning program. The enrichment part of a language curriculum must encompass these factors which encourage successful transfer and learning of the target language.

A language enrichment program should not be seen as separate from the school curriculum. Instead, it needs to complement and strengthen the development of language proficiency of students in schools. Therefore, what occurs in the language classrooms must be extended beyond the walls of the classrooms so that a link is created between what is learned in the classrooms with what occurs outside of the classrooms. A healthy balance has to be created between the immediate needs of examinations and the long-term needs of communicative competence. Furthermore, within an enrichment framework other interrelated factors such as the teachers' philosophy, theories, and experience of the language; the contemporary climate of the teaching situation (which is affected by such factors as the political, economic, and technological advances of the country); the available teaching aids and materials; and the constant demand to prepare students for the standardized exams all play interconnected roles within the school language curriculum (See Appendix A for a diagram of the framework).

Within the enrichment program, various activities and tasks are prepared which require active participation of the learners. Some examples of such activities include:

- a reading program with such tasks as writing a synopsis, journal, and compiling vocabulary lists
- language immersion projects such as language camps and visits
- a specific day or week or month or time and space devoted to the use of the language such as an English zone, spelling bee competition, story-telling corner, read-to-me corner, essay and drama competition, poetry reading at the general assembly, etc.
- a network of people who could provide the constant input of the language such as pen pals, teacher mentors, conversation partners and so forth

These activities are supported by classroom or school environments that provide simple strategies to encourage the use of the language such as murals, labels in and around the school, consistent exposure to language competitions (choral speaking, scrabble, etc.) and English notice board (interactive in that learners can pose questions or reply to questions). All these need to be given

acknowledgment and recognition in the form of rewards and encouragement (e.g. prizes, public mention, etc.) to motivate and sustain interest in the use of the language.

It should be pointed out here that the main emphasis of this enrichment program is more on the process of learning rather than the performance of learning. It is hoped that a series of language activities, in-class as well as out-of class, will lead the students to a successful language acquisition process.

## A Report on Our Teacher Training Workshops

The purpose of the teacher training workshops was to exchange ideas and experience as well as update teachers' knowledge and skills on language teaching and learning. Some teachers who have been teaching over a period of time may need to update themselves with the current teaching-learning trend. Some others, especially, the non-trained teachers, lack knowledge, skill, and experience and may still need some general exposure on effective teaching techniques that could be carried out in their schools. The training workshops, involving 77 English teachers from the Maran District, were conducted in Jengka during the school holidays. With the help of the Maran Education District Office, the teachers were selected from several schools to participate in the training workshop.

These workshops were initially meant for teachers who were not English majors and those who have taught English for less than two years. The teachers were divided into three groups: primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary. However, because there were not enough teachers who were not English majors, other English teachers were also asked to participate. Table 1 shows the academic background of the teachers and Table 2 depicts the number of years that the teachers had been teaching. A majority had taught for less than 3 years.

Table 1: English Teachers' Academic Qualification

Academic Qualification	Primary N=29	Lower secondary N=23	Upper secondary N=25
English/TESL Degree		11	15
Non-English/TESL degree with Dip. Ed. (English/TESL)		6	4
Non-English/TESL degree		6	4
English/TESL Teaching Certificate	21		2
Non-English/TESL Teaching Certificate	8		

Table 2: Years of English Language Teaching Experience

Years	Primary N=29	Lower secondary N=23	Upper secondary N=25
1-3	16	11	14
4-6	6	4	4
7-9	2	2	1
9-11	1	2	3
More than 11	4	4	3

The three workshops, each run consecutively over three days, were fully funded by Lembaga Kemajuan Wilayah Jengka (LKWJ) or the Jengka Development Authority, a governmental body responsible for the welfare and the development of the Jengka district in Pahang. LKWJ has been working hard to raise the educational level and the economic standards of the Jengka settlers. The majority of the settlers in Jengka grow palm oil and rubber trees under the government's Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) scheme.

## Contents of the Training Workshops

The overall design of the workshop comprised three main parts.

## Part One

The first part consisted of an introductory session whereby the teachers participated in a number of ice-breaking activities, and were provided with an overview of the objectives of the workshop. The purpose of the introduction session was to provide the participants with a sense of purpose and commitment and to allow an opportunity for them to get acquainted with each other. The session was necessary to ensure that all participants were comfortable and were ready to participate in the activities to be conducted. At this initial stage, the teachers were also requested to fill-in a form in which they provided information on their personal and academic background.

## Part Two

The second part of the workshop consisted of a session which was designed to expose the teachers to established and current literature on the theoretical content of teaching and learning a language, in particular, content background knowledge on ESL pedagogy. The teachers were asked to answer a written survey on common terminology and concepts related to ESL teaching and learning. For instance, they were asked to put a check against words and phrases in a list that they had heard of or had encountered before or ones they thought they could explain such as "Monitor theory, ESP, ESL, Audiolingual method, i + 1, choral speaking, Piaget, interlanguage " and so forth. This activity served as an advance organizer to understand the content knowledge that was provided later in the session. A facilitator presented information and content which included an overview of the current status of English within the Malaysian context and its interrelationship with contemporary changes and advances in the political, economic and technological climate in Malaysia and in the world in general. For instance, the teachers were made aware of the role of English as a world language and its significance to Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor project and how as English teachers they play a crucial role in ensuring the success of the project. They were further reminded of the Malaysian National Philosophy of Education and were provided with information and problems on issues related to English language teaching. In addition, theoretical background on the various approaches and syllabi, methodology, factors affecting ESL learning and the processes of language acquisition and learning were explicated. Teachers were encouraged to discuss this in groups and then presented their views and solutions to the problems posed. A discussion of possible strategies and approaches in integrating an enrichment program within an examination-oriented curriculum were conducted before they were introduced to the suggested enrichment program framework and the theoretical underpinnings of the approach.

The teachers were later introduced to a variety of in-class activities and out-of-class activities that form part of the enrichment program. The teachers had to actually participate in each activity to help raise their awareness and foster empathy for students. A sample of the activities included:

- jig-saw reading
- interpreting cultural bias (use of cartoon strips and a colloquial variety of English and idioms)
- jig-saw listening
- shared journal writing
- song cloze and punctuation exercises using songs
- the use of English jokes and tasks using the different shades of meanings of words
- vocabulary building tasks
- a chain story activity
- a visual expression of the self (using symbols and analogies to describe teachers and students) activity
- a "create an advertisement" group activity using materials found in the home

The participants carried out the activities in small groups and were later required to present some of the products of the activities to the whole group. Open discussions and comments were encouraged. At the end of the activities, the teachers were asked to reflect on the activities in which they

participated and to comment on their feelings and reactions as an individual teacher and alternatively as a student. The teachers were provided with references on books and other materials to which they could refer for more creative ideas on language learning tasks and activities (for example, Gaudart's "Reaching out to Learners: Creative Ideas for Teaching English")

The teachers' participation in the activities helped make them realize that English language learning can be interesting and fun using simple and useful tasks and activities that could be incorporated within any English language lesson. The teachers were also made aware that even within an examination-oriented syllabus, such tasks and activities could be injected into the routine of "drill and practice" for the examination. Students require a break from the monotony of examination-format exercises through short, fun-filled activities which at the same time help reinforce items learned in the drill practice sessions. The in-class and out-of-class activities have to be related and continuous. For example, in practicing grammatical items in role-plays, students can be further encouraged to use the language learned in a drama or short skit presented as part of the school's teachers' day celebration. Poems created in class activities could be read at the school's general assembly.

The participants were also provided with general information about language learning and teaching such as the myths about the skills of reading and writing, what teachers think are their "persona" as a teacher, poems on being a teacher, a student and roles of an ESL teacher. The teachers devoted some time to reflect on some of the issues raised about their roles and their professional development.

### Part Three

The third part of the workshop involved a series of presentations by the facilitators on guidelines and tips on how to assist students in preparation for the examinations. This session was requested by the organizers for they wanted the teachers to be further exposed to various test-taking strategies and techniques which could help the teachers manage the preparation of students for the standardized examinations. A brief session of reviewing sample examination papers and strategies in approaching the various test techniques on the papers were conducted. However, the final activity conducted was a session whereby the teachers reflected upon the ideas and concepts found within the visual representations (the drawings that showed what a teacher stands for) and symbols they had drawn in the beginning of the workshop and compared each one to the one they drew at the end of the three sessions. It was a revealing and enlightening discovery for many of them. A majority had shifted their view on the roles of teachers and students from being teacher-centered to one which is more student-centered and humanistic. Based on feedback at the end of the workshop (an evaluation form), the teachers seemed convinced to a certain extent that simple and short activities, both in-class and out-of-class, are worth attempting even within a serious exam-oriented syllabus.

### Conclusion

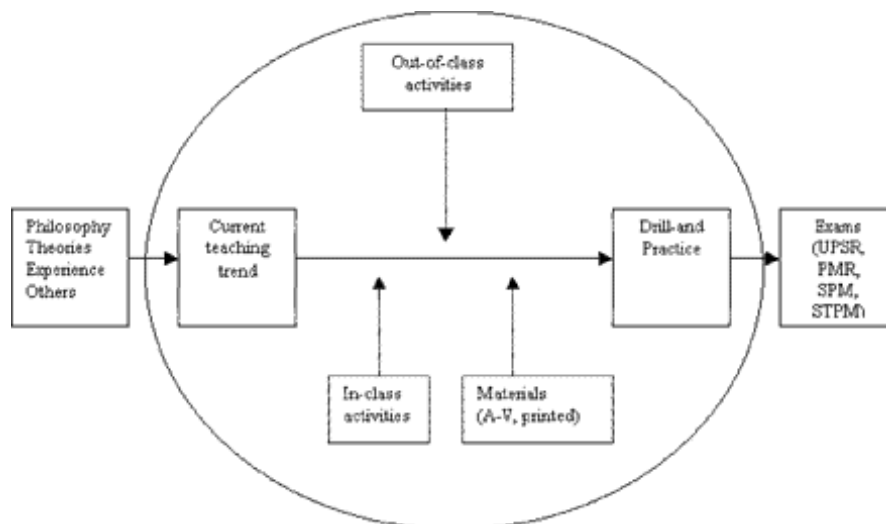
Teaching a second language to students in rural areas remains a great challenge because performance in exams is considered more important than for other purposes. It requires not only courageous, well-determined, and committed teachers but also creative and innovative teaching techniques. Teachers have to find practical ways to motivate the students to learn and appreciate the language, and at the same time, sustain students' interest in the language learning process. The framework of the enrichment program that we suggest here recognizes motivation as a crucial factor which interacts with other factors involved in language learning process. Hence, if continuous, interrelated, and meaningful activities, which are process-based rather than product-based, were implemented in schools, the dilemma between training the students to score high in the examination and teaching life-long language skills can be resolved. The enrichment program must exist within any exam-oriented school curriculum in order to maintain students' motivation and interest in learning ESL in Malaysia schools.

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## Appendix A

Framework for an Language Enrichment Program



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<http://iteslj.org/>

<http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Hussin-Motivation/>