

Increasing Motivation at University Level: A Paradigm of Action Research

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Abstract—The purpose of this study is to understand practitioner's teaching practices in order to bring changes and improvements. The study is conducted through the framework of action research. Thus, action research is always considered as a practice changing practice (Kemmis, 2007). The prime object of the study is to improve teaching practices and suggest some new emerging trends to implicate in teaching and learning practices. However, the study doesn't only narrate the problem, but it also resolves and improves the teacher practices. The study tends to describe the practice and reflection employing group interviews as a data collection instrument. Considerably, the collected data was qualitatively analyzed to develop understanding to improve practices and increase motivation among students learning English as a compulsory subject. The study reports that students' motivation is increased with new teaching practices which are student centered. These teaching practices in the action phase indicate that students are satisfied with student centered learning.

Index Terms—action research, motivation, teaching practices

I. INTRODUCTION

The study is meant to increase the motivational level of Lasbela University undergraduates who seemed less motivated in learning English as a foreign language. As a teacher researcher I identified the problem and planned to solve it and suggest pedagogical implications with the cooperation of my colleagues. The primary focus of the study is to increase motivation in classes within the framework of participatory action research. The purpose to design the study was to improve own teaching practices for effective learning and teaching. Action research is a new approach to teaching practices which is different from traditional classroom research. And this is discussed in the literature review. The study addresses the research questions and objectives as follows:

A. Research Questions

1. What are the reasons for lack of motivation in compulsory English Classes?
2. How can I increase motivation among students and improve my teaching practices?

B. Objective of the Study

1. Identify reasons which cause lack of motivation among students
2. Explore teaching practices to enhance motivation for learning English

After this introduction, I present literature review to understand action research and reflective practices adopted to improve teaching. This review will help me to explore produced literature in action research paradigm and relate it to my study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Within a few decades, teaching has been considered as a researching framework in which teachers are known as researchers. This paradigm shift in teaching has indicated that teaching practices may be subject to change and improvement. Teachers' interest has increased in inquiry of their teaching practices concerning reflective thinking, theories, professional development and curriculum design and deliberation (Wittrock, 1986). This motivation in teaching has enhanced among teachers as researchers who work under an umbrella of action research. However, the theoretical construct of action research helps me to understand it systematically. Action research is defined in various ways. According to McNiff (2002), action research is the process of transformation, a systematic process to observe, describe, plan, act, reflect, evaluate, modify (cited in Bughio, 2012). It is generally considered as a practitioner's research. However, it is a matter of concern that how action research is different from traditional research. In traditional research, researcher investigates or explores for the well being of others. In action research, the researcher investigates

the problem related to their teaching practices with colleagues to solve the problem of immediate concern (Buglio, 2012). This difference shows that action research tends to solve the issue concerned with researchers and teachers practices, while traditional research is bound to benefit others through investigation and exploration. Further, a brief history of action research is described to have in depth view of action research.

In terms of historical perspective on action research, Lewin (1948) is deemed as a father of action research in the educational world of teacher research. Actually, action research was seen as a spiral of phases each of them is made of a circle which consists of plan, action and fact finding of the action (Lewin, 1948, p. 206). In 1960s, Corey employed the kind of research developed by Lewin, at the teachers' College at the Columbia University. In the context of education, he believed educators to be an agent of change as they perform functions of research and its application (Ferrance, 2008). Furthermore, Corey (1953) defined action research as "the sequence of our teaching is more likely to change and improve our practices than about someone's exploration of his teaching. However, action research was abundantly used in 1970s, since then it has been one of the evolving research paradigms for teacher researchers who use it to investigate problem and solve it through practical implications. Moreover, the modern version of action research focuses the participatory approach for describing action in a particular context. In this regard, it is action which develops theory on the basis of effective participatory approach and practice, viewed as applied theory (Elliot, 1991, cited in Buglio, 2012). Furthermore, I discuss some of the central principles of action research

A. *Main Principles of Action Research*

The prime object of action research is focus on action and research simultaneously. The action engages respondents in the framework of planned intervention, in which some strategies are developed in the domain of research. Then, intervention takes place through action in accordance with assumed research problem or question which needs a change or improvement (Burns, 2005, pp. 58-59). In addition, there are some features of AR. It includes systematic collection of data, enacted planned intervention, analysis of data, reflection on findings for more observation and action. This process makes researchers understand that action research is planned, organized and reflective practices in teaching and learning language. Thus, the produced literature on action research suggests that it carries subjective approach because it addresses local situations and the problems of the participants with the aim to investigate and deliberately change and improve practices. And however, this distinctive feature makes AR different from other practices in research (Crookes, 1993, 2001). Now, I present the most suitable definition of action research which my study takes as a basis for research. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1992, p. 10) "to do action research is to plan, act, observe, and reflect more carefully, more systematically, and more rigorously than one usually does in everyday life". This refers to that action research is a systematic process which is planned, acted, observed and reflected. Furthermore, I present some other definitions to have a broader view of action research.

1. Action research changes peoples' practices, their understandings of their practices and conditions under which they practice" (Kemmis, 2007).
2. Action research is a practice composed of sayings, doings, and relatings (Kemmis, 2007, p. 1).
3. Action research is a form of self-reflective inquiry carried out by practitioners, aimed at solving problems, improving practice, or enhancing understanding" (Nunan, 1997, p. 229).
4. Action research is a meta-practice: a practice that changes other practices" it is always a practice changing practice" (Kemmis, 2007).
5. The combination of action and research renders that action a form of discipline inquiry, in which a personal attempt is made to understand, improve and reform practice. (Hopkins 1985, p. 32).

These definitions about action research advocate that it is a practice which aims at improving and bringing some changes and reflecting on what is done. Moreover, I present some main characteristics of participatory action research. There are at least seven most important characteristics of PAR (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 566-567); PAR is a social process, participatory, practical and collaborative, emancipatory, critical, reflexive, recursive and dialectical, aim to transform both theory and practice. These features of participatory action research provide researchers a particular view of action research. With it, an idea is developed that action research is composed of social, collaborative, practical and reflexive processes. The purpose of above mentioned features is to focus on sound research which must respect much more than the cannons of methods (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 68). Likewise, I now present action research as an evolving paradigm in Pakistan.

B. *Action Research in Pakistan*

In Pakistani context, action research has been widely used as an evolving paradigm of reflective practices. Teachers view this sort of research as a new framework. Thus, research and teaching are known as two different fields (Rasul, 2009, p. 1). Thus, for more clarity, it is elaborated in the following words:

It is assumed that all this would come from the world outside the classroom - as a matter of fact from the administration, syllabus/book designers, policy makers etc. The teacher is a powerless practitioner of the plans laid by others, a feeble follower of the path carved by others. Research is something that teachers view as distant from them and it is considered to be something that professionals do and teachers only use it instead of discovering it for themselves (Halai, 2011).

Importantly, research needs to be viewed to bring improvements and changes in Pakistani educational institutes (Dean, 2009). This idea is strengthened and supported to enhance professional development through action research (Mohammad & Kumari, 2009, cited in Halai, 2011). In addition, Bughio (2012) supports the view of Rasul that there is a great need of systematic and principled research and universities can play an important role in creating change agents for improving teaching and research. These researchers do not favor the teaching and research considered as separate areas.

The above mentioned literature in context of my research has helped me to develop a plan for my research study. As a teacher researcher, I observed that my students were less motivated to attend English compulsory classes. This observation helped me to identify actual problem students had and I decided to improve my teaching practices. So I planned to act, observe and reflect my teaching ways for the purpose of improving practices.

III. METHODOLOGY

I have chosen action research as a method for my study because it aims at improving and changing practices. Since I am a practitioner and methodology for my research must meet practitioner's research needs. I state that action research has provided an effective framework for finding out problem, developing knowledge in collaboration of colleagues and solving the problem. As I have already discussed that framework of action research is better choice compared to traditional research for the present study. For, action research tends to answer researcher's issue closely associated with his/her teaching practices.

A. Model of Action Research

For my research, I have chosen action research model developed and devised by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005; 2007). This model best suits my study because it answers my research questions which I have designed for the study. Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) offer some features of action research model. It doesn't only involve mechanical steps but it also includes a spiral self-reflective cycles as follows: (a) planning a change, (b) acting and observing the process and consequences of the change, (c) reflecting on these processes and consequences, (d) replanning, (e) acting and observing again, (d)reflecting again, and so on.

B. Data Collection

The data was collected through group interviews. Group interviews are useful where 'in-depth information is needed' to know how respondents think (Bell, 2006, p. 162). Watts and Ebbutt (1987) explain the advantages of group interviews as:

such interviews are useful...where a group of people have been working together for some time or common purpose, or where it is seen as important that everyone concerned is aware of what others in the group are saying. (In Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 286)

First, I interviewed a group of students to know the problem. However, the reported problem was a lack of motivation among undergraduate students learning English as a compulsory subject. The students were from Marine Sciences and Agriculture Faculties. Second, I interviewed four of my colleagues in Department of English, Lasbela University, Baluchistan. And one of my colleagues showed willingness to work as a co-researcher in my study. Teachers are addressed as A, B, C, D, while students are addressed with pseudonyms.

C. Data Analysis

I collected data from teachers and students. Then, I analyzed data qualitatively through field notes, reflection on observation, interviews and discussion. A number of themes emerged from interviews and discussions contributed to my understanding. Further, an interpretative approach was used to interpret and analyze these emerging themes. Thus data analysis increased my understanding of the problem and contributed to planning strategy for improvement. This data will be lucrative for students, teachers and researchers in my context.

IV. FIRST PHASE: RECONNAISSANCE

This phase started with interviews for students. And the type of interview was focus group. I interviewed some of the participants from two classes, Bs 2nd year Agriculture and Bs 2nd year Marine Sciences. This focus group interview helped me to understand that problem was with my teaching methods which were not working well and caused a lack of motivation. Now my task was to increase motivation among students. Interviews with students lasted for 30 minutes and during this process I made notes which helped me to find out different themes developed through process (e.g., dissatisfaction with teaching method, lecture method teaching, teacher centered classes, no friendly environment, no rapport between teacher and students).

Participants showed that they were not happy and satisfied with lecture based method I used in teaching English as a compulsory subject. They believed that they were not enjoying learning because they were bound to listen and listen. It is drawn from their talk that they were sick of traditional methods of teaching English. Here are some extracts noted from their interviews.

- a. I am not happy with the way teaching is done. Because it has no role stored for me to play (Naveed)

- b. I am interested to participate but here I am only listening (Ahmed, Agric).
- c. It is only teacher centered class. There is nothing interesting but focused listening (Nawazish, Marine)
- d. I am not motivated to attend the class because of lack of motivation from teacher (Asma, Marine).
- e. There is no friendly environment provided. Teacher comes delivers lecture and goes without any feedback from us (Anita, Agri).

These views indicate that students reported dissatisfaction with traditional method of teaching. The main idea is that students are interested to learn through new methods. They believe that they are not motivated with one style of teaching which brings no change in teaching and learning practices. These traditional methods of teaching caused students focus on memorization, rote learning in contrast to creativity and understanding.

A. No Friendly Environment

Students want that they should be taught in friendly way. A teacher is not friend to them while teaching. They report that actual learning takes place in the friendly and comfortable environment. There is a huge gap between teacher and student. And because of this gap, learning is affected.

- a. I want my teacher to be friend to me because I like this way of teaching (Javed, Marine)
- b. My teacher is very strict. I want him to be good to me (Ali, Marine)
- c. I am very anxious in unfriendly environment which is not conducive to learning so my learning is affected (Asad, Agri)

These statements recorded show that students need friendly teacher who listens to them and meets their learning needs. There must be a good relation between students and teacher. There are many themes developed from the discussion and group interviews. The problem identified was lack of motivation among students for learning English.

B. Solution to the Problem

After interviews with students, I discussed the issue with my colleagues in Department of English, Lasbela University, Baluchistan. The group discussion was quite fruitful. It helped me to understand how to plan to solve the problem. Colleagues reported many things to increase motivation among students. They stated that teachers must create friendly environment for learning. Furthermore, they stated as follows:

1. Teacher should provide incentives for students to learn actively (teacher, A)
2. I am a teacher and I am very friendly to my students and this relationship I like most and help me understand more about students (teacher, B).
3. As a teacher, I try to understand needs of my students. And this process works effectively in my teaching because being familiar with their needs, I practice course which almost meets their needs (teacher, C)
4. I prefer that classes should be student centered because actual learning takes place and I find students more energetic and interactive in classroom (teacher, D).

Importantly, discussion with colleagues helped me to find out the solution to the problem. My colleagues suggested a number of things which play an important role in increasing motivation among students. The main themes developed from discussion are interactive class, provision of some rewards (prize, appreciation), encouraging students for participation, various classroom activities, and listening students' needs. After this, I noted that feedback from teachers and students was almost similar in context. They suggested that to increase motivation is to encourage students providing some incentives and respecting them as individuals.

C. Action Phase

Keeping all in account, first, I acted to change the method to teach students with new method and that was student centered. I told them that there would be student+ centered class. In acting this process, I assigned some roles to students to perform in the class. And the roles assigned were written on the papers. I invited them to pick one of the papers to select their role. And these roles were such as teacher- student, doctor- patient, boy - girl husband-wife actor-actress, shopkeeper - customer manager- client. These roles seemed interesting to students and I observed they were happy to perform because they had time to explore themselves in different roles. First time, as a teacher researcher, I realized that students were enjoying learning and my new teaching method was working effectively.

Furthermore, I also provided them as friendly environment to perform different roles. In doing this I joined them as a student and they felt happy. My changed attitude made students' learning quite easy. After the class, I received some feedback from students. And they said that they had never enjoyed such class because they had hardly opportunities for sharing and speaking in the class.

D. Providing Some Incentives

This phase was collaboratively supported by my colleague; A. she helped me to manage the class. She worked with me as a teacher researcher. We went with some prizes in my hand. We told students that these prizes are for them and they will be given on the basis of their performance in today's class. We observed that all students wished to participate and perform better to win the prizes brought for them in the class. We gave them some classroom based activities such as; quiz, **true** or false, **fill** in the blank, pointing mistake in a sentence.

It seemed a lively class because students were so excited to answer the questions I asked them orally. The class was very interactive. All the students actively participated and won the prizes by performing best. As a result, students began to communicate this with other fellows who were studying other courses. This type of interaction with students created an impression on students that they freely shared their needs and problems as students. As teacher researchers, we observed that students were truly motivated to show their interest in learning. They were interested to take part in activities. With motivation, we found that students were confident now and they tried to be active learners. This was what we found missing in teaching. After the class, I received the feedback from students in group interview and discussion.

a. The class was very good. I enjoyed it very much. I am motivated to learn in such way to teaching and learning. It was interactive. It was activity based learning which motivated all of us. (Anara, Marine)

b. Today's class was simply fantastic because I won the prize which pleased me that I had an ability to win competition. I am motivated to study in activity centered learning (Saja, Agri).

c. The class was motivating because it motivated all of us to participate in different activities. The class was completely student centered. I was very active but no matter I did not win any prize but I hope to win in the future if such activities are included in teaching methods.

The above interesting and motivating answers show that students were active learners. The reason was simply different method of teaching which helped me to increase motivation among students. Later, I thought to conduct needs analysis session in the class to know students' general and specific needs.

E. Listening Students' Needs

This session was conducted to listen to students' needs. It was aimed to keep myself aware of what students wish to learn and what they are taught in classroom. Students reported that the designed course doesn't meet their needs. All of them have different purposes to learn English language. The main purpose of this needs analysis was to communicate this to the policy makers and curriculum developers who do not design syllabi according to students' needs. And this is possible when students are listened carefully and counseled properly. I heard the needs that I was unaware of my own students.

This listening showed some positive effects on students because the rapport was developed between me and my students. They were free to share their needs and were very communicative throughout the session.

After listening to students' needs, I planned to teach them according to their needs. I changed my course of compulsory English with the guidance of Head of Department. He suggested that I should use new books designed for undergraduate students in Pakistan. These books are EAP (English for academic purpose), ESP (English for specific purpose) and EFE (English for employment). Then I replaced the following with new ones mentioned above (e.g., High School English grammar, Practical English grammar, Grammar at glance)

On the first day, I used English for academic purpose book. I suggested students to buy the book or get photocopies for reading. I taught students Unit 1 from the text which stated as follows:

F. Introducing Yourself

Work in pairs and draw a flower with five petals. In the center write your name and its meaning. In the petals write (a) your star sign and date of birth (b) your major subjects (c) one hobby (d) one good habit, one bad habit (e) languages you can speak

Then, introduce yourself to the person sitting beside you; tell all the information written in the flower. This beginning seemed a sort of change a change in my students. This change was noticed when they happily started practicing the unit. Some of the students passed remarks which I received at the time of teaching.

a. It is wonderful unit. I am happy to introduce myself which I have not done before (Asma).

b. I feel better to write my good and bad habit. It seems very interesting session (Hali, Marine).

c. We are enjoying interacting with one another because we listen and are being listened by. The activity is simply new and interesting (Noor, Agr).

This introducing session helped me to know that it really played a role in increasing motivation in the class. Students were satisfied with doing exercises from a new book which is based on communicative teaching approach. It focuses on communicative skills.

After the class, I received feedback from students about the class and a new book introduced. Students remarked that the class was interactive which they had not experienced before. They stated that they are motivated with such interactive activities. In addition, they maintained that they feel confident in speaking English and sharing their knowledge with the class

G. Observation Phase

I have seen that my new teaching practices have become very effective because I observed it through increasing levels of motivation among participants. After the classes I had a group discussion with my students. They seemed quite satisfied with the changed teaching methodology. With discussion, I made some notes during the process. I share some extracts drawn from discussion.

a. Sir, I wish that this new way of teaching may be used because it is interactive and learning process (Naheed, Agr).

b. Keeping in view old method, I claim that this way of teaching is more useful. I saw a change in course and it seemed to meet our communicative needs (Asma, Marine)

c. I prefer that this book may be finalized as the course for us because it covers meaning and form of language (Asad, Agri).

Apart from this phase, I went to discuss this change with my colleagues who had suggested changing the pattern of teaching in order to increase motivation among students. I got some other useful ideas in discussion. These are changing the pattern of assessment; clarifying the criteria students will be assessed with, meeting parents to know about students, encouraging students to participate in debate competitions, organization of class. This is a new planning for further practices. These ideas need to be implemented in classes next semester.

H. Reflection Phase

Action research is a practice about practices. I have developed a number of things from focus group interviews with teachers and students. They have suggested very lucrative and practical pedagogical implications for teaching and learning. As a teacher researcher, my role in the research was to know my teachings practices and improve them. In addition, the main object of the study was to increase motivation among less motivated students for learning English. I observed that students' learning was less effective and less motivating so therefore I identified the problem through discussions with group of students and then with my colleagues. I drew some meaningful ideas related to improving teaching practices.

- a. Always encourage students to participate in activities
- b. Respect students as individuals
- c. Understand students differing styles of learning
- d. Focus Students cultural, social and geographical differences
- e. Integrate meaning and form focused learning
- f. Lesson planning
- g. Planning and re-planning
- h. Making and remaking practices to improve and change existing practices

These themes are very important and the plan is required to implement them in order to bring a change in practitioners' practices. Kemmis (2007) states, "action research is always a practice changing practice" (p. 05). This idea best suits and defines my research as well. I agree that it is to change teaching practices we as teachers do in classroom.

The study advocates that students' motivation is a matter of great concern in learning English language in general in, Pakistan in particular. This is a new approach to solve the issue with the help of other fellows. Broadly speaking, research on L2 motivation has suggested many frameworks for investigation. However, these frameworks have been used either quantitatively or qualitatively for exploring L2 motivation. Whereas, action research approach is adopted to increase motivation among L2 learners. This approach doesn't not show either students are instrumentally motivated or integratively. But, it tends to find out the problem of lack of motivation and solves it through classroom implications in teaching methodology.

V. CONCLUSION

The study indicated that Lasbela University students' motivation to learn English was increased with the changing teaching strategies in classroom. Students showed boredom and lack of interest in old teaching methods (e.g., teacher centered class, no time for students' talk, lack of rapport). The study used action research paradigm to identify problem, to solve it by suggesting some pedagogical implications. In terms of pedagogical implications, the study shows that learning should be learner-centered and meaning focused wherein learners feel free to use English and participate actively in academic activities such as pair work, group discussion and public speaking. As a teacher-researcher, I have learnt that teachers must be aware of their students' needs and learning problems. As the result of it, the actual learning takes place as this study has suggested through saying, doing and relating forms to real practices. The study concludes that action research is a paradigm to use in teaching and keep improving practices. The study also suggests that such approach needs to be implicated in classroom pedagogy in Pakistan.

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