WHY NOT THEIR WAY?

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Abstract

The way information is disseminated and learned is changing rapidly. What used to be meaningful sources of information in the past may be less preferred these days. As this trend has been touching nearly all aspects of life, it also brings about vast impacts in the teaching and learning process. Moreover, we are now dealing with the Y generation which obviously has distinct characteristics compared to the previous ones. Unfortunately, in the university where I teach, the way the material presented remains unchanged: a workbook prepared by the academic commitee for 29 diverse study programs. This paper, hereby, aims to explore a variety of ways in which this book can still be utilized but taking students' learning preference into accountall at once. Needs analysis containing students' learning preference were then distributed at the end of the first meeting, followed by a small discussion for better clarification. Then it is analyzed and clustered in order to obtain a clear picture on how the material available can be developed into a meaningful interesting source. Several activities and additional materials were next designed to cater for students' dynamic participation in exploring the workbook. Students were asked to express their impression on material discussed after each meeting, and this was then discussed in week 7. It is revealed that with activities they like, classroom materials can be turned into something interesting.

Keywords: learner's preference, classroom activities, teaching Z generations.

Introduction

With the speeding passage of time, enormous changes have occured in many ways, including teaching learning process. Infiltration of technologies, great access to a wide range of divergent sources, and the arrival of the millennial students in our classrooms are, indeed, influential factors that need to be taken into consideration. To provide challenging butthought-provoking learning environment these days, accordingly, attemps have to be made in accordance with the present situation.

It has been widely known that good learning environment is a crucial issue in a language classroom. It is this factor that leadslearners to enjoy learning the material, beenthusiastically engaged, and furthermore, take over the responsibility on their own learning (TCB,2015). Thus, classrooms which offer various learning activities, provide opportunities for students to practice and experience the language are often mentioned to be the ideal ones (Heick, 2014). Having these, expectantly, language learning will be more meaningful and hastily to take place.

Concurrently, we cannot ignore the presence of millennial students in our classroom – the ones encompassing their own distinct characteristics compares to the previous ones. Working with them in our classroom these days means making attempts to recognize them better in order to be able to facilitate learning in a better way so that language learning can occur fruitfully.

Methodology

The subjects of my study are the first year students (approximately 19 years old) of Diploma level, majoring at Informatics and Environmental Management, learning basic Academic English. The skills taughtinclude grammar, reading, speaking, and writing. To learn English, two types of classesneed to be attended: the lecture and the tutorial classes. The former is a one-hour lecture class, holding in a class containing more than 60 students, mainly conducted in one way communication, discussing theory. The

later, however, is a four-hour class, smaller than the first class (generally contains 30 to 35 students), aiming to review the theory, do exercises related to it, and discuss the answers. The assessment covering Quizes (first Quiz testing the theory in reading and grammar¸while the second is speaking), Mid-Test, and Final Test, consisting of theory (Structure and Reading) as well as speaking and writing materials, answered in writing.

A workbook, containing theory and excercises, requires to be used to teach all students in Diploma, irrespective of their major (there are about 29 dissimilar majors). This workbook is essential for students as the assessment mentioned above will be similar to the exercises presented in this workbook.

To obtain the idea how the teaching process can be meaningful, a questionnaire pertaining students' learning preference were distributed to be filled up by the students at the end of the 1st meeting, so that students have experience being in the lecture and tutorial classes.This questionnaire was written in Indonesian and explained by the teacher to avoid misunderstanding and confusion.To ensure that what have been experienced in theclassroom is able assisst students in understanding the materials¸ students were asked to submit their impression on their learning experience they wrote after each meeting. Why does this matter?

Millenial students are distinguished from previous generations for their distinct characters, both in negative and positive ways (Main, 2013). These students are characterized as easy to have their attention shifted (Bart, 2011), but "optimistic and multi tasking" (Rivera and Huertas, 2006). They are good at current technology, and enjoy doing rather than just knowing, and goal-motivated (Howe and Strauss, 2003, Gleason, 2008). Roberts (2015), therefore, predicted the forthcoming trends in language teaching by recommending various material sources to obtain from and ways to deliver the material. He suggested that

teachers have to find "innovative ways", incorporating technology and various applications to utilize. Similarly, Boraie (2013) pointed out that to teach millennials teachers require to develop their professional competence and ability to equalize with students' new perspective. (Norton (2014), went on further uses of technology which are close to today's students' characteristics and explain how the devices can be beneficial for language teaching. The above studies indicate that teachers play an essential role in teaching these Y generation – the ones we are facing in our classroom now to cater for their specific needs.

Finding and Discussion

The followings are the results of the questionnaire, which can be divided into three primary categories. The first category is the type of classes the students prefer to attend, the second is the way they learn the language, and finally the activities the students favored.
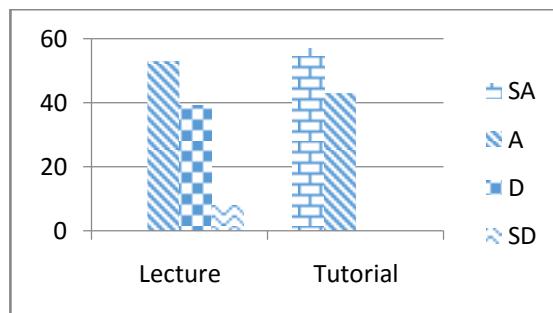

Figure1. Preferable class to attend

In regard with the type of the class, learning in the tutorial class is preferred by my students for a number of reasons: smaller number of students, more stress-free environment, more opportunity to explore and discuss materials for better understanding, and more confident to apply the skills being taught. It is crucial, therefore, to provide a variety of ways to trigger students so that they can gain much knowledge and skills being learned.
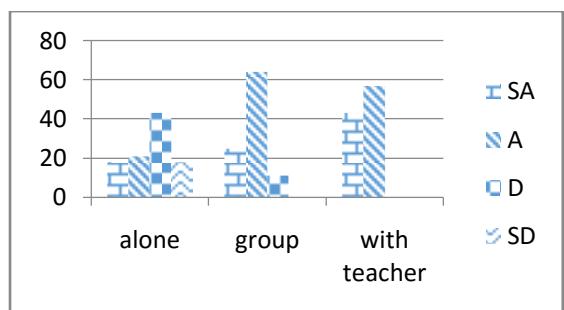
The second category shows:

Figure 2. Preferable way of learning

It was exciting to find out that students in my class love conducting learning in many different ways: alone, in a group, and guided by a teacher. What is more attention-grabbing, though, is the fact that certain way of learning is favored by several students but disliked by others at the same time. This, again, leads to a great challenge to make every student can take the advantage of classroom activities.
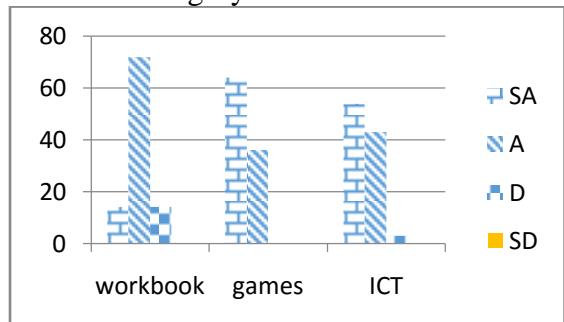
The third category:

Figure 3. Preferable Classroom activity

The figure indicates that the most favoured activity to perform in the classroom is playing games, followed by using mobile phones and other information and communication technology, and finally doing exercises on the workbook. While admitting that the last activity is important to check their comprehension upon the theory learnt, students thought this would be a tedious activity to perform. Certainly, activities need to be created to turn this image into something challenging, one of which is by combining the less preferred activity with the favored ones.

The above findings demonstrate that teachers these days are faced with a variety of challenges in meeting demands of the

students– particularly the millennial ones. Bearing in mind that these students are risk taker, optimistic but easily shift their attention, teachers can make their own formula to maintain students' focus on their learning material. Teachers' innovation, creativities, open mindness, and willingness to learn more, are indeed required. As an attempt to incorporate my students' preferences, the following learning activities were carried out in my classroom:

1. Combining the ways to do exercises

As some students prefer to work by themselves, most of the activites performed individually first so as to provide an opportunity for each every student to strugle on their own. This is particularly done when coping with structure and reading exercises on workbook. When finished, checking can be conducted with pairs, small groups, or with the teacher directly. At another time, students (individually, pairs or even in groups) were asked to come forward, write their answer in the laptop connected to the classroom monitor. In this way, other groups are able to give their comment and correction so that finally everybody can contribute their opinion. Otherwise, class is divided into eight groups of 4 with a leader appointed by the teacher in each group. It is this leader who leads the discussion and keeps his/her group member participation.

Another activity that allows group work but also cater for individual need is by doing jigsaw activities in which students have to work in a small group first but need to pay great attention to the exercises being discussed. After that this group is dismissed and every individual has to make a new group to share the anwers to the exercises they had discussedin the previous group. Variations can always be made in this kind of activity, for instance using bingo game, group competition, and the like.

The above activities were made to challenge students to have courage in expressing their opinion as friends are generally seen as a good counterpart to share with. Once feeling comfortable,

students are expected to be responsible for their own learning. By sharing answers with other grups, it is expected that students have adequate understanding on the materials and confidence in disseminating them.

2. Games and the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Learning through games has, indeed, been used in classroom teaching for years. As Roberts (2015) suggested, however, that the method with which students taught can be the same but there is a need for teachers to be creative and innovative. Even millennials are in favor of games as they are often viewed as fun and relaxing activities; thus, reducing anxiety.

A relatively vast number of games can be carried out – particularly when dealingwith speaking and writing skills. Mobile phones which save lots of event, pictures, people, and songs in it can also be used as a great source to develop speaking materials on workbook.

Another valuable interesting source is social media like twitter, facebook, and the like. The most salient thing to note is that the games should be appropriately selected in order to

Games like twenty questions (to practice yes/no questions), guess who I am (to practice wh-questions), cross-word puzzle (to improve vocabulary), are we thinking the same (to describe person and personalities), are some common ones but can be conducted in a variety of ways. Mobile phone can also be used to tell about past activities, describe persons or things, fixing schedule, comparing and contrasting, and the like. In addition, facebook and twitter are used to practice writing; for instance writing daily activities and home town, suggesting some things to friends, etc. Another game to play is Kahoot which can be used to practice grammar exercises.

Conclusion

The are numerous ways for us, teachers, to teach our students, whoever they are. One salient aspect to keep into consideration is that we want our students to take advantages from the learning process in the clasroom so that they can finally capable of using English in the real world. Hence, what we can do is to make our lessons as meaningful as possible by disseminating information, designing proper materials, and conducting various relevant activities. To reach this target, it is essensial to identify who our students are, what and how they like to learn, and what activities make them understand and improved more.In this way, we will make language learning in the classroom meaningful and benefecial for our students.

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