
16. Student's classroom participation in English language teaching: The case of Gozamen General Secondary School in Grade 10A

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Abstract

During my teaching practice at this school, I was placed to teach in lower level grades in their class room participation, in grade 10A. At the school there were four grade10 sections, but I performed my practicum in a class which had 47 learners, 23 boys and 24 girls. During my practice the main area that I taught was English and I didn't have minor area since I was a Pdsc/English student, how could I find ways to help twelve learners in grade 10A at Gozamen General Secondary school to improve their participation during English lesson? I began my action in the week beginning June 17. I encouraged the learners to participate so that they would be able to understand the meaning of the pictures which I showed them. This action worked for five out of twelve learners who participated during my lesson presentation. On this action seven learners did not take part in the activity. Some learners gave different reasons- that they were unable to do the running or the jumping activities because they were sick. But it was a good trial.

Keywords: English, Teaching Elementary, Training, Action research.

Full Text:**1. Introduction**

I did my School based studies at Gozamen General secondary school. It is an urban school situated seven kilometers west of Debremarkos town. The school had 836 learners who were being taught in the morning and afternoon session at the school. The school had a principal (male) and a vice director and many Department Heads. There were twelve English teachers. The school had nine classrooms.

During my teaching practice at this school, I was placed to teach in lower level grades in their class room participation, in grade 10A. In the school there were four grade10 sections, but I performed my practicum in a class which had 47 learners, 23 boys and 24 girls. During my practice the main area that I taught was English and I didn't have minor area since I was a Pdsc/English student. I had also helped my support teacher by doing other duties like marking the period register and checking the attendance register. I was also involved in some of the administrative work and in classroom management. Through this involvement I came to know about the behavior of the learners, and how discipline problems were handled in that school and improvements were seen in the classroom participation of the students.

Since in the beginning of modern education in Ethiopia, at the beginning of 20th c, different curricula had been designed in accordance with the contemporary education policies.

After the "down fall of the Dereg regime," educational and training policy was shifted from teacher center to student centered method.

In order to implement this student centered method, teachers are expected to use different active learning methods; so without students` participation it is impossible to achieve the desired goal of the subject matter.

One of the advantages of student participation is that it offers the possibility of the variety of viewpoints exploring the particular individual view of students as well as the general organizing principles that help to make the topic as a whole. It also provides an opportunity to share experience with other students and teachers (Robert Fisher 2005) I am a teacher and have taught in different primary schools, but since 2004 E.C. I had been assigned to do my practicum in Gozamen General

Secondary School. When I was doing my Practicum course, I taught English in grade 10A students. During this time I faced a problem of low participation during English lessons. So I found the problem and wrote a proposal before the time being now, but now I organize my final action research report.

2. Objective of the study

As an Education trainee I was required to do an action research project. I identified twelve learners in grade 10A who could not participate during English lessons and they were not responding to questions, they weren't sharing ideas during teaching learning process in the class. I tried to help them during the English lesson to improve their participation. **I choose a research topic:**

`How can I find ways to help twelve learners in grade 10A at Gozamen General Secondary school to improve their participation during English lesson?`

During my teaching practice, and also when my support teacher was teaching, I discovered that learners did not participate during English lessons actively. That is why I chose this problem for my action research project.

In order to carry out my action research project successfully, I started observing the learners every day. I realized that most boys and girls were not happy when it was time for English lessons; my support teacher also realized this before I began my action research project, but it was not solved. As a result, I decided to look into the matter myself.

The level of participation of students in Gozamen General Secondary School was unsatisfactory in different activities during the time of English. Let me write about some of the problem of the students like they had limited ability of writing, reading, and listening English. Then it mattered me to minimize the problem of twelve students and I scaled up the strong side of my action research.

The next concern is that most books in the Library are written in English so without any understanding of English Language, it is difficult to understand what the books say. So it also concerns me as a citizen and also as a teacher.

All the problems mentioned above influence student's language learning. To solve their problem, I have identified the different aspects of the problem during my continuous observation, teaching in the class and asking questions.

3. Significance of the study

As we all know participation is one of the essential elements in implementing active learning methods which make students active participant in the teaching learning process and help them to learn more. But at Gozamen General Secondary School grade 10A students didn't actively participate in English lesson. Even, when the students were given some activities to be done in group, they didn't do it; instead, they waited for lecture from their teacher. This made students always to wait others rather than try to do by their own.

Therefore, the main reasons which initiated me to conduct this action research were to:

- ❖ Indicate the means how to make students active participant during the English language lesson.
- ❖ Show how we formulate strategies' to make students active participants during the English language lesson. Using good strategies' in teaching learning process help students to participate actively in the lesson.
- ❖ Initiate the students to participate in different activities to learn more from their mistakes.
- ❖ Introduce that students get more chance to correct themselves when they participate.
- ❖ Gather necessary information from the students which make them passive participant.
- ❖ To get the immediate solution for the problem of less participation during English lesson.

Since low participation was a problem, I found that it was very necessary to give the meaning of the term in this research project. In this paper 'participation' will refer to taking part in an activity. Learner's involvement in the lesson was very important.

The learners should be able to contribute by giving his/her ideas in the lesson, to share ideas with other learners, and also by asking questions.

4. Solution

My action research report was mainly centered on minimizing the cause of the problem which was mentioned in my concern part. When I performed and conducted my action research I was doing the following activities. I :

- Found the solution for the existing problem without using bureaucratic approach.
- Created awareness to students what active participation was?
- Found ways of motivation and change attitudes of the students towards participation.
- Have shared the main ideas with my mentor.
- Used different teaching methodologies to motivate students.
- Guide students to develop the habit of using the library.
- Tried to tell stories at the beginning of each lesson; will the stories help learners to be interested in the lesson?
- Tried to use more teaching aids in my lessons. It helped the learners to improve their participation?
- Tried to know giving gifts would help or not? (like pen and exercise book)
- Tried to use pleasing words like “thank you very much, keep it up”, it was helpful for students?
- Tried to use body language, for example actions for the learners to get the meaning of words.

In this case, our learners need to learn and think independently and critically. They must master strategies for identifying, analyzing and solving problems. They should be able to develop self confidence. Learners should be able to use their own senses and have the ability to contribute productivity to their lessons; if learners in the classroom are able to do these things, then I will conclude that the learners’ participation was good.

5. Sample size

Selecting sample units:-In my action research project, twelve learners were selected for treatment in the problem. But in addition to this I also included 3 English teachers and ten students for sampling.

To improve students' participation, I was developing different strategies. In my class there were 47 students. Among these students my target groups were twelve learners who were selected by using observation.

In this action research project, I used four methods in collecting data: - questionnaire: interview: observation and keeping personal diary.

I formulated some questions for the class teacher, my support teachers; I did so because I wanted to get more information about learners in the classroom. The items in questionnaire were made very easy and simple to understand. When I asked the teacher to answer the items in the questionnaire, I also told the teacher why I was asking them these questions.

I interviewed some of the learners in order to get their views and suggestions on the subject, English. I observed the learners' class participation and kept a personal diary of their participation on the English lessons.

I encountered some problems in using these methods because at first I wanted to interview the learners but in the occasion, they were feeling to be shy and they may not answer the way I expected them to do. But this did not affect me too much because I changed my plan. I was deciding first to observe them because I was new for their faces and behavior. As time passed by I interviewed them in order to get the information easily.

6. Participant of the study

When I conducted my action research, different concerned bodies were helping me. Some of the contributors who helped me were students, teachers, department heads, mentors, the vice director, the director and different administrative workers. For example, students were helping me by filling the given questionnaires and giving comments. The department head and director was also helping me by giving advice sand constructive comments when I taught and conducted research in their school

7. Data analysis techniques

During my practicum observation I discovered that both boys and girls could not participate in English class to answer questions. For example, on March I observed that 10 learners were unable to participate. These learners were unable to participate and they were very passive during my lesson presentation. It seemed that they could not show interest in learning English.

I observed that in the following week the improvements of these boys and girls were insignificant in their participation. I tried to find out the reasons why they were unable to participate through interview, questionnaire and keeping personal diaries. The data that I collected by using the above data gathering tools was analyzed in the following way:-

Data which was found from the questionnaire would be analyzed quantitatively through percentage and frequency counts. But data from diaries, observation and interview will be analyzed by using narration.

8. Evaluation of change

I used two methods in evaluating my work. I.e. an evaluation table and drafted observation sheets. On the evaluation table I kept the learners' results and on the observation sheets I put a tick mark each to indicate that whether the learner was able or unable to participate in English lesson.

The reason for these two processes was that I wanted to see the difference before and after my actions. I recorded each learner's marks from the time I started working with him/her, on every task that they did. The evaluation table was helping me to know how successful the work was.

Finally, I invited some English teachers to observe my actual teaching in the class room and they told me that the teaching learning process was enjoyable. In addition to this, they gave necessary feedbacks that helped me to redirect my research and devoted more actions to have long lasting solution for the problem.

9. Recommendation

I believe that from my action research project, I have learnt many things. Some are the following:-

- Develop student participation was very important for effective language learning.
- How to solve problems with myself and tend together with my students.
- Teachers could play an important role to achieve educational objectives.
- Action research was the basic tool to evaluate the strength and weakness of teaching learning process.
- Action research required collaborative work to solve the existing problem.
- I have also learnt the possible ways of solving challenges that happened during my action research work.

During my practical teaching I also realized that most learners like rewards, especially if they have done something very good in the classroom. I decided to provide reinforcements for learners who were able to contribute more in the lesson. I reminded my learners to be more actively involved in the lesson because they would miss the motivation which would be given to others because of their performance and commitment to the classroom. At the end of each period I gave them some simple exercises.

10. Actions taken

I began my action in the week beginning June 17. I encouraged the learners to participate so that they would be able to understand the meaning of the pictures which I showed them. This action worked for five of the twelve learners who participated during my lesson presentation. On this action seven learners did not take part in the activity. Some learners gave different reasons- that they were unable to do the running or the jumping activities because they were sick. But it was a good trial.

I realized that some of my learners liked to be praised, especially if they participated. Because after I praised them there was a change on their faces. They got changed by showing smiles and happiness on their faces. If a learner was quiet

in the class, after praising him/her by saying “Thank you very much, keep it up do it tomorrow” he/she would start talking or raising their hands and asking questions. This means that the learner’s participation improved. And this indicated to me that the action really worked. However this was not happening to all learners. It worked for eight of them. But still four of the learners did not take part in the pair work activities which I asked them to do.

This action really worked. It was a happy day for me in my classroom. The action worked for all twelve of the learners,. Sometimes I could see them raising their hands in order to give ideas. The learners were very excited to receive gifts and they demanded that I continue with the lesson. From that day the learners’ participation, and how they behaved in the classroom, seemed to improve very much. They were very anxious to learn.

I also included the use of more teaching aids in my lessons using real objects which they could see, in order to help them to understand the content very easily. The activities which the learners did, was naming the types of food which were on the table. Secondly they were asked to read words which were attached to the chalkboard. This lesson seemed to be very easy because my teaching media was displayed on the table and it was very easy for the learners to name and point out various objects because some had seen them before. This was very successful lesson because everyone was able to participate and contribute.

As my school based students continued I introduced the use of body language in my lesson presentations. I used these actions in order to help the learners to understand and get the meaning of word rather than explaining in their first language, **I also had learnt**

- Four out of the twelve learners were affected by shyness.
- Five learners out of the twelve with poor participation were still adapted to the old system of education when the teacher was regarded as the only source of knowledge in the classroom, while learners were taken as useless instruments that were good at listening.
- Three learners out of the twelve were having a problem because they were thought to be naturally dull’ some learners could not answer questions from

the presentation after a few minutes. Sometimes learners were failing to read words after me. It seemed that, because they could not cope, these learners were naturally dull.

Interview with the support teachers

According to my interview, the support teacher said that participation in her class was really a problem. She said that poor participation affected her a lot because poor participation meant that the learners did not understand the lesson. So she had to repeat the same lesson the following day.

The support teacher said that both boys and girls were very poor in English She said that some learners were too shy to share ideas among the others. Another of the support teacher' explanations were that the problem was caused by letter -table. She said that sometimes teachers could be the cause of the problem if letter- tables were not taught, or introduced, to the learners in grade 1. In addition she said that sometime the method of teaching English can be the problem, especially if mother tongue is used when presenting English lessons.

In order to improve the situation the support teacher had a number of suggestions. She said that slow learners should be given more/extra work to do in order to improve. She added that they should encourage speaking English by their teachers especially when they are around the school premises and in their classrooms. This will help them to improve their language; the support teacher suggested that the use of teaching aids is also important in our lessons. She also added that the teacher should use body language, for example, doing some actions for learners to find the meaning of words. She suggested that teachers should have enough time to discuss problems with their learners. A further suggestion from the support teacher was that letter- tables should be introduced at an early stage, so that learners will be able to participate and have interest in learning a new language.

Interview with the learners

The learners whom I interviewed said that the problem was their parents who were not able to provide them with food when they come to school. On this point the learners' reasons are very reasonable because hungry learners will become slow learners and they will not enjoy learning.

When I asked them if they liked to learn English they all said that they like subjects likes Math, English, writing and Silos, because they enjoyed looking at nice pictures and listening to some nice stories.

I also asked about their feelings when they were divided in groups for discussion. The learners said that they do not feel happy and free when put into groups. The reason given was because some members of the group laughed at others and this made them not contribute.

Plan of action

According to my plans I decided to:-

- Give enough time to learners so that they could be able to speak and act freely in the lesson
- Let the learners get more involved in to the subject so that they could be able to discover things for themselves
- Try to include many activities in my lessons so that the learners would be able to be actively involved in the lesson. These activities would include drama and role plays in which learners could play some activities like buying in the shop
- Use pair work – instruct them to ask each other some oral questions
- In group work- put learners in groups so that they could share ideas and take part in discussion
- Use more teaching aids and show them some attractive pictures linked to the topic in order to arouse the learner's interest into the subject
- Try to do something as a good teacher and role model and bring realities to learners so that what they see in the classroom they may not forget

- Giving the learners time to express themselves by letting them ask questions whenever they did not understand. I also encouraged the learners to ask some questions so that they would be able to understand well
- Taking my learners according to how they are in the classroom. For example, there are three types of learners in the classroom, and each learner in a different way. There are gifted learners, slow learners, and the average one. I did not expect the slow learners to do the same as the gifted learners because they are not the same and they learn in a different way.
- By doing all this I thought I would be able to help my learners to improve in order to get motivated, and also encourage them to be interested in the lessons.
- **Actions taken**
- I began my action in the week beginning June 17. I encouraged the learners to participate so that they would be able to understand the meaning of the pictures which I showed them. This action worked for five of the twelve learners who participated during my lesson presentation. On this action seven learners did not take part in the activity. Some learners gave different reasons- that they were unable to do the running or the jumping activities because they were sick. But it was a good trial.
- I realized that some of my learners liked to be praised, especially if they have participated. Because after I praised them there was a change on their faces. They got changed by showing smiles and happiness on their faces. If a learner was quiet in the class, after praising him/her by saying “Thank you very much, keep it up do it tomorrow” they would start talking. Or raising their hands and asking questions. This means that the learner’s participation improved. And this indicated to me that the action really worked. However this was not happening to all learners. It worked for eight of them. But still four of the learners did not take part in the pair work activities which I was asking them to do.

During my practice teaching I also realized that most learners like gifts, especially if they have done something very good in the classroom, I decided to buy some’

presents for the learners who were able to contribute more in the lesson. I reminded my learners to be more actively involved in the lesson because they would miss the gifts which would be given to others because of their performance and commitment to the classroom. At the end of the period I gave out some presents.

This action really worked. It was a happy day for me in my classroom. The action worked for all twelve of the learners,. Sometimes I could see them raising their hands in order to give ideas. The learners were very excited to receive gifts and they demanded that I continue with the lesson. From that day the learners' participation, and how they behaved in the classroom, seemed to improve very much. They were very anxious to learn.

I also included the use of more teaching aids in my lessons using real objects which they could see, in order to help them to understand the content very easily, The activities which the learners did was naming the types of food which were on the table. Secondly they were asked to read words which were attached to the chalkboard. This lesson seemed to be very easy because my teaching media was displayed on the table and it was very easy for the learners to name and point out various objects because some had seen them before. This was very successful lesson because everyone was able to participate and contribute.

As my school based students continued I introduced the use of body language in my lesson presentations. I used these actions in order to help the learners to understand and get the meaning of word rather than explaining in their first language, I also made the learners participate in a role- play of a shopping game. The learners were politely asked for giving thing in the shop. This process worked for eight of the twelve learners. Two of the four learners who could not particulate in the role- play were the same ones who did not participate in the pair work

I also tried telling some short stories in the first period before the beginning of the lesson. Regardless of what subject I taught. I did this to try to encourage the learners to be attentive during the lesson. As I did this I realized that the learners liked listening to stories. This action worked for ten of the twelve learners and only two failed to participate.

In another pair activity the learners were expected to ask for, and give the price of an item. The learners were expected to ask questions like "How much is it," and to give answers like "That's too much ", "That's a good price", "That's very cheap". Ten learners out of the twelve were able to participate in this activity. The two who did not participate included one of the two who did not participate in the previous role-play and pair work.

On this activity learners did very well because if the item sold was very small, but the price was high they could refuse and say "That's too much' but for a big item, if the price was low they could answer" "That's very cheap", or "That's a good price". In this lesson I helped my learners to recognize the difference between an expensive item and something which is very cheap, or with a good price, they also learnt how to know the meaning of the words.

Monitoring the action and reflections on the action

When monitoring change I used two methods in collecting data. I used an evaluation table and drafted observation sheets. On the evaluation table I kept the learner's results and on the observation sheets I was able to tick that the learner was able or unable, to participate in class.

The reason for these two processes was that I wanted to see the difference before and after my actions. I recorded my learners' marks from the time I started working with them, on every task that they did. The evaluation table helped me to know how successful work was.

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