

## **CREATING A POSITIVE CLASSROOM CLIMATE: A MOTIVATIONAL FACTOR FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

Raghul E.\* & Saradha Rajkumar\*

---

This article is mainly focussed on how a positive classroom climate motivates students' learning in a classroom especially in acquiring English as a second language. Learning English becomes an easy task if a learner's interest is stimulated in the classroom. Though there are many sources of stimulus for a learner, a positive classroom climate itself will motivate the beginner in acquiring the English language in a classroom. A good classroom ambience energizes the students to acquire language and it creates a positive influence on the pupil and makes them feel comfortable in the learning room. It creates a willingness to learn and helps to gain positive approach to learning and influences the outcome of language acquisition. A friendly classroom set-up attracts the attention of the target audience and helps them gain more confidence in a particular learning situation. It creates a desire for learning the language. It even changes the negative attitudes of the learners towards classroom and learning English language in a classroom. A positive classroom approach develops the self-esteem of the English language learner. Teacher's feedback employing strategies such as the use of various innovative teaching tools, supporting materials, coupled with positive approach, by focussing on student-teacher relationship, and providing individual guidance in a better learning environment creates a significant impact and inspires them to move towards second language acquisition.

**Keywords:** motivation; classroom climate; second language acquisition

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Motivation plays an important role in the acquisition of English language in a classroom. There are many ways in which a learner can be motivated in the language learning process. There are various factors which create motivation in the classroom. Positive classroom climate is one such an important factor which influences learners and creates a positive impact on the learning. Classroom environment, in which students learn, provokes students' interest for learning and brings out a huge change in the minds of the learners about learning and the knowledge acquired. The change in students can be either positive or negative which depends upon the teacher who plays a key role in creating an effective learning environment and bringing out the best in students.

### **II. POSITIVE CLASSROOM CLIMATE**

Positive classroom climate is a learning environment which the teacher creates for effective learning in the classroom. In a positive classroom setting both the students

---

\* Division of English-VIT University, Chennai – 600127, E-mail: [raghulrufus@gmail.com](mailto:raghulrufus@gmail.com) & [saradharajkumar@vit.ac.in](mailto:saradharajkumar@vit.ac.in)

and the teachers feel comfortable and make an effort to understand each other in order to mutually get connected with one another. Positive classroom climate is the learning atmosphere of the classroom in which students are motivated and students' learning is promoted. The teacher plays a major role in creating positive and motivating classroom climate. Positive classroom climate is an environment, developed from the overall actions and attitudes of the students and teachers, showing towards one another in the classroom. Classroom climate can be identified as an optimistic setting for students where they are connected towards each other both emotionally and physically. It can be called an intellectual place for learning with positive approach. It is an environment where students are molded with positive approach towards English language acquisition. A positive classroom climate is determined from the teacher–student relationship and a student's relationship with his/her peer students. This influences learners and the process of learning. It helps students to gain positive attitude towards learning and the subject learned. Milwaukee (1986) defines the teacher as the climate setter of the classroom.

Classroom climate is defined with two types. They are Open classroom climate and closed classroom climate. In Open Classroom Climate, students are given freedom to express their views and to discuss in the classroom. Teacher creates a healthy rapport in the classroom where students feel supported and appreciated by the teacher. Students' ideas are accepted and their participations in the classroom are encouraged. Whereas in closed Classroom Climate, a teacher plays a key role and dominates the classroom and creates full control over the students. Teacher decides the role of the students in closed classroom climate. Students' ideas are given less priority where their opinions are not ignored. The teacher's ideas and thoughts are given more important and the teacher imposes his or her own ideas and expression on the students in the classroom.

### **III. MOTIVATION**

Motivation is a process of stimulating the interest of the learner in English second language acquisition classroom. Motivation plays a significant role in English classroom. The language is best learned when the learning takes place in a motivated classroom. For this we need to look into the different motivational theories which propose that motivation is most needed and expected by the learners. And motivation provides the turnkey when some needs are to be fulfilled. Mike Begenchev (2011) in his writing calls motivation as an “unobservable phenomena.” In the opinion of Dornyei (1994), there are three levels of motivation: the language level, the learner level and the learning situation level. All these three levels can be applied in creating a positive classroom, in which learning situation level plays a predominant role in making motivating and influencing classroom climate.

There are two kinds of motivation. They are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation in the perspective of language learning is the eagerness and

interest aroused within the individual to do and take part in some certain language activities. It creates a positive feeling towards the language learning and to engage in certain behaviors. It takes place when students learn the language because they enjoy learning a language. Extrinsic motivation in language learning is created by the external factors such as teacher's feedback and appreciation, for getting external rewards like getting good marks and certificates to get a job and to avoid punishment from the teachers. A positive classroom climate can create and increase both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the classroom.

#### **IV. CLASSROOM CLIMATE – A MOTIVATION FACTOR FOR SLA**

A positive classroom environment motivates students in their learning and helps them to achieve their goal. Creating a motivating classroom climate includes teacher–students relationship, student's relationship with peer groups, use of innovative teaching tools and supporting materials and the feedback the teacher offered to students.

##### **(a) Teacher–Students Relationship**

The most important factor in creating a motivating classroom climate in second language acquisition is the SLA teacher who acts as a climate setter in the classroom. There should be a mutual understanding and healthy relationship between the learners and the teacher. Students' motivation in the classroom derives from the learning atmosphere the teacher creates for the learning in the classroom. A teacher is one who creates interest on the subject by being friendly, supportive, knowing both strengths and weaknesses of the students appreciating their efforts and stimulating their interest on the subject learned.

Based on this context, in an engineering curriculum a teacher–student relationship can be enhanced by assigning project-based learning which will lay open an innovative platform for the learners to apply their theoretical concepts and experience a wholesome satisfaction of watching the theoretical ideas be executed in real-time situations. If such situations are not possible, a simulated activity will certainly fan the learning spark in a better and more involved activity. But there is still an opportunity for the teacher to lead the way for better and more result-oriented sessions.

Teacher's relationship with students motivates not only the learners in acquiring the English second language but also facilitates motivation to the teachers themselves. A healthy relationship and understanding between the students and the teacher encourages both sides to value this progressive relationship and responsibility. It paves for a better understanding to promote motivation and produce the learners with a better language acquisition. Teacher can create a great impact on the students by knowing the students' names which will make students realize that they are given individual attention in classroom. The perception of students

on classroom motivation and their views is far more important than the personal characteristics of teachers. The learners feel that the teacher should be empathic/connected/supportive, understanding, accessible, sharing mutual respect and trust, respecting opinions, giving feedback, enthusiastic/fun, sharing interest, etc.

**(b) The Role of Teacher in Creating a Positive Classroom Environment**

In present day learning ambience, and in fact, when dealing with the Gen Y learners, a positive approach has a better impact than a negative one. Respect for learners has taken prime place in the order of taking up responsibilities among the teachers. Focus is now not on what to teach but how to teach. Existing resource material should only be treated as general guidelines and not as the final material for exam preparation. Keeping this in mind, the teacher should be an enterprising knowledge dispenser by making use of real-life situations, media and technology to open the avenues of exploratory and experimental ideas. As mentioned earlier, if practical applications trigger the minds of engineering and other technology-related learners, accessibility or encouragement to explore new genre by the learners of humanities will set the pace for an innovative learning.

With key boards and especially virtual keyboards available to all and sundry, a virtual world trip can be devised for our learners. What with smart phones and ipads at our disposal, even a virtual classroom is not very far away from our fingertips. Once the methodology has been decided upon, time management should be taken care of – the learners should not be spending more time nor should the activities be designed for less time which would lose its significance of language learning. A time frame should be adhered to for evaluation and providing feedback for improvement and enhancement. A thorough preparation is required not only from the teacher's side, but also for the learners who need to be updated about the activity designed for them well in advance. At this juncture, technology can be put to good use. Creating group mail IDs, exclusive group specific Facebook page, Moodle, Google Docs, and several technological aids to elicit interest in the academic learning will be very encouraging for the learners. Use of digital pens is another feature which can encourage an eco-friendly learning culture. On the whole a novel method that can be adopted to make use of social networking considered a nuisance by less tech savvy people and regarded as the most popular among current Gen Y learners can turn out to be an asset for language learning. Quoting from first-hand experience, this effort has had and will definitely be well received by language learners. In truth, a teacher can immediately strike up a good rapport with the learners. Institutions where such facilities are available, documentaries and educational film clippings from Discovery Channel and other popular excerpts can be screened during theory or laboratory sessions. Other popular activities to improve speaking and writing skills are review of one's favourite movies, film and business icons, dream career, and mock video and

radio jockeying, news reading and any other activity that touches an interesting chord in our learners.

**(c) Feedback and Evaluation**

Be gentle while correcting or pointing out our learners' errors. Be accessible and approachable when they need you most. This will certainly change their mindset about language teachers who always appear to them as disciplinarians. Individual attention is another key to reach out to our learners and make the classroom a comfort zone for them. In addition, peer group teaching technique works wonders in language classrooms. What a class teacher cannot do, a teen teacher can achieve. Identifying the needs of the learners and catering to it reflects the interest of the teacher and how much they value their learner's presence in the classroom. Such acknowledgement does what appreciation cannot do. In addition, identifying learner needs leads teachers to know their strengths and weaknesses as well and enables the teachers to act accordingly in favour of their learners.

**(d) Innovative Teaching Tools**

There are many multimedia technologies which can be applied in English classroom such as audio tape, video recording, digital board, digital pen, etc. Students show more interest in learning with modern technologies. Use of these new technologies in the classroom will bring the real world experience to the learners and can influence them to engage in active participation during their learning process.

Some activities that would help students open up are pair activities and group activities. Classroom activities such as those discussed below are proof of their enthusiastic participation in interactive sessions. Whatever activity it may be, the teachers' responsibility is to take heed of the groups handled by them – heterogeneous or homogeneous - and accordingly device their activities.

- Knowing your neighbors
- Recording your speeches or conversations
- Making small talk
- Discussing your family members
- Getting to know likes and dislikes
- Identifying the positive and negative traits of a friend or sibling
- Watching and Reviewing movies
- Mindmapping
- Brainstorming
- Preparing a Questionnaire
- Discussing fashions/trends
- Being part of a Mock interview

- Expressing your strengths and weaknesses
- Analysing Case Studies.

And the list can go on endlessly if you are an enterprising and innovative teacher. Jadhav B S (2011,65), in his research 'Teaching English the use of Supporting Materials' Explores and experiments with the use of variety of supporting text types such as newspaper advertisements, news items, cartoons, riddles, jokes, puzzles, limericks, malapropisms, folktales, anecdotes and proverbs in classroom teaching. With the use of these supporting materials students can be motivated and can develop their learning skills. Challenging activities that are motivating will light their imaginative skills, creativity in writing and set huge stress to improve communicative skills.

#### **V. THREE CS FOR POSITIVE CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION**

A perfect cooperation and coordination between teacher and students enables language learning as a group work which needs a high cooperation among the students to finish the creative activities. In a social classroom setting students get equal chance to participate in learning activities. Teachers provide students with the opportunity to speak in the group, to interpret the learning topic, to communicate effectively, to share their views and to express their innovative thoughts. It creates a curiosity to learn and take part in classroom culture. Students will show their involvement and will engage in building meaning in language learning. There will be high self-esteem when they feel surrounded by positive learning situation. Students take responsibility to learn and participate in learning tasks very independently and express their viewpoints in the classroom. Students create within a team spirit where there will be friendliness, self-understanding and understanding of others. They all work together as a team and participate to produce their best in English language acquisition.

#### **Negative Classroom Climate**

If a more positive classroom climate can motivate students learning, then a more negative classroom climate will demotivate students' learning in the classroom. There are no tailor-made modules both for positive as well as negative classroom climates. It is the teacher's ability to customize solutions for such occasions. The main reason behind such stressful moments for the learners is their language acquisition anxiety. Again the responsibility falls on teachers to infuse a bright and positive approach in creating a viable classroom ambience.

#### **VI. CONCLUSION**

True to this quotation of Albert Einstein "I never teach my pupils, I only provide the conditions in which they can learn," a teacher's responsibility increases manifold because a language is best learned when students will have healthy competition

and flexible learning atmosphere in the classroom. This positive relationship will make the learners motivated and will give a stress-free learning process. Classroom climate affects both the teacher and the students. If the learners achieve their goal of English language acquisition the teachers also achieve their goal of effective teaching. Both are mutually benefitted. Positive classroom climate stimulates a student to acquire English language. Our first hand experiences in a flexible classroom make a huge difference between English language acquisition in real world context and learning other subjects in a conventional atmosphere. Creating a motivational classroom climate includes teacher–student relationship, peer group relationship, positive feedback, course content, use of support materials and using innovative tools to teach. Thus positive classroom climate is an important motivational factor for English language acquisition.

### *References*

- Ambrose, S. A. (2010). *Bridges, How Learning Works: Seven Research Based Principles for Smart Teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Dornyei, Z. (1994). Motivation and Motivating in the Foreign Language Classroom. *The Modern Language Journal* 78, 273-284.
- Jadhav B. S. (2011). *Teaching English the Use of Support Materials*, Orient BlackSwan.
- Milwaukee Carolyn Keeler *Observation of Classroom Climate: The Development of an Observational Tool*, Wisconsin. 1986.