The Effects of the Incentive Program on the English Communication skills of Year One English Major Students at the Faculty of Education

أثر البرنامج التحفيزي في مهارات الاتصال باللغة الإنجليزية لدى طلاب السنة الأولى في تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية التربية

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Abstract:

Motivating and establishing a positive learning environment for our students is really a crucial matter. This study presents a new mechanism that can help in motivating students at the Faculty of Education. By inviting guest speakers to talk about some topics related to their soft skills and their future careers as teachers, students are requested to apply what they have learned from the guests' in-group presentations. The data for the recent study was collected through evaluation sheets and semi-structured interviews. The findings showed that inviting guest speakers to the classroom can have a positive impact on the students' knowledge, and language learning as well. Therefore, this mechanism should be integrated into the semesters, not only for the first-year students.

Keywords:

Motivation, Soft Skills, Group Presentations, Guest Speakers, Incentive Program.

ملخص الدراسة

يعد تحفيز وإنشاء بيئة تعليمية إيجابية لطلابنا أمرًا بالغ الأهمية جدا. تقدم هذه الدراسة آلية جديدة يمكن أن تساعد في تحفيز الطلاب في كلية التربية. من خلال دعوة المتحدثين الضيوف للتحدث عن بعض الموضوعات المتعلقة بمهاراتهم الشخصية ومهنهم المستقبلية كمعلمين، يُطلب من الطلاب تطبيق ما تعلموه من العروض التقديمية للضيوف داخل المجموعة. تم جمع بيانات الدراسة الأخيرة من خلال أوراق التقييم والمقابلات شبه المنظمة. أظهرت النتائج أن دعوة المتحدثين الضيوف إلى الفصل الدراسي يمكن أن يكون لها تأثير إيجابي على معرفة الطلاب وتعلم اللغة أيضًا. لذلك، يجب دمج هذه الآلية في الفصول الدراسية، وليس فقط لطلاب السنة الأولى.

Introduction:

Every teacher wants motivated students, because they work hard, set personal goals in addition to class goals, pay attention to what needs to be performed, persevere through obstacles, do not require constant encouragement, and sometimes even inspire their classmates to work together on projects. As instructors, we frequently question how or even if we can harness the motivation of some and transfer it to others. We can usually recognize who is motivated and who is not. Motivation is one of the most important factors influencing language-learning success, so it is essential for language teachers to engage their students in motivating programs and projects. On the last two terms on my teaching experience at the faculty of education, I have realized that the teaching and learning environment is not motivating due to various obstacles concerning the educational systems going through during the last 10 years in Libya. However, I have discussed with my colleagues about establishing a motivating program that I called "Incentive program". This program aimed at creating an

English-speaking environment for our semester 1 and 2 students in an interaction with some influential personalities, who are natives or native like. This gave them a supporting and encouraging opportunity to level up their language and speaking skill, to improve their presentation skills, to increase their fluency and to develop their soft skills.

Literature Review:

One of the teachers' roles is the necessity to provide the students with a motive to level up their potential and their language skills. Despite all of the bad circumstances and the lack of facilities that the Faculty of Education encounters, we as qualified teachers are required to solve problems and develop students' English language level. The shortage of teaching aids and tools and even the bad learning environment have a bad outcome regarding our students' development. Dörnyei (1998) clarified the influence of motivation, which is considered a key to learning a second language (L2) and one of the biggest factors affecting language learners' success. Belonging, according to Weiner (1990), can possibly be a key influence on motivation. The lack of learning motivation results in a decline in learning quality and has emerged as a major problem in education. The primary measure of motivation, or even effort, is only employed by a student who has confidence in their potential to succeed. Creating instructional methods that deviate from students' current circumstances and involve them as active participants in the process can help in motivating them. The educational process should inspire the students to use their cognitive frameworks and reflect on their own behavior in order to expand their knowledge and thinking styles.

Empirical studies concentrate on the importance of intrinsic motivation in the quality of learning based on the self-determination theory proposed by Deci & Ryan (1985). According to this theoretical model, behavior can be intrinsically motivated by the person who chooses it in order to feel competent and self-determined in his interactions with the environment. This requires boosting the subject to seek out and select circumstances that allow them to use their abilities, even if doing so needs more effort or work.

An essential component of inspiring and sustaining motivation in our students is relating to their purpose for studying. Although conversing with others is the main goal of learning a language, many students may go through the entire school year without ever having a conversation with a native speaker. Then, bringing a guest speaker is one way that might assist students in connecting with inspiration-boosting language learning. According to Eveleth & Baker-Eveleth (2009), "Traditional guest speaker experiences are where a guest would interact with students in a series of collaborative activities such as presentations or seminars".

Gallagher (2019) clarifies that teachers and institutions should regularly include opportunities for students to connect and synthesize their learning. Thus, inviting experts to speak on how concepts and abilities in the course or program are applied is one technique, as Gallagher explains, to assist students in connecting and synthesizing their knowledge (69-70, 118-119). The idea that such speakers are a welcome addition to a class is well documented. Students view speakers as someone who can teach them more about "real life" experience in the field of their choice and serve as a potentially valuable professional connection who can help them succeed in that field (Byrd et al., 1989; Kamoun & Selim, 2007; Merle & Craig, 2017; Metrejean et al., 2002; Wortman, 1992; Zou et al., 2019). A recent review of 18 studies across 13 disciplines suggests that having guest speakers enhances

pedagogy by improving teaching outcomes and leads to a mutually beneficial relationship for the students, professors, and speakers (Zou et al., 2019).

Previous studies suggest that a good guest speaker is knowledgeable, dedicated, and credible (Eveleth & Baker-Eveleth, 2009; Farruggio, 2011). Also, a good guest speaker is an excellent communicator who understands students' needs, prepares well, and knows how to engage and motivate students in the classroom (Lee & Joung, 2017).

However, at the Faculty of Education, we as teachers should support and immerse students who are the upcoming teachers in the learning environment that we want them to establish, enjoy, and model in their own professional practice. Students should be giving and receiving feedback, engaging in dialogue and fieldwork tasks, taking risks and experimenting with valid practices, embracing a growth mindset for themselves and others, and learning how to depend on themselves and make self-studies. Akomolafe & Adesua (2015) claim that the classroom, as a learning environment for students to acquire knowledge and appropriate learning environment, is the key to effective learning and development which fosters a sense of belonging, enhances the joy of learning and caring relationship among students, indicating that students are allowed to increase feeling of satisfaction in academic performance. Furthermore, in this incentive course, the students had a different learning experience in which the students had to interact with others.

Statement of Research Problem:

The problem to be addressed in this study is the decrease in the students' performance in the English language due to the lack of motivation, facilities, and creative ideas at the Faculty of Education, Benghazi University. The shortage of teaching aids, tools, and the bad learning environment badly influenced the students' outcomes and development. Furthermore, as a teacher at the Faculty of Education, I have noticed that year 1 students' teaching environment is demotivating, which had a negative impact on the students' language development. Therefore, I suggested this communicative mechanism which I have called an "incentive program". To have the best results for the students' English language performance and motivate them and make the learning environment more encouraging, this mechanism should be implemented.

The incentive program aims at creating an English-speaking environment for our semester 1 and 2 students. Interacting with some affective personalities, who are natives or native-like, this program gave them a supporting and encouraging opportunity to:

 a. Level up their language and speaking skills.
 b. Improve their presentation skills.
 c. Increase their fluency.
 d. Develop their soft skills.

Objectives of the Study:

The current study aims at investigating the efficiency or the effectiveness of the Incentive program on improving students' English language skills for first-year students at the Faculty of Education, Benghazi University. The study attempts to achieve the following objectives:

a. Assess the impact of inviting guest speakers on improving students' English language skills.
b. Discuss the obstacles to implementing the Incentive program among students at the Faculty of Education.
c. Depict the impact of inviting guest speakers, whether they are native or native-like, on the performance and the learning outcomes of students at the Faculty of Education.

Research Questions:

In order to achieve the previous objectives, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between motivating students and their learning outcomes?
2. What is the influence of bringing qualified guests, who are native/native-like, into the language classroom?
3. How effective is the Incentive Program?
4. What are the difficulties of implementing this kind of program at the Faculty of Education?

Methodology:

The current study adopts an qualitative method, with interviews and focused groups method to collect data. One of the goals of this program is to help students improve their language and speaking skills. The teacher had prepared lesson plans on specific topics for "leveling up the students' language and speaking skills". The topics in the lesson plans were related to their career and professional life to improving their soft skills. There was a guest for each topic to talk about his/her experience, and the topics were as follows:

1. Volunteering and teamwork.
2. Community service.
3. Becoming an inspiring teacher.
4. Travelling. 'Invest in traveling instead of stuff'.
5. Improving your presentation skills.
6. Fast food 'establishing a business'.
7. Youth leadership.

Each lecture lasted for 2 hours; in the first 60 minutes, there was a lead-in, presenting the topic with activities to build an overall knowledge of the topic and gain some new vocabulary. Some of the lessons were above their level, but the researcher solved this problem by pre-teaching the new vocabulary or any advanced reading or listening activities online, which the researcher did over the weekend via WhatsApp group, so it was somewhat simplified in order to save time during the lesson instead of explaining, so the students could practice more.

Regarding the point, which is leveling up the students' language and speaking level, during the lesson on the first 60 minutes, they had knowledge about the topics that gave them the chance to interact with the guest using and practicing what they had just learned. Next, the role of the guest, he/she gave a short presentation followed by an activity in which the

students had the chance to discuss or interview the guest in groups. Most of the activities with the guests were in the form of interviews or discussions.

The second factor that the researcher has mentioned before is improving the students' presentation skills by informing the students at the beginning of the program that "there is going to be a task for them as an assessment". They had to do it in groups consisting of 3 by choosing one of the topics that they have already taken during the incentive course and tried to make fieldwork in which they had to find a native speaker or native-like or even anyone who has good fluency in English, then videotaping the interview. In addition to that, they did research about the topic, then presented it to some of the faculty staff. Therefore, it was a chance to practice their presentation skills, using topics, which they were familiar with.

Finally, the other factor which the researcher has talked about before is improving students' fluency, during the steps of the program in which the students had a great knowledge and English language input, then finalized it with a task at the end. The researcher believes that the subjects during the semester and with this program, their fluency is going to be improved. We are going to notice more confident students and upcoming teachers.

Instruments and Data Collection:

The sample of the study consisted of 30 first-year students at the Faculty of Education, Benghazi University in Libya, and 5 guest speakers who are native or native-like in English. The researcher has collected the data through in-classroom teaching and guest speakers. The students' reflections through evaluation sheets were used in this study consisting of 12 statements with a rating scale for the program and for the guest speakers. 30 students submitted the evaluation sheets.

The statements described the activities that have been used in the program and how good or bad the guest speakers were. The response scale options include "strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree". see Appendix 1

The other data collection tool was semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview has been referred to by Burgess as a 'conversation with a purpose' (1984), the characteristics of which include:

- The interviewer and respondents engage in a formal interview.
- The interviewer develops and uses an interview guide. This is a list of open-ended questions and topics that need to be covered during the conversation, usually in a particular order.
- The open-ended nature of the question defines the topic under investigation but provides opportunities for both interviewer and interviewee to discuss some topics in more detail. It often includes prompts to help the interviewee to answer.
- The interviewer follows the guide but is able to follow relevant lines of inquiry in the conversation that may stray from the guide when they feel this is appropriate.

There was a chance to interview 30 students with some questions regarding the program. See Appendix 2

Discussions of the Findings:

As the researcher has mentioned before, the recent study was conducted to give a positive and motivating learning experience to year-one students at the Faculty of Education, Benghazi University.

The results of the current study indicated that the majority of the participants strongly agree or agree, and some are neutral concerning the statements in the evaluation sheets. The table below shows the number of students and their evaluations.

Table 1: Incentive Program Responses

Statements	5	4	3	2	1
1. The objectives of the Incentive program supported the objectives of my course (Listening & Speaking 1 / 2).	16	14	\	\	\
2. The objectives of the Incentive program were clearly defined.	6	5	10	9	
3. The content of the program supported the objectives.	6	3	10	11	
4. The program objectives were met.	15	10	5		
5. The presenters/speakers were knowledgeable about their topics.	25	5			
6. Participation and interaction were encouraged.	30				
7. The topics were well-organized and easy to follow.	20	10			
8. Topics covered were relevant to me as a future English teacher.	15	10	5		
9. The topics were related to the lessons discussed in class. (Listening & Speaking 1/ 2).	9	6	15		
10. My teacher did a follow-up activity related to the topics.	30				
11. This program helped developed my Listening & Speaking skills.	25	5			
12. This training experience will be useful to my work as a future English teacher.	20	10			

Table 2: Presenters'/ Speakers' Evaluation (In presenting: voice, eye contact, body language, etc.)

Name of Speaker	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Average
Guest speaker 1 'Food and restaurant'	**11**	**9**	**10**	

Guest speaker 2 "Community service and volunteering"	10	7	11	2
Guest speaker 3 "How to be a good Teacher"	20	10		
Guest speaker 4 "Traveling"	10	10	7	3
Guest speaker 5 "Presentation skills "	15	8	72	

Regarding the evaluation of the guest speakers, their responses were high; as you can see from the above-mentioned table, excellent and very good and good for most of them except for the community service and traveling topic. However, some of the students during the semi-structured interviews indicated that the topics of community service and volunteering were a bit complicated, and they should have spent more time on them. Furthermore, regarding the traveling topic, some of them claimed that it was not an interesting topic for them. They also concluded that they should have another topic related to their learning and career.

Furthermore, during the interviews, the students gave good remarks on the idea of inviting a guest speaker to talk about their future careers and how to become a good teacher. They even wished to have the same program for their upcoming semesters. See Appendix 3

In addition to that, some students demonstrated that the practical and interactive part of this program, which was mostly concerned with interviewing and discussions, gave them a beneficial learning experience.

Eventually, these results from the evaluation sheets and the semi-structured interviews revealed that this incentive program has a positive impact on the students' learning process and their motivation to learn the language in a different mechanism. Therefore, this study indicated that exposing students to knowledgeable people to interact with during their learning process can have massive positive effects. However, the next semester, the management of the faculty refused the continuation of this program as they claimed that we should not cooperate with people from outside the University.

Recommendations & Limitations:

After implementing this program among the first-year students, at the Faculty of Education, Benghazi University, the recent study presents the following recommendations:

1. Future research can deal with bringing a guest speaker to any subject for not only listening and speaking. This can have a great reflection on the students' learning process.
2. Future researchers can create or prepare lessons that can encourage students' soft skills and then apply them in a practical side, for example, group presentations that can help the students in teamwork and corporation.

3. Teachers should cooperate with the Red Crescent team to provide these kinds of soft skills workshops. I believe they are the best example of teamwork, leadership, and community service.
4. There should be a proper course assessment in order to evaluate students' progression in this program.

Like any other research, there are some limitations or obstacles that the researcher may encounter, and among them are the following:

1. There are some challenges concerning engaging the students absolutely. The first is to find native speakers, as I used my own social network. The faculty have not provided any facilities all of the facilities were on the researcher own expenses.
2. There were many challenges, therefore, there should be a team, working on this program.
3. Due to the bureaucratic management of the faculty's administrators and the time management. The continuity of this program was refused with no official reason.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, there are several factors affecting our teaching process and other factors affecting the learning process in the past few years in our department. The researcher believes this kind of motivating activities to our students will bring good and positive results to themselves as teachers and to the faculty as a whole.
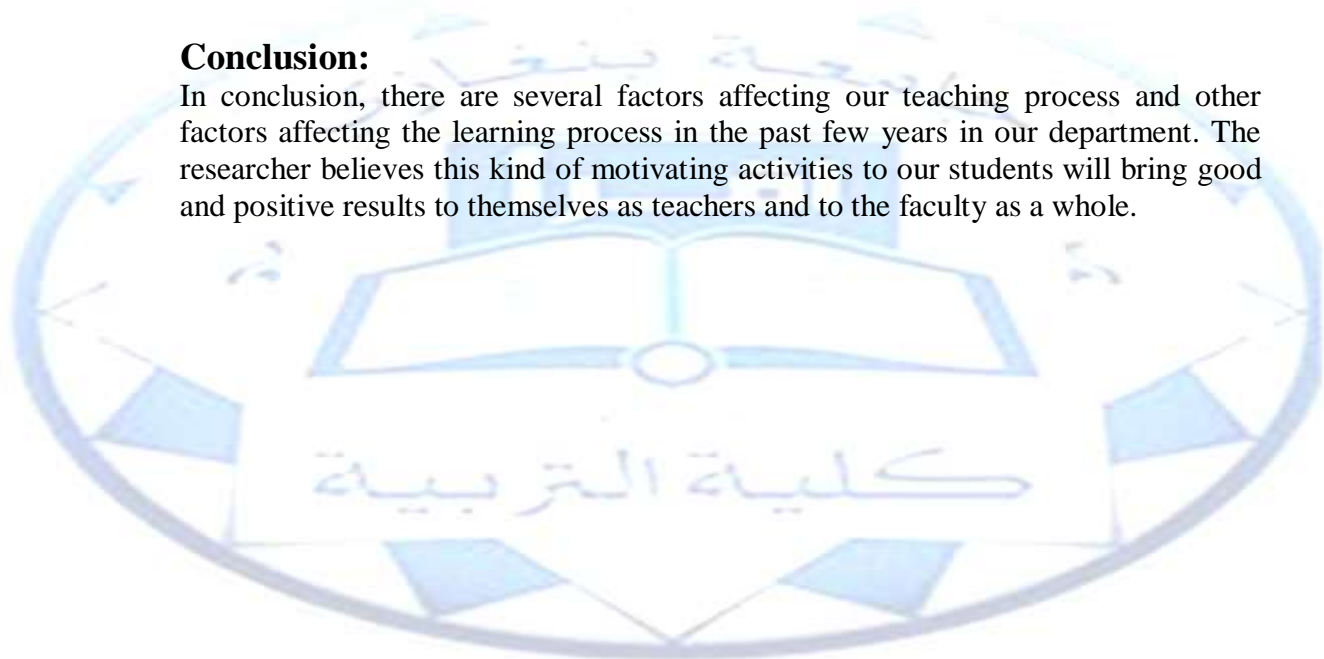
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Appendix 1

INCENTIVE PROGRAM

Feedback Evaluation Form

Please rate the following statements. Use the following rating scale:

5 – strongly agree   4 – agree   3 – neutral   2 – disagree   1 – strongly disagree

Program

	5	4	3	2	1
13. The objectives of the Incentive program supported the objectives of my course (Listening & Speaking 1 / 2).					
14. The objectives of the Incentive program were clearly defined.					
15. The content of the program supported the objectives.					
16. The program objectives were met.					
17. The presenters / speakers were knowledgeable about their topics.					
18. Participation and interaction were encouraged.					
19. The topics were well organized and easy to follow.					
20. Topics covered were relevant to me as a future English teacher.					
21. The topics were related to the lessons discussed in class. (Listening & Speaking 1/ 2).					
22. My teacher did a follow-up activity related to the topics.					
23. This program helped developed my Listening & Speaking skills.					
24. This training experience will be useful to my work as a future English teacher.					

Presenters' / Speakers' Evaluation (In presenting: voice, eye-contact, body language, etc.)

Name of Speaker	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Average
Jhonathan kissinger "WOW"				
Ibrahim Dofani "red crecent"				
Amanda " campridge'				
Jasmin Tiger				
United international institute staff " presentation skills				

Appendix 2

Interview Questions

1. What topics would you have spent more time on? Why?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. What topics would you have spent less time on? Why?

_____
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_____

3. What did you like most about this program?

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4. What didn't you like about the program?

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_____

5. Please provide any other additional comment/s about the program.