



Promoting Social and Emotional Well-Being of ESL Students through Engaging and Inclusive Environment

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Abstract

This paper aims to describe and highlight different ways and strategies on how language teachers can provide positive learning environment that may promote well-being of students or learners. In the current health and global crisis, more and more students feel stressed and anxious about what is happening around. This dominant emotion impedes their desire to continue learning because their concentration is affected hugely and widely. To achieve the primary goal of this study, the researcher employed qualitative method in the form of phenomenology. Through interview and conversation analysis, this paper pointed out various and helpful tips and insights from the findings. At the end, these tips are recommended to language teachers for inclusion and infusion in their online and offsite classes that can promote social and emotional well-being during times of disruption.

Keywords: social and emotional well-being, instructional strategies, inclusivity, engaging learning environment, language teaching

1. Introduction

In the age of 21st century, language teachers are expected to cultivate among learners' different skills useful and relevant to the workplace such as communication, collaboration, and critical thinking among others. However, many learners are becoming passive due to present pandemic situation where several other prefer and decide to work instead of pursuing academics. On the other hand, teachers and stakeholders are still hopeful and optimistic that through proper guidance, supervision, and effective strategies they can still unleash and motivate students to become alert, active, and engaged in online tasks and classes.

This study is grounded on Affective Filter Hypothesis of Krashen in Brown and Attardo (2016) which illustrates the reason for individual differences in L2 ability carrying feelings, emotions, and moods. According to Krashen, anxiety blocks language learning. He further states that this is the reason why children learn quickly; they have no affective filter. The affective filter determines which language models (dialects) people will adopt, which parts of the language will be studied, when attempts at acquisition will pause, and how quick a learner will acquire the second language.

The main objective of this study is based on the question/problem: How do language teachers provide learning atmosphere that promotes well-being of learners?

2. Literature Review

Educators are often influenced by a set of perspectives and philosophies about instructional practices and strategies offered by leaders, presenters, and books. Students and pupils should be the most active members of the classroom setting. Some teachers claim that their first year of teaching was unsuccessful because they were still crawling on system and facing a stage of adjustment. Students have to be the most active in the classroom since the core of learning process is the learners. Learners tend to gain more and recall ideas effectively when they can engage in hands-on and collaborative learning activities. As seen around the globe, organizations today are seeking applicants who are problem solvers, leaders, communicators, and policy makers who can work well in teams. Those skills are better honed and upgraded in an active classroom (Rollins, 2017).

In a student-centered classroom, structure and predictability are required to achieve formulated goals. It has been proved that effective learning structures in place is even more important in the active classroom setting than in the teacher-centered delivery because learners are moving and collaborating (Rollins, 2017).

Lesson framework is likewise essential because it balances student autonomy and classroom setting. At some instances, rethinking lesson frameworks can ensure that each lesson component has a purposeful and distinct mission. In the lesson framework, variety encourages thinking and curiosity. Teacher delivery is important for parts of the content. Teachers provide directions and make decisions to achieve higher quality of work (Rollins, 2017).

According to Kirschner, Sweller and Clark (2006), instruction that is unsupervised and does not provide specific ideas that students need to learn can be unproductive and may reduce achievement. The strategies suggested and cited in the paper fit into an instructional outline that thoughtfully builds time and create boundless opportunities.

Creating more active learners means creating a balance between roles of teachers in learning and responsibilities of teachers. Through appropriate lessons and tasks given, student work will deepen and develop with a certain level of effectiveness (Rollins, 2017).



2.1 Active Student Learning as a source of Higher Achievement

Less time and focus are allocated for teacher talking and delivery, and a greater emphasis and time are spent on having students develop, read, create, analyze, and summarize. In a traditional learning environment, information largely flows from teacher to students. Teachers are highly engaged as they move, write, explain, erase, question, rephrase, and respond. On the other hand, in an active learner-centered classroom, information flows in both directions, and students are evidently active (Tomlinson, 2017).

Teacher talk time is a concern. Hattie (2012) states that somewhere between 70 and 80 percent of the class time is consumed by teachers talking and that older students are outtalked even more than students in lower grade levels.

In addition, Tsegaye and Davidson (2014) discovered in their study of language teachers that it was even higher, with an average of 83.4 percent classroom discourse belonging to teachers and 16.9 percent to students.

In a study conducted by Yair (2000), 865 students in grades 6-12 in all academic tracks wore wristwatches programmed to beep throughout the day. When the watches beeped, students responded to questions about what they were doing which covered their level of engagement, mood, and thoughts.

Marzano and Toth (2014) explain that the traditional teacher-centered pedagogy/approach has limitations. Rather than increasing student outcomes and independence, students may be spending the core of their time just listening. If learners spend most of their time at lower levels of thinking, students may find themselves unready for more challenging assessment tasks.

The significance of linking the part to the whole is a main point from Bailey and Pransky (2014) as they provide guidance in helping students collect information to long term memory. They say that when students are doubtful about the main idea or goal of what they are studying, their brains tend to either frantically search for meaning and connections, which covers precious active memory space, or zone out and give up on knowing what is happening. Simply state, seeing how the parts fit into the big piece helps learning more feasible.

Creating learning experiences that balance teacher explanation and student discovery requires reflection on what a lesson should contain and perhaps even the tasks of the teacher. The professional reward depends on the outcomes of seeing how students successfully carry out tasks and providing feedback to share in their learning and what caught their interests (Tomlinson, 2017).

Gladwell (2013) also shares about a special capacity some people possess for overcoming tremendous adversity in order to achieve victory. A gleaming example of his finding includes a number of students who became successful in their chosen career despite issues on dyslexia and other learning disabilities. He underscores that even children with disabilities can be successful as long as districts and schools will incorporate the soft skills. The communities also aim to graduate students with character skills to become successful members of the community; at the same time, being lifetime and lifelong learners.

Even students graduating from prestigious business schools with MBAs are often lacking the skills employers are seeking for. This was a picture from the message of Bloomberg (Levy & Rodkin, 2015). About 614 employers responded to a survey that asked not just about the traits they required from candidates but also their attributes that are most difficult to find. Their results were showcased in a dynamic online graphic called “the skills gap”. Moreover, the survey indicated that these skills which employers most desire among candidates but have most difficulty finding: creative problem-solving, strategic thinking, leadership, and communication skills.

An advance organizer which is a linkage to previous knowledge can provide a way to students for them to acquire information more effectively and demonstrate to students an image of success (Hattie & Yates, 2014).

Learner engagement, autonomy, pedagogical tasks, and increased opportunities to spend time with students learning through multiple perspectives are good start for a favorable list (Tomlinson, 2017).

Stations are not only bridge to incorporate movement during sessions. Students can stand to exchange notes, work problems, or play a vocabulary enrichment game. At the very minimum, learners can take a swift stretch break during lesson breaks. Learning stations, by their nature and purpose, can infuse purposeful student movement. Also called centers, learning stations may have an elementary image, but they are an integral instructional device and technique for all ages (Tomlinson, 2017).

Movitz and Holmes (2007) share their experiences in teaching high school where they incorporated learning stations while handling a medieval unit. One key point on their reflection is that learners don't outgrow their love of learning through hands-on and multisensory tasks. They witnessed increased student participation and more meaningful experiences through stations.

Cooperative learning, on the other hand, can be an effective mixture together and simply asking students to work together lacks the organization and same goals of effective cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is not just working in groups; rather, it is purposive, tactical, and structured instructional strategy that can promote healthy learning environment (Tomlinson, 2017).

Fielder and Brent (2007) provide logical reasons as to why cooperative learning is attainable and effective. Students can learn better by performing something active, rather than simply sitting and listening. They also believe that cooperative learning benefits smarter students, who are put in the position of having to explain and summarize concepts to team members who contribute to success of the team.

Macmillan (2021) online course offers insight that says building relationships that are meaningful and not just transactional. The teacher has to allocate time in each lesson to learn about the lives of his students. The teacher should find out what inspires students and what they feel passionate about. They can also talk about themselves and value communication practice. With the chance provided by the teacher to understand his students and understand one another, this situation forges stronger bonds among members of the class leading to creating a more supportive and inclusive classroom environment.

It also suggests teachers to be transparent by offering full disclosure on why the teacher presents the lesson and how tasks and materials are designed to help students achieve progress. Explaining the purpose of the tasks, activities, and approaches to students provide them a roadmap for completion and motivation.

2.2 Pickup Gold along the Way

Tomlinson, (2017) notes that when teachers use multimodality and progressive tasks in classrooms, they provide alternative routes for the learners and create opportunities for them to pick up gold along the way. As expedition leaders, teachers can observe which paths their

adventurers (learners) choose and encourage them to reflect on which have been useful. The activities, strategies, approaches those students identify as useful can be compared with gold nuggets picked up on their way. These gold nuggets help students for future learning and help teachers differentiate and cater for students' attitudes, skills, and performances.

Another approach is to provide progressive tasks that slowly increase in difficulty, allowing learners to work at their own pace, and empowering them to work independently. Some students work quickly through tasks. What matters most is that the progress of students from their beginning points, not that they all work the same (Tomlinson, 2017). Some students need extra challenge while others need extra assistance.

2.3 Offer Alternative Routes

Offering students alternative choices about how they process and complete tasks enable them higher autonomy and increases engagement. It also provides them with varied routes into comprehension, maximizing the opportunity for successful learning. Inclusion of multiple approaches to learning is possible through application of multimodality in classrooms. Multimodality is the application of multiple communication channels such as sound, gesture, image, writing, and video within one medium allowing students to gain meaning in a variety of ways. By encouraging imagination and creativity, students are able to form and express their own views to better understand the world around them. Inclusive classrooms should promote critical thinking, communication, and collaboration (Macmillan, 2021). Further, collaboration has essential role in ensuring transmission of ideas and social interaction of learners whatever the modality is. If students feel they are engaged and comfortable in the classroom, they will be willing to attend and participate whenever sessions are held.

2.4 Synthesis

Most of the findings and works cited center on how educators provide quality and effective instruction among their classrooms and how they assess and evaluate learning outcomes. The current study is connected to the thoughts and ideas shared and implied by the literature and outputs completed by researchers, experts, and educators. The commonality lies in the central mission and goal of this paper, which is developing learners as they face new normal challenges and situations. Furthermore, through quality instruction and other factors, this study aims to protect and maintain social and emotional well-being of students as all peoples around the globe withstand the effects of the pandemic.

Teachers can support the development of learning skills of students while they allow them with space to respond and evaluate what tasks and activities work best for them. Students can also carry out reflection tasks at the end of each lesson. Teachers can create tick-box evaluation forms to help learners identify what they discovered most engaging and which tasks helped them learn most effectively. Using varied strategies, teachers can offer students alternative routes through the learning jungle that will increase their chances of reaching their temples at the same time, allowing them pick up gold along the way.

In a positive learning environment, learners are engaged, safe, connected, and supported. Healthy and safety issues and efficient communication with both parents and teachers are also highly emphasized for a successful learning outcome. In this aspect, the role of collaboration plays a significant role. By incorporating collaborative and learner-centered strategies, teachers can make a difference in the lives of students hence, preparing them for the real world and the workplace.

3. Materials and Methods

This paper investigated how language teachers deal with struggles of learners in the language classroom during the stage of pandemic. Furthermore, the study uncovered how language teachers, who served as participants, provide healthy and conducive learning atmosphere by using relevant strategies and techniques that can promote the well-being of students online and offline.

Beforehand, the researcher collected perspectives from experts then picked five participants using criteria including experience and education. He picked out participants by using purposive sampling technique in which the traits of subjects were considered and connected to the problem and phenomenon. He used phenomenology to study the life experiences and observations of the participants regarding the phenomenon or event. To get a clear picture of the context and event, the researcher used interview and online discussion with the participants. Content analysis helped the study achieve results.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Online Conversation and Observation

P1- In an online class, we normally do "catching up" by asking "how are you?" "I am asking them how they do with distance learning and let them express their emotions. Communication matters a lot in uncertain times like pandemic lockdown (communication, follow up, motivation).

P2- During online class, I am trying to know how my students are going through. I have a class monitor who advises me about situation of others. I keep on encouraging my students to move forward and go on. I am making them realize that we are responsible and accountable on our actions (asking students, making follow up, encouragement).

P-3 Being a teacher in this pandemic makes me more appreciative and considerate to my students. I try to appreciate simple acts and be grateful for them. I check their mental well-being and situation. I also listen to their stories (consideration, appreciation, storytelling).

P-4 As an educator, I personally encourage students to be prayerful and take challenges for betterment. I have been telling them not to give up (prayer and encouragement).

P-5 In my online class, I set personal query on how are they. I motivate them always to catch up and do their best with prayers (follow up, motivation, prayer).

The first participant shared that catching up with students by asking a question creates an atmosphere of care and concern. Through an open atmosphere where students can feel acceptance and communication, they can somehow build motivation and confidence to stand amidst crisis and stress.

The second participant opined that it is important to know how his students are going through by asking them in the form of follow up. He also encourages his students to be strong, responsible, and accountable. The term “encouragement” is a magic word for him.

The third participant believes that showing appreciation and consideration to students helps them build and shape social and emotional well-being. Students in the class are allowed to share their thoughts and stories.

The fourth participant stated that personal encouragement to face challenges among students is working well. He also includes on his advice the value of prayer.

The fifth participant starts with questions as a form of follow up and feedback. He keeps on motivating students to study hard and live their dreams. He also stressed prayer as a weapon.

Teachers can support the development of learning skills of students while they allow them with space to respond and evaluate what tasks and activities work best for them. Students can also carry out reflection tasks at the end of each lesson. Teachers can create tick-box evaluation forms to help learners identify what they discovered most engaging and which tasks helped them learn most effectively. Using varied strategies, teachers can offer students alternative routes through the learning jungle that will increase their chances of reaching their temples at the same time, allowing them pick up gold along the way.

Positive learning climate helps learners deal with stress and negative feelings that may interfere with their desire and focus to learn and participate among classrooms both virtual and onsite sessions. If the language teacher has built and set a healthy and conducive environment, eventually the well-being of students will be promoted and protected. Hence, there will be smooth, productive, and meaningful interaction among learners under the supervision and instruction of the teacher. Furthermore, an inclusive classroom can help the language teacher conduct effective learning assessments that measure intended learning outcomes.

The researcher compared his notes, observations, and conversations with his participants to form reliable textual data that are within the standards of trustworthiness and validity as required in any qualitative undertaking or investigation. He also made sure that all collected data were kept confidential and participants were properly oriented about the purpose and procedures of the research.

As teachers meet the learners online, he can provide an atmosphere of appreciation which is motivation. He can uplift them further by leading them to prayer or reflection. He can ask questions as his way of knowing their situation. All efforts and greetings are part of an active communication where students can freely respond and share what they feel inside.

Based on the responses of the participants as examined by the researcher, the most effective ways on how language teachers can build and promote social and emotional well-being of learners in the language classroom includes: (1) motivation, (2) prayer, (3) feedback or follow up, and (4) communication.

From the ongoing points, this study believes that an inclusive learning environment is able to employ varied tasks and strategies that can promote healthy and conducive classroom that can maintain and sustain the social and emotional well-being of others.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

After analyzation and exploration of life experiences and observations of the teacher-participants, this study offers fruitful and meaningful recommendations and insights. Language teachers should be patient, flexible, and reflective on the current situation of their students by offering leniency in terms of submissions and tasks. They should be considerate when it comes to selection and imposition of projects and activities because not all students have money and connectivity to meet such requirements. To provide effective learning atmosphere, varied and appropriate strategies and techniques can be applied by the teachers in the language classroom that may provide and promote social and emotional well-being of students. It is concluded and recommended that inclusion is possible when and if the learning atmosphere is promoting well-being of students amidst uncertain times.

It is also worthy to recommend that collaboration between parents and teachers should be emphasized because working together is necessary to achieve goals of school and family. Teachers are there to transfer the ideas, concepts, and skills but sustainability of this task should be supervised by parents or family. If family and teachers will work together, no matter how heavy the loads are, children and students can carry out their tasks and projects.

Language teachers and other areas of specialism can uplift and promote the well-being of their students by providing balanced, appreciative, and motivating classroom atmosphere (even virtual class) that will make students feel they are motivated, appreciated, and respected. Different strategies can be applied in the online and onsite class so that individualities, differences, and potentials can be cultivated. Despite ongoing crisis, all members of the academic institutions can surpass all challenges.

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