

Supporting Professional Learning
in
Southeast Asian Universities
through
DEPISA



Edited
by
Kevin Laws, Lesley Harbon & Christabel Wescombe

Developing Educational Professionals in Southeast Asia

DEPISA
Monograph no. 5

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Developing Educational Professionals in Southeast Asia

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Introduction

Since 2010 Developing Educational Professionals in Southeast Asia (DEPISA) has been dedicated to the continuous improvement of teaching practices through practitioner inquiry. Beginning with 18 members from five universities involved in a project funded by the Australian Government and the University of Sydney DEPISA has grown into a network of over 200 members from more than 20 educational institutions.

DEPISA is a unique organisation. Apart from the initial funding through Australian Leadership Awards Fellowships DEPISA has grown through the support of its members and key universities. There are no membership fees to join DEPISA. There are no conference fees to attend our annual meetings.

It is important to acknowledge the part played by the following universities in providing facilities and other support for our meetings:

Can Tho University, Vietnam
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Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand
Suratthani Rajabhat University, Thailand
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DEPISA also acknowledges our members, who either self-fund or seek other funding to provide for travel and accommodation expenses in order to attend meetings.

We believe that the encouragement of practitioner inquiry through action research, learning through action, practitioner-led research and other forms of inquiry assists our members in their professional learning and this, in turn, contributes to the improvement of teaching practices and students' learning.

Monograph no. 5 contains articles representing various forms of practitioner inquiry across a range of disciplines from 30 members from six countries. We are extremely grateful for the support received from Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand for hosting our 12th DEPISA International Conference and publishing Monograph no. 5, and in this way making a valuable contribution to the improvement of teaching and learning across the Asian region.

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Enhancing Teenage EFL Learners' Motivation through Activity-Based Language Teaching

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Abstract

Promoting learners' interest in learning is very important for learning to be effective. This action research study was conducted to find the answer to the issue 'To what extent does activity-based language teaching (ABLT) affect teenage EFL learners' motivation?'

In this study, 74 teenagers using the same level with a course book, *Smart Choice 2*, were divided into two groups: the control group was taught in a traditional way with lectures; and the experimental group was taught with ABLT. Participants were required to complete questionnaires and invited to join in interviews. Classroom observations were also made. Data were analyzed and synthesized using the Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

The results showed that ABLT had a positive effect on teenage EFL learners' motivation. In addition, it helped to raise learners' confidence and provided insights into factors which distracted students throughout the experimental period.

Introduction

As educators introduce innovations to improve teaching quality, there has been a big shift in the role of teachers and learners. Instead of maintaining the traditional teacher-centered classroom model, researchers have advocated learner-centered models. ABLT is considered a progressive teaching method which allows learners to construct knowledge for themselves. Nevertheless, very little research has been conducted to determine the effects of ABLT on EFL learners, especially on their motivation.

Literature review

Christiansen and Walther (1986) define activity as goal-oriented actions occurring as a consequence of changes in their needs and intentions. This definition emphasises Leontev's theory about the structure of activity and the role of human needs and goal-directed processes caused by the motive of the activity. Richards (1982) supports the above mentioned theory and sees activity as a kind of purposeful procedure involving learners in doing something related to the goals of the course.

Activity-based language teaching (ABLT)

Many researchers (Harfield, Davies, Hede, Panko, & Kenley, 2007; Prince, 2004; Suydam & Higgins, 1977) have discussed ABLT as a teaching method in which students actively participate and learn through planned classroom activities. According to Prince (2004) ABLT requires the active involvement of learners in their course of study. Harfield et al. (2007) reflected that ABLT is a teaching method in which learners can make a dynamic contribution in all learning activities without being ‘unreceptive spectators’ (p. 98). Further, Suydam and Higgins (1977) defined ABLT as a process of learning with students ‘actively involved in doing or seeing something done’ (p. 8).

Why ABLT?

Fines (1994) pointed out that ‘good learning is always active learning, in which students rather than the teachers do the work’. Suydam and Higgins (1977) considered that teachers who use ABLT need to have the use of manipulative materials. Teachers should not only follow the task sequences in textbooks. Instead, they should assign, rearrange and split the task into shorter activities which integrate the new content with the learners needs. Stößlein and Changchun (2009) argued this approach is a way that teachers integrate learning with learners’ current knowledge. Students are exposed to a myriad of different activities as they learn how to learn. Actively involving learners in classroom activities is believed to be an effective way for them to improve. ABLT helps learners not only gain knowledge but also improves and develops some important skills including team-working, communicating and problem solving.

What is an ABLT lesson like?

In investigating the effect of ABLT on students’ performance in listening Khan and Tabassum (2015) conducted a study in which an ABLT lesson of forty minutes comprised four activities: Preparation, Presentation, Practice and Production.

Gomathi (2013) in his research suggested some ideal activities for use in the communicative grammar classroom included: Brainstorming; Word/Sentence Building; The Jigsaw method; Just for minute; and the Twenty Questions Game.

The process of designing a task is more complex than that of designing an activity. As can be seen from Figure 1, an activity is merely a part of task designing. Moreover, according to Nunan (1989) a task can stand alone as a communication act and has a sense of completeness. An activity, in contrast, is just a simple action which serves a concrete purpose in the whole lesson.

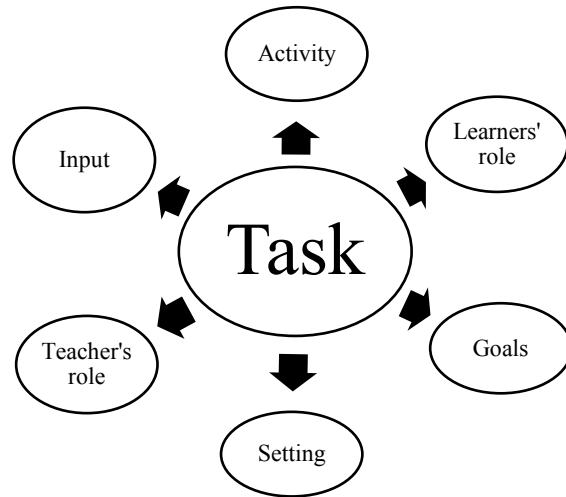


Figure 1: A framework for analyzing communicative task (Adapted from Nunan 1989/2000, p. 11).

Motivation

The concept of motivation has been defined in different ways, but most researchers agree that motivation is ‘responsible for determining human behavior by energizing it and giving it direction’ (Dörnyei, 2009, 117).

Brown (1994) considered motivation as an inner drive or impulse that promotes people to do a particular action. According to Cherry (2014) motivation is viewed as the process in which all behaviors are begun, guided and goal-oriented. Regarding motivation in second language learning, Gardner (1985) and Dörnyei (2009) saw it as the key factor that directly influences the success of a learning process. Connecting this factor with the use of ABLT in English teaching, Hake (1998) argued that learners’ motivation is facilitated by involving learners in interactive activities.

During the 1990s there was a revival of research interest related to motivation in learning a second language or a foreign language (e.g. Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1994; Williams & Burden, 1993, 1997). Dörnyei (1994) developed what he termed an ‘extended framework’, which considered motivation at the Language Level, the Learner Level and the Learning Situation Level. According to Dörnyei course-specific motivational components are related to ‘the course syllabus, teaching materials, teaching method and learning task’ (p. 280). These are mentioned in another framework proposed by Keller (1983) which related motivation to teacher’s behaviors, personality and teaching style. Group-specific motivational components concern the group dynamic of learners and include four sub-factors: goal, norm and reward system, group cohesion and classroom goal structure (Keller, 1987).

Table 1. Components of foreign language learning motivation

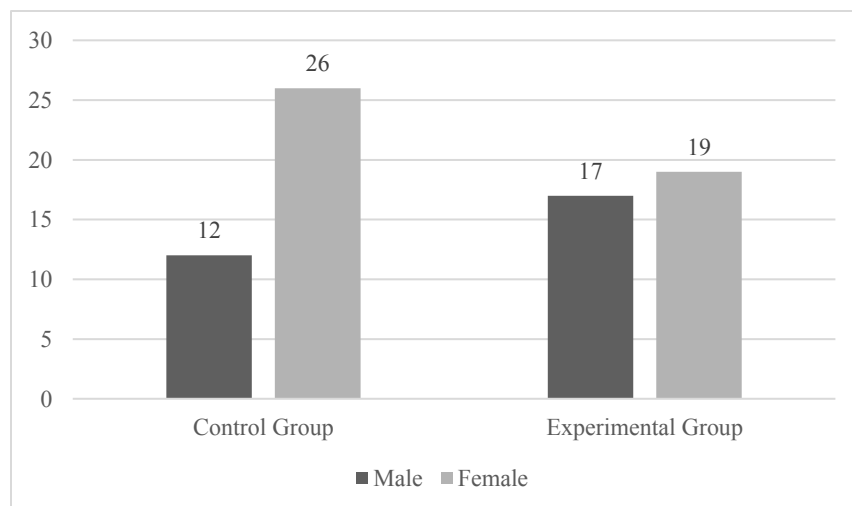
Language level	Integrative motivational subsystem
Learner level	Need for achievement Self-confidence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language use anxiety • Perceived L2 competence • Casual Attribution • Self-efficacy
Learning situation level <i>Course-specific motivational components</i> <i>Teacher-specific motivational components</i> <i>Group-specific motivational components</i>	Interest Relevance Expectancy Satisfaction Affiliative motive Authority type Direct socialization of motivation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modelling • Task presentation • Feedback Goal- orientedness Norm and reward system Group cohesion Classroom goal structure

Research question

To what extent does Activity-Based Language Teaching affect teenage EFL learners’ motivation?

Twenty-nine male and 45 female learners participated in this research study. All of them were required to complete a questionnaire. Six students (3 boys and 3 girls from the experimental group) were randomly chosen to participate in follow-up in-depth interviews about their attitude toward the practice of ABLT. Each interview lasted from 10 to 15 minutes. All of the answers were recorded and transcribed for the process of data analysis.

Figure 2. The number of participants in each group



The ARCS model (Keller, 1987) was used to measure students' motivation. This contains four components: Attention; Relevance; Confidence; and Satisfaction, which are required for people to be and to remain motivated.

Research design

The five steps of Learning through Action (Laws, 2013) were applied in the research.

Step 1: Identifying the issue

In many lessons it was noticed that the students were excited with warm up activities but they quickly became bored with the lessons, especially when the teacher kept lecturing to explain grammar rules. The idea arose as to whether turning all learning content into activities to make students become more active in the learning process and to gain knowledge by themselves, would retain learners' motivation.

Step 2: Gathering data

The study began by requiring all students to complete the questionnaire. This provided primary data about the level of students' motivation before the intervention. Next, the students in the experimental group, were taught with ABLT and those in the control group were taught through traditional teaching methods based mainly on lecturing.

The classrooms were observed to gain an impression of students' attention and confidence (which were determined by the number of students volunteering to answer questions and take part in activities, and the number of students who looked outside or did something else instead of learning English).

The teacher researcher noted positive and negative aspects after each lesson, recorded the interviews, made videos of the lessons, wrote reflections, and took photographs to provide illustrations about students' work. After six weeks the participants were asked to do the questionnaire for the second time.

Step 3: Interpreting data

The data were analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantifiable data from the questionnaire were processed with SPSS, and the qualitative data were analyzed manually through theme grouping.

Step 4: Acting on evidence

The process of acting on evidence is summarized in Figure 3.

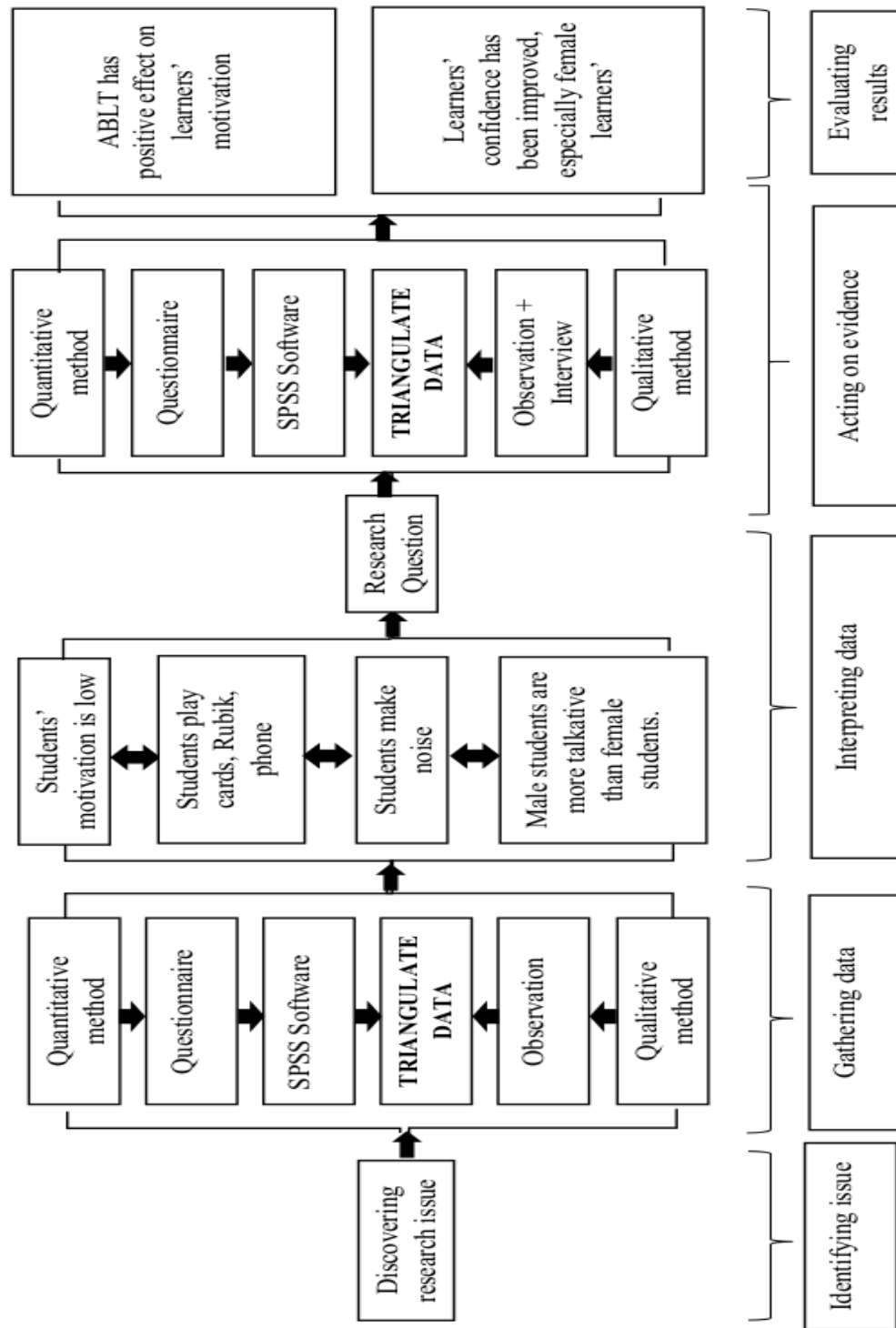


Figure 3: Five-step procedure of Learning through Action model

Step 5: Evaluating results

The researcher evaluated the results and prepared a report.

Results

When the questionnaire was administered before the intervention it was found that there was no significant difference in the motivation between two groups.

After the six-week experimental period, the teacher researcher delivered the questionnaire for the second time (see Table 2):

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on pre-intervention and post-intervention of the two groups

Group		Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Experimental (N=36)	Pre-intervention	2.82	4.41	3.71	.42413
	Post-intervention	3.24	4.71	3.95	.38094
Control (N=38)	Pre-intervention	2.74	4.74	3.64	.53471
	Post-intervention	3.09	4.29	3.7	.32931

As indicated in Table 2, the pre-intervention mean score of the Control group (M=3.64, SD=.53) and Experimental group (M=3.71, SD=.42) were at the same level. For the post-intervention, the mean scores from both groups after receiving different treatments show that the Control group remained at the same level of motivation, while the Experimental group scores changed.

An independent sample t-test was run to analyze and compare the mean score in learners' motivation between two groups. The results from the Control group show that teenage EFL learners' motivation between pre- and post- tests was at the same level ($p=.134$). The results from the Experimental group indicate that teenage EFL learners' motivation between pre- and post- tests was somehow different.

After the intervention, students are more motivated than before, with the mean scores at 3.95 and 3.71 respectively. In other words, ABLT had positive effects on teenage EFL learners' motivation.

Table 3: Mean scores of the experimental group between pre- and post- intervention

Group (N=36)		Mean	SD	t-value	P	df
Experimental	Pre-	3.71	.42413	-2.494	.015	70
	Post-	3.95	.38094			

Data collected through qualitative methods supported these results. The interviews indicated that the students agreed that the use of activities brought about a different classroom atmosphere and helped the lessons become attractive and lively.

Student 1 said:

Compared with the previous one, this course makes me more interested in learning English by the appearance of new things such as new topics, new activities and new games...

Student 4 said:

... students can interact with teachers and friends, while the teacher in the last course just let me learn by lecturing and he did not gave chances for us to interact ...

It can be concluded that ABLT helped change the atmosphere in the classroom positively. The students became more involved in the class activities and were aware of what they could do in the lessons. When students are involved in the learning process they feel more interested in learning and therefore become more engaged in their learning.

Each cluster made a contribution to motivation which included Attention, Relevance, Confidence and Satisfaction. It was noticed that learners' confidence had been improved after the intervention.

ABLT and learners' confidence

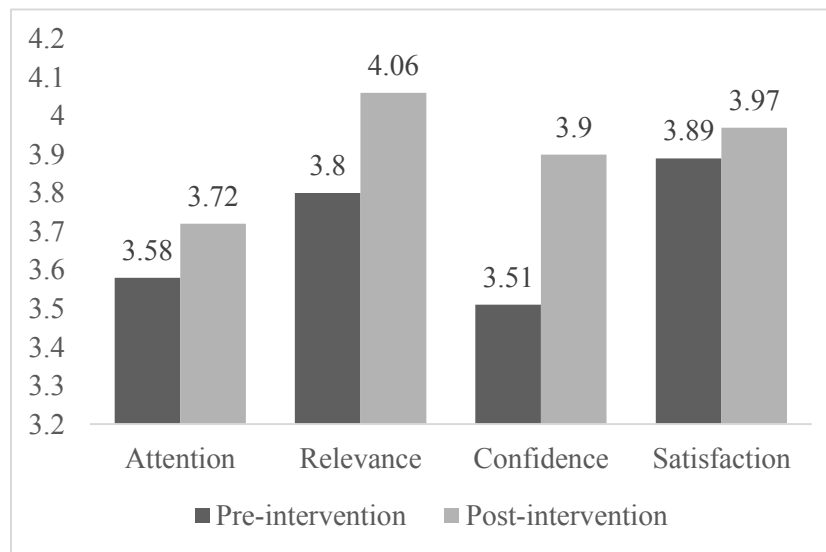


Figure 4. Descriptive statistics on pre- and post- Intervention in the experimental group

It can be seen that EFL learners' motivation in each cluster increased in the post-intervention columns. Although the statistical analysis showed that there were no statistically significant differences between pre- and post- intervention in Attention, Relevance and Satisfaction, learners' Confidence has been raised significantly.

Qualitative data also indicated an increase in the students' confidence after the intervention. Through observation, the teacher-researcher found that the students actively took part in learning activities. The data collected in the interviews also showed that the students in the Experimental group were quite confident when joining in the activities.

Participants believed that the activities in the lessons helped reduce boredom and thus they concentrated better on their studies. As a result, the lessons became understandable and they could remember what they did and learnt longer (Student 2).

However, the interviews provided some insight into why some learners become distracted during lessons. When the teacher-researcher asked the students ‘What are reasons that disturb you in the lesson?’ the students revealed some reasons that were also supported by teacher observations.

Student 4 said:

...many students bring cell phones to classroom and use [these] while studying...because they think that the main purpose of coming to this center is for relaxation ...and talking.

Student 2 said:

‘students love playing’. Since most of the students in this group were 10 to 12 years old, they were quite innocent and they loved playing games such as Rubic, cards and yoyos that they brought into the classroom.

Student 2 also said:

... because they just meet together twice a week, they have many things to talk about together...

Students 4, 5, and 6 agreed that they could be affected easily by their surrounding environment.

Pedagogical implications

The results of this study indicated that ABLT helped the teacher boost teenage students’ motivation and hence the students paid more attention to their study and became more confident. In the light of the findings, it can be concluded that teenagers are aware of their active role in the classroom and they highly appreciate interesting activities in an EFL lesson. Therefore, appropriate teaching methods such as ABLT should be taken into consideration for positive changes in the EFL classroom.

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