THEMES IN EDUCATION

ACTION RESEARCH
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Introduction

Educational action research has always been significant for teaching practitioners who share the same interest in common issues or problems. However, in this specific action research; the attempt was on selecting major focuses in a non-native English educational environment with collecting, analyzing data and reporting results.

Considering the huge amount of expectations on today's teachers, no activity is time-worthy unless it ensures a promising, satisfying results. Thus, to maintain validity and reliability, this action research had to avoid relying on any single source of data and to observe any evidence through multiple perspectives that can help to compare and contrast.

Special Thanks

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Your organizational skills, professionalism, and kindness create a marvelous environment that is enjoyable to work in. Thank you for extending compassion and flexibility whenever one of us needs. I appreciate having the opportunity to work here under your supervision. Thank you again!

A Brief Glance to the Selected Focuses

- Nature of Second Language Learners
- Cultural Diversity
- In-School Issues
- Hyperkinetic Behavior
- Teaching Methods
- Enhancing Motivation
- Integrating Technology to Increase Attention Span
- Parents Involvement
- Post-School Phase

Nature of Second Language Learners

Second-language (L2) learning is a process in which students seek to learn a second language taking in consideration, the psychological and educational conditions. Susan Gass and Larry Selinker have mentioned in their book Second Language Acquisition "Second language refers to any language learned in addition to a person's first language; although the concept is named second-language acquisition, it can also incorporate the learning of third, fourth, or subsequent languages." [1] Children of ESL are recognized among our various age students as the most difficult. For a while they may remain silent in class as they adapt a new language even though they might be active in different other classes. The first reason to investigate in order to get a clear-cut about the situation, whether the nature of the student is as the same or differ from an English class to a native one. This "Silent Period" may last for a few days, weeks or even a whole academic year unless there is a native language interaction with another classmate.

How a second language is acquired so quickly? To answer such question, it is obvious that individual students vary in types, techniques and styles of acquisition. Studying the characteristics of students' flexibility, behavior, motivation, personality and background will certainly help to understand how a specific student would acquire the language with not much loss of time.

With no less significance, knowing which area of language to acquire is

just important. As Jim Cummins suggested in 1979, the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), or the language of social interaction, and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), or the language required for success in academic disciplines. BICS is the language of the playground, of talking with one's friends, of shopping, and will usually be acquired in informal settings. CALP, on the other hand, needs specific and direct teaching. [2]

All over, there were and still some common myths about ESL students that they can learn English quickly by exposing them to the language and surround them by native speakers or to stop speaking their native language and focus on using English more frequently. Actually, exposing to the target language is insufficient to ensure academic language proficiency in particular. On the other side, native language would only facilitate second language development and achievement. With a proper guidance to the target language, especially in the matter of translating non-verbal signals, idioms and expressions.

Understanding the nature of students education and if they have been attached with the language once before, may provide you with a better understanding of their educational needs and ways to support them.

Cultural Diversity

The term Cultural Diversity mostly common in the field of education as students of multi-cultures opposed to a monoculture. For example, native Arabs studying English in the USA. However, I have defined the term as well for ESL students who have sensed the effects of the culture while learning the target language in their native environment. The reason why; because exposing a second language even in the same environment equals exposing and knowing that particular culture. Not only being in UK or USA to feel the cultural diversity but learning the language by itself would certainly makes you feel the differences.

The mother language of a learner can have a great influence on the process of learning another language, for it all has the same main goal; communicating through reading others segments. Therefore, applying the first language to the target one will, somehow, increase unconsciously the acquisition process.

Many people argue that even in the matter of translation, languages, the first and the target one, most likely would meet and share some of the same ideas, thoughts and feelings which confirm the idea of transmitting, at least, some of the characteristics of the first language to the target one.

To manage such differences in one class; we have to consider the differentiation between both languages. Also the different cultural heritage of different student's backgrounds. Communication will possibly provide accurate information to effective work and group performance.

In-School Issues

In this chapter, we will discuss the difficulties in dealing with misbehaving students and frequent misbehavior. Sometimes, we find students have difficulties in concentration during a lesson. That might be attributed to the lack of interest, distracting factors or many other reasons. In order to fulfill the acquisition process, we need to determine the causes and effects and eventually to have appropriate solutions.

There are lots of misbehavior actions facing teachers during school day. We can categorize those issues into 4 types: educational, psychological, behavioral and social. Through this categorization; we can propose actual and effective solutions for what we face in our classes and schools. It is not necessarily violence toward the student or yelling or even calling up parents as magical solutions to eliminate what the student express. An understanding students' psychology and social/family environment are keys to find out the proper procedures to deal with them.

Educational Aspect:

- Poor academic achievement.
- Poor academic corresponding.
- Poor planning for studying.
- Lack of passion to school which leads to neglect it.
- Fear of academic failure.
- Studying in wrong ways.
- Lack of motivation to learn.
- Coming to school late repeatedly.
- Frequent absence without excuse.
- Difficulty of absorbing lessons.
- Difficulties in some school subjects or courses.
- Ambiguity in purpose of learning specific subject.
- Hating school because of negative-treat of teacher.
- Age difference compared with class-mates.
- Lack of doing homework.
- Escape from class.

Psychological Aspect:

- Negative attitude toward self.
- Inattentiveness during class lessons.
- Difficulty in making right decisions.
- Difficulty in choosing alternative solutions.
- Jealousy of other colleagues.
- Shyness in unusual situations.
- Excessive anxiety.
- Fear of loneliness and isolation.
- Feeling of depression from school environment.
- Irritation over simple actions.
- Oblivion.
- Poor self-confidence.
- Aggressive behavior against other colleagues.
- Week personality.
- Fear of school.
- Stammering.
- Kinetic behavior.
- Lack of love and care by parents or teachers.
- Lack of the needs to play and entertain.
- Stubbornness.
- Extreme anxiety before exams.

Behavioral Aspect:

- Cheating during exams.
- Lying as a habit.
- Using abusive words.
- Lack of morals and decency.
- Lack of respect for others' properties.
- Making school/class a messy place.
- Robbery.
- Writing/drawing on walls and other school properties.
- Aggressive attitude toward younger colleagues.
- Doing undesired or dangerous behavior.
- Lack of responsibility.
- Negligence of preserving clean uniform and body.
- Unclean face and hands.
- Throwing trash in school yard.

Social Aspect:

- Inability of making friends or retain them.
- Confusion when meeting others.
- Difficulty of positive interaction with others.
- Lack of participation in team games.
- Feeling not belonged to the school.
- Lack of corresponding with school laws and regulations.
- Difficulty in making positive attitude towards school.
- Effect of family issues on the educational achievement.
- Lack of participation in school activities.
- Overprotection and spoiling effect.
- Racism.
- Family separation (due to divorce or break up)
- Negative impact of friends.

Factors Encourage The Existence of Problems:

- Incorrect ways of raising children.
- Excessive pampering of a child.
- Lack of attention in home.
- Imitating others.
- Reaction to a punishment.
- Feeling of depression.

Identifying Problems:

To identify student behavior and to be clear for the teacher and parents as well, there should be connections or links between all people who are responsible and surrounding the student in everywhere and at all time. Most places the student goes to or stays in witness the repetition of wrong behavior. Therefore, it becomes easy to identify and treat. In particular, primary sections' students spend between 7 to 8 hours a day at school. The rest of the day they just stay at home except a few hours during weekends or special occasions during the week. To recognize and meet student needs we have to split the observation between teachers and the parents specifically. If there is other people who are concerned or in charge of the student in other places/times, they might be added to the connection circle too. For example, student's coach in sport centers. Also if he lives with other than his parents if they are divorced.

Furthermore, accurate observation and diligence toward newest behavior as being reckless actions are keys to a faster treatment. Because even if the student did not do incorrect behavior, he might mimic anything comes across his eyes. Accordingly, warnings and cautions in the right way are necessary.

Guidance Methods:

- As Muslims, we always use the religious awareness.
- Health awareness by parents and school advisor.
- School grouped guidance in different occasions.
- Guiding students through reading the solution of a specific problem. (as a hint)
- Guiding student to attend school activities. Each for his own needs.
- Using behavioral forms.
- Practicing correct and right habits.
- Punishment from the vice principle.
- Extra tasks or assignments.
- Advice and persuasion.
- Consulting other teachers and parents.
- Prepared programs.
- Thrill students through suggestions or hints.
- Do not give accurate dates for desired programs. Keep them curious and excited.
- Surprise them between now and then.
- Let students share their experiences, do some tasks or work on projects under the supervision of teachers.

Hyperkinetic Behavior

Definition:

"Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Hyper Kinetic Disorder (HKD) are amongst the most commonly diagnosed behavioral disorders in children and young people. Core symptoms include developmentally inappropriate levels of activity and impulsivity and an impaired ability to sustain attention. Affected children and young people have difficulty regulating their activities to conform to expected norms and as a result are frequently unpopular with adults and peers. They often fail to achieve their potential and many have comorbid difficulties such as developmental delays, specific learning problems and other emotional and behavioral disorders." [3]

Finding Hyper Kinetic Students:

Actually, it is not much difficult to notice hyper kinetic students. In general, they are like the most obvious students to recognize due to constant disturbance. There are 3 symptoms that indicate the hyper kinetic behavior; lack of attention or distraction, hyperactive or impulsivity.

According to Dr. Russell Barkley in his book Taking Charge of ADHD - 2005; these 3 symptoms can be known as the following:

Lack of Attention or Distraction Symptoms:

- Difficulty of maintaining concentration.

- Frequent oblivion.
- Inattention for details.
- Committing mistakes due to negligence.
- Inability to finish what he has started.
- Anarchism.
- Losing personal things.
- Avoid doing homework.
- Inability to follow instructions.

Impulsivity Symptoms:

- Lack of patience.
- Inability to wait for the role.
- Rashness in answering questions.
- Interrupting others.

Hyperactive Symptoms:

- Inability to stay still.
- Inability to play quietly.
- Too much talking.
- Too much running and climbing.

Dealing With a Hyper Kinetic Student:

- The first and important point in dealing with a hyper kinetic child is understanding your child's disorder is not enough. However, informing school advisor or teacher that he is not bad or evil is as important.
- A hyper kinetic child is more interested in activities, art works and games which help him concentrate even more.
- Sharing times with the child in playing some games to develop his abilities.
- Be patient and avoid criticizing or pushing him.
- Focus on positive behavior and appreciate it. Also, avoid negative behavior as they never happened (only if it is not dangerous).
- Being aggressive could only make the child nervous.
- Involve the child by doing chores with you.
- Investing the hyper kinetic behavior positively through participating in any sport activities.

Teaching Methods

Definition:

Teaching methods refer to the strategies used for classroom instruction and management. Nevertheless, every teacher has or use his own style, methods or philosophy. There are 2 main teaching theories; teacher-centered learning and student-centered learning. As far as Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Education is concerned, student-centered learning approach is more favorable and recommended.

Teacher-Centered Learning:

In teacher-centered learning, teachers are more dominant than students. Mainly, teachers use direct instructions while students receive information. In Saudi Arabia particularly, teachers were using this approach for the past few decades especially in direct instructions and initiations.

Student-Centered Learning:

On the other hand, student-centered learning is more concerned with students as the most important figure in the learning process. A teacher's role focuses on coaching, guiding and enhancing students. Active learning is very familiar strategy for all teachers in Saudi Arabia that helps the student-centered learning process. It also consists of multiple skills and strategies which activate students to function in the learning process.

Active Learning Skills:

- Distinguishing facts.
- Planning.
- Prediction.
- Experiments conduct.
- Collecting evidence.
- Determine the credibility of information sources.
- Communication.
- Evaluation.
- Analysis.
- Imagination.
- Accuracy.

Active Learning Strategies:

- Problem-solving.
- Critical thinking.
- Collaborative learning.
- Role-playing.
- Investigation.
- Simulation.

Modern Teaching Methods:
- Presentation.
- Discussion.
- Projects.
- Problem-solving.
- Field trips.
- Chants and stories.
- Personal educational system.
- Classroom questions.
- Collaborative learning.

Which of Modern Teaching Methods to Use?

To choose one method upon the others; depends on the teacher in sorting the information he intend to send to students. It also relies on the teacher's character and the stage he teach. Well teachers use multiple methods in one class in order to keep students not bored. For instance, teachers may start with presenting the title and the goals of the lesson. Then, he may use classroom questions to excite students and provoke them to think about the lesson. After that, he could move at the end of the period to discuss with students to reach for final results.

Enhancing Motivation

"I never teach my pupils, I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn." Albert Einstein. [4]

Motivation plays a significant role enhancing astonishing spirits within student's hearts and minds. It may adopt multiple forms which teachers can invest to serve the learning process and also as a stimulus element. There is no doubt that teachers seek to go ahead with students level up to the top, wherefore, teachers suppose to insure using each and every possible way or even twists that may fulfill the object/objects he want to claim. As well as encouraging students and enhance their response for the sake of positive progress continuity. Also, meaningful and positive enhancing has a great role in individual's life because as a result, students ought to self-assessing and monitoring their manners and behavior to the best.

Definition:

As Merriam Webster Dictionary define the word "Motivation":

- The act or process of giving someone a reason for doing something : (the act or process of motivating someone).

- The condition of being eager to work : (the condition of being motivated).

- A force or influence that causes someone to do something. [5]

So, we can suggest that motivation is the inner power which pushes an individual to do a certain action, follow a particular pattern/behavior or to encourage and stimulate eagerness of doing something.

Motivation Role in Learning Process:

You may not own your students but you may own their admiration! In relationships (generally), people follow the ones they really love or like. When you control the people whom are in love with your personality or character or what so ever, you can spark their inner fire. Motivation and stimulation become very easy by making them responsible for themselves and their actions and behavior.

The Base of Motivation:

Proper educational guidance aims to place desirable adjustment within students' behavior and minds setting. Mental and physical motivation play a significant role enhancing virtuous behavior and modify noxious ones. All over, it is as a responsibility on parents and teachers to practice the punishment/reward principle as a major educational methodology to control and improve students' behavior properly.

Integrating Technology to Increase Attention Span

Technology has significantly impacted the educational industry. The use of technology aims to aid the learning process whether on students or teachers. It can help preparing lessons and collecting enough data for teachers on one hand, finding good and fast resources for students on the other hand, as well as other magnificent abilities with fast results. In the field of education, the use of technology include some of the new learning facilities such as: computer, lap top, USB, CD's/DVD's, television, smart board, projector and the internet as an ocean of unlimited information and so many other facilities.

Importance of Using Technology in the Learning Process:
- To increase the creative and inspirational thinking.
- To promote students to give opinions.
- Facilitate the delivery of ideas and information away from initiation.
- Time-saving for teachers in explaining lessons and in doing homework and other worksheets for students.
- Providing suitable environment for learning.
- Applying experiments from several places of the world.
- Multiple ways to obtain the same information through internet, journals and encyclopedias.

Benefits of Using Technology in the Learning Process:

- The ability to follow up with students/parents.
- The ability to access online libraries or dictionaries.
- Guiding students to appropriate information.
- Acquiring self-learning skills.
- Exploiting educational electronic/online games.

Parents Involvement

There is no doubt that family has the large impact in the process of constructing individuals in the most suitable and appropriate way. It is undeniable that family has also the greatest load in developing students' capabilities. Such developments are essential foundation in raising the level of education for students.

Family Contribution With Students' Homework:

Raising children in the correct ways and feeding their scientific knowledge is what every family seeks nowadays. Within Saudi Arabia, the mother is of prime importance. The most important factors of student's success or failure lies with her through constant follow-up for homework and other worksheets; since the father has other responsibilities such as providing house needs and working outside of the home mainly. But if we look from another perspective, we find that involving in the matter of follow-up must be jointly between the father as well as the mother. Especially the "Perfect Family", should all members participate in its duties. As the lack of follow-up from the father side to his son in early stages of his age particularly, may costs the child a sort of carelessness and constant failure. The mother on the other side, may sometimes, be unable to combine the household duties and her child's school obligations. Therefore, the father has to participate even with a little part in the process of raising the child.

Reasons of Students Poor-Level of Education:

- Lack of interests of many parents about what happens inside the school.
- Lack of access with latest updates and activities held in the school.
- Poor communication with the child.
- Poor communication with the school.
- Lack of asking about the child's school life.
- Not helping the student to overcome the obstacles.

Improving the Educational Process:

- Give before taking actions. All parents should think about the support and encouragement he/she give to their child.
- Parents should show their pressure to mend our educational process.
- Parents should fight for the sack of development of education and to preserve and ensure the quality of education provided to their children.

The Impact of Parents Involvement:

- Opinions and attitudes which are related to the importance of the educational process.
- The sense of belonging to the school.
- Communication between the school and parents helps the developing of the educational process and the success of the social events at the school.
- Support students' achievements in all subjects.

Post-School Phase

The Student At Home:

The family is the neglected factor of school success. We have to reconsider the relationship between homes and school in order to activate the real role of the family and not only in educational achievement, but also to ensure the excellence in success.

Regular School Day:

Students return home after spending a school day that lasts nearly 7 hours. They stay at home around 17 hours, half of them sleeping and the other half wasted in playing or doing nothing. Those "17 hours" show the importance of family supervision to direct and instruct the student.

Suggested School Day Plan:

 In our society, Saudi Arabia, the day is divided into 5 main periods. The day starts with Fajar prayer around 5 a.m. and students have to leave home to school. Around 12 p.m. is Duhur prayer time. Also, it is the time for students to get back home. Usually, they arrive home hungry. We should offer them a proper lunch meal and let them spend some time to rest. Students as children may use their resting time in playing Play Station or other games or even sleeping. If so, they should not sleep over 2 hours. Around 4 p.m. is Asur prayer time and we may suggest to do their homework and assignment then even if it is not requested for tomorrow. The best way to do an assignment is by letting the student

handle his own homework and manage to find a way for answers. There is nothing wrong in asking any family members for specific details or ideas, or he may even call his classmates. Either ways, the student should do his homework on his own since the very first years in primary school. The greatest principle students have to learn whether in school or home; is to learn how to be independent. One of the serious faults; destroying the student's learning progress by others doing his assignment out of sympathy or feeling pity on him especially in early stages of school. A better way for parents is to supervise him while doing his assignments and to assure he do it correctly. In some cases, the student may ask for help. Again, there is nothing wrong in asking for help but the parents should provide words, ideas, hints or guide him to the right page of the book to find the answers. In worst scenarios, students with learning disabilities, parents may offer him more than just help but also by doing some or more of the assignment in piece of paper and the student may copy the answers in notebook or activity book. At the end of Asur period, comes Maghrib prayer time. Roughly, the student have around 1 hour until Isha paryer time. It would be healthier for the student to breathe fresh air in the outdoor garden or anywhere safe. Give him some space to regain his breath and power. It is recommended to eat dinner straight after Isha prayer and have some time to study (around 2 – 1 hours) and then he may fall asleep. Before going to the bed, students should arrange his bag and prepare his books and other tools and materials. With Fajar prayer he wakes up and has an appropriate breakfast at home before going to school. It is

strongly advised not to go to school without having a breakfast because it is an important meal to fill the body with enough energy.

Exams Periods:

Most certainly, exams periods are not simple for students. In order to pass these periods peacefully, students need special care and also a clear plan. When students get back from school, they should have a couple of hours to rest and eat lunch. After Asur prayer, they should start studying for tomorrow's exam. It is important the student does not hold his mind about today's or yesterday's exam. Thinking about the past is just waste of time. Therefore, parents should help them preparing for the next day. Family should be calm during exams periods and call off parties and visits. They may spend their time to set a proper and healthier studying atmosphere. Also, it is very important the student gets enough time for sleeping. Another important matter is to wake up 2 hours earlier and having breakfast. Never let the student restudy the whole book. In such periods, fresh juices, fruits and vegetables are necessary.

Private Tutor:

Some families attend to have private teachers in home to help the student do homework, assignment and studying. In most cases, these types of teachers are more likely to be harmful than being beneficial. Student may need a private teacher in specific conditions as: trying to catch up the absence from school because of illness or having learning difficulties with particular subjects (Math, Science, English and Arabic

Grammar. Higher grades: Physics, Chemistry and Biology). Such conditions require the use of a private teacher. Furthermore, not any type of teachers but a well-educated, specialist and experienced teacher.

Private teaching is not a good because the student may get lost between the school teacher and the private one. Each one has his own way and methods. And since the private teacher is more likely to satisfy the student than actual teaching; this teacher may seek to implement the student's desires in time, place and type of studying he wish for. Thus, the private teacher becomes a disadvantage in the learning progress of the student.

Students Attendance and the Role of the Family:

Regular attendance is crucial in adopting the school environment. If the student kept on dropping some classes he will eventually miss some of the lessons. Because some subjects are accumulative, missing those classes leaves him with a huge gap to adapt with these subjects. The family is the only responsible for organizing the student's time between studying, sleeping and going to school.

Students Absence:

It is the responsibility of the family to inform the school advisor about the student absence during the first period. On the other hand, the school is responsible to inform the family about the student absence in a maximum time of the second period.

Sickness Absence:

Some students are absents with a minimum feeling of sickness. Frequently, the student has some issues in adapting with the school or a specific teacher. To treat such cases, parents should take on students with regular attendance and to not drop the school unless for some illness reasons based on a doctor.

Absence Fever Before Exams Periods:

Many students used to be absent a few days before exams. This absence is not for the sake of students. Teachers may help students sometimes with this absence when they do not fill their periods with effective revisions. Especially with topics which students did not fully digest.

Studying at Home:

Students need someone to follow-up with them. Not as private teachers do but to make sure the student does his assignments and well studied. As well as inspecting the student's notebook and teacher notes.

Vacation Period:

One of the misconceptions in our society; vacations as being a time of playing, sleeping and laziness. Some parents and teachers as well attempt to justify this misconception as being a time of rest and relaxation away from schools atmosphere. However, knowledge has no time or place to be acquired. As I believe, vacation is all about changing

our daily life's order. For instance, in school days, students wake up early and go to school for a specific time. But in vacation, while schools are closed it does not mean a student drop out the learning process totally. Intellectual students are those who have the tendency towards learning in all the time. Therefore, such vacations should be more beneficial for students. So, as a recommended plan might be as the following: a slight increase in sleeping time. Also, a good increased time in playing. As well as fixed and reduced time for direct learning. There also should be a time for self-learning as free reading or revising some old information. Furthermore, summer camps during summer vacations have lots of advantages and benefits on educating and guiding students toward practical skills, values and self-improvement. In some cases, like family owned business, parents may assign some tasks to the student to work on between 3 to 4 hours a day.

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