



INNOVATION TO AMPLIFY SELF PRESENTATION SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY

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Article Received:30/05/2020

Article Accepted: 28/06/2020

Published online:30/06/2020

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.8.2.269](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.8.2.269)

Abstract

The purpose of this small scale study is to discuss the effect of innovative concepts on students in higher education. The study focuses on the fact that higher order thinking, team working skills as well as self-presentation skills can be developed among undergraduate students to enhance their employability and prepare them for the workplace. The results of the study reveal that students who are exposed to concepts of innovation can develop better skills with a proper understanding of their own creative potential. This would enable them to deal with difficult or challenging circumstances at the workplace with self-confidence and a clear logical mind.

Keywords: Innovation, Team work, Communication, Self-presentation skills, Problem solving, Transformative learning.

Introduction

English prevails as a dominant language across the world and students are expected to gain some mastery over it. Although most employers in the UAE expect fresh recruits to possess a high level of integrity and be self-disciplined individuals, it is important for researchers to note that potential employers are barely satisfied with the quality of the graduates who apply for jobs.

Nguyen (2005) elucidates that according to employers, the topmost skills that are mandatory are communication skills, a sense of responsibility, balanced personality, and problem solving skills along with an ability to take the initiative and use co-operative team working skills.

Hence it is crucial that students are given opportunities to acquire these skills through team work where suitable topics would motivate students to brainstorm for ideas and share them with their peers. Developing higher order thinking skills along with interpersonal capabilities would have a

tremendous impact on their performance at the workplace.

The research questions that were investigated are as follows.

1. Is there a co relation between higher order thinking skills and topics focused on innovation?
2. Would it be possible to develop the self-presentation skills of undergraduates through structured team work on concepts related to innovation?

The hypotheses that were applied are provided below.

Hypothesis 1: There is no co relation between higher order thinking skills and topics related to innovation.

Hypothesis 2: A serious co relation exists between higher order thinking skills and topics related to innovation.

Hypothesis 3: It is possible to develop the self-presentation skills of learners through structured team work based on concepts of innovation.

Challenges and Rationale for the study

Typical employers constantly look for new recruits who are capable of higher order thinking. Graduates with creative and innovative ideas are preferred as there is a huge skill gap between problem solving and project handling. While students know how to acquire knowledge and regurgitate it, it was observed at the beginning of the semester that most of them did not know how to communicate with confidence, evaluate problematic situations or apply logical thinking. Therefore, it was necessary to develop their higher order thinking abilities to enable them to express themselves confidently.

Literature Review

Nguyen (2005) has explained that graduates generally lack initiative when they need to solve problems at the workplace and certain skills are required by industrial employers. The researcher has also noted that many graduate students entering the workforce lack oral or written communication skills. Ortega (2009) supports this with an observation that collaborative learning may facilitate learning through the usage of oral tasks.

Poon (2009) has mentioned that some government firms may use additional ways to boost the proficiency of students. In addition, parents have displayed an uncritical submission and acknowledged the importance of English communicative skills at the workplace.

Storch (2013) declares that students have to struggle when they need to deliberate and express their thoughts. As researchers delved into the sociocultural theoretical perspective, they have noted that collaborative learning can provide learners precious opportunities for scaffolding. While working on specific tasks related to language learning, students would be able to deliberate and disseminate ideas. This kind of team work would enable them to adopt a similar mechanism at the

workplace and solve problems that they may encounter in real world situations.

Galloway (2017) has elucidated that the challenges of globalization require English language instructors and professors to change their approach in order to assist students to face realities that exist beyond the classroom.

Phongsirikul (2017) supports the theory of changing instruction in the twenty first century classroom and observes that language professionals would need enormous will power to change their teaching strategies. Matsuda (2018) has also argued that the world of English is messier at present and implies that teaching methods need to change. These viewpoints need to be respected as transformative learning can reform the field of education.

While conducting this study, variables related to gender and age were not taken into consideration as it was a mixed group of men and ladies in the age group of 19 to 30. This could be a limitation that can be redressed by researchers in the future.

Methodology

As a part of this longitudinal study, two sections of the course *Communication Skills* were targeted. The control group was from the fall semester of an academic year at a private university in the UAE. The experimental group was chosen from the fall semester cohort of the consecutive academic year. It is important to note that this is an older mixed methods study. Both the cohorts had a mixture of Engineering, Computing, Business and Interior Design students and they were informed that they would be part of a research procedure. Although the cohort size was larger, irregular attendees were considered as outliers. As a part of the course, the control group received some exposure to communicative activities based on their syllabus and textbook. However, the experimental group was exposed to additional, innovation oriented activities. Initially, the experimental group was shown a brief video on the innovative usage of lathe machines by ancient people. This video was used to motivate them, develop their listening skills and improve their pronunciation and diction

through observed modeling. The video was highly appreciated by the students who realized that ancient people were highly innovative with regard to building huge structures and decorating them with elaborate frescoes and stone work. In subsequent class sessions, a few minutes were devoted to discussing innovative ideas. Students were given small team tasks of problem solving wherein they had to discuss innovative ideas and share it with their peers. This was meant to develop their higher order thinking and communicative skills. It must be noted that it was not easy to evaluate whether students were developing their higher order thinking / problem solving skills. The researcher had to rely on close observation and take notes during the process of group work and team task activities

that were carried out in the classroom. Another activity assigned to the experimental group was to carry out brief presentations on innovative concepts that they had unearthed. Students were very enthusiastic to present their ideas and came forward without any hesitation towards the end of the semester.

Findings

A pretest was conducted at the beginning of the semester which was meant to be diagnostic in nature. Students from both the groups were asked to do a brief presentation on independent topics.

Table 1 - Results of the Pretest

Cohorts		Approximate time taken for task completion	Assimilated average class scores for the presentations / 10 %	Total percent /100%
1st group	Control group (n = 26)	3 minutes	3%	30%
2nd group	Experimental group (n=26)	4 minutes	3.5%	35%

The results of the pretest were abysmal as students were very shy, reticent and hesitant in voicing their ideas. Table 1 illustrates that 30% of the

control group was able to do well while 35% of the experimental group had a fair degree of success.

Table 2 - Results of the Posttest

Cohorts		Approximate time taken for task completion	Assimilated average class scores for the presentations / 10%	Total percent /100%
1st group	Control group (n = 26)	7 minutes	7.5%	75 %
2nd group	Experimental group (n=26)	7 minutes	9%	90%

The posttest was an individual self-presentation by the respondents from both cohorts. The presentations were evaluated for knowledge, clarity, confidence and voice quality. The findings are shown above through table 2. They reveal that the self-presentation skills of students in the experimental group increased dramatically and reached up to 90%. It is evident that there was a sharp increase in their performance. Although the

control group improved to some extent due to communicative activities in the classroom, the experimental group displayed a higher degree of improvement, self-confidence and self-presentation skills that were exemplary.

Discussion

While conversing about core employability factors, some managers in the UAE have acknowledged that problem solving and higher

order thinking skills are critical for the workplace while self-presentation and team skills are highly valued. Hence, there was a sense of urgency to develop these skills. It must be noted that this small scale study was also useful to find out the role of innovative concepts in motivating students. Hypothesis 2 of this small scale study was proved to be true to a large extent. It was discovered through observation that higher order thinking skills received an impetus while students brainstormed for ideas related to innovative concepts. While monitoring students who were involved in team tasks, a huge difference was noticeable. The students in the control group were not very optimistic while discussing ideas mentioned in the textbook. Some students were not paying attention to their peers. On the other hand, students in the experimental group were vibrantly energetic because they were coming up with innovative ideas which were seldom used at the workplace.

In addition, hypothesis 3 regarding the development of self-presentation skills through team work and innovation was also proved to be accurate. Hypothesis 3 was proved as there was a significant difference in the pretest and posttest results of the students in the experimental group. There was a definite improvement in the performance of students from the experimental group.

Conclusion

Employability skills are considered as transferable skills and are not related to technical skills. These skills refer to generic, essential communicative competencies which could be inclusive of writing skills or soft skills. These kinds of non-technical skills would enable a graduate employee to do well in the workplace (DEST, 2007). On the whole, it is imperative to note that these employability skills would provide a competitive edge to students who are preparing to enter the workforce.

The current study was productive as a gradual exposure to "innovation" motivated students to do well. Hence, innovation based topics and team work are highly recommended as a successful strategy to develop higher order thinking

and self-presentation skills of undergraduates in higher education.

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