

English Education Reform

E. Hitzer, Univ. of Fukui, Faculty Development Forum, Vol. 4, p. 11 (2004).

This article covers motivation, student experience, contents and means of teaching, as well as applications. Motivation is key for teacher and student. English teachers need to reflect their own motivation and share it with the students, to fully motivate the students. One of the best motivations is to view a student as a true “neighbor”[1]. This concept motivates the teacher to give his best, maximize student benefit, aim at raising the student to the same level and avoid isolated skill training.

Humans share an inherent communication orientation towards God (prayer) and towards neighbors (conversation). Oral and written language serves this purpose. The natural aim of language education must hence be: Empowerment for communication. Both human history and childhood experience prove that oral precedes written communication.

Student experience naturally is rather mixed. Minus entries are the unbalanced English education for university entrance examinations at high schools and the lack of proficiently English speaking school teachers. Both leads to what I call “written approach to speaking.” Written communication means: much time, dictionary use, time for fixing grammar and consulting ‘experts’. Trying the same for oral communication makes the other party assume lack of: skill, topical knowledge and interest, resulting in communication stop. On the other hand, true oral communication is characterized by short time, no dictionary use, imperfect grammar, mere use of language fragments with the overall aim “to bring the message across.”

The famous 17th century pioneer of education J.A. Comenius stated: “Everything should flow by itself. Enforcement be far from the things.”[2] Contemporary English education in Japanese schools is deficient in this respect. This applies to method, aim and practice. University students say: “It was boring” or “I began to hate it.”, etc. Here is not the place to go into details. Summarizing we can say, students are not trained for (oral) communication and often leave school with a squashed motivation. One direct lesson is, that university English education should avoid the “for examinations ONLY” image.

How can adult English education reattach the subject to daily life, and show that oral communication is easy and enjoyable to learn and practice?

I propose that learning, practice and progress must ultimately become self-controlled. One nice tool for this is the English multimedia content of the internet.[3] It is

important to learn the situational language skills necessary for enjoying English media, for striking up and maintaining a conversation, for traveling and living abroad, etc. It is necessary to foster positive associations of English and ones own preferred future.

The choice of syllabus should naturally start with interests and experiences of the teacher (authenticity!), English attached to daily life, situational skills, general social interests and relation to the student’s scientific major.

The means should be geared towards real, attractive and practical use of English, supplementing knowledge on demand (vocabulary, oral explanations, multimedia, tables) and employing language games. Dialogues, student presentations and activities beyond the classroom nicely combine aim, practice and result.

The example of the Akita International University with 45 applications per opening shows, that requirements like: “Students are required to study abroad for at least a year.”[4] strongly attract students. It seems some Japanese universities are so far ignorant of the vast potential of international university exchange for highly motivated language learning. What are the benefits of studying abroad: maturity, language proficiency, understanding other cultures and mindsets, natural purpose-driven learning, high motivation, friendships, etc. I speak here from my own experience and from numerous testimonies of others.

Students finally need to be given a strong sense of the unlimited applications of new language skills. In the short term this means communication with foreign students and researchers both at the place of study as well as at conferences. In the short term students can enjoy songs and movies better, let their hobbies and research benefit, and create their own internet presence, etc. In the mid term, they can travel and study abroad, gain new job opportunities (domestic & abroad), engage in NGO/volunteer work and maintain cross border communication. In the long term reeducation and retirement abroad, welcoming of foreign tourists and promotion of international peace und understanding are major and more than individual benefits.

As in every field of knowledge serving and teaching others with the new language skills gives true and confident consolidation and mastery. All students should gain this perspective. Motivated practice is the key. But practice without motivation is detrimental.

[1] [Matthew 22:39.](#)

[2] J.A. Comenius, Opera didactica omnia.

[3] Now *English for You* homepage:

<http://sinai.mech.fukui-u.ac.jp/teaching/English4U.html>

[4] The Asahi Shimbun, p. 21, 2004-3-25.