Research Article

USING MICROTEACHING AS AN EFFICIENT TOOL IN TEACHING ENGLISH AT UNETI HANOI VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

Microteaching has widely been considered as an efficient tool for developing and mastering specific teaching skills by modifying teaching behaviour and employing real teaching situation. The first section of this assignment will focus on strengths and weaknesses of Microteaching method used in a Reading Lesson, Unit 12 with topic "Music" for students at UNETI. This research paper was made possible through the help and support from everyone, including: my parents, my mentor teacher, my peer observers, my friends, and in essence, all sentient beings. Especially, please allow me to dedicate my acknowledgement of gratitude toward to following significant advisors and contributors: Firstly, I would like to thank my mentor teacher, for her support and encouragement. She kindly read my paper and offered invaluable detailed advices on grammar, organization and methods to approach the theme of the paper. Secondly, I would like to thank my peer observers to spend valuable time to take notes what happened in class, read my paper, help me to do interviews, and give valuable advices Finally, I sincerely thank to my parents, my friend, who provide the advice and financial support, supply me with modern computer program to calculate the percentages. The product of this research paper would not be possible without all of them.

Keywords: Microteaching; developing; mastering; real teaching situation.

INTRODUCTION

When I read the lesson plan, three main steps with specific aims in a usual reading lesson could be found clearly and easily. In the first stage, warm-up and lead-in, brainstorming approach was applied in order for Students to get the general idea of the topic "Music". In pre-reading, Teacher asked Students to listen to some pieces of music to guess the style, which might make them motivated, comfortable, convenient and familiar with the language needed in coping with the text. On the other hand, Teacher supplied Students with types of music compared to their own background knowledge of those types. Moving to the main section, the while-reading part, Students had to read the passage about music and answer the questions after getting acquainted with some new vocabulary. This stage aimed at helping Students to understand the specific content and to become aware of the rhetorical structure of the text. The final stage asked Students to draw a mind map about the roles of music based on the reading text and their background knowledge and discuss which role is the most important. Through the lesson plan, I can see that Teacher who took up one skill at a time played the role of an observer or a supervisor of the process, while Students were the negotiators who gave and took message from the unit. They had chance to work individually, in pairs and groups and immediate feed-backs were made after some tasks. Microteaching in this lesson is relatively rather simpler than in one of traditional teaching. Moreover, patterns of classroom interaction could be studied objectively. In general, the complexity of the teaching process in this lesson was reduced to observable and controllable teaching contexts that enabled Students to improve their techniques in a simple sequence of steps. However, this lesson plan had a number of limitations when I took a deeper look. The warm-up or lead-in activity should have been shortened because 5 minutes was too long for brainstorming with "music". In addition, if Teacher wanted to lead to pre-reading with matching activity, there was no need to ask the questions "What band/ singer do you like best?" In my

opinion, the lead-in might have been more interesting if a guessing game had been given out (Teacher divides class into some groups, gives some pictures about famous bands or singers and asks Students to guess who they are and what type of their music; the group who give more right answers in short time will be the winner). This game not only would have made Student warmer but it could have led to the matching activity in pre-reading more smoothly as well. Just like the warm-up activity, waste of time and illogical working method could be found clearly in pre-reading. Some questions were raised, "Is 5 minutes enough for listening 5 pieces of music? How can Students guess the right answers? May Ss give more right answers whether they work individually then check in pairs or in groups at the beginning? How can Teacher classify and explain types of music for Students to understand clearly?" If I were that Teacher, I would pass activity 1 and ask Students to do only activity 2 in the form of a game called "Lucky style of music" (Teacher divides class into 2 groups A & B, gives 5 numbers and explains the rules: each group can choose one number turn by turn, under the number is the type of music Students have to match with its description, if group A or B give right answer, they will get the score hidden under the number; group with higher score will be the winner). In activity 1 in while-reading, after Students looked through the word in the box and underlined them in the text individually, Teacher should call random Students to read aloud to check pronunciation and ask them to guess the meanings then Teacher can correct and give feedback. After Students completed the sentences, Teacher must ask them to give answer then correct. The important feedback must not have been forgotten here. It must be given by explaining how to do this kind of task: define forms of those words, define forms of blanks then choose suitable word form, then choose word with suitable meanings. Or this feedback could have been considered to Teacher's instruction at the beginning of this task and Teacher could have asked Students to recall how to do this task as feedback after correction. Last but not least, Teacher had better have hold the post-reading as opinion-sharing activity (Teacher call some representatives from each group to share their ideas in class and ask others to pay attention and give comments, so Teacher can check Students' pronunciation and

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intonation, encourage them to speak English. In short, these findings suggest that in general Teacher needs to plan more logically and stay engaged throughout, even when Students are working individually, in pairs or groups. Teacher needs to be ready to facilitate and provide resources for Students. It is important to spend time listening to learners talking, take notes of their errors to deal with later during a time in class when it is more appropriate to focus on accuracy.

ACTION RESEARCH

Introduction:

The teaching of vocabulary has been the subject of much discussion in recent years and a number of research and methodology books have appeared on this topic. Therefore, the second section of this assignment is about my research proposal on my teaching matter. I observed that English teachers in secondary school seemed to rely heavily on drilling and questioning as strategies for teaching and learning vocabulary. It seemed that learning English is restricted to inside the classroom, and students have no other opportunities to use or be exposed to English. From previous teaching practice placements, I found that learners had problems learning and retaining new vocabulary. In addition, pictures and games play a very important role in learning vocabulary, especially with young learners. Therefore, I decided to investigate whether using games or pictures in the English classroom would assist the learning of vocabulary. However, after observation in English lesson in the pre-intermediate students, UNETI and from my own experience of teaching the elementary students, there seemed to be a significant difference in taste of learning vocabulary through games and pictures of the two age groups. I realized that pre-intermediate students tended to be more interested in learning vocabulary through games rather than through pictures which elementary ones preferred.

METHODOLOGY

Action research is a process that aims to investigate issues in a variety of contexts and tries our ideas to improve or overcome the issues. Richards and Lockhart, cited in Troudi (2003), define action research as "teacher initiated classroom investigation which seeks to increase the teacher's understanding of classroom teaching and learning and to bring about change in classroom practice" (p.186). My teaching strategy for the purposes of this action research project was to try to use games and pictures to teach and practice vocabulary in order to contextualize the words and to recycle vocabulary.

Research questions:

(1) Which is better to teach vocabulary: through games or pictures or both of them?
(2) Which method is suitable to each level (Elementary and Pre-Intermediate)?

Collection techniques:

In order to assess the results of this strategy, I used six research tools: interviews, observations, a reflective journal, a pre-test & post-test examination and self-reflection form to collect data and to reflect on my teaching to ensure the consistency of gathering the information and to have a clear idea about how the opinions and thoughts have changed after implementing the action. In addition, the collected data would be analyzed by a computer program for:

- Analyzing mean of scores of pre-test and post-test.

- *Analyzing Standard Derivation of scores of pre-test and post-test.*
- *Dependent T-test would be used for comparing vocabulary skills from pre-test and post-test examinations' results.*

Sources:

I interviewed the elementary and pre-intermediate students to find out their opinions about my vocabulary teaching strategy. Lessons with pictures and games were held for two level groups (elementary and pre-intermediate at UNETI): All new vocabulary was divided to be taught with games and pictures equally. While that my peer observers and myself were taking notes on Students' behavior, and of course in my reflective journal, I jotted down the informal conversations I had with teachers and students.

Data:

In my action research, I tried to ensure ethical treatment by telling each individual who was observed, interviewed or quoted that they would be anonymous and the information would be used to fulfill the research purpose only, and it would not affect them negatively. The participants were clearly informed about the action research process: they were informed that they would be observed during the implementing of the action and they would be interviewed afterward. Moreover, the participants were informed that they were going to be observed and interviewed to gain more data to answer research questions. The teacher responsible for the group was informed that the implementation of my strategy would not negatively impact on learning time.

Procedure:

- Class orientation would be taken place on the first day of the experiment.
- Pre-test would be used before the experiment began
- The experiment would be implemented for each period (60 minutes per each) as follows:
- The teacher told learners to arrange tables for games, no need for pictures.
- The teacher warmed up learners with an activity.
- The teacher taught vocabulary through games or pictures to students.
- The teacher started the vocabulary games or showed pictures of vocabulary to students.
- After that, teacher concluded what they learned with students.
- My peer observers took note of what happened during lessons (how students enjoyed the lesson, how the environment was, etc) and interviewed teacher and some students after lesson.
- Post-test would be used after the experiment finished.
- Self-reflection forms would be provided after the post-test examination.
- The data of pre-test and post-test would be statistically analyzed after the experiment finished.
- The data from the self-reflection forms would be coded before calculated into percentage and frequency.

First-cut analysis:

Having implement the strategy of using pictures or games to teach and to recycle vocabulary and having collecting the data through the interviews, observations, a journal, data analysis from a pre-test & post-test examinations and self-reflection form, the main themes emerged as follows:

- Using games and pictures to practice and recycle vocabulary seems to increase word memorization.
- Using games and pictures to practice and recycle vocabulary seems to foster students' interaction.
- Using games and pictures to practice and recycled vocabulary seems to enhance student' motivation.
- The results calculated from the computer program showed that post-test scores were much higher than pre-test scores.
- However, there are still some differences in taste of two levels: Elementary students are more suitable to using pictures in learning vocabulary than playing games and vice versa because in some interview reports, they said some type of games were not suitable because it was too difficult, limited time, unclear instruction and cheated learners.
- The interesting thing in the reflection forms is many learners use their English for the examinations or extra classes after school instead of the English in daily life

After implementing the games and activities or using pictures to practice vocabulary and after recycling words through those methods, it seems that students' ability to memorize the words has become more efficient. Through my observations of students, and especially when they had their regular revision of the previous lessons, I noticed their increased ability to recall the words. As I noted my research journal "Am glad to hear some students say 'we had this word in that game or I like the picture with that word'; it shoes me how well they remember the word". This might be because students were given cognitively demanding tasks, where they needed to so dome thinking to complete them. My mentor teacher commented about students' genera performance by saying:

"In general, I think that students have good word memorization; the students get high marks in their tests and exams. Their general performance has increase over this semester."

When I interviewed two level students about what they thought about the games and the activities that demand thinking, there was two-way opinion: most elementary students said they preferred using pictures in learning vocabulary because it was easier and did not waste much time, while the majority of pre-intermediate said that such games helped them in their spelling test, and they would help them in their upcoming tests. One student said:

"It made us think about the correct spelling, and that enables us to avoid spelling mistakes in the test. Actually I remembered the seasons' names very effectively in our regular spelling test and that was because the activity needed thinking about the word forms".

Thornbury (2002) has observed that "The more decisions the learners make about a word, and the more cognitively demanding these decisions, the better the word is remembered" (p.25). Accordingly, it appears that using games enhances students' ability to memorize the words, as they activate learners' minds and give them the time to pause and think about the words, whether to compare, contrast, match or draw pictures which represent them, which store the words into students' working memory and hopefully the long term memory.
Another theme which emerged from the research is that effective interaction occurs through using games and activities. Moon (2000) states that "Interaction is the main source of language input" (p.73). Through my observation, I noticed that while students completed the games and activities, they talked about the activity and how they can do it, but I rarely heard them chat with peers. "I was listening to their conversations and I was hearing the target language being used a lot", I noted in my observation. My observation is supported by my mentor teacher and my peers' observations, who commented that students talked with each other about the pictures, the games and they clarified complicated things. This is also supported by the students' interviews which most of them have said that they talk about the activity, whether asking their classmates what to do, or asking what a specific word means. "I talk with my friends about the games or new words. Sometimes I ask my friends what we have to do". According to my overall data, it seems that the pictures and games played in the lessons enabled students to assist each other with how they can complete the, clarify difficult points, translate difficult meanings, or share their ideas about the topics. The other theme that emerged from the data is that pictures and games enhance students' motivation. Kyriacou (2001) points out that "… Activities must elicit and sustain pupils attention, interest and motivation" (p.23). Before I prepared any pictures, games and tasks I thought about how the activity was going to motivate the students. Through my observations, interviews and calculation results I can see how students were willing to guess the words through pictures or play games and to have activities where they can interact with each other. A peer has described the students' motivation during the lesson as follows "They are willing to guess the word or do the activity; everybody wants to participate" The majority of students' comments were also positive. One student described why she liked one particular game or picture by saying "It's fun, it's the first time we play such game. I feel that it will help me to remember the words". In my journal, I have described my observation of the reaction of the students while they were doing that game:

"They really enjoyed doing that. The most important thing was the look of enjoyment that was shown on students' faces especially the weak and the quiet girls. They were participating b having a turn to say, hear the words, and hit them. I really felt satisfied when I saw them participating and learning with enjoyment".

Students' positive attitude toward pictures, games and activities may show that students really enjoyed them. This may mean that the students really want to have the opportunity to play games, as they provide an active and supportive environment in the classroom. Further, students get bored with their usual classes where they sit passively. This can be shown by one student who said to me "This is the first time we play games. We never had a teacher who offers such games". Halliwell (1992) has summarized the benefits of meaningful games as follows: "They exploit and develop the capacity for interaction and talk, the capacity for indirect learning, the capacity for creative use of language resources, and the capacity for playing and fun" (p.40). Accordingly, pictures, games and activities provide students with chances to examine the words closely, as well as enhancing their motivation to learn.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, I found that using pictures, games and activities to practice vocabulary enhances students' ability to memorize words, encourages students' interaction; and enhances students' motivation. However, using pictures or games must be taken into consideration carefully to make it suitable to each level. Using pictures with simple activities is suitable for elementary level, while pre-intermediate students are better at playing games with more complicated rules to learn or recall vocabulary. Furthermore, the whole process of conducting this action research and reading about vocabulary teaching and learning has contributed to my professional development in terms of providing me with knowledge of the varied current issues and strategies in teaching vocabulary. It has really enriched my theoretical background and enhanced my ability to teach vocabulary effectively.

DISCUSSION OF THREE DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES: OBSERVATION, INTERVIEW AND TEST.

Observation, interview and test are the most popular methods of data collection which have widely been applied in doing research. I, myself, have used those methods to carry out my action research above. Through the process of using them, I realized some advantages and disadvantages of each as follows.

The first method is observation which is classified into hidden observation and direct one. The purpose of direct and indirect observation is to collect evidence of achievement by watching a learner's performance while they take part in an activity, but without interfering in their work. The activity can be a real situation or a simulated situation, for example, role-plays. Observation allows you to see the knowledge being put into practice and is better used when assessing competence based learning. Direct observation is undertaken in person, either by a teacher, peer or workplace supervisor. Indirect observation takes place when using appropriate technology such as video recording. Observation can bring many advantages, such as: providing students with the opportunity to demonstrate competence and skills, allowing them to put knowledge into practice, providing creative and innovative method of assessment, contributing to the development of an activity based curriculum and providing a range of evidence for portfolios as well. However, some disadvantages still exist because observation can be time consuming for teacher and it can be difficult to observe and assess individuals within a group. Secondly, interview is a purposeful exchange between two individuals to uncover perspectives, experiences, feelings and insights on a phenomenon. It is also considered as a powerful method of collecting in-depth and detailed qualitative data. Doing interviews to collect data for a research is very flexible, open to follow up because we can prepare an interview form with questions in line with the evaluation focus. In addition, we can use the basic method of communication and eliminates limitation and artificiality of writing or filling a questionnaire. But, like observation, interview takes much effort and time is needed. Furthermore, small samples, generalization from sample to population cannot be done. Test is also a tool to assess the knowledge, skills and attitudes gained through the training. It could be used to assess initial knowledge, behavior, improvement in these respects in the training process and outcomes reached at the end of training. The first advantage test brings is to measure the gains and justify the project effort and spending. It also helps to identify the weaknesses and strength of participants in knowledge, skills and attitude, and provides feedback to both participants and the trainers.

However, it could cover only a limited extend of the project goals and processes. In general, observation, interview and test remain the most common methods of data collection in qualitative research, and are now being used with increasing frequency in dental research, particularly to access areas not amendable to quantitative methods and where depth, insight and understanding of particular phenomena are required. The examples of dental studies that have employed these methods also help to demonstrate the range of research contexts to which observation, interview and test can make a useful contribution. The continued employment of these methods can further strengthen many areas of dentally related work.

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