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Action Research Approach in TESOL

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Abstract- Through observation of students 'behaviour, foreign language teachers often seek ways to improve their teaching of a foreign language. Teachers teaching of a foreign language observe their students' behaviours, analyze them, identify possible problems, propose intervention for the problem, and evaluate the results after implementation of the proposed intervention. Some solutions succeed; others fail. When this approach results in a 'self-reflective spiral of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and re-planning', it is called Action Research (Mc Niff & Whitehead 2002: 46). It is a practical approach, which aims to develop the process of teaching and learning by empowering participants and extending participation through collaboration (Zuber-Skerritt 1991: 2) In this paper, I will show how Action Research succeed to solve a problem that I have faced in my familiar classroom. According to the Action Research approach, solving problems of teaching that may happen in TESOL classrooms takes collaboration and much participation. Each teacher should play a great and essential role as a collaborator to help students to improve both teaching and learning levels. In addition, it is important for a teacher to evaluate any proposed solution through assessing the level of the students. In fact, the levels of the students partly reflect the level of the teacher and her/his effort in developing the procession of education. School and teachers can be considered two essential factors of the factors of students' success. Where Fullen (2001:115) argues that educational change depends on what teachers do and think, it is as simple and as complex as that', Willis reminds us that individual human action is embedded in cultural and structural systems not of the individual's making (Willis 1977). Herein lies the value of Action Research for TESOL as a 'collective, self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices' (Kemmis and Mc Taggert.

Keywords: *action research approach, improve, teaching of a foreign language, observe, intervention, solutions.*

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Action Research Approach in TESOL

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Abstract- Through observation of students 'behaviour, foreign language teachers often seek ways to improve their teaching of a foreign language. Teachers teaching of a foreign language observe their students' behaviours, analyze them, identify possible problems, propose intervention for the problem, and evaluate the results after implementation of the proposed intervention. Some solutions succeed; others fail. When this approach results in a 'self-reflective spiral of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and re-planning', it is called Action Research (Mc Niff & Whitehead 2002: 46). It is a practical approach, which aims to develop the process of teaching and learning by empowering participants and extending participation through collaboration (Zuber-Skerritt 1991: 2) In this paper, I will show how Action Research succeed to solve a problem that I have faced in my familiar classroom. According to the Action Research approach, solving problems of teaching that may happen in TESOL classrooms takes collaboration and much participation. Each teacher should play a great and essential role as a collaborator to help students to improve both teaching and learning levels. In addition, it is important for a teacher to evaluate any proposed solution through assessing the level of the students. In fact, the levels of the students partly reflect the level of the teacher and her/his effort in developing the procession of education. School and teachers can be considered two essential factors of the factors of students' success. Where Fullen (2001:115) argues that educational change depends on what teachers do and think, it is as simple and as complex as that', Willis reminds us that individual human action is embedded in cultural and structural systems not of the individual's making (Willis 1977). Herein lies the value of Action Research for TESOL as a 'collective, self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices' (Kemmis and Mc Taggert.

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I. Introduction

Through observation of students' behaviour, foreign language teachers often seek ways to improve their teaching of a foreign language. Teachers observe their students' behaviours, analyze them, identify possible problems, propose intervention for the problem, and evaluate the results after implementation of the proposed intervention. Some solutions succeed; others fail. When this approach results in a 'self-reflective spiral of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and re-planning', it is called Action Research (Mc Niff & Whitehead 2002: 46). It is a practical approach, which aims to develop the process of teaching and learning by empowering participants and extending participation through collaboration (Zuber-Skerritt 1991: 2) In this assignment, I will use Action Research to solve a problem that I have faced in my familiar classroom.

II. Analysis of my Classroom

I have taught English language as a foreign language to female students in the secondary stage in my home country, Saudi Arabia. The school is located in a small village and is not as big as urban schools in the cities. Sixteen students is a manageable number, which helps the teacher to ensure that each student understand the lesson. The curriculum of the secondary stage contains various topics, which are related to different dimensions of life, such as sports, principles of life customs, education, etc. Each student should have two books – one is called 'pupil's book', which has the main topics that should be taught by the teacher in the classroom; and the other book is called 'work book', which has many different tasks for homework. Village schools are not fitted with technologies of education, such as smart board, modern furniture, etc., to assist the teacher in the delivery of English Language lessons. Therefore, the common method of teaching is Grammar-Translation Method for most of teachers.

As one of the EFL teachers in villages in my home country, I normally employ Translation Method in my teaching. I begin the lesson by showing what was written in the students' book to the students, translate the new words from L2 to L1 (English language to Arabic one), and then have the students repeat the new words chorally and individually. Next, I show the students the tasks written in their workbooks and explain how to answer the tasks. To be honest, I am not satisfied with my students' level in speaking English language in the classroom. Therefore, I decide that it is best to conduct an action research project to find a solution to the low level of students' speaking.

III. Identifying the Problem

a) Problem Identified

The problem which I face in my classroom is the low level of speaking by three quarters of the students. They cannot speak fluently or communicate by speaking. This is not only a significant problem in learning a foreign language but an essential one as well. It is incumbent upon the EFL teacher to search for solutions to any problem in teaching a foreign

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language. To learn foreign language, it is essential for the students to practice four skills, listening, reading, writing and especially speaking in the classroom.

b) The cause of the problem

As EFL teacher, I think that the main cause for the low level in my students' speaking is the use of the Grammar-Translation method in teaching English Language. This method provides a very limited role for the students to practice speaking -most of the time they passively sit as listeners in the classroom. The teacher dominates the whole role in the classroom.

c) Proposed change to address the cause

To solve the problem of my students' lack of competency in speaking, I should provide my students with opportunities to speak English Language in the classroom. I would like to change the method of teaching English Language with a method in which speaking ability of the students will be improved successfully. One of the successful methods which help the students to practice speaking is Cooperative Method. It is an effective instructional method that can be used to support educational development.

IV. Collecting Data of the Problem Before Intervention

This stage of the stage of collecting information about the effect of using grammar-translation method on the ability of students' speaking in order to make sure that it is the cause of the problem. There are two kinds of collecting data either quantitative collecting or qualitative collection. Both of them are useful methods, and the teacher can use all of them, or only use one kind. Data collection takes two weeks. Although some statistical data can be produced after coding the video tapes, I use video tape as a qualitative method of data collection.

a) Video Tape Recording

Video tape recording can be employed as a useful device to gather information about a particular issue. It is important to help me as a teacher notice what I and my students are really doing in the classroom. By watching video, I can remember easily what has happened in the classroom during the lesson. Also, I can see how many opportunities the students have in the classroom to speak English language. After watching the video, I notice that all my questions which I have asked the students demand short answers, and as a result the students cannot extend their answers. For example, one of the lessons is about (Simple Past Tense). The whole role in the classroom is performed by me and the students simply passively listen to me and then answer some simple questions, such as ' give me the past form of the following verbs: go, open,..', therefore the students' answers are ' went, opened..' I do not allow them to describe something that had happened in the past by using 'Simple Past Tense'

b) Implementation Cooperative Learning in the Classroom

Cooperative Learning is recognized to be one the successful methods used in Teaching English Language in the classroom. Research indicates that learners of a second language will get more opportunities to hear the foreign language and to communicate with their peers. My role is to lead sitting up the structure of cooperative learning in the classroom and to help the students to accomplish the task successfully.

Implementation of Cooperative Learning is through dividing the students, sixteen students, into groups and giving them different tasks to accomplish. Doing the change has two stages as follows:

c) Pre- task stage

Before starting the task, I explain the new approach which I will use in teaching the lesson instead of the usual method, including its aims, students' roles with the new approach, and how they play an important role in the success of the new method. Then, I divide the students into small group. For example, the number of my students is sixteen, so the groups will be four groups of four students in each group. The members of each group are selected according to the students' levels in English language, high, medium, and low level.

d) Task implementation stage

To start the task, I introduce the topic of the task to the students and present some words and phrases that can be used to accomplish the task. They are encouraged to use familiar words or phrases in doing the task if they are related to the topic. While the students are engaged in the task, I encourage them to only communicate with their peers in the same group in English language and remind them that it is not allowable to use their mother tongue in speaking. In addition, they should practice speaking in doing the tasks even when they make mistakes. Through practice, they will eventually overcome their mistakes. Although cooperation between students is encouraged, students may consult with me if they find any difficulty. During the task, I pass through the groups to check their achievements and share in the students' discussions. After they finish the task, I ask each group to write down briefly how they accomplish the task. Then one of each group should read what they have written to all the other groups.

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V. Collecting Data After Cooperative Learning Implementation

The implementing of the new method which is Cooperative Learning takes a month. During this period, I review information to know if there is any change in the students' ability of speaking. There are different ways to gather data, but I use the same way of collecting data before implementing the change in order to see the differences in the level of speaking of the students before and after the change. The ways of collecting data is as follow:

a) Video Tape Recording

I use video tape recording several times during a month to see the progression in the speaking ability of the students, and how they develop during a month. It also shows the students' reactions toward the new approach. By watching Video recording, the students' role in the classroom is seen clearly. They participate more times than before. At the beginning, they seem that they are not able to speak English in doing tasks, but then they accept the idea of doing tasks in groups.

VI. Analysis of Data

a) Analysis data before doing a change

All the information which is gathered while I am using Grammar-Translation Method as a method of my teaching indicates that the speaking ability of the students is very low. The Students seem not to be interested in English classes. They are bored because they think that they should memorize more than practice speaking, which causes the absence of some student from English classes. The students said that even when they know the meaning of words in their mother tongue, it does not help them to communicate by using the foreign language.

b) Analysis data after doing a change

All the collection of information after implementing Cooperative Learning points out that in the first week of using Cooperative Method, the students don't communicate and they are not be able to speak English. In the second week, they can speak limited English language, with many mistakes in both pronunciation and grammar rules. Gradually, in the third week, the students can overcome most of their mistakes to become more self-confident to speak English in front of other students. The last week shows the noticeable progression in the level of speaking of the students. They can express their ideas by using English language.

VII. Evaluation of using Cooperative Method in Classroom in Comparison with Grammar-Translation Method

My observations indicate that there are differences between methods used in the classroom by the teacher for student achievement to speak a foreign language. From my experience, using Grammar-Translation Method in teaching a foreign language results in a poor use of English language. Students work with the language as a set of individual words that can be put together in order to create a sentence. Generally speaking, grammar translation method could not help the students to communicate through the medium of English Language.

In contrast, by using the Cooperative Learning Method in the classroom to teach a foreign language, I expect that there will be a noticeable change in the students' performance. Students will be more motivated; they will be able to communicate by using English language in classroom even they face difficulties. I expect that a spirit of cooperation will be seen between the students.

VIII. Conclusion

According to the Action Research approach, solving problems of teaching that may happen in TESOL classrooms takes collaboration and much participation. Each teacher should play a great and essential role as a collaborator to help students to improve both teaching and learning levels. In addition, it is important for a teacher to evaluate any proposed solution through assessing the level of the students. In fact, the levels of the students partly reflect the level of the teacher and her/his effort in developing the procession of education. School and teachers can be considered two essential factors of the factors of students' success. Where Fullen (2001:115) argues that educational change depends on what teachers do and think, it is as simple and as complex as that', Willis reminds us that individual human action is embedded in cultural and structural systems not of the individual's making (Willis 1977). Herein lies the value of Action Research for TESOL as a 'collective, self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices' (Kemmis and McTaggert 1988: 5).

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