DESIGNING MEANINGFUL AND RELEVANT ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' MOTIVATION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Andreas Winardi
Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana
aw_ppbi@staff.ukdw.ac.id

Abstract

Teachers and students all over the world are now facing the biggest shift in their lives, from studying in the school to studying at home, from meeting their teachers and friends face to face to meeting them via technology, and from depending on teachers to give them knowledge to depend on themselves. This change is not easy to cope with, both teachers and students are at their wit's end. They are confused what to do and if this continues, they will be frustrated and lose their motivation for learning. Many parents complain that their children have to do a lot of assignments that overwhelm them. As a result, they lose motivation. To remedy this situation, teacher needs to design activities which are relevant and meaningful to their students.

Keywords: Meaningful, Relevant, Motivation

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic has changed every aspect of our life. In this new situation, we have to obey the health protocol such as wearing a mask, washing our hands, and doing physical distancing. In the field of education, the teaching-learning process must also follow the strict rule of avoiding physical interaction; therefore, students are not allowed to go to school and the lessons are delivered online.

The online learning is quite problematic for both teachers and students. In the past, teachers used to meet their students in the classroom and then there were a lot of activities that students did like playing games, singing some songs, and having group work. But, in online learning, the activities are limited, usually the teachers explain the materials, then give assignments. If this pattern continues, it will result in students getting bored and losing their motivation for learning.

The question is how teachers can keep the students engaged and motivated. To answer this question, we need to define what motivation is. Deci and Ryan (2000, p. 55) state that there are two types of motivation, namely intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. According to them, intrinsic motivation refers to "doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable", while extrinsic motivation refers to "doing something because it leads to separable outcome". Simi-

larly, Adama, Ekwutosim, and Unamba (2018, p.53) posited that intrinsic motivation is "an inner force that motivates students to engage in academic activities, because they are interested in learning and they enjoy the learning process as well" while the extrinsic motivation "promotes effort and performance with rewards serving as positive reinforces for the desired behavior." From the these definitions, it can be concluded that the lecturers can make the students intrinsically motivated by designing interesting and enjoyable activities so that the students eagerly do the activities, while to promote external motivation, the lecturers may inform the students that the activities they do are relevant and meaningful and will be beneficial for them in the future. We often hear the statement," why should we study hard if what we learn in campus cannot be used after I graduate?" or "The subjects I learn are not in match with the demand of the business world" The lecturers must counter these complaints by showing them the relevance and the purpose of doing certain activities.

Related to the discussion about external motivation, ones need to know the definition of meaningful and relevant activities. Christiansen and Baum (1997; p. 599 in Eakman, 2013, p. 101) defined the meaning of activities as "the personal significance of an event as interpreted by an individual.", while relevant activities simply put is, based on Oxford Learner's Dictionary, "closely connected with the subject you are discussing or the situation you are in." In summary meaningful and relevant activities are activities that the students consider important and can be applied to the real world or transferable to fulfill their needs or goals.

DISCUSSION

This semester, I teach among others: *English for Job Hunting* (EfJH), *English for International al Communication* (EfIC), and *English for Business Communication* (EBC). In this section, I share some activities I have assigned my students to do in these three classes.

Activities in *English for Job Hunting class*
Digital curriculum vitae (CV)

When people want to apply for a job, they send their CV and Cover Letter usually through mail or e-mail. But, in this digital era, some companies start to ask its applicants to send the videos about him/herself. This digital CV has an advantage for both the company and the applicants. For the company, they can see the applicant in person because sometimes the photo that the applicant send is quite different from the "real" person. Through videos, the company can see the face and listen to the applicants' voices. For the applicants, sending a video is a golden opportunity to persuade and convince the company to employ them.

The activities consist of 3 stages:
1. Preparation stage
   To be able to successfully facilitate the students to "convince the company" in this activity, the teachers should do the following:
   a. Make sure that the students look confident when they present themselves. One way to boost their confidence is to rehearse many times. They need to present in front of the mirror and record themselves. They can be asked to watch their videos repeatedly and make necessary improvements.
   b. Equip themselves with the skills to give a successful presentation.
      In terms of contents, students should not make mistakes such as saying "I want to presented" or "I want to presentation about myself", "I am good at speak", or "I could be better at analyze", "I am able to singing" and many other possible mistakes. In terms of delivery, students should speak clearly and confidently. They should not speak too fast or too slow. They should be reminded not to hesitate to make eye contact to the audience (despite the audience being virtual one, students should speak as if they speak directly to them). Stu-

dents must not speak monotonously or else they will make them bored and sleepy. They should be encouraged to use gestures to make the presentation alive.

2. Presentation Stage

In this stage, the students send their videos to the lecturers. Then, the lecturers watch the videos.

3. Evaluation Stage

After watching the videos, the lecturers give correction and feedback to the students. If needed, their peers can also give feedback (to help them, the lecturers may give them rubrics as a guideline to evaluate their friends' performances). Upon receiving the feedback from the lecturers and friends, the students then revise their videos.

Online interview

After students (applicants) sending the CV and Cover Letter, the company will invite some shortlisted candidates to be interviewed. The interview is of utmost importance because usually this is the final stage to decide whether an applicant is accepted or not. Downes (2008, p. 50) states that "responding to questions at an interview is your opportunity to give evidence of your skills and experience, prove you know what the job entails, and demonstrate you are the best person for the job."

Like the digital CV activity, the online interview also has three stages:

1. Preparation stage

In this stage, in addition to giving general tips such as finding the exact location of the company, having enough rest before the interview date, and coming early to the interview, the lecturers can give tips on how to answer the interview questions successfully. Usually there are two types of questions:

a. Questions about the applicants' motivation, knowledge, education, ambition, and personality. The following are the examples:

(a) Tell me about yourself.

(b) What are your strengths?

(c) What are your weaknesses?

(d) What university did you attend and why did you choose to study there?

(e) Why do you want to work in our company?

(f) Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

(g) Why should we hire you?

(h) Why do you believe you are the best candidate for this position?

Lecturer may give tips, for example, when answering the questions about weaknesses:

(a) Applicants should not say that they have none. This is because the company will consider an arrogant.

(b) Applicants should not mention their weakness without mentioning the steps to tackle them. If you just list your weaknesses, the company may be afraid to hire you because your weakness may hinder you to give maximum contributions to the company.

(c) Related to these tips mentioned, it will be better that in addition to mentioning their weaknesses, they also inform the company on how they overcome your weaknesses, for example:

"In the past, I could not speak English well, but I took an English course and kept improving my English by listening to English songs and watching English movies. By doing so, my English is getting better."

  b. Competency-based questions
  These types of questions gauge the students' ability to handle specific situations. For examples:
  (a) Have you ever had to make a difficult decision? Tell me about it.
  (b) Have you ever experienced pressure at university or at work?
  (c) Have you ever played an important role in a team?
  (d) Have you ever demonstrated your leadership ability?
  (e) Have you ever organized an important event?
  Lecturers may suggest that the students use the STAR method to answer these questions (Downes, 2008). The acronym STAR stands for: **Situation**: Lecturers can begin by explaining the situation or the problems that the students face, for example, they are going to have an exam, but their mother call to go home because their father is ill. **Target/Task**: The students must decide whether to take the exam or go home to visit their father. **Action(s)**: Students discuss with the lecturers about the situation. **Result**: The lecturers give the students permission to go home and schedule a make-up exam.
2. Interview stage
  This is conducted online and the lecturers may opt to interview the students or assign the students to work in pairs and in turn they may become interviewer and interviewee.
3. Evaluation stage
  The lecturers give feedback to students regarding the things that need improvement, for example, lack of eye contact, unnecessary gestures, and inappropriate dress.
The two mentioned activities, digital CV and online interview, are meaningful and relevant for the students because most of them will hunt for a job after they graduate.

Activities in *English for International Communication class*
I share some activities the students have done in the class set up in response to that the world is going global and the needs to interact with people from other cultures increase.

Learning to enhance communication skills
To ensure effective communication, students need to be able to pronounce words correctly so that their speaking partners comprehend the message. First of all, I asked my students how to pronounce the word" ewe". Most of them were confused or did not know how to pronounce that word. After asking some students to pronounce the word, I informed them that actually we can check how to pronounce the word by using the phonetic symbols found in a dictionary. Then, we practiced to pronounce some English words using the phonetic symbols as a reference.
Next, I informed them that we often find it difficult to understand the native speakers of English because they tend to speak fast by linking the sounds. Then, we watched a video on how the sounds are linked in English. To practice, I gave them tongue twisters like:
  1. How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood.
  2. She sells seashell on the seashore.
  3. Peter piper picked a peck on a pickled pepper.
The students found this exercise very fun and entertaining. Finally, to check their understanding, I dictated some English words, the students wrote down the words, for examples: (ju:) ewe, (blu:) blew.
The activities are relevant and meaningful for the students because in this global era, it is highly probable that they will need to communicate with people from around the world.

Crossing cultures
We live in the multicultural world and with the advancement of technology and communication, it is easier for students to study and work abroad. On the other hand, there will be more and more foreign students and workers coming to Indonesia. This phenomenon requires stu-

dents to be aware that they will deal with people whose cultures may be very different from their cultures and they need to realize the importance of understanding other cultures. Failing to understand other cultures may result in misunderstanding, conflict, and embarrassment. Here are some activities that can be used to increase students' awareness and understanding of other cultures:

I divided the students into two groups. I gave the first group a text about Japanese cultures and the other group a text about Italian cultures. I asked each group to read the text and list some important cultural information. Then, I asked each person to find a partner (Japanese with Italian). They pretended to be a Japanese businessman/woman or Italian businessman/woman. They imagined that their business partner (from Italy or Japan) would visit their country to discuss business with them. Before their partner came to visit, their job is to inform their partner about some customs or cultures that they needed to obey during their visit.

Learning other cultures will certainly be relevant and meaningful for students who intend to study or work in another country because each country has its unique customs. For example, in some countries, women are not allowed to shake hands with people of the opposite sex, so we can imagine how awkward the situation is when our male students offer to shake hands with their female co-workers. Additionally, the way people greet others may differ around the world. The Japanese bow their head, people from Middle-East may hug their friends, the European men and women tend to kiss cheek to say hello, and many more.

Furthermore, one part of the cultures is gestures. Students need to be aware that the same gestures may have different meanings across places, for example: head nod which means 'yes' in Indonesia may mean 'no' in some parts of the world. Blanchard and Root (2007) give some information regarding the meaning of gestures all over the world, for example: finger circle. This is widely accepted as the American "OK" sign, while in Brazil and Germany, it is considered vulgar or obscene. It is also considered impolite in Greece and Russia. From this example, it can be seen that even the seemingly insignificant "OK" sign, if used in Brazil and Germany may cause anger and lead to broken relationship.

Hence, to illustrate the use of gestures, I played two videos. The first video was about Italian gestures and the second video was about Japanese gestures. We played a simple guessing games; I played the video, then paused, and gave students an opportunity to guess the meaning. It was fun and hilarious.

Making an appointment
In their future career, students will need to make an appointment with their clients, investors, and suppliers. Hence, I played a video about requesting, agreeing/disagreeing a date, cancelling an appointment, and suggesting an alternative date. The students watched the video and learned some expressions/phrases. After that they did a role play on making an appointment.

Describing people
Describing people is an important skill to learn because they will need to do this, for example, when they must pick up somebody from the airport. To ensure that the person they are about to meet recognize them, they need to be able to describe themselves accurately. As an exercise, I asked my students to send an e-mail (to an imaginary person) describing him/herself.

World Englishes
In the world of limitless possibilities, the students may travel all around the world, and communicate with people who speak various kinds of English (American English, British English, Australian English, Indian English, and many others). As an example, I played a video about the differences between American and British English. From this video, the students can learn that American and British English differ in terms of vocabulary, spelling, and pronunciation. In vocabulary, for example, American people say "garbage/trash" while British say "rubbish".

Americans say "cookie" while British say "biscuit". In spelling, American write "humor" while British write "humour". In terms of pronunciation, one of the differences is Americans tend to pronounce the "r" clearly, while the British tend not to say the "r" sound.

I then asked the students to make a video regarding many variants of English. By doing so, I hope that my students will be more aware, open-minded, and appreciative to the different kinds of English.

Activities in *English for Business Communication class*

As the name of the course suggests, the students who take this class will learn how to communicate in a business context. There are a lot of relevant and meaningful activities in class.

Describing products

At some point in their life, the students of business will need to describe their products or service to their clients, prospective customers, or investors. In order to be able to do the tasks successfully, the students need to be adequately prepared. Lecturers can share the knowledge about how to describe products, for example, when describing products, they can talk about:

1. Its size: it is tiny, small, big, or others.
2. Its shape: it is round, oval, flat, or others.
3. Its ingredients (what is it made of?): It is made of plastic. It is made of metal, it is made of wood.
4. Its function: It is used for cutting wood. It is used for showing directions.
5. Its special features: It has a handle. It has some buttons.

In addition to the basic things to describe products, it will be better for the lecturers to inform his/her students that in order to persuade or convince the prospective investors/buyers to invest or buy, they need to highlight the competitive advantage and the problems that their products can solve. For example: I showed them a video about a small car which is so small that the owner can put the car in her pocket. This product can solve some problems such as the difficulties in finding parking spot and getting stuck in a traffic jam. Another important thing that the lecturers need to inform his/her students is no matter how good their product is if they cannot present/describe the products in such interesting and impressive ways, the investor will not invest and the buyers will not buy. Therefore, the students need to be equipped with presentation skills such as using powerful adjectives like "fantastic", "remarkable", and "awesome", instead of just common and plain adjectives like "good" and "nice". It is also useful for the students to make a demo on how the product works because some people will not believe until they see. Hence, using visual aids will make the presentation more attractive. In the lesson, I played several videos about innovative products and how the investors present their products convincingly, enthusiastically, and confidently. After watching the video, the students could create their own videos describing the product that they wanted to sell.

Business meetings

Having meetings is something that cannot be avoided in the business world. Business people need to brainstorm and discuss some ideas to solve their problems or implement new policies. To participate effectively in a meeting, students must have the skills such as:

1. Giving ideas or suggestions:
   a. I think we should/should not _____
   b. If I were you, I would _____
2. Agreeing with ideas
   a. I think you are absolutely right.
   b. That is a brilliant idea.
3. Disagreeing with ideas
   a. I think that's a good idea, but_____

b. I don't think your idea will work because_____

I divided the students into several teams, and each team had to do a business meeting simulation. One of them become the chairperson of the meeting and the others took certain roles like the Human Resource Manager, the Finance Director, the Marketing Manager, and others. Each team did a business meeting simulation, for example, to discuss how to survive in the pandemic era, then sent the link of the videos to me.

CONCLUSION

To motivate the students, lecturers need to design activities that have connections or can be applied to the real world. Moreover, students will be enthusiastically do the activities when they know that the activities are relevant with their needs and meaningful for their life, for example, the needs to communicate with people from other cultures that will expand their horizons and widen their insights. Another example of relevant and meaningful activities is mastering job interview techniques because most of them will search for the job after they graduate, and the ability to answer interview questions effectively will maximize their opportunity to get their dream job.

REFERENCES

Adamma, O. N., Ekwutosim, O. P., Unamba, E. C. (2018). Influence of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation on pupils' academic performance in mathematics. *Supreme Journal of Mathematics Education, 2(2)* 52-59.

Blanchard, K. & Root, C. (2007). *For your information* (Second Edition). New York: Pearson Education, Inc.

Deci, E. & Ryan, R. M. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*, 54-67.

Downes, C. (2008). *Cambridge English for job hunting*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eakman, A. M. (2013). Relationship between meaningful activity, basic psychological needs, and meaning in life: Test of the meaningful activity and life meaning model. OTJR Occupation Participation Health · March 2013. DOI: 10.3928/15394492-20130222-02