

## TEACHERS' CREATIVITY IN DESIGNING LEARNING ACTIVITIES: SUSTAINING STUDENTS' MOTIVATION

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**Abstract:** Sustaining students' motivation during teaching and learning process, unquestionably, is considered as the most challenging task. Therefore, the teachers have to be mindful and creative in designing an activity as it is the core of the lesson. However, in practice, some teachers are sometimes found to aimlessly use an activity as they run out of idea. Thus, this study is conducted to serve as a reference for the teachers in designing a specific activity that helps the students stay motivated. A descriptive qualitative was employed as the research design to gain deeper analysis on types of activity that encourage the students to learn English. The data were collected through interview which involved 5 professional English teachers as participants. The result revealed that the design of the activity should be appealing and correspond to the students' interest, age, level of proficiency, school policy, materials and media availability. Thus, it is suggested that the teachers should be brave to try out new activity and attend some teachers' training, such as CELTA or DELTA, to improve their teaching skills.

**Keywords:** *designing learning activity; learning activities; students' motivation; sustaining students motivation; teachers' creativity; teachers' perspective.*

### INTRODUCTION

Motivation, undeniably, plays as one of significant aspects determining the success in language learning. Yet, in fact, motivating the students to learn is considered as one of the greatest challenges because motivation itself has complicated definition or concept. According to Vroom (1964), motivation is seen as the force that stimulates goal oriented actions. Meanwhile, Locke and Latham (2004) stated that motivation refers to internal and external factors influencing individual to acquire and extend their skills and abilities. Even though these two experts stated quite different definition of motivation, both parties stated the same factors that might discourage the students to learn, such as the students' mood, peer-conflict, family problem or dislike the design of the activity. These factors then make the students have different level of motivation. Therefore, the teachers have to fully understand various concept of motivation which includes definition and ways in assisting the students to accomplish their goals. By doing so, it is expected that the teachers could come up with solutions in sustaining students' motivation during teaching and learning activity.

Further, as motivation is fluctuated, so it is possible for the students to feel discourage to learn at a certain point. Therefore, the teachers

should play their role as a motivation builder and keeper. In other words, teachers should know how and what to do if their students' level of motivation is decreasing. In this case, Harmer (2000) suggested five stages to build students' motivation which include affect, achievement, attitude, activities, and agency. Ferlazzo (2015), on the other hand, also added some strategies to sustain students' motivation that include giving the students freedom in choosing final project, giving constructive feedback, developing a positive teachers-students relationship, and designing meaningful task. However, this study only focuses on the activities designed by the teachers to maintain students' motivation. It is believed that teachers' choice in using specific activities in teaching and learning can provide a positive impact on students' motivation.

Some researchers have conducted studies on strategies to sustain students' motivation. Winston, Train, Rudolph, and Gillette (2018), for example, conducted a study concerning faculty motivations to use active learning among pharmacy educator in United States. The result of the study suggested that the faculty members who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to use various active learning strategies. Furthermore, another research conducted by Vibulphol (2016) found that most students have

a high level of motivation since the teachers employed various strategies such as autonomy-support and controlling. This finding is in line with Lai and Ting (2013) who state the teachers should use various strategies to enhance students' motivation.

Referring to the aforementioned studies, it can be discovered that it is important to implement a specific activity in order to sustain students' motivation. The teachers will not know whether the activity they used can really help the students stay motivated unless they try it out. Some studies may suggest that to deal with passive students, the teachers can use learning contract. However, this may not work in another classroom context as each student is unique. Therefore, the teachers can also adjust the content or the way they implement the procedures. For instances, when a teacher tries to use YouTube during teaching and learning, he firstly has to know whether his students are familiar with the use of it or not. If they are already familiar, so the teacher may adjust the project by asking them to create a video, for example about commenting a well-known youtubers or making a video about the trick to learn an idiom. Furthermore, the teacher should also be able to identify whether the students are motivated intrinsically or extrinsically. For example, the teacher can design an activity that includes rewards, such as gaining more points for an active student.

Thus, the primary concerned of the study is to find out teachers' creativity in designing activities to sustain students' motivation. This study specifically investigates the types of activity used by some professional teachers who have gained CELTA or DELTA certificate or at least have more than 5 years of teaching experience. By investigating this issue, it is expected that teachers can know various activities that can be implemented in the classroom and consideration made by some professional teachers in choosing specific activities. The study delimited the aspect of sustaining the students' motivation proposed by Harmer (2000). Specifically, this study only investigates the way the teachers enhance the students' motivation through designing a fun and engaging activities. The activity is taken into account since the success of learning majorly depends on the way teacher design the activity. If the teacher carelessly designs the activity, the students might feel discouraged to learn as they found that the activity is too easy or boring.

Therefore, this study is also useful to be served as references when the teachers are out of idea.

## **METHOD**

As previously describe, the purposes of this study are to explore the activities that the teachers use to sustain students' motivation. Considering the purpose of the study, qualitative research is considered to be the appropriate research design for this study since it will help in gaining more specific and deeper analysis on a kind of activity that actually works in making the students stay motivated during teaching and learning. Furthermore, the investigation was about the detail description of English teachers' creativity in designing activity that can sustain students' motivation. As Paris and Winn (2013) points out that qualitative research helps to conduct in-depth analysis and acquire detail description of current phenomenon and be highly engaged in current issues.

In conducting this research, five EFL teachers who have gained CELTA (certificate in teaching English to Speakers of other languages) or DELTA (Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language, advanced TEFL qualification) certificate or at least have more than 5 years of professional teaching experience were involved. These certificates are internationally well-known and hard to attain so it is assumed that the respondents are qualified to share more creative ideas in designing an activity that make students be motivated during teaching and learning. Additionally, teachers who have more than five-years experiences were also included because they have encountered many experiences in teaching and know how to deal with it.

The data of this study were collected through face-to-face interview. The interview consisted of five questions designed based on the research needs. After collecting the data, the researcher analyzed the collected data in order to find the result. The steps of analyzing the data that are; transcribing the interview sessions from audiotape recording, reading and analyzing the transcription relating to teachers' creativity in designing the activity in order to sustain students' motivation, interpreting the data, categorizing the data based on the relevant theory aiming to answer the research question and drawing conclusion from the interview data analysis. After the interview analysis, the researcher then takes a brief look on the lesson plan to know the teachers' detail plan.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data were collected from five respondents who are all teachers either from private or public school by using interview. Before the interview, the researcher also asked for approval and notified them about the major core of the questions, then asked them to bring one lesson plan. The name of the respondents will be replaced by using R1 until R5.

From the result of the interview, it is found that the teachers adjusted the learning steps which have been stated at the lesson plan that suit to the students. Moreover, four out of five teachers suited the learning activity to the time allotment. However, this phenomenon is a common since the time allotment may influence the process of teaching and learning. This is in line with Brandvik and Mcknight (2011) who state the students take longer or shorter time to do the activity that the teacher thought.

Furthermore, it is found that one of the teacher chose to change the plan when the students are less motivated and feel asleep. It can be seen in the following excerpts:

*“There were some changes happening in the class, mostly because the timing is a little bit off, especially in the guided discovery part. However, most of the plan went out as planned”. (R1)*

*“Yes, there were some changes. The changes mostly depend on the condition. For instances, the time allotment. If the time is a bit off then automatically, some activities are being cut off or adjusted if in the implementation the students found it too hard to do the exercises”. (R2)*

*“Yes mostly because of the time is a little bit off”. (R4)*

*“Yes. Sometimes, I have to omit some activities because of the time is a little bit off”. (R5)*

*“There is because some students in the beginning of the lesson found out to be discourage to learn and feel sleepy”. (R3)*

Referring to the aforementioned answer, it can be inferred that most of them have experienced making incorrect time prediction and they (R1, R2, R4, R5) decided to omit it from the lesson. As during the lesson, the students need more time in doing some exercises. Therefore, it is suggested for the teacher to select the most important thing to do during teaching and learning. Besides, it is also suggested to choose the best task for students

that suit to the time allotment. Therefore, the teachers have to select the appropriate material, activity and task which suit to the class situation and the time allotment.

Other than that, it bears in mind that there is no divine standard on how to make an adjustment step in teaching and learning. Generally, the teachers make some adjustment step that is based on types of problems that the teachers encounter, such as the students' and teachers' readiness, students' competency, teachers' skills, and classroom situation. It is not necessarily that the changing in lesson plan should be highly sophisticated and eye-catching. The most important thing is to make sure the second plan is running. Andy (2013), however, provides some suggestions about the things that the teachers can do if their plan does not work well including listen to feedback and act on it, use group work, pause for a minute, simplify the complicated activities, have some back up activities, provide ice breakers, or trim the fat that is move on to the meatier task if teachers find the task they provide is too easy for the students.

In addition, one of the teacher decided to add some activities, such as warming up activities that involve physical activity in order to stimulate students to be more active, like doing hockey pokey dance. This happened when the students were passive at class. This is good as teaching young learners needs some physical activity in order to attract their attention and motivate them to learn. As mentioned by some experts, hokey pokey dance can captivate the students' attention and help them to develop concentration, sequence skills, cultural competencies, and improve grammatical skills regardless of the teachers' teaching approach and style (Shehadeh & Farah, 2016).

In conclusion, there are many things that the teachers can do to replace the activity that is no longer serving as they plan, such as adjusting, omitting, or adding. Thus, the teacher should always be prepared for the worst condition and be calm and confident because their positive energy will also make the students' attitude towards learning be positive.

The second finding is about the teacher's consideration on choosing specific activity to be implemented at class. The activity is the core of the lesson which can be used to make the students grasp the materials. Besides, the clear reason for choosing an activity will enable the teacher to connect it with a specific goal. As

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stated by Woolfolk (2013), the activity that the teachers use should be able to clearly fulfill one of the four types of goals that are learning goals, performance goals, work-avoidance goals, and social goals. Based on the result of the interview, it is found that all the professional teachers can elaborate the reason of choosing a specific activity even though they do not specifically mention the activity they use is in line with a specific goal. However, at least, the teacher know why they pick up a certain activity. This can be seen in the following excerpts:

*"There are some considerations why I chose the topic and the activities. Generally speaking, I chose the topic of astrology because I knew they were interested in that, so I felt that choosing this topic would improve their engagement to the activities done in the class. I chose the topic of suffixes to differentiate word class because (1) I found students mixing their word class especially in writing and (2) knowing the suffixes can help them become more aware of different word classes which can help them in reading (to guess the meaning of words) and the productive skills (speaking and writing, to become more accurate)". (R1)*

*"It purely be based on the students' ages. If I teach younger learner, I used a lot of games. But when I teach adult learners, mostly I used the activity that involved problem solving. Other than that, the level of difficulty also has to be taken into account. For example, if we teach adult learners we also have to make sure about their competence level. If they have an elementary level, so the activities that we used should not be too difficult for them to follow. The words choice also should be in reading for example the number of words should be a little compared to the advanced learners". (R2)*

*"I added the "the hokey pokey dance" to make the students physically active but also having fun as they are required to sing along. This activity also will make them gaining new vocabulary. The hockey pokey dance is used because it has appealing rhythm and the lyric also not too difficult to follow. Additionally, the move is also easy to imitate". (R3)*

*"The first is topic. Learning activities should enable them to blend in with the topic of the lesson. The second is students' proficiency. I have to make sure students can accomplish the learning activities, which means the activities should not be too easy or too hard to do. The third is time allocation. Activities fit the time allocated. The*

*fourth is availability of facilities. Let's say I want them to open an exercise online. If internet access is not something they have, it would be impossible." (R4)*

*I mostly design an activity which involve active communication such game based activity like finding culprit or commenting on their friends' work or performance like what we commonly see on Indonesian idol. But, I change it into Indonesian best debaters or best story teller". (R5)*

From the excerpts, it can be clearly seen that they have various reason for applying or choosing a specific activity. R1, specifically, choose the topic about astrology as this topic is very appealing in teaching teenagers. It is agreed that teaching teenagers is difficult because they are in the transition age between adulthood and childhood. Therefore, it is better for us to choose a topic that can stimulate their curiosity, such as astrology that can be both appealing and controversial. Meanwhile, R2 and R5 claimed to adjust the activity based on the students' age for example he will used a lot of games to teach young learners as they are easily distracted. Thus, it is a good idea for teachers to involve games during teaching and learning so that the students will not feel bored. Game-based learning itself is any types of educational game that is used during the teaching and learning activity which can entertain and make the students' behavior towards learning changed (Connolly, Boyle, MacArthur, Hainey, & Boyle 2012). Usually, the focus of the approach is to make the students unaware that they are actually learning and to create a joyful learning environment.

Additionally, they added that teachers also have to consider the students' level of competence. Accordingly, it is suggested to design an activity that is not too difficult for students to follow. The most important thing is designing activity that could work or run in the classroom because if the activity designed is too difficult, the students will feel discouraged to learn. R3 and R4, on the other hand, proposed to include some physical activity such as hokey pokey dance. He stated that physical activity is needed to refresh the students' mind. To teaching young learners, a lot of movement is necessary.

Basically, the design of the activity should be based on the students' interest, students' age, students' level of proficiency, time allotment, and classroom situation. Besides, the teacher

also has to consider the gender. As mention by Broophy (2010) that an activity which relate to the real world will encourage the students to learn because they have a background knowledge on that and it is easy for them to remember as they can make a correlation with the real world context. Moreover, he further suggested that the activity that the teachers used should have a clear instruction, directions, and significant of the task because unclear instructions will lead to decreasing the students' motivation in learning.

The third finding is about whether the activity used motivates students to learn. This can be found only after the teachers evaluated their teaching and learning activity. Kulczycki and Rozkosz (2017) point out that the evaluation helps the teacher to assess whether the learning has been successful and to clarify the teachers' expectation. The findings can be seen in the following excerpts:

*"At that time, definitely, students were engaged throughout the lesson. However, I couldn't take full credit for that as they were naturally active students as well. I could give them any topics, and they would devour them."* (R1)

*"It depends. Usually before teaching, I analyze what types of students that I am going to teach. If the students like game-based learning, I will design an activity that full of games. But, if they like project then I will design an activity that involved so many project. In a nutshell, the design of the activity I used is based"* (R2)

*"Yes. Definitely, they feel more motivated to learn"*. (R3)

*"Not always because to pay attention to the students' individually sometimes it is hard especially when you have to teach more than 40 students. However, I mostly design an activity which involves classroom discussion so that it makes a contribution individually within a small group"*. (R4)

*"Yes, because they do not feel like they are actually learning but they can gain something from it."* (R5)

It can be inferred that the activity that R1 to R5 used successfully make the students stay motivated. R1 specifically mentioned that the choice of the activity or topic for astrology that he used has flourishingly motivated the teenagers to learn. However, he added that their

students are naturally active students so the choice of activity does not really matter. However, the activity that the teachers used still have the greatest impact on the students' performance in the classroom because if the teachers just carelessly design activity even an active student would heartlessly follow the lesson, an active student can stay active because the teachers used appropriate activity that match with their level of competence and interest. In this case, Bissengayeva, Aigerim, Zinagul and Zhanar (2013) suggested the teachers to involve competence-oriented tasks (the topic should be based on real-life problem) in teaching and learning. He believed that by learning problem the students can be more independent learners and interested in learning. Moreover, Nicolaidis (2012) added that in designing activity, the teachers should consider the students' language ability, the educational content, the content standard, the content objective, the language objectives, the details of teaching strategy and learning activity as well as the methods to assess and evaluate the students' learning achievement.

Additionally, R2, R3, R4, and R5 added that involving many physical activities, such as hokey pokey dance to teach young learners and designing problem-based activity and game-based activity to teach adults learners can help teachers in sustaining students' motivation to learn. Choosing astrological topic for teenagers that include interview, group project, finding truth and involving activity which makes the students actively participate during classroom activity can also be done. Besides, using technology-based teaching, such as creating blog or video in youtube can be an effective way. As stated by Ghavifekr & Rosdy (2015) and Jamienson *et al.* (2013) that using technology-based teaching will enable the teachers to provide various appealing activities and help them to design a creative learning. However, Wang (2015) suggested that the teachers need to pay attention on the content that they decided to use. One mistake can lead to a total failure in teaching and learning, such as the students feel addicted to a certain social media. Therefore, the teachers really need to pay attention on all aspects that related with technology.

Wholly, all the professional teachers do not always use a sophisticated activity, but use the activity that can make the teaching and learning run smoothly. They all agree that it will be wasting time if they used the most-popular activity which the students are not familiar with

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because the main purpose for teaching is to successfully transfer the knowledge and to successfully make the students comprehend the lesson. In addition, the activity used by all of the teachers has proven to sustain the students' motivation. Therefore, the teachers out there can use it as references if they are out of idea. However, the teachers have to make some adjustment based on their own situation and condition.

The fourth finding is about the teachers' point of view towards some suitable activities to improve students' motivation in learning. The respondents stated their opinion as follows:

*"I would definitely suggest teachers to find topics students can relate to, either to their interest, or state explicitly why it can be useful for them in their life (maybe it can be useful for the test they might face, or when they enter university/working environment). The use of different types of activities can also become useful to avoid boredom in the classroom (think stirring-settling activities, pair work-individual work-class discussion, reading-writing-speaking-listening). If it is not possible to choose topic because of the constraint of materials from the school, think of different ways to make it relatable for them (for example, when they are learning personal recount text, rather than just asking them to write a composition, maybe ask them to write a postcard for a friend abroad, or when they are asked to write a narrative text, ask them to write for a competition in a magazine that has good prizes). Make the activity rewarding and meaningful for them. Also, this is not related to the activities, but I find that building good rapport with students are also a must! When you have good relationships with the students, most of the time they will be more motivated and used multimodality and technology if it is possible because students are usually happy when they do some research from the internet. And also don't forget the power of reward". (R1)*

*"Design a fun activity which matches with the students' preferences. It does not mean that the teachers always follow what the students' want. But mostly, students will feel motivated if they are given a chance to work independently. So, we as a teacher should not feed the students all the time but we should let them be an independent learner. Additionally, we should give them reward by giving compliments and do not apply punishment, but we should make the students aware of the consequences for not doing their best in completing the task given". (R2)*

*"Because the students have different level of concentration, I suggest not using a monotone activity but choosing more lively activity, especially for teaching young learners". (R3)*

*"One, use interactive and engaging activities, such as using a new technology like Aengisup for deleting some lyrics. Two, collaborative or group work is a good option. Three, consider the level of difficulty or complexity of the task. Four, use technology. Five, use reward system". (R4)*

*"Explicitly tell the objectives to the learners so that they know what they are going to learn and they know that the lesson is important". (R5)*

From abovementioned result of interview, it can be concluded that there are many activities that the teachers can use to sustain students' motivation, such as using various activity which correspond with the students' interest. As stated by R1 and R2 that the teachers need to be really up to date about hot topic that suits to the students because this kind of topic usually makes them feel interested in teaching and learning process. However, it does not always mean that the topic should be really new, but teachers can also use topic that enables students to connect it with their knowledge. If they can find the connection, they will feel that the lesson is beneficial and meaningful so that they will pay more attention and follow the activity well.

Further, R1 added that if it is impossible to choose other materials because of the constrains of the school, just think another simple way when the students supposed to learn. For example, when learning personal recount, the teachers can ask students to write a letter for their friend or teachers can make a competition with the rewards, such as asking them to write for a magazine which have a good price, gaining more points, etc. The point is the teachers should not be discouraged or stressful about the school policy. The teachers have to stay professional and think another way.

On the other hand, R2 mentioned that it does not always mean to design the activity that the students want because it will be overwhelming as the students have different preferences. However, R3 and R5 added that the activity should not be monotone and have a clear objective. Thus, in teaching a text, the students do not always have to independently write a full text in the end of the lesson, the teachers can vary their activity, such as by conducting writing games or designing group project.

If it is also possible, R4 suggested that the teachers can also design the activity that involve the use of technology because they also need to teach the students about what is new and make them to be technology expertise. In a nutshell, teachers have to be confident in using a specific activity because teachers' positive attitude can also influence the students' performance. Other than that, the teachers should get feedback about the activity that they used from the students because it is really important to hear their opinion. From the abovementioned result of interview, it can be concluded that there are many activities that the teachers can use to sustain the students' motivation, such as using various activity which correspond with the students' interest. If the teachers know well the students' interest, the teachers are expected to better relate the subject to the students' life and know what to do in the class.

## CONCLUSION

There are numerous activities that can be used to sustain students' motivation. In the practicality, the teachers should not be afraid of implementing new activity because the teachers do not know if the activity can work unless they try it. In doing so, however, they should consider some factors, such as school policy, students' preferences, objectives that they have set, students' level of proficiency, and students' age. Additionally, the important thing in designing activity is making sure that it can run smoothly and can facilitate the students to grow their ability and competence to their fullest. If teachers run out of idea, they can try to use some activity that proven to work. However, teachers should also make some adjustment because they have different condition and situation. Also, teachers should be readily prepared for the worst and be confident because their positive attitude can also affect the students' motivation in learning.

This study provides some suggestion for the teacher and for the future researchers. Firstly, for the teachers, it is suggested to discuss with the fellow teachers if they are unsure about implementing or using a new activity. Additionally, the teachers can follow some training, such as TESOL, TEFL, CELTA, or DELTA to improve their creativity and skill in designing activities. Lastly, for the future researchers, this study can be served as references for conducting similar study.

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