

**Efficient Strategies to enhance Student's Shift from a Passive Observer to an Active Participant in EFL Classes
(Case Study of First-Year Students at Dr Moulay Tahar University of Saida)**

استراتيجيات فعالة لتعزيز تحول الطالب من مراقب سلبى إلى مشارك نشط في أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية
(دراسة حالة لطلاب السنة الأولى بجامعة الدكتور مولاي الطاهر في سعيدة)

ALI RABAH Nouria

Dr Moulay Tahar University of Saida (Algeria), nouria.alirabah@univ-saida.dz

Received: 28-11-2022

Accepted: 30-12-2023

Published: 30-12-2023

Abstract :

The present study aims to shed light on learners' participation and involvement in EFL classes. It investigates the difficulties that prevent students from being active in classrooms and suggests solutions to enhance their participation and engagement in learning. To complete this research and achieve accurate results, both quantitative and qualitative data is used. Results are collected using two questionnaires, the first questionnaire is addressed to EFL teachers and the second is directed to first-year EFL learners at the University of Dr Moulay Tahar, Saida. Results indicate that both EFL educators and learners hold responsibility for students' passivity and reticence in the classroom; teachers' and learners' attitudes in EFL classes have a significant impact on the level and quality of participation and involvement during the course. Results, however, showed that most EFL students are passive throughout the course because they have a variety of psychological and linguistic issues that prevent them from actively participating in EFL classes and instead drive them towards passivity which engenders a passive learning environment.

Keywords: Engagement, Attitudes, Participation, responsibility, learning.

ملخص:

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى إلقاء الضوء على مشاركة المتعلمين وانخراطهم في أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية. تخص هذه الورقة الصعوبات التي تمنع الطلاب من النشاط أثناء الحصة الدراسية و تقترح حلولاً لتعزيز مشاركتهم وانخراطهم في التعلم. لإكمال هذا البحث وتحقيق نتائج دقيقة، تم استخدام الأساليب الكمية والنوعية. وجمع البيانات باستخدام استبيانان: الأول موجه لمدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية والثاني موجه لمتعلميها في السنة الأولى بجامعة الدكتور مولاي الطاهر، بسعيدة. تشير النتائج إلى أن كلاً من معلمي ومتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية يتحملون المسؤولية عن سلبية الطلاب وتحفظهم؛ تؤثر مواقف المتعلمين في حصص اللغة الإنجليزية تأثيراً كبيراً على مستوى وجودة المشاركة أثناء الدرس. ومع ذلك، أظهرت النتائج أن معظم طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية سلبيون طوال الحصة لأن لديهم مجموعة متنوعة من المشاكل النفسية واللغوية التي تمنعهم من المشاركة بنشاط في أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية وبدلاً من ذلك تدفعهم نحو السلبية التي تولد بيئة تعليمية سلبية..

كلمات مفتاحية: الالتزام، المواقف، المشاركة، المسؤولية، التعلم.

Introduction:

The majority of students do not actively participate in lessons, they passively receive information from their teachers; this phenomenon may be the result of a number of factors. Learners' passivity and reticence in EFL classes. Educators try to come up with ways to encourage their students to be active participants in the classroom because learning a foreign language is an interactive process that asks for their involvement. Learners are required to use the language and practise it in order to develop a higher proficiency level in English. However, they may encounter situations where they are unwilling to speak or participate, which is a serious problem.

In the present research, descriptive methods were used in order to collect relevant data, questionnaires were addressed to both EFL teachers and learners of first-year EFL classes at the university of Dr. Moulay Tahar of Saida. The population of the study consists of 100 first-year EFL students were chosen randomly and 07 teachers who were chosen carefully by targeting only those who teach first-year learners. The gender and age range factors were not significant in the study. Respondents participated in this research by answering a questionnaire which helps to collect the needed information. First-year EFL learners were chosen as a population of the study because they are totally new, and have no experience which means that they are more likely to face difficulties and problem coping with the new environment. Giving opportunities to them to express their opinions and thoughts helped the researcher to collect reliable data which is a key point of research accuracy. In addition to first-year EFL learners, seven EFL teachers from the department of English were also involved. The participants were both magister and doctorate holders with different specializations and more than five years of teaching experience. EFL teachers were involved in this study because they are always in direct contact with learners, so they are familiar with student's degree of participation and engagement during the course, and they are aware of the problems and the difficulties that learners face during EFL classes which means that teachers are a trusted source of reliable information. The research tools were used to gather data from both teachers and learners' view points and thoughts concerning the problems that prevent first-year EFL students from actively participate in the classroom which leads them to passivity; in addition to the solutions they found suitable to be active participants during the course rather than being passive recipients.

The primary goal of learning English is to improve one's ability to communicate clearly and effectively. To achieve this goal, students should actively engage in a variety of classroom activities. By practising the language through conversations, debates, and discussions, they will increase their level of language proficiency. One of the key issues that most educators try to address is how to increase the engagement and participation of EFL students in the classroom. The current case study of First-year EFL students at the University of Dr. Moulay Tahar-Saida aims to shed light on the primary causes of EFL learners' passivity and assist most EFL learners in overcoming all of the challenges that keep them from participating actively in the classroom. To that end, the following questions were asked: What issues in EFL classrooms contribute to students' passivity and what are the potential remedies that could assist EFL students in participating actively in the classroom. The following theories were developed to provide answers to the aforementioned questions: EFL learners have a variety of linguistic and psychological issues, which led them to be passive during the lesson. Cooperative learning may increase student engagement in EFL classrooms. EFL educators' attitudes in the classroom have an impact on how much participation occurs. In the current study, descriptive methods were employed to gather pertinent data. Questionnaires given to EFL teachers and students of first-year EFL classes at Dr. Moulay Tahar-Saida University were used as tools for data collection.

The study provides an overview of English language teaching and learning, as well as justifications for why students should be involved in EFL classes and challenges that prevent them from participating actively in the classroom. Descriptive statistics and graphs are used to analyze and interpret the data. The last part concludes with some ideas and advices that could assist in changing learners' perspectives from being passive recipients to being active participants in EFL sessions.

1.. Active Learning:

Maintaining students' interest and involvement throughout the EFL learning process is crucial. The active learning methodology is an important component of education because it gives students the opportunity to apply what they have learned through conversations, debates, practical exercises, etc. Students take the initiative to learn new things rather than just being passive recipients of the information. Active learning methods were defined classroom

activities by Bonwell and Eison (1991) as ones that encourage students to participate in learning while also considering the activities' relevance and substance. It involves asking the class questions, opening discussions in small groups, debates, etc. According to the constructivist learning theory, people acquire new knowledge by fusing it with previously learned material (Branford, Brown, and Cocking 1999). Active learning encourages cognitive effort and mental development since it requires students to broaden their comprehension by connecting their past knowledge with new information.

1.2..Passive Learning:

In the passive learning environment , students are expected only to ingest and register information presented by the teacher., students are not engaged in the learning process which lead them to lose attention during the course therefore, some of them drift off to speak with their mates or play games because during the course they do nothing but receive information through listening to their teacher's explanation, reading and observing to obtain good grades in examination. There are no options for students to provide feedback to their teacher or to themselves (Wingfield and Black, 2005) because they have less opportunity to connect or think aloud. Many researchers asserted that passive learning can come across as monotonous, offers no opportunities for the teacher misunderstanding. In addition to the previous factors, the passive learning approach enables instructors to convey a lot of information in a short amount of time (Miner, Das, and Gale, 1984). Because students are not compelled to engage in class, they can learn comfortably and without stress in a passive learning setting where the teacher directs the learning process. This gives educators more control over the course's flow.

1.2.1..The Importance of Speaking in EFL Classes:

It is amazing how quickly English has spread over the world in recent years. It is an international language (Gnutzman and Intiman, 2008). People started teaching and learning English as a result it becomes an official language over the world. It has also helped to break down boundaries related to race, color, and religion (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, hill and Pincas, 1980), to reinforce the other claims, Nunan (1991) asserts that people learn a foreign language in order to adapt to how to speak and communicate with it. They judge their achievement

based on their ability to hold a successful conversation in foreign language. Many teachers agreed that when students speak and express themselves in EFL classes that will increase their motivation, competence, and eliminate any kind of ambiguity or misunderstanding throughout the course as long as they keep asking questions, discussing the topic being studied, and participating; learners will no longer hesitate to be involved in the conversation. Learners use English in EFL classes to express their thoughts, ideas, and opinions consequently Speaking exercises assist learners to prepare for real-world circumstances in a secure environment, according to Harmer (2007). He also said that speaking exercises let teachers gauge the proficiency of their students and help them identify any language issues or deficiencies that may be rectified in the future.

1.2.2..Learner-centred Approach:

In a learner-centered approach, students actively construct their knowledge by examining and critically evaluating particular situations. This teaching strategy aims to improve student's learning capacities. The emphasis of instruction is shifted from the teacher to the student, who is seen as an active participant throughout the course. The learner-centered approach promotes active participation in the course rather than passive listening. The application of various methods and techniques that will help to create a collaborative, supportive, and interactive learning environment where reflection, creation, discussion, inquiry, and accountability take place is made possible by the implementation of the learner-centred approach to learning (Kafai & Resnick, 1996; Piaget, 1963; Vygotsky, 1978). It encourages students to actively participate in the learning process by teaching them the skills necessary for successful learning, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, discussion of ideas and thoughts, working in groups, analyzing situations, and making decisions.

1.2.3..The Importance of Learners' Engagement in EFL Classes:

Active participation in EFL classes gives learners opportunities to practice the foreign language, and express their ideas and comments; it develops a sense of co-operational work among students which encourages them to work together to debate, discuss and solve problems. Allwright and Baily (1991) stated that interaction is an act that learners do together and in groups. Additionally, EFL classroom interaction helps students learn various language patterns and forms, which will enable them to identify their language gaps and shortcomings and be remedied during communication. From this perspective, participation in

language classes' communications and interactions provides learners with chances to enrich their knowledge of vocabulary and language structure through exposure to various classroom debates and discussions. Classroom involvement and participation promote learners' vocabulary and grammatical rules knowledge and provide them with opportunities to practice them in appropriate contexts. Additionally, learners' participation in EFL sessions inspires them to be more active and productive in class. According to Nunan (1989), engagement in the classroom enhances students' ability to manipulate, analyze, and understand information. Nunan described a successful classroom as one in which students collaborate to generate its events.

1.2.4..Obstacles that prevent Learners from being Active Participants:

The most crucial factors for improving learners' language competency is their engagement and involvement in EFL sessions, but most EFL students struggle with issues that hinder them from being active participants. Students are hesitant to share their opinions and instead choose to remain silent. There are two categories of challenges that stop students from participating in EFL classes: linguistic and psychological barriers.

1.4..Linguistic Hurdles:

In order to improve their language proficiency and ability to use the language naturally, EFL students are required to communicate and interact in English. However, the majority of them find it difficult to do this because of linguistic barriers like a lack of vocabulary, poor grammar, pronunciation, and the use of their native tongue. Research confirmed that the majority of EFL students have trouble speaking as a result of their poor vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation skills.

1.4.1..Luck of Vocabulary:

A significant problem for EFL learners is a lack of vocabulary knowledge, which prevents them from contributing and being actively involved in the language learning process. According to Thornbury (2005), language has a wide variety of expressions and words. Unfortunately, EFL students struggle to find the right and appropriate word to use to transmit an idea in a particular context due to their poor vocabulary repertoire, so most students prefer to remain

passive and avoid interfering in any debate, discussion, or conversation. This makes it difficult for students to communicate freely and express themselves easily.

1.4.1..Pronunciation Problems:

Most non-native speakers have difficulty with word pronunciation and articulation when learning English which is the case for students taking EFL lessons. According to Genc and Ozkan (2011), pronunciation is a crucial aspect of speaking a foreign language. Due to a lack of practice listening to native speakers and depending on teachers' pronunciation. EFL learners have trouble pronouncing and articulating words. This is because they are unfamiliar with the rhythm, sounds, and stress of English words.

1.4.2..Weak Listening Abilities:

The secret to learn a foreign language successfully is to perfect the art of effective listening, which helps students to gather information and correct prior knowledge through observation. A crucial ability for learning how to communicate effectively in a foreign language is listening. Learning how to listen helps students be more productive because it enables them to understand what others are saying and respond to it with ease. EFL students who listen intently to their teacher and fellow students when using the English language are more likely to improve their level of communication performance over time.

1.4.3..Anxiety:

One of the psychological issues that prevents students from participating fully in foreign language lessons is anxiety. Anxiety is defined as the experience of stress, doubt, worry, and uneasiness. In some situations, anxiety manifests and can be challenging to manage. Communication anxiety is a significant issue, particularly when speaking a foreign language. To increase their level of proficiency, EFL students are encouraged to use the language in class; Learners are under a lot of strain, which makes them feel anxious, since they are required to concentrate on organizing their thoughts and ideas in an understandable manner in addition to creating proper language structure, grammatical function, and pronouncing words in a comprehensible manner.

1.4.4..Shyness:

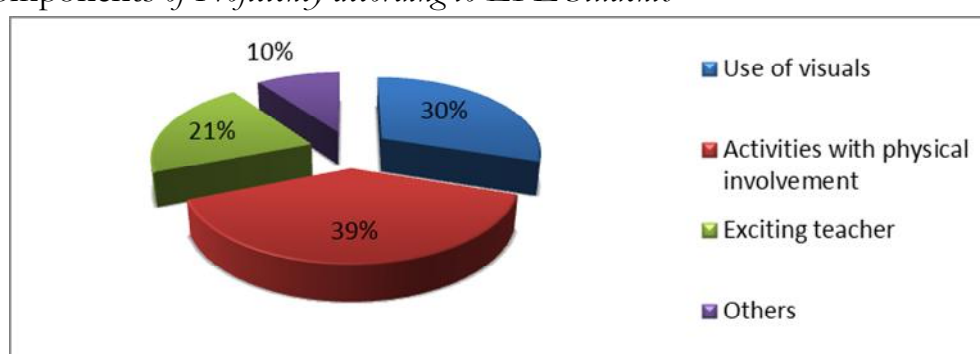
Shyness is an emotional state that manifests during social interactions or public performances and is linked to feelings of stress, worry, and trepidation. While Juhana (2012) described shyness as the feeling that the majority of students face when speaking in English classrooms. Shyness is poor self-efficacy perceptions about one's social performance. A good EFL learning environment includes active contact and involvement in the classroom where students communicate with each other, voice opinions, and share ideas; nevertheless, timid students are hesitant to work with others and dislike tasks that require group work; creating a passive learning environment by speaking in front of an audience and communicating ideas. In other words, shy students do not like to be the centre of attention in class; they would rather take notes passively than make mistakes and draw ridicule.

1.4.5..Fear of Making Mistakes:

One of the obstacles preventing EFL students from actively participating in class is the fear of making mistakes and receiving negative feedback from their teacher or their peers. These learners are reluctant to participate in class discussions or debates, and instead, choose to passively observe. In general, foreign language learners feel anxious when speaking the language because they are scared about making mistakes and receiving criticism in addition to being the centre of attention in the classroom. The fear of making mistakes hinders language learners' ability to engage, use the language, and express their ideas and opinions. When first-year EFL students were questioned about their proficiency in English, they gave a variety of answers, which were analyzed and arranged in the following table:

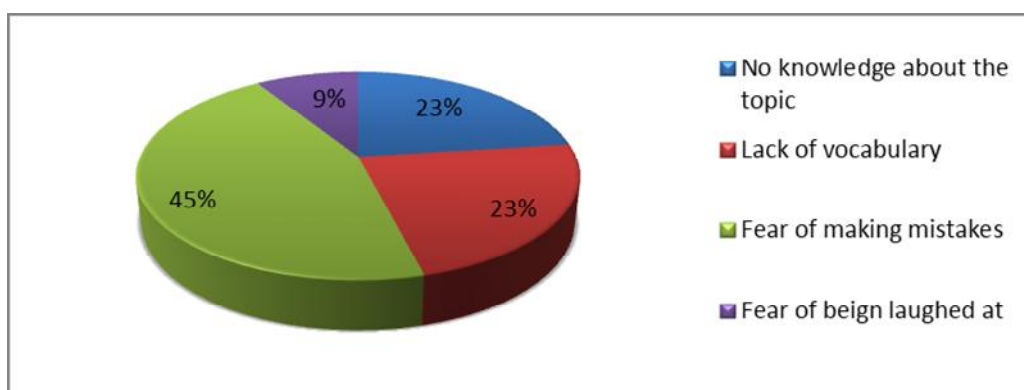
Graph 1

The components of Proficiency according to EFL Students



Source: Data gathered from the Departement of English at Dr Moulay Tahar University (the Year 2021)

The pie chart shows that (39%) of EFL students preferred sessions that included physical exercises, whereas (30%) of the participants said that using visuals was an incredible exciting way to use in EFL classes. However, (21%) of the respondents stated that the teacher is the primary factor in creating a motivating and stimulating environment for learning English, and (10) suggested that all of the aforementioned recommendations should be implemented in addition to the use of engaging topics for discussion in order to create a motivating, exciting, and stimulating learning environment. This suggests that the teacher's selection of topics and texts must be relevant to the students' areas of study. They added that EFL learners should be given opportunities to express their thoughts and ideas freely. The results revealed that all the learners are willing to actively participate in the classroom as long as the learning process takes place in a motivating, stimulating, interesting, and exciting environment; in which new technologies are used and teachers stay away from traditional ways of teaching. The attempt behind asking these questions was to evaluate EFL learners' level in certain points and gather relevant information about the difficulties that prevent them from active participation in the courses. The collected data are displayed in the following pie charts.

Graph 2*EFL Learners' Participation Difficulties*

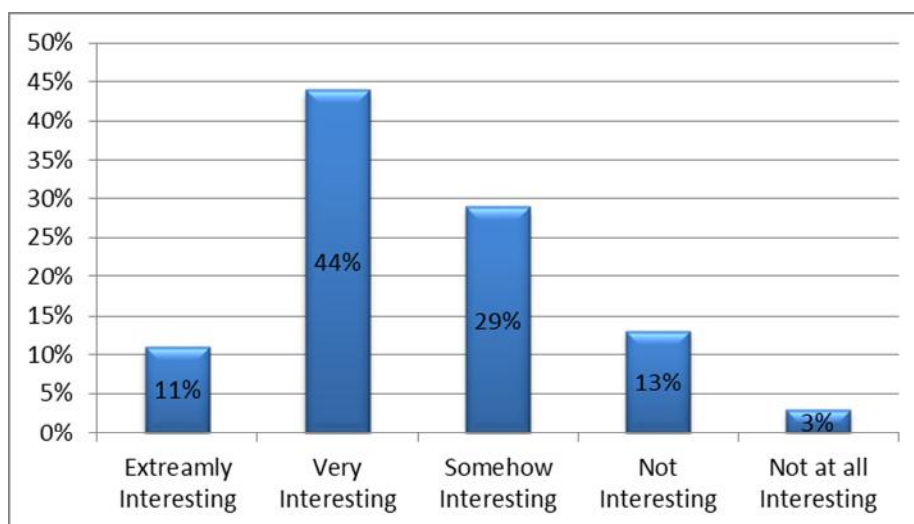
Source: Data gathered from the Department of English at Dr Moulay Tahar University (the Year 2020)

According to the pie chart above, (45%) of the students said that their lack of participation in class is due to their fear of making mistakes. Some students provided examples to support their claims, such as the fact that they have poor pronunciation and steer clear of any grammatical or structural errors. However, (23%) of the participants concurred that a lack of vocabulary is what prevents

them from participating actively because they lack the vocabulary skills and relevant terminology and words to express their ideas and thoughts in an effective manner. Another participant (23%) that they do not participate in class because they are unfamiliar with the subject. The remaining respondents (09%) stated that one of the issues that contribute to the passivity of EFL learners is a lack of confidence and a fear of being ridiculed. Some students mentioned other factors that are one of the reasons they don't participate, such as shyness, and in some cases, they find the course topics to be extremely boring and not at all interesting, which is why they prefer to be passive. Others said they do not participate in the course to avoid receiving any criticism or rejection from the teacher because he only has their best interests in mind without providing any encouragement or good comments, condemns their ideas. These findings suggest that first-year EFL students struggle with a variety of linguistic issues, including a lack of vocabulary, issues with pronunciation, a fear of making mistakes, and a lack of prior knowledge of the subject matter being covered by the teacher. This question aims to know if learners are interested in the topics selected by their teachers or not. The bar-chart bellow displays the responses of the participants

Graph 3

Learners' Opinions about the Topics Selected by Their Teachers



Source: Data gahered from the Departement of English at Dr Moulay Tahar University (Year 2021)

According to the bar graph above, (44%) of the participants found the subjects chosen by their lecturers to be highly interesting, while (29%) of them claimed that the subjects were at least somewhat intriguing to them, (13% of the informants noted that the subjects did not interest them. While (03%) claimed that the teacher's selection of the course's topics is completely uninteresting.

1.4.6.. Results and their Interpretation:

When being asked different answers were given by the first-year students. The majority of the informants (57%) agreed that lack of vocabulary is the main reason behind EFL learners' passivity in the classroom which means that learners suffer from some linguistic problems that negatively affects their classroom participation. Whereas (29%) of the participants mentioned that EFL learners remain passive during the course because they are not interested in the topics being presented and tackled in the classroom. On the other hand (14%) of the teachers believed that psychological problems such as shyness are the main reasons behind EFL learners' hesitation and passivity in the classroom. These results reveal that speaking is the main problem that most EFL learners face during participation in the classroom. (5%) of the informants declared that the teacher- learner relationship has no impact on their involvement in the classroom and have nothing to do with their educational achievements. They mentioned that their educational success or failure is the result of their own performance. They agreed that they are responsible for their studies; they should be motivated and actively involved in learning so as to succeed. (44%) of the participants found the topics selected by their teachers very interesting. On the other hand, (29%) of them declared that the topics are somehow interesting, (13%) of the informants mentioned that the topics are not interested to them. Whereas (03%) declared that the topics chose by the teacher to be tackled in the course are not at all interested. The majority of EFL learners find the topics being presented by their teachers to be tackled during the course uninteresting and do not meet their field of interest

1.4.7..Suggestions and Recommendations:

To enhance a students' shift from being a passive observer to an active participant, several efficient strategies can be implemented. Firstly, it is crucial to create an inclusive and engaging learning environment where all students feel comfortable and encouraged to contribute .This can be achieved by fostering

open discussions, group activities and project -based-learning. Additionally, incorporating hands on learning experiences, such as experiments or real-life stimulations, enables students to actively apply their knowledge and connect it to real-world situations. Furthermore, providing regular feedback and recognizing students' efforts and achievements can boost their motivation and increase their active participation. Teachers should also use technology and multimedia resources to present information in a visually appealing and interactive manner making the learning process more stimulating and captivating. Finally engaging students to take ownership of their learning by setting goals and creating opportunities for self-reflection.

Conclusion:

According to the study, both EFL teachers and students are accountable for the degree of engagement and participation in the classroom. EFL students face a variety of linguistic and psychological challenges, including a lack of vocabulary, pronunciation issues, anxiety, stress, poor self-confidence, and a lack of motivation, all of which impede them from participating fully in class. The use of dull themes and activities, giving students unfavorable feedback, and inappropriate delivery and explanation methods are all factors that contribute to the passivity of EFL students. In order to change EFL learners' attitudes from being passive recipients to active participants and foster an interactive and dynamic learning environment, some solutions and strategies were therefore put were put out to assist both EFL teachers and students in solving this problem such as a supportive, pleasant, stress- and anxiety-free classroom atmosphere where students feel safe and confident to involve themselves and contribute is the first step in creating an active learning environment in the classroom. Additionally, it is advised that EFL instructors use engaging subjects, exercises, and resources that take into account the interests and existing knowledge of their students, it is also advised that they give students constructive criticism in order to motivate them and build a solid classroom attendance. EFL teachers should assist their students in overcoming both linguistic and psychological barriers. First, they should be familiar with the field of psychology so that they are prepared to handle any situation that may arise in their classes. Next, they should act as language role models.

Appendices:

Appendix 01 : Students' Questionnaire:

Dear students,

You are cordially asked to respond to the following questions as we conduct research on learners' participation in EFL classrooms.

Please be aware that all responses will be kept private.

I appreciate your cooperation.

Insert name:

Please tick (✓) the most appropriate response :

Section One: Information about the Learner

How is your English level?

Advanced

Intermediate

Beginner

1. Why did you choose to study English at the university?

You love the English language

You did not have any other choices

Others (specify)

.....
.....

2. The reasons behind studying English are :

Communicative purposes

Academic purposes

Other purposes (specify)

.....
.....

3. In which learning environment would you like to study English?

(you may tick multiple choices)

Use of visuals

Activities with physical movement

An exciting and active teacher

Others (specify)

.....
.....

Appendix 02: Teachers' Questionnaire:

Dear educators,

We are researching learners' involvement in EFL classes, we would be very grateful if you help us by answering the following questions. Thank you for your collaboration and cooperation.

Please tick (✓) the most appropriate response.

1. Do you feel that your students are involved in the learning process?

Always

Sometimes

Never

If not. Why?

.....
.....

2. Are your student's active participants?

Yes

No

If "no" what are the difficulties they face?

Lack of vocabulary

Shyness

They are not interested in the topic

Others (please specify)

.....
.....

3. What activities do you use to make your learners more active?

.....
.....

4. In your opinion, in which learning environment should English be taught?

.....
.....

5. Do you think that the use of ICT technologies in EFL classes may keep learners actively involved?

.....
.....

6. What are the methods and techniques you use to shift your learners from being passive to active participants?

.....
.....

Thank you

References:

1. Allwright, D. and Bailey, K.M. (1991). *Focus on the Language Classroom: an Introduction to Classroom Research for Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. Bonwell, C.C., Eison, J.A. (1991). *Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom*. Washington, USA: Eric Clearing House on Higher Education.
3. Bransford, J.D., Brown, A.L., and Cocking, R.R. (1999). *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School* (2nd Ed). Washington, USA: National Academies Press.
4. Broughton, G., Brumfit, C., Flavell, R., Hill, P., Pincas, A. (1980). *Teaching English as a Foreign Language* (2nd Ed), New York, USA: Routledge.
5. Gnutzmann, C., Intemann, F. (2008). *English as a Lingua Franca in Higher Education*. Berlin, NY: The Deutsche National Bibliothek.

6. Harmer, J. (2001). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. London: Longman.
7. Harmer, J. (2007). *How to Teach English*. London, UK: Longman.
8. Juhana, M. (2012). *Psychological Factors That Hinder Students from Speaking in English Classes*. Indonesia.
9. Kafai, Y., and Resnick, M. (1996). *Constructionism in Practice: Designing, Thinking, and Learning in a Digital World*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers
10. Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing Tasks for Communicative Classroom*. London, England: Cambridge University Press.
11. Nunan, D. (1991). *Language Teaching Methodology: Textbook for Teachers*. NY: Prentice Hall.
12. Ozkn, Y., and Genc, B. (2011). *Speaking the Real: News Articles as Major Source for Oral Competence*. David, J.A. *English as a Second Language: Languages and Linguistics*. New York: Nova.
13. Thonbury, S. (2005). *How to Teach Speaking*. NY, USA: Longman.