Motivating Zootechnical Students Through Innovative Materials and Authentic Texts

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Abstract

Two types of authentic materials were introduced in a Brazilian high school, including popular songs and texts from the students' field of specialization. Following this intervention, student motivation was explored through interviews, class observations, and a comparison of student grades. Students described dissatisfaction with their previous English learning experiences and expressed enjoyment of the new texts, even requesting more. They were actively engaged during lessons with the new materials and earned higher course grades than students in another section of the same course. The use of innovative materials and authentic texts appears to be associated with higher student motivation in this study.

Introduction

For many years I have been teaching English at a public federal institute of education in Brazil to intermediate technical/high school students who are enrolled in a full-time course called "Technician in zootechnics integrated to high school." They have two 50-minute English classes per week. English is part of the regular curriculum that consists of 20 subjects, so the learners do not have much time to dedicate to English. They are always very busy with so many other subjects. Our students come from different socioeconomic contexts. Most of them don't have a high level of proficiency in English. They are originally from public schools, and some of them come from rural areas.

In Brazil, Portuguese is the mother tongue. English is part of the curriculum but there are few good quality public English courses for people who want them. Therefore, students get unmotivated. In Brazil, it is often said that students study English in the public educational system only as an obligation, but in fact most of them learn almost nothing. It seems that the English language is not a priority to the Brazilian education system. In fact, however, English is an essential addition to any program in our globalized world.

In my context, it has been said that it is very difficult for public school students to learn English well and become independent in reading, listening and speaking. This can be true in some ways, but I thought it was time to investigate and make some needed changes in order to improve the process of teaching and learning. I was motivated by Ferrance (2000) who stated, ". . . educators can also investigate what effect their teaching is having on their students, how they could work better with other teachers, or ways of changing the whole school for the better" (pp. 28-29). Therefore, investigation is needed in order to implement actions to motivate students and

make them understand the importance of learning English and use it as an international tool of communication and a professional key to success.

During the time I have been teaching English, it has been very common to hear students repeating the same demotivating words or habits all the time. Most of them usually repeat that they have not learnt anything in English. They say teachers have worked with grammar only, and the verb "to be" has been taught in class all their life. The teaching has been teacher-centered, not student-centered, and not communicative or focused on the learners. Grammar translation has been the focus instead. I think this picture gives us some idea why students are unmotivated. That's why I decided to investigate and try to implement a new approach to teaching in order to get successful outcomes.

My idea was to enter the students' world. This means that materials used in the classroom should be relevant to the students. Maybe something they like a lot, or even love. Therefore, I decided to introduce innovative materials in my classroom with the expectation that they would increase my students' interest and motivation. The new materials would be interesting to students because they connect with students' real lives in one of two ways: first, they connect to students' personal interests through technology and pop culture, and second, they connect with students' professional interests through authentic English for Specific Purposes (ESP) texts on zootechnical topics. I thought that using something that makes sense to students could be motivating and we could get good outcomes. That's how I got to my action research question: ***If I add innovative materials connected to my students' context, incorporating pop culture and authentic zootechnical texts, will learners be more motivated to learn English?***

Literature Review

Motivation

Motivation has a very important role in the process of teaching and learning. According to Ryan & Deci (2000), "Motivation concerns energy, direction, persistence and equifinality . . . Perhaps more important, in the real world, motivation is highly valued because of its consequences: Motivation produces" (p. 69). People do things better if they are motivated. Corder (1981) thinks that if motivation exists, success in language learning is guaranteed. According to Travers, Elliot & Kratchwill (1993), motivation is a topic that can mean the difference between success and failure in the classroom. According to Gardner (1985), motivation is the most important factor for success in language learning. It is even more important than specific ability in languages. Gardner has been a key figure during the last few decades in the development of theories of motivation in language learning. It has been said that the most effective and extensive research on the role of attitudes and motivation in second language acquisition (SLA) was carried out by Gardner and Lambert (1972), who are considered to be the pioneers in the field. They also formulated a social-psychological theory of motivation in language learning, which distinguishes between extrinsic (outside, "social") types of motivation, and intrinsic (internal, "psychological") types.

ESP Materials

There are no perfect course books or printed teaching materials which fit every student's needs in terms of General English (GE). It is important to remember that GE is the most popular English form of English instruction all over the world, while ESP teaching is not a very common approach. Since ESP is a specific teaching approach, it is more difficult to find good materials

for specific needs. Furthermore, materials that are appropriate for a particular ESP course or area may not prove so effective for other ESP courses or areas. That's why ESP practitioners might be required to develop materials or adapt the available materials for a particular learning situation.

Bocanegra-Valle (2010) summarizes in a flowchart the steps for evaluating and designing materials for the ESP classroom. According to her, we should find out if there are materials available for the course. If yes, we should evaluate the materials. If no, we should design and develop in-house materials or adapt authentic materials. Then we implement and review. This can be a continuous process (p. 145).

Authentic Materials

In order to better motivate students and prepare them for real situations, I decided to use authentic materials. But, what are authentic materials? The scholarly literature on this subject contains a variety of explanations. Swaffar (1985) says that "an authentic text, oral or written, is one whose primary intent is to communicate meaning" (p. 17). According to Little, Devitt, and Singleton (2001), an authentic text is "created to fulfill some social purpose in the language community in which it was produced" (as cited in Guariento & Morley, p. 347).

In this study, authentic materials mean something close to Little, Devitt, and Singleton's definition. Here, authentic materials mean that they were produced by native speakers and have some social purpose in the language community in which they were produced. An American pop song was used because it makes sense to the students. They love videos. An authentic American zootechnical text was used because it is connected to the students' course.

Tomlinson (2012) reports that authentic materials can "provide meaningful exposure to language as it is actually used, motivate learners and help them develop a range of communicative competencies and enhance positive attitudes towards the learning of a language" (p. 161). Gilmore (2007) states that "authentic materials, particularly audio-visual ones, offer a much richer source of input for learners and have the potential to be exploited in different ways and on different levels to develop learners' communicative competence" (p. 103). Spelleri (2002) notes that "authentic materials offer real language that is contextually rich and culturally pertinent" (p. 16). Peacock (1997) empirically investigated the use of authentic materials in the classroom and concluded that motivation and on-task behavior increased significantly when learners used authentic materials.

To summarize, we can say that authentic materials are beneficial because they offer great learning opportunities to students. Authentic materials "expose learners to language that serves a useful purpose, provide a refreshing change from the textbook, focus more closely on learners' interests and needs, provide information about a variety of topics, increase learners' motivation, and connect the classroom with the outside world" (Thomas, 2014).

When selecting locally relevant authentic materials, teachers should concentrate on surface culture topics such as the arts, customs, food, holidays, places, situations, and traditions that are relevant to the local context; in addition, they should give students opportunities to engage in critical thinking about cross-cultural nuance by adding deep culture topics such as attitudes, perceptions, and values, while avoiding any possible risk of offending the students.

Locally relevant topics help students to stay connected to their reality: the local context is the world in which they live outside the EFL classroom. The learners' personal interests should

also be considered, and authentic materials should be kept engaging, short, and appropriate to their proficiency levels. Finally, teachers can invite the students to contribute by bringing their own examples of authentic materials, and facilitate opportunities to work with the same text in various ways—for example, with speaking, listening, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary activities (Thomas, 2014).

Methods

Participants

I did this research project in a class at the technical/high school described in the introduction. The class had 25 students, 14–19 years old. They have two 50-minute English classes per week. I selected a representative sample of 12 students to interview, representing strong, mid, and weaker learners. Table 1 shows us the details about the participants: number, gender, and age.

Table 1
Age and Gender of Interview Participants

GENDER	STUDENTS' AGE				
	15 years old	16 years old	17 years old	18 years old	19 years old
Male	01	02	01	01	01
Female		03	03		

As we can see, there is a broader age range among male students, while the female ones are almost all at the same age, that is 16 and 17 years old.

Intervention Procedure

I wanted to look at how students feel working with authentic zootechnical texts. As a warm up, however, I used some popular video clips connected to their context and likes. The

first aim was to motivate students to get involved in learning activities in the classroom. That's why a pop song was chosen, even though its vocabulary was very different from the text used on the second activity, the reading activity. At first, I thought of choosing a country song connecting to the text for the reading activity, but I realized that the country song didn't make sense to the students. On the other hand, most of them had been listening to popular songs on their cell phones.

Based on those facts, a popular song was selected for the listening activity. The strategy was not only to give students the opportunity to watch the video and sing along, but also to practice their listening skills through a fill-in-the-blanks exercise. After that activity, students became motivated, relaxed, and confident that they could go further in learning English. It was time to introduce the second and more challenging activity, using the abstract of a technical text on animal science.

Based on my experience, I believed that by adding innovative materials to my teaching, students would be more motivated and they could learn much more English. Descriptions of sample activities with innovative materials can be found in Appendix A.

Data Collection and Analysis

    Interview questions.

The questions were carefully selected. Students first talked about their experience before coming to the Institute where I work. Then they talked about their experience here, up to now, and later they reflected about the changes in their way of studying English and what it can do for them in the future. I also left an open question in which they could talk about anything they

would like. It's the appropriate space for students to talk about anything remarkable that is connected to the theme of this research.

These are the questions students answered in the interview:

1. Please, tell us about your experience in studying English before coming to our Institute.

2. Comment about the differences or challenges you have faced here and how you overcame them, if you could.

3. What do you think about the innovative material we use in your course, (videos, songs, podcasts, recordings, etc.), as supportive tools to English learning? Explain how those materials encourage you or not, please.

4. In this course we also have been using some texts on zootechnical. Have those texts enhanced your interest in reading, or not? Explain your reasons, please.

5. Please, compare the previous way English was taught to you and the new approach using innovative materials and authentic texts. Has the new methodology made any difference to you? If so, give an example(s) and tell us how it can help in your career. Be as authentic as you can.

6. Please, feel free if I forgot to ask anything else you would like to comment on.

After completing the interviews, I analyzed them qualitatively, drawing an overall impression of student answers for each question.

Observation of class activities.

During the observations, I recorded classes and took notes of everything related to motivation during a regular lesson and later on the following lessons, after introducing the innovative materials. It was possible to check how students acted in class while using the

traditional methodology and how they reacted when the innovative material was incorporated in my teaching and what happened to their motivation.

Teaching is a complex and dynamic activity, during a lesson many things occur simultaneously. It is not easy to capture everything that happens in the class, so, I tried to be as objective as I could. After observing the activities, I wrote my impressions to myself and refined my plan for future actions.

Comparing student grades.

I teach several classes at the Institute, so I decided to compare the grades of different classes, in order to better understand the impact of the innovative materials. I compared the average grades of two classes, at the same level. In one of them I used the innovative material and in the other I used traditional teaching.

Throughout Brazil, a 0–10 grading scale is used. "0" is the worst grade and "10" is the best. In my Institution the passing grade is 6/10. I used a t-test to analyze the grades of the two groups, to determine whether any differences between the means were statistically significant.

Results

Findings

Interview answers.

The aim of the interviews was to check if incorporating innovative materials to authentic EAP texts significantly increased students' motivation, but I could not simply ask a single direct question about it. First, I needed to understand how and why my students got to the level of English proficiency they had attained. That's why questions about their learning history were

asked. In fact, even though many students come from different cities and different family structures, there were no big differences in their answers. When asked about their studying history before coming to the Institute, all interviewed students had almost the same complaints. They said that the verb "to be" was taught throughout their life and they didn't even know know what for. Most of them said that, in fact, they learned nothing. Just a few students, two 17-year-old girls, said that they think they learned the verb "to be," only. One of them said that English used to be much easier at her former school and now it demands some studying. For this reason she doesn't like English anymore. A 19-year-old male student, classified his former school experience as something horrible. According to him, the English teacher barely used to appear for class. He declared that he didn't learn anything there.

About the differences or challenges in this context (question # 2), the students answered that they had to work hard to adapt to the Institute. Most of them said they realized that they didn't know anything and they needed some help from senior students and others to continue at school.

Regarding materials, all of the students loved the video clips and they even suggested that I should use videos in all of my classes. They stated that they would like to suggest some videos. I accepted the idea, under the condition I could evaluate the videos before using them.

All of the students also said that using authentic texts was a very good methodology. According to them, associating language to zootechnical texts encourages them to learn not only English but also zootechnics. In other words, they say that it is a content and language integrated learning methodology.

While answering question #5, the students largely repeated the complaints from question #1, about the non-communicative teaching they had to face in the past. However, the learners recognized that after two years at the Institute they have changed a lot. Nowadays, they are able to understand some spoken English, read English texts and communicate in English to some degree. A few of them can even use spoken English at an intermediate level. They pointed out the importance of using innovative materials in class and said that they are eager to be interacting all the time and learning more. Finally, in question #6 they reinforced the idea of using innovative materials and creating a more integrated communicative teaching system.

Observation of class activities.

Video activity.

Observing the video activity really confirmed my hypothesis that incorporating innovative materials and authentic EAP texts can significantly increase students' motivation. Students got so involved in the video activity that they decided to create a group which they call "the choral," and they have made some presentations at the school. I included their singing presentations and videos in their grades. I also use the song's lyrics to work on vocabulary, language use, and grammar, when it is needed. I always try to connect the song's message to the real world and their context.

Reading activity.

The reading activity also worked very well. I chose a text directly connected to the students' course. So, even though the text is in authentic English and the students are not upper intermediate students, they managed to deal well with the text.

The students were divided into groups of four. All of them received a handout that contained a text and a list of questions about the text. I told them that they would receive the answer sheet only in the last phase of the work. So, for the time being, they should work collaboratively. They had to read, discuss and take note of everything because they needed it for the final phase: creating a paragraph and commenting about the text. Students were moved from group to group three times.

Comparison of course grades.

The students did good quality work. Some of them did even better than expected. We had seven groups in class, and just one group did not meet expectations. This shows that the students were really motivated and got good results. Student grades at the end of the term can be seen in Table 2, below. Class 2ª D, where innovative materials were incorporated got an average grade 22% higher than the Class 2ª A, where only the traditional methodology was used. A t-test confirmed that this difference of means is statistically significant, with $p < 0.0001$.

Table 2
Average Grades of Participants in Both Classes

CLASS	N	METHODOLOGY	MEAN GRADE	Standard Deviation
2ª A	32	Traditional materials	6.17	0.85
2ª D	25	Innovative materials	7.12	0.90

Discussion

Interviews, observations, and grades helped me answer my action research question. In the interviews, the students revealed that traditional, noncommunicative teaching does not meet their needs and that they desire something authentic and innovative connected with their context and needs. In other words, they desire something motivating. The interview showed that, when

motivated, students not only complete their regular activities assigned by the teacher, but also they want more and even suggest new innovative activities.

Observing my students was a very important experience. It was possible to check how they acted in class while using the traditional methodology and how they reacted when the innovative material was incorporated in the teaching and what happened to their motivation.

Those students' attitudes are reflected in their grades. The data indicates that the innovative material really made a very positive impact. Students became motivated as they were encouraged to use authentic material connected to their major. They reacted positively to the activities and got good results.

The result of this research was very remarkable to me, and I think it can be remarkable to others as well. People learn something when it makes sense to them. Some motivation is needed; otherwise, learning may not happen. That's why I decided to try to motivate my students through an innovative approach. My hypothesis was that adding innovative materials and incorporating them with authentic texts from the zootechnical field, connected to my students' context, learners would be more motivated to learn English. My goal was that my students not only learn English but also incorporate some new culture and be able to connect to global information in their career. Based on students' responses to interview questions, observations of their participation in new activities, and their higher grades, the answer to my acton research question confirmed my hypothesis: **If I add innovative materials including authentic zootechnical texts, connected to my students' context, my learners will be more motivated to learn English**. As shown in this paper, students got motivated, improved their grades, and suggested that the teacher should expand the project.

Conclusion

This paper provides information about students' language learning history in the Federal Institute of Education in a small city in Brazil. It shows how their motivation can be enhanced if innovative materials are added, including authentic technical texts connected to students' context. No doubt the examples here may be useful to some other parts of the world. In my international teaching and learning experience I have heard many stories similar to those reported on this paper. Therefore, incorporating innovative materials and authentic ESP texts could probably increase the development of students' motivation in other locations as well.

As shown in the interview data, students had very difficult learning experiences in the past. The experiences presented here show that adding innovative materials can make positive changes. Students became more motivated and participative, and their grades were 22% higher than the traditional teaching and learning group. More than just getting better grades, students showed a very positive attitude to learning. The proof of motivation is the fact that the learners themselves proposed new activities involving innovative materials, authentic texts, and communicative methodology. The results indicate that this approach works well.

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Appendix A

The first activity involves a popular American song. The objectives for this activity were:
   a) motivate students to get involved in learning activities;
   b) develop listening skills and vocabulary.
The second activity is a reading activity. An authentic American text on international animal agriculture was used. The objectives for this activity were:
   a) motivate students through authentic text connected to their course;
   b) develop their reading skills working in groups, cooperatively.

Video Clip Activity
For this activity a new song from a popular singer was chosen. It is a Demi Lovato video clip that will be used in two versions. Links are given below for 1) official version and 2) lyrics version.
1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4QwRk4Hjzq8
2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hgo8rsROG8s
First, students watch a video clip (official version) then the lyrics one. The teacher will clarify new vocabulary and pronunciation of new words. Later on, the video will be played again, (official version) and this time learners will do an exercise, filling in the blanks with some missing words while listening to the song. After making sure that they have done their job, completing the missing words, they will check their answers on the key answers sheet, that is shown on the multimídia screen system.
The video lyrics version will be played again at a lower volume, and students will sing along and they will be recorded. Their video may be used as an assessment and a learning tool.

Listening Exercise
Directions: Fill in the blanks according to what you hear on the song
(Underlined words are blanks on student copy)

Tell Me You Love Me
By Demi Lovato
Oh no, here (01) we go again
Fighting over what (02) I said
I'm sorry, yeah I'm sorry
Bad at love, no, I'm not good at this
But I can't say I'm innocent
Not hardly, but (03) I'm sorry
And all my friends, they know and it's true
I (04) don't know who I am without you
I got it bad, baby
Got it bad
Oh, tell me you love me
I need someone on days like this, I do
On days like this

Oh, tell me (05) you love me
I need someone
On days like this, (06) I do
On days like this
Oh, can you hear my heart say
No, you ain't nobody 'til you got somebody
You ain't nobody 'til you got (07) somebody
And I hope I (08) never see the day
That you move on and (09) be happy without me
Without me
What's my hand without your heart to hold?
I don't know what I'm living for
If I'm living without you
All (10) my friends, they know and it's true
I…

Reading and Writing Activity
Directions: In groups of 4, read the text below and discuss the following questions about it, please. According to your teacher's instructions you will be moved from group to group, more than once. So, be collaborative and take note of everything. You will need it at your last group for developing the final work. Then, produce a paragraph summarizing the ideas and expressing your opinion on the topic. (See question #8) You may be against or in favor of the topic ideas. Give convincing justifications for your position.

Teaching international animal agriculture
By S. D. Lukefahr
Abstract
Students who major in animal science at U.S. institutions are generally exposed to a curriculum that emphasizes commercial, large-scale production of the few traditional food animals: cattle, poultry, sheep, and swine. Globally, most farmers live in lesser-developed countries under limited-resource conditions of land, feed supplies, equipment, and capital. The promotion of commercial animal production enterprises may not be appropriate for such farms because it can subject farmers to considerable economic risk. Rather, use of limited numbers of large livestock, locally adapted breeds, or smaller livestock (e.g., ducks, goats, guinea pigs, and rabbits) may be more appropriate under subsistence, integrated farming systems. In this global context, a course in international animal agriculture has been taught for 15 yr to undergraduate and graduate students. The course consists of a review of traditional and potential livestock species well suited for impoverished families on small farms and methods to implement sustainable livestock projects, including feasibility, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation stages. To enhance student understanding, global food issues and challenges are illustrated with case studies. A term paper is also assigned for which students choose three suitable livestock species or local breeds that would be complementary on a small crop farm (< 5 ha). Daily dietary

requirements of protein and energy per family member are calculated. Itemized enterprise budgets and production tables are prepared. Early in the course, the general consensus of students was that people who are malnourished and live in poverty have low personal ambition and motivation, and that their problems should be amenable to solution by application of American technology and expertise. The course modifies such attitudes and enhances a student's critical thinking and problem-solving abilities and communication skills. Course evaluations indicated that students believed that it is important to acquire some international knowledge and understanding when seeking a job, and that certain animal science courses should contain some international content. Students gain an understanding of global animal agriculture and an appreciation of the complexity of food production and hunger issues.
http://www.animalsciencepublications.org/publications/jas/abstracts/77/11/3106

Questions:
   1. What is the theme of the text?
   2. What kind of curriculum is showed to students who major in animal science in US?
   3. Is that kind of large scale production aplicable to most farmers? Explain.
   4. What has been done in order to adapt the course to meet small farms and
      and local impoverished families' needs?
   5. What is done in order to enhance students understanding of global reality and needs?
   6. In the very beggining of the course, what was the general consensus about people who are malnourished and live in poverty and what happenned at the of the course about that idea? Explain.
   7. What can we infer about the students'view about the complexity of food production and hungry issues, at the end of the course?
   8. Develop your paragraph.

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