The Development of Language Production Ability of Junior High School Learners of English Through Self-expression Activities

The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze the influence of self-expression activities on the language production ability of junior high school learners of English. I have introduced a self-study notebook as an activity to promote self-expression. What I will show in this study is how the quality of writing by three students has changed and how much a self-study notebook has affected their motivation to write in English.

The students in this study have many problems with writing in English: they can’t write in order of subject + verb, they make spelling mistakes, they don’t know very well when to use general verbs and when to use “be” verbs and can’t write a well-organized passage. As a cause of these problems, it can be said that I, as the teacher of these students, don’t spend enough time focusing on what Larsen-Freeman (2003) calls the “Use” activities of “Form, Meaning and Use”. So I need to establish instruction that considers the balance of “Form, Meaning, Use” in class and I intend to spend much more time doing activities of “Use” by making use of self-study notebooks.

Larsen-Freeman (2003) suggests the concept of grammar as a means of overcoming the problems with learners being unable to use grammar properly in actual situations. She defines grammar as the ability to use grammar structure and regards grammaring as a fifth skill following listening, reading, writing and speaking. She points out that learners can understand language well through language activities that take into consideration the balance of three dimensions, Form, Meaning and Use.

Tanaka and Tanaka (2003) show that increasing necessity, concreteness, self-connection and freedom is important in order to change language activities into activities that encourage students’ willingness to express themselves. English classes which focus on self-expression have four features: (1) the inclusion of students’ own ideas and thoughts (2) language activities as a means of attaining students’ goals (3) some focus on relationships with other people and (4) consideration of the speaker’s real intention. So we are concerned with self-expression activities to develop the ability to express themselves on their own.

Chapter 1 states the background of this research and the purpose of this thesis. It is important to develop the ability to express our own ideas and thoughts in English. The students are asked to make an English sentence with new language materials on the basis of basic sentences in the textbooks. The purpose is to have the students master “Form” and
“Meaning” and help them become accustomed to writing in English. Self-study notebooks are given as their homework. They are asked to write two connected sentences. The self-study notebooks were introduced in January, 2008 for the purpose of taking time for “Use” as much as possible and acclimate of home study. The important things are that the students are praised for the good points, asked questions and are given comments on their writing. The students read aloud their writing in the class, get comments and/or evaluation from classmates and learn by means of listening to their classmates’ speech. Qualitative changes in the sentences that students wrote in the self-study notebooks and in changes in students’ attitude toward learning are analyzed.

Chapter 2 shows an overview of the research and the definition of self-expression activities. Teaching grammar rules is not sufficient to foster the ability to use grammatical structures accurately, meaningfully and appropriately (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). The “Inert knowledge problem” as she put it, is that students can’t make use of the grammar rules which they learned when they use the language. In addition to teaching grammar rules, we must give students an opportunity to properly express themselves. Tanaka and Tanaka (2003) say that self-expression activities are used to express our opinions and thoughts. We must also give them an opportunity to produce comprehensible output (Swain, 1985). Muranoi (2003) says that language ability is developed by producing comprehensible output.

Chapter 3 explains the design of Study and analyzes the results. It outlines the areas I examine the purpose, participants / study procedure, data analysis, a case study examples of participants. This section would be a good place to mention that there are three very detailed case studies of students in the section, which would help the reader anticipate content. Initial problem, characteristics of change, and present and future challenges are shown in a table.

In chapter 4, the data from the questionnaire is analyzed. The questionnaire has two kinds of forms, alternative form and descriptive form. It’s about qualitative changes in the sentences that students wrote in the self-study notebooks and in changes in students’ attitude toward learning. The results reveal that students feel they can make English sentences by themselves, write short journals and read English around them outside the school. Self-study notebooks gave them the impression that their writing skills had improved.

Finally, Chapter 5 draws conclusions from this study and examines students’ motivation and writing ability. To conclude the study, the students’ impressions, feelings and opinions through “reflection cards” and “interviews” are shown. Further research is required to find what activities are effective in helping students think that they are happy to write. Teachers should help students cultivate a positive attitude toward writing.