



Research Article

CREATING HAPPINESS IN A READING CLASS: A CASE STUDY*

Le Thi Tuyet Minh

School of Foreign Languages for Economics

Corresponding author: Le Thi Tuyet Minh – Email: snowle@ueh.edu.vn

Received: April 8, 2019; Revised: June 6, 2019; Accepted: July 7, 2019

ABSTRACT

Reading, especially for the English majored bachelors, is usually tiring and boring as they have to study long reading texts and long sessions. This research is a case study in which the writer attempts to raise students' learning spirits in reading sessions by carrying out some physical activities; collective spirit-raising activities; games which include physical movements, PowerPoint and Kahoot; emotion showing actions; funny stories and riddles. The paper first presents the research base on learners' motivation, then analyzes the findings from the questionnaire asking students' opinions on the effectiveness of the activities in promoting students' spirits. Finally, the writer draws up some suggestions for promoting students' learning spirits, including turning tasks into games, letting students show their team spirits and solidarity in class, paying attention to students' feelings, integrating with drawings and visual arts, incorporating funny stories and riddles into lessons, breaking lectures into small parts, making students stand up and move, or do something different, or give them a short break with some quick relaxing activities. These ideas can also be applied broadly in any other classes, not being restricted in reading classes.

Keywords: happiness, reading, motivation, promote spirit, students' engagement.

1. Introduction

In reading classes, the process of reading and answering the comprehension questions is rather boring; especially it is tiring for the English majored bachelors who have to study long reading sessions. So a question is raised: How to promote students' spirit in reading classes? Abundance of ideas for motivating students have been proposed by researchers and educators all over the world, and there has also been a lot of research on the effectiveness of different kinds of games on motivating students, but few studies are in rating the effectiveness of the spirit-raising activities. In this paper, the writer introduces the

Cite this article as: Le Thi Tuyet Minh (2019). Creating happiness in a reading class: A case study. *Ho Chi Minh City University of Education Journal of Science*, 16(8), 264-274.

activities she has applied to enhance students' happiness and engagement. The procedures include physical exercises, collective spirit-raising activities, games, among which are facilitated by PowerPoint and web-based platform Kahoot!, and other activities include emotion showing actions, funny stories and riddles. The students are asked to rate their favor and the effectiveness of the activities in enhance their spirits. The findings give some suggestions for teachers' implementation of the teaching process.

2. Research base

Research has yielded insight into the process as well as the practices for effective teaching and learning. To engage in learning process, learners must be motivated. To help understand motivation in instruction we can look at the ARCS Model of Motivational Design as developed by Keller (1983). The ARCS Model identifies four essential components for motivation:

[A]ttention: Learners are more motivated when the instructional design generates curiosity and interest about the content or learning context.

[R]elevance: Learners are more motivated when goals align with their interests.

[C]onfidence: Learners are more motivated when challenge is balanced. The learning process must not be either too easy as to bore the learner, or too difficult such that success seems impossible.

[S]atisfaction: Learners are more motivated when there are rewards for correctly executed actions.

Neuroscience has provided educators and practitioners with practical applications in language instructions. Helgesen (2018) with the Science of happiness in ELT maintained: "Positive, motivated students – engaged with what they are studying and with each other – learn more and approach tasks with more enthusiasm. [...] Positive psychology encourages 'active constructive' answers to questions which help people re-experience positivity". So with our goal as language teaching, by focusing on positive emotion, we can encourage and engage learners. Helgesen (2015) also stated "emotion shapes learning", and "using touching stories, facilitating self-disclosure, unleashing creativity, organizing non-threatening competition, fostering learning through discovery, all work towards this purpose." He reassured that if a task is not emotionally engaging, skip it, and turn it into a game.

Empirical research demonstrates that learning is improved among happy students. In addition, cooperative learning can create positive relationships that increase students' achievement, and promote healthy psychology to learning as in research of Millis & Cottell (1997) and Johnson, Johnson, & Smith (1998).

Also in the light of neuroscience, Sousa (2010) maintained "emotions have a great impact on learning" and "movement enhances learning and memory". Additionally,

Hillman, Erickson, & Kramer (2008) conceded “exercise effects on brain and cognition”. When we sit for 20 minutes, there’s a built up of blood in the feet, lower legs and buttocks. Stand and move for one minute and there is a 15% increase of blood (and therefore oxygen) to the brain (Sousa, 2011). As Richland (2014) stated: “Your brain needs to move that body in order to be able to stay focused and to learn.” Thus one way to activate students’ brain so that it can do its job is to move.

How can educators apply these ideas in their teaching?

Helgesen (2018) provided a lot of activities for creating happiness in the classroom. Willis (2010) also drew up some strategies for promoting positive feelings including:

- Allowing students to move around in class periodically in learning activities. Examples are using pantomime while they guess which vocabulary word is being enacted or doing a ball toss.
- Shared reading by students pairs.
- Creating opportunities for students to experience intrinsic satisfaction from incremental progress, not just feedback after final product assessment.
- Using humor, not sarcasm
- Structuring positive peer interactions
- Using well-planned collaborative group work

3. Classroom setting, Rationale & Objectives

3.1 Classroom setting

The undergraduate program for students majoring in Business English at UEH has 6 modules for developing students’ four skills. The second-year students in this study are in the module 3 reading class, so the students are at upperintermediate level. The course book is *Advanced Market Leader*, 3rd edition by Iwonna Dubicka & Margaret O’Keeffe, Pearson Longman publisher. The course includes six weeks with twelve reading passages related to business topics. There are 35 students in class. They have one class meeting each week, which lasts for five periods (each period is 50 minutes).

3.2. Rationale & objectives

The five-period sections of the reading course are quite long and tiring for the students with the process of reading and answering the comprehension questions. The students need some breaking activities. Therefore, the instructor implements a lot of fun and relaxing activities with the purpose of promoting students’ spirit in order to facilitate the learning process.

4. The process of the research

Teachers around the world have implemented different kinds of games and have done a lot of research on the effectiveness of games on students' achievements. However, the writer finds that games are not enough to promote students' spirits during her reading sessions which may last up to four hours long. In the light of the applications in neuroscience, the theoretical background presented above and her own experience, the writer exploited these following activities in her class with an attempt to generate movements and create positive emotions for the students.

5-minute physical tasks. The teacher executed some physical exercises with students like stretching, bending, etc.

Peer neck massage. Students formed two separate lines; they put their hands on the neck/ shoulders of the person in front of them. They massaged the person. After a minute or so, they turned around and massaged the other person.

Ball/ stuffed animal toss. The teacher tossed a soft ball or a stuffed animal to a student. The student who caught the ball or who the ball hit would answer the question. Then that student would continue to toss the ball to other students.

Hugging. Students would find the partners who they like and give them a hug. First they did in pairs, then in groups of three or four or five.

Drawing your emotional faces. The teacher showed Andrews and Withey's faces measure, shown in Figure 1 below and asked students to draw their face to show their feelings. The teacher also encouraged students to be more creative in drawing their faces.

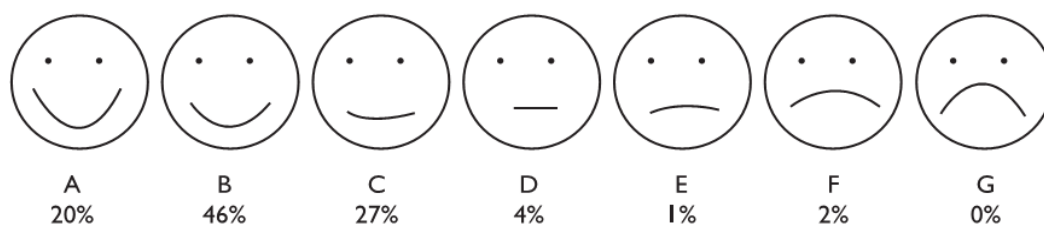


Figure 1. Faces and feelings (Andrews and Withey, 1976 as cited in Argyle, 2013)

Showing emotion with hand gestures. Students would show their feelings simply by hand gestures like raising their thumbs up/ down or horizontally. The teacher also encouraged students to be more creative with their hand gestures.

Playing games. There were a variety of games that the teacher utilized in her class: games with PowerPoint, games with Kahoot!, and games integrated with physical movements such as *Snap It* (This is a vocabulary review game in which the students work in groups. The teacher reads the definition of the words; those who see the word snap it quickly and keep it. At the end of the game, who has the most words is the winner), *Slap it*

(This is also a vocabulary review game. The teacher writes the words on the board. The students, in two groups, stand in two lines. Each time, one student from each group will run to the board to slap the word as the teacher reads the definition of the word. The one who slaps the word first is the winner and wins one point for their group.), *Running answer* (in which the students, in two teams, in turns, run to the board to write down the answers, which team finishes first and has more correct answers is the winner), or *Rock-paper-scissors* (in which the students compete for the right to answer the questions).

Showing your team spirit. The teacher asked the students to show their team spirit. The teacher gave some suggestions such as creating a chant/ slogan for the team, slapping hands together, etc. and encouraged the students to be more creative.

Funny stories with blanks. The students, in pairs, read some funny stories and filled in the blanks.

Riddles. The students worked in groups to find out the answers for the riddles.

After 6 weeks, the writer carried out a survey to ask for the students' reflections on the effect of the activities by delivering the questionnaire in Table 1 below. The respondents were 35 second-year English-majored students. They were asked to rate the degree to which they like the activities and the level of effectiveness of the activities in enhancing their spirit to study. The research questions utilized the Likert scale.

Table 1. *The questionnaire*

Dear my beloved students,

In order to improve my teaching, I'd like you to rate the activities that we have done in class.

Please tick (✓) into your corresponding choices.

1. How do you like these activities?

| Activities | Dislike | | Neutral | Like | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|---------|---------|------|--------------|
| | very much | Dislike | | Like | very much |
| 1. Games with PowerPoint | | | | | |
| 2. Games with physical movements | | | | | |
| 3. Games with Kahoot! | | | | | |
| 4. Peer massage activity | | | | | |
| 5. 5-minute physical task | | | | | |
| 6. Hugging activity | | | | | |
| 7. Ball toss activity | | | | | |
| 8. Showing emotion with hand gestures | | | | | |
| 9. Drawing your emotional faces | | | | | |
| 10. Team spirit showing activity | | | | | |

11. Funny stories with blanks**12. Riddles**

Can you tell me why you like or don't like these activities?/ Any other ideas:

.....

2. How effective are these activities in promoting your spirits?

| Activities | Very in-effective | Not effective | Neutral | Effective | Very effective |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|---------|-----------|----------------|
| 1. Games with PowerPoint | | | | | |
| 2. Games with physical movements | | | | | |
| 3. Games with Kahoot! | | | | | |
| 4. Peer massage activity | | | | | |
| 5. 5-minute physical task | | | | | |
| 6. Hugging activity | | | | | |
| 7. Ball toss activity | | | | | |
| 8. Showing emotion with hand gestures | | | | | |
| 9. Drawing your emotional faces | | | | | |
| 10. Team spirit showing activity | | | | | |
| 11. Funny stories with blanks | | | | | |
| 12. Riddles | | | | | |

Can you tell me why?/ Any other ideas:

.....

5. Findings

With regard to the students' preference, their responses are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The students' preference of the activities

| Activities | Dislike very much | Dislike | Neutral | Like | Like very much | N |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|---------|---------|------|----------------|----|
| 1. Games with PowerPoint | 0 | 1 | 8 | 18 | 8 | 35 |
| | | 3% | 23% | 51% | 23% | |
| 2. Games with physical movements | 1 | 2 | 11 | 16 | 5 | 35 |
| | 3% | 6% | 31% | 46% | 14% | |
| 3. Games with Kahoot! | 0 | 1 | 14 | 11 | 9 | 35 |
| | | 3% | 40% | 31% | 26% | |

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|
| 4. Peer massage activity | 1 | 5 | 16 | 9 | 4 | 35 |
| | 3% | 14% | 46% | 26% | 11% | |
| 5. 5-minute physical task | 0 | 4 | 19 | 10 | 2 | 35 |
| | | 11% | 54% | 29% | 6% | |
| 6. Hugging activity | 3 | 6 | 14 | 8 | 4 | 35 |
| | 9% | 17% | 40% | 23% | 11% | |
| 7. Ball toss activity | 1 | 3 | 8 | 15 | 4 | 31 |
| | 3% | 9% | 26% | 49% | 13% | |
| 8. Showing emotion with hand gestures | 0 | 4 | 12 | 13 | 4 | 33 |
| | | 12% | 36% | 40% | 12% | |
| 9. Drawing your emotional faces | 0 | 4 | 9 | 8 | 14 | 35 |
| | | 11% | 26% | 23% | 40% | |
| 10. Team spirit showing activity | 0 | 0 | 5 | 15 | 15 | 35 |
| | | | 14% | 43% | 43% | |
| 11. Funny stories with blanks | 0 | 0 | 7 | 17 | 7 | 31 |
| | | | 23% | 54% | 23% | |
| 12. Riddles | 0 | 0 | 6 | 14 | 8 | 28 |
| | | | 21% | 50% | 29% | |

Some of the students did not rate some activities, so the numbers of responses for some activities were a little different from the others.

The results showed that most of the students liked the activities carried out. Very few students had negative feelings.

To the writer's surprise, the activity that the students enjoyed the most is *Team spirit showing activity* (86%). *Games with PowerPoint* followed with 74%. *Team spirit showing activity* also had the highest number of strong likes with 43%, and surprisingly *Drawing your emotional faces* activity got the second highest of strong likes. The students' next favored activities included *Funny stories*, *Riddles*, *Drawing your emotional faces*, *Games with physical movements*, *Games with Kahoot!*. So the students showed a strong preference for games, in all kinds.

As for physical activities involving *5-minute physical task*, *Peer massage activity*, *Hugging activity*, *Showing emotion with hand gestures*, and *Ball toss activity*, although many students expressed their interest, there were a considerable number of students who had

neutral idea, and they stated more dislike than for other activities. The two activities that got the most dislike were *Hugging* (26%) and *Peer massage* (17%).

With regard to the students' rating of the effectiveness of the activities, their responses are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Rating the effectiveness of the activities

| Activities | Very in-effective | Not effective | Neutral | Effective | Very effective | N |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|---------|-----------|----------------|----|
| 1. Games with PowerPoint | 0 | 0 | 3 | 21 | 11 | 35 |
| | | | 9% | 60% | 31% | |
| 2. Games with physical movements | 0 | 1 | 3 | 20 | 11 | 35 |
| | | 3% | 9% | 57% | 31% | |
| 3. Games with Kahoot! | 0 | 1 | 10 | 11 | 11 | 33 |
| | | 3% | 31% | 33% | 33% | |
| 4. Peer massage activity | 1 | 2 | 16 | 12 | 4 | 35 |
| | 3% | 6% | 45% | 34% | 12% | |
| 5. 5-minute physical task | 0 | 3 | 17 | 11 | 4 | 35 |
| | | 9% | 48% | 31% | 12% | |
| 6. Hugging activity | 1 | 6 | 12 | 11 | 5 | 35 |
| | 3% | 17% | 34% | 32% | 14% | |
| 7. Ball toss activity | 0 | 1 | 13 | 15 | 6 | 35 |
| | | 3% | 37% | 43% | 17% | |
| 8. Showing emotion with hand gestures | 1 | 4 | 11 | 15 | 2 | 33 |
| | 3% | 12% | 34% | 45% | 6% | |
| 9. Drawing your emotional faces | 0 | 5 | 6 | 10 | 14 | 35 |
| | | 14% | 17% | 29% | 40% | |
| 10. Team spirit showing activity | 0 | 2 | 3 | 13 | 17 | 35 |
| | | 6% | 9% | 37% | 48% | |
| 11. Funny stories with blanks | 0 | 0 | 8 | 12 | 11 | 31 |
| | | | 26% | 39% | 35% | |
| 12. Riddles | 0 | 0 | 5 | 13 | 11 | 29 |
| | | | 17% | 45% | 38% | |

Most of the students thought these activities were effective though a rather large number of the students had neutral idea for the effectiveness of some activities like *5-minute physical task*, *Peer massage activity*, *Ball toss activity*, *Hugging activity*, *Showing emotion with hand gestures*.

In correspondence with the students' likes, *Team spirit showing activity* and *Drawing your emotional faces* activity maintained the highest positions in rating with strong effectiveness. The three kinds of games were also rated among the highest level of effectiveness. Understandably, the activities that they didn't like were not considered as effective as the others. However, more students thought *Hugging* activity were effective than they liked it.

6. Suggestions and discussion

From the findings of the research, the writer has proposed some suggestions for motivational instructions.

Students love games, in all kinds, so teachers should involve a lot of games and competition in their activities. Turn tasks into games.

The fact that *Team spirit showing activity* had the highest number of the strong likes suggests implications that teachers need to let students show their team spirits and solidarity in class.

Students enjoy *Drawing your emotional faces* activity, and they drew some very funny and creative pictures, so teachers need to pay attention to students' feelings and integrate with drawings and visual arts.

Funny stories and riddles should also be well incorporated into lessons as students are keen on them.

Some students dislike *Hugging* and *Peer massage* due to the sensitive reason; therefore, teachers should only employ these two activities occasionally.

In addition, teachers should break lectures into small parts. Students get bored, tired and they can't stay focused with long lessons. Teachers should change type/ way of activities, diversify the activities by integrating four skills. As frequently as possible, teachers should make students stand up and move, or do something different, or give them a short break with the activities like *5-minute physical tasks*, *peer neck massage*, *hugging*, *drawing emotional faces*, or simply *showing emotion with hand gestures*. A quick relaxing activity is really helpful in releasing melatonin and will energize students to work more effectively.

Make students talk, exploiting peer and group work.

The motivational activities implemented in this research can be applied in classes for all four skills, not being restricted in the reading class. These activities were carried out smoothly thanks to the students' enthusiasm, and the number of the students in class (N=35)

was rather ideal. For larger classes, it will be very difficult to implement the activity like 5-minute physical tasks.

More research can be done on the application of neuroscience in language teaching. Educators need to be more creative in creating more joyful activities for their learners. In addition, teachers should integrate all senses as well as make use of different learning styles in their teaching.

7. Conclusion

Inspirational and motivational activities are important in facilitating the learning process. A good teacher needs to integrate well motivational activities into their instructions to optimize learning. Joyful learning emotion fosters students' motivation; therefore, teachers should fuel students with a few quick relaxing activities in order that they can tackle the book more effectively. Finally, education needs to be a joyful experience to achieve its best outcome as Confucius said: "Need to study is not as good as like to study, like to study is not as good as enjoyment to study."

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** Author have no conflict of interest to declare.

REFERENCES

- Argyle, M. (2013). *The psychology of happiness*. London: Routledge.
- Helgesen, M. (2015). Do-it-yourself NeuroELT: Ways to make your textbook more brain-friendly. *SPELT Quarterly*, 30(3).
- Helgesen, M. (2018). English language teaching & the science of happiness: positive psychology communication activities for language learning. Retrieved from Abax.co.jp
- Hillman, C. H., Erickson, K. I., & Kramer A. F. (2008). Be smart, exercise your heart: Exercise effects on brain and cognition. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 9, 58-65.
- Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T.; & Smith, Karl A. (1998). *Active learning: Cooperation in the college classroom*. Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.
- Keller, J. M. (1983). "Motivational design of instruction," In Reigeluth, C.M. (Ed.). *Instructional design theories and models: An overview of their current status*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Millis, B. J. & Cottell, P. G. Jr. (1997). *Cooperative learning for higher education faculty. series on higher education*. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press.
- Richland, K. (2014). *How Can I Make Reading More Interesting?*. Retrieved November 10, 2018, from <https://www.quora.com/How-can-I-make-reading-more-interesting>
- Sousa, D. A. (2010). How science met pedagogy. *Mind, Brain, & Education: Neuroscience Implications for the Classroom*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Sousa, D. A. (2011). *How the Brain Learns* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, p.34.
- Willis, J. (2010). The current impact of neuroscience on teaching and learning. *Mind, Brain, & Education: Neuroscience Implications for the Classroom*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

TẠO RA HẠNH PHÚC TRONG LỚP HỌC ĐỌC: NGHIÊN CỨU MỘT TRƯỜNG HỢP**Lê Thị Tuyết Minh***Khoa Ngoại ngữ Kinh tế – Trường Đại học Kinh tế Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh**Tác giả liên hệ: Lê Thị Tuyết Minh – Email: snowle@ueh.edu.vn**Ngày nhận bài: 08-4-2019; ngày nhận bài sửa: 16-6-2019; ngày duyệt đăng: 10-7-2019***TÓM TẮT**

Môn đọc, đặc biệt đối với các cử nhân chuyên ngành tiếng Anh, thường rất mệt mỏi và nhàm chán do các bài đọc dài và phải học liên tục nhiều giờ. Do đó, nhằm nâng cao tinh thần học tập của sinh viên trong các buổi học môn đọc, người viết đã thực hiện một số biện pháp như: cho người học tham gia các hoạt động thể chất; hoạt động thể hiện tinh thần tập thể; các loại trò chơi, bao gồm trò chơi có liên quan đến vận động, trò chơi trên nền tảng PowerPoint và trò chơi trên nền tảng web Kahoot; các hoạt động thể hiện cảm xúc; câu chuyện vui và câu đố. Bài viết này trước tiên trình bày cơ sở nghiên cứu về việc tạo động lực cho người học, sau đó phân tích kết quả từ bảng câu hỏi khảo sát ý kiến sinh viên về hiệu quả của các hoạt động trong việc thúc đẩy tinh thần học tập. Cuối cùng, rút ra một số gợi ý để thúc đẩy tinh thần học tập của sinh viên, bao gồm: biến các nhiệm vụ thành trò chơi, để học sinh thể hiện tinh thần đồng đội và tinh thần đoàn kết trong lớp, chú ý đến cảm xúc của học sinh, kết hợp với các hình vẽ và nghệ thuật thị giác, tích hợp các câu chuyện vui và câu đố vui vào bài học, chia bài giảng thành các phần nhỏ, khiến học sinh đứng lên và di chuyển, hoặc làm điều gì đó khác biệt, hoặc cho họ sự nghỉ ngơi ngắn với một số hoạt động thư giãn nhanh. Những ý tưởng trong bài viết này có thể được áp dụng trong bất kỳ các lớp học nào, không chỉ giới hạn trong các lớp đọc.

Từ khóa: happiness, reading, motivation, promote spirit, students' engagement.