

Learning And Assessment Of English Language In Expeditionary Learning (EL) Among Undergraduate University Students

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Abstract— This paper aims to enhance readers' understanding of the Learning and Assessment of English language through Expeditionary Learning (EL) Model. The study presents the findings and implications of an experiment conducted among undergraduate university students. The design principles of EL Model are enumerated along with the kinds of expeditions being explained. Learning and Assessment in EL is elaborated by detailing the Facilitators' role and the classroom environment required for implementation of this model. The advantages of using the EL model for Learning and Assessment is analyzed by the investigator and presented with findings from the experiment. The study also makes observations that the EL model is a learner-centric model and the psychological principles of learning is incorporated in the design principles of the model.

Index Terms — Assessment, Classroom, Design, Expeditions, Findings, Implications, Learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Expeditionary Learning model, the process of learning itself is seen as an expedition. It is an innate nature of human beings to be curious and to learn new things every day. Several personal experiences and self-discovery promote intellectual growth of English language learners and also help in construction of knowledge for learners. Expeditionary Learning (EL) is a model that harnesses curiosity and investigation in individuals. Students from various economic backgrounds get benefitted out of the system since it is learning through and with diversity. Respect for others help them to profoundly address individual and group differences thus unleashing creativity and innovation in learning. Students are able to compare their learnings with other learners and also with their previous performances through the EL model. In this model, 'learning by doing' is encouraged. Students do, perform, act, execute, implement, attempt, complete, fulfill, accomplish and achieve. These are the learning objectives of outcome-based education. This kind of an education system differs from the traditional methods of teaching and assessment. Students are assessed based on their learning expeditions instead of writing a theory paper for a stipulated time. It also develops the character and intellect of students (Welton, 2010). Expeditionary Learning model changes curriculum, assessment and pedagogy in classrooms in many ways. It offers project- led training where learners participate in multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary in-depth study of different topics and different subjects, as groups and sometimes as individuals. They are assessed based on portfolios, presentations and the ability to complete tasks within time. Achievement of learners largely depends upon the outcome of tasks that includes successes, failures, determination, perseverance, discipline, team- building, imagination and curiosity.

In order to test the EL model, a sample size of 36 students was exposed to the Expeditionary Learning Model in first year undergraduate class. The study attempted to study the advantages of using the model both for learning and assessment of English language among learners.

2. KINDS OF EXPEDITIONS

Students and Facilitators engage in different kinds of learning expeditions throughout the learning process. Challenging inquiries become part of learning and assessment (Kumar, 2011). A theme/topic is being explored by students by working on various small projects. The projects could be individual based, group based or community based. Field work assignments help them to understand the real-life and practical concerns in the society. They are given tasks such as interviewing people, writing journals, blogs, travelogues and many more interesting engagements. Time is given for learners to self-reflect and write in a journal. They gather their thoughts and reflect on what they have learnt and how they have learnt. They analyse their SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats). This helps them to plan their next day better than the previous one. The engaging, purposeful and rigorous expeditions are the core of the EL curriculum. In-depth study of topics/themes along with the enumeration of lesson objectives and learning outcomes enable students to assess themselves continuously. The facilitator in the class keeps track of every expedition of their students. They support and encourage wherever required. Minimal guidance is given most of the times but the facilitator acts as a mentor, a guide and a coach during different kinds of expeditions. It is the responsibility of the facilitators to give meaningful learning targets and ensure that the students are conscious of the learning outcomes. This model also caters to multiple intelligences of students. Various kinds of learners like linguistic, kinesthetic, visual, musical, intra- personal, inter-personal, naturalistic and logical learners are benefitted greatly out of this model. Students are highly enthusiastic, motivated and engaged to carry out expeditions. The expeditions that are mostly seen as small projects help them to understand languages, science, and math better than students who study using traditional methods. This also ensures that there are low

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disciplinary issues among students and also less absenteeism. It is generally observed that the students are mostly above grade level.

3. LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT IN EL

Assessment is embedded in the pedagogy and the curriculum. Expeditionary Learning helps students to use their higher order thinking skills. Students are able to analyse, interpret and judge, evaluate their own works and the works of their peers. Constructive criticism is also embedded in the process where they do not only look at areas of improvement but also learn to appreciate and congratulate one another. (Hughes, 1989) Continuous revision, consistent feedback, self-reflection and willingness to improve is demonstrated by the students. The skills and knowledge of students are assessed by a panel of people. They are evaluated based on different rubrics that may include demonstration of understanding, communication, research, skills, higher order thinking etc....If they are found to have done a shallow work, they are given opportunities to rework and resubmit the tasks/ projects/ portfolios without which promotion to the next grade is denied. A culture of reflection and revision motivates students to become better performers. Self-evaluation, peer evaluation and group evaluation helps them understand and critique their own shortcomings and creates a competitive spirit to prove that they can fair better.

4. THE EL CLASSROOM

The EL classroom focuses the needs of individual independent learners and the emphasis of individual choice among learners. Choice in the area of learning is emphasized. Students not only choose what to study, but also find out how and why they want to study a particular area or topic. Co-operative learning and self-learning are emphasized by the approach. EL involves students in decision-making, turn taking, mutual support and constructive feedback. The model focuses on meaning and form and helps in acquiring knowledge and skills that is created in the classroom. The classroom environment for the student is set so that he/she can take part in the given activity that will lead to learning. The materials required for such learning should be made available by the facilitator. Proper care is taken that ample material is available for all the students in the classroom so that they can work independently or in pairs or groups as required. Both the classroom environment and the materials should always be maintained in a state of preparedness. Further the positive, constructive and interesting presentations of the expedition are also given so as to stimulate the interest of the students to take part in the expedition. Expeditions are designed in such a way that English language is also sometimes learnt in a scientific manner. By learning English through expeditions, investigations, creativity or problem solving, students are more likely to see the purpose for their learning (Cohen, 1994).

5. FACILITATORS' ROLE

The Facilitators' role in assessing students is vital since they should be able to build the assessments through their instructions. They act as guides to the learning expeditions that the students undertake. Facilitators should give enough time for students to reflect and at the same time ensure that

they are able to collaborate in groups. Detailed feedback has to be given and recorded meticulously. They have to be engaged in their expeditions in order to foster better support for students whenever required. This also ensures personal and professional growth for Facilitators (Gibbons and Cummins, 2002). EL centers on the concept that students' achievements of goals are important rather than exams, rankings and grades. The Facilitators should remember that learning opportunities and learning experiences should determine the success of learning. Learning opportunities should be created and defined using learning goals. Facilitators should support their students in order to achieve their learning goals. Facilitators should ensure students' involvement at all times. Students' involvement is important in Expeditionary Learning. They are expected to understand, make meanings and develop actions in order to prepare for the real world. Parents, institutions, communities and societies also become responsible to instruct and assess individual learners.

6. EL- LEARNER-CENTRIC MODEL

It is considered that there are two broad orientations in teaching, one being the Facilitator-centered orientation and the second being the student-centered orientation (Kember, 1997). Kember puts forth his thoughts that there is a wide and significant difference between the two orientations of teaching and that there is a difference in the results. According to him, the learner-centered curriculum must be encouraged among the teaching community to yield better results and that the Facilitators' role must be minimal in a classroom. This includes the idea that the construction of knowledge happens by the students and that the Facilitator of EL is a facilitator of learning rather than a mere presenter of information. There are five areas that need to change to achieve Learner-centered learning and assessment: the function of content, the role of the instructor, the responsibility for learning, the balance of power (Weimer, 2002). These are depicted in Fig 1.1

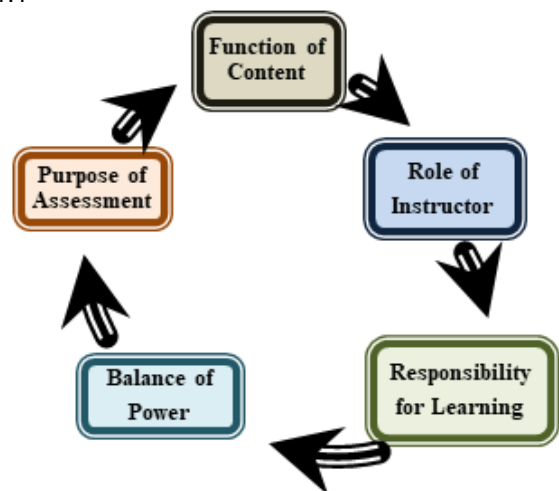


Fig 1.1

Weimer discusses the following points about Teaching and Learning of English language which emphasize that EL is a learner-centric approach.

1. The functions of the EL content should include building a strong knowledge foundation and to develop learning skills and learner self-awareness.
2. The roles of an EL facilitator focus on student learning. The roles are facilitative rather than didactic.
3. The responsibility for learning shifts from the facilitator to the students. The facilitator creates learning environments that motivate students to accept responsibility for learning.
4. The processes and purposes of assessment include constructive feedback and assists students' improvement. EL uses assessment as a part of the learning process.

The balance of power shifts from that of the facilitator to the students.

Lea et al (2003) summarize some of the literature on student-centered learning to include the following tenets:

1. The reliance on active rather than passive learning
2. An emphasis on deep learning and understanding
3. Increased responsibility and accountability on the part of the student
4. An increased sense of autonomy in the learner Mutual respect within the learner Facilitator relationship
5. A reflexive approach to the teaching and learning process on the part of both Facilitator and learner.

EL fosters to reform the teaching learning situations in the mentioned tenets thus proving that it is an effective model for learning and assessment.

7. EL AND LEARNER-CENTERED PSYCHOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

EL throws light on how the Learner-centered psychological principles are related to English language teaching. The psychological principles were laid by American Psychological Association in 1997 that are considered to be Learner-centered and which may be deciphered in a language classroom. The principles serve as a useful tool for language Facilitators in understanding psychological factors influencing a learner. The Learner-centered psychological principles offer a background for evolving and incorporating the different components of innovations in teaching approaches. The principles suggest the involvement of students actively in a classroom. It provides the thought that the approaches of teaching and learning should be remodeled according to the needs of the learners. The learners become the primary focus. The principles are categorized into four different domains namely metacognitive and cognitive factors, affective and motivational factors, developmental and social factors and individual difference factors as presented in Fig 1.2

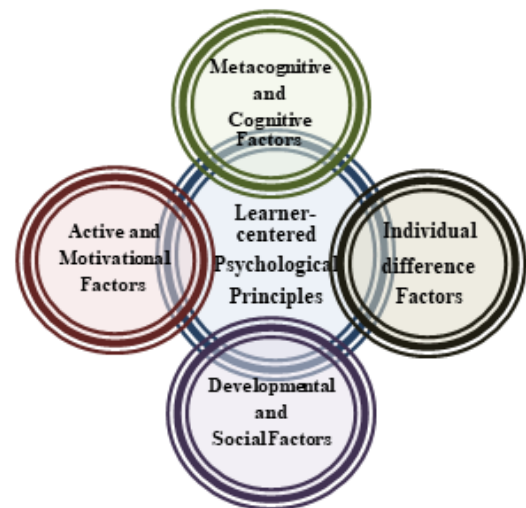


Fig 1.2

Learner-Centered Psychological Principles

The EL approach of teaching English language focuses on the metacognitive and cognitive factors like the nature of the learning process, goals of the learning process, construction of knowledge, strategic thinking, and thinking about thinking and the context of learning. The approach is sensitive to the affective and motivational factors like motivational and emotional influences on learning, intrinsic motivation to learn and effects of motivation on effort. The development and social factors which include developmental influence on learning, social influences on learning, individual difference factor, individual differences in learning, learning and diversity, standards and assessment are also given utmost importance in Expeditionary Learning of English language.

8. DESIGN PRINCIPLES OF EL MODEL

According to certain educational philosophies of Expeditionary Learning, we see that the assessment models are largely outcome-based. Students take responsibility of their own learning. They are able to empathize and care for others while they collaborate and compete with one another. Their Emotional Quotient (EQ) is strengthened and they are able to become better individuals in the society (Venkateswaran, 2000). The learners are able to take risks, accept challenges, persevere, plan and complete the tasks by taking proper decisions. Success or failure in the endeavours is also owned solely by the learner. Discovering their strengths and weaknesses become part of the process. They also experiment in a variety of ways. Not only do their interpersonal skills strengthen but also their intra-personal skills as they are able to spend time in solitude for reflection. Since there is a strong bond with nature and fellow human-beings, service and compassion become part of learning. They also learn that they have to be inclusive since there are heterogeneous students in classrooms and the outside world. They accept diversity, appreciate and embrace differences. These are the design principles of the model.

9. THE STUDY: FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

In order to test if learning and assessment happens in a better manner using the EL model in classrooms, a sample size of 36 students was exposed to the Expeditionary Learning Model in first year university undergraduate class. The study attempted to consider the advantages of using the model both for learning and assessment of English language among learners. The findings and implications of the study conducted are explained below:

Table 1.1

Learning and Assessment	Mean	SD	N	t-value	p-value	S/NS
Without EL model	36.56	8.886	36	-0.965	0.341	NS
With EL model	47.48	8.491	36	9.274	0	S**

NS - Not Significant
S** - Significant at 0.01 level

From Table 1.1, it is evident that ($t=-0.965$, $p>0.05$), t-value is not significant. It is seen that there is no significant difference between the values without using EL model for assessment and learning. Hence, it is derived that there is no significant difference between the students who learn and are assessed without EL Model. The mean scores do not vary significantly.

It is also evident that ($t=9.274$, $p<0.05$), t-value is significant. It is seen that there is a significant difference between the values with using EL model for assessment and learning. Hence, it is derived that there is a significant difference between the students who learn and are assessed with EL Model. The mean scores vary significantly. The findings of the study is represented in Fig 1.3

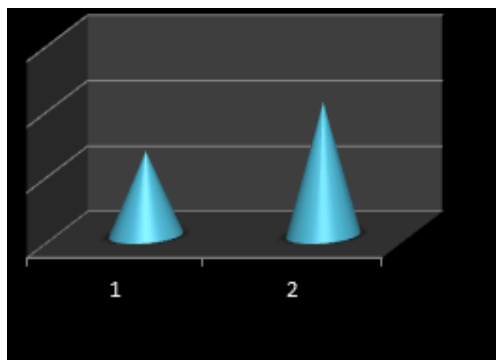


Fig 1.3

- 1-Learning and Assessment without EL
- 2- Learning and Assessment using EL

The learning and assessment curves of the students with and without using the EL Model for learning and assessment are represented below in Fig 1.4

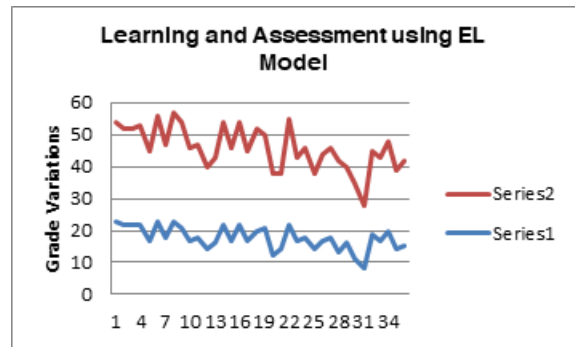


Fig 1.4

Series 1 indicates the learning and assessment curve of students without using the EL Model
Series 2 indicates the learning and assessment curve of students with using the EL Model

After a span of two months, the same model was used in order to check for the same. The results were similar which is indicated in Fig 1.5. This clearly shows that the EL model of learning and assessment is successful among university graduate students.

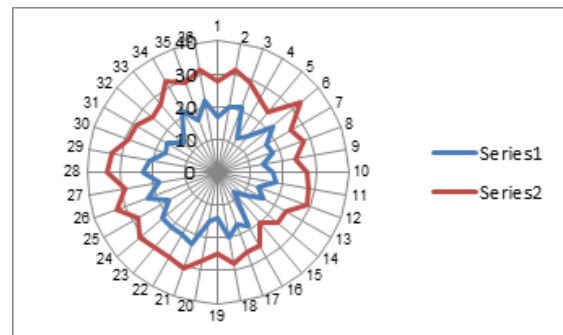


Fig 1.5

Series 1 indicates the learning and assessment curve of students without using the EL Model
Series 2 indicates the learning and assessment curve of students with using the EL Model

10. CONCLUSION

Expeditionary Learning model embraces the power of student-engaged learning and assessment practices to build student ownership of learning. It helps students to focus on reaching standards-based learning targets, and drive achievement. This Expeditionary Learning and Assessment model is the key to ensure that universities achieve educational quality. Students continually learn, assess and improve the quality of their work through the use of models, reflection, critique, rubrics, and work with experts. Facilitators engage in ongoing data inquiry and analysis, examining everything from patterns in student work to results from formal assessments, disaggregating data by groups of students to recognize and addressing gaps in achievement. The experiment conducted among the undergraduate university students also proves that the Expeditionary Model of Learning and Assessment have many advantages when it is implemented among university undergraduate students for learning and assessing English language.

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