

**A SOLUTION TO INCREASE THE MOTIVATION TO LEARN ENGLISH FOR
FINANCE STUDENTS IN THE NORTH OF VIETNAM**

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<https://doi.org/10.54922/IJEHSS.2023.0519>

ABSTRACT

This paper shows that, pair/group work and graded-task were applied to increase students' motivation in learning English. Moreover, working in pairs and groups could create a pleasant, non-threatening environment for students so that their motivation may be improved. On the other hand, graded task was also one of the most effective ways to motivate the students' participation in the English class because the graded-task method also helped the teacher design more appropriate activities for mixed level students. It made better students pay attention to lessons and worse students both easily followed the first group and actively participated in the English classes.

Key Words: Learning English, Graded-task, Mixed Level, Finance Students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Motivation is believed to be one of the most important factors affecting the learning language progress of the learners. There are many factors having effect on students' motivation in the English classes such as teaching method of teacher, attitude of students toward learning or teacher, content of the lesson and so on (Hammer, 1991). Yet, how teachers can create and maintain students' motivation is a difficult question. To answer this question, many authors have documented a lot of solutions in fostering students' motivation such as applying some activities for English class (playing games, listening to English songs, watching video) (Kuramoto, 2002), applying pair/group work activities (Doff, 1998 & Harmer, 1991); and using graded-task (Tice, 1997) in order to design more interesting and suitable tasks to motivate students' motivation.

In this study, however, pair/group work and graded-task were applied to increase students' motivation in learning English because Doff (1998) said that pair/group work encouraged students to use the language, motivated them to involve in and concentrate on their tasks. Moreover, working in pairs and groups could create a pleasant, non-threatening environment for students so that their motivation may be improved (Doff, 1998, Harmer, 1991). On the other hand, Tice (1997) said that graded task was also one of the most effective ways to motivate the students' participation in the English class because the graded-task method also helped the teacher design more appropriate activities for mixed level students. It made better students pay attention to lessons and worse students both easily followed the first group and actively participated in the English classes.

In the current study, the causes of the problem were identified by delivering the questionnaire to the students in some universities in the north of Vietnam after the first three weeks before modifying pair/group work activities and using graded-task. It was also identified by observing students' behavior during learning lessons. The data were collected and organized to identify the causes of poor motivation of students in English lessons. They were interpreted or

analyzed to confirm the causes making the students lowly motivated in English lessons was teacher's teaching method and whether two new techniques were suitable to increase students' motivation effectively or not. It means that the teacher did not often use or had a little usage pair/group work activities and graded-task in the English class that why her students were lowly motivated in the English lesson. To change this situation or to increase students' motivation in English class, the researcher modified more pair/group activities and used graded-tasks to motivate her students in the class.

After identifying the causes of students' low motivation and how they were lowly motivated, a nine week experiment was conducted to test to what extent pair/group work activities and graded-task motivated students in English lessons. The action plan was developed on the basis of data collected from the students (from week 5 to week 13) these above methods. Each observation time, to record the change of 40 students, the researcher had to ask assistance from her two colleagues. Before observing the students, the researcher trained her colleagues the observation technique and had some pilots to confirm their observation results.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Five main sections are discussed in this study. Firstly, there are the different authors' definitions, some characteristics and process of an action research. Then, the research questions are restated. Next, there is description of subjects of the study. They are the students taking part in the experiment as participants and two teachers observing the students' behavior in the class. In addition, the description of the data collection instruments, questionnaires and observation, are described hereafter. They are two of the most effective tools used to collect data for the study. The procedure of data collection of the study is also presented in the last section.

2.1. An action research

2.1.1. Definitions of action research (AR)

There are many definitions of AR that have been proposed over recent years. Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1998) defined that AR was a form of self reflective enquiry undertaken by participants who were simultaneously members of the context in which the research took place in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practice. Wallace (1998) conceptualized AR was a process in which some decisions about teachers' future practice result from problem identification and analysis on daily practice. Burn (2010) said that action research was a small scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such intervention. According to Ferrance (2000), action research was a process in which participants examined their own educational practice systematically and carefully, using the techniques of research. However, the definition of action research of Ferrance (2000) is used in this study because it is suitable with the aim, the subject, the situation and the model of AR of the study.

2.1.2 Characteristics

AR has some characteristics that are suitable for this research. That is reason why it is selected to do in this experiment:

First, AR is best done by the practitioners or teachers (Nunan, 1989). It is conducted by the researchers to gather information about methods that their particular school operates how they teach and how well their students learn. The information is gathered with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, affecting positive changes in the school environment and on educational practices in general, and improving students' outcomes (Mill, 2003).

Second, it is small scale contextualized, localized to discover, develop, and monitor changes to practice (Wallace, 1998). Changing practice makes teachers really become producers as well as consumers of knowledge (Reason & Bradbury, 2001).

Last, all the stage of a research are implemented in a strict order which allows educators to systematically and empirically address topics and issues that affect teaching and learning in the classroom.

2.1.3 Action research procedure

As AR is used in real situations since its primary focuses on solving real problems, the current study will be applied steps of action research to find the real causes of low motivation of the Finance students and to propose suitable solutions to increase their motivation.

There are a lot of action research models. Nunan (1992) showed that his model included 7 steps: (1) Initiation or stating the problem; (2) Pre-liminary Investigation or Literature Review;

(3) Hypothesis; (4) Intervention or giving some methods to change current situation; (5) Evaluation or listing some advantages and disadvantages after having intervention; (6) Dissemination or share with other; (7) Follow up or next steps.

Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1998) believed that action research has four steps which progress as a spiraling and evolving process: (1) Planning, (2) Action, (3) Observation, (4) Reflection. Ferrance (2000) said that an action research could be followed 6 steps: (1) Identification of problem area; (2) Collection and organization of data; (3) Interpretation of data; (4) Action based on data; (5) Reflection (6) Next steps.

According to Burn (2010), there are 5 steps of action research. They are (1) Identifying the problem; (2) Planning the action; (3) Putting the plan into action; (4) Observing the results of the plane; (5) Reflecting and planning for further action.

However, this study followed the action research model of Ferrance (2000) because it was suitable with the actual situation and the subject students of the Finance students.

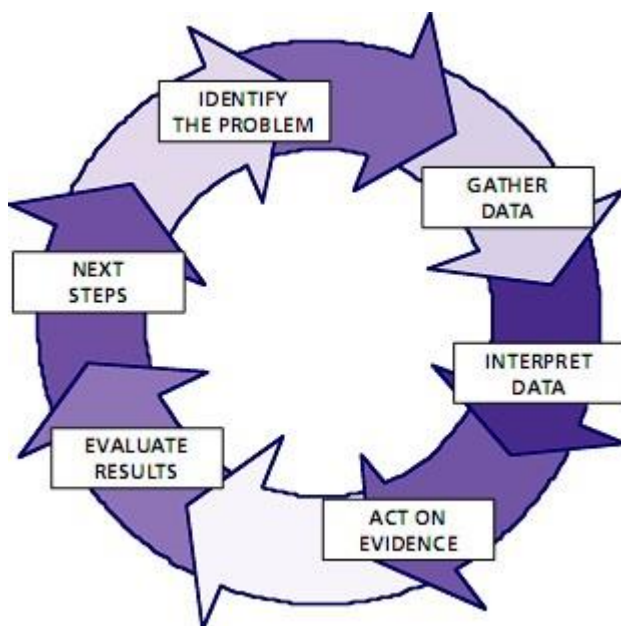


Figure 1: Action research cycle (Adapted from Ferrance, 2000, p.9)

The above circle shows that a study is conducted in following steps:

First, to identify the problem, teachers have got several questions they need to investigate during teaching process. However, the most important one of these questions is chosen to make an action research about this field.

Second, initial data are collected and organized in this step by some of the most effective instruments such as interview, diary, observation and questionnaire to find causes of the problem and what cause is the most important.

Third, based on the data collected by the data collection instruments, the hypothesis is formed to develop an action plan by interpreting the collected data.

Fourth, after identifying the problem, an action plan is planned and developed to improve the present situation. It is necessary to have a detail plan including who is going to participate, when it is going to be started, how long it is going to be conducted, when it is going to be completed, what modifications to the curriculum are, how the revised teaching strategies are implemented, what techniques are used to change the current situation.

Fifth, data collection instruments are used one more time to collect data before and after intervention. Basing on analyzing the collected data after experiment, the result of experiment is compared to that before intervention or the result of other experiments.

The last one is Next steps. As a result of the action research project, identify additional questions raised by the data and plan for additional improvements, revisions and next steps.

2.2. Research question restated

This action research aims at answering the following question: To what extent do pair/group work activities and graded-task affect the students’ motivation in English lessons?

2.3 Descriptions of subjects of study

2.3.1 Student subject

In this study, student subject is 40 non- English major students. They are the first year students who are from different provinces and cities in the North of Vietnam and they are from 18 to 20 years old. Nine of them are male and others are female. Some of them have taken part in the entrance examination in English but others have not done. Some of them have learned English for 3 years, some other have learned English for 7 years. Of course, their English level is very different. As a result, some of them perceive lessons faster than others, some are left behind. This difference leads to the difference of students’ motivation in English class.

To apply graded task techniques to teach the subject of the current study, they were given an English layout test before experiment (see Appendix 3). Basing on the result of the English layout test, the 40 students were divided into 3 levels of groups. There were only 8 students who had result higher than 7.4 point (on the 10 point scale) so they were divided into 2 better groups. The 23 students had result from 5.0 to 7.4 were divided into 5 average groups, and 9 students who had result lower than 5 point were divided into 2 lower groups. These results are foundation for the researcher to believe that these students are suitable for this study. (Table 1)

Table 1: Detail of students’ profile

Students’ profile		Number and Percent of students	
Age	18	33	82.5%
	19	5	12.5%
	20	2	5%
Gender	Female	31	77%
	Male	9	33%
Length of learning English	3 years	5	12.5%
	7 years	35	97.5%
	More than 7.5	8	20%

The result of an English layout test	6.0 – 7.4	23	57.5%
	Lower than 5.0	9	22.5%

2.3.2 Observers

Also take part in this study was two teachers of the English Department. They got English M.A degrees of Ha Noi National University. The first observer observing the students from 1 to 20 has taught English for 10 years and the second one observing the students from 21 to 40 has taught English there for 5 years. They are willing to collaborate with the researcher to observe the class and discuss the observation results, the teaching techniques, and the procedure applied for teaching English in this class. To make sure both of them have the same results from observing the students, the researcher has to train them the ways to observe the students and these two observers will be made pilot several times to assure that they have the same results before actually observing the students for the study. The techniques will be trained as detail description of section 3.4.2.

2.4. Descriptions of data collection instruments

Two data collection instruments, questionnaires and observations, were used to guarantee the objectiveness of the data. This multi-method approach is to ensure a clearer insight into different levels of analysis and that the result of one method can help to develop or inform others (Byrne, 1987).

2.4.1 Questionnaire for students

According to Brown (1994) and Wallace (1998), questionnaire was one of the most effective data collection instruments, it helped to obtain information about different kinds of issues that were easy to analyze. Moreover, Nunan (1992) showed that questionnaires could provide information gathered from a large number of participants. Therefore, the questionnaire (Appendix 1), adapted from Kuramoto (2002) & Guilloteaux (2007), was used to collect data about the students' attitude, the students' learning method, the teacher's teaching method and the students' involvement to identify the causes of the problem and to evaluate the progress of student after applying intervention tools.

However, all students learn English because it is one of compulsory subject. Furthermore, they realize that it is also a tool supporting them to find job and keep their job in the future well. Thus, four of six factors that affecting the students' motivation, the students' attitude, the students' belief or learning method, environmental support or the teacher's teaching method and the student's involvement or self- motivation, were centered on.

The questionnaire of the current study consists of 30 questions. They are also divided into four groups. The first group includes questions from 1 to 7. Questions 1, 2, 3, 5, 7 were adapted from questions 1, 23, 5, 10, 19 of the questionnaire phase 1 of Guilloteaux (2007), Questions 4, 6 were adapted from questions 8, 7 of the questionnaire phase 2 of Guilloteaux (2007), In the original questionnaires, they were used to collect information of the students' attitude towards learning English after modifying pair/group work and using graded task to increase their motivation. Therefore, in the current study, they were also used to get information of students'

attitude of English learning. However, they were used to gather data of attitude of the students both before and after intervention. Basing on the result of analyzed data, the students' motivation was confirmed to be affected by whether their attitude towards learning English or not.

The second group consists of questions from 8 to 15. Questions 9, 10, 14 were adapted from questions 16, 24, 8 of the questionnaire phase 1 of Guilloteaux (2007), questions 8, 11, 12, 13, 15 were adapted from questions 23, 9, 12, 17, 27 of the questionnaire phase 2 of Guilloteaux (2007). In the original study, they also were used to identify how students' learning method had effect on the students' motivation in learning English after each phase. Of course, in the current study, they were used to get information of students' learning method both before and after being intervened. From the collected data, the reason why the students poorly participated in the English classroom was identified due to the students' learning method or not.

The third group includes questions from 16 to 23. Questions 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 23 were adapted from questions 20, 24, 13, 16, 28, 22 from Guilloteaux (2007) phase 2 of his study. Question 20 was adapted from questions 11 and 12 of the questionnaire of Kuramoto (2002). The question was used to ask which activities the students definitely like or dislike doing again. In this study, they were combined in one to ask how much the students satisfied with all the activities of English lesson. Question 22 of this study was adapted from question 1 of the questionnaire of Kuramoto (2002). In the original questionnaire, it was used to ask the studying from the textbook. In the current study, it was used to ask how much the teacher modified the tasks in the textbook to become more suitable with the student subject of the study. However, the scale used to measure the students' motivation was changed to be suitable with the new context.

The last group is formed questions from 24 to 30. Questions 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30 of the study were adopted from questions 13, 20, 21, 17, 25, 11 of the questionnaire phase 1 of Guilloteaux (2007), question 25 was also adopted from question 21 of the questionnaire phase 2 of Guilloteaux (2007). The aim of these questions in the original questionnaires was used to investigate how much the students were involved in all activities of English classroom. In the current study, they thus were used to collect information about students' self-motivation or involvement before conducting experiment and after having intervention to change.

Of course, the scales including six levels such as: not true at all, not true, not really true, somewhat true, true and very true were completely adopted from the original questionnaires to measure the students' motivation. Because they were so detail and suitable with the current study, the collected data were correct. Therefore, the results analyzed from the data were believable. In order to help students have clear instruction and make the questionnaire easy for students to understand, the questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese, the students' the first language. Questionnaires were completed by each student at the end of last lesson of the third week of the course to get some information about students' behavior before intervention and at the end last lesson of thirteen week of the course to collect information about students' motivation after intervention. Of course, the students were informed that their information of questionnaire was kept secret. It did not have effect on their studying result.

2.4.2 Class observation

Nunan (1992) supported that observation is also one of the most effective tools to collect data for studies because observation is suitable to observe some forms of behavior. Therefore, it also used to measure the students' behavior in this study.

The observation sheet adapted from Peacock (1997), it was quoted from Phan Bich Thuan (2006). It was used in this study to observe the students' behavior or measure students' time to be on-task during they were participating activities of English lessons because it has a high degree of explicitness. The observation sheet was completed by two non-participated observers to evaluate students' on- task behavior and measure the students' motivation. Classroom observation was made in class to make the double check and critical look in order to find out the real situation of students' motivation before and after modifying pair/group activities and using graded task.

The observation sheet consists of 12 columns for 12 scans and they were designed for to be filled out by the two non- participant observers. To ensure the reliable results from the two observers, the two observers had been carefully trained observation techniques. The observers placed themselves in an unobtrusive position in the classroom and started observing when students had been working in pair/ groups and using graded task for two minutes with their different tasks. The observers entered "1" if the student on-task and "2" if the students off- task for each scan. The students were considered to be on-task if they were engaged in the pedagogic work and they were considered to be off-task if they showed a complete lack of attention to the set task. Students were identified by name and observed one after another, clockwise around the class. The students were required to sit at the same position for all lessons. Each student was observed for 5 seconds for each scan. That means after every 5 seconds, the observer wrote down the category best describing the observed students' behaviors at that moment, and then turned to the next student. Observation continued until all students had been observed 12 times.

In this study, the forty student subjects were observed by two non-participants who were willing to cooperate with the researcher and pay attention to the result of the experiment. The first one observed the students' behavior from 1 to 20 and the other observed the students' behavior from 21 to 40 after being carefully trained the above techniques to observe the students' behavior successfully. Then, these observers were made to run the pilot observation with the same students several times to check their observation techniques to make sure their result observation are quite the same. They were only asked to observe the students when they knew clearly how to carry out the observation. A class "on-task" and "off-task" percentage was then calculated. The class observation was carried out 6 times, 2 times before having intervention during three first week of the course and 4 times during the nine week experiment. More detail information was mentioned in 3.5

2.5 Data collection procedure

Data collection procedure was divided into two main stages. In the first stage, both of data collection instruments: questionnaire and observation were used to collect data. Basing on the data, the causes of poor participation of students in English class were identified. Here are some more details of the use of them in the first stage.

Before the experiment, observation was also used two times to investigate the students' behavior in the English class without intervention. The first time was carried out after finishing unit 2 in the

second week; the second time was implemented after the last period of unit 3 of the third week. To have effective observation results and confirm the students' behavior during English lesson before intervention, two non-participant observers were required to observe the students' behavior in the English classroom before giving them a detail teaching curriculum and training them observation methods. It is to make sure two observers have the accurate and perfect observation results as the requirement of the study.

To collect initial data about reasons why students were low motivation in English lessons, the forty copies of the questionnaire were delivered to 40 students after finishing unit 3 at the end of the third week of the course in 5 minutes. The questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese and was explained clearly to make sure that all students understand all questions of it.

Basing on the results come from analyzing data collected with questionnaire and observation, the reasons why the students poorly participate in the English lessons were originated from teacher's teaching method. Among of techniques used to motivate students to participate in activities of English classroom, modifying pair/group work and using graded task were applied to increase their motivation in the English class in an experiment because they were used to increase students' motivation in some previous studies and they are also appropriate to the subject and the context of the current study.

In the second stage, the observation was carried out 4 times, two times in unit 9 and unit 11 to observe students' behavior when modifying pair/group work to teach students, two times in unit 10 and unit 12 to get information of students behavior when applying graded task to teach students following the detail teaching curriculum to measure the students' behavior or progress after modifying pair/group work and using graded task to design different level tasks for the students.

The forty copies of the questionnaire were delivered one more time to the student subject to get data from the questionnaire to confirm the results of the four observation times after finishing the last period of the thirteenth week of the course.

2.6. Action plan

Because of low participation of students in English lessons, the action plan was carried out to find out the reasons of the problem. Two intervention instruments, modifying pair/group work and using graded task, were suggested to increase students' motivation in English class. To measure the success of the action plan two data collection instruments were used to data before and after intervention and then these two kinds of data were compared. The action plan was followed the action research model of Ferrence (2000) so it concluded 6 steps.

The first steps (the first three weeks). During the first week, the researcher observed the classroom and identified some problems affecting the students' motivation in the English class, the main cause of the problem would also be guessed. During next two weeks, the two non-participant observers were asked to observe the classroom two times to measure the students' participation in the English classroom before applying the two new techniques two times, the first time was implemented at the end of last lesson of unit 2, the second times was carried out after finishing last lesson of unit 3. After finishing the first three weeks, the questionnaires were delivered to the students to indentify the causes why the students poorly participated or motivated in the English class.

The second step (the fourth week of the course), all data collected from the observation sheets were gained by the two non participants during unit 2 and unit 3; and the data collected from the questionnaire were obtained by the researcher after the end of the last period of unit 3 to identify what causes of the students' poor motivation in learning English. The collected data played an important role in the study because the collected data had effect on success of the study.

The third step (the fourth week of the course), these data were analyzed and interpreted carefully to identify how much the students actively participated in the English classroom and the reasons why they were not highly motivated in the English lesson. Basing on the collected data, the main reason causing the students poorly motivated was identified by teaching method of the teacher. To solve the problem, modifying pair/group work and using graded task were used to increase motivation of the students and they had effective effect on the students' motivation.

The fourth step (from the fifth week to the thirteen week), the experiment was conducted during 9 weeks. It was divided into 3 stages:

In the first stage, the first week of the experiment (the fifth week), forty copies of layout test were given to the students. Basing on the result of the layout test, the students were divided into 3 kinds of groups. The 2 better groups consisted of 8 students who got marks were higher than 7.4, the 5 average groups included 23 students that got mark from 5.0 to 7.4 and the 2 lower groups were 9 students who got mark below 5.0. To carry out the experiment successfully, the reasons why the research divided them into smaller groups with different levels or mixed level groups would be explained carefully for the students before the experiment. Then, they would be trained the ways to group themselves.

Typically, the formula 1 was encoded for the way they group themselves at the same level with names of color, 2 better groups (they were called red 1 and red 2) included the 8 best students of the class, 5 groups (they were called from green 1 to green 5) consisted of the 23 average students of the class and 2 lower groups (they were called yellow 1 and yellow 2) contained the 9 lower students of the class. To avoid confusing tasks of different level group, teacher should use highlight pen to color task of each group after their group's name. The formula 2 was encoded the way they grouped themselves in mixed level groups. Each group included one student of better groups, from 2 to 3 students of average groups, and one or two students of lower groups. At that time, names of the groups were named after the names of animal such as tiger, bear, zebra, elephant, monkey, etc. After training the students the ways to group themselves, it was easy for the researcher to conduct all activities in the classroom and to apply the teaching methods successfully. In addition, the students did not feel that they were sitting wrong seats or they were left behind in the classroom.

In the second stage, from the sixth week to thirteenth week, the two new techniques of pair/group work and graded task were applied to design different tasks for the students. Before the experiment, the students only worked in pair/group when the requirement of the textbook and they were not given appropriate tasks to their different levels. During the experiment, most of speaking activities of unit 7, 9, 11, 13 were modified in the pair group technique and of unit 6, 8, 10, 12 were used graded task techniques to make them more interesting and to design different level tasks for students in order to increase their motivation in English class. However, unit 5 were applied both pair/group work and graded task techniques to design task for students to train them the way to group themselves in formula 1 or formula 2.

For example, READING AND SPEAKING part of unit 5 of NHW, The lady who lives on a plan, might be followed by steps.

Because the students were trained the way to group themselves, the teacher only told them to group their groups in formula 1, they understood clearly how they grouped themselves, why they had to group, and which level of the exercise they had to face to, and how the members of each group worked together.

After the students grouped themselves, the teacher delivered their tasks in three sections of the reading practice:

Pre-reading: after the students grouped themselves, they were given their exercise with clear requirement, limit time was also given at the same time (see Handout 5A), and then the key of the exercise was given to check.

While-reading: all the students were required to work individual to answer 6 questions of exercise 2 and to choose the sentences true (T) or false (F) of exercise 3 on the textbook (see Handout 5B). After certain given time, the correct answers were given out with detail explanation.

Post reading: the students regrouped themselves in the formula 2. It meant that each group consisted of different level members to discuss about the topic “What do you like or don’t like Joanna’s house?”. After they discussed their opinion about Joanna’s house, they were required to write a paragraph about from 80 to 120 words of this topic.

During applying new teaching method from week 5 to week 13 of the course, four observation times were carried out. Two times were implemented in unit 9, 11 to observe the students’ behavior in English class when they took part in activities that were applied pair/ group work techniques, two other times were conducted in unit 10, 12 to observe students’ behavior in English class when they participated in activities applied graded task techniques.

After the last period of unit 13, the questionnaire was given to the students again. The result of the data collected from the questionnaires would be basic for the researcher to confirm the motivation of the students really changed as the results of the observation sheet revealed.

The fifth step (the fourteenth week of the course), all channels of data were collected with using both observation and questionnaire one more time, and then they were analyzed and interpreted one more time to confirm the reason that causes the students poorly motivated was the teacher’s teaching method and to measure progress of the students’ motivation during the learning process. Basing on the collected data, we could measure how much they participated in the activities of the classroom, and then compare with their behavior before experiment or compare students’ behavior when they were increased with pair/group work to their behavior when they were increased with graded task.

The last step, improvement, positive and negative points of the experiment, a detail action plan of the next step would be showed clearly. Basing on the result of the experiment, it was considered a successful experiment because their students’ motivation was increased. However, the result of it was not so high as the result of the previous studies. Therefore, next time, both two above techniques will be combined to design different tasks for all students at the same period.

In short, action research model of Ferrence (2000) is appropriate to this study so the study gained a certain success. However, the improvement was not so high as that of the previous studies.

3. CONCLUSION

This paper presented the research method of the study as well as the reasons why the method is selected. This action research contains 6 steps which are clearly presented in 3 phases including pre-action research, action research, and post-action research. Besides, the description of the different data collection instruments consisting of questionnaires, observation which are considered as essential tools to collect information about the main cause of students' low motivation and more information about the participants of the study were also introduced in detail. The results of the experiment helped the researcher come to the conclusion that causes of the students' low motivation were the teacher's teaching method, their low motivation might be increased with modifying pair/group work and using graded task. From the results of the experiment, the researcher would make decisions that she neither continued nor stopped applying the methods for increasing her students' motivation in the future.

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