# HOW TEACHING AND LEARNING RECEPTIVE SKILLS IN A RICH ENVIRONMENT IMPROVE THE (PYP) STUDENTS' OVERALL LANGUAGE PRODUCTION AT MAJMMAH UNIVERSITY, KSA

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**ABSTRACT:** *The study attempts at investigating the impact of the rich learning environment at Preparatory Year Programe (PYP) in Majmmah University, KSA on the overall improvement of EFL/ESP students' productive skills. The PYP deanship at Majmmah University has been witnessing a great development and impressive advances in terms of preparation of distinctive curricula that meet students' specialization for the required standards at colleges of medicine, engineering, applied medical sciences and computer sciences. The progress in providing the effective teaching and learning materials is also evident today. And the huge progress in constructing the rich learning environment was not possible without a vivid awareness of the importance of teaching and learning aids in motivating students for better language production. Thus, it seems as if decision makers have been investing more money for the overall development of education quality at this newly established university. The establishment of the Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) deanship at Majmmah University couple of years ago appeared to be integrated in different terms. For instance, classes are well equipped with different learning and teaching facilities that make the application of technological mediums such as CDs, MP3s and USBs easier in accomplishing language learning process. Furthermore, classes are also equipped with lap tops, headphones, two enormous speakers, a podium through which instructors control the smart boards operation and a TV screen which is freely used by the students as a listening exposure device with multiple access such as watching movies or watching some breaking news. Additionally, syllabus selection was also done in such a way that covers the needs of the EFL as well as the ESP learners. For almost three years the researcher has taught English in modern classes occupied by 16 maximum students who were divided into 4 main groups, each group seated around a big table. In a situation similar to such a modern and effective model of PYP classes, intensive receptive skills are easily taught and their intensity will definitely impact the students' production of language skills by the end of the day. To undertake this study, a qualitative method is adapted where the researcher interviewed a sample of instructors who are currently teaching at PYP deanship. The interview questions aim at determining the strengths of the intensive receptive sessions on improving the quality of the output for the EFL/ESP students. The researcher has also conducted a classroom observation reflecting on his experience of three years of teaching at PYP deanship of Majmmah University. Finally, the study resulted into some significant findings among which are:*
*1. Using modern technology and different classroom seating attract students' attention and motivate them.*
*2. A productive classroom promotes minimal anxiety through well-defined expectations, appropriate instruction, and sufficient scaffolding.*
*3. An effective learning platform is the one that establishes strong interactions and promotes a collaborative learning culture.*

**KEYWORDS***: ESP, EFL, rich learning environment, receptive skills*

## INTRODUCTION

The correlation between the receptive skills and the productive ones are strongly inseparable as the literature reviewed show. For example, it is found that students cannot develop speaking skills unless they develop listening skills (Doff, 1998). Moreover, students need to understand what is said to them in order to have a successful conversation and that is why the researcher claims that a rich learning environment where students are access to diverse learning materials is extremely important for having real comprehension. Shumin (1997) on the other hand shares the same ideas of Doff (1998) via affirming that when one person speaks, the other responds through attending by means of the listening process. The strong connection between the two skills, listening and speaking is also clearly stated by Richards (2000): who refers to the vitality of the two skills in different stages of any functional communication while providing services. The art of listening is also declared by Edward (1990, 3): *"Listening is an art; and in order to perfect it people must take responsibility for at least their 50 percent of the communication process. "Like prospecting for gold a person may never know when they might strike it rich."*

If listening is an art and it is also comparable to gold prospecting operations as stated by Edward (1990, 3): we strongly believe that getting the quality of it required using skillful instruments and tools as is the case of PYP deanship at Majmmah University. Intensive receptive skills sessions, particularly listening seem to be effective to such a way that ESP/EFL students at PYP deanship of Majmmah University can easily express themselves in English. What is so special at PYP programme is the great opportunity students have to practice the language in an ideal learning environment and the precise policy in selecting curricula solely for the students' needs.

### Statement of the study problem

Learning receptive skills can improve students' language production particularly when students have access to intensive input sessions. As observed by the researcher during the last five years, evaluation and assessment of some courses is based on presentation tasks. Students have to give at least one presentation summary on a particular area related to the course which is subjectively evaluated by the instructor in five minutes minimum. For instance, in some linguistics courses such as Semantics & Pragmatics, Applied linguistics and Sociolinguistics students find it difficult to give the required presentations and in some cases they reject them although they know that they are going to miss some assessment grades. In academic writing courses as well, students need to submit five in- class essays to meet the requirement criteria of the course assessment and evaluation. However, some also find it challenging to cope with the situation and at the end of the day they may write one or two paragraphs on the chosen topic instead of writing an essay. These challenges seem to have strong connection with the quality of the receptive input sessions specially when we take into account that traditional learning settings are still dominating the EFL classes as observed by the researcher in Qassim University. Classes are not well equipped with actual teaching materials that regularly motivate students to produce the language. Today, most classes at the college of Sciences and Arts, Arrass where the researcher works are extremely poor in terms of teaching aids. And that is why lecturing methodology is still leading the situation of EFL/ESP teaching and learning in a virtual reality of traditional classes. With reflection on the researchers

experience in teaching EFL/ESP at PYP deanship of Majmmah University for three years, intensive input sessions of the receptive skills have been dominating the process. And that was only possible as we believe because the learning and teaching settings were rich and have impacted the students' overall improvement of language production.

**Study questions**

This study will attempt to answer the following questions:
1- To what extent classroom environment result into a meaningful and productive learning?
2- How does it facilitate students' task engagement?
3- How does it create a positive academic achievement to both ESP/EFL learners?

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Environment is associated with educational setting that focuses on human behaviour in origin or outcome is defined as the atmosphere, the tone, the ambiance or the climate that permiates (Boy & Pine, 1988; Dorman & Fraser, 2009). And it refers to the psychosocial environment rather than the physical one. It seems as if decision makers at Majmmah University have been considering both the rich learning environment as well as selecting syllabuses that are consistent with the learners needs particularly at PYP programme during the last couple of years. They have carefully considered not only syllabuses associated with the learners needs, but to somehow they have also taken into account how to motivate learners towards the effective learning through these text books. For instance, when it comes to the established methodologies at PYP, we can say that students can have both the hard copy as well as the soft copy. Given both to the teachers and students as well, access to the required materials through switching on their laptops or either through turning on the smart boards. Technology is effectively used in such an environment for instance, using tapes recoding, CDs, DVDs, memory cards or even watching the news or any programme broadcast by the international English medium channels are common in all EFL/ESP classes today.

Teaching receptive skills (reading & listening) is then efficiently taught via implementation of active learning methods. As a receptive skill, reading comprehension is a process that goes beyond just reading the actual words on a given page. Descending from a cognitive view, reading is an interactive process rather than just a set of skills as found by (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, and Pearson, 1991). Thus, a good definition of reading comprehension might be the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language (Snow, 2002 p. 11).Harmer (1991: 188) clarifies this by saying: "*We will not get students to interact properly with spoken and written materials unless we ensure that their desire to read or listen has been awakened*".

Therefore, we can say that a rich learning environment can easily motivate learners for better reading and listening improvement. Currently, PYP students at Majmmah University are distributed in classes similar to the English labs and they access to several materials associated with teaching the receptive language skills such as TV screens, laptops, headphones, etc.

Additionally, the diversity of instructors native and bilingual was also positive in terms of majors, some native speakers were only involved in teaching listening.

In this situation, instructors always have a great opportunity to consider minor details such as forming a good rapport and creating strong pace balance while teaching. Although pace is a subjective judgment that refers to the feelings of the learners working with different in - class activities, but in rich learning environment teachers can easily manage it. In these classes pace which is defined as the speed of the class can go smoothly since activities are easily instructed by the teachers and the rich learning environment may prevent the slow speed on one hand and the high speed on another hand which may have a negative impact on the learner. Furthermore, students can effortlessly work with freer practice activities which are generally associated with productive skills when using the language in non – restricted environment aiming at developing the learner's fluency. Practically, these activities can take different shapes such as mingling position where students freely leave their seats for a while to complete a given task.

Concerning classroom control, teachers also have a chance to manage such classes via taking a good position where every single student has the opportunity to perceive and pick up clear instructions before starting any given task. Generating strong rapport via interacting, asking questions and engaging with students is also possible in case of small classes with 16 students. For instance, to insure that students understand blocking vocabulary items, teachers ask concept checking questions (CCQs). Additionally, teachers need to confirm whether students know what to do or not before they actually start any given task via testing instruction checking questions (ICQs). Rearrangement of chairs when necessary is also possible in such a class and definitely these activities motivate learners to implement collaborative learning of reading and listening as receptive skills.

**Teaching receptive skills**
In teaching language skills, candidates need to consider both the receptive and the productive ones .Teaching receptive skills is not different in terms of stages, but the only difference is that when teaching listening candidates need to consider the time limits depending on how hard is the intended listening material under instruction. Hence, it is important to evaluate the difficulty of the listening materials simply because candidates may need to do it once or twice. Additionally, teachers have to consider students' needs of understanding the text they are required to listen to before being involved in any given task. However, in our expectations of language production, it seems vital to consider the classroom environment while teaching listening. The literature review shows a significant impact of the classroom environment on learners (Fraser & Goh, 2003; Zandvliet & Buker, 2003).

**Teaching reading**
Teaching any skill requires a lead – in stage to enable students engage in a comprehensible awareness of what they are going to learn. Thus, in teaching reading the lead- in stage aims at generating interest and real desire of reading the target text as well as encouraging students' prediction to activate the known vocabulary on the subject. For instance, students are asked to read

a text about a bibliography of a famous person in their hometown. Candidates can encounter the above aim via the following processes:

Candidates could get students to think about or discuss a series of questions such as;

Where were the famous person born?

Do you really think he is famous? Why?

Candidates also need to assure that students know how to work and do the task before they actually start. In other words, candidates need to set the task clearly before students, and then ask them to do it. However, before conducting a clear feedback, learners be ensured if they have time for pair/group checking.

This stage is followed by an optional one known as pre – teach stage aiming at   removing any unknown words or phrases to avoid preventing an overall understanding of the text or tasks completion. Then an initial gist task is undertaken in which the instructor's aim is to enable students skim a text via practicing and developing their reading abilities to read quickly for overall understanding. According to (Jeremy Harmer, How to teach English, 2007 (pp.100/101), we may want to read for the following: first, we may want to read to get general ideas in a text "*student need to be able to skim a text*". Second, we may read to scan specific information where students do not need to read the entire words within the text, "*They do not have to read every word and line*". Third, we also read to get detailed information.  Thus, choosing a good topic definitely motivates students to read and empowers them to improve their overall reading and speaking skills. Descending from researcher's reflection and teaching experiences at PYP deanship of Majmmah University, rich learning environment where students can go online in few seconds can impact the selection of good topics associated with the concerns of youth such as smart phones applications. As stated by (Dorman, Fraser & McRobbie, 1995): learners can learn better within a more positive perception of the classroom environment simply because classroom environment is a strong determinant of student cognitive and attitudinal outcome.

 To illustrate how a reading passage can be taught, the researcher is providing a tangible example titled (a bibliography of a famous person) in this section.  Practically, working with the above-mentioned reading task, first, candidates need to set a clear and short time limit perhaps 1- 2 minutes depending on how many paragraphs students are going to read. The aim here is to see if their predictions and discussions were correct compared to what is stated by the text.  Hence, it is extremely important for the students during this stage to know the reason behind reading before and not after they actually start, simply because they will not read in the way the task is designed. Additionally, the text type is also important to be considered before asking students to go through this process. Although it is very common to begin reading in this way, it is not always essential. For example, some short texts such as teachers' timetables or schedules don't require skimming to generate main idea around what they are about.

Scanning for specific information is another stage that aims at enabling students to practice and improve their ability while scanning a text quickly for specific information, but again this stage is also optional and it depends on the suitability of the targeted text.  In applying this technique on the previous text, (a bibliography of a famous person), students are expected to answer questions

such as when did the person become famous? , or in what age does he become famous? , why is he famous? , what are his contributions to the community? etc.

Regarding the aims of reading for detailed comprehension, students are going to go throw this stage to develop a reading ability that empowers them find out more in-depth understanding of the text. Thus, true / false questions can easily be conducted out of the model reading text (a bibliography of a famous person). In order to answer the questions, students have to decide them via scanning the text and determine which parts mention the true / false statements, but they have to read more carefully and understand more deeply.

Finally, productive follow up task is conducted with a main aim in which students are required to develop their fluency on the topic of the text via giving them the opportunity to react to the content. For example, reflecting on the previous text (a bibliography of a famous person) this stage can practically be followed by a group discussion, where students decide how and why the person is famous or would they like to become famous and in acting so what contributions do they need to make for their communities. Furthermore, students could perform a role-play activity where one student is playing a role of a famous person and the other is acting as someone considering becoming a famous person in the upcoming future and asking for advice on what it's like. Both activities give students opportunities to react to content, to recycle language they may have come across in the text and to develop their fluency.

## Teaching Listening

When teaching listening we need to consider the environment where every single student has the opportunity of a good perception since the aim is to enable them produce the target language by the end of the day. According to (Walberg, 1991), there is a connection between an individual's perception of learning environment and his/her performance within that environment. Teaching listening is similar to teaching reading in terms of the division of stages. However, some practical differences must be considered while teaching listening. First, controlling the speed is different when comparing listening to reading. In reading, it is determinable a head, but in listening, it is not under control of the receiver. Second, always there is a limitation of time difference when we compare the two skills. Students can read a text several times; however, when it comes to listening they have a time limit on hearing something. These differences are extremely important to be considered, thus, with listening, students need to be given plenty of opportunity for pair checking and they also need to be warned about the accent they are going to listen to before conducting any feedback.

When candidates clearly set up the listening task before students, candidates do follow the task cycle where students listen first and complete the task then they simply check in pairs as well as in groups. The role of the teacher during these stages is to act actively monitoring both the task completion and the pair checking stages as well. It is also important to empower students to listen carefully without any difficulties, and when these difficulties occur, candidates need to know which parts are they. That is why a teacher may decide to play the recording again focusing on a very particular segment. Nevertheless, candidates regularly need to complete pair checking via conducting the monitoring stage before deciding to play the recording again to know exactly what

difficulties students are facing. Questions such as do you want to listen again? , should be avoided since it is the teacher's job to know that students are always willing to listen again and again even when they successfully completed the task. This perception is because students are always keen on knowing every single word while listening to complete the task. Nonetheless, it is very common to come across words where we do not know their meanings while reading or listening, and teachers need to teach students how to overcome this problem via adapting different strategists since the unknown words are sometimes unimportant and they do not spoil the comprehension of the text. To sum up this section, the researcher can say that both listening and reading go through the same stages, but the only difference is that teachers need to play the recording again and again whenever it is necessary in teaching listening for specific information or detailed comprehension task. However, this repetition is not common when it comes to listening for gist task unless the task is too difficult and not general enough or students want to focus on more details than what they were asked to.

Mostly, on each specific segment candidates play recording twice to three times maximum when the task is in an appropriate level.

## Material and methods

The data collection process is undertaken via a quantitative method where two instructors who are currently teaching at PYP deanship have been interviewed. The aim of the interview was to determine what progress students made in producing the language after being exposed to the intensive input sessions in a rich learning environment with a variety of learning tools and comfortable seating setting. The following are the interview questions distributed to the study subjects:

1-      To what extent classroom environment result into a meaningful and productive learning?
2-      How does it facilitate students' task engagement?
3-      How does it create a positive academic achievement to both ESP/EFL learners?

## Summary and findings

While teaching at PYP deanship the researcher observed that classroom environment has a big influence on learning. It is evident that meaningful and productive learning is only possible when students feel comfortable and have access to learn by themselves instead of listening to a professional lecturer dominating the time allocated for both EFL/ESP classes respectively. The researcher also assumes that learning settings of PYP are well established and organized and can meet the learners' needs today. The findings confirm the availability of up - to - date facilities of learning English, including the availability of English textbooks, supporting resources, and TV screens in all PYP classes today. According to the study first subject being interviewed, rich learning environment can facilitate learning in the following terms:

**(1)**      Using modern technology and different classroom seating attract students' attention and motivate laerbers in Majmaah PYP. Statistics showed that students results were improved since they take a placement test and a progress test at the beginning and end of each semester unlike those who were taught in traditional classes in other premises.

Figure1: Using technology in small EFL/ESL classes at PYP deanship, Majmmah University, 2020

**(2)** It helps students using the Internet and other media to display their presentations, check vocabulary or work in groups as well as saving teachers time.

**(3)** It creates a positive academic achievement to the learners through joining the English club during breaks in which students feel comfortable because of its seating by changing the class environment, the English lab for listening and the (I tool) of the course.

According to the second study subject being interviewed, rich learning environment can facilitate learning in the following terms:

Question 1: "To what extent does the classroom environment result in meaningful and productive learning?"

Students gain success in an atmosphere conducive to learning. A productive classroom promotes minimal anxiety through well-defined expectations, appropriate instruction (including various tools and materials), and sufficient scaffolding.

Figure2: Different settings of EFL/ESL classes at PYP deanship, Majmmah University, 2020

Question 2: "How does it facilitate students' task engagement?"

An effective learning platform is the one that establishes strong interactions and promotes a collaborative learning culture. Students remain on task when the instruction is relevant and engaging.

Question 3: "How does it create a positive academic achievement for both ESP/EFL learners?"

Student engagement leads to better and more promising learning outcomes. A positive learning environment allows students to feel involved and to take responsibility for their learning.

Figure3: Modern EFL/ESL classes at PYP deanship, Majmmah University, 2020

**Recommendations**

1.      Public Universities in KSA are highly recommended to invest more money to establish better learning and teaching environment.

2.       It is extremely important to generalize the experience of the PYP learning environment to the rest of the colleges at Majmmah University as well as other Universities in KSA.

3.      It is also important to conduct regular teacher -training programs on how we can make the best use of the various teaching materials that motivate students for better learning.

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