



## Relevance of Brainstorming in an EFL classroom

Intakhab Alam Khan

King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah-KSA.

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received: 20 October 2012;

Received in revised form:

04 October 2015;

Accepted: 09 October 2015;

#### Keywords

Interaction,  
Participation,  
Brainstorming,  
Learner-centered teaching,  
Decision making.

### ABSTRACT

Modern teaching is characterized by interaction, communication and participation. It is believed that an interactive class must incorporate participation in order to assure learner centered teaching and better results. Brainstorming is one of the popular techniques of participative approach to decision making which can be employed in a pedagogic situation as well. The present study is of exploratory type. It uses descriptive approach of research, however questionnaires have been used to elicit primary data from the concerned samples. The findings show that brainstorming is a useful technique of teaching which catches attention of both the teachers and learners.

© 2015 Elixir All rights reserved.

### Introduction

Brainstorming is basically a technique of decision making that can be employed in any situation where participation is expected. It is used in an educational context as well. The process of brainstorming is primarily based on physical and intellectual presence of the group, therefore, quantity is assured. This leads to choosing out the best out of many, however, brilliantly followed up by the expertise of the coordinator.

Brainstorming also verifies the extent to which the decision body has understood the problem. Sometimes, people go for a decision without going deep into the actual problem. Such decision create problem in the long run as they are ineffective and sometimes harmful.

During the process of 'Brainstorming', the entire group becomes able to know about one another's sincerity and commitment towards the institution they are working for.

The expertise of all the members exposed before many members will enable themselves to generate sufficient number of the alternatives and each alternative may have some relevance to the problem however, there exists a possibility of some reservations keeping the current situation in view.

#### Advantage of brainstorming

Some of the advantages of brainstorming technique are summarized below:

1. The target group can generate/create a greater number of alternative responses since the group's information and knowledge tend to be more comprehensive and reliable.
2. The group decision making is democratic in nature. The democratic processes are more easily acceptable and more consistent with the democratic principles which ensure equal academic opportunities.
3. Implementation of a brainstorming based decision is more effective as the entire group participate.

Advantages of brainstorming show how important it is. The relevance of the same can be felt both in general and educational context.

However, it may be more relevant and feasible in educational institutional because educational administration is totally based on human relation and brainstorming is highly democratic in approach (Khan, 2004, 2005).

#### Brainstorming and the classroom

Brainstorming is the random generation of ideas based around a topic. There is no editing or ordering of these ideas. They may then be used as the basis for another activity such as writing or speaking activity.

#### Example

Brainstorming the responses on the topic of 'healthy eating' by writing all the words they associate with it on a sheet of paper and later on the board. If the class is equipped with smart board, the responses can easily be recorded. The teacher can record the responses even by using simple recorders or similar devices.

#### The classroom

Brainstorming can encourage learners to think more freely and innovatively than if they were doing a more restricted and routine classroom situation. It allows learners to remember what they know, and to teach each other. It is a dynamic and stimulating way to lead learners into a topic.

#### How to brainstorm

Brainstorming is a tool that uses a relaxed, informal atmosphere combined with lateral thinking to solve problems. In spite of its importance in the generation of new ideas, many students do not have enough training to use it.

This activity will teach students to brainstorm effectively. It can be carried out in a one-period session. No materials are required apart from a pen or pencil and sheets of paper except in a sophisticated high tech classroom.

#### The activity

The following steps are usually followed:

- generate new ideas,
- help the students that they are in brainstorming session,
- divide the class into some groups as per the need,
- Allocate a good student in each group the responsibility of the second leader (the teacher is the leader-1).

### Literature Review

There are so many investigations that can be found related to the learning strategies in general. Participative technique catches special attention for many researchers.

The following is a re-hash of some of the related studies:

Tsui (1996) explored the motivation aspect related to learners involved in the brainstorming activity. Bejarano et al (1997) discovered the important role played by small group interaction in helping students develop learning strategies. Very little research however has looked at the effectiveness of learning strategies such as brainstorming in the teaching of productive skills such as writing. Richards (1990) found that student interaction was an important part of developing the cognitive skills involved in generating ideas, and found brainstorming was an effective way of achieving this. Results from this study showed that students who were trained in brainstorming techniques were more efficient at generating and organising ideas than students in a control group.

Brown (1994) studied about the relevance of interactive approach to learning which revealed many interesting facts regarding the issue. Rao (2007) found that students who had been trained in brainstorming techniques and used them regularly over a twelve-month period produced measurably higher results in writing tasks. In addition to this, an attitudinal survey showed that students who participated in this research project felt positive about the effectiveness of the brainstorming techniques. 'Brainstorming' has been used successfully in business for invention and innovation (VanGundy, 1981). In the language classroom, brainstorming is often used in teaching writing. Activities such as free-association and word-mapping are often included as part of the pre-writing or warm-up phase (Richards, 1990, 112).

### Task and the brainstorming phases

Brainstorming includes many phases/steps:

Phases:

1) The original question is broken down into smaller questions. For example the following target issue/question need to be further divided:

How has the mobile technology affected human life?

This issue/question was then broken down into parts:

- a) How has mobile changed our present life?
- b) What will happen if we don't have mobiles?
- c) How mobile affected negatively as well?
- d) Is mobile extremely important for you?

The class may be sub-divided into groups and each group is assigned one part of the question.

2) Students are allowed 3-5 minutes to individually brainstorm ideas on the given question.

3) Students then discuss in their small groups the ideas they generated during stage

2. Each group then elects a recorder/moderator whose job it is to summarise the ideas/options

4) The reporters then move to a new group and report on the ideas developed by their previous group. The new group then builds on the ideas generated by other group(s) and adds any new ideas of their own. It is important that this stage is constructive and none of the ideas of the previous group(s) are rejected. This stage is repeated until all groups have had an opportunity to participate/interact to each part of the question.

5) When all groups have had discussed each question, the reporter/moderator report back to the class as a whole on the ideas of each group.

6) These ideas are then presented into an organized whole and shared with the people.

### Speaking Tasks and 'Brainstorming' activity

As it is known that 'Brainstorming' is an activity used to generate ideas in small groups, it focuses on the participation. The purpose is to generate as many ideas as possible within a specified time-period. These ideas are not evaluated until the end and a wide range of ideas is often produced. Before a speaking activity on a specific topic is dealt, the teacher generally starts 'a warm up round' to overview learner's previous knowledge and generate ideas. Though 'Brainstorming' is useful in the whole process of teaching in general, it can be more employed in a class of speaking/ conversation in particular. It is a useful activity for warm-up in conversation classes. Some learners are more successful than others. In order to find out why, and Rubin (1975) studied the characteristics of good learners. Four of these characteristics are discussed below. These may explain why brainstorming is a useful tool in our classrooms.

Brainstorming can help students to learn to take risks. McCoy (1976) makes a strong argument in favour of learning problem-solving skills in order to reduce anxiety. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers in brainstorming and no danger of teacher correction. By carrying out a simple brainstorming warm-up, students can obtain a sense of competence and feel more confident in making intelligent guesses.

### Brainstorming on a Picture/image

In this modern age, website images can be used to brainstorm the target learners to write or speak. A practical situation can also be a source of brainstorming.

### Method of the study

The present study was basically of descriptive type aiming to explore the learning situation and strategies to cope with. Two questionnaires (one each for teachers and the students concerned) were used. The content validity was checked prior to the administration of both the tools.

### Analysis and interpretation

Apart from the researcher's own experience and observation, the following is the analysis of both the tools employed for the study.

### Item wise analysis (students' questionnaires): Appendix-A

1 Against the statement-1, thirty respondent (more than 60%)

.....

2 70% respondents admitted that questioning leads to thinking.

3 60% are positive towards the effective use of the brainstorming technique.

4 Most of the sample students would like to use these techniques in learning English more often.

5 A lot of learners think this brainstorming technique is very interesting. It needs more time.

6 Many affirmed that the leader/teacher helped us to answer questions.

7 The learners stated that the teacher gave us clues to respond against the situation.

8 80% learners find brainstorming as interesting learning activity.

9 78% students are in favour of learning through brainstorming activity.

10 76% respondents are in favour of question-answer activities in an EFL class.

These findings have been presented through the graph as well (Appendix. B)

### Analysis of the teachers' questionnaires (Appendix C&D)

#### Item wise analysis

- 1- Most of the teachers state that the brainstorming session helps the learners in preparing EFL tasks.
- 2- The teachers also confirmed that 'brainstorming' helps the learner think about questions in different and useful ways.
- 3- The teachers believe that the teacher is a moderator of the learning process based on brainstorming strategy.
- 4- Almost all the teachers say that the teacher in a brainstorming session should help in the generation of the ideas.
- 5- The brainstorming session leads to group learning.
- 6- The process is based on the learner centered activity.
- 7- It is also affirmed that the brainstorming session is usually liked and preferred by the learners.
- 8- It is believed that 'Brainstorming' makes the learners enthusiastic.
- 9- The teacher should not tell the answer rather choose the best out of many.
- 10- Brainstorming is not only a generating process, but a decision-making activity lead by the teacher-leader.

#### Findings, results, Conclusion and recommendations

##### Findings

It has been found that brainstorming is an effective teaching strategy, and it can be easily introduced into language classes. The research studies previously discussed also confirm that it helps our students to become better learners. In addition, it is a fun activity which students enjoy and well worth trying out in your own classes.

##### Results

Students participated constructively and enthusiastically in the classroom interventions and were very positive about the brainstorming techniques they studied. Below is a breakdown of the survey results.

Brainstorming had a strong positive effect on the classroom environment and the learning behaviour of the students. The students in the study got involved in the brainstorming enthusiastically. Many students were found prompt which shows self-initiative made by the target learners.

The students were made familiar with the task of the vocabulary in the speaking task due to the brainstorming session held for the warm up activity.

##### Conclusions

The above results suggest the majority of students participating in the study felt positive about the effectiveness of the brainstorming techniques used in an EFL. All students agreed to some extent that the techniques had helped them prepare more effectively for their language learning tasks. The success of 'brainstorming' as a teaching-learning strategy is further supported by the observation and experience of the teacher-researcher. This is quite important to bear the fact that brainstorming technique can be used in many ways in educational setting in general.

##### Recommendations

The present study was carried out on a small sample, therefore it is recommended to conduct a more in-depth case study on a larger scale to explore facts in a more systematic manner.

##### References

Bejarano Y, Levine T, Olshtain E, Steiner J. (1997) The skilled use of interactive strategies: creating a framework for improved small- group communicative interaction in the language classroom System 25: 2203-14

Brown, H.D, 1994 Principles of Language Learning and teaching, Prentice Hall Regents, p.416

Khan, I.A.(2005).Educational Management, New Delhi: Academic Excellence,pp.34-39

Khan, I.A. (2004) Relevance of modern management techniques in Educational Institutions, New Delhi: Gagandeep publication, pp.45-57

McCoy, R.I 1976. Means to Overcome the Anxieties of Second Language Learners, Foreign Language Annals, pages 185-9, No. 12, 1979.

Rao Z. (2007) Training in Brainstorming and Developing Writing Skills, in ELT Journal 2007 61(2) Oxford University Press.

<http://www.edwarddebono.com>

Richards J. (1990) New Trends in the Teaching of Writing in ESL/ EFL in Wang Z. (ed.) ELT in China. Papers Presented at the International Symposium on Teaching English in the Chinese Context, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, Beijing.

Rubin, J 1975. What the "Good Language Learner" Can Teach Us, TESOL Quarterly, Vol. 9, No.1, March 1975.

Tsui, A.B.M. (1996). Reticence and anxiety in second language learning, Voices From the Language Classroom, Cambridge 1996, 145-167.

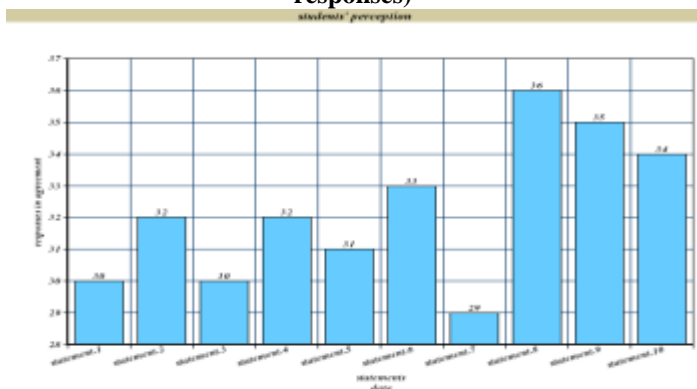
VanGundy, A. B. (1981, 2nd Ed. 1988). Techniques of Structured Problem Solving. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

#### Appendix-A

Questionnaires for the students  
(Sample: 45)

	Statement	agree	undecided	disagree
1	This questions asked by the teachers helped me in preparing for my language task.	30	8	7
2	The questioning activity gave me ideas I would not have thought of otherwise.	32	6	7
3	This question-answer exercise helped me think in a different and useful way.	30	7	6
4	I would like to use these techniques in learning English more often.	32	4	9
5	"This technique is very interesting. It needs more time."	31	8	6
6	The leader/teacher helped us to answer questions	33	7	5
7	The teacher gave us clues responses	29	8	8
8	We find this technique interesting	36	5	4
9	We would like to learn this way.	35	5	5
10	We were active throughout the question-answer activity.	34	8	3

**Appendix. B**  
Graphical presentation of the questionnaires (students' responses)



**Appendix-C**  
Questionnaires for the Teachers  
(Sample: 14)

	Statements	Agree	undecided	disagree
1	The brainstorming session helps the learners in preparing EFL tasks.	9	3	2
2	The brainstorming helps the learner think about questions in different and useful ways.	8	4	2
3	The teacher is a moderator of the learning process.	7	4	3
4	The teacher should help in generation the ideas.	11	2	1
5	The brainstorming session leads to group learning.	10	2	2

6	The process is based on the learner centered activity	9	4	1
7	The learners usually likes the activity	8	4	2
8	Brainstorming makes the learners enthusiastic.	9	3	2
9	The teacher should not tell the answer rather choose the best out of many.	7	4	3
10	Brainstorming is not a generating process, but a decision-making activity.	8	3	3

**Appendix. D**  
Perception of the teachers

