

Developing Attention Level (in English Learning) in a Group of Grade VIII (B) Students, Hengrabari ME School, Guwahati

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Abstract: Often during classroom hours, it is found that (some) students are found lost in their own world, while some are engaged in doodling, passing chits, etc, as they are no longer paying attention to what the teacher is saying. Needless to say, inattentiveness interferes with the students' ability to learn, retain new information and participate in classroom activities. It is therefore, a big challenge for teacher to make teaching-learning more joyous and interesting for the pupils. This study was carried out to find out to find out the possible causes that made a group of students - of Grade VIII, Hengrabari ME School, Guwahati, Assam – demotivated to pay attention in the English subject class. The researchers observed the class for two days to identify the group of the inattentive students. The sample comprising 28 students was selected purposively. Most of these students were first-generation students belonging to economically- backward section of the society. An interview schedule was distributed amongst these students to obtain their responses regarding their interest in the subject. A pre-test was conducted by researcher, which further supported the results obtained from the interview schedule. Remedial measures were employed for six days, and thereafter, a post-test was conducted to see whether the strategies applied have produced desirable results. The paper briefly offers few suggestions and measures that the teacher can implement in the class so that the students can remain focussed and motivated during the teaching-learning session.

Keywords: action research, English, inattentive, inductive teaching, pre-test, post-test, remedial, teaching aids, vocabulary

I. INTRODUCTION

Action research, also known as practitioner-research, is a practical approach to a professional inquiry in any social situation. Mills (2003) defines, "action research as any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, counselors, or others to know about particular teaching practice or learning process." (p. 5). The essence of action research involves teachers identifying and solving a particular issue to improve both students learning and teacher effectiveness.

The location of this action research project is a government school, named Hengrabari ME School, located in VIP Road, Hengrabari, Borbari, Guwahati, Assam. A dusty, narrow road leads to this school. The school is set in a large campus, with a basic structure and minimal physical facilities. Trespassers and cattle are regular visitors in the school, who use the school premises as pathway and resting zone. It was only a few decades ago, that the area, where the school is located was covered with dense forest. However, with the pressure of increase population, these forests were cleared and the hillocks were cut down to accommodate a concrete jungle. Borbari, where the school is located, is populated mostly by indigenous tribal people, who are mostly farmers, vegetable vendors, butchers, etc. So, most of the students in the school belong to low socio-economic background section of the society.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

While speaking to the principal of the Hengrabari ME School, Guwahati, the researcher found out that the problem of inattentiveness is acute mostly among weak learners. Also these students tend to drop-out usually after Grade VIII or after enrolling at Grade IX. She also mentioned that this problem is mostly seen in case of 'English' learning. So, the researcher has chosen to study '*Developing Attention Level (in English Learning) in a group of students of Standard VIII-B, Hengrabari ME School, Guwahati.*' The researcher conducted an action research within a period of 10 days. During the general observations, the researcher realized how the students are, in general, inattentive, talkative and most of the times off-task. Most of them are first

learners in their family; the parents do not have adequate awareness regarding their children's laid-back attitude towards studies, especially for subjects like English. So, it was very important and relevant to conduct a study to find out the probable reasons behind this trend and find a possible way out. The study aimed to give the students a clear purpose to work so that they are able to stay on-task during the teaching-learning session. Also, by employing interesting teaching strategies, the teachers can take adequate actions to help the students overcome the fear and boredom of the English subject. This will help increase their motivation and engagement in the class.

III. OBJECTIVES

Objectives of this action research are as follows:

- To identify the causes of inattentiveness among the students of Standard VIII (B) of Hengrabari ME School, Guwahati.
- To study the activities through which the child can remain connected during the classroom session.
- To study the effect of the desirable strategies on the pupils.

IV. METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

For the study, a group of 28 students were selected from Grade –VIII (B) through purposive sampling. A checklist was given to the teacher to find out the methods she/he uses to conduct the English class. Furthermore, the researcher observed the English class for two days to find out the exact number of students displaying inattentive behaviour. An interview schedule was distributed amongst those students to get their responses regarding their interest in English subject. The pre-test conducted by researcher further supported the results obtained from the interview schedule. Remedial measures were employed for six days, and thereafter, a post-test was conducted to see whether the strategies applied have produced desirable results.

V. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The data was collected based on observations, questionnaire, and one-on-one interviews. The recorded observations during the research period were thoroughly coded, analysed, interpreted and presented in three different tables. Frequency counts and the corresponding percentages were used to answer the specific problems of the study.

VI. PRE-TEST

During two days of observation, the researcher noticed that a group of the students of Grade VIII-B were totally inattentive in the English class. They were rather busy doodling, staring into space, talking with each other or making distracting noises. It was clearly visible that they were least interested in the subject, and don't feel connected in the class.

When the researcher asked them to give a self-introduction in the first observation class, she immediately sense discomfort amongst few students. Few of them were whispering to each other, with their faces almost dug inside the tables. Some of them were trying to avoid any kind of eye contact with the researcher, hoping that she doesn't ask them any question. Unsurprisingly they were not able to answer anything in English.

In a student-centred classroom, it is the students' learning that is at the centre. So, the researcher divided the students into three groups and asked them to discuss about a general topic "Importance of English in today's world". She initiated the discussion by asking them few motivating questions so that they get an idea as to how to start the discussions. The questions are mentioned below:

1. Do you think English should be taught in schools? If yes, why? If no, why?
2. Do you think it is useful for you?
3. What would you like to obtain from English?

However, after few minutes of probing, the researcher realized that the students were not willing to have free-talks in groups. She walked around and urged the groups, even one by one, to speak up. But some just sat looking flummoxed, while the rest were giggling.

VII. REMEDIAL MEASURES

In order to solve and minimize the inattentiveness encountered in English subject with the Grade VIII-B pupils, the following remedial measures were employed:

1. *Movement and Encouragement*

During the 2-days of observation, the researcher noticed that most of the time, the teacher stood in front of the blackboard while teaching. So, the researcher decided to walk around the class during classroom activities. This is one of the most efficient ways of getting to know students, especially the back benchers. Many a times during the loud reading session and pronunciation drills, she stood at the back of the class to show that she did care for the students on the back rows.

Another means the researcher adopted was that when she found someone was distracted, she would call their name to answer the question in order. This was effective to keep the pupils alert, as they became conscious that they could be asked question at any point in time.

2. *Relating the Textbook Contents to the Real Situations*

The researcher spiced up the regular classes by connecting it to real situations. For instance, when discussing a lesson 'A Short Monsoon Diary', the researcher first spoke about the bounty of the nature. She encouraged the students to imagine themselves in a place like Cherrapunji, Meghalaya wherein the landscape looks beautiful during the rains. She also discussed about sound of the rain, how a thirsty tree creeper moves rapidly when touched by the rains, about the greenery, etc.

Additionally, the researcher narrated about her own experiences that she enjoyed during monsoons in Mumbai. This warm-up activity kept the students well connected before the announcement of the topic.

3. *Guess Work*

When giving examples of sentences with a new word, the researcher read it and asked the students to try their best to interpret the meaning and translate it. To make sure everyone concentrated their minds on it, the researcher used voice modulation. For example, she said: 'Students please pay attention to my next sentence (in a heightened tone). Let's see who can give us a good translation. Repetition here was necessary. Instead of directly writing the meaning of the word on the blackboard, the researcher asked the pupils to guess the meaning by themselves. For instance:

To explain the meaning of '*at a snail's pace*', the researcher first asked them whether they know the meaning of the word 'snail'. After getting a satisfactory answer from few, she explained that it is an animal. She asked them to describe the animal: its size, does it move fast or slowly, etc. The researcher found that the students were using their imaginations freely, which was missing before. It was evident that they were enjoying the guess work.

4. *Use of Teaching Learning Materials*

While explaining the chapter 'A Short Monsoon Diary', the researcher made use of flash cards and charts. The pupils look quite amazed when she showed them various pictures of the different season. The researcher was quite sure, at that time, everybody was listening to her and no one was sleeping! When she asked them if they wanted to see a picture of the poet Ruskin Bond - a loud 'YES' was heard in unison.

5. *Medium of Instruction*

During the observation classes, it was seen that traditional method of teaching with emphasis on rote learning was mostly used during the English class, which made the classroom more teacher-centered. Most of the explanation was done in mother-tongue - Assamese. The researcher verbally explained the chapter and word meanings in Assamese.

The researcher therefore explained the lesson 'A Short Monsoon Diary' in English. She slowed down the speaking speed, and repeated as often as possible in class. When listening to English, students have to concentrate their minds in order to catch the words and seek for the meaning in their minds. This kept them on toes and prevented them from engaging in any inattentive behaviour. However, the researcher made a point to speak in Assamese every now and then, explaining difficult words and sentences. This brought a more relaxed expression on the pupils' faces.

VIII. POST-TEST

After the remedial measures were employed for a period of 6 days, the class was observed again on the ninth day and a post-test was conducted. Questions similar to the ones asked on the first days of observation were asked. At the beginning, the researcher asked some of the students from the focused group to say something about themselves. The responses were unexpected and quite positive, as all of them were able to speak few lines about themselves.

With specific question, however, the responses were more positive. Before intervention, whenever the teacher asked any questions, the students avoided eye-contact. Even the researcher was greeted with bored expression when she asked any question. During the post-test, it was observed that when the researcher asked, "Who would like to read the paragraph?" and used encouraging words like, "Who would be brave enough to be the first volunteer?" there was overwhelming response from the focus group. One of the girls who were tagged as inattentive stood up and managed to read few lines. By the fifth time, two boys stood up who, always avoided to engage in any classroom activities, to answer.

IX. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

Table 1: Provides Information Based on the Teacher's Response Regarding the Way She Conducts the English Class.

Sl.No	Information Obtained from the Teacher Regarding the Way She Conducts Her English Class	Teacher's Response in 'Yes' or 'No'
1	Have you observed inattentive behaviour in your class?	Yes
2	Do your students actively participate during the English class?	No
3	Do your students pay attention to you when you announce the day's topic?	No
4	Do you start your class with a warm-up session, i.e. ask them motivating question before you announce the topic?	Sometime
5	Do you use any teaching aids while teaching?	Sometime
6	Do you have sufficient learning materials for classroom transaction?	No
7	Do you use only English as a medium of instruction in your English subject?	No
8	Do you use mother tongue (Assamese) to teach English in the class?	Yes
9	Are you comfortable with the subjects assigned to you?	Yes
10	Do you do model reading in the class?	Sometime
11	Do the students answer when you ask them questions?	Sometime
12	Do the students converse with you in English?	No
13	Do you conduct group discussions/extempore speech/debate session during your English class?	Sometime
14	Do you encourage your students even when they are not able to perform well in the class?	Sometime
15	Do you walk around the class while teaching?	Sometime
16	Do you try to clarify the doubts of students whenever necessary?	Yes
17	Do you think the students will be more attentive by use of teaching learning materials rather than using the traditional method of teachings?	Yes
18	Do you give adequate feedback to the parents/guardian about their child's progress/weakness?	Sometime
19	Do you discuss the student's inattentive behaviour with their parents?	Sometime

During the interview, the teacher expressed that she very often witnesses inattentive behavior among the pupils. Most of the time, the students don't pay any attention when she announces the day's topic. The teacher believed that teaching-learning material is important to make the learning environment more easy and joyful. However, she doesn't make very frequent use of the materials. Also, during the interview she revealed that the school doesn't have sufficient and adequate teaching learning materials.

Also, the teacher frequently used mother tongue in classroom teaching; therefore, students got less exposure to English language. During observation, it was seen that the teacher was not explaining the meaning of the words in English. In fact, direct translation of the words was given to the pupils. These teaching practices revealed that the teacher had been using traditional ways teaching in which students had very less opportunities to improve their comprehension and speaking abilities.

Table 2: Inattentiveness of Grade VIII-B Pupils in English Subject at Hengrabari ME School, Guwahati before Intervention

Type of Inattentiveness	Boys (N= 19)	Percentage	Girl (N=9)	Percentage
Fidgeting with hands or squirm in seat	4	21.05	3	33.33
Fail to give close attention	4	21.05	3	33.33
Talk excessively	3	14.29	0	0
Don't listen when spoken to directly	0	0	1	4.76
Interrupt others	3	14.29	0	0
Avoid or dislike to engage in work	2	10.53	1	4.76
Don't follow instructions and fail to finish work	3	14.29	1	4.76

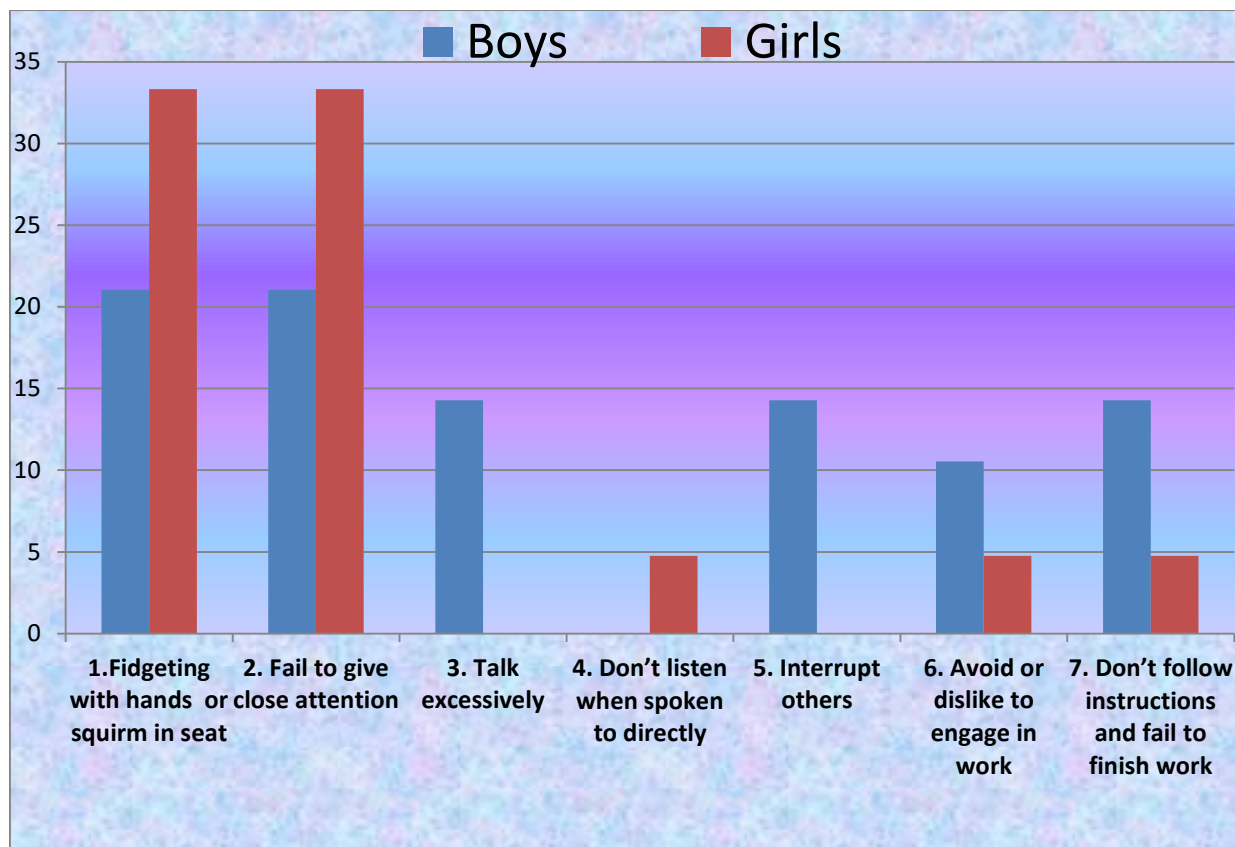


Fig. 1: Inattentiveness of Grade VIII-B Pupils in English Subject at Hengrabari ME School, Guwahati before Intervention

Table 2 and Figure 1 show the focus group displaying inattentive activities during English class.

- 21.05% of boys and 33.33% of girls were found fidgeting with hands and squirming in their seats.
- 21.05% of boys and 33.33% of girls fail to give attention.
- 14.29% of boys talk excessively during the English class.
- 4.76% of girls don't respond when spoken directly.
- 14.29% of boys keep interrupting and disturbing others during the class.
- 10.53% of boys and 4.76% of girls avoided or disliked to engage in activities.
- 14.29% of boys and 4.76% of girls don't follow instructions and fail to finish their work on time.

From the above table, it was found that Grade VIII-B pupils were inattentive during English class. So, some remedial measures or interventions are required to lessen inattentiveness.

Table 3: Percentage of students' showing different response regarding their interest in English subject before intervention.

Sl. No	Questions	Students' Response (N= 28)					
		Number of Yes	Percentage	Number of No	Percentage	Sometimes	Percentage
1	Do you like coming to school?	26	92.86	2	7.14	0	0
2	Do you study regularly at home?	4	14.29	24	85.71	0	0

3	Do you submit your home assignment on time?	25	89.29	0	0	3	10.71
4	Are you comfortable in your school environment?	26	92.86	2	7.14	0	0
5	Do you like English subject?	3	10.71	25	89.29	0	0
6	Are you scared of English subject?	28	100	0	0	0	0
7	Do you understand English properly?	9	32.14	19	67.86	0	0
8	Can you speak basic English?	4	14.29	24	85.71	0	0
9	Do you find your English class interesting?	3	10.71	25	89.28	0	0
10	In your English class, do you participate in the classroom activity?	0	0	22	78.57	6	21.43
11	Are you familiar with basic English grammar	13	46.43	15	53.57	0	0
12	Does the teacher explain you with enough examples till you understand the concept?	8	28.57	2	7.14	18	64.29
13	Does your teacher use any teaching aids besides the blackboard?	8	28.57	1	3.57	19	67.86
14	Do your parent(s)/guardian teach you English at home?	0	0	28	100	0	0
15	Have your ever participated in any scholastic activities (essay/debate/extempore speech, etc)?	4	14.29	24	85.71	0	0
16	Do you read English story books, newspaper, etc?	0	0	23	82.14	5	17.86

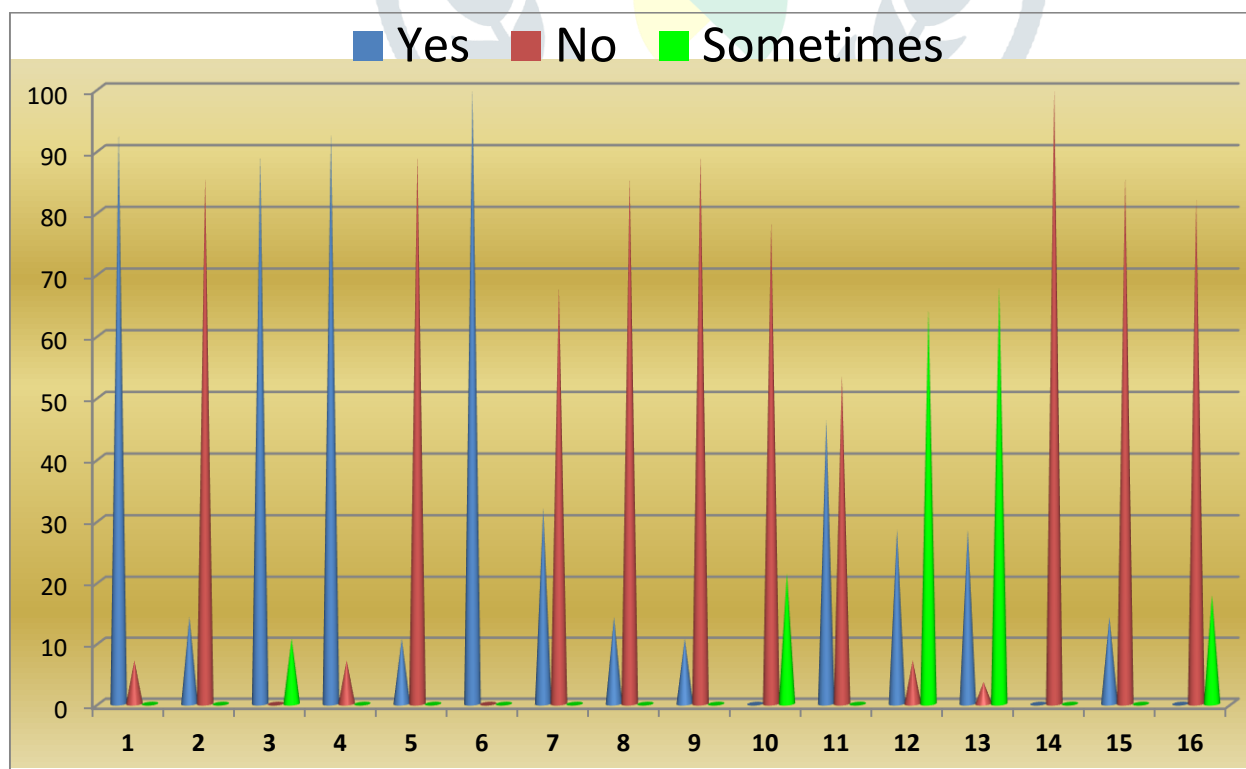


Fig. 2: The Bar diagram showing a detailed analysis of students' showing different response regarding their interest in English subject before intervention.

Table 3 and Figure 2 reveal the responses obtained from the focus group. The responses are thoroughly coded and analysed.

- 92.86% likes coming to school, while only 7.14% don't like to come to school.
- Only 14.29% students study regularly at home after school hours, whereas 85.71% don't.
- 89.29% claims to submit their home assignment on time, and 3% said that they submitted sometimes on time.
- 92.86% seems comfortable in the school environment, while 7.14% said they aren't comfortable in the school.
- 89.29% said they don't like the English subject and only 10.71% said they like the subject.
- An overwhelming 100% agreed that they are very scared of English subject.
- Only 9% seem to understand English while 67.86% don't understand the language properly
- 14.29% can speak basic English whereas 85.71% said they can't speak the language at all.
- 10.71% responded that they find the English class interesting, whereas majority of the pupils(89.28%) said they found it boring.
- 21.43% said that they participated in the English classroom activities, while 78.57% said they didn't.
- 46.43% said they are familiar in basic English grammar, 53.57% said they aren't familiar with the grammar.
- 7.14% said that their teacher doesn't explain the concept till they understood, 28.57% said that the teacher explains and 64.29% said that she does it sometime.
- 100% said that the teacher uses teaching learning materials sometimes.
- 100% said that their parents/guardian don't help them study English at home.
- 85.71% said that they have never participated in scholastic activities (debate, essay, extempore speech, etc), while 14.29% said that they do participate in such activities.
- Only 17.86% said that they read English story books, newspaper, etc sometime, while 82.14% don't read.

Table 4 Shows the Percentage of Students Exhibiting Inattentive Behaviours Has Reduced After Employing the Remedial Measures

Remedial Measures	Boys (N =21)	Percentage	Girls (N=19)	Percentage
Movement and Encouragement	5	23.81	3	15.79
Relating the Textbook Contents to the Real Situations	9	42.86	4	21.05
Guess Work	6	28.57	2	10.53
Use of Teaching Learning Materials	7	33.33	5	26.32
Medium of Instruction	8	38.10	6	31.58

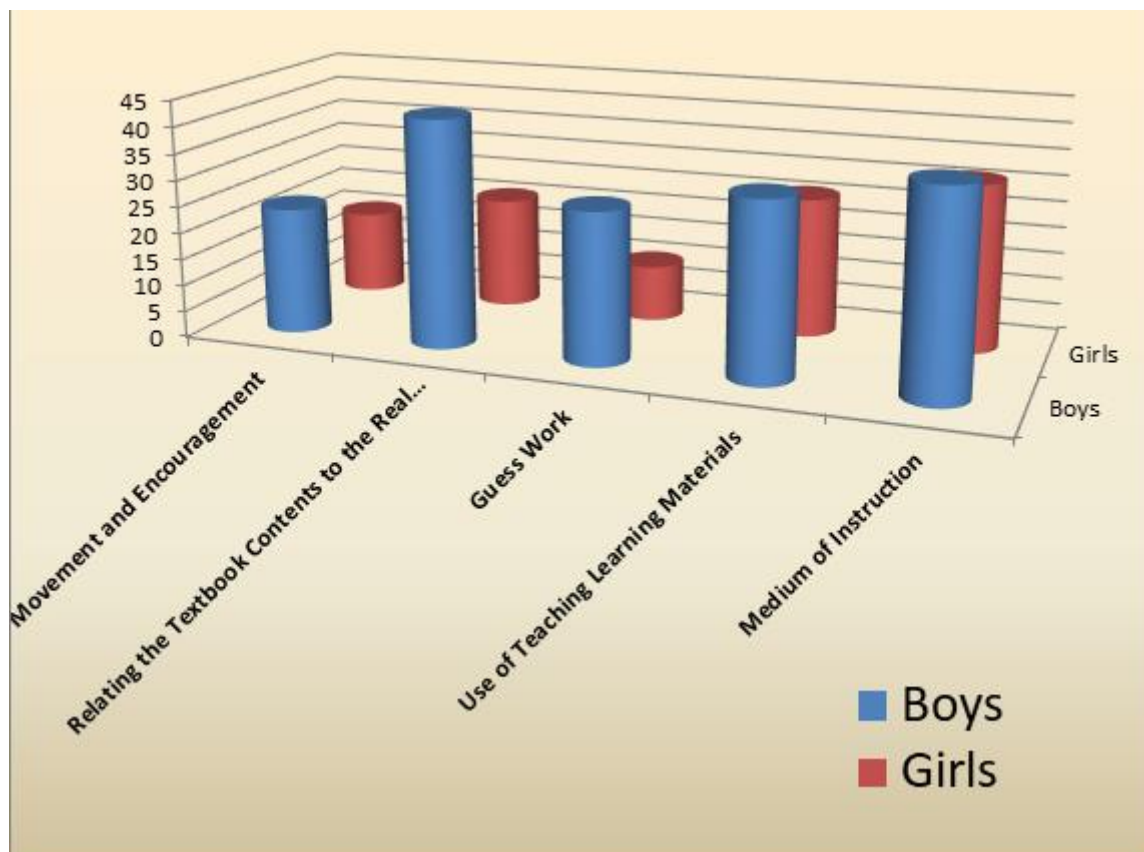


Fig. 3: The Bar diagram showing detailed results of using remedial measures to lessen inattentiveness

Table 4 and Figure 3 reveal the effects of using desirable strategies as intervention to minimize inattentiveness of the pupils. It also shows that after employing the remedial measures, the number of the pupils who were inattentive decreases through the series of observation and tallying of table sheets.

- ✓ Using 'Movement and Encouragement', the number of boys who remained inattentive was 5 or 23.81%. The girls who were inattentive were 3 or 15.79% in English subject class.
- ✓ Using 'Relating the Textbook Content to Real Situations' 9 or 42.86% of boys were found to be attentive. 4 or 21.05% of girls were found to be inattentive during the English class.
- ✓ Using 'Guess Work' strategy, 6 or 28.57% of boys were inattentive during the English class, while 2 or 10.53% of girls were inattentive.
- ✓ During usage of 'Teaching Learning Material', 7 or 33.3% of boys were inattentive, while 5 or 26.32% of girls were inattentive during English class.
- ✓ Using Medium of Instruction (English), 8 or 38.0% were inattentive while 6 or 31.58% were inattentive during English class.

After analyzing the data, it was found out that there is a significant decrease in the inattentiveness of the Grade VIII-B pupils by using desirable remedial measures after intervention. This goes on to show that the inattentiveness in the pupils was successfully minimized.

X. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The following are the important findings obtained from the present investigation:

1. The class was mostly teacher-centered and doesn't provide enough room for innovation on the part of the students. As the teacher occupies a place of authority, the students remain submissive. This leads to anxiety and restlessness, and they eventually get involved in various inattentive behaviors.

2. It is evident from the findings that the students get confused whenever they are asked to speak or explain anything in English. So, they don't follow instructions and don't respond when spoken directly.
3. The student-teacher ratio in the class is 1:40, which clearly indicates that it is very difficult for the teacher to pay attention to each and every student. This is one of the big causes for the increasing inattentive behavior in the class.
4. Usually the English subject teacher was in a hurry to complete the course work for examination purpose. In such situations, usually inattentive behaviors go unnoticed or ignored. As long as the syllabus is complete, the teacher is happy.
5. The study also revealed that most of the students don't have any learning environment at home. The pupils come to school for the sake of coming. They never go home and study. In addition, there is nobody at home to help them with English. This pose as a major reason for their inattentive behavior.
6. Most of the parents/guardians are illiterate and they are not aware of their ward's progress. They never come for parents-teacher meeting. So, the teacher(s) is usually not able to give any feedback to the parents about the child behavior in class.
7. Though some students are interested in the subject, yet they are still afraid and think that English is very difficult. The teacher also fails to adequately motivate the students to make the day's lesson interesting and make them realize the importance of the subject
8. These students lack confidence, especially in a subject like English. So, they always try to escape from any kind of activities such as debates, extempore speech, essay competition, etc.

XII. SUGGESTIONS

- **Encouragement**

The researcher found out if a student's action in class was praised and applauded s\he would try her\his best to be better afterwards. Besides encouragement, to make a student speak out depends on teacher's sensitive observation. Some students would not be brave enough to put up their hands or stand up themselves, but it seemsthat they really had own ideas in their minds. They seem to be having sense of attempting or looking at the teacher. At such moments, the teacher can call out their names.

- **Communicative Teaching**

It is important for the teacher to step in the shoes of the pupils and understand what the lesson feels like to them. The teacher should find out ways to help all the students feel useful and valuable members of the class and be friendly with them, especially the backbenchers.

- **Classroom Activities**

Through collaboration and group discussion, pupils learn to take account of the views of others. So, classroom activities should be varied, such as playing games and group tasks. Activities based on pupils' experiences and interests should be introduced.

- **Colour the Content**

Language learning is most effective when students' interest, motivation and attitudes are taken into consideration. Proper arrangement of colorful teaching aids, such as charts, pictures, use of indigenous materials, etc., would facilitate their use. Beginning the class with storytelling and anecdotes seem a useful way to create a conducive atmosphere for learning.

- **Critical Thinking**

One of the most effective ways to get a student-centric class is to promote critical thinking. For instance, when teaching new words, instead of giving literal translation of the word in mother tongue, the teacher should let the students guess the meaning of the word through imagery, associated words, etc.

XIII. CONCLUSION

It is a truth that there is not one fixed methodology which will guarantee successful learning for all students. Another important thing to remember is every student in a classroom is unique, having different moods and different levels of learning. So, teachers need to first reach out to their students as individuals, so that they can pay attention to the pupils' individual emotions. They should be creative and imaginative and seek various way of teaching in order to make the class more interesting and effective.

Also, the teacher-centered classrooms are to be changed with student-centered classes, and communicative approach and task-based teaching approaches should be employed. An encouraging remark used by the teacher goes a long way to inspire students.

Laidlaw (2005) has rightly said that it is necessary to observe students when giving class, and ask the following questions in the heart:

- *Is s\he bored?*
- *Dose s\he find the work too difficult? (Do I need to think about the language I am using in my explanations? Should I be writing more\less on the board? Should I be using more pictures to help some students follow the learning better?)*
- *Should I make opportunities to find out how much is this student understanding?*
- *Are my teaching methods suitable for this student?*
- *Could I present the material in a different way for different students, to help support individuals' particular learning styles?*
- *Is student X unhappy?*
- *Should I be strict or understanding with this student?*

If teachers bear the above questions in their mind, then it would give the students a feeling of been considerate and discourage disruptive behaviors from beginning.

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