

How setting SMART Goals enhances learners' self-efficacy
beliefs in student-centered learning

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Teaching Context

Title: 3rd grade optional English conversation

Level: 3rd grade high school students (17-19)

Class size: 17 students (4 boys, 13 girls)

Time: Weekly double-50 min classes (100 minutes)

Textbook: None (I make any materials for class)

Goals and Objectives

Overall Goal: prepare students for their individual goals that they have for the next year and beyond.

Objectives:

1. Students are capable of setting realistic goals that suit their personal needs and learning objectives.
2. Students understand the difference between different types of goals, and can predict which goals might not suit them, such as those that are too easy/hard, unattainable in the time period, etc.

3. Students are capable of breaking a larger goal that may seem out of reach into more attainable tasks.

Summary

I joined NUFSS TESOL Master's program from the summer, and started my AR Research from September 2021. In the beginning, I wasn't quite clear on how I wanted to do my research, but as time went on I identified several issues and made changes where I could. I took Learner Autonomy with Dr. Juanita Heigham over the summer, and I decided I wanted to focus on helping my students become more autonomous learners in the future. One thing

I started by introducing weekly "Exit Tickets" for students to reflect on class, ask any questions, and most importantly, set a goal to complete by the following class. We're explicitly not allowed to give homework to our 3rd grade students in the optional classes, as they're focused on studying for entrance exams, but this allowed them to set "homework" for themselves instead.

Over time, I noticed some students struggling with setting "realistic" goals that suited them. Some set goals that they felt were too easy, like watching one YouTube video a week. Others set goals that were objectively impossible, like memorizing 2,000 words in one week. Due to these issues, I decided to introduce them to SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely) goals, and we practiced in class analyzing what makes a goal "helpful" and what an "unrealistic" goal would look like.

After introducing SMART Goals, many students started setting goals that helped them accomplish the things they wanted to more concretely, and by the end of the year many reported that this helped them learn to set goals that fit their needs.

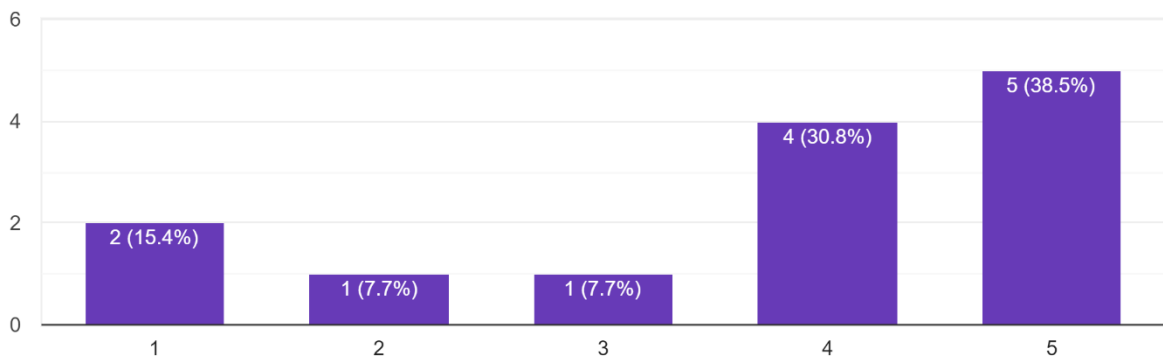
Results

At the end of the year, I gave all students a survey regarding our class, including 3 questions about the weekly SMART Goals they set. 13 of 17 students replied for me.

1. “How helpful was the following activity for learning English? -Setting weekly SMART Goals”
2. “Think about your weekly SMART goals. How did the goals you set change throughout the year?”
3. “Did setting SMART goals each class help you? Why or why not?”

Setting weekly SMART Goals

13 responses



I was a little surprised at how many students reported a negative or neutral experience with SMART goals, as these students in particular hadn't mentioned any issues previously, so I looked closer at these students' responses to the other two questions.

Student 1:

Q2: sorry, I don't remember well...

Q3: I think setting SMART goals didn't help me. In my case, I didn't make a detailed plan about what to do or how to improve my English skill in the long run.

Student 2:

Q2: Not much cuz I always forgot them

Q3: No same as above

Student 3:

Q2: Got harder

Q3: No. I often forgot to try them

Student 4:

Q2: In May and June I often forgot my goal after the class, but I became to remember it after Komorebi [school festival]. I gradually made my goal strict.

Q3: It was a good chance to improve my study plan.

Analyzing the responses of these students, it seems that a major challenge for some students was remembering to focus on their goals when they only had class once per week, or sometimes even less considering things like holidays and class cancellations due to COVID-19. This is understandable, but definitely something that should be addressed and monitored in the future.

Looking at the students who rated this more positively, however, there is also a common theme:

Student 5:

Q2: Only set easy goals isn't good because I can complete it easy. Setting little difficult goals is good because I started learning more hard to complete them.

Q3: I think it can help us. That's why making clear goals is motivated me.

Student 6:

Q2: I planned to write an essay a week. After that, I tried to do it twice a week.

Q3: It was a really good help because the goals made it clear what I should do in a week.

Student 7:

Q2: I have a more specific goal.

Q3: Yes! It becomes clear what to do.

Overall, students reported benefiting from setting weekly SMART goals, though a major challenge some students faced was struggling to remember them throughout the

week. Especially considering our class only meets once per week, or sometimes even less often considering things like holidays, this is to be expected but definitely needs a solution moving forward.

What You Learned

This semester was just as much research for me as it was learning how AR Research works and experimenting with how to do my research in the future. I learned a lot, and intend to use the feedback from my students and issues that I noticed to improve my research next year and beyond.

Students need some way to be reminded throughout the week, such as a daily journal they carry with them regularly, ideally every day with small reflections written in them. From next year, I plan to have students choose a notebook they like, and use part of it to keep track of their reading log, and the majority to keep track of their daily and weekly goals. Hopefully having a tangible reminder will help them keep on track, and we can keep an eye on this issue in the future.

Splitting into an entrance and exit ticket would suit my classroom better, providing time for reflection and peer feedback before setting a new goal. Not a lot of time was focused on this in class, it was more of an individual “homework” with little feedback or accountability, so I want to build this more strongly into my classroom routine in the future, including adding the entrance ticket, and things like regular peer discussions between students, along with more surveys to get a better idea of how this is impacting students and setting both short and long-term goals in the beginning of the year.

We sometimes struggled between deciding how to take the surveys and analyze the data considering the technology available to us, so another thing I intend to do in the future is have students log in to a gmail account at the beginning of class, and use Google forms for future surveys. This will allow me to use the tools available on Google Forms for their surveys, instead of being restricted to the more limited tools I've been using on SurveyMonkey until now. We also have wifi access in our school from this year for teachers and students, allowing them to use their phones for surveys instead of class computers if they prefer.

It's also been challenging to analyze a lot of my data, as a lot of the phrasing makes it subjective and hard to compare between students/across time, so I want to modify my surveys to include more Likert scales, like the chart above.

Future Issues

With so much changing, it's hard to predict what future issues I may come across. One thing I'll especially keep an eye on is whether students are really using the new notebooks, and whether it's helping them to remember or if we should try something else.

I'll also be working with all new students next year, so it's hard to say what the year will look like, and what their goals will be.