**Action Research**

**Students’ Negative Attitude Towards Cambridge Unlock Online Workbook:**

**Reasons with Suggested Solutions**

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**Introduction**

Teaching and learning English language became so demanded in recent decades. Recent trends in teaching English, though, started promoting using student-centered approaches, where students learn English autonomously and they are exposed to authentic contexts and material. At the universities, different programs for teaching and learning English are being applied to provide the undergraduate students with quality of teaching, so that they can interact communicatively and academically to meet the demands of the job market.

Unlock by Cambridge Learning Management System (LMS) is one of the programs for teaching and learning English as a foreign language (TEFL). This program has been adopted at Birzeit University (BZU), Ramallah, Palestine since September,2016; where I work as an instructor of English language. The Cambridge Unlock English program is mainly designed for all university students in different disciplines and it has four levels: Remedial (A1), Intermediate I (A2), Intermediate II (BI), and Advanced (B2). First year students, who enter BZU, conduct a placement test and are placed in the appropriate level based on their results. The Unlock Cambridge courses are aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which divides language activities into four types: receptive (listening and reading), productive (spoken and written), interactive (spoken and written), and mediation (translating and interpreting). It is worth mentioning that this program offers a set of standardized Review Tests, as well as an online workbook based on the Information and Communication Technology approach (ICT) or ICT-based learning.

The Cambridge Unlock Online workbook comes parallel with the main course book. It allows students to save valuable time with automated marking and it enables them track their progress so that they can identify their problematic areas and assist themselves accordingly. Students can also use tools, such as blogs and forums to encourage collaboration, knowledge sharing and communication. It also provides a structured approach to learning, that is built on the critical skills covered in the classroom through fun, engaging, and interactive reading, writing, speaking, listening and language development activities. In a sense, the online workbook offers electronic materials; which students are supposed to solve from their personal accounts.

Over the current semester, I have been teaching Unlock courses to five sections with 150 students from different majors. However, I have had EFL students in my classes who are demotivated towards the Unlock online workbook. Although the main target of this online learning workbook was to create autonomous learners, my students tend to be irresponsible and careless towards this kind of learning and evaluation. They used to activate their accounts and doing their online tasks in the last minute. Some of them even use ready key answers, getting them from students’ forums in order to pass the course only without achieving the utmost learning objectives, which are driven from such an online workbook. Among all of this, I became more aware of this problem and its seriousness from the report that I got from the gradebook on Cambridge Unlock Online Workbook, where I can follow the students’ progress and grades. The gradebook at that time showed me that many of my students activated their accounts and started their online tasks too late. It also showed few of them were solving the workbook tasks and activities by units. This issue got my concern and motivated me to start this investigation in this action research, which mainly addressed two main questions:

1. What are the reasons that demotivated my students towards the Unlock Online Workbook?
2. What are the suggested solutions?

To get thorough information about the possible answers for these questions, I have reviewed different studies and examined some literature conducted on using ICT-based learning. This is because the paradigm of the Cambridge Unlock Online Workbook was built on the ICT-based learning. I also had a look at the results of some studies from different countries related to students’ attitudes towards such a recent approach in teaching. Then, I opened an unstructured discussion with my students as a trial to spot some reasons that may stand behind their attitude and interpret why they were demotivated, so that I can suggest some solutions.

**Literature Review**

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)-based learning has become a main aspect in the teaching-learning interaction. In this approach, the chalkboards or whiteboards are replaced with an interactive system, using students’ own smartphones or other devices for learning autonomously. Students can also watch videos at home and solve different interactive exercises.Thus,integrating ICT-based learning in education has an important role in facilitating the process and the system of teaching and learning (Rhema & Miliszewka,2014). Different studies revealed the effectiveness of this approach on instruction, learning and assessment, and they proved its positive results on the educational change and reform (Kent& Facer,2004).

ICT-based learning has become a new trend in foreign language teaching and learning all over the world (Liu,2009). Moreover, previous research showed the effectiveness of this type of teaching and learning on raising the educational quality and connecting the learning to the real-life context. Its major role on transforming the educational environment into learner-centered classes was confirmed, too (Lowther, et al.2008). Besides, the value of using ICT-based learning was confirmed in a variety of studies that revealed that students with this approach would achieve better results in communication, cooperation and problem solving. Online materials, for example, can be accessible 24 hours a day, and they tend to be available on the internet. Thus, the learners’ knowledge will be enlarged through engaging them into meaningful context, where they select, organize and access audios, videos, …etc (Fue, 2013). E-books usually offer some reading applications that supply vocabulary building activities and games related to improving reading comprehension skill. Furthermore, based on the constructive learning approach, ICT-based learning taps on higher-level concepts. In McMann’s study (2009) cited by (Fu,2013), it is shown that there was statistically significant correlation between using ICT and the acquisition of higher-thinking skills. Generally, using ICT-based learning may trigger different characteristics, which are: autonomy, capability and creativity (Lowther et al,2008). Students would also become autonomous learners since they take control of their learning and they become capable to work autonomously and with others.

In terms of the students’ attitude towards using ICT-based learning in their instruction, several studies were undertaken to address this issue. Many revealed that students’ attitudes were mostly positive (Rhema & Miliszewka,2014; Bush,1995; Olatoya,2011). On the other hand, other studies showed that using ICT-based learning may generate different challenges that would affect students’ attitudes towards using this strategy in teaching (Fu,2013). One of these obstacles is related to students’ mobility and anxiety over the standardized test results. The lack of the technological access and skills, and the insufficient number of the academic advisors as well as the absences of the instructor’s feedback may also reduce the students’ motivation towards such a technique. Some literature showed that the gender also plays a key role in creating the differences in the perceptions of the usefulness of technology, that male students tend to have more positive attitude towards ICT-based learning than female students (Rhema & Miliszewka,2014).

**Methodology**

After reviewing some previous studies and literature, I held a free discussion class with my students asking them about the reasons that may stand behind their carelessness and demotivation towards Cambridge Online Workbook. From my student’ complaints, I could induct and correlate some factors that negatively impacted their attitudes towards using this Cambridge Online Workbook. The anxiety over the standardized testing in Cambridge Online Workbook could be a reason that makes students afraid and worried from this system. The students mentioned that their responses on the exercises in this system are irreversible, and their answers are considered to be one shot, which may cause this frustration and demotivation among them. This interprets why some of them use ready key answers ” *We choose the correct answers and we are pretty sure that they are the right ones, yet when we submit them, they are considered to be wrong to discover later that this was due to leaving a space or forgetting to capitalize some words, and you know, once we have submitted the answers we cannot try again*”.

Others also explained:” *Solving Cambridge Online Workbook alone requires us spending two hours to solve one unit only and at the end we lose grades, but by using ready answers we save time and we get better grades*”

Moreover, another factor, that I could infer from my discussion with my students, is the lack of the technological access and skills. First year students, in particular, joined the university without being skillful enough to cope with such online systems. Thus, they raised the issue of their need to sufficient training on this type of technology. They also mentioned their problems with their codes as a reason for being activating their accounts late, *“When we joined the university we expected more training on this system. They gave us an overall orientation, yet it was insufficient…” .* Several students, on the other hand, addressed the issue of not having personal laptops or computer devices, “and *you know, Cambridge Online must not be solved* *and logged in from smartphones*”. Thus, some studentsdo not have easy access to this system and they either borrow laptops or solve Cambridge Online Workbook from the devices in the university campus, which is impractical as they explained*.*

In terms of solving the online workbook units late, students explained*:” Cambridge is available during the whole semester, this may give us a chance to delay solving the activities till the deadline.. “.* The absence of the instructors’ feedback could be another reason that makes them this online workbook carelessly. “ *We do not know when we get the correct answers until we submit them, sometimes we have some questions to clarify certain points, but we have no instructors to ask, thus it is better and safer to get ready key answers …”*

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Based on the investigation in this action research, different issues were raised to shape and answer the research two main questions which were:

1. What are the reasons that demotivated students towards the Unlock Online Workbook?
2. What are the suggested solutions?

From the previous sections, I could infer different reasons that may stand behind my students’ negative attitude towards the Unlock workbook, and these reasons are listed as following with some suggested solutions:

1. The anxiety over the standardized testing in Cambridge Online Workbook (Unlock) could be one reason that caused students’ demotivation. Students described this system as a one-shot performance, and all their mistakes are graded. The absence of the instructor’s feedback and scaffolding may also enlarge the students’ anxiety, that they revealed their need to consult their instructor about some questions but usually they do not have, which caused this absurdity within this system.

This conclusion raised the issue of activating the forum in Cambridge System, where students will be able to contact with the teacher and their classmates, share their enquire, which makes them feel more comfortable.

1. Another reason that may stand behind the students’ demotivation is the lack of the technological access and skills. Students suggested the lack of having personal computers or laptops as an obstacle that confronts them within this system. Generally speaking, students explained their need to more training on this online workbook, and they explained if they could have been given two or three preparation lectures about Cambridge Online Workbook, this would reduce some of their tension. Besides, it seems to me that it would be easier to them if they are enabled to access Cambridge Online Workbook from their smartphones, which would make it appeals more interactive and fun.
2. As for the third reason, I inferred that the flexibility in the time constrains that we applied may make students unaware of the importance of the time, which interprets why they solve the Online workbook tasks too late. Thus, locking Cambridge Unlock Workbook regularly by units could assist in solving this issue, as well as giving students quizzes and tests from the online workbook materials.

Overall, I could conclude in this action research that there are certain techniques I should have changed before the beginning of this semester, and these reforms are mainly technical strategies, but would give tremendous positive results on students’ attitudes and might encourage them to get more benefits from Cambridge Online Workbook. That the main purpose of this ICT-based learning was meant to develop their English language skills autonomously rather than overwhelming them.

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