

Title: Role of technology in attendance enhancement of ESL learners

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Summary of Outcomes: Attendance improved by 50% of the target group with the use of this technology intervention (and see below).

Abstract: Through time, we noticed that there is a significant drop in the attendance of ESL learners during the months of January and February every year. Most of our ESL learners do shift work and that is why their attendance seems to be irregular, this happens throughout the year. We understand that the poor attendance could be due to very cold winter conditions; however, last winter was quite mild with few very cold wintry days.

We have two instructors in attendance for every lesson. One instructor teaches the intermediate level and the other the basic level class. Classes are sometimes held together.

As classroom instructors, we started exploring different ways of reaching out to our learners to try to turn attendance around through that time period. We thought, in the world of modern technology, many of our ESL learners carry cell phones, ipads or have easy access to computers. As a result, we decided to post class schedules on our college web site. These class schedules included:

- dates and times of classes,
- class activities,
- skills to be taught,
- and activities in the community.

Previous to this research project, we randomly distributed monthly special event calendars only. But for our project intervention, we decided to post the weekly class schedules on the college web site every Friday for the upcoming week. Secondly, we notified the learners through emails and provided a link to the web site at the same time so they knew to check the college Website.

Question: "If we were to post the upcoming week's activities on the College Website, and send a follow-up e-mail to our ESL students so they could check the Website, would that

help improve attendance rates?”

The Intervention (including Baseline and Timeline):

Timeline:

The time period for the project was three weeks, March 19 to April 15, 2012.
(There was a week break for Easter through this period.)

Attendance:

Attendance baseline: 10 learners per day (average) with non-attendance in Jan/Feb

Classes are held on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 7 to 9 p.m.

Intervention

Every week on Fridays, starting from March 16, we uploaded on the web site the lesson plans and activities that would take place in the following week.

Information was uploaded on:

March 16 for the week of March 19 to March 22

March 23 for the week of March 26 to March 29

April 13 for the week of April 16 to April 19

Information dissemination:

_Table format (as learners had been taught in class how to read schedules in tabulated form and obtain information).

Data collection Techniques:

Attendance records

Survey – use of web site

Group discussions on the project

The Findings:

Attendance increased by 2 learners (**50% of target**)

Out of 13 learners surveyed – 11 did check the web site and 2 did not

Out of 11 learners who checked the web site:

- 9 checked more than one week
- 8 mentioned that web site information helped them to decide whether they should attend classes

- 8 found the web site information very useful
- 3 found the web site information useful

Other Findings:

1. Learners got familiar with the college web site
2. Our Thursday computer classes, helped learners to get comfortable using computers and the college web site.
3. Research team met once a week. That helped to plan better lessons and coordinate the delivery of the lesson plans and conduct various activities.
4. The research team has decided to continue to meet on a weekly basis as it is proving beneficial to both teachers and learners.

Discussion and Recommendations for other Practitioners:

1. Emails can be effective way of reaching out to learners with information.
2. Prior knowledge of what is happening in the class does help learners to plan their attendance.
3. Better planning and coordination of classes, lessons and activities happen when instructors meet once a week or in a fortnight on a regular basis.
4. As instructors working together, we became more intentional about what we were going to teach within the timeline of the activities posted.

Our next step will now be :

1. Continue to meet weekly to plan and upload weekly classroom content and activities ahead of time.
 2. Provide opportunities to learners who need extra help to navigate through the internet and access emails.
 3. The research team is exploring the idea of weekly posting as a simple question or task related to the lesson on the web site. This will provide the research team with new and valuable information about learner engagement.
 4. We would like to explore another Research-in-Practice project on learner Engagement, including using this approach for the key winter months.
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