A Study of Cooperation in Speaking Homework on Spoken English Teaching for Medical College Students

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Abstract. Based on the current situation of spoken English teaching in China, the author has conducted a study of cooperative speaking homework on spoken English teaching and learning. The development of internet and educational technology has expanded classroom teaching to home learning. In this study, some medical college students were divided into groups and cooperatively fulfilled their oral tasks after class, which have been video recorded for check. It has brought some outcomes. First, it can arouse student’s interest in English speaking; second, students learn to be cooperative instead of competitive; third, students become more confident and creative in learning. The study also indicates how teachers help students to learn English speaking better via the modern educational technology and instruments outside classrooms.

Introduction

Nowadays, with the development of internet and educational techniques, classrooms are no longer the only situations in which students can learn how to speak a foreign language, and even students-centered teaching methods are no more as popular and effective as before, let alone teacher-centered classroom teaching. Due to shortage of teachers and limited teaching resources, most college English teaching is undertaken in large classes, esp. for non-English majors. A normal class may include 50 students or more. Thus there are three major problems: first, there is lack of interaction between the teacher and students; second, students have little chance to put on their performances to practice oral English; and in most classrooms there are thickly arranged and fixed desks and chairs, which are unfavorable for group activities when practicing oral English. In such situations, teachers are under great pressure because they are obliged to fulfill the tasks of the teaching syllabus within limited time, let alone sparing students enough time to practice their oral English. Therefore, most students feel bored because they are passive in class.

In China, college English is a basic and compulsory course for college students and the newly-edited College English Teaching Syllabus focuses on the students’ language competence, esp. speaking ability and communicative skills to meet the demands on future daily work and life. So how to teach English speaking better is always a task for English language teachers.

The development of information technology and its globalization has brought new challenges in higher education in China, so most reforms focus on how to improve the quality of education and teaching, and how to cultivate students to meet the development of the modern society. The information technology provides the possibility of various technology-based methods of teaching and learning, such as multimedia, MOOCS and flipped classrooms, thus teachers of College English benefit a lot from the development of internet and information technology.

In this research, the author employs the cooperative learning theory into after-class homework, which is supposed to make up the limited classroom performance and creates an environment for students’ learning of speaking English in students’ leisure time, and the author tends to study whether cooperation in after-class homework can promote students’ oral English.
**Research Background**

Theories for foreign language and second language teaching mainly developed in the 1970s and 1980s, and the Input Theory of Krashen [1] and the Output Theory of Swain [2] got much attention. So direct and competitive teaching was prevailing, which makes some students passive and less confident in learning. Later on, researchers became focused their interest on individual learners, their needs, character, language level, etc. Individualistic teaching was also less successful than cooperative learning and teaching [3].

Cooperative learning started in America at the beginning of the 1970s, developed in the 1980s, and was widely used in second language and foreign language learning in classrooms. In cooperating learning, students work in groups at a mutual task, interact actively with one another and try to achieve a good remark or score shared by the entire group. Cooperative learning is a successful way to motivate students’ learning interest, promote their successes, train students’ teamwork spirit and enhance their self-esteem [4,5]. But the research on cooperative speaking homework outside classrooms is rare in China, due to lack of educational technology.

With the reform of College English teaching, Wen Qiufang put forward the theory of Output-driven Hypothesis based on the theory of Output Hypothesis of Swain[6][7]. The theory of Output-driven Hypothesis puts more emphasis on learning in speaking and writing, assuming that speaking and writing tasks can motivate and encourage students to do more input work, such as listening and reading, in order to fulfill output tasks, for example, speaking and writing. That is, in foreign language learning, output language tasks become the driving or stimulating force to inspire students to do more language input attentively, as well as language output. For instance, in order to speak more fluently and get a more standard accent, students would listen more, read more, and enhance their language sense.

Due to this background and the demands of College English Teaching Syllabus, English speaking competence is the focus in college English teaching and learning. But it is difficult for teachers to arrange and check students’ speaking tasks in the classroom environments, because of a large class and limited time. For students, it takes time to master fluent spoken English without lots of oral practice outside classrooms.

So this study attempts to apply cooperative learning into after-class learning environments, and to study whether it is a good way for students to improve English speaking with the aid of IT technological and digital tools, e.g. smart phones, cameras, network platform, etc.

**Research Procedures**

1) The researcher chooses 2 classes of students randomly as subjects, assigns them to mock a job interview. One class is clinical majors, and the other is majors of mental health, totally 97 first-year college students.

2) According to their willingness, students of each class are generally divided into several groups, about six students a group. 44 clinical majors are divided into seven groups, with five groups including six subjects each, and two groups including seven subjects each. The class of mental health is also divided into seven groups, with six groups including six members and one group seven members.

3) The researcher explains in class how to prepare a face-to-face job interview, different jobs and interview settings, guides them to take different role responsibilities, such as the director, producer, secretary, performers, etc.

4) Students are required to create conversations of job interviews, record the mock scene of job interviews, and after two weeks submit their written report (designed and printed by the researcher beforehand) and their videos.

5) The written report covers requirements on the homework, and mainly includes: name of job interviews, conversation script, different roles of group members, achievements and problems, self evaluation, etc.
6) The researcher gives final scores to each group (individuals get the same score as the group total score) and shows some videos in class, via multimedia, in order to stimulate their interest and encourage students to do more speaking tasks in after-class activities.

Results Analysis

1) Analysis of the written report
Totally there are 14 written reports submitted, most of which were fulfilled as required. The names of job interview covers hospital recruitment interview, salesperson interview, teacher interview, manager interview and so on, among which 5 interviews are about hospital recruitment interview, 4 about teacher interview, 3 about salesperson interview and 1 is manager interview. (Refer with: Table 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Reports(14)</th>
<th>Hospital</th>
<th>Salesperson</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Manager</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent (100%)</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This result indicates that students are familiar with teaching situations and some medical knowledge, so they have something to talk about even if they forget some lines before the camera in performance.

The conversation scripts vary from about 860 words to 1550 words in different settings, including words between the interviewer and two or three interviewees, or between two interviewers and different interviewees.

The written reports also show that most group members are active in taking different roles in the activity, among whom some take two roles such as producer and interviewer, or interviewee and editor. And self-evaluation shows that nearly 89% students have promoted their oral English and courage, and deepen their friendship.

According to the written reports, there are also some problems. About 17% students find it difficult to perform their interview in a proper quiet place; because of the school schedule, most time the classrooms are occupied. So most groups can only choose lunch time to prepare their interview. About 12% students think it is not so convenient to edit their videos because of lack of technological skills, esp. female groups. And some complain that some particular individual is lazy and passive in fulfilling the task. There is one student abandoning the task because of illness.

All in all, most students report they improve a lot in this cooperation homework. They find much more confidence, pronounce better in English speaking, and can also create conversations with others. And they expect that they can continue such after-class cooperation in speaking activities, for example, making up a short play and putting it on performance.

2) Analysis of videos of job interviews
The videos vividly show how hard students worked after class and their great achievements. From 14 videos submitted as well as the written report, the researcher finds that most students have made great efforts to accomplish the task and most mock interviews are great successes. The videos last from about 15 minutes to 30 minutes. Among the 14 videos, 11 videos are formal mock interviews, in five of which students all wear uniforms according to interview settings; and three of which are informal and humorous interviews, just like micro films, and including code-switching between Chinese and English in performance. And 13 videos are captioned with English subtitles, 2 videos with both Chinese and English subtitles. (Refer with: Table 2)
Table 2. Videos of mock interviews of 14 groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal</th>
<th>Informal</th>
<th>Captioned with English</th>
<th>Captioned with both English and Chinese</th>
<th>In uniform</th>
<th>No uniform</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are also some problems about video editing. Due to different video techniques, some groups are not good at remaking the video, esp. the group including more girls. Besides problems about video editing, the video also indicates that some students were a little shy and nervous in the mock interview, due to lack of good preparation or courage.

**Pedagogical Implications**

Based on the written reports and the videos, the researcher finds that cooperative learning in speaking homework is successful for medical college students to learn speaking English outside classrooms, making up the shortage of oral practice in classrooms. There are several outcomes coming about in the following.

First, after-class cooperation in speaking English can improve students’ oral English and promote the performance assessment for students. In after-class cooperative group work, students are willing to take on the tasks, determined in working towards their goal. Motivated and driven by the final mutual score, they have great determination to endure any difficulty and frustration on the sake of group honor. So the group is likely to get better results than that of individuals, and also enhance their self-evaluation in performance.

Second, students working together in speaking activity can promote team spirit and friendship between students. In after-class group work, they work cooperatively with great interest in their learning, and learn to know each other, how well each learns, what to do together and each individual’s role. During the process of cooperative learning, they can develop caring and liking with each other, committed to the group, regardless of their different characters and attitudes.

Thirdly, after-class cooperation in speaking English can develop creative insights and enhance self-esteem and confidence. As the Chinese saying goes, three heads are better than one. Students in cooperation can sparkle good ideas, produce stimulating feelings and original expressions, and creatively solve problems. It is also found that cooperative work after class can enhance self-esteem and confidence of students. Each member can have a basic sense of self-acceptance and respect for oneself, as well as other group members, feel more confident and enjoy his/her own share of success as part of the whole group.

**References**


