

Study on Warm-up Activities in College English Class

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze the effects of warm-up activities in college English teaching on non-English majors and tries to probe how teachers implement warm-up activities in college English class. It is based on a qualitative study design in which questionnaire is used as the data collection procedure. The participants of the questionnaire are 143 college students all from non-English major, and 121 valid questionnaires are returned. According to the analysis of the data collected by the questionnaire, findings are categorized and discussed within the scope of the study.

1. INTRODUCTION

As an indispensable part of the beginning of a class, warm-up activity plays a very important role in English class. Many researchers have made studies in depth on warm-up activities in English class. Allwright (1984) claims that warm-up activities are designed to attract students' attention, to help them put aside distracting thoughts, and to get them ready to focus individually and as groups on whatever activities that follow. Kay (1995) defines 'warm up' as the first stage of a lesson plan. He holds that it is an effective way to help the students begin to think in English and to review previously introduced material, and different types of warm-ups help provide variety and interest in the lesson. XuBo (2007) puts forward that warm-up activity is a kind of teaching behavior when teachers start a new lesson. In this study, warm-up activities refer to the mental preparation and background knowledge preparation conducted by teachers before the formal English class teaching activities. The activities are usually guided by teachers through various forms, including asking questions, discussion of given topics, playing games, word guessing, role-playing, short videos, etc.

What's more, the importance and role of warm-up activities in college English teaching have been discussed. Turney (1975) and other scholars explore the function of

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warm-up activities for the first time. They propose that proper warm-up activities have the characteristics of arousing students' attention, activating students' learning motivation, constructing learning objectives, clarifying learning tasks and building a bridge between new and old knowledge, so that teachers can guide students into a new class quickly. Liu Guiping (2007), Wang Pei (2008) and others mentioned that from the perspective of improving language ability, warm-up activities can create a good language environment for students to cast them into English classes quickly and actively, arouse students' interest in language learning and English teaching contents, and exercise students' language skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation to a certain extent. These studies focus on the functions, characteristics and importance of warm-up activities in English class. However, there are few empirical studies on warm-up activities in English classroom in China, especially in College English class. Therefore, based on the qualitative study, this paper aims to analyze the effects of warm-up activities in college English teaching on non-English majors and how teachers implement warm-up activities in college English class.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

By collecting questionnaires from non-English major sophomores of grade 2019, combined with the warm-up questions in each unit of College English Intensive Reading III published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press and edited by Dong Yafen, this paper aims to study the influence of warm-up activities in College English class on non-English majors and how college English teachers should carry out warm-up activities in a better way.

2.1 Research questions

The research questions in the study are as followed:

- (1) What are the effects of warm-up activities in college English class?
- (2) How can teachers implement warm-up activities in college English class?

2.2 Participants and research methods

The participants of this study are the non-English college students from the College of Post and Telecommunication of WIT. These students are sophomore, and they have learned the college English for three semesters, so they have a good basis for English.

The questionnaire is targeted at 143 college students all from the non-English major, and 121 valid questionnaires are returned. All questions in the questionnaire are multiple-choice questions. The questionnaire listed issues are concise, accurate and clear in order to avoid ambiguity and to guarantee that the questions are quite easy for the questionnaire respondents to understand. The author affirms that the questionnaire is only for the study, not for other purposes, so as to eliminate the concerns of the questionnaire respondents.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to the effective questionnaire data, we made a deep analysis. The findings of two research questions are presented.

3.1 The effects of warm-up activities in college English class

Firstly, warm-up activities can stimulate students' passion for college English class. Because of the limited space of this article, the figure that shows whether the students

want to have warm-up activities before learn a new unit in English class is not listed here. Form the questionnaire, 63.64% of the students want to have warm-up activities before learning a new unit in English teaching class, and 31.4% of the students think that they can accept warm-up activities. What’s more, 36.36% of the students think that warm-up activities can always motivate them to learn the new text, and 48.76% of the students think that warm-up activities can sometimes arouse their interest in learning the following-text.

Aspects	Frequency	Proportion
Preview the relevant topic of the new text	58	47.93%
Preview some new core vocabularies in advance	53	43.8%
Have more chances to listen to and speak English in class	48	39.67%
Give me some time to concentrate my attention to class	60	49.59%
Activate the atmosphere in class	78	64.46%
Others	12	9.92%
Total	121	100%

Figure 1. The aspects students can learn for the following text.

Secondly, the aspects of warm-up activities can provide students to learn the new text are diverse. Figure 1 shows the benefits that warm-up activities can provide students in regard to learning the subsequent text. It can be seen that the proportions of each option are not much different. The highest proportion (64.46%) of the five aspects is to “activate the atmosphere in class”, and 49.59% of the students hold that warm-up activities can give them some time to concentrate their attention on the class, which indicates that warm-up activities can activate classroom atmosphere in order to attract students’ attention and make them quickly enter the learning state. 47.93% and 43.8% of the students respectively think that warm-up activities can help them preview the relevant topic of the new text and learn some new core vocabularies in advance.

Skills	Frequency	Proportion
Vocabulary and grammar	62	51.24%
Oral and listening skills	76	62.81%
Cultural knowledge	63	52.07%
Life Experience	49	40.5%
Others	15	12.4%
Total	121	100%

Figure 2. The aspects of skills students want to learn.

Thirdly, figure 2 shows the aspects of skills students want to acquire form warm-up activities. It can be known that the proportion (62.81%) of “oral and listening skills” is the highest of five aspects, which means the importance of listening and speaking cannot be ignored. In addition, it can be found that the proportions of “vocabulary and grammar” (51.24%), “cultural knowledge” (52.07%), and “life experience” (40,5%) are not much different, which indicates the needs of students is more extensive. Therefore, what can be seen from this figure is that warm-up activities can let students not only learn the vocabulary and grammar, and listening and speaking skills, but also know about the background information and cultural knowledge related to the text they are going to learn in class.

Finally, in the textbook College English Intensive Reading III, each unit provides students three warm-up questions to discuss before learning a new text. These questions

are closely relevant to the topic of a new text. So students can get a general understanding of the theme of the new text by discussing these questions. From the questionnaire, there are 46.28% of the students who sometimes preview the warm-up questions in the textbook before class, and about 20% of the students often look at the warm-up questions in advance, which shows that most students are interested in the warm-up questions and are willing to preview the questions. When asked whether the warm-up questions can help students expand their thoughts in discussion, the results are pretty good. 56.2% of the students think that the warm-up questions are helpful sometimes, and 24.79% of the students hold that the warm-up questions are always useful, which indicates that the warm-up questions provided by the textbook are pretty helpful to students.

3.2 The implementation of warm-up activities in college English class

As for the forms of activities, the main way is to assign students to take turns to answer questions, and there is less interaction between students. Some teachers occasionally use the multimedia to carry out warm-up activities. From the questionnaire, there are some aspects that teachers need to think about and improve to implement warm-up activities in a better way.



Figure 3. The forms of students' favorite warm-up activities.

Firstly, figure 3 shows the students' favorite forms of warm-up activities. It is easy to see that "Short videos" is the most popular form of warm-up activities, accounting for 88.43%. It shows that most students are more interested in the audio-visual form. Correspondingly, teachers should make full use of the multimedia technology. It not only can motivate students' activity and make class atmosphere lively, but can improve teaching efficiency in class. Playing games is the second one that 46.28% of the students expect, which indicates that students prefer interactive and active warm-up forms. The proportions of "group discussion" and "Question and Answer" are 23.14% and 9.09% respectively. These two forms of warm-up activities are not very popular with some students.

Secondly, teachers should integrate the course contents and the factual English competence of students to find the best join point of teaching and learning. That's to say, the warm-up questions provided by the textbook may be difficult for students to understand and answer, so teachers need to redesign the questions according to students' learning competence. From the questionnaire, 43.8% of the students think that these questions are a bit difficult, but acceptable. However, 37.19% of the students find it hard to understand the warm-up questions clearly. Meanwhile, this data can partly explain why over 20% of the students seldom participate in warm-up activities.

Thirdly, the length of warm-up activities is important for teachers to control properly.

Length	Frequency	Proportion
5-8 minutes	45	37.19%
8-10 minutes	53	43.8%
10-15 minutes	10	8.26%
15-18 minutes	13	10.74%
Total	121	100%

Figure 4. The length of warm-up activities.

From figure 4, it can be seen that over 80% of the students think that warm-up activities should be controlled within less than 10 minutes, and only 10.74% of the students hold that it should be with 15-18 minutes. Therefore, teachers need to find a good balance. For familiar areas, warm-up activities can be shorter, and for relatively new areas, warm-up activities can be longer. The warm-up activities must be sufficient, and the time should be adjusted at an appropriate time according to the needs. Teachers try not to shorten or cut off a certain warm-up activity because of the urgent completion of the established teaching objectives, thus affecting the mood of students and ultimately influencing the teaching effect.

Finally, the contents of warm-up activities should be diverse in order to satisfy students' learning expectations for English. From figure 2 in 3.1, the aspects of skills students want to learn through warm-up activities are quite extensive, so teachers need to make a good and adequate preparation for warm-up activities. What's more, in the process of warm-up activities, teachers should flexibly grasp their own role. Teachers should act as guides, try their best to lead students to finish the activities cooperatively, and to activate the atmosphere of the classroom.

4. CONCLUSION

The present study mainly investigates the effects and the implementation of warm-up activities in college English class. For college English class, not like English class in primary school or middle school, the aspects of skills college students want to acquire in English class is more diverse and extensive, so teachers should design warm-up activities according to students' needs in order to improve students' learning interest and passion, make the classroom atmosphere more active and ultimately improve students' diverse skills, especially the communicative skills of spoken English.

But this study is also constrained by limited time, imperfect analysis tools and the in comprehensive perspectives concerned. Therefore, the depth and width of the results are far from satisfaction. However, the researcher still expects that the effects of warm-up activities in college English class and the suggested methods on implementing warm-up activities for teachers will be further proved in the future research, and the outcome of this study may become helpful to researchers, especially who are paying attention to English teaching of students in colleges.

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