

On the efficiency of Self-efficacy and reflective study of Learning Mechanism

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Abstract. Learning is cognitive process of knowledge study, especially foreign languages, but some factors can influence the efficiency of learning in many ways. This paper puts forward that self-efficacy and reflective study should be the main impact on learning mechanism, so how to find the proper ways to stimulate the motivation of learner's study is the main research question of this paper, and the suggestions are shown in the end, that is the out-class activities as the effective supplement of self-study.

Introduction

As the impact of globalization and the need of economic development, China has enhanced its English teaching for the last 10 years. Some kindergartens have bilingual classes. Most of the primary schools have offered English as a required course from Grade One. Traditional teacher-centered teaching is replaced by student-centered method. Reform in English teaching obviously works when a new generation appears with better English ability than their parents.

When this generation graduates from college, most of them still won't be able to communicate with foreigners freely, nor switch between English and Chinese fluently; let alone write in English accurately. A lot has been discussed recently on English teaching at the college level. To some extent, it is reasonable to say it is a failure because exam-oriented education misleads and impedes college English teaching in China, such as College English Test Band Four or Six (CET4, CET6). Although the passing rate has been increasing, students' communicative skills still lag behind.

Case study

Let's take CCIT (Changchun Institute of Technology) as an example. It is a four-year comprehensive college in northeast part of China, which has about 13,500 students from all around the country, whose English abilities are totally different. Each week English classes are 4-6 hours, but for freshmen and sophomores only. In order to fulfill teaching tasks, teachers could not give students enough time to practice what they learned in class. With limited time, they had to reduce teaching content, which then influences final results on the exam. From this point, it can be seen in-class English teaching at the college level is too limited in time and space to fit for students' communicative needs, which also influences students' motivation to learn language.

Confucius, the famous Chinese educator, says "The one who knows it is not so good as the one who likes it; the one who likes it is not so good as the one who takes delight in it." So motivating college students to learn English becomes a serious problem in China.

Current pedagogy shows there is no universally correct way to learn English for every individual. When in-class English teaching is no longer enough for the diverse needs of English learning, out-class activities start to work on developing appreciation of English culture and fluency in the language. The evidence shows exposure to authentic language and opportunities to use the language in natural situations are keys to out-of-class language learning that forms part of an in-country language learning experience [1].

In this instance, out-class activities become a focus of concern. Out-class learning, as it relates to language learning, has recently been broadly defined as any kind of learning that takes place outside

the classroom and involves self-instruction, naturalistic learning or self-directed naturalistic learning [2]. However in this paper it is narrowed as a series of activities organized by the teachers and the students at college on the purpose of enhancing students' English ability, especially for their self-efficacy and reflective study.

Effective methods of learning mechanism

“English Culture Festival”, in which a series of out-of-class activities are promoted, has been held in CCIT for eight years since 2003. They all have the same theme, “Experiencing English”. It was usually in October, but was moved to May-June this year for the weather's sake, because how to create a good English learning atmosphere is very important.

In terms of five basic language skills, listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation (interpretation); out-class English activities are designed as English culture lectures, English reading and vocabulary contests, English riddle games, English handwriting shows, English tongue twister games, English speaking contests, contest of English songs, English dubbing, English drama English debate and English corner. All of the students are encouraged to take part in these activities. On the last Friday night of the June, there is always a big English party celebrated by the teachers and students, in which all the winners in the contests would get together and have a big show. It is the climax of the “English Culture Festival”.

After getting involved in these out-of-class activities, students know their advantages and disadvantages better, so they can find the right way to improve their English ability. At the same time it is the right time for English clubs to recruit new members, which highlights students' college life. English clubs offer college students a platform to share common interests with others and to be more sociable. Several English clubs have been set up for 3-4 years, such as English speech club, English debate team and English drama club. Students use all the opportunities they can to communicate in English which is helpful to build up their self-esteem and self-confidence. These activities fulfill the students' desire to learn English well and to increase their enthusiasm to learn.

According to the participator's English ability, out-of-class activities are divided into three levels: basic, intermediate and advanced.

First, lectures on English culture are very important for the students to establish appreciation for English language and the customs in English speaking countries. Some professors who came from abroad are invited to give the lectures, accompanied by pictures and videos of their own experience. They are persuasive and allow the students to have a vivid image, which stimulates their curiosity for knowledge of different cultures and motivates them to learn the language well. This activity is popular among the students who are interested in English language and culture.

McCarthy (1990. xiii) pointed out that, “No matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wide range of meaning, communication in an L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way.” Specifically, Nation (1990) indicated that getting learners to do language tasks when their vocabulary is inadequate for the task is a frustration experience. So in order to enlarge students' English vocabulary, the Contest of English Reading and Vocabulary is regularly organized, usually twice a semester. During some festivals, English riddle games play an important role and become one of the most popular out-of-class English learning activities. Many students feel bored and find it hard to learn and memorize English vocabulary in English classes. After they join in these activities with enthusiasm, the challenge and fun lead them to learn more English words and enhance their English reading ability. The activities help students establish good language learning habits, self-instruction and autonomy.

When students master enough vocabulary and prepare to speak, native dialects influence their English pronunciation, particularly those students from the southern part of China. There are several consonants they can not distinguish or pronounce, such as /l/, /n/ and /r/. Their local accent hinders sound discrimination, sound stream division, stress and intonation. Generally in-class teaching is not

enough to solve these problems completely. Time is limited and the size of each class is large (40-50 students). Therefore teachers start “Morning English” activity, which is a team-work project. The students work together to read English materials every morning, while the teachers check their work regularly. In order to enrich this activity, a tongue twister game is often introduced

No matter how poor the students’ English is, vocabulary activities offer an opportunity to participate and gain confidence. Thus fluent English is never a dream for them, but more a mountain they will explore, step by step upward.

Second, some intermediate out-of-class activities require a greater level of skill in English reading and speaking, even performance, such as English Culture and Literature Contest, Contest of English Songs, English Speech Contest, Competition of English Drama and Performance and English Dubbing for Movies.

College students, at an emotional age, are easily attracted to romance. Songs and movies are popular. Learning English songs is a good way to solve some phonetic problems, such as liaison and elision. Watching movies is another effective way to improve English listening and speaking skills. English movies on the weekends are particularly welcomed, not only because the selected movies are the latest, but also because of the lively analysis by the teachers.

The most exciting activity is English dubbing, in which students can play the roles in the movie and dub their favorite parts in English. In this way the students can improve their phonetic skills. Then they will feel confident in drama performance, which needs integrated English skills and the courage to face the public. The students feel excited and challenged after they take part in these activities. The study proposed that learners studying a language abroad in immersion situations are presented with a rich range of language learning opportunities outside of class [1].

Third, the advanced out-of-class activities need not only better language skills, but also profound knowledge, such as English linguistic and literature lectures, English Debating Contest, English Translation and Writing (or Interpretation) Contest and Mock Trial of Business World. These activities are mainly designed for juniors and seniors, because they are more experienced. Entertainment and enjoyment in out-of-class English activities is not enough for them. What they need is something which guides them to their future career and fits their active thought as well. They want the whole world to hear their voice. Only those out-of-class activities in advanced level can satisfy them, such as English debate. The discussion on domestic and international issues can meet their need of showing their concern and responsibility to the society, even to fellow human beings. It is a generation of speaking out their mind and writing down their thoughts to let the world know who they are. Once they are ready to face the world, they become more practical. International business is no longer a mystery to them, because they experienced Mock Trial of Business World. This gives them experience in job hunting to interviewing. Studies have also shown that motivation and cognition influence out-of-class learner behavior [3].

Over 4000 students participate in these out-class activities each year. Out-of-class activities are welcomed by the students and are effective in improving students’ English ability. During the past eight years, many students have won prizes in different English contests around the districts and the nation. For instance, two students won the 2nd prize and another two won honorable prizes in “CCTV Cup” National English Speaking Contest. Debating teams won 3rd prize and honorable prize in 11th and 12th “FLTRP Cup” National Debating Competition in 2004 and 2005.

The above shows out-of-class activities play an active role in the development of students’ English communicative skills, and proper guidance by the teacher does help establish good language learning habits. It has been argued that different contexts providing opportunities for language learning, like different context of language use, are not discrete [4]. Thus out-of-class activities should be closely linked to in-class teaching and vice versa.

Comparatively speaking, out-class activities stand in a higher level for their broader view of knowledge. They are more logical and active, which include not only English language itself, but also every aspect of English speaking countries, such as customs, living style, ethical concepts, etc. On the other hand they consolidate what students learned in class and turn those individual skills (vocabulary,

grammar, writing, reading and translation) into an integrated training, which can make up the disadvantages of limited time and content in in-class teaching. Specifically, they meet the need of diversity and benefit any student.

Second, out-class activities are much more flexible than in-class teaching, because they give students more freedom to use their English. Teachers help and guide them in the right direction, which ensures the activities are meaningful. The students themselves are the real designers, organizers and participants.

Third, diversification of out-of-class activities is the key to popularize English at the college level. There are many types of out-class activities which can enhance students' English communicative skills. All roads lead to Rome. The point is how to encourage students to choose one "road" which fits them best.

Summary

On the surface, English language learning is an intensified process. In a deeper sense it is a cognitive mode which goes forward in a potential way. Out-class activities offer a natural context for the students to learn English in a relaxed and purposeful atmosphere with their beliefs, individual styles and their own strategies, especially for their self-efficacy. Ellis (1994) concluded that learners get the most benefit from formal language instruction when it is coupled with opportunities for natural exposure to the language[5]. It seems that each activity works independently, actually the activities are closely connected by nature. Only well-organized out-class activities can serve in-class teaching well, in which the students develop their English skills properly, accurately and actively. At the same time this process allows teachers to identify ineffective factors which influence students' English learning and develop more effective instructional strategies with updated information, and students can reflect their learning process naturally as well.

It is a fact that out-class activities play an important role in the process of English learning, but it should be known that they would never replace the need for in-class teaching. It is only a supplement in the final analysis. Otherwise it will hinder normal English teaching in the college.

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