An Analysis on the Application of Interactive Teaching Approach in College Oral English Class

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Abstract: How to cultivate students' communicative competence has become one of the core contents of current college English teaching. Facing the new challenge, Interactive Teaching Approach emerged and has been favored and advocated by domestic and foreign education scholars. Based on the theory of Constructivism, Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Interaction Hypothesis, this paper conducts a qualitative analysis of previous studies tentatively. By studying the actual situation of college oral English teaching and the current research status of the Interactive Teaching Approach, this paper analyzes the application status and its advantages. The study indicates that the domestic college English teaching environment should be improved and teachers fail to give students adequate guidance and sufficient training. This study also finds that Interactive Teaching Approach is effective to improve college students' communicative competence based on previous researches. The results show Interactive Teaching Approach contributes to lighten students' learning passion, promote the interactive teaching climate and improve the efficiency of college oral English teaching. The author hopes that this study could help the application and popularization of the Interactive Teaching Approach in college oral English teaching, and contribute to the reform of college oral English teaching.

1. Introduction

The requirements for the comprehensive application of college students' oral English ability have increased with the development of economic globalization and international communication. However, based on the purpose of examination-oriented education, traditional oral English teaching in China focuses on simple knowledge transmission. Students cannot get enough exercise in class and their oral English is not good.

To cultivate students' oral ability and the effectiveness of class, college English teachers need to change the traditional teaching theories, explore and adopt manifold effective developed teaching modes. Facing the new challenges, how to cultivate students' oral ability has become one of the core contents of college English teaching. Facing new challenges, the Interactive Teaching Approach (ITA) has been favored and advocated by domestic and foreign educators.

Based on Interaction Theory, Constructivism and Krashen's Input Theory, this teaching model

aims to improve students' self-learning ability through the interaction between teachers and students. At present, the previous study on the Interactive Teaching Approach is mainly based on empirical research. However, there are still some limitations in the application process.

Although students in China have started to learn English from elementary school, they still can't communicate with foreigners fluently at college's levels. Besides, most students in colleges have fears. They do not want to make a vivid interaction with the teacher. What's more, students lack the consciousness and initiative to train oral English. College oral English classes could not achieve the desired educational effects.

Given the problems existing in college oral English class and deficiency in previous researches, this study aims to make a supplement for the limitations of previous ones. Through literature analysis, it attempts to find an effective way of using ITA which can optimize the teaching effect and provide a reference for the reform of college oral English teaching.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Interactive Teaching Approach

Douglass Brown believes that interaction is the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feeling or ideas between two or more people[1]. Interactive teaching is a kind of self-regulated teaching mode which was proposed by American educational psychologists Palincsar, A. S. and Brown, A. L.in 1984. It aims to improve students' communication competence and self-monitoring skills. Students learn a lot from others and benefit mutually. In the development of the teaching model, interactive teaching, a cooperative learning model led by experts, has been widely regarded as one of the initial models of change[2]. It first appeared in western countries and then was introduced to China. Since the 1990s, Interactive Teaching Approach has been widely used in second language teaching. In the 21st century, domestic studies have also begun to focus on Interactive Teaching Approach especially in the reform of oral teaching.

Nowadays, Interactive Teaching Approach is a student-centered, teacher-led model that allows students to fully participate in the entire teaching process. It focuses on cultivating students' communicative competence and paying more attention to interactivity in language teaching activities. In college English teaching, the application of the Interactive Teaching Approach provides students with more opportunities for language practice. In this way, students will have a better master of English and cultivate their communicative competence.

In my opinion, Interactive Teaching Approach is a flexible teaching mode. There is no fixed method. Different teachers have different ways to make interact with students, but the ultimate goal is to change the traditional teacher-centered teaching atmosphere. Teachers should try their best to help students play subjective action better in the classroom.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation of Interactive Teaching Approach

2.2.1 Theory of Constructivism

Constructivism is one of the perspectives and theoretical foundations for spoken English teaching. Constructivism is a teaching model that emphasizes the importance of student-centered. Constructivists point out four elements which will influence language acquisition, students, teachers, tasks, and the environment. They believe that students themselves are the most important.

However, the traditional teaching method does not conform to the objective law of students' learning cognition. Teachers should change their teaching concepts and chose proper teaching

models based on the requirements of constructivism. The role of teachers has changed from lecturers to designers, organizers, participants, motivators and evaluators. Teachers should create opportunities and scenarios for students to.

Based on the theory of Constructivism, the Interactive Teaching Approach pays more attention to stimulating students' subjective initiative and strives to form an interactive communication relationship between teachers and students, and among students. Teachers become students' learning partners and provide positive guidance. It is more suitable for students to cooperate and progress together in this interactive and open learning environment.

2.2.2 Theory of Communicative Competence

Communicative competence was first proposed in 1974 by the sociolinguist Hathaway Dell Hymes. It replaced Chomsky's linguistic competence. He pointed out that the content of competence includes communicative competence and interactive competence. Communicative competence mainly has four main components, and one is linguistic competence. Communicative competence includes organization, pragmatics, strategy, and psycho-motor[3].

This theory has developed with the times. Brown agrees that communicative competence especially emphasizes human interaction in different contexts to agree on different issues, to negotiate the meaning of language, to obtain and exchange ideas from others, or put one's ideas into others' minds[1].

Under the theory of communicative competence, the Interactive Teaching Approach pays attention to the training of students' speaking ability in learning English. Therefore, there is no doubt that communicative competence is the goal and core part of the ITA.

2.2.3 Input Hypotheses

American linguist Stephen D. Krashen proposed five hypotheses on second language acquisition in the early 1980s. Among those theories, the Input Hypothesis is the core part. This hypothesis demonstrates a substantive understanding of how second language learners accept and absorb linguistic knowledge. Krashen makes a distinction between the concepts of learning and acquisition. Learning refers to the consciously acquisition of language knowledge through the rules and forms of language while acquisition means unconsciously learning[4].

The Input Hypothesis emphasizes the importance of classroom teaching of second language acquisition. Krashen argues that ideal language input must be interesting and relevant. The input material must be able to attract the interest of the learners, and the content itself must have some logical relevance[8]. If the learner is interested in the input material, he or she could consciously accept linguistic information during the learning process and will provide more positive feedback. As a result, the efficiency in learner's language acquisition will be greatly improved.

Therefore, the Interactive Teaching Approach under the Input Hypothesis provides new ideas and new methods for the reform of college English classroom teaching[5].

2.2.4 Output Hypotheses

Krashen overemphasized the importance of language input in second language acquisition. He argues that a sufficient amount of input words would enable learners to naturally acquire language, but ignores the necessity of language output[8].

In 1985, Swain, Canadian linguist, found out these inadequacies and proposed the Output Hypothesis. Swain explains the reason why students often make grammatical mistakes in speaking and writing is that they rarely practice language expression. In the classroom, teachers mainly focus on knowledge transfer, and students have few opportunities to speak. Besides, the teacher

rarely gives timely feedback and corrects the mistakes made by the students in the output[6].

Based on the Input Hypotheses and Output Hypotheses, the Interactive Teaching Approach demands that students should not only absorb the knowledge in the internalized classroom, but also master the content of the course, and finally achieve the output of the comprehensive ability.

2.2.5 Theory of Interaction Hypotheses

Michael H. Long first proposed the Interaction Hypothesis. He believes that only language input is not enough for language acquisition. Learners must have the opportunity to be trained, that is, the language must be acquired through interaction. During the process, the learner often obtains various feedbacks through correction, such as requesting repetition, clarification, verification, etc..., so that is called input[7].

Oral English teaching needs the interaction between teachers and students, and among students which will help improve the efficiency of classroom teaching. In the classroom, meaningful interactions cannot be achieved if students cannot fully utilize all of the target languages.The study of Interaction Hypotheses is based on a series of theories of second language acquisition. It is very helpful for learners and is of great significance for college language teaching.

2.3 The Characteristics of Interactive Teaching Approach

The purpose of the Interactive Teaching Approach is to improve students' self-learning ability. It is the interaction between teachers and students in communicating which inspires students in the learning process which has the following characteristics:

(1)Multi-Initiative: Students are able to actively participate in each step in an interactive English class and develop their ability to think and express their opinions independently. For example, the teacher can train students practicing English by specifying topics, making personal presentations, group work, or debate to let them express their opinions.

(2)Multiple Interactive: Interaction is not only between teachers and students, but also among students, or between students and electronic media. This kind of interaction can happen among multiple individuals. Different types of interactions enable students to discuss issues on an equal footing, analyze problems actively, and accept suitable suggestions.

(3)Exploratory: Teachers and students analyze, evaluate, question and discuss common problems for what they have taught and what they have learned. These tasks are proposed by teachers and students who try to make new explorations based on existing knowledge. ITA helps students grasp new knowledge and make a contribution to the development of our college English reform.

2.4 Relevant Research at Home and Abroad

2.4.1 Overseas Research

In western countries, the Interactive Teaching Approach, arising in the 1970s, was first used in professional training for adults. This is a kind of teaching method based on Constructivism, Input and Output Hypotheses, and other teaching theories. It aims to create a positive atmosphere of mutual respect, mutual trust as well as equality, and achieve interactive goals. Interactive Teaching Approach is also a method to complete tasks in oral English classes with interactive activities. Through various interactions, students improve their ability in expressing their opinions and improving communication skills.

However, how students achieve their learning goals in class? There is no doubt that effective

language teaching should not violate the rules of natural learning. During the class, students just listened to obey the teacher's wishes. Therefore, traditional teaching methods did not meet teaching and learning needs. Besides, more and more foreign scholars have found that interaction is very important for language acquisition in recent years.

American linguist, Rivers has made a great contribution to the development of interaction theory. He pointed out that communication comes from interaction and interaction is the most important part for language communication. He began to break up traditional teaching methods in language acquisition[8]. Another famous scholar H.Douglas Brown developed Rivers' theory and made it more systematic. In his book, he listed twelve principles that could be helpful to set the foundation of interactive language teaching[1].

Since then, some studies on second language acquisition have fully revealed the fact that interaction is of great significance for language acquisition, especially in the development of communication. Through interaction, students could have the chance to express their ideas in English and improve their communication skills. In this way, students would complete the tasks with interest and passion. Based on the literature review of traditional language teaching and interactive language teaching as well as its theoretical foundations in western, the importance of interaction in language class becomes quite obvious.

2.4.2 Domestic Research

Until the 1990s, Chinese scholars have begun to study on Interactive Teaching Approach. Compared to the quantity, it was much less than abroad. On the content of previous research, there are a lot of repetitions on similar topics. The researches of Interactive Teaching Approach mainly focus on these topics: the theoretical basis of the Interactive Teaching Approach, the roles of teachers and students as well as the application of ITA. However, the topics about the type of designing and implementation of ITA are much fewer.

There is no doubt that more and more Chinese scholars begin to focus on interactive language teaching, especially in the reform of oral English teaching although there is a long way to go.

3. Current Situation of College Oral English Teaching

3.1 Teacher-Centered Classroom

The traditional teaching method in college English class is teacher-dominant. In the current oral teaching environment, students' communicative competence and communicative initiative have not been effectively reflected.

In fact, many teachers are still limited by the traditional teacher-centered model. Teachers actively teach knowledge, while students are only passive recipients of knowledge. Although it can bring knowledge to students, students learn English without enthusiasm. Students are pushed by teachers and exams. Teachers ignore the cultivation of students' self-learning ability, which ultimately affects the final effect of teaching work.

3.2 Insufficient Opportunities for Interaction

In the teacher-centered classroom, students are more passive in understanding content and the classroom atmosphere is dull. Teachers usuallyl end a course with some simple practices. Some teachers even stay in the teaching mode of "textbook-chalk-blackboard" in class and students do not have enough opportunities to practice.

In the college oral English classroom, the number of students in it is rather big. There are

usually more than 60 people in one room. It is impossible for every student to practice. According to the previous research, many colleges even have big classes with 60 to 120 students in China for students who are not major in English. Students seldom have the chance to participate in discussions and speeches.

There is no doubt that the teaching content is rigid. Class teaching is static and unitary, and the classroom atmosphere is depressed. All these fail to fully mobilize the initiative and interest of students. College students are willing to seek new things and hope to have opportunities to show themselves and improve themselves. If the form in the college English classroom is still the same as that in high school, no one will be interested in it. This boring course cannot stimulate students' active participation consciousness and may exhaust their passion.

3.3 Lack of Environment on Language Acquisition

Apart from English lessons per week, the opportunities for students to use English are very limited. Many English teaching classes in college are mainly carried out in a bilingual environment. Besides, most of the topic selected and used in oral English class is based on textbooks. These topics update slow and lack innovation which cannot match with the students' cognition. Oral English communication is also carried out under presupposed circumstances irrelevant to students' daily life. In college oral English teaching, there is a big gap between the teacher's classroom expression and communication in real life.

The textbooks set by the school cannot be close to the actual situation and cannot keep pace with the hot spots of the times. Based on the texts, teachers seldom use real material in the college oral English class. The teaching contents have separated from students' daily life. The design activities in class lack real communication situations that are close to the actual life of students. Teachers ignore the importance of creating lively and vivid scenes. It does harm to stimulate students' enthusiasm for expressing their opinions.

Therefore, when designing topics, teachers are supposed to listen to students' opinions. It is necessary for teachers to know what students are interested in and be familiar with popular social and cultural hotspots.

3.4 Inappropriate Guidance

At this stage, the guiding role of teachers needs to be further exerted. In some college oral English classrooms, teachers have too much criticism and interference with students. Teachers can correct students' mistakes in time when they speak English. However, if the teacher is involved in a lively discussion and the teacher interferes, it will inevitably affect or even destroy the atmosphere of conversation and communication. All these will eventually lead to deviation from the purpose of the communication activity. Students will feel extreme tension and worry when speaking English and the feedback from teachers makes it more difficult for students to express their views bravely.

Regardless of whether students give expected answers, they always want to be encouraged by the teacher. According to the actual situation in college oral English class, the teacher misses the duty to make the students accept intelligible language input as much as possible. Students will feel uneasy and worried about using English and lack of interest in English.

3.5 Lack of Treating on Thinking

At present, the focus of oral English class education is not the cultivation of students' thinking ability. English professors in college usually pay too much attention to the training of students

Language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and translation which ignore the ability to think critically and independently. Students lack profound thought and systematic knowledge structure.

The precious wealth of higher education to students is their thinking ability. They should understand not only what they learn, but also why they learn. Therefore, it is not limited to the mastery of classroom and book knowledge but embodied in the acquisition of application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation which belong to the higher level of thinking ability. The cultivation of thinking ability should be the core content in college oral English education.

4. Applications of Interactive Teaching Approach for College Oral English Class

4.1 Teacher Roles and Student Roles

Traditionally, the teacher is the authority who determines the teaching content and teaching methods while students play the role of passive participants. However, the dominant roles of teachers in the classroom prohibit the learning process and restrain learner's initiatives. Hence, the teacher needs to change their teaching methods and beliefs.

Interactive Teaching Approach can effectively reflect the student's subjective status, and let the students take part in the classroom teaching activities and play an indispensable role. The purpose of the interaction is not only to better transfer knowledge to students, but also to enable students to express their own opinions, to provide suggestions for teachers' teaching work, and to help teachers optimize their teaching work. Traditionally, the image of teachers in the students' minds is majestic and swearing. This is one of the reasons why students are not willing to interact with teachers. When applying ITA, it's helpful to change the image of teachers and it's easier for them to have a better relationship with each other.

On the one hand, the teacher in an interactive class should at least take the roles as a facilitator, an organizer and manager, the resource, a director, a participant, and a motivator. When guiding students to learn, teachers should fully consider the strengths and weaknesses of different students, and teach students based on their aptitude, so that students can learn useful knowledge and master practical ability.

On the other hand, students are not only the learners of knowledge but also the masters of the whole class. As a guider, teachers should try their best to let students take part in the classroom interaction actively. A debate can be held on a topic with the teacher as a judge. In practice, students could be the masters who set topics and rules. The achievement of teaching objectives depends to a large extent on the initiative of students' learning. Therefore, with the cooperation of teachers and students, we can finally achieve the teaching goal of oral English interactive teaching.

4.2 Designing Interactive Activities

Interactive language teaching goals are achieved through interactive activities. By organizing a large number of interactive activities, it is beneficial to cultivate the communicative competence of students. Activities involving real communication can facilitate learning oral activities, where the language is used to perform meaningful tasks.

Teachers should make their classes attractive by organizing more interesting games, group work, and various activities for students according to the teaching aims. For example, teachers can give opportunities for students to do English drama performances, debates, English song competitions, English poetry recitations, etc. During the preparation process, in addition to some oral communication, students also need to consult information through the computer. It does help to build up the human-computer interaction.

All these can help teachers draw students' attention and make them become interested in language acquisition. Teachers should explain clearly enough so that students could understand the expectations of activities. Besides, tasks should be under students' capabilities: it should be achievable but could stimulate students' interest. In a word, with all kinds of interactive activities, we can finally achieve the teaching goal of oral English interactive teaching.

4.3 Authentic Materials and Situations

Lack of authentic language acquisition environment is one of the main problems faced by English learners in China. There is a big gap between the language teachers used in the classroom and the communication that happened in real life. Without authentic using practices, students' communicative competence could not be greatly improved. Therefore, teachers should put students in a real communicative situation, allowing them to get in touch with real language materials and semi-authentic materials. It is very important to provide real-life situations as much as possible in order to help students use the target language.

During the teaching process, teachers can let students set the learning topic according to their own interests and their daily life. For example, students can take over the role of the teacher as a designer, and the teacher can organize teaching activities initiated by students in order to maximize the participation of the students.

Besides, it is essential to have foreign language teachers in college English oral classes. Having face-to-face communication with students to experience authentic English expression in different situations is useful for students to improve their communicative competence.

4.4 Giving Positive Feedback

Teachers should give positive feedback and use statements of praise and criticism to raise students' interest. In general, encouragement, compared with criticism, is more likely to motivate students to learn. The former can make students feel happy and the latter is more likely to make students lose interest and enthusiasm for learning, and may even dampen students' self-esteem.

For those students with poor English foundation, they may feel inferior during the process of learning English. If the teacher can't create a relaxing teaching atmosphere and give them positive encouragement, these students will be restless in class. This kind of treatment cannot allow students to relax and make them actively participate in the learning process.

However, too much encouragement will have a negative effect on learning motivation. On the contrary, appropriate criticism or disciplinary punishment could have a certain positive effect on students.Therefore, teachers are supposed to combine punishment and encouragement in the process of interactive teaching. Only in this way can teachers achieve better teaching effects and enhance the enthusiasm, initiative, and consciousness of students. In an interactive and democratic classroom atmosphere, students, treated fairly and freely, are able to overcome the fear of speaking and express their own opinions.

4.5 Cultivation of Thinking Ability

Benjamin Bloom regarded the cultivation of speculative ability as an important purpose of higher education as early as 1956 and divided the objectives of higher education in the cognitive field into six hierarchical types: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. The first two belong to the lower level of thinking skills in the cognitive field, and the last four belong to the higher level of thinking skills. The former is the premise and foundation of the latter [9].

The cultivation of thinking ability is not only the weak link of English teaching in China but also the weakness of foreign language talent training. Therefore, one of the most important things in college oral English class is to cultivate students' thinking ability. If there is no thinking ability in the learning process, it is a passive, thoughtless process of receiving information.

The teachers in college oral English class should focus on the cultivation of students' ability on thinking. The main goal of thinking ability training is to motivate students to make a reasonable evaluation, analysis as well as a description of teaching objectives and resources. After synthesis and reorganization, knowledge passes through students in mind and become a useful store capacity. The important quality of excellent foreign language talents is embodied in the cultivation of the most valuable thinking ability, which is not only the core connotation of foreign language education but also the basic element of the cultivation of foreign language talents with an innovative spirit and thinking ability.

5. Conclusion

It is undeniable that interaction in the classroom, especially the interaction between teachers and students, is essential to improve the effectiveness of language acquisition. However, in fact, in Chinese universities, college English classroom interaction and its research are still not satisfactory. Based on the previous researches, this study analyzes the problems in college English oral teaching, this thesis aims to provide some suggestions for interactive oral English teaching through literature analysis and classroom observation. Although this study still in its infancy. The author hopes to conduct in-depth research on this issue in the future.

(1) There are still many ways of classroom interaction. This study only involves the discussion of ITA in general. How to use the Internet to carry out interactive teaching to greatly help students develop their comprehensive pragmatic competence may be the further topic of ITA.

(2) Future interactive research can be extended to all subjects, involving more students and teachers to participate in classroom interaction.

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