The Importance of Oral English Teaching

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Abstract

Today, more and more students are complaining about their oral English course because they could get very little achievement in improving their oral English. It has become an important issue that how oral English should be taught. This article first gives an introduction to the importance of oral English teaching. Then it points out the problems existing in oral English teaching. The paper also mentions an important teaching approach that is related with oral English teaching—Communicative Approach. Then it gives two factors, which are important to oral English teaching. One is the interaction between learning and teaching, and the other is the creation of comfortable atmosphere in the oral English classroom. The most important part of the paper is that how oral English should be taught.

Keywords

Communicative Approach; Oral English Teaching; Comfortable Atmosphere.

1. Introduction

Oral English teaching in China is challenged by many realistic problems. The shortage f competent teachers, the unreasonable arrangement of oral English curriculum and the silent students in classroom inevitably form obstacles to oral English teaching.

A number of problems in oral English teaching are caused by the curriculum which makes the students silent in oral English class. Actually the implementing of the curriculum is difficult because the arrangement of this course sometimes does not reflect the reality of the classroom.

Also the curriculum lack appropriate information sharing, collegiate support and resources because there are not enough communication between fellow teachers. If teachers could work together to develop and evaluate a curriculum, an oral English course could be much better than the current one.

By the time they have entered college, most of the Chinese students have already learned English for more than six yeas. However, most of them are accustomed to memorizing new words and expressions and paying attention to grammar points and language structures. So they find hard to express themselves in oral English. On the other hand, they may find out that the textbooks or materials for oral English course are of little or no use to them because there are a lot of dialogues and conversations and few new words and expressions.

Some students are often inhibited about speaking English in classroom because they are worried about making mistakes or they are fearful of getting criticism from the teacher. Some other students complain that they cannot think of anything to say because they have no motive to express themselves.

2. Communicative Approach

Communicative Approach is a very important teaching approach, which is authoritative in the field of English teaching. This approach first appeared in the late 1960s in Britain and was developed in the 1970s. Then it spread all over the world in early 1980s. This teaching approach emphasizes fluency rather than accuracy. Teachers should neglect students' mistakes in order

to make their speech fluent if necessary. The ability of communicating successfully in real situation is much more important than the acquisition of a very accurate grammar. Therefore, the emphasis of Communicative Approach is on real communication rather than on grammatical analysis.

Communicative Approach has some characteristics, some of which are summarized as follows:

It emphasizes the process of communication. Through the communication learners could learn the language and develop their competence by using the language appropriately.

It aims to teach the language which is needed when learners want to express or understand other people. For example, when two learners want to talk bout stock, they would learn some proper terms about stock very quickly in order to continue their talk.

It is learner-centered. In the language classroom learners are the main characters of the class and the classroom activities are mainly managed by the learners. What the teacher needs to do is to create a learning environment for the learners to speak the language out. In a word, learners are encouraged to express their ideas in a creative and natural way with as few interventions as possible.

All of those characteristics of Communicative Approach provide a base to oral English teaching. The elite of this approach should be adopted in designing oral English course.

3. Two Important Factors in Oral English Teaching

3.1. Interaction between Learning and Teaching

Since oral English is a special course for students in the classroom, the traditional view of relationship between learning and teaching is not suitable for oral English class. So we need to overcome the faulty assumption mentioned before and to establish a new style of relationship between learning and teaching. According to modern linguistic research, interaction is the best way to learn how to communicate with each other. As teachers, they should see themselves as friendly facilitators of students' learning. Teachers also need to give both opportunity and encouragement to students to speak and to explore their thinking through the learning process. As students, they should cooperate with their teacher actively. If the classroom activity suggested by the teacher is reasonable, students could manage it with great interest. If students are not satisfied with their teacher's teaching style, they could also tell the teacher directly, which could help the teacher to improve the teaching as soon as possible.

3.2. Creation of Comfortable Atmosphere in the Oral English Class

A comfortable atmosphere could help students open their mouths and clear up their thoughts before making a speech. It is obvious that if the atmosphere in the classroom if hostile or not friendly enough, the students would be hesitant because they are afraid of being laughed at when they make mistakes. A relaxed atmosphere is the first essential requirement in the oral English classroom.

In order to create a comfortable atmosphere, teachers should do something actively. Here are some suggestions below:

Students would feel that they are respected by the teacher, and they could remark on any aspect of the class they wish, or ask a question about something they don't understand in class.

Try to know some background knowledge about the students. This could help teacher create conjunct topics between teacher and students or among students. E.g. if most students in a class are interested in football, the teacher could organize a discussion about football, football playing skills and famous football players.

Teachers should always avoid negating students completely when they are answering a question or expressing their own ideas. If the teacher has to tell the students that their answer

is wrong, use words like "Good guess, but…" or "You have a good imagination "instead of "You are wrong " or "Your expression is absolutely incorrect " which may make students frustrated.

4. Teaching Oral English

4.1. Choose Material for Oral English Teaching

When choosing material for oral English course, teachers should take students' language level, interest and relevance and some other factors into consideration. Besides, teachers should make sure that the material adopted in oral English class is available and flexible so that it could be used in various ways. The material should be more and more difficult and complicated so that the students could improve their spoken competence step by step.

4.2. Select Activities

Teachers should select such kind of activities which students will feel ease at. Activities adopted at the beginning should be easier so that students wouldn't feel depressed when they are implementing. Then teachers could put more difficult activities when students could accept harder ones. Besides, teachers should provide opportunity for students to form their own thinking style.

4.3. Plan Activities Carefully

Activities should be carefully structured and demand on students as few as possible. Sometimes students could form their own ideas, but they couldn't express the ideas with proper English at the same time. So, the activities should also be planned that there is enough time for students to prepare.

In order to help students understand the material better and offer them more opportunities to speak, teacher could design some questions about the teaching material before the class. These questions may involve the theme, main idea, characters, and opinions and so on. Students could prepare these questions first and then discuss them in groups at random. This is a good way to improve oral communication among students and to make the students understand the material better.

Discussion is a kind of classroom activity, which could help students to improve their oral English effectively and to form their own thinking style. This activity is implemented by groups of students, usually at the end of the class. It could give students opportunity to communicate with each other face to face. The teacher may prepare the topic for discussion beforehand and divide the class into several groups, each group with six or eight students. Then the teacher should inform the students about the topic for discussion and time limited clearly.

The topic for students to debate must be controversial. Then the teacher should give some guidance to the students on preparing the debate. For example, after reading a text entitled "To Lie or not to Lie, the Doctor's Dilemma", the teacher can propose the topic that whether doctors should lie to patients or not. Before the debate begins, the teacher may ask the students to write on the blackboard some of the arguments for and against the topic:

For: example

--lying speeds recovery

--lying is benevolent

--lying makes patients optimistic

 Against:

--lying harms patients

--lying quickens recovery

--lying is deceptive

--lying destroys patients' hope

Then the teacher divides the class into two groups and provides students with some expressions used in the debate. Each group has a representative to speak for team. Other numbers supply arguments for the representative to use. During the debate, the others listen carefully, then they can exchange their own opinions based on what they have heard. Finally, they vote to decide on the winner. The teacher does not join any group but offer some help if necessary. Debate is an effective way of improving students' listening, speaking and thinking.

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