An Action Study on Morning Reading Activity on Campus Among College English Learners

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Abstract

Having gone through fierce competition and standardized university entrance exam, most of the undergraduates are conversant at English reading and listening, but by and large weak at speaking and writing. At present, there is still considerable room for improvement in English speaking training in the university of China. For instance, students in mounting numbers become nonchalant about improving their speaking on account of the fear of making mistakes, the pronunciation mistakes "fossilization", the lack of intrinsic motivation and confidence in expression, the scarcity of professional oral English trainees and all-in English environment for students to immerge themselves in. However, as is universally acknowledged, speaking skill should be given more priority in an era of globalization and intercultural communication which is gaining paces. Thus, teachers should try their utmost to prepare students better for their future study and provide them with more opportunities to see and explore the world with no obstacles in language.

As the online study goes viral and the vibrant and fast upgradation and innovation of learning method speed up, the factors contributing to student's learning motivation have subjected to great change. Thus, it is necessary to analyze and delve into the current research condition and future possibilities. Besides, in general, the study on the English learning motivation of undergraduates in China still stays at superficial level and its major contents and principles are applied and fabricated, leading to the lack of features of the time and creativity. This paper is going to put emphasis on and analyze "Morning Reading Activity" on campus, focusing on improving speaking ability of university students based on the past learning and teaching experience and researches. This article is designed to expound on English speaking learning and training in details by the following two questions: (1) How to apply affective filter hypothesis put forward by Steven Krashen in speaking activity? (2) How to exercise motivation principle in the activity?

Key words: Affective filter hypothesis; Motivation principle; Morning reading activity

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Through the observation of students' learning and my learning journey, it could be easily noticed that one phenomenon where a number of Chinese students are adept at taking English test but weak at speaking it out. Based on the huge gulf between the expectation and reality, the article aims to dig deeper in the field.

At college, many students have opportunity to improve their oral English under the guidance of senior schoolmates. Before over two months' special speaking training (so-called "morning reading activity" in the article) some of them were shy and timid to speak in public. But after the training, they became more confident in airing their voice in public and their risk-taking ability got improved. Then it is obliged to try more means to further improve their speaking, thus they proceed to take part in many English related competition, including speaking, writing and reading ones.

Until some of the best became the leaders to lead the morning reading, they did not realize its power and wanted

to let more people to know it. It is found that during that morning reading, the students are highly motivated and looking forward to learning more. So in the article, it expounds on the correlation between morning reading activity and affective filter hypothesis and between it and motivation theory.

This article is intended to discuss over English speaking training on campuses through which students will become stronger risk-takers and their anxiety in speaking will be reduced. In recent years, an extracurricular activity, which is named as "Morning Reading Activity", become popular with college students. Morning reading activity (MRA) is an organized English speaking training in the early morning, which is usually presided by a junior or senior who excels in oral English. Steven Krashen expounded five hypotheses on SLA (Second Language Acquisition) in details in his book Principle and Practice in Second Language Acquisition. They are the hypothesis of learning and acquisition, natural order hypothesis, monitoring hypothesis, input hypothesis and affective filter hypothesis respectively. Among them, Krashen held the view that there were two significant factors which could exert great impact on learner's learning result. One is the total amount of comprehensible input and another is the effect of affective filter. The affective filter refers to "the psychological barriers to prevent learner from capitalizing on the received comprehensible input to acquire the second language".

It is of value to dig deeper in this area in that students could be greatly motivated to improve their speaking, especially for English majors. However, more often than not, researches in this respect merely focus on superficial theory clarification. Few practical suggestions and complete systems are given. Most of the previous studies investigated whether the morning reading activity would contribute to students' speaking fluency and accuracy. For now, it is necessary to formulate and establish a thorough training process for students and leaders to follow. Many new findings, like motivational speaking learning and affective filter hypothesis experiments will follow this study.

1.2 Purpose of the Research

Because there is nearly no similar study on the morning reading activity based on some specific educational methodologies. In the article, it conducts research grounded on two pedagogical theories to analyze the activity. It will explore its value in the following perspective: is it really important to stimulate students' intrinsic motivation in study by means of some special activity?

The research aims at finding out the relationship between morning reading activity and affective filter hypothesis and motivation theory. Krashen divided the affective factor into three parts, i.e. motivation, confidence and anxiety. From his perspective, the stronger the motivation is, the more confident the learners will become. In turn, they will have less anxiety and better learning outcome. Motivation can be separated into two parts - intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. The intrinsic motivation means that students' learning behavior is driven by intrinsic psychological willpower and mechanism, such as crying for self-improvement and knowledge acquisition, yearning for improve comprehensive English abilities and so on. Extrinsic learning motivation denotes that the study activities of students are spurred on by outside environment like wishing to acquire scholarship by enhancing English test score or get access to the opportunity of study overseas through passing the IELTS exam. This study adopted action research method and in total 60 students were involved in the investigation. This study will provide a snapshot for English speaking training on campus and add teaching theory to Chinese English teaching territory. But its practicality is only limited to college students. Whether it could also be applied to senior high school students is left for studying.

1.3 Framework of the Thesis

This thesis consists of four parts. In part one, three parts altogether are introduced: the background of the study, purpose of the research and the framework of the thesis. Three related concepts are presented in chapter two. They are affective filter hypothesis, motivation principle and morning reading activity. As is illuminated in the chapter two, the influence of affective filter hypothesis from three dimensions: confidence, anxiety and motivation. Motivation principle is composed of two parts: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Thirdly, the research method and procedure are discussed in chapter three. In addition, the justification of each step is listed. The morning reading activity ran for ten weeks, and in every week different learning materials was handed out and different core ability was to give priority to. All procedures were discussed by all members first and then announced by the leader officially. In the end, a summary of the whole thesis is made the fourth part. It is devoted to providing some pedagogical implications and suggestions for future researches.

2. RELATED CONCEPTS

2.1 Morning Reading Activity

Morning reading activity, also known as English public speaking (EPS), which is increasingly gaining popularity and attention in tertiary education. Over the past two decades, researchers at home and abroad have carried out a multitude of studies on how to develop students' public speaking ability, some of which have manifested that one critically affective factor influencing the effectiveness and quality of public speaking the most is speaking

anxiety and a group of students in the survey, even some experienced speakers or national public speaking contest participants suffer from anxiety of different degrees. There are a number of variables contributing to speaking anxiety in public. Some researchers have conducted experiments on the affective factor from the perspective of behaviorism, cognitive theory, genetics and psychological flexibility. Throughout the review of existent literature, many researches on affective filter of English public speaking focused on the first language learning as well as the second language using, but a few shed light on the learners studying English as a foreign language (EFL). Besides, a majority of them are qualitative researches rather than empirical.

Grounded in proceeding researches, this study was intended to figure out the relativity between reduce stage fright, public speaking anxiety and communication apprehension and to improve public speaking and communicative competence on the basis of providing highly-targeted assistance and training course to them. It examined the efficacy of learner training on reducing public speaking anxiety of college students, looking at whether the speaking training would improve their communicative competence and reduce public speaking anxiety.

Morning reading activity (Feng, 2019) in campus mainly focuses on improving oral English and forming a good habit of getting up early in the morning. Usually, it is held at set time and place, composed of certain number of students who are creating the learning platform side by side. Among all the students, it will choose one leader who is going to take full responsible of the study content, the procedure and the connection of each part that is tantamount to the work of host or hostess. The main learning material will revolve around the basic four skills in English study - speaking, listening, reading and writing and it can design single one activity which could combine and integrate the training of more than two abilities. The greatest benefit of the activity is not only in improving integrated and all-round skills in English, but in making good use of the time of the day. Seize the day and make every day count with meaningful and fulfilling growth for the team members.

2.2 Affective Filter Hypothesis

Steven Krashen, a well-known and world-renowned linguists in America, expounded on five hypothesis about SLA (Second Language Acquisition) in details in his book Principle and Practice in Second Language Acquisition. They are the difference between learning and acquisition, natural order hypothesis, monitoring hypothesis, input hypothesis and affective filter hypothesis respectively. Among them, Krashen holds the view that there are two significant factors which could exert great impact on learner's learning result. One is the total amount of comprehensible input. Another is the function of affective

filter. The affective filter refers to "the psychological barriers to prevent learner from capitalizing on the received comprehensible input to acquire the second language". He divided the affective components into three parts. They are motivation, confidence and anxiety. From his perspective, the stronger the motivation is, the more confident the learners will become. In turn, they will have less anxiety and better learning outcome. On the contrary, if the motivation is lower than normal level, they are not confident and their anxiety increases, the learning result will be greatly compromised. According to Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, study motivation, confidence and the degree of anxiety will have an influence on students' learning outcome.

The affective filter hypothesis from Krashen's definition is that many affective variables exert a constructive and facilitative impact on second language acquisition. These variables contain self-confidence, anxiety and motivation. Krashen claims that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for excellence in second language acquisition. On the contrary, low motivation, low self-esteem, anxiety and introversion can raise the affective filter and form a "mental block" that prevents comprehensible input. To put it in another word, as the filter is up, it impedes language acquisition (Schütz, 1998). Among the studies on affective factors abroad, the best-known is Gardener and Lambert's study on motivation and attitude. In 1977, Dulay and Burt designed the study process to find out how the affective factors influence the second language acquisition. In addition, they defined the affective filter as "an inner managing system which subconsciously prevents the learners from absorbing the language through affective factors" (Gu, 2018).

Affective filter hypothesis has received many criticisms. Manmay Zafar (2009) put forward that since the first publication of Krashen's Monitor Model and its subsequent revisions, Kranshen's theory about second language acquisition has sparkled substantial controversy and debate. And he raised many questions about the application of the affective filter. For instance, Krashen proposed that filter is totally absent in case of children, but in reality even children can be greatly affected by personal confidence. How and why can children master L1 successfully? How to explain the achievement of some exceptional cases in which some adults attain native-like proficiency? Besides, he held that Krashen is too reticent to provide a complete and persuasive reply and his hypotheses still need future verification. Another scholar Joel Walz (1982) also mentioned the limitation of Krashen's theories in his review. He mentioned that the followers of Krashen and new researchers alike may be disappointed by his book Second Language Acquisition and language learning since the overall progression of

ideas were not be clarified logically, especially in the section of affective filter hypothesis.

Giving full consideration to its merits and limitations, this study will focus on the effect of affective filter hypothesis in real language learning environment. Thus, the research aims at finding out the relationship between morning reading activity and affective filter hypothesis and motivation theory. And the definition of affective filter in the study refers to "the psychological barriers that prevent learner from capitalizing on the received comprehensible input to acquire the second language".

2.3 Motivation Principle

Motivation principle in education means those driving forces that could stimulate students' intrinsic learning motivation and help them hold on to their goals for a long run. In the meantime, study motivation can be separated into two parts - intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. The intrinsic motivation refers to that students' learning behavior is driven by intrinsic psychological willpower and mechanism, such as crying for self-improvement and knowledge acquisition, wanting to improve comprehensive English abilities and so on. Extrinsic learning motivation means that the study activities of students are spurred on by outside environment, like wishing to acquire scholarship by enhancing English test score or get access to the opportunity of study overseas through passing the IELTS exam. The biggest difference between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation lies in that intrinsic motivation is much more stable and it could keep the learning behavior running for longer time. On the contrary, driven by extrinsic motivation, students are prone to lack desire and ambition to study further after they attain their goals to certain degree.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Major Procedures

The activity lasts from the middle of September in 2019 (the first freshman semester) to the end of November in 2019 and it is conducted every day except the weekend. But there is an exception that we will continue morning reading on the weekend for preparing speech contest. It is ongoing for ten weeks. The major contents are as follows. During the first to third week, we learned 22 vowels and 28 consonants so that we learned 50 phonetic symbols in total. Besides, we learned native expression and short speech - Just Speak. In the fourth to fifth week, we studied 18 pronunciation skills systematically, including plosion, liaison, change and irregular change. In the sixth week, we imitated one TED speech - Girt, the key to success, focusing on the intonation and the accuracy of pronunciation. In the seventh week, we learned one English song - Hey Jude and used it to reinforce and

consolidate 18 pronunciation skills. In the eighth week, the main process is about reading poems. During the week, we learned four poems, including When You Are Old, Love Your Life, Facing the Sea with Spring Flowers Blossoming and L Like You to Be Still. And at the end of the week, we drew a conclusion and reviewed what we have learned in the week. In the ninth week and tenth week, we tried the news report. In the process of news reporting, one acts as reporter while others raise some questions after report. The activity is ongoing...

In addition, we have a special session called Daily Sharing. Everyone shares three cultural points and makes examples for each of them. Then there are two minutes for everyone to make a detailed statement, with other people taking notes or complementing examples.

The last part is English only debate. The procedure is as follows. We will decide the order of topic setter in advance. Every day the setter will announce the topic for the next morning in order to provide enough time for us to prepare. In the debate, we will go through two sessions - standpoint clarification and free debate. In standpoint clarification, we will apply examples or theories to support our views. And in free debate part, everyone can air their opinions freely without any rules. In the end, choose one people in each side to make a summary of their overall viewpoint.

What's more, we will pick up one piece of TEM4 material to perform intensive listening practice in the purpose of training our listening on a daily basis.

（1） Know the students - intensify students' intrinsic study motivation and stimulate their enthusiasm

In the first week, l knew some students haven't had a good command of 50 American phonetic symbols through communication. After knowing students' needs, we began to design the learning material on the ground of phonetic symbols which contains three parts - single syllable practice, native phrases study and tongue twister. Students began to get acquaintance with one another at the very beginning. But they spoke in a small voice and behaved timidly due to unfamiliarity and lack of confidence. However under the guidance of the tutor, students started to open themselves, spoke loud and practiced a lot. Coupled with their past experience of studying phonetics, they got used to the new environment gradually and forged a enabling learning atmosphere for all.

(2) Organize the material - make the study interesting and improve students' confidence in speaking

From the fourth to seventh week, we help students establish learning confidence from studying 18 pronunciation skills systematically and then consolidate the understanding and deepen memory of them by imitating one TED speech and learn one English song which all contain many pronunciation skills and from which we could learn many sentence patterns and advanced vocabularies. In the process of imitating speech

and learning song, we let students be the "teacher" and everyone needs to guide others to imitate one sentence or one paragraph. Through the "learn by teaching" method, the students' motivation and passion are strongly promoted. What's more, everyone is to get involved in learning process by virtue of diverse practice activities, strengthening cooperation and team or pair works and increased interest in study.

（3）Prepare for Teaching Method - Help Students Set Appropriate and Sensible Learning Goals
Teaching methods we used in morning reading activity include Task-based teaching method (TBLT) and communicative teaching method (CLT). In the session of daily sharing and English debate, our requirement is that the basic line of English output must go beyond 95% and raise demand to a higher level for students in the following study with the input increasing. Although sometimes they will feel anxious and uncomfortable, they will try every feasible means to achieve their goals. When students are going to set their own goals, the one thing the tutor must do is to guide students to think twice about their final decision and make sure that every goal is within their capability that could be reached through unremitting efforts.

3.2 Method

This study combined both the merits of qualitative and quantitative research, adopting the method of observation, questionnaires, participant interviews and learner and teacher diary records, leveling off the drawbacks of using observation as a single instrument to investigate. 64 sophomores majored in English, including 7 males and 57 females, who took part in the English public speaking training in a period of a semester, completed all the questionnaires, public speaking anxiety self-rating scale and journals. They served as the major sources of the study. The anxiety self-assessment scale was modified grounded on the public speaking monitoring strategy and self-evaluation scales, comprising 18 items such as stage flexibility, speech preparation, fluency and diction. The data collected were transcribed and analyzed for testing their relationship.

3.3 Justifications

The study must relate the final findings with affective filter hypothesis and motivation theory. Accordingly, this article uses these two theories to enrich the morning reading activity and cultivate students' potential which seems like an untapped reserve.

3.3.1 Activity 1: 50 Phonetic Symbols Teaching and 18 Pronunciation Skills Teaching

Students must copy the material assigned by leader and then check and write down every single symbol on their material. During the process, students need to study by themselves what is beneficial to improve their self-learning ability. This is also one method of enhancing

their confidence when they appear in morning reading place since they have already been very familiar with the given materials.

For example, how can the students learn the phonetic symbols? It could follow the psychological order of optimal learning that begins with syllables and ends up with tongue twisters. Here is an excerpt from phonetic symbol teaching handout:

/i/
Words: believe; bee; dream
Phrases:
Seeing is believing.
I am not buying it.
Keep it a secret between you and me.
Never let the reality get in the way of your dreams.
Tongue twisters: I Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers. A peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked. If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers, Where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?
/ɪ/
Words：pretty; limit; money
Phrases:
I am easy to please.
It looks pretty on you.
Zip your lips.
Money talks.
Never underestimate your power to change yourself.
Tongue twisters: I wish to wish the wish you wish to wish, but if you wish the wish the witch wishes, I won't wish the wish you wish to wish.
I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice-cream!

Concerning pronunciation skills teaching, it is usually divided into four sections, including plosion, liaison, transformation and others. Here one example - direct and indirect liaisons are presented:
For Direct Liaison:
Rule: the formal word ending with consonant and the latter word beginning with vowel, they will be linked together.
Not at all.
Time is up.
I'll look at it.
Take a drink.
Can l help you?
You are full of it.
Try to finish the job as soon as possible.
For indirect liaison:
Rule: the formal word ending with consonant and the latter word beginning with vowel, they will be linked together but should be joined by phonetic symbol /j/ or /w/.
Join by /j/
Hurry up.
Don't worry about it.

Thank you for coming to see me off.
Join by /w/
Just do it.
Go on with your work.
How often do you swim?
How about seeing a film this evening?

3.3.2 Activity 2: Daily Sharing

In daily sharing, the leader should prepare the content in advance and send to WeChat group. The content could be any English idiom and native expression. Because through memorization and deliberate practice, the participants' muscle memory will be strengthened and they could probably use them in daily life. The method the leader uses here is motivation-oriented approach. After knowing its significance, the participants will become more proactive to share what they already knew and search for more what they don't know yet. With time going by, they will form a good habit of sharing and always keep in mind "love to learn and love to share". Gradually, the students will be willing to exchange ideas with others, especially in teaching.

3.3.3 Activity 3: English Debate

The participants will have English debate every day. And they will decide on the order of topic contributor in advance. And in the following days all the students will follow the order. Participants will be divided into two sides: positive and negative side and they will adhere to their own stands and argue until the last second. In addition, the debate will last for half an hour. During the half an hour, there are two procedure the participants will go through: viewpoint statement and free debate. This activity can boost students' interest and motivation to prepare and participate in.

3.3.4 Activity 4: Speech Imitation and Song Study

Through speech imitation and song study, students could find the interesting part of English learning so that it will not be dull and mundane any longer. They will gradually find out a suitable way for them to practice. Through this activity, the participants will notice that they are born to be different in speaking, sounding, pacing and performing, thus they will feel more confident to handle a variety of English learning tasks when their affective filter becomes lower.

3.3.5 Activity 5: Poem Reading

By imitating the teaching method in the film Dead Poem Society, the participants read the poem one by one. After reading it, everyone needs to share his or her understanding and feeling that must be related to their daily lives. Through the activity, students start to learn how to learn something from their daily life and keep a positive attitude towards the life. It is designed to arose and stimulate their enthusiasm about life-long learning.

3.3.6 Activity 6: News Report

Each participant will prepare one news report which can be selected from official accounts or news websites. They should report the news like an anchor and then answer the questions raised by his fellows. The first part is similar to a reading activity. And the second part is tantamount to an impromptu speech in which the participants is only allowed for at most 10 seconds to organize his or her answer.

3.3.7 Activity 7: After-Activity Practice

The participants will carry on many after-morning reading practice, including reading and listening training (use TEM-4 test as material). In respect of listening, all the participants should accomplish one TEM-4 listening test which focuses on intensive listening and the practice is followed by peer-editing. And regarding reading, the participants will read English textbook related to their majors or interests.

3.3.8 Activity 8: Thematic Writing and Speech Delivering

The eighth activity is listed as the final one, which doesn't mean it is insignificant. However, it is utterly the opposite. The article regards this activity as the most significant English learning strategy for EFL(English as a foreign language) learners, for it combines the practice of reading, writing and speaking and is one way to give to their full play their creativity, oral output and motivation.

4. RESULTS

The results showed that compared with pretest on public speaking anxiety, students became far less stressful when speaking, for the number of high-anxiety student decreased from 23 to 12. Sample pair analysis unveiled that the average ability and strategies of responding to anxiety had greatly improved. What's more, the score of four indicators (speech content, structure, expression and non-verbal skills) was much higher than that of pre-test, except for time management. And the strategy application varied significantly among different group of students with a different level of anxiety. Still, the data showed that the lower the students' anxiety is, the better they could perform on the stage. Correspondingly, the performance of students' speeches were closely associated with their anxiety level in which those with middle-level and low-level anxiety, by and large, scored higher than those high-level ones. In brief, the three variables, public speaking anxiety, responding strategies and speech performance were mutually affected by one another. One example was that the intensity of anxiety and responding strategies showed an negative correlation ($P<0.05$); more saliently, the stage performance was inversely correlated with anxiety level ($P<0.01$).

The results of the study contribute to an understanding of the particular role of training class on reducing student's speaking anxiety and improve public speaking. Theoretically and practically, it provides a snapshot for future researches to consider the possibility of combining public speech teaching with formal class. And further

suggestions and implications for classroom teaching and future study were also elaborated in the end. In the following days, students and teachers should work together to shape a more enabling study environment for speaking and contributing individual viewpoints.

Through in-depth self-reflection and self-cultivation, the article came to the conclusion that teacher can help students to enhance study motivation and confidence intrinsically and gradually form a good habit of automatic learning and putting forward questions, on the ground of applying effective filter hypothesis and motivation principle.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1 Conclusion

By applying affective filter hypothesis and motivation principle to design morning reading activity, including warming-up, review, all variety of practice methods and extracurricular tasks, participants become more proactive to speak and train their speaking and other skills, being apt to set sensible learning goals for themselves in order to enhance motivation.

The participants increasingly excel in oral output in fluency, complexity and accuracy and are willing to talk with strangers in English without embarrassment. In the following speaking and speech contest, they already know how to prepare and how to leave a deep impression on their audience and judge by speaking with beautiful pronunciation and intonation naturally.

5.2 Suggestions

In the teaching, teacher had better design and tailor a variety of activities to meet the needs of students on different levels. It cannot be too difficult for students to comprehend and take part in. And the mentors in morning reading should know how to lower down the participants' affective filter so as to make them feel at home and shape a harmonious environment to study.

With regard to morning reading, leaders have got to stimulate the participants' intrinsic motivation to get involved in the activity and get themselves all-in. Then they will figure out every feasible means to improve their comprehensive English ability.

In terms of assessment, establishing a sound feedback, reward and punishment mechanism to promote students' enthusiasm is of significance. Having an immediate check or small test can drive the participants to reflect on themselves and practice deliberately. Ultimately, they will get improvement.

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