

Strategies of English Communicative Activities for Hearing-Impaired Secondary School Students Under Task-Based Language Teaching

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This paper studies the strategies of English communicative activities for hearing-impaired secondary school students from the perspective of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), focusing on the status quo of the English teaching, research for the students with hearing impairment, and the purposes of using these classroom English communicative activities as effectively evidenced by English teaching practice worldwide. These communicative teaching activity strategies, in the opinion of the author, will effectively improve not only the English communicative skills but also the cross-culture communication competence of the students with hearing disability.

Keywords: TBLT, hearing-impaired students, English, communicative competence, strategies

Introduction

Learning English is conducive to the enrichment of the knowledge and overall development of the students with hearing impairment. Maxwell (1984, pp. 191-224) found that the people with hearing disabilities have to learn English if they want to enter the mainstream society. They mainly learn to read and write in English and use written English to communicate with the people without disabilities so as to become better integrated into the mainstream society. Cawthorn and Chambers (1993) noted the advantages for hearing-impaired students to learn French as a second or foreign language: (1) It is helpful to expand hearing-impaired students' horizon of knowledge and reduce or eliminate the society's discrimination and prejudice against them as a result of their disabilities to learn; (2) learning a foreign language like English adds something new and interesting to their routine learning at school and in their lives; and (3) foreign language learning may help them focus on their study because learning a foreign language is different from learning other subjects like math or the Chinese language.

Johnson, Liddell, and Erting (1989) worked out an English learning curriculum for the American students with hearing-impairment, the design of which followed three basic principles: (1) teaching English with the help of sign language; (2) focusing on the English reading and writing skills; and (3) complying with the law of the second language acquisition. Many evidence-based studies also show that the sign language is the main tool the deaf students use for daily learning and communication and that it can effectively improve their English skills (Stokoe, 1980, p. 379; Martin, 2002, p. 1). Some other related researches also indicate that the most

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effective way for the hearing-impaired students to learn is to rely on their visual sense which may help them to acquire the abilities to read and write in English in the end (Fodor, 1983, p. 89).

YANG (2010, pp. 16-18) explored and proposed four effective ways to teach English vocabularies to the students with hearing impairment in the high school. WANG (2016, pp. 56-57) analyzed how a teacher should make use of the classroom teaching to help students with hearing impairment learn by doing, apply what they learn, and solve the problems they encounter from the perspective of constructivism. LI (2013, pp. 92-93) studied how to help the hearing-impaired students learn English with the help of the Chinese language by comparing the similarities and differences between the English and Chinese sentence patterns. WANG (2014, p. 18), however, pointed out that the study of the deaf students' English learning motive, strategies, autonomous learning still lacks depth and needs further research.

Despite the fact that many researches have been done to identify the better ways for hearing-impaired students to learn English, much needs to be done in terms of evidenced-based methods. As such, based on Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) theory, this paper will mainly deal with some English communicative activities which have been proved effective and productive for the deaf students in China to learn English through learning by doing both in and out of the English classrooms.

A Brief Survey of the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

The Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has been widely applied to the Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) or the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) since it was popularized by Prabhu while working on an English teaching project in Bangalore India (Harmer, 2001). The TBLT is designed to assign students to complete meaningful tasks by using the target language, such as seeing a doctor, taking part in interviews, and asking for assistance from the customer service in real life communication itself (Leaver & Willis, 2004). Ellis (2003) concluded that Task-Based Language Teaching is conducive to the target language fluency and learning confidence on the part of the students. The essence of the Task-Based Language Teaching is that language learning should be closely linked with language use to build the students' target language communicative competence by means of completing a series of meaning tasks (WANG, 2006, p. 26).

The advantages of the Task-Based Language Teaching lie in that it emphasizes the language input and output in a comprehensive and pragmatic manner and centers on the communicative competence rather than fragmentary knowledge of the language through completing a series of meaningful communicative tasks. If designed and prepared with care, this new approach to language teaching can be a very flexible form of language learning and teaching to meet the diverse learning needs of the deaf students and at the same time enable the teachers to cater to the needs, interests, and abilities of the students in their learning (WANG, 2006, p. 37).

Purposes of Teaching English Communicative Activities to Hearing-Impaired Students

The English communicative activities aim to improve the hearing-impaired students' communicative competence and help them acquire the English skills through communication (Howatt, 1984, p. 279) including the English knowledge and the knowledge about how to correctly use English in real communicative environment.

Improving the Overall Communicative Competence

The English communicative activities are designed to improve "the linguistic competence, pragmatic

competence, discourse competence, strategic competence and fluency” (Hedge, 2000, pp. 46-55) of the deaf students. These activities can help them overcome their physical disabilities and give a full play to their learning potentials. What is more, such learning activities can also develop their abilities to cognize, think, cooperate, and innovate so as to help them better integrate into the mainstream society in which they can play their due roles as its members (ZOU, 2008, p. 100).

Fulfilling the Communicative Function of the Language

The primary function of a language serves as a communication tool that people employ to communicate their ideas, maintain interpersonal relations, and fulfill the social functions (Halliday, 1979). The effective communicative activities in English classrooms can help students to improve their English skills by participating in these functional activities such as execute orders, exchange information, make comments, reconstruct a story sequence, find the difference between things, fill in the application forms and book tickets, etc. Besides, these communicative English activities can help students with hearing-impairment get ready for real English communication settings in the future and effectively fulfill the communicative functions in English.

Arousing the Hearing-Impaired Students' Interest in Learning English

Both interests and emotions play a vital role in the outcome of learning English. If students with hearing disabilities are interested in what they learn in the English class, they are likely to succeed in their target language learning. So teachers need to attach great importance to the special habits, the needs, as well as interests of the deaf students when they design the English communicative activities. Many evidence-based effective English communicative activities can contribute positively and greatly to not only the efficiency and efficacy of their English learning but also the hearing-impaired students' interest and confidence in English.

English Communicative Activity Strategies for Students With Hearing Impairment

Due to the hearing loss and poor speaking ability, the hearing-impaired students mainly depend on their visual input for processing information. Besides, as hearing-impaired students at large are curious, overactive, and unable to concentrate on what they do for long, their English teachers need to adopt intuitive and vivid methods together with oral and sign language to teach English such as the interactive English activities. The teachers also need to make the best use of the hearing-impaired students' visual ability and keen observation to help them improve English communicative skills, especially reading and writing skills (LUO, 2007, p. 55). In the English class for the deaf students, the teachers should always keep to the communicative principles in terms of teaching procedure, teaching organization, and teaching method (LI, 2015, p. 104). The author discovers that the following five out of the seven evidence-based effective and productive communicative activities as proposed by Stern (1992) can be used for teaching English to students with hearing disabilities because they are very suitable and effective activities to inject impetus, enthusiasm, and interest into the English class for the deaf students.

Giving and Following Instructions

In the classroom teaching, the English teacher often gives orders or instructions for the hearing-impaired students to follow by using English and sign language. For example: *listen to me, look at the blackboard, please*, etc. As the students respond to the instructions given by the teacher, they are executing the communicative activities in English. For instance, one of the popular English learning games called “Simon

says...” is often used for practicing giving and following instructions in English. Students can form into two groups and change roles to play this communicative fun game to learn to use the English imperative sentences and have word drills (Ur & Wright, 1992). The activity is more suitable for students with lower English proficiency, but owing to its rigidity, it should not be used for long.

Information Gap

The information gap activity involves the given information transfer from one student to another student, which gives rise to communication between them. A typical example is the pair work where a party of the pair has a part of the given information and tries to transfer it to the other party. To carry out this communicative activity, the teacher can divide the students with hearing disabilities into pairs or groups and let them play the roles of the persons who meet to give and receive the information. The teacher can give the pair two cards with different information and then asks them to complete the cards by asking and answering questions. This type of communicative activity is good for improving the hearing-impaired students English speaking and writing skills. It can also be done outside the classroom. Students can go to tourist scenic spots, international hotels, and Walmart because these venues can provide them with better English communicative activity settings where they can continue to improve their English communicative skills after school.

Information Transfer

Information transfer takes place in the process of information collection, processing, conversion, and transfer. The teacher can ask the hearing-impaired students to process what they read, classify and convert the information, and then put it into tables or charts for better presentation. For example, the teacher can ask students to read a short English article on American music and then tell them to put into tables the major American music forms, its features, famous singers, and major songs. This communicative activity can help improve the hearing-impaired students' English reading and writing skills. This activity can also be implemented out of the class.

Problems Solving

Another popular communicative activity is the problems solving which aims to find the solution to the problems through interactive activities in English. In order to solve the problem, the students having hearing disabilities actively communicate with one another in the target language. This activity aimed to solve a problem or work out a study or activity plan is beneficial to improve the students' abilities to communicate in English. For instance, when students make a picnic plan, they would discuss the following in a group as to (1) where to go; (2) when to go; (3) how to go; (4) what to take; and (5) what to do (Byrne, 1986). This activity can help improve the hearing-impaired students' speaking and writing skills and interpersonal relation skills.

Role-Play

Role-play is aimed to require students to play a role in language communication activities (Wehmeier, 2004). This activity is very effective to boost hearing-impaired students' communicative competence because the role-play is meaningful and lifelike. The role-play includes play, simulation, and improvisational performance. During the role-play activity, the teacher assigns the students to certain roles and asks them to act in their own way. The process of role play involves the scene, role assignment, role preparation, role play, and role evaluation (DENG, 2011, pp. 144-145). This lifelike communicative activity can help the hearing-impaired students enhance their English enthusiasm, interest, and confidence as a whole.

Conclusion

Based on what was said above, the teacher should use the tailored effective communicative activity strategies to improve the hearing-impaired students' English skills based on the latter's current English proficiency and their learning characteristics resulted from their hearing disabilities. What is more, the teacher needs to construct a cross-culture English communicative environment in which students are able to be engaged in learning by doing, applying what they learn, and solving the problems they encounter as they learn (Dennick, 2012, pp. 618-624; Ofsted, 2010).

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