

Original Paper

Fostering Learners' Language Proficiency in Oral Class: A Lesson Plan for Integrated Instruction of English Listening and Speaking Skills

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Abstract

This paper aims to foster language learners' English proficiency by means of integrated instruction of listening and speaking skills in English oral class. It develops a comprehensive lesson plan from the selected textbook, which is applied to first-year English-major students in a northern university in China. The findings of the study are that students' language accuracy and metacognitive awareness would be significantly improved through perception practice in the listening process. In addition, sufficient input previous to listening exercises enables students to produce spoken output more effectively and efficiently. An integrated lesson plan, emphasizing both English listening and speaking skills, helps language learners in improving language fluency and complexities, and eventually in enhancing their pragmatic competence to develop into strategic listeners and competent speakers in the target language.

Keywords

language proficiency, oral class, integrated instruction, English speaking and listening

1. Introduction

Throughout the world today, and especially in developing countries, there has been a tremendous need for people to learn English well. China, being no exception, has a large population who start to learn English from as early as kindergarten to primary schools and secondary schools. English, as a compulsory course, has been taught in higher education institutions to non-English major students. What's more, most universities and colleges of various kinds have established English majors of

different academic specialities. Meanwhile, many employers look for applicants with high English proficiency, which contributes to the craze that an increasing number of adult learners joining in the trend to learn the language.

However, the outcome turned out to be less satisfactory. Despite heavy investment (both personal and national) in English language learning, Chinese EFL learners encounter many difficulties and barriers, which consequently result in their inability of learning English well, especially in listening and speaking skills.

Although there are multiple reasons for this phenomenon, the fundamental reason lies in the fact that most educational institutions aim to help their students pass local, national or international examinations. And many of these examinations are written, with little or no listening/speaking element to them. Thus it is unanimously acknowledged that listening and speaking skills can be ignored because it is much more important to improve reading and writing skills for the examination (Fareed et al., 2016).

As it is known that listening is one of the crucial components of spoken language processing, and there is no spoken language without listening (Rost, 2011; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). That is to say, listening and speaking are closely connected. One skill cannot be greatly improved unless the other skill is also developing. The lesson plan proposed in this paper is to integrate listening into speaking instruction in the context of EFL classroom in China. It serves its purpose in two ways: First, it aims to increase students' listening ability through perception practice and metacognitive instruction. Second, it also strives to improve students' speaking ability with a framework of teaching-speaking cycle (Goh & Burns, 2012; Sabnani & Renandya, 2019). Thirdly, it emphasizes the use of interactive strategies from a pragmatic perspective and takes students' confidence and motivation in those processes into consideration.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Rational for Listening Instruction

It is widely believed that a bottom-up approach focusing on the perception stage of the cognitive process would be more suitable for intermediate EFL learners in listening comprehension (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Wah, 2019). Recognizing words in fluent speech is the basis of listening comprehension, and the development of automaticity of word recognition is considered to be a critical aspect of both L1 and L2 acquisition (Segalowitz et al., 2008; Hui & Godfroid, 2020). Although different factors may contribute to comprehension, listeners will tend to rely on lexical information alone (Mattys et al., 2009; Han et al., 2020).

Unfortunately, unlike reading a continuous text where white spaces between words are obvious, EFL learners often find themselves lost in a continuous incoming flow of utterances and unable to distinguish word boundaries. Indeed, identification of phonological words is a process involving estimating lexical units and boundaries within larger phonological groupings (Luo et al., 2020).

Therefore, perception practice is one of the essential goals of this listening lesson plan.

On the other hand, there are certain times that word recognition does not always succeed and yet listening comprehension still can continue successfully because the listener can make inferences about the meaning of an utterance through other sources of information, including the pragmatic context. In the listening material, a group discussion was held among a few people about campus love. Students may not be able to catch the details of everyone's opinion but still can decide which side the speaker is standing based on other factors, such as prosodic features of speech: Rising tone at the end of a pause unit is most often used to indicate common ground or information that the speaker considers already shared with the listener; the level tone is used to indicate that additional information is coming. And the falling tone is used to identify focal or new information, and it also fills a turn-taking function (Rost, 2011; O'Grady & Bartlett, 2019). Together with their common world knowledge, it is not difficult for students to interpret the speech act of agreement/disagreement.

Nevertheless, it would be insufficient for students to develop their listening competence with only a bottom-up approach and perception focus. They also need scaffolding in increasing their metacognitive knowledge and strategies so as to better understand and manage their listening process.

Metacognitive knowledge is one's self-knowledge about learning in terms of person, task and strategy (Goh, 2000; Teng, 2020). To be specific, firstly, having clear person knowledge of one's listening problems and various affective factors determines one's self-concept and his/her success or failure in learning (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Hwang et al., 2017). Secondly, task knowledge is about the purpose and nature of the learning task. Students need to know how to approach and complete a real-life listening task. In this case, they are required to listen and write down different opinions on campus love. Lastly, students should know which strategy could be used to accomplish a specific goal. In this listening practice, students are expected to listen selectively for the main arguments in the group discussion.

Equipped with the knowledge of the three aspects, students would become more aware of the listening process. At the same time, they also learn to plan, monitor and evaluate their comprehension efforts and the progress of their overall listening development (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Hwang et al., 2017). During this process, they are also better able to perceive, parse, and utilize the aural input they receive. Gradually, they will become self-regulated learners, which in turn generates more effective listening, confidence and motivation.

As designed in the warm-up activity, students plan and organize their opinions on discussion topic while predicting what aspects the following listening material might cover. They compare notes and monitor comprehension in group work and finally evaluate their overall performance in a reflection diary.

2.2 Rational for Speaking Instruction

Hymes (1979) defined the speaking competence as an individual's ability to use language effectively in actual communication. This ability consists of both language knowledge and language skills. This idea

was further developed by Canale and Swain (1980) in the second language acquisition context. They divided students' communicative competence into four components: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. The ability of strategic communicative skills was highlighted as a key component of second language communicative competence. The second language speaking is a "combinatorial skill" as it involves doing various things at the same time (Johnson, 1996, p. 155). The notion of language skills is based on a definition of linguistic knowledge which covers language structure, meaning, and use (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983). Learners need to acquire spoken grammatical knowledge to produce speech that is natural and authentic (McCarthy & Carter, 2001; Masruddin, 2018). They also need to master the pronunciation of target language sounds and avoid common errors associated with their first language (Hewings, 2004; Susilowati et al., 2018).

Learners' speaking competence largely depends on their lexical knowledge. In other words, their individual vocabulary size decides the content and fluency of speaking ability. Additionally, learners' spoken knowledge also needs to be complemented by pragmatic knowledge about speech acts and sociocultural practices. To put it another way, they need to enhance sociolinguistic competence to be aware of the norms in communication in different societies (McKay, 2002; Muhamadjonovna, 2020).

Learners should be able to proceduralize their linguistic knowledge through increasing use of this knowledge in various communicative contexts (Johnson, 1996; Wei et al., 2018). The concept of "skills" refers to learners' knowledge about language and communication that is put into action when in speech production. There are four categories of core speaking skills that learners need to develop. They are *pronunciation, speech function, interaction management and discourse organization*. The pronunciation skills are the ability to produce the segmental and suprasegmental features of the target language. Studies have indicated that prosodic features, such as intonation and stress have an essential impact on the intelligibility of learners' speech production (Hahn, 2004; Peñuela, 2018). EFL learners strive to develop pronunciation features that are similar to the American or British native-speaker models that they selected. Moreover, the mastery of expressing and interpreting speech functions is a significant part of learners' pragmatic competence in different cultural contexts in which English is used. It strengthens the opportunities for appropriate and successful communication with not only native-English speakers but also other speakers of English from cultures they are likely to encounter.

In spite of the previous two core speaking skills, it is still not enough for learners merely to know the ways of expressing their basic wants and intentions. To be exact, they also need to learn to manage interactions and influence the direction these interactions take. Finally, effective speaking is dependent on the ability of learners to organize extended discourse in accordance with accepted linguistic and sociocultural conventions. It requires knowledge of discourse routines and lexico-grammatical knowledge to establish cohesion and coherence. As language speaking is a challenging and demanding process for language students, communication strategies are utilized for this purpose. They include cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies and interaction strategies. In this way, it could enable

language learners not only to participate more effectively during oral communication but will develop their language further.

To conclude, it is necessary for teachers to establish a holistic view of what the speaking competence entails in order to teach speaking effectively. It will facilitate teachers in planning and delivering lessons that develop students' speaking ability in a comprehensive and balanced way. Also it helps teachers in their reflection of teaching materials in a critical manner.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methods

3.1 The Teaching Speaking Cycle

In the speaking section, the *Teaching-Speaking Cycle*, proposed by Goh and Burns (2012), is adopted to meet the needs of students in the Chinese EFL context. Each stage is incorporated a specific activity to address students' particular needs in the speaking process (as shown in the following figure).

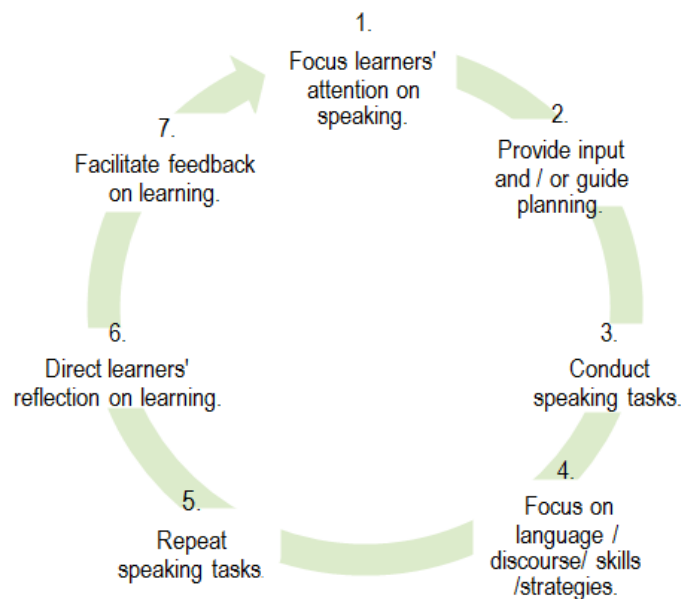


Figure 1. The Teaching Speaking Cycle from Goh and Burns (2012)

As illustrated in the above figure, there are seven stages in this framework, fulfilling specific functions in the process of teaching speaking in oral English classes.

Stage 1. Focus students' attention on speaking. Provided with sufficient input in the previous listening section, students are encouraged to reflect on their opinions and compare theirs to those views in the listening materials. By identifying the similarities and differences, they could develop metacognitive knowledge of a person, task and strategy. For example, "What type of people am I?"; "Why do I hold such opinion toward campus love" and "Is it possible that I could persuade someone into changing his/her opinion? And how? "

Stage 2. Provide input and guided planning. Students listen to the material again, this time just focusing

on the ways of expressing agreement and disagreement. Students identify and highlight formulaic expressions/phrases related to agreement/disagreement expressions in the transcripts. Teacher elaborates if necessary.

Stage 3. Conduct a speaking task. Students express their own opinions to group members and ask for their opinions in the ways that they learned from the transcript. It focuses on both form and meaning. The purpose of this task is for students to develop speaking fluency via group discussion.

Stage 4. Post-speaking activity. Teacher discusses with the students the language skills and strategies in giving and asking for an opinion from a pragmatic perspective in terms of politeness in the speech act of agreement/disagreement. Students are asked to interpret implicit messages, such as pauses, fillers, repetitions, etc. that accompany the sample discussion.

Stage 5. Task repetition. A minor change should be noted in task repetition. That is, students are asked to get out of their original group and talk to the rest of the class. They need to find out who holds a different opinion and write down at least one reason on the worksheet. Meanwhile, they also need to record their performance of interaction using their smart phones. In this stage, both fluency and accuracy are emphasized for the reason that repeating the task can facilitate automaticity in using different types of linguistic knowledge and skills (Goh & Burns, 2012).

Stage 6. Direct learners' reflection on learning. Students watch their previously recorded performance and write reflections based on the provided template. Then they share and compare reflections with their peers. It is an effective way to examine one's language learning through structured reflections. Besides, students tend to learn faster and better from peers.

Stage 7. Summary and feedback. Teacher summarizes the key learning points of the lesson in class. And after class, the teacher reads and writes comments on the reflection sheets before returning to the learners. Students would benefit from teacher's feedback on individual performance and gradually become more confident and competent speakers.

3.2 Lesson Plan

This study is targeted towards a group of intermediate first-year English major students at Yuncheng University in China. Their English language-learning span differs from 6 to 9 years of formal school study where they received extensive training mainly on vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension. It is anticipated that their reading and writing abilities are overtly higher than listening and speaking abilities. Thus, this integrated instruction could meet students' needs to a large extent.

The lesson plan for the integrated instructions of English listening and speaking skills consists of three steps, namely, a lesson plan for integrated skills, lesson plan for listening skills, and lesson plan for speaking skills. The audio materials are selected from the textbook of *Contemporary English*, which the subject students are currently using in this semester. The link is provided for future research: (<https://player.fm/series/round-table/mar-30-controversial-dragon-pattern-in-wheat-field>).

Table 1. Lesson Plan for Integrated Listening and Speaking Skills

Listening and Speaking task	Expressing and asking for opinions on campus love
Theme/Topic	Stating your opinion on campus love
Time	180 minutes (with one 15-minute break)
Numbers of students	30 students (6 groups)
Listening skills developed	To develop students' skills in listening selectively for main argument/ key information
Speaking skills development	To develop students' skills in expressing/ asking for opinions
Listening strategies practiced	Prediction and inference, paraphrasing to check understanding
Speaking strategies practiced	Planning, comparing, self-monitoring and self-evaluating one's language use; Interactional strategies

The above lesson plan aims to foster students' integrated skills of listening and speaking from a macro perspective. Concrete stages, steps, time allocation, particular activities and relevant materials are pointed out in the following tables.

Table 2. Lesson Plan for Listening Skills

Stages	Steps	Time	Activities	Materials
Stage One (10 mins) Pre-listening tasks: to build a real-life context and a relaxing listening atmosphere	1. Warming-up	5 mins	Whole class brainstorm in discussion on the lead-in question: "What is your opinion on campus love?"	Audio listening material (Round Table Talk) on campus love
	2. Planning	5 mins	Ask question "Please give me one adjective to describe campus love." And select 6 different adjectives to form students into 6 groups.	
Stage Two (30 mins) Listening task: Listening for main points task	3. First listen: No notes.	5 mins	Students listen to the audio material for the first time without taking any notes.	
	4. Second listen: Note-taking.	15 mins	Students listen for the second time and take down notes on people's opinions (both for and against campus love) as many as possible.	
	5. Third listen: checking notes.	10 mins	Students listen for the last time to compliment and self-check their notes.	
Stage Three (15 mins)	6. Compare notes in groups.	10 mins	Students compare their notes with group members.	
Post-listening: to	7. Compare with	5 mins	Students compare their work with the	

focus learners' attention on content and language use	transcripts.	5 mins	transcripts. Students write self-reflection diaries	listening material Appendix2: Listening Performance Reflection Template Students' reflection diaries
Stage Four Extension task	8. Reflection. 9. Feedback and extensive listening outside class		Teacher gives feedback to students' reflection diaries Extensive listening task from the same source outside class	Resources from <i>Round Table Talk</i> Website

As the speaking skills are considered more challenging for students, more steps and time are provided to prepare and guide them in their actual output.

Table 3. Lesson Plan for Speaking Skills

Stages	Steps	Time	Activities	Materials
Stage One (10 mins) Warming-up task: to focus learners' attention on speaking get them start talking after the break	Group discussion focusing on language fluency.	10 mins	Students discuss within groups on the following questions: A) Which part do you agree/ disagree with the statements in the audio material? B) How is your opinion similar to /different from theirs? C) Is there any arguments/reasons that you didn't think of before? D) Is it likely that you may want to change your opinion or part of it?	Notes and transcripts from listening part
Stage Two (10 mins) Give input and guide planning.	1. Audio- listen for language input. 2. Language accuracy activity.	5 mins 5 mins	Students listen to the material again, this time focusing on the ways of expressing agreement and disagreement. Students identify and highlight formulaic expressions/phrases related to agreement/disagreement expressions in the transcripts. Teacher guides and elaborates when necessary.	Audio listening material on campus love Transcript of the same listening material
Stage Three (15 mins) Speaking	Group discussion.	15 mins	Students express their own opinions to group members and ask for their opinions in the	

task:			ways that learned from the transcript.	
Opinion-expressing Task				
Stage Four (15 mins) Post-speaking activity.	1. to focus learners' attention on language skills and strategies.	7 mins	Teacher discusses with the students the language skills and strategies in giving and asking for an opinion from a pragmatic perspective. (Politeness in Speech act of agreement/disagreement)	
	2. to alert students about other factors in the process	8 mins	Students are asked to interpret implicit messages, such as pauses, fillers, repetitions, etc. that accompany the sample discussion.	
Stage Five (30 mins) Task repetition.	1. Whole class Activity.	30 min	Students are asked to get out of their original group and talk to the rest of the class.	
	2. Fulfill the Worksheet.		Students need to find out who holds a different opinion and write down at least one reason on the worksheet.	Appendix 3: Speaking Worksheet
	3. Recording performance.		Students also need to record their performance of interaction using their smart phones.	
Stage Six (25 mins) Directing learners' reflection on learning	1. Recorded-performance watching and reflections.	15 mins	Students watch their previously recorded performance and write reflections based on the provided template	Recorded Performance; Appendix 4: Speaking Performance
	2. Comparing reflections.	10 mins	Students share and compare reflections with their peers.	
Stage Seven (5 mins) Summary of key learning points and teacher feedback	1. Summary	5 mins	Teacher summarizes the key learning points of the lesson.	Reflection Template
	2. Feedback	After class	Teacher reads and writes comments on the reflection sheets before returning to the learners.	

4. Discussion

This proposed lesson plan outstands itself in the following two major aspects. Details of advantageous benefits to students' overall language proficiency are listed below.

4.1 Listening Instructions

Firstly, authentic listening materials. Unlike the traditional unappealing textbook, the listening material is downloaded from a popular English-learning website with a real-life topic about campus love. It

arouses students' interest immediately and activates their prior knowledge for more output. Besides, the nature of the listening material (group discussion among young people) fascinates students. Thus their listening comprehension increases in a free and relaxing environment. What is more, the unplanned and spontaneously spoken English conversation allows students to improve their understanding due to its features of false starts, fillers, repetition, abundance, etc. therefore, successful listeners must often tolerate ambiguity, and wait for later utterances to decide what was intended before (Soodmand & Khasemy, 2019).

Secondly, perception practice in listening meets students' needs. Based on the fact that an overwhelming majority of my students never received systematic training in English listening before they enrolled in the university, it seems unrealistic to teach them listening strategies in a top-down approach. Instead, what they need most is to learn how to segment sound streams into meaningful units and automatize the process so as to decrease the working memory load and enhance listening comprehension.

To be specific, the learners in question need more scaffolding on sound perceptions, word boundaries and segment of sound streams. The lesson design for listening section focuses on a bottom-up process to enhance learners' perceptual competence. In addition, it is also dedicated to raising their metacognitive awareness by instilling the ideas of planning for the listen, monitor their listening process and evaluate their listening performance.

Thirdly, metacognitive awareness-raising. In a traditional class, listening comprehension failure was mostly attributed to students' inability to comprehend or lack of close attention. Yet, metacognitive instruction discloses the source of difficulties in three ways. First and foremost, it encourages students to know more about themselves concerning strength and weakness in listening and the problems they have in the listening process. In this way, students could plan their listening before the start by allocating their focus and attention reasonably. Furthermore, students don't listen for the sake of the listening. Instead, they could learn to gain knowledge about the purpose, demands, and nature of listening task so that they are more able to adjust themselves mentally and intellectually for general interpretation.

Fourthly, students grow to be more aware of listening strategies and have their understanding about how best to approach the listening task. For example, they start to accumulate both effective and ineffective strategies into their general strategy repertoire. On the one hand, they adhere to certain specific principles to facilitate comprehension and manage learning. On the other hand, they consciously avoid unhelpful listening habits, such as word-for-word translation, anxiety, and distraction, etc. To put it another way, students don't always have to be the slave of listening; instead, they can gain control and become the master of listening. Accordingly, it is believed that students would enjoy listening class more and become more motivated to learn the language. And once they become strategic and autonomous learners, the benefits are beyond the classroom.

4.2 Speaking Instructions

Firstly, sufficient input from the listening section. In current practice, listening and speaking are two independent courses delivered by two different teachers. Students are expected to speak up immediately after given a topic at the beginning of a class. Without much input or activation of their prior knowledge, students remain reticent and passive. Unfortunately, the speaking class turns out to be a listening class solely from the teacher. By integrating listening with speaking instruction, it lays a solid foundation (in both linguistic and informative term) for students to familiarize and relate to themselves. It also facilitates the transfer from what they know in mother tongue to the target language, thus greatly enhances students' motivation.

Secondly, task repetition boosts overall competence. The shift of focus from language accuracy to fluency or setting higher requirement in task repetition activity, in fact keep students interested and challenged. Their overall ability, including linguistic, grammatical, and interactive skills, could be developed.

Thirdly, pragmatic instruction. It is highly necessary for teachers to integrate pragmatic elements into language learning because students are expected to use the language to interact with people in specific contexts. Their pragmatic awareness should be raised for communicative purposes. For example, it is considered direct and impolite to disagree with other people by starting with "No, I don't agree." Yet, it is suggested that students begin with a compliment or partial repetition of previous remarks before their disagreement. In this way, students could realize the function of language and become more culture-sensitive.

Fourthly, indispensable reflection and feedback. Keeping a reflection diary would benefit students' learning in the long run. Through this, students could get a chance to reflect themselves and their behaviors in language learning so that they would have a better idea of where and how to improve. In addition, with the scaffold of the teacher's specific feedback, students could develop into successful metacognitive and autonomous learners.

In summary, learners face challenges in three stages. Their relatively limited scope of topical knowledge could be the first and foremost barrier in conceptualizing an idea. Moreover, the formulation process fails to complete due to their inadequate grasp of linguistic and grammatical knowledge. Besides, poor pronunciation and intonation, inaccurate use of vocabulary and a lack of fluency also impede their ability of articulation.

5. Conclusion

This lesson plan aims to integrate listening with speaking instruction for a group of first-year English-major university students in a northern university in China. An audio listening material on campus love is used for listening and speaking activities. Students' language accuracy would be improved through perception practice, and their metacognitive awareness is raised to plan, manage and reflect on the listening process. Sufficient input from the listening section enables students to produce

spoken output more effectively. In task repletion activity, their language fluency or even complexities develop to a certain extent. Meanwhile, their pragmatic competence increases as well. Ideally, with the teacher's guidance and scaffold, they would develop into strategic listeners and competent speakers in the target language.

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