

Original Paper

In-class Activities for Improving English Listening and Speaking in Cross Cultural Communication

Yuxiu Hu¹ & Xinting Zhang¹

¹ Southern University of Science and Technology, China

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Abstract

This study presents a comprehensive framework for designing in-class activities aimed at enhancing English listening and speaking skills in cross-cultural communication in the age of self media. The study emphasizes the crucial connection between in-class activities and the broader curriculum design, giving special importance to the alignment of activities with course objectives. Drawing from established principles of curriculum design, constructivist theories, and key findings in cross-cultural communication, the study outlines a systematic approach that consists of four distinct steps-recognizing cultural self-awareness, interpreting and explaining foreign cultures, comparing and contrasting cultural elements, and evaluating cross-cultural content. Overall, the study offers a structured and practical approach to designing in-class activities that align with the objective of improving English listening and speaking skills in the context of cross-cultural communication under the help of self-media. By following this comprehensive framework, educators and students alike can enhance their cross-cultural competence and contribute to more effective cross-cultural communication teaching and learning.

Keywords

Cross-cultural communication, Self media, English listening and speaking, In-class activities

1. Introduction

Designing in-class activities is closely related to the course curriculum design. In-class activities must serve and cater to the design of course curriculum, esp. the teaching objectives. According to Tyler (1949), curriculum design should follow four principles including clearly stated and proper teaching objectives, effective teaching content, organized teaching materials and design, and efficient teaching evaluation. Therefore, in order to design effective in-class activities, one should follow the teaching objectives first, select proper and engaging teaching materials and finally realize the objectives by

practicing the well-designed in-class activities.

English listening and speaking have been challenging for Chinese learners of English, while among all communicative skills, listening and speaking plays a more important role in one's daily routine. Even in a country with English as a second language, it is essential to do English listening and speaking in cross-cultural communication.

This study will present in-class activities for improving English listening and speaking in cross cultural communication in the age of self media, and outline the steps how these activities were designed based on the course teaching objectives and some key theories such as constructivism theory and findings like English listening in cross-cultural communication.

2. Theoretical Base

Constructivist theories believe that Learners build their own knowledge through experience, but not through “given” information (Piaget, 1973; Bruner, 1966, 1990). According to Blurton (1999), “Modern constructivist education theory emphasizes critical thinking, problem solving, ‘authentic’ learning experiences, social negotiation of knowledge, and collaboration - pedagogical methods that change the role of the teacher from disseminator of information to learning facilitator.” It further describes constructivist methods of learning as involving “self-paced, self-directed problem-based learning processes”. Therefore, the core of in-classroom activity designing in this study is to inspire students to actively construct knowledge.

Sun (2016) proposed five principles for teaching cross-cultural communication. They are critiquing, reflecting, exploring, empathizing and doing. Therefore, in order to cultivate students' cross-cultural communication competence, the course design should try to provide a scenario in which students acquire information through a problem based learning approach and independent thinking, that is to listen to cross cultural information and cases, then analyze, compare and contrast, and do self reflection. Eventually, students would develop the ability to think from different perspectives and make careful evaluations. This process enhances cultural confidence, provides opportunities for practicing English, and helps promote China's stories. Thus, the teaching objectives for improving English listening and speaking in cross-cultural communication in this study was set as to recognize, interpret and explain, compare and contrast, and evaluate the cultural phenomena in the listening material, podcasts.

3. Designing Steps

Building upon the theories explained above, this study implemented a four-step approach to craft in-class activities in an attempt to achieve the teaching objective of enhancing English listening and speaking in cross cultural communication. The four steps are recognizing, explaining, comparing and contrasting, and evaluating.

3.1 Recognize – Cultural Self-awareness

Cross-cultural competence encompasses knowledge, skills and attitudes required in cross-cultural

communication, while knowledge in cross-cultural communication begins with cultural self-awareness (Deardorf, 2006). For this reason, the first step of designing in-classroom activities should be to recognize and understand one's own cultural background, values, beliefs, and even biases, which is a fundamental aspect of effective cross-cultural communication, therefore, a foundational skill in cross-cultural communication.

3.1.1 Before Listening

Before listening to the podcast, the primary listening material used in the study, a scenario was provided about the cultural phenomenon to be analyzed and evaluated, then questions were presented to students to guide the problem solving process.

The example used here is the cultural conflict between China and Korea. British Museum announced an activity to happen to show how Koreans celebrate Chinese New Year, but they used "Korean new year", that ignited another feud between Chinese and Korean netizens. After explaining the scenario, the instructor asked students the following questions:

- a. What does your family do on Lunar New Year's Eve?
- b. What happens on the second day of the Lunar New Year?
- c. How is the Lantern Festival celebrated, and why is it important?

The students shared their initial thoughts in English in response to these questions, thus setting the stage for their subsequent listening and speaking activities.

3.1.2 Listening

The students engaged in listening to a podcast entitled Happy Lunar New Year, in which the host introduced that billions of people around the world celebrate the Lunar New Year, also known as the Chinese New Year, when celebrations usually begin and what are some important holiday traditions. Afterwards, the students watched a video that introduced Chinese New Year Celebrations in English.

3.1.3 After Listening

Having gathered information from both the podcast and video, the students were tasked with crafting a two-minute speech on the topic of Chinese New Year. They were then paired up to deliver their speeches. As the class drew to a close, three questions were assigned, and the students were instructed to record their answers, a preparatory step for creating their own podcasts.

- a. How do Chinese New Year celebrations emphasize the importance of family? Explain using details from the story.
- b. Is it Chinese New Year or Lunar New Year?
- c. What is cultural appropriation? What do you do with it?

A piece of news from CNN was assigned as an after class reading homework. The title of the news is *Is it Chinese New Year or Lunar New Year?*

3.2 Interpret and Explain Foreign Culture

The second step is to interpret and explain foreign culture and showcase culture-specific knowledge such as cultural traditions and celebrations that are different from one's own to facilitate effective

communication and mutual understanding between individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

Christmas, an important holiday celebrated by millions of people around the world too, shares features with Chinese New Year in terms of joy and festivity connected with these two holidays, though they have different cultural significance and traditions as well.

After a brief introduction of the task, the students listened to a podcast about the story of a pair of parents, who go further than most parents to create a magical Christmas for their kids, and how they celebrate Christmas. By interpreting the celebrations and traditions in the podcast, the students had discussions in groups and explained the cultural significance of Christmas.

3.3 Compare and Contrast

Comparing and contrasting is the third step to achieve the teaching objective of English listening and speaking in cross-cultural communication. It involves examining the similarities and differences between two or more cultures to gain a deeper understanding of their practices, norms, values or communication styles. The purpose is not to criticize other cultures, and there is no superiority or inferiority of culture. By knowing the similarities and differences, people could move beyond stereotypes and generalizations, recognize and respect cultural differences, and finally have mutual understanding, effective communication, and harmonious relationships between people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Many people around the world celebrate Christmas, and they celebrate in a variety of ways. The podcast used in this step shared unique and unusual ways the people from around the globe celebrate Christmas. Four listening comprehension questions and one discussion theme were posed:

- a. How are the Christmas traditions of the correspondent from Australia similar to Fourth of July celebrations in the U.S.?
- b. How does the correspondent from Taiwan celebrate Christmas?
- c. How does the correspondent from Kenya celebrate and decorate for Christmas?
- d. What must the correspondents from Spain do to make their log poop out Christmas presents?
- e. What are some similarities and differences in the way Christmas is celebrated around the world? Explain using details from the audio story and your own ideas.

Some comparing and contrasting expressions such as in contrast, in addition, while, but, similar to, on one hand.....on the other hand, in comparison, whereas, however etc. were reviewed and practiced when responding to the discussion question.

3.4 Evaluate

The final step is to evaluate, another important cross-cultural skill. It is to cultivate students to maintain a respectful and open attitude, apply their cross-cultural knowledge, and make cautious judgments on the materials they listen to, and it involves acknowledging the existence of differences, respecting cultural diversity, and attempting to use empathy to feel and experience things from the perspective of others.

Children born in the U.S to poor, undocumented immigrants face many problems. The children are American citizens, but their parents are not. With this background information, the students listened to a podcast about American Children but immigrant parents and then had discussions on the following questions:

- a. Do you think a government should provide services for undocumented immigrants? Why or why not?
- b. In your opinion, should people be treated differently depending on how they come into this country?

Language of argument was practiced in the afterwards presentation based on the two questions above. For example, using transitional phrases, persuasive language, and counterarguments etc.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has explored the design of in-class activities aimed at improving English listening and speaking skills in the context of cross-cultural communication, particularly in the age of self-media. By adhering to the principles of effective curriculum design and drawing upon relevant theories such as constructivism, the four-step approach outlined in this study provides a structured framework for educators and learners to navigate the complexities of cross-cultural communication.

The in-class activities presented in this study, guided by educational theories and practical steps, offer a pathway for educators and students to develop the language and cultural competence necessary for successful cross-cultural interactions. Through these activities, learners not only improve their English listening and speaking skills but also contribute to better cross cultural communication.

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