THE APPLICATION OF SITUATIONAL TEACHING METHOD IN ORAL ENGLISH

TEACHING IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

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English is the most popular language in the world, and in China it is a common subject that every student should learn at school. As an English teacher, I should teach the students the four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. But I believe that oral English ability is the most important part, and also it is hard for the teachers to teach in class. Therefore, teachers should find some good methods to let the children practice speaking English as much as possible in class. There are a lot of teaching methods we can use in teaching English. But refer to teaching elementary students, I will recommend and choose the Situational Teaching Method, which is the most effective way to teach oral English in the primary school classroom. Teachers should create some situations for the students to learn and practice the language words and sentences. Banciu (2010) stated that "language is a living body that adapts itself to the communicative context and situation so that the teacher who wants to procedure competent users of the language must target the students' communicative competence" (p. 1). Therefore, I will focus on that method in the paper. Developing oral language in the primary classroom, strategies for improving oral English teaching will be discussed. In addition, teaching oral English in primary school needs to be researched further.

Keywords: oral English teaching, speak English, primary school.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Because English in China is a second language, the students who are studying English need some authentic and artificial situations and environments in order to best learn and practice English. By incorporating both authentic and artificial environments that promote English language retention, teachers not only improve English writing but also increase competency involving oral English. The development of oral language competence seems to be the most important aspect of learning a language, and the most difficult to teach because of the lack of experience in authentic situations with other English speakers. Therefore, teaching oral English lessons to the English as a second language (ESL) learner is a real challenge for all the teachers around the world. In order to help the teachers to teach oral English better, we should find some different and effective ways. The Situational Teaching Method is one of the best oral approaches, especially in primary school, because it takes social situations that students encounter on a normal basis and introduces students how to use learning in a practical daily life situation. Under these familiar situations they can easily get involved and actively practice. It makes the language alive, meaningful and useful.

The ESL students in primary school are children, so they have very limited English vocabulary and lack the ability of speaking fluently. If they find it is beyond their ability to learn and understand, they will not get involved in the class and speak anymore. Therefore, the teachers should create some authentic and interesting situations for them to learn the language. The students will find the usefulness and
happiness of learning English, and after that it can become easier to teach them oral
English in class.

This paper will focus on language teaching strategies used by ESL teachers, and
the application of the Situational Teaching Method in teaching oral English in primary
school.

**Statement of the Problem**

The problem to be addressed is, “Why is the Situational Teaching Method useful
for teaching oral English as a second language in the primary school?” This paper will
also address how to effectively use the Situational Teaching Method.

**Definition of Terms**

*Situational Teaching Method*- It is an approach developed by British applied
linguists between the 1930s and the 1960s, and which had an impact on language
courses being used today. Situational methods use teaching techniques in oral English
that build off of events (i.e. lessons) or unplanned English use. That is, the teacher
takes advantage of what young children are attempting to communicate to develop
skills.

*Communicative Language Teaching*- It is a philosophy under whose guidance
teachers use a diversity of methods to encourage the students to participate actively in
communicative activities for practical purposes. (Li, 2008)

*Group Work Method*- It is a generic term covering a multiplicity of techniques in
which two or more students are assigned a task that involves collaboration and
self-initiated language. (Brown, 2008)
**ESL**- Abbreviation for the term 'English as a second Language'. It is the use or study by speakers with different native languages. And this term is most commonly used in relation to teaching and learning English as a second language.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study is to write about the effective teaching methods of oral English teaching, especially focused on the Situational Teaching Method use in primary school. I hope it can help all the ESL teachers in primary school to have new ideas about teaching English.

**Significance of the Study**

After the study, it can help the ESL teachers to know how important and effective the Situational Teaching Method is to teaching our kids. Maybe it can help the teachers to change their minds about language teaching.

**Delimitation of the study**

The research will be conducted in and through the Karrmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, and the online library at the University of Wuhan. Primary searches will be conducted via the Internet through EBSCO host with ERIC, Academic Search Elite and Google/Google Scholar as the primary sources. Key search topics included “teaching methods,” “Situational Teaching Method,” and “oral English teaching.”

**Methodology**

A brief review of literature on the studies of the importance of opening oral English lesson in the ESL primary classroom was conducted. A second review of
literature relates the problems and development of English teaching in primary school and the strategies for improving oral English teaching was conducted. The findings are summarized and recommendations are made.
Chapter II: Review of Literature

As we all know, English is the most popular language in the world, and oral English is an important part of learning English. Therefore, it is better to know how to teach oral English well as ESL teachers. As an English teacher in primary school, I find that we should encourage the pupils to speak English as much as possible at school, but sometimes it is really hard for them to speak naturally and enhance their oral English competence. Therefore, teachers should find better ways to teach oral English. As well as to encourage language mastery through practice, more and more ESL teachers will choose the Situational Teaching Method to teach oral English, especially in primary school. In conclusion, the application of Situational Teaching Method in oral English teaching in primary school can help us to get better result.

1. A review of oral English class

In my first portion of analysis in this review, I want to focus on the aspects of oral English teaching. In order to give you the main idea of my research study, these points should be provided: oral language development, the necessity of open oral English class in primary school, and anxieties and problems in the oral English classroom.

1) Oral language development. Language is an amazing gift that provides for the ability to speak and convey the meaning of our ideas or thoughts to others. Also it is the complex system of communication; it can help us to express affection, to teach, to explain, to ask for more information, and so on. Honig (2007) points out that "oral language proficiency with others is an awesome social skill that our ancestors
developed less than 130,000 years ago” (p. 581). In addition, Chomsky (1965) believed that language is a hard-wired in the brain. Like Chomsky, Honig (2007) thinks that all cultures have oral language, and children in every culture learn to speak oral language without realizing how much they know (p. 582). What’s more, the earliest roots of oral language development lie in the communicative social interactions and games the caring adults give to their babies. So, although English is not our mother language, we can learn it through specific environments and situations.

2) The necessity of open oral English class in primary school.

a. The features of English education in primary school. Nowadays, most of the children learn English at a very early age. In primary school, we have English class almost every day. Yang (2008) states in his paper that the students would like to learn when the content is interesting and is closely related to the daily life of the children (p. 2). After teaching in primary school for four years, I totally agree with this idea. The English teachers need to stimulate their interest in learning English constantly.

According to the features of English education in primary school, the children do not have strong direct motivation to learn English; the only effective way for the teachers is to arouse their learning interest. On the one hand, we can choose the funny contents or contexts to teach them, and try to establish a better English atmosphere in class. On the other hand, we can use some various methods to teach them, such as games, competitions and other interesting activities.

b. The necessity of opening oral English class. According to Yang (2008), it is really necessary to open oral English class in primary school from the aspect of theory
and practice (p. 3). We all know that English learning includes listening, speaking, reading and writing. The purpose of learning English for us is not just to get high marks on the English exams, but to cultivate and enhance the practical ability of English and language use. English and Chinese are popular languages in the world; the best way to show that you have mastered them is to speak. So, the oral English ability is one of the most important abilities of learning English. It is the requirement of English education reform in China to focus on the oral and listening English. In recent years, the English reform emphasizes that the English teachers should change their concepts. The new curriculum emphasizes that teachers should focus more on the students and let them actively get involved in the class. The student-centered teaching is accepted and appreciated by most of the teachers and our government, so that we should encourage the pupils to speak bravely and confidently in English class. Additionally, more and more schools regard oral English as part of the final test to evaluate their English abilities.

In addition, we know that the early childhood is the golden age to learn languages. They can learn it well through the different kinds of activities the teachers give to them. For example, the English songs, role plays and guessing games can stimulate their interests.

3) **Anxieties and problems in oral English classroom.** Although we learn that the oral English class in primary school is necessary and important, there are still some problems with it. Liu (2007) points out that a number of the students become anxious when speaking English in class. He considers that some causes may be as
follows: the lack of vocabulary, low English proficiency, difficulty of the task, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes and lack of practice (p. 10). As a matter of fact, Cortazzi and Jin (1994) claimed that Chinese English learners often thought vocabulary was a big obstacle for them to learn English (p. 129). Especially in primary school, many children know little vocabulary, so they will find it hard to speak English and will be nervous and anxious in class.

In addition, Yang (2008) still states that many children who have been learning English for some years can not speak or express themselves in English. In other words, many children failed to reach the basic ability of speaking English. This is the true phenomenon of oral English education recently in many schools in China. The reasons for it will be complicated, for first instance, the traditional pattern of English teaching. For a long period of time, we focus on the teaching of knowledge, not the language use of English. That is the reason why our education policy finds the problems and tries to reform. Second, some of the English teachers lack proficiency in teaching English at school. Consequently, they can not teach the children well enough to let them achieve oral English competence. Moreover, the learning circumstance should be improved in the oral English classroom. It is important for the teachers and parents to create some better English circumstances for the students to learn.

2. A review of Situational Teaching Method

In this section, I want to study and analyze the different teaching methods for improving oral English teaching in primary school, and stress the Situational Teaching Method. Therefore, it includes some aspects as follows: first, developing oral
language in the primary school classroom; second, strategies for improving oral English teaching in primary school, including the application of the Group Work Method to oral English teaching, using popular movies in teaching oral skill, the application of Communicative Language Teaching in oral English teaching, and the application of the Situational Teaching Method in oral English teaching.

1) Developing oral language in the primary school classroom. Brabham and Villaume (2002) said that “children acquire language through implicit and explicit instruction” (p. 392). So, we can design some possible English instructions for the children in the oral English class. Kirkland and Patterson (2005) argued that "The development of oral language is facilitated through a carefully planned environment that promotes thoughtful, authentic opportunities to engage in conversation" (p. 392). What's more, he stated that our classrooms should be rich in examples of printed, it can include art work, pictures or stories. The children would be glad to see their work displayed in the classroom, and through these products, the children can learn and interact with each other properly. They can see and hear English when someone participates in the language experiences. Kirkland, Aldridge and Kuby (2002) pointed out that “the use of displayed environmental print in meaningful activities connects signs, symbols and logos found in the world of the children to print in the classroom” (p. 392). In addition, the print rich classroom can give the children opportunities to interact and convey oral English in their free time in the classroom. As a whole, through these points we have discovered, our oral English must be developed in the primary school classroom.
2) Strategies for improving oral English teaching. As we all know, oral English teaching is a weak and hard point of teaching English. Many children can read or write some stories, but they fail to communicate using English with others in their daily life. Therefore, our English education reformed to focus on oral English proficiency. Jin (2009) believed that English teachers should master some effective ways to stimulate and cultivate the students’ interest and their confidence in learning English (p. 7). First, he stated that we could hold oral English tests in school. If we use this effective way, we can give the students more chance to practice their oral English. The aims of learning English for them are not only to pass the listening and writing sections of the exam, but also to cultivate the ability to communicate. Second, he said that we needed to increase the language input. It is good for the learners to practice oral English, and increase the language input will improve their speaking ability. Third, he thinks that we should enrich cultural awareness. Language is a kind of culture, so the English teachers need to tell the students the relevant cultural knowledge and background. In addition, some modern methods we can use to improve oral English teaching include: group work competition, teaching English songs, making use of movies or cartoons, or attaching importance to outside class practice.

(1) The application of group work method in oral English teaching. Brown (2008) gives the definition of group work: it is a generic term covering a multiplicity of techniques in which two or more students are assigned a task that involves collaboration and self-initiated language (p. 91).
As English teachers, everyone knows that the aim of oral English teaching is to encourage the students to speak more confidently and cultivate their cooperative and communicative learning ability. According to this, the Group Work Method is a good way to teach oral English.

Xiong (2010) states that the group work has many advantages in oral English teaching (p. 92). First, it cultivates the interdependence of the members in the group. Second, she thinks that it can provide more opportunities for them to practice oral English. Third, it can make appropriate use of interpersonal skills. Finally, it can reduce the learners’ anxiety and provide a positive language environment. In addition, Jin (2009) points out that the group work can offer the teacher opportunities to work with the students who need special attention. It also can improve the students’ ability to understand and communicate (p. 8). Therefore, the application of the Group Work Method in oral English teaching is effective and useful for us.

(2) Using popular movies in teaching oral skills. The multimedia learning theory is likely to be more meaningful for the learners if their experience is considered in designing multimedia learning environments (Mayer, 2001). What's more, Dikilitas and Duvenci (2009) made a data test to see whether this meaningful learning would contribute to oral performance.

In addition, Bulter-Pascoe and Wiburg (2003) claimed that picture and video are described as the three dimensional texts (p. 169). That is to say, the video or movies can help the learners to understand the language of the text and consolidate their learning process. In order to find the effect, Dikilitas and Duvenci (2008) chose 10
students to participate in their study, and they divided the students into two groups: the test group and the control group. The test group students would be taught language of context through a popular movie, while the control group students would be taught language of context through textual materials. Consequently, from the data analysis, they found the test group students talk and speak more and longer than the control group students. So, their oral production and performance are more effective.

Hence, oral English teachers can select popular movies to use for teaching in English class. The students learn most efficiently when they are interested in, entertained and motivated by kinds of films. Especially in primary school, if we choose some funny and developmentally appropriate movies or cartoons to teach oral English to the children, they must be happy and their motivation to learn will be enhanced.

(3) The application of the communicative teaching method in oral English teaching. The communicative approach is a philosophy under whose guidance teachers use a diversity of methods to encourage the students to participate actively in communicative activities for practical purposes (Li, 2008). It is one of the best ways to teach oral English. Moreover, she claimed that there were two principles in the application of the communicative approach. One is task-oriented. She said that our teachers should put forward the teaching requirements, and around the central task we should arrange kinds of activities. Another is student-centered. She also thought that English language is learned by the students, so they have the responsibility of learning in the classroom. It is required that the teachers provide appropriate situations and
methods for the learners, so the students can practice oral English through the communicative approach.

Johnson (2000) argued in his paper that "the teaching content approach to communicative language teaching bases itself on a linguistic insight regarding what is entailed in knowing a language" (p.197). What's more, he believed that the implication of this concerns the concept of information. So we should create the task in the classroom through the communicative method. Byrne (1978) provides incomplete plans and diagrams which students have to complete by asking for information.

In conclusion, the application of Communicative Language Teaching can help the teachers to teach oral English well in the classroom, but there are still very limited qualifications for many ESL classroom teachers to use the Communicative Language Teaching effectively, especially in primary school. There are usually over 45 students in one class in China, so it is hard to let all of them communicate together. In addition, the children in primary school do not have enough vocabulary and language competence to communicate naturally.

(4) The application of the situational teaching method in oral English teaching.

The Situational Teaching Method is also called the oral approach, was developed from the 1930s to the 1960s by British linguists such as Palmer and Hornsby, who attempted to formally develop a scientifically-founded approach to teach English. Pittman (1963) found that “principal classroom activity in the teaching of English structure will be the oral practice of structures. This oral practice of controlled
sentence patterns should be given in situations designed to give the greatest amount of practice in English speech to the pupil” (p. 179).

In my experience of oral English teaching, I always choose this approach to teach the children oral English. For example, if I need to teach the greetings to them, such as “good morning,” “nice to meet you,” “goodbye,” I will create a situation for them to learn the greetings. The situation of "go to school" and "leave school" will be set up first, and according to our real situation, so they can understand and practice the greetings better and more effectively. In addition, if I need to teach them some knowledge of festivals, I will find some information about language background for them, and try to take some real objects or pictures into the class. Furthermore, I will decorate the classroom. It is necessary to provide a situation and better language environment for them to practice their oral English. This can stimulate their interest of learning and speaking English. In my opinion, the situation provided for the children to learn English in primary school is significant and meaningful. They can practice oral English unconsciously and naturally.

While the Situational Teaching Method must be a useful method in teaching oral English in primary school, some teachers have several concerns about using this method in ESL classrooms. Teachers should consider how to use suitable situations. For these concerns, ESL teachers do need some discussions for using situations for their teaching plans. To address these concerns, teachers need to have further study about the Situational Teaching Method.
Chapter III Conclusions and Recommendations

From my review of some literatures, I have found that the oral English teaching in primary school should be more effective. In order to be more successful, our English teachers need to master different kinds of language teaching methods. If we use these methods flexibly, the aim of oral English teaching may be reached. In fact, through my analysis and research of these different methods, I prefer using the Situational Teaching Method to teach oral English in primary school. I believe that this method is the best choice for us to teach children oral English. The reasons can be easily found. First, children have little knowledge and vocabulary of English, so it may be hard for them to understand and practice English without real situations or environments. Second, the good and proper situations can link the language with the social lives of the children. Last but not least, providing the situations to learn language seems to coincide with the natural development of language acquisition.

Therefore, if primary English teachers try to use many different situations when teaching the children oral English, students can understand and learn English better. Maybe in the future, more and more English teachers in primary school will advocate this approach in oral English teaching, but there still are some problems with using the Situational Teaching Method more efficiently and what kinds of situations we can make relevant to the teaching context. We need further study or research about these teaching problems and issues.
References


