Preliminary Year: A needs analysis for creating an enhanced spoken English environment

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Overview

• UNNC & CAS
• Research need
• Literature Review
• Methodology
• Results & Discussions
• Conclusion
UNNC

• First Sino-British university in China
• 2004 – 15 years
• 90% - domestic students
• 10% - HMT and International students
• PY – approximately 2000 students, 18-19
  96% domestic students including HMT

(UNNC website)
CAS – What we do

Coaching and Support (CAS) provides English language and study skills support and guidance for *Preliminary Year* students through:

- One-to-one advising
- Academic skills workshops
- General English
- Online paraphrasing forum
- Online self-study materials
- *@UNNC* lunchtime life skill discussion
- ZOOM – digital video pal (new project)
- PAIR UP – (Trial activity)
Need for the research

Students
- reluctant to speak in English
- unable to find friends who are willing to speak in English
- feel it is weird to speak in English with their Chinese friends
- Gaokao exam - spoken English component is optional in several provinces

CAS advising
- Struggle to explain their problem or thoughts in English
- Student request for help with spoken English
  - 96 ss

Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning
- “Inconsistent use of English in classrooms and on campus”
- “English is the working language at UNNC and students are strongly encouraged to use it in all occasions”
Related studies

Students’ self-report of their English speaking encounters outside the classroom (Rooke, 2010)

What opportunities are available to students to use English outside the classroom?

- The majority of students speak English outside the classroom for less than one hour per week
- Around 1/5 of respondents never speak English outside the classroom
- Domestic students report lack of interaction with international students

A survey from the 2012 CELE tracking survey concludes - Students need to build confidence to speak up in seminars (Smith, 2012)
Related studies

CELE needs analysis (CELENA) survey 2017

19 staff were asked about students’ spoken English level.
Some of their responses:

“Many students are unable to express their ideas”
“Most students are shy to speak.”
“Students tend to memorize answers, or have 'set' answers/questions.”
“do not want to talk in the seminars”
“a sizeable minority who either barely speak or struggle to present themselves coherently.”
“Students show a reluctance to speak without prep”
“They are good (somehow) at monologues but not in a conversation.”
“Students are unable to talk about their immediate environment, explain their needs, and form personal opinions on very common topics.”
Related studies

CELE needs analysis (CELENA) survey 2017

29 students were asked about how to improve students’ spoken English level

Some of their responses - 10 from PY:

“more chances to practice oral English”

“CELE should provide more speaking opportunities for students besides class, like arrange the chat weekly.”

“more practice about speaking.”

“have some one-to-one exercise oppounities regularly”

“provide more oppotunities for students to speak English in ordinary life.”

“Students need more oral practice on daily communication”

“Encourage the students to practise oral English skills more”

“more presentations and discussions in year 1”

“More general English speaking practice to build confidence”

“Speaking is a long term process. One year is hardly sufficient”
Literature Review

• Spoken language production is often considered a difficult aspect of language learning (Brown and Yule, 1983)

• Littlewood (2007) asserts that a foreign language can create inhibitions and anxiety easily. When students try to say things in a foreign language they are worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism or losing face.

“Most students are shy to speak.”

• When all or a number of learners share the same mother-tongue, they tend to use it because it is easier for them (Harmer 1991).

“...weird to speak in English with their Chinese friends.”
Literature review

Studies in Asian contexts (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Tsui, 1996; Jackson, 2002) report that Asian EFL learners are often reticent and passive in classroom situations

- Reticence among Chinese students a common problem (Tsui, 1996 and Ng, 2010)
- Fear of making errors or losing face contributes to student reticence (Tsui, 1996)
- Standard answer concept contributes to reticence (James, Miller and Wyckoff, 2016)

“Students tend to memorize answers, or have 'set' answers/questions.”
There is a rich body of research that has looked very closely at precisely what happens when students are engaged in:

- pairs (Mondada & Pekarek Doehler, 2004; Platt & Brooks, 2002)
- small groups (Bloome, 2015; van Compernolle & Williams, 2013)
- whole-class conversation (Seedhouse, 2004; Walsh, 2006; Waring, 2013)

The findings are quite astounding for they show that through their use of language in well-constructed and genuinely engaging speaking tasks, students:

- develop their conversational competence
- become more proficient in the use of appropriate rather than just accurate language
- deepen their understanding of difficult concepts
- expand their analytic abilities
- push each other beyond their current individual capacities
- learn to play with language and take risks with it
Literature Review

- **Need linguistic competence**, an adequate vocabulary and mastery of syntax to speak in another language (Nunan, 1999). However, linguistic competence is **not sufficient** for someone who wants to **communicate competently in another language**.

- Nunan (1999), the speaker **needs communicative competence** which includes not only linguistic competence but also a range of other sociolinguistic and conversational skills which help him/her **know how to say what to whom and when**.

- Johnson (1995) asserts that the **second language students need communicative competence** to participate in and learn from their classroom experience.

- **Interaction is a mini-laboratory** for language use – allowing learners to make discoveries about their new language as they use it to communicate their ideas. (Swain, 2005).

- Research on peer interaction demonstrates that it provides unique **language learning opportunities** (Philp, Adams & Iwashita, 2014).
Methodology

• Survey – Microsoft Forms
• Hyland (2006) suggests one of the most common approaches for Needs Analysis is questionnaires.
• Larger samples
• Anonymity and authentic responses
• Preliminary Year - 20 (pilot) 374 students (main)
• Questionnaire
  - Gather information on students self assessment of needs on spoken English
  - 6 questions
Results

1. Do you have enough opportunities to practise spoken English?

![Pie chart showing 62% YES and 38% NO]
Results

2. I have participated in the following CAS SE activities.

- One to one advising for spoken English - 94
- UNNC lunchtime discussion - 100
- CHAT UP - 95
- Unable to register - 138
3. Ability to organise spoken English activities.

- 23% I am able to organise spoken English activities for myself - 93
- 52% I am unable to organise spoken English activities for myself - 105
- 25% I would like CAS to organise spoken English activities - 232
Results

4. Preferred choice of facilitator for the spoken English activities.

- Student - 70
- CAS team member - 111
- Either student or CAS team member - 185
5. How often would you like to practise spoken English if it is made available by Coaching and Support team (CAS)?

- Everyday of the weekday - 155 (49%)
- Once a week - 178 (42%)
- Twice a week - 23 (6%)
- Once a month - 12 (3%)
6. How would participating in spoken English activities help you? Choose as many options as you wish.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Series1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help with improving fluency</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help to express my ideas in English</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help to speak confidently</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help to interact with foreign friends</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help to improve general English</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help to practise oral presentations</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help to participate in group discussions/seminars</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of the above</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussions

- **No** opportunity – 231 (62%)
- Yes – 143 (38%)
  - Unable to organise SE activities – 29
  - CAS to organise SE activities – 25
- Unable to participate in CAS activities – 138 (32 %)
- Ability to organise spoken English activities is **limited** – 77 %
- Prefer spoken English activities to be **organised for them** – 53%
Discussions and Implication

• Prefer either student or CAS member as facilitators – 51%
• Spoken English support is beneficial
  - express ideas in English – 59%
  - speak confidently – 46%
  - in all 6 categories– 49%
• Strong need
Conclusion

• UNNC presents itself as an international university
• 96% of our students are native Chinese speakers - feel uncomfortable using English
• Opportunities to use English in a more realistic and natural settings at UNNC are limited

• Should we or not extend SE support ?
• Spoken English environment?
• Strategies/set skills?
• Do we have the means?
• How best can we extend this support?

Trialed two new activities
• ZOOM - digital video pal
• PAIR UP
Conclusion

Research specialised in analyzing actual conversations shows that (Kubanyiova, 2018)

- a lot of meaningful learning is happening as language learners participate in speaking
- time and space for speaking allow them to become more sensitive to how their emerging language works for communicative purposes
- they also begin to learn how to make it their own and use it creatively
Conclusion

Creating the necessary speaking environment is valued as

- time for extra practice of previously learned material
- also as time in which new learning opportunities come to life

(Kubanyiova, 2018)
References


References


Smith, R. (2012). *A survey to gauge the effectiveness of the current Preliminary Year curriculum in English for Academic Purposes at UNNC.* Ningbo, China: CELE, University of Nottingham Ningbo China.


