

UTILIZING GROUP PRESENTATION ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING PRAGMATICS TO 4TH YEAR ENGLISH MAJORS AT FOE, HNUE

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Abstract

Among the linguistic subjects being taught at the Faculty of English, Pragmatics has always been one of the most difficult yet interesting ones. This has inspired the author of the study to seek for an effective way in delivering pragmatic lessons to his students, and group presentation has long come to mind. This minor research study aims at investigating the effectiveness of using group presentations in teaching the subject of pragmatics to 4th-year English majors, as well as proposing some suggestions for improvement in the futures. The conclusions drawn seem to be promising and show that this type of activity has effectively enhanced the teaching and learning process of this subject. The students seemed really interested in the way the lessons conducted and claimed that their study of pragmatics did achieve positive results.

Key words: Pragmatics teaching, Group presentation activities

1. Introduction

1.1. Rationale

It is undoubtedly that in order to be a teacher of English, students have to master both the English language teaching methodology and the English language itself. This explains why English linguistic subjects are of great importance. Of these subjects, pragmatics has constantly been considered one of the most challenging yet exciting ones. Many students interviewed claimed that they liked the subject, but it also caused them so many difficulties during their learning process. All of these have given the rise to the author's interest in carrying out a research study aiming at investigating the effectiveness of using group presentation activities in

pragmatic lessons. In addition, the author has been working on pragmatic subject for nearly five years, both as a teaching assistant and a main teacher.

1.2. Aims of the study

The study aims at:

- investigating the effectiveness of utilizing group work presentation activities in teaching pragmatics to 4th-year English majors at the Faculty of English, Hanoi national University of Education
- proposing suggestions for further improvement for the teaching and learning of the pragmatic subject

2. Content

2.1. Theoretical background

Pragmatics

Pragmatics can be briefly defined as the study of how language is used to communicate. It is important to note that Pragmatics goes beyond the meanings carried in individual words and the order of words to consider how people use language as they communicate. Pragmatics addresses such questions as why speakers phrase a sentence one way rather than another in a given context. For instance, a study of pragmatics enables researchers to explain how an individual comes to understand that “Can you pass me the sugar” is not a query about whether he/she has the physical ability necessary to perform the act, but actually a request that she/she do it.

Group work benefits

Group work has great potential for an array of reasons:

Students are encouraged to become active rather than passive learners by developing collaborative and cooperating skills.

- It encourages the development of critical thinking skills.

- It promotes students' learning and achievement.
- Students have the opportunity to learn from and teach each other.
- The focus is on student-centered approach to teaching and learning.
- Students are involved in their own learning process.
- Teaching effectiveness and efficiency increases, and as a result there is an increased enjoyment among teaching staff and students.
- It also makes the Unit of Study challenging, motivating, engaging and exciting.

2.2. Methodology

Group Presentation Activities

The class is divided into a number of groups depending on its size as well as the pragmatic issues covered during the course. Each group is randomly assigned an issue and has to work together to make a presentation in front of the whole class on it. In order to assist students in their presentations, the teacher sends to each group a set of guided questions for each issue; however, to keep the equality among all groups, these questions come to the students only one week before their class presentations. During a lesson, the group in charge has to present their understandings of the issue while the other groups listen and raise questions, comments, or contributions. Arguments over certain aspects of the issue are expected to occur among the students. At the end of the lesson, the teacher gives the final conclusion over the issue under discussion and explains any other queries from the students. For the purpose of motivating students to work harder in their groups, the teacher also marks the presentation and adds it to the mid-term results of the students.

Data collection

In order to assess the efficiency of the use of these presentations activities, the author used such instruments as class observation and student interviews. After each lesson, the author input data into his class observation log which contains a

number of categories: student attendance, student attitude, student involvement, the number of questions under discussion, the quality of the students' presentations, etc. Besides the observation log, the author did regularly interview his students after the lessons for their ideas and feedbacks about the use of group presentation activities in class. The interview also uncovered what changes students expected to see in the next course if these activities would still be in application.

Data analysis and findings

According to the observation, there are many promising results. The students' attendance improved greatly compared with previous semesters. More importantly, the students' interest and attitudes toward the subject of pragmatics tended to be far better as well as more positive. In addition, the presentations of the students were getting more and more improved during the course. Supporting these findings from the observation log, the interviews did reveal very positive reactions and feedbacks from the students. Almost all of them felt greatly interested in the way the lessons were conducted and claimed that they had studied more effectively and easily with the group presentation activities. What they expected to see was the improvement in the roles of each student in his/her groups and the involvement of the whole class in a group's presentation.

3. Conclusion and suggestions for further improvement

The application of group presentation activities appeared to be really effective in enhancing the teaching of pragmatics to the 4th-year English majors. The students felt more engaged in the lessons of such a challenging theoretical subject and did achieve deep understandings of the important issues. Moreover, the group work had brought the students closer to each other and encouraged them to be more active and cooperative in their learning process.

In order to make the activities more effective in the future, the author proposes an idea that the topic assignment to each group of students should be made random. This means students are still divided into groups, but they do not know whether

they have to present a certain issue until they go to class. The new way of assigning topics is hoped to put all students in a state that they have to prepare for all of the issues covered in the course and are always ready to make presentations when required by the teacher.

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