



Transitioning to a communication-oriented pedagogy: Taiwanese university freshmen's views on class participation



Wen-Hsien Hsu^{*}

Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Taiwan University, No. 1, Section 4, Roosevelt Road, Taipei, 10617, Taiwan, ROC

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 16 September 2013

Received in revised form 21 November 2014

Accepted 7 December 2014

Available online 29 December 2014

Keywords:

Class participation

EFL

Communication-oriented pedagogy

Non-native-English-speaking (NNES) Asian students

Tertiary English instruction

Second and foreign language

Class discussion

ABSTRACT

This study investigated 354 Taiwanese university freshmen's attitudes toward oral participation in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom as they transitioned to an English-medium, communication-oriented pedagogy. It aimed to elucidate the causes of students' participation and non-participation in class discussions and the relationship between participation and English language performance. Data were gathered from two questionnaires and two English performance measures. Results showed that students' class participation significantly correlated with their course achievement and English listening proficiency. In addition, they revealed an apparent contradiction between students' views and their reported behaviors. Though students valued class participation and were reluctant to be passive learners, they demonstrated low overall involvement. Analysis further suggested that limited verbal contributions to class discussion among EFL students may signal an evolving desire for learner autonomy and active participation deterred by a complex mix of linguistic and non-linguistic variables. On the other hand, students indicated that being prepared for class, feeling assured of their answers before speaking, and engaging in small group activities were conducive to participation. This study proposes several pedagogical implications to aid instructors in promoting second and foreign language students' engagement and learning outcomes in a communication-oriented pedagogy.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Students' oral participation is important for the learning and teaching that takes place in the second and foreign language (L2/FL) classroom. Through their exposure to and engagement in meaningful communicative interactions, learners not only become acculturated into the discursive norms and behaviors of their classroom communities (Morita, 2004), but they also improve comprehension and develop communicative competence in the target language (Long, 1996; Morell, 2007; Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos, & Linnell, 1996; Swain, 1985). Specifically, class participation provides a primary forum for FL students to put their interlanguage knowledge into practice because in most cases the opportunities to communicate in the target language are confined to the language classroom. Therefore, promoting participation among FL students during instructional activities becomes particularly essential.

^{*} Tel.: +886 2 3366 3169.

E-mail address: hsuwenhsien@ntu.edu.tw.

Despite the importance of class participation, engaging learners constantly challenges both content and language instructors. This challenge often raises pedagogical concern in intercultural classrooms when non-native-English-speaking (NNES) Asian students are involved. The assumption that NNES Asian students are passive and reticent learners has been widely debated and extensively researched in the fields of international education, higher education, and applied linguistics (e.g., Chanock, 2010; Ellwood & Nakane, 2009; Jones, 1999; Lee, 2007; Littlewood, 2000; Mariskind, 2013; Marlina, 2009). In contrast, there is less research into the class participation of NNES Asian students in their native countries. In these contexts, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) and a compulsory school subject primarily by instructors who speak the same first language (L1) as the students. Because NNES Asian students' previous learning experiences often affect their participatory behaviors in the classroom (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009; Jones, 1999), research into this under-addressed area can help instructors working with these students in inter- or transcultural academic environments to better understand their students' learning needs.

Investigation into class participation among NNES Asian students is further justified by the widespread promotion of a Western-based communicative approach to language teaching (CLT) across Asia. With the instructional goal of preparing students for entrance examinations, the grammar-translation method has predominated in formal secondary English education in many Asian EFL contexts (e.g., China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Vietnam). Because this method assigns little pedagogical value to listening and speaking and provides few opportunities for classroom interaction, it detrimentally affects the overall communicative abilities of many NNES Asian EFL learners (Bruthiaux, 2010; Nunan, 2003). To remedy this situation, language educators have introduced CLT as they have reformed English curricula and pedagogies across Asian EFL countries (Li, 1998; Littlewood, 2007). At the secondary-school level, however, the applicability of the Western-based CLT in most cases is heavily circumscribed by the significant impact of an exam-oriented, grammar-based English teaching tradition (Kikuchi, 2009; Li, 1998; Wang, 2002; Yu, 2001). In contrast, the tertiary English curriculum allows greater flexibility for innovative instruction because it lacks the overarching constraints imposed by exam preparation. Consequently, the dominant English teaching methodology has gradually shifted in recent years toward a communicative paradigm (Chern, 2010).

Because of the methodological disparity between secondary and tertiary English education, it remains unclear how NNES Asian university freshmen perceive and cope with the transition to the more communication-oriented, English-medium pedagogy promoted in tertiary EFL curricula. Specifically, much remains to be explored about how university freshmen switch from their previous roles as *L2 learners* to their new roles as *L2 users* (Cook, 2002). That is, the literature has not yet determined how these students handle the challenges that arise in the shift from treating the target language as an academic subject to using their knowledge about the target language for communication. This study begins to address such concerns by presenting the class participation experiences of 354 first-year tertiary EFL students in Taiwan.

2. Literature review

A review of existing literature on classroom participation reveals that most research has been conducted in English-speaking tertiary content tutorials or multicultural ESL classrooms; only limited research has addressed students' class participation in EFL academic contexts. This is a serious oversight in an increasingly globalized higher-education market. Instructors and other students may have misconceptions about NNES Asian students because they do not understand the classroom participatory patterns into which these students have been socialized. Such misconceptions are likely to negatively influence faculty-to-student and student-to-student interactions in intercultural learning environments.

2.1. Consolidation of responsibility

Though there are few studies on EFL learners' class participation, a considerable body of literature provides insight into students' participation in U.S. university content classrooms. This literature may have implications for research on learner involvement in L2/FL academic contexts. Active participation promotes learning effectiveness, cultivates critical thinking, enhances course performance, and fosters intellectual development (e.g., Fassinger, 1995; Fritschner, 2000; Murray & Lang, 1997; see Rocca, 2010, for an overview). Despite these benefits, a seminal study by Karp and Yoels (1976) found that one overriding norm observed in the college classroom is the "consolidation of responsibility," whereby the class relies on a handful of students to be verbally involved in class discussion, while the majority remains infrequent participants or reticent listeners. Several decades later, studies confirm that this norm persists in mainstream U.S. tertiary classrooms, regardless of universities' growing emphasis on a learner-centered, interactive format (Fritschner, 2000; Howard & Baird, 2000; Howard, James, & Taylor, 2002; Rocca, 2010).

2.2. Factors affecting undergraduates' class participation

One significant predictor of undergraduates' low participation is large class size. Research by Fassinger (1995) has found an inverse relationship between class size and student participation. Large classes predispose instructors to lecture, a teaching style that allows students to feel anonymous, thereby diffusing their sense of responsibility for contributing verbally to class discussion (McKeachie, 1990). Likewise, large class size negatively affects students' participation in the L2/FL classroom, as teachers find it more difficult to provide individualized instruction and implement communicative group activities (Hiep,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/373091>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/373091>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)