

THEORETICAL REVIEW ON STUDENTS' ORAL PARTICIPATION IN ENGLISH CLASSROOMS

CƠ SỞ LÝ LUẬN VỀ VẤN ĐỀ THAM GIA VÀO CÁC HOẠT ĐỘNG NÓI CỦA SINH VIÊN TRONG CÁC LỚP HỌC TIẾNG ANH

Tran Hoa Mi

University of People's Security, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

This review summarizes the relevant research on students' oral participation in classrooms where English is used as a means of instructions. Specifically, this library-based research reviews studies that have touched upon the merits of promoting students' oral participation in class and factors influencing such activities. It has been found out that students' classroom participation is highly correlated with their academic achievements and English proficiency. The review of literature indicates several aspects that can affect students' engagement in oral activities in English classes. These factors include cognitive, pedagogical, affective, socio-cultural, and linguistic features. Finally, this review discusses gaps in the literature and directions that future studies may take to address these gaps. These implications include reconsidering the way of categorizing the factors, further examining the effects of teacher's traits and socio-cultural factors on students' classroom oral participation in the recent days, especially when Western values integrated more and more strongly to Asian nations.

Keywords: *oral; participation; English classrooms; theoretical review; implications.*

TÓM TẮT

Bài tổng quan này tổng hợp các nghiên cứu về việc tham gia của sinh viên vào các hoạt động nói trong lớp học tiếng Anh. Cụ thể, bài này phân tích giá trị của việc thúc đẩy học sinh tham gia các hoạt động nói trong lớp và các yếu tố ảnh hưởng đến hoạt động đó. Việc tham gia vào các hoạt động nói trong lớp có ảnh hưởng to lớn đến thành tích học tập và khả năng thông thạo tiếng Anh của sinh viên. Các nghiên cứu trước đây cũng chỉ ra năm nhóm yếu tố ảnh hưởng đến việc tham gia của sinh viên vào các hoạt động nói trong lớp học tiếng Anh, bao gồm các yếu tố liên quan đến nhận thức, giáo dục, cảm xúc, văn hóa-xã hội và ngôn ngữ học. Sau cùng, bài viết thảo luận về các vấn đề chưa được đề cập trong các nghiên cứu trước đây và đưa ra các hướng nghiên cứu mới, có thể được tiến hành trong tương lai để giải quyết những vấn đề này. Các nghiên cứu trong tương lai cần xem xét lại cách phân loại các yếu tố, nghiên cứu kỹ càng hơn về tầm ảnh hưởng của giáo viên và các yếu tố văn hóa-xã hội đến việc tham gia của sinh viên vào các hoạt động nói trong lớp học tiếng Anh của sinh viên trong thời đại ngày nay, đặc biệt là khi các giá trị phương Tây du nhập ngày càng mạnh mẽ vào các quốc gia châu Á.

Từ khóa: *nói; tham gia; lớp học tiếng Anh; tổng quan lý thuyết; ý nghĩa.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In traditional classes, students rely on teachers for information. They do not need to make any efforts in order to find out answers or main points of the lessons. Therefore, passive classes, which are significantly problematic with almost teachers in general and foreign language teachers in particular, are common.

In fact, in classes where foreign language is used as a tool of communication, active participation helps students be able to use the language accurately, fluently and confidently whether in its spoken or written forms - the main aim of learning a foreign language. It is the teacher's responsibility to guide and help students participate by giving them the opportunities to be involved in the classroom discussions. By this way, students will not only develop their proficiency and accuracy in the language but they will also use the language confidently.

In the limitation of the paper, the author has tried to identify some important aspects of oral participation in English classrooms as well as figure out some implications. Hopefully, by examining the effects of students' oral participation and its causes, language teachers can come up with appropriate teaching plans and strategies so as to promote students' talking time.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper is drawn on a library research study. Firstly, theoretical materials relevant to different aspects of classroom oral participation, particularly in English classrooms, are collected. Then, they are categorized into themes. In the next step, some themes of interest are selected to be presented in the paper. Finally, within each theme, the literature is compared and

contrasted to figure out the directions for further research.

3. LITERATURE ON CLASSROOM ORAL PARTICIPATION

In this section, the definition, the importance and factors affecting students' oral participation in English classrooms are presented in turn.

3.1 Definition

Among plentiful ways of defining the classroom oral participation, the researcher adopts perspectives guiding her during the research process [1]. Participating in class is when students answer and ask questions, make comments and join in discussions. Passive students are those who do not speak in the above ways in class [1].

Students' oral participation in English classrooms is divided into three modes of engagement: compliance, navigation and negotiation. When students reply to their teachers' questions (the teachers' management of classroom communication), they adopt compliance. The second mode, navigation, occurs when students take the initiative to overcome communication. Navigation can help comprehension and contribute to language development. Negotiation occurs when the teachers' and students' roles become less asymmetrical, and interlocutors attempt to reach decisions through consensus (Allwright, 1984, as cited in [2]).

3.2 The need for classroom oral participation

Numerous studies have been conducted to examine the importance of classroom oral participation to students.

First of all, students' classroom participation is highly correlated with their academic achievement. Furthermore,

improved communication and high levels of classroom participation are enviable for students' humanity, their effectiveness in transmitting and analyzing knowledge, or for improving the retention rate. [3]

Beside the correlation to students' academic achievement, classroom oral participation is strongly related to their English proficiency or performance. More proficient students tend to be more active in classroom communication [4] and passive participation in classroom activities negatively affects students' performance in English, especially oral skills.[5], [6]

In short, classroom oral participation is strongly beneficial to students' academic achievement and English proficiency. Therefore, research on its effects and how to promote it in English language classrooms has been dramatically implemented. It is vital to realize which factors facilitate and debilitate students' oral participation in English classrooms. This is the main concern of the next section.

3.3 Factors influencing students' classroom oral participation

Factors affecting students' classroom oral participation are classified into five major categories: cognitive, pedagogical, affective, socio-cultural, and linguistic. [7]

Cognitive

The first category, cognitive, deals with the level of students' self-rating of their English proficiency and their knowledge and interest of the topics or activities.

Regarding the importance of the students' self-rating of their English proficiency on their oral participation, the students' unwillingness to communicate correlated significantly with their self-rated English proficiency and access to English. [4]

Moreover, students' knowledge of the subject matter as well as students' interest level in the topics under discussion may affect their level of oral participation. [8] For example, some Korean students find issues such as abortion, world economics, politics, suicide, and death penalty uninteresting. [9] Moreover, because many Asian students do not have enough knowledge of content material, they face some difficulties to participate in the discussion. [10] In contrast, students who are interested in a topic or activity are more likely to engage and persist. [11]

Pedagogical

Factors related to teachers and classmates are those which fall under pedagogical category.

Teachers, an indispensable variable in classrooms, can noticeably affect students' oral participation.

Firstly, instructors' false assumptions of students' ability result in students' inability to use the target language in class for interactions. An instructor may assume that a student has no aptitude for the language or lacks the desire to improve it, he/she then ignores that student. His ignorance may cause reticent students perceiving that it is not worth contributing in class. [12]

In addition, teachers' language choice can construct or obstruct students' participation in classroom communication. [13] Teachers can construct the participation by activities like direct error correction, content feedback, checking for confirmation, extended wait time and scaffolding. In contrast, obstruction can be done through turn completion, teacher's echo and interruptions. In brief, teachers' ability to control their language use is as important as their appropriate methodologies

in facilitating or hindering students' participation.

Moreover, the approach that teachers adopt in class influences students' oral participation. Student-centered classrooms encourage more participation as compared to teacher-centered classrooms. [14] In student-centered classrooms, working together in English, students are more involved, talk more, share their ideas, value each other's contributions, help and learn from each other, feel more secure and less anxious, use English in a meaningful, realistic way and enjoy using English to communicate. [15]

Other pedagogical factors that can have impact on students' oral participation include the competitiveness among peers, the class size, and the dynamics of the class, the group size. They can facilitate some students while it will stop others from taking part in classroom discussions. [16], [7]

Affective

Affective factors of oral participation, including shyness, self-esteem and communication apprehension, have also caught attention of many researchers of the field.

Firstly, shyness is believed to influence students' oral interaction. [8], [17] Shyness could be the result of any one or a combination of the following factors: skill deficiencies, social introversion, social alienation, ethnic/ cultural divergence, unfamiliarity with academic discourse, lacking confidence in subject matter, and/or communication apprehension. [18] Therefore, those students who are shy, quiet, unsociable, reserved and passive are less likely to participate in class activities.

Furthermore, studies have found that students' self-esteem has some effects on their behaviors in the classroom. [19] Self-

esteem is a set of evaluative attitudes that a person has about himself or his accomplishments. [20] The students with low self-esteem give few responses in the classroom whereas those with high self-esteem display strong communication skills and keep interactive with others. Nevertheless, in another study on the relationship among self-esteem, comprehension apprehension, extroversion, introversion and classroom participation, self-esteem was not a significant predictor of classroom participation as was expected. [21] Therefore, the recent writer suggests that more research should be conducted to examine the effects of self-esteem on students' classroom oral participation.

Communication apprehension is another possible variable that may affect students' classroom participation (Jaasma, 1997, as cited in [21]). Communication apprehension is defined as an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication. [18] Even when students are motivated to contribute, familiar with the discussion topic, and/or interested in the topic, they may be inhibited due to their fear of speaking [21]. In [7]'s study, a Korean nutritionist acknowledged that "deep in her heart she wanted to communicate, but she did not have enough confidence in her speaking ability. Sometimes, she had questions or answers, and knew exactly what she wanted to say, but she was worried that the other students might not understand her" (p. 122).

Socio-cultural

Research has shown that socio-cultural factors strongly affect students' oral participation in classrooms.

Socio-cultural values and norms from Asian countries are believed to cause Asian

students' reticence in classroom. [7] argued that "socio-cultural coupled with linguistic factors seems to be the most debilitating in relation to the students' classroom participation" (p. 174). The socio-cultural factors include the Asian cultural beliefs, values and norms which these students grew up with influence what they perceive and do in American classrooms. For example, in Korea, teachers demand that students not ask too many questions in class and not ask questions without raising their hands. One participant in this study believes that ones should show respect for their teacher by not talking too much in class. This belief seems to discourage their active classroom participation.

This finding corresponds to those of a study comparing an Anglo-American and Korean-American classroom in a preschool setting by Farver and other colleagues in 1995(as cited in [22]). The results indicate that the activities in the Korean-American classrooms - memorization, task persistence, effort and a passive involvement in learning - are in accordance with the Korean values of social harmony, group identity and self-control.

Examining the performance in class of students from different cultures and home countries values, [1] conducted a study on the participation of twenty students from China, Indonesia, Iran, Cambodia, Japan, Guatemala and Armenia. It was found that students' cultural background is significantly correlated to their participation.

In a cross-cultural study of classroom behaviors on eight international students who are from a major university in the American southwest originated from Argentina, China, Italy, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, the Ukraine and Vietnam. Data gather from questionnaire and

interview indicated that students from different home countries performed differently in class. [22] For instance, a Chinese participant found it most difficult when taking part in classroom discussions because, as she claimed, in China, professors do most of the work and that she learned from a professor not her classmates' contributions. It is explained by [23] that Confucian encourages the Chinese to respect hierarchical relationships between individuals. According to students, teachers are expected to teach as well as guide them. Therefore, the teacher is viewed as the authority figure who guides the progress of the class. A Japanese participant felt that she learned much more on her own because in Japan, all assignments are individual. Moreover, this is the strong tendency in Japanese classroom practices is using the written mode of communication. It seemed that students primarily copy what on the blackboard rather than respond or listen to the teacher [24]. These can be the reasons for the Japanese participant's difficulties in working with others.

Linguistic

Linguistic factor refers to students' linguistic capacities. Many students are reluctant to participate in class because of their poor speaking skills, whereas others with good speaking skills feel eager to join oral interaction activities in classroom. In a study on Asian students' classroom communication patterns in U.S. Universities, many participants stated that because of their poor English speaking abilities, they are silent in class in order to avoid making mistakes that, in their minds, would result in a loss of face [25]. It would damage their prestige as graduate students and their perceived public images as smart students or

accomplished scholars in their own fields and in their own countries. [7]

In general, five significant sets of factors can influence students' classroom oral participation. Teachers should be aware of these factors so that they can know what to facilitate for the promotion of students' participation in oral English language classroom activities. Accordingly, students may achieve their academic goal and language proficiency better.

4. IMPLICATIONS

The author has reviewed the literature in regard to different aspects of students' classroom oral participation like the need for oral participation in class and factors influencing their oral engagement in activities in English classrooms. Some gaps identified from the review are going to be discussed in the following section for further research.

Firstly, some researchers have advocated the way [7] categorized factors affecting students' oral participation in English classrooms into cognitive, pedagogical, affective, socio-cultural, and linguistic. The author of this paper believes that cognitive, affective and linguistic can be classified as student factors. As a result, three categories include student, pedagogical and socio-cultural factors have been pointed out. However, the validity of such classification should be addressed in further research.

Secondly, many researchers admitted important roles of teachers in students' oral participation. Supporters argued that teachers' assumptions, language choice and

approach strongly impact students' oral participation [12-14]. However, [26] argued that neither the professor's gender nor his interpersonal style played a central role in the class participation. These teachers' traits seem not to be studied since that time to reinforce this finding. Therefore, the author suggests that the effects of these factors need to be further examined in future research.

Thirdly, socio-cultural factors are significant indicators for students' oral participation. Social norms, values and beliefs which students grew up with affect their engagement in classroom oral activities. According to many researchers, most Asian students encounter difficulties when learning in Western schools because of their reluctant tendency to speak in class, which is in accordance with their home country socio-cultural factors. All research agrees with the influence of socio-cultural factors on students' reluctance to speak. However, the author of this paper believes that more research should be done to examine how they affect students' oral participation in English classrooms in the recent days, due to the strong integration of Western values to Asian nations.

In short, due to what the author reviewed, some issues are, supposedly, worth exploring in the future. It is hoped that these recommendations can be the guidance to researchers who are interested in the issue and that the paper can benefit the teacher and student readers when dealing with students' silence in English classrooms.

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Corresponding Author:

Tran Hoa Mi

University of People's Security

E-mail: hoamitrans88@gmail.com