

To Speak Like a TED Speaker—A Case Study of TED Motivated English Public Speaking Study in EFL Teaching

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Abstract

This paper intends to investigate the effectiveness of a new course pattern—TED-motivated English Public Speaking Course in EFL teaching in China. This class framework adopts TED videos as the learning materials to stimulate students to be a better speaker. Meanwhile, it aims to examine to what extent the five aspects of language skills are improved. Participants are required to give answers to the questions in the questionnaires. SPSS 15.0 is used to analyze the data. The result shows that students in this course respond very positively to this new pattern and are satisfied with their improvements in language skills; they have shifted their roles from a learner to a creator; their critical listening and thinking abilities are greatly enhanced at the same time.

Keywords: TED-motivated, public speaking, role-shifting, critical thinking

1. Introduction

1.1 *The Thriving of Teaching Public Speaking in EFL in China*

Public speaking is one of the most important and effective ways of getting people's idea across. From the ancient time, public speaking has been an effective means to express political stances well as an indispensable skill of daily communication. Important occasions like university thesis defense before graduation, job interviews, and business biddings all require outstanding public speaking ability. A good speaker needs to be able to express his or her views in public places with logical and organized language, using non-verbal skills to interact with the audience, and answering questions from the audience. These communicative skills or abilities are exactly the goals that EFL courses need to achieve.

English Public Speaking has been introduced into China's tertiary curriculum only very recently. Not until the year 2006 has China witnessed a sharp increase in the number of universities offering English Public Speaking courses (Wan, 2013). Among the various factors that have contributed to the phenomenon, awareness of the importance of speaking ability ranks one of the top reasons (See Wan, 2013). Reports suggest that English public speaking can be an effective approach to help students develop communicative awareness, build confidence, use English in a comprehensive way, and more importantly, enhance their critical thinking ability (Wan, 2011, 2013; Zhang, 2009). Many scholars believe that English Public Speaking skills help break the traditional way of delivering speeches in Chinese, in which innovative and personal ideas tend to give way to empty talks. One of the efforts to change the "Chinese pattern" of Public Speaking is the wide spread and popularization of TED speech videos, especially among university campus. Discussions centering on how to speak like TED speaker has arisen on the Internet and other media forum. This paper is trying to build a new pattern of English public speaking course by exploiting TED speech videos in the EFL classrooms to motivate student learners to deliver a speech in English before the public.

1.2 *Challenge for Traditional Listening-Speaking EFL Course*

The vast amount of accessible media resources and portable devices have already challenged the traditional English Listening-Speaking course. EFL teaching needs to focus not only on improving students' language skills, but more on putting students in a self-motivated speaking situation. However, most of the classroom activities are limited to fictional activities; students speak English for the sake of practice instead of the need of communicating. The scenarios teachers create are likely to be detached from the real situations; students tend to lose interest in some of the topics. At the same time, students have difficulty applying their language resources to

deal with practical problems in reality (Wang, 2001; Zhang, 2007). Language drills do not help students exchange information and express themselves, especially on formal occasions (Wang, 2001). English teaching in EFL classrooms in China is still teacher oriented; they frame the entire classroom activities (Zhang, 2007), while students are passive learners. Instead of language drills for its own sake, teachers are responsible for guiding students to enhance their abilities in logic thinking and inference, data collection, idea organization, being persuasive and how to use nonverbal languages to be more expressive (Yan & Jia, 2006).

1.3 Attempts to Promote English Public Speaking Course in China

After seven years' investigation, Yan builds an ITTAP (Imitation, Training, Technique, Evaluation, and Participation) model for teaching public speaking in China (Yan & Jia, 2006). Chen (2010) constructs the "Communication Model of English Public Speaking" as the theoretical basis for Public Speaking of ESL class based on the integration of Bachman's language communication model (1990) together with Lucas' kernel ideas of speech communication theory (2005). Wang (2001) believes that videotaping help ESL class to be more effective and lively. In the study, students are required to offer feedback on their own performance as well as their peers, in hope that peer reviews help student improve their ability of making public speeches. Jin (2011) conducts an empirical study on the measures of decreasing anxiety of university students in public speeches.

1.4 Problems to Address

Most of the researches on English Public Speaking teaching are dedicated into experiential and theoretical descriptions (Chen, 2010; Jing, 2009; Yuan, 2000; Ren, 2007; Yan, 2006; Zhang, 2007; Ren, 2013). Some of the studies lack theoretical support. Few studies provide complete and systematic lesson planning and models to follow. The most important aspect of public speaking is what to say; in other words, how to help students choose an appropriate topic so that they are really able to form ideas in their mind and willing to share with others, instead of ending up in empty talks. As mentioned above, the tremendous amount of resources like English movies, TV series, test soundtracks, together with various MOOCs, are more easily to get accessed by students than ever before. Teachers are facing unprecedented challenges. How can they be sure that the videos, movie clips or soundtracks are welcomed by the majority of the students? What if some students say that they have no interest in the topic the teacher has assigned to them? Even if they follow the instruction and do the required speech, they are probably not really devoted to it. Another noticeable aspect is how to develop students' critical thinking abilities. Chinese students tend to be persuaded easily and follow other people's idea, lacking the courage to challenge others and being afraid of making mistakes. Taking no interest might be one of the reasons as well. As what has been mention above, a good speech topic is food for thought, providing sources and materials for people to meditate. The wide range of topics TED speeches offer help stimulate the students' inspirations and innovative ideas.

In this study, we hope to: (a) increase language input through TED speech by raising students' learning motive, reducing their affective filtering and promoting language output; (b) assimilate the language and ideas from TED videos they have watched by taking notes in the target language. As a result, students are able to learn vocabulary by themselves. More importantly, we want to (c) provide statistical evidence to see how the TED-motivated public speaking course facilitate learning in EFL teaching. Therefore, we are focusing on developing a detailed and systematic description of class patterns and offer statistical analysis based on the questionnaire.

2. What Is the Pattern of "TED Motivated" English Public Speaking Course?

"TED Motivated" English public speaking uses the videos of TED speeches as the input of the target language. Detailed task descriptions and requirements are offered by the instructor for each phase.

This pattern adopts videos of TED speeches as the input of the target language. The advantages are summarized as follows:

- 1) Topic Selection: TED speeches offer a wide range of topics, covering from literature to technology, entertainment to politics. This helps students choose among the videos whose topics they are really interested in. For teachers, on the other hand, they don't have to rack their brain to work out a topic that students might find it boring.
- 2) Valuable language input resources: TED speeches are delivered by speakers all round the world. Most of them are native speakers. Non-native speakers with different accents also provide challenging listening resources for students. After all, under international settings, there's no such "standard" English. These videos therefore, can be served as linguistic input for language learners. There are great ideas, touching stories, and diverse cultural elements in these videos. As foreign language learners, students are able to practice their

listening abilities, learning new words when they are taking notes and get inspiration of ideas from the speakers. Sufficient language input is the foundation for language output as well as future improvement.

- 3) Assimilation in language learning. All the students are required to take notes while they are watching or after they have watched the videos. When they cannot follow, they need to listen repeatedly until they catch the sentence, the phrase, or even the word they want to learn or use in their own speech. As a result, they are motivated to learn by themselves, instead of being pushed by teachers. Vocabulary acquisition naturally follows innote-taking.
- 4) Imitating TED speakers and awareness of using body language. TED speakers set examples for the students. They tend to imitate the way those speaker deliver their speeches, including eye contact, gestures, smiles, and other mannerism that contribute to an effective delivery of speech.
- 5) Self-evaluation and feedback. During class presentation, one student videotapes the speaker. The speaker watches his or her own speech video and provides written comments. In this way, the students know intuitively about their strength and weakness in delivering the speech. They have applies metacognitive strategy in their study.

As discussed above, the five parts form the core of TED-motivated public speaking course. To be brief, TED-motivated pattern is concerned with free selection of topic, effective language input, assimilation, imitation and self-evaluation.

3. Experiment

3.1 Description

The current experiment intends to use SPSS software to investigate into the effectiveness of TED-motivated English Speaking class design and students feedback of the English Public Speaking course. In this part, we will present the class design and procedure, final evaluation and statistical analysis of students' feedback.

Specifically we are interested to find out:

- 1). The effectiveness and self-motivation of language input and output through TED-motivated class framework.
- 2). How does this class framework help students become a more effective public speaker?

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Participants

Participants are 150 freshmen from 5 classes majoring in Software Engineering in Dalian University of Technology (90 male, 22 female). They had one-semester course entitled TED-motivated Public Speaking.

3.2.2 Materials

We designed a questionnaire to assess the effectiveness of the question of interest. The questionnaire is divided into five parts. A five-point Likert scale was utilized to gauge opinions: 1=totally disagree, 2=basically disagree, 3=uncertain, 4=basically agree, 5=totally agree. Scale options 3 allows students to make reservations with the level of agreement or disagreement for each item. At the end of the semester, a pretest was conducted by distributing questionnaire to a small group of 8 students to guarantee the effectiveness of the questions in the questionnaire. Some modifications were made based on the feedback of these students. Altogether 150 questionnaire were distributed, among which 112 were effective and were analyzed by SPSS 15.0.

4. Results

The results are analyzed in 5 aspects. The first part is concerned about the effectiveness and motivation of language input (See Table 1). As we had expected, students are willing to explore among the topics and find one they are interested in (Q2, mean=3.76), rather than assigned by the teacher (Q3, mean=2.54). In addition, most students watch not only one video before they finally decide on the one they like (Q1, mean=2.54). What is more, revealing results can be found in self-motivated language input. Most students agree that they prefer to imitate the intonation and pronunciation of the speaker in the video as well as to use words and sentences in the video to form their own speech. The result also indicates that vocabulary acquisition is improved during video watching (Q4, mean=3.60). Besides language input, the role of note-taking in public speaking is proven to be very positive (Q5, mean=3.63), and suggest that note-taking should be included in the Public Speaking Course as an essential part of the framework.

Table 1. Effectiveness of language input

Question No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Q1	2.54	1.17	.000
Q2	3.76	0.75	.000
Q3	2.54	1.04	.000
Q4	3.60	0.84	.000
Q5	3.63	1.02	.000

The second aspect focuses on language output of the students. As we can see, students need to keep practicing till they are able to speak fluently before delivering the speech in class (Q1, mean=3.98). More inspiringly, students do not only retell what they have heard from the video, but also integrate their own idea to create their own speech (Q2, mean=3.81). They are willing to answer questions raised by their peers after they finish their speech (Q3, mean=3.88) and they regard this QA part as interesting (Q4, mean=3.93), which indicates that they are eager to interact in English and are very active to be a language creator. The role transfer is of critical importance for both EFL teaching and learning.

Table 2. Effectiveness of language output

Question No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Q1	3.98	1.01	.000
Q2	3.81	0.90	.000
Q3	3.88	0.92	.000
Q4	3.93	0.76	.000

The third part of the questionnaire intends to investigate the application of body language in speech delivery. The data results show that students are fully aware of the role that nonverbal language plays in delivering a public speech. For example, students respond positively about the importance of facial expression in speech delivery (Q1, mean=4.10), and they are willing to display their body language in future speech delivery (Q4, mean=3.80). Despite admitting the importance of nonverbal language, student are not quite satisfied with their body language performance (Q2, mean=3.14, Q3 mean=3.18), which indicate that there is still room for further improvement in future practice.

Table 3. Body language and gestures

Question No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Q1	4.10	0.82	.000
Q2	3.14	0.99	.000
Q3	3.18	1.06	.000
Q4	3.80	0.95	.000

In the fourth part, we want to check whether watching students' own speech videos help them improve their public speaking skills (See Figure 4). As the result shows, most students have watched their own videos (Q1, mean=3.8); they agree to a large extent that watching videos help them realize their strength and weakness of speech delivering skills (Q2, mean=3.71), and believe it enables them to make better progress in the future.

Table 4. Functions of video watching

Question No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Q1	3.80	0.98	.000
Q2	3.71	1.01	.000

The fifth part concerns about how TED-motivated speech class encourage students to develop critical listening and thinking abilities. The results shown here, compared with the previous 4, are significantly higher, which approves that this class framework works effectively for enhancing critical thinking and listening skills. A significant number of students agree that TED-motivated speech class give them food for thought, motivate them to think, and the contents are enlightening (Q1, mean=3.84). More importantly, most students respond positively to the statement that “I hold my own opinion about what the speaker says in the video” (Q2, mean=3.87). For the statement “Watching TED speech videos have broaden my horizon”, the mean value has reached 4.11 (Q3), which reflects the class framework (TED-motivated Public Speaking Course) has successful motivated students’ language learning and they have greatly enjoyed the learning process; at the same time, it proves that in this framework, students has successfully transferred the roles from a passive learner to an active explorer, and the result has confirmed that this process as rewarding and fruitful.

Table 5. Enhancement of critical thinking abilities

Question No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
No. 1	3.84	0.99	.000
No. 2	3.87	0.83	.000
No. 3	4.11	0.77	.000

5. Discussion

5.1 Self-Motivated Language Input and Output

In this study, we guarantee the effectiveness of language input in 3 aspects: Firstly, the reduction of affective filter. The “Affective Filter Hypothesis” (Krashen, 1985) holds that a relaxing environment and clear learning motivation promote language input. A sufficient amount of language input needs to be based on the listeners’ interest. The class mode in this project satisfies the student’s needs to choose on their own will among the topics they like, which, to a great extent, guarantees the “effectiveness” of language input. Secondly, the subjects need to watch more than one videos to find the one they are interested and thus increase the amount of language input. Thirdly, the subjects need to take notes of what they have heard in the TED speech and thus learn to summarize and get the main idea.

In order to find an appropriate video, students tend to search under different headings and subheadings for the one video. In other words, they have to watch more than 2 or 3 videos to obtain a proper one.

According to Swain (1985, 1995), successful language learners rely not only on comprehensible language input, but effective language output. A complete learning process involves both aspects. This course achieved this goal in the ways below:

- 1) Note taking. Students were required to write down the main idea of the TED speech they watched, a process entails induction, assimilation, and integration. Meanwhile, they need to write down a brief comment on the ideas of the speaker. That is, to what extent they agree or disagree with the opinions given by the speaker.
- 2) Speech delivery. Each students need to finish two public speeches. Before the speech delivery, they have to keep practicing until they are able to memorize the details and express themselves fluently.

5.2 Critical Listening and Thinking

Lucas (2004) differentiated 4 types of listening strategies: appreciative listening, empathic listening, comprehensive listening and critical listening. For comprehensive listening, listeners are required to understand the facts and information, and are able to summarize the main idea while they are listening, which is a basic level for a listener. One the other hand, critical listening poses a higher demand for listeners. They need to distinguish facts from opinions, judge the validity of the evidence offered by the speaker, and think about to what extent one

agrees with the speaker. Critical listening leads to critical thinking. To enhance students' ability of critical thinking, EFL teachers need to clarify the details of what to do. Use questions to guide students to think independently. In this project, the participants are required to give comments of what they have heard from the TED speech they have picked. They need to offer their answer to the following questions after they have watched the video:

- 1). Why do you choose this video?
- 2). What impresses you most in the video?
- 3). Do you agree with what the speaker says in the video? Why or why not?
- 4). Do you think the speaker in the video is a good speaker? Why?

By providing answers to the questions, students need to reflect on the videos they have watched, and think deeper about the content and ideas.

5.3 Enhancement of Gestures and Non-Verbal Language Skills

Instead of being taught how to use gestures, students watch the speech videos and imitate the speakers' gestures both consciously and unconsciously. More importantly, they have the chance to watch their own speech videos and make direct comparison in nonverbal gestures like eye contact, body language, facial expressions, and stress in their tones. To reinforce the effect, students are required to give comments on their performance in the video by themselves and peers as records for their improvement.

6. Conclusion

As the data shown in the result, the "TED Motivated" English Public Speaking Course pattern we have practiced for this semester has worked effectively in improving students' language learning, as least to the students' understanding. As we had expected, this course pattern meets the demand of the students' desire to be an explorer in language learning, thus guarantees sufficient linguistic input. On the other hand, students responded unexpectedly positively to their linguistic output during the course. They have already shifted their roles from a knowledge receiver to an explorer. Meanwhile, critical thinking abilities are developed and awareness of body language and manners have been enhanced. In a word, the TED-motivated English Public Speaking Course works successfully in motivating students both in language learner and a better public speaker.

Admittedly, there are some limitations of the study. Further research needs to be conducted. In future studies, we hope to do a comparative study investigating whether there is significant difference between the TED-motivated class pattern and other course patterns. In addition, we will try to find correlations between this class framework and students' academic achievements. Also it would be interesting to collect data from the teachers' perspective, and more realistic results will be produced in this case. We did not include this part in this paper mainly because of two reasons. First, for this pattern of course design, students are in the dominant place in the whole process. They are the executor, leader and presenter of the learning tasks. Therefore, they have experienced more role-shifting in the new course pattern. To some extent, they have much more intense experience than the teachers. Statistics and data from the students' perspective offer valuable information for the teachers to assess the effectiveness of the course. The other reason is much simpler, the limitation of the length of the paper does not allow more analysis from this new perspective. We can only leave this question to future studies.

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