

An Empirical Study on Developing Primary School Students’ English Listening and Speaking Ability Through Original Cartoons

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Abstract

It is found that the English teaching hours and listening and speaking practice are limited for Hangzhou primary school students, and their English listening and speaking ability develops slowly. In order to improve this situation, a 9-week comparative empirical experiment on listening and speaking by English cartoons was carried out among 60 students in two classes of Grade Three in Hangzhou XSJ Foreign Language School. The experimental class selected the interesting original English animation with appropriate difficulty, and carried out the cooperative group training of original animation listening and speaking for 30 minutes after class with the mode of "role playing imitation practice". The results showed that the training mode was popular among students in the experimental class, effectively improved the interest and enthusiasm of English learning, increased comprehensible language input and output practice time. The average score of English listening and speaking of the experimental group has increased by 9.18%, which is far more than that of the control class and their spoken fluency, vocabulary richness and pronunciation standard have also improved significantly.

Keywords: Primary school English; Original cartoons; Listening and speaking practice mode; Empirical study

1. Introduction

1.1 Research background

It is known that the primary schools in China do not make enough English lesson arrangement for students. There are only 2 to 3 lessons for one week, and many schools do not even hold English class for students below the third grade. English teaching generally places emphasis on the ability of reading and writing, but neglects the ability of listening and speaking. In addition, there is not much chance in the surrounding environment for students to apply English skills to their daily life. Therefore, primary school students are not very good at listening and speaking when it comes to that matter, which is why "dumb English" has always been common. (Zhou Huanhong, 2020) Most students' oral training mainly comes from repeating the dialogues written in textbooks and having conversations among the teachers and the students. (Luo Jiaxue, 2020)

English lessons held for primary school students is relatively short, and not every lesson can have enough time for training students' listening and speaking ability, resulting in less practice in the classroom. Listening and speaking training materials are mostly based on school textbooks, whose content is monotonous, tedious and in lack of fun. Listening and speaking training tasks are also in lack of diversity, and the students hold little passion for them. Listening and speaking training generally takes place in the classroom. The content is mainly

based on the textbook materials. Usually, the students are not very active in performance when taking such training lessons, often unwilling to take the initiative to practise their oral ability. The oral training mode is mainly the dialogue training between teachers and students in the classroom. A teacher will have to deal with 30 to 40 students in one class, which is very limited for the training. In addition, there are only 2 to 3 English lessons each week in a primary school, and there is no homework to practice their listening and speaking after class and no extra work to make up for the lack of training time, which leads to the slow improvement in English listening and speaking ability. (Sun Wenlin, 2020)

In order to change this situation, the researchers believe that, based on the input-output hypothesis put forward by Krashen (1981), choosing interesting original English cartoons with appropriate difficulty can effectively improve this situation by adopting the mode called "Cartoon Role-playing and Imitation Practice". The mode involves imitating dubbing, role playing, topic discussion and other activities. It is mainly carried out by having the whole class to watch cartoons, repeating the voices of the cartoon roles, imitating the way the roles speak and doing segment performance and theme discussion.

Compared with the traditional listening materials, cartoon films and TV programs have become the first choice of listening and speaking training materials after class due to their moderate speaking speed, simple and clear dialogues, positive content which is suitable for both the young and the old, vivid graphic pictures and others advantages. (Huang Yahong, 2020) What's more, the original English cartoon is presented to be very close to life. It provides English learners with authentic language environment and rich information by watching and listening, which makes up for the monotony and dullness of the textbook content. Such listening and speaking resources provide a simple, interesting but effective way for students to learn English.

1.2 Domestic and foreign status of related research

Through searching for the relevant information, it is found that there are few experiments that attempt to adopt the original cartoon into English Teaching in primary schools; but some domestic researchers, such as Huang Yahong (2020), Zhang Xiaomei (2019), Li Wei (2018), Sun Xiaoping (2017) and Cao Nayan and He Xueyun (2016), Zhang Yonghong (2018), and Guo Qiuling (2015), have begun to introduce the original film into college and middle school oral English teaching, which has achieved good results.

Foreign researcher Amalia (2014) believed that cartoon videos could help students have a better understanding of the language by offering visual feed, thus improving their learning skills. Kusumaningrum (2016) found that English movies stirred up the interest of Indonesian high school students in English learning.

Because people did not fully understand the concept of cartoons, it was generally believed that watching cartoons would affect children's learning. Therefore, few people attempted to use English original cartoons as a method to improve the listening and speaking ability of primary school students. (Mo Yin, 2019). Also, most researchers focused on classroom teaching so that they ignored the autonomous learning self-learning ability of primary school students during their free time. They failed to realize that having students gradually improve their recognition of the learning process and then master effective learning approaches was also one of the goals of the New Curriculum Reform. The improvement in listening and speaking ability depending only on the classroom practice was not enough. Students needed to practise on their own in their free time, too. With the aid of modern technology, cartoon video naturally stood out with its obvious advantages and became the first choice of listening and speaking materials after class. (Gu Sujie, 2020)

2. Research Design

2.1 Research questions

In view of the unsatisfactory teaching situation of English listening and speaking in primary schools in

Hangzhou, this study proposes to apply the original English cartoon to primary school teaching so as to explore effective ways to improve students' listening and speaking ability, and conduct comparative experiments, hoping to solve the following problems:

- (1) What is the effect of cartoons as extracurricular listening and speaking materials on improving pupils' listening and speaking ability? And how are the results?
- (2) How to choose the cartoon materials to cultivate the listening and speaking ability more effectively
- (3) What techniques or skills should be paid attention to during the cartoon imitation practice? What are the influencing factors?

2.2 Research objects and methods

2.2.1 Research objects and experimental period

This experiment selected 60 English students from the two intact classes of the third grade in Hangzhou XSJ Foreign Language School as research objects. All the students began to learn English in school from grade one, and there was no significant difference in their scores. The two classes of students were randomly divided into the experimental group and the control group for the experiment, in which 30 students in the experimental class carried out a 9-week English cartoon watching experiment; the control class had also 30 students, which remained the same of their original English learning status.

2.2.2 Research tools

(1) Questionnaire

According to Zhang Li's (2020) *Junior Middle School English Listening and Speaking* questionnaire, a survey based on English listening and speaking training of the primary school students came into being, which included 10 questions in the following four dimensions: self-evaluation of listening and speaking ability, reasons that caused learning difficulties in listening and speaking, time and approaches for extracurricular listening and speaking practice, and the attitude towards original English cartoon training mode. These questions were designed to find out about related information on the condition of English learning of the research objects.

(2) Interview Outline

An outline of the interview on English listening and speaking training for primary school students (see Appendix 4 for details) was compiled by the author, which included three specific topics: the preferences and opinions on cartoon materials and training tasks, the effectiveness and suggestions of this training mode, which was used to investigate the relevant situation of English listening and speaking training of the experimental objects before and after the experiment.

Primary school English Listening and Speaking Teaching Interview Outline (see Appendix 5), including 3 topics on classroom listening and speaking training mode and student feedback, listening and speaking materials and training mode after class, and listening and speaking training for English original cartoon, were used to investigate the relevant situations of primary school English teachers' teaching of listening and speaking lesson before the experiment.

(3) English Listening and Speaking Ability Test Tools

Referring to the Cambridge Children English test (ESOL Examination Department of Cambridge University, 2014), two sets of primary school English listening and speaking ability test (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2) of the same type and difficulty were compiled for the experiment before and after. There were 2 big questions and 18 small questions in the test. The full score was 36 points. The duration of the test was 30 minutes and the degree of difficulty was about 0.75. There were 16 questions in the listening part, with a full score of 16 points; the oral part was divided into two parts, *Reading Aloud* and *Answering Questions*, with a full score of 20 points, lasting for 5-8 minutes.

(4) Evaluation Standard

The listening test was scored according to the number of correct answers, and the oral test was graded five levels according to the fluency, accuracy, lexical richness and standard degree of intonation.

2.3 Experimental exercise materials

In the experiment, the original English cartoons were selected as the teaching materials for listening and speaking. All cartoon resources were obtained from regular channels, and the content was positive and suitable for the level of students of this age, so as to ensure the suitability and rigor of the training materials. The list of the cartoons is as follows: *Garfield*, *Sing*, *Monsters. Inc*, *Monsters University*, *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*, *Rango*, *Bolt*, *WALL-E* and other original cartoons.

2.4 Listening and speaking experimental training mode

The experimental class mainly used class multimedia device to play the cartoons. After-class listening and speaking training was carried out 3 to 5 times a week for about 30 minutes each time. In order to ensure that the whole class could watch and complete relevant tasks in time, such as filling blank, guessing word meaning, imitating dubbing, performing segment, discussing topic, etc.

At the same time, a WeChat group for listening and speaking practice in the experimental class was set up. We encouraged the students in the experimental class to make use of their spare time with mobile phones and tablets, do mobile listening and speaking exercises through group cooperation, and upload the practice video and audio onto the WeChat group to remark, learn from each other and make common progress.

2.5 Experimental methods and steps

(1) The control group only maintained the original normal English classroom teaching and homework, without the intervention of original cartoon after-school training.

Before the experiment, the students who participated in the experiment were clearly informed about the arrangement of relevant matters, so as to ensure that each student and their parents knew and voluntarily participated in the experiment.

(2) Before and after the experiment, questionnaire survey and English listening and speaking ability tests were conducted on the two groups of students. There were 115 students selected for group interview to understand their experience and feelings of listening and speaking materials and practice methods. The survey results were compared with the test data to show whether the original English cartoon was effective or had other influence on improving the listening and speaking ability of students.

At the same time, 3 to 5 primary school English teachers were interviewed before and after the experiment to understand the current situation of primary school English listening and speaking teaching, and learn about their views on Cartoon Role Play listening and speaking practice.

3. Research Results and Analysis

3.1 Test and analysis before and after the experiment

Before and after the experiment, two sets of Primary School Students English Listening and Speaking Ability Tests were used to test the students' English listening and speaking ability in the experimental class and the control class. Below were the results:

(1) The Comparison of total scores of listening and speaking

Table 1: The Total Score of Listening and Speaking Ability Test Before and After the Experiment (Full Score: 36 points)

Option	Experimental Group	Control Group	Difference (P)
Before (score)	26.80	26.74	0.950
After (score)	29.26	27.05	0.043

According to Table 1, there is no significant difference in the average score of English listening and speaking test before the experiment between the two classes, while there is no significant change in the average score of the control group in the test after. The average score of the experimental class has increased by 9.18%, indicating that the original cartoon listening and speaking training mode has achieved good results.

(2) Comparison of listening performance

Table 2: Comparison of English Listening Test Results Before and After the Experiment (Full Score: 16 points)

Option	Experimental Group	Control Group	Difference (P)
Before (score)	12.63	12.57	0.906
After (score)	13.83	12.73	0.028

It can be seen from the Table 2 that there is no significant difference in the class average score of the English listening test before the experiment between the two classes. After the experiment, the average score of the experimental class has increased by 9.50%, which shows that the original cartoon listening training mode has achieved good results.

(3) Comparison of oral English scores

Table 3: Comparison of Oral English Test Scores Before and After the Experiment (Full Score: 20 points)

Option	Experimental Group	Control Group	Difference (P)
Before (score)	14.17	14.17	1.003
After (score)	15.43	14.25	0.070

According to the Table 3, there is no significant difference in the class average score of oral English test before the experiment between the two classes. After the experiment, the average score of the experimental class has increased by 8.89%, indicating that the original cartoon oral training mode has achieved good results.

Table 4: Comparison Table of Oral English Test Scores between Control Group and Experimental Group Before the Experiment (Full Score: 5 points)

Option	Fluency and Coherence	Lexical Richness	Accuracy	Pronunciation
Control Group (score)	3.48	3.27	3.68	3.73
Experimental Group (score)	3.45	3.32	3.70	3.70
Difference (P)	0.963	0.984	1.013	1.005

Table 5: Comparison of Oral English Test Scores between Control Class and Experimental Class after the Experiment (Full Score: 5 points)

Option	Fluency and Coherence	Lexical Richness	Accuracy	Pronunciation
Control Group (score)	3.52	3.32	3.68	3.73
Experimental Group (score)	3.90	3.73	3.78	4.02
Difference (P)	0.000	0.000	0.073	0.000

Compared with the Table 4 and the Table 5, after 9 weeks of listening and speaking training, the

experimental group expanded its original advantages and made great progress in ridding the original disadvantages, even surpassing the control group in the test. There has been a significant improvement on the fluency, coherence, lexical richness and pronunciation of the experimental group.

3.2 Questionnaire survey results and analysis

The survey results are as follows:

During the experimental period, about 30% of the students in the two groups thought that their oral English was better than others. After the experiment, there was no change of that in the control class. The students in the experimental class thought that their listening and speaking ability had been improved and their self-confidence was significantly enhanced, the increase is up to 53.34%.

The average oral practice time of the experimental class was 27 minutes, which was much longer than that of the control class (8 minutes). Ninety percent of the experimental class students loved this training mode very much. They thought that cartoon listening and speaking training made listening and speaking learning no longer monotonous and boring. The students could constantly improve their language ability in the authentic language context created by the cartoons and expand their vocabulary based on textbook. In the experimental class, 46.67% of the students thought that this mode would be of great help to listening improvement, and 53.33% of the students were willing to continue using this mode to practice their oral English. The attitude of students affected their efficiency of learning, and their love for the cartoon training mode helped them to absorb knowledge, promote their English learning and improve their listening and speaking ability.

3.3 Interview survey results and analysis

The results of group interviews with 5 English teachers and 15 primary school students are as follows:

(1) Teachers' views on cartoon listening and speaking training mode:

They thought that, although the original English cartoons could provide the students with authentic dialogues, it was too difficult for the primary school students to understand the context. The original English cartoon was made for the children in English speaking countries to watch. So there must be some unfamiliar sentence patterns and vocabulary, which were far beyond the ability of English learners of the same age in China. At the same time, it was difficult to find suitable video materials. In comparison, some picture books and listening and speaking training materials with mature grading system in China will be of more use to improving students' English ability.

(2) The Opinions of students on the current English listening and speaking lessons

Students thought that English listening and speaking lessons were too boring, the atmosphere of learning in classroom was inactive, and the textbook content was not interesting. They hoped they would have new materials such as sci-fi themed cartoons or songs added in English listening and speaking lessons, and have more dialogue practice among the teachers and the classmates.

(3) The Opinions of students in the experimental group on the cartoon practice

The 10 students interviewed all liked the original cartoon listening and speaking training mode. They thought that the training mode combined entertainment with learning, the training time was fairly reasonable, and the training task was challenging but also enjoyable to them.

4. Conclusions

(1) Through 9 weeks of Cartoon Role Play Practice experiment, it is found that this practice mode is hugely adored by the students in the experimental group. The average time for the experimental class to practice English listening and speaking after class every day has been multiplied 2.4 times up to 27 minutes; and practice on mobile phone or iPad can be carried out anytime and anywhere to improve learning efficiency. The average

score of English listening and speaking test in the experimental class is 9.18% higher than that in the control class, which shows that the mode can effectively stimulate the interest of students in learning, and effectively improve their English listening and speaking ability. Compared with the conventional teaching materials, the effect of this training mode on the improvement of students' listening and speaking ability is more remarkable, and the oral fluency, coherence, lexical richness and pronunciation are greatly improved. It helps simulate English communication context to learn authentic spoken English, which is in line with the interest of primary school students.

(2) The exercise materials should be selected according to the age characteristics and interests of the primary school students, such as sci-fi theme cartoons, such as *Hotel Transylvania*, *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs 2*, *Bolt*, *Sing*, etc. At the same time, cartoon films with difficulty should be selected based on something more difficult than the textbook so that students can constantly challenge themselves and improve their listening and speaking ability.

(3) By establishing a WeChat group for class practice, the spare time should be made full use of to carry out mobile group cooperative practice, which is not limited by time or place. Through the accumulation of time and amount of role play practice, we can achieve "enough comprehensible language input + effective output practice", and finally reach a higher level of listening and speaking ability.

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