Analysis of the Course Evaluation Results of an ELF Class

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Abstract

This paper discusses the results of the end of course evaluation questionnaire of an ELF class. From the eight questionnaire items form two (spring and autumn) iterations of the course, two items were mainly focused on: 1) the instructor's manner of talking was easy to follow, and 2) the speed of English spoken in class was appropriate. The results show that more of the autumn semester students tended to "strongly agree" with both items than spring semester students.

Keywords

ELF, language skills, content knowledge, course evaluation, communication gap

Introduction

ELF refers to the use of English in intercultural communication among English users from any part of the world. In other words, it can involve speakers from the Inner Circle countries, the Outer Circle countries, and the Expanding Circle countries.

How should we deal with the students in an ELF class where mixed English proficiency levels are mingled in terms of language skills and content knowledge understanding? This paper discusses the results of an course evaluation questionnaire in an ELF class where such students interact. The main research question is "What does the data tell us about the inner/outer/expanding circles students' responses in an EIL/ELF class?"

1 Method

1.1 Subjects

Two courses will be compared: 1) Globalization and English Education in Japan (Spring), and 2) Globalization and English education in East Asian Countries (Autumn). The course objectives of the two courses are:

1) expose students to several varieties of Outer and Expanding Circle Englishes used in videoconferences and also in class.

2) raise awareness of English varieties (e.g. English usage and functions) among the speakers (scholars) and the in-class students.

3) enhance students' language skills (listening, and speaking) through a variety of activities.

4) discuss and explore the pedagogical implications that may help students consider how and to what extent they can integrate insights from these courses into their own autonomous learning.

1.2 Materials/Instruments

At the end of the each academic semester, a course evaluation was conducted for official college records, and at the same time a questionnaire was conducted to investigate paralanguage for research/academia. Also, for academic evaluation, the term-end paper submission and student-led oral presentation were used to examine linguistic competence. This paper mainly deals with the results of the end of course evaluation questionnaire (2014 to 2016).

1.3 Analysis Procedures

After describing the general tendency of the eight items, we will focus on characteristic items such as language related items (2: The instructor's manner of talking was easy to follow. and 3: The speed of English spoken in class was appropriate.) And content-related items (4: The contents of the class were interesting, 5: The materials were useful, 6: The instructor presented topics effectively.)

2 Results and Discussion

Overall, it may be that most students seem to be satisfied with the class because they tend to remain on the left side (strongly agree or agree) of the scale..

2.1 One Aspect

More students in the autumn course tended to "strongly agree" with both items than spring students. One of the reasons is because some students have dropped out after attending for a few weeks when they realized their insufficient English proficiency. In other words, the students who answered the

questionnaire were native English speakers, ESL students, students from overseas, and some determined Japanese students who thought they would manage to survive this course.

2.2 Another Aspect

In the spring semester, more Japanese students survived than in autumn. One of the reasons is tthe topic for Spring is "Globalization and English Education in Japan." The topic was familiar to them and they have already experienced this kind of education to some extent. They naturally have more ideas to express in group discussions where they could easily understand what the group members are talking about. This is contrasted to the situation of the autumn term where the topic is English education in Asian countries, since Japanese students need to both listen and speak in the target language while organizing their ideas about an unfamiliar topic (English education in Asian countries).

2.3 Linguistic Aspects

- *"I couldn't link that too much because I am not good at English and I couldn't listen to everything"*
- *"Actually, it's hard for me to listen to their English, so it's much harder for me to understand what they talked about…I can find my language skill (speaking and listening) stupid"*

These raw comments make us realize that teachers need to help students identify their language skills and help them improve their linguistic skills. Also, teachers should provide them with specific additional instruction.

2.4 Language skills and Content understanding/knowledge

It appears that there are more students who are not satisfied with the contents than with the language elements. Therefore, we need to reconsider this aspect more carefully. However, there are some other students who have already dropped out of the course even in the middle of the term because of language problems (listening and speaking, especially listening). For this reason, we need to take those students who dropped out into account when reconsidering the language problems. In other words, there should be a link between EFL intermediate level instruction, EFL advanced level instruction, ESL level instruction, and NS instruction in terms of language proficiency.

3 Conclusions and Implications

In order to cope with the EIL/ELF class where students of mixed English proficiency levels interact, it is essential to consider: a) improving language skills improvement and b) increasing content knowledge while raising awareness of the varieties of English.

It is ideal that students from Inner Circle, Outer Circle and Expanding Circle countries are mixed in an ELF/EIL class. However, because of the gaps in English proficiency, particularly with speaking and listening in group and class discussions, it is inevitable that there will be a communication gap between native English speaking students, ESL students and EFL students. It might be better to provide a link or bridge to help solve this problem.

For example, in the case of Japanese students, we need to 1) prepare an opportunity to lessen psychological pressure, 2) to foster their listening ability, and 3) to enhance their oral interaction abilities. Also, we need to provide them with more familiar topics so that they can be more involved from the beginning of the discussion rather than needing to understand the content so they can participate.

It might be a good idea to stream the classes based on English proficiency (listening and speaking) or awareness levels of varieties of English, so that the students in each class are relatively homogeneous in terms of a specific category (e.g. English proficiency or content knowledge).

Rethinking the theoretical construct of English proficiency is needed. "What is the theoretical construct of English proficiency (e.g. speaking ability or listening ability) in an ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) context?" (cf. Harding, 2018). As Leung and Lewkowicz (2006) claim that ELF is a use- and context-driven phenomenon not primarily tied to any particular ethnic or racial group, nation, or geographic space, the teaching and testing of English needs to reflect this reality.

4 References

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