

Developing Students' Speaking Skills: Toward Better Strategies in EFL Settings[†]

(英会話能力向上法—EFL環境におけるより良い指導を目指して)

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概要

グローバルなコミュニケーションがますます求められ、英会話能力の向上がさらに重要課題となってきた。しかし、残念なことに、中国でも日本でも十年近く英語を勉強するにもかかわらず、多くの学生たちが流暢に英語を話せない。この現象は中国や日本に限らず、アジアの国々全般に見受けられる。そこで、英会話能力向上のためにはどのようなEFL環境が必要であり、どのような指導方法が行われるべきか、中国と日本の学生へのアンケート結果からそれらの課題を模索する。

伝統的な英語教育とは違った英会話習得法を研究する上で、まず、現在の中国と日本の高校生の英会話能力についてどのような問題があるか、両国の英語教育を比較する。また、授業時間中だけではなく、アフター・クラスにおける英語教師の役割と指導が、学生の話す技術を改善するためにどのように役立つかを調べる。中国と日本では政治的、文化的背景が異なるだけでなく、教師と生徒とのかかわり方も相違するが、どちらにも共通して言えることは、学生のスピーキング・スキル向上のためには魅力ある話題の選択が重要であり、学生の能力、年齢、モチベーション、文化的背景に合った学習者中心のシラバスに基づく指導が必要である。

キーワード：English Communication, China, Japan, EFL settings

1. Introduction

Nowadays, with developments of global communication, oral English is becoming more and more significant than ever before. Unfortunately, a large quantity of students who have studied English for almost 10 years are unable to speak English fluently in China and in Japan. Why do they have spent so much time to study and try their best to learn English, but cannot open their mouths to communicate with others in English yet? They need to correct oral English teaching ways, apart from traditional English education (reading, listening and writing), to improve the

level of their oral English. This request is also a main task for English teachers to re-arrange their English lessons in order to provide enough time to do various oral activities.

The purpose of this research is to study the better methods of teaching oral English as a foreign language (EFL) settings through comparing teaching differences between China and Japan in high school. I will compare the needs of oral English teaching in China and in Japan, and through this comparison, I will analyze what kinds of aspects are necessary in the oral English teaching process. Meanwhile, I hope I enable to find out some good forms of oral English through this analysis in order to improve my future oral English teaching.

Based on my research about oral English teaching, I will provide a great number of good

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suggestions as well as a variety of summaries of teaching forms for oral English teachers. At the same time, I also want to enhance my capacity of teaching oral English in my further teaching as a qualified oral English teacher.

I decided to concentrate on better strategies and skills in EFL settings which might be helpful for English teachers and enhance their students' speaking skills. Developing students' speaking skills, I have divided my research questions into two parts as followed:

Q1: What are the serious problems in high school in China and in Japan?

Q2: How can oral English teachers improve students' speaking skills during the class time even after class in high school?

More precisely, the first research question explores "the problems" students face in oral English and improve the detailed aspects teachers have to focus on and make efforts on these aspects. The second research question investigates "the conversation" in real class as an important role that can promote students' speaking skills as well as oral English teachers' teaching methodologies.

To finish my research at a high level, I compare the results of the same 16 questions in different countries (China and Japan) respectively. From these results, I also provide some comments about each question based on the background of analyzing the data from the survey.

An activity is an important part of speaking English class to all of the English teachers both in China and in Japan, and an interaction is also necessary for teacher-student (S-T) even student-student (S-S) communication in English lessons. Although students are all in Asia, they have different answers about this question: the number of Chinese participants who thought Group Activity was the best way to exercise oral English accounted for 58 percent of the total approximately. On the contrary, the number of Japanese participants who believed Two Person Activity was the best method to improve speaking skills occupied 51 percent of the whole numbers of

participating in this survey.

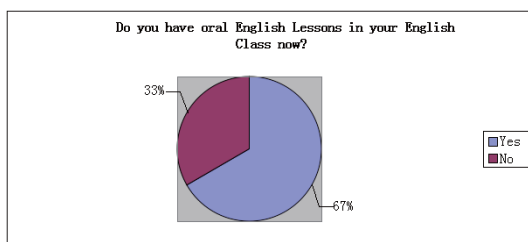
Therefore, teachers as English communicators should consider which kind of activities is fit for their students and think about how the different activities can be mixed together in their class for an interesting atmosphere for students as possible as they can.

The survey of each question, providing the comments at the end of the charts, is illustrated. The sixteen questions are analyzed with my suggestions and advice respectively. Actually, for the English teachers, oral English teaching has been becoming a significant part of English education. In order to search out the difficulties during the oral English learning process, I divided my survey in two periods, one is in China and another is in Japan. Through these survey, I have found out several differences between Chinese students and Japanese students in the area of oral English learning.

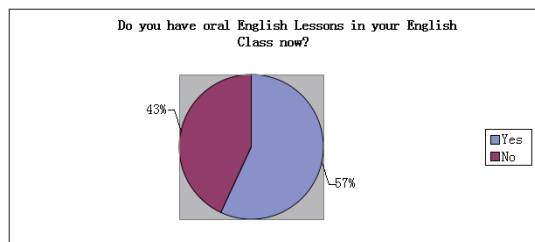
Based on these meaningful data, I have summarized some skills about oral English teaching from various aspects to improve students' skills of the oral part. As an English teacher in China from 2008 to 2012, I also had lots of experience of teaching oral English fortunately. These valuable experiences provide me some academic consideration. To be frank, improving students' speaking skills is actually a process for teachers to enhance their capacities of teaching oral English as well: for example, Linguistic aspect, Psychological aspect and Cognitive aspect. In the meantime, I have summarized the research on the teaching of conversation as well.

2. Questionnaire

Question 1: (China)

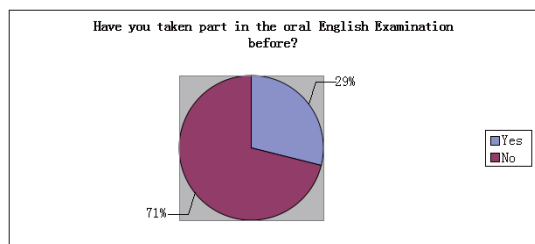


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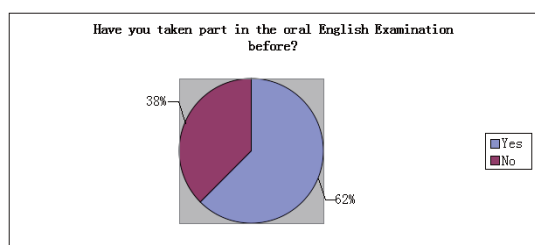


From these charts, we can understand that speaking English has been becoming more and more popular in China or Japan, and the oral English lesson has become one significant part of the traditional English lessons. More and more English teachers start to focus on the cultivation of students' speaking ability. This is an advanced concept for all of them, while the oral part of English teaching also ask English teachers to face a new challenge for their traditional teaching as well.

Question 2: (China)



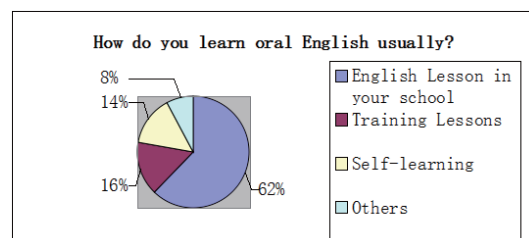
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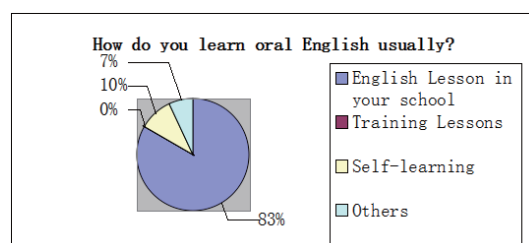
Through this survey question, as illustrated above, we are able to find out the truth that the high school students in Japan have many chances to take part in speaking during their lesson. On the contrary, these opportunities in China are not so many as that in Japan. On the one hand, the English teachers in China just focus on grammar and reading parts in order to pass the various entrance examinations, but in these exams

there are no speaking or oral test unfortunately. Accordingly, in Japan, for example, the Eyiken examination has the oral part of English test. These may lead to the different results of the same survey questions between China and Japan.

Question 3: (China)



(Japan)

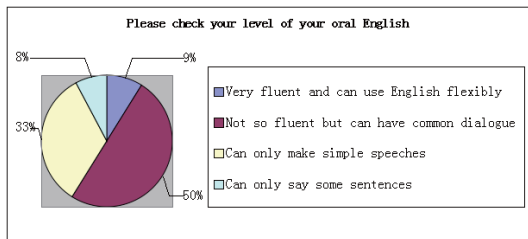


As illustrated above, there is an interesting phenomenon between Chinese students and Japanese students and these different oral English studying methods will bring to different results of improving speaking English ability to a large extent. The charts show that 83 percent of the students in Japan used to learn oral English through the lessons only in their school. I suppose that this is not enough for them to enhance their speaking skills.

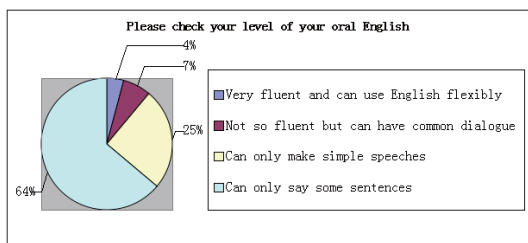
Compared with Japanese students, we can find out that 16 percent of the students in China improve their oral ability more by the training school; for example, the New Oriental English School provides excellent language environments for students. Through this training, students can do so many speaking exercises which only can do in their traditional English limitedly. Through the contrast, I believe that the progress of oral English skills need students to spend their leisure and spare time to study; only through oral English lesson in daily learning is not enough for them to familiar with the second language as a tool to

communicate with others.

Question 4: (China)



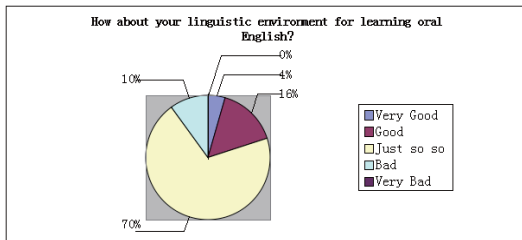
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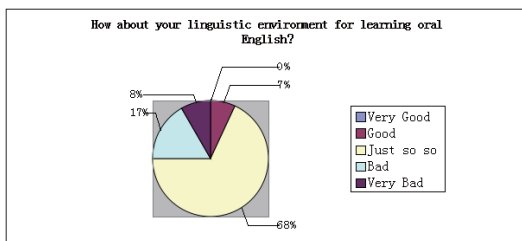
By analyzing the data about the level of students' oral English, we can search out the reason why 64 percent of Japanese students can only say some sentences without any confidence. And we can find out the reason why Chinese students are confident to their level of speaking English. In other words, just like the analysis of Question 3, Chinese students are thought to use their leisure time to enter the training school while Japanese students only learn through the traditional lessons in school learning the speaking English. there is a gap between China and Japan on speaking English education.

It is not that the speaking English in Japan is worse than China. I have the experience to tour the English lesson in Japanese High School fortunately. Through that touring, I found that once a week Japanese students will have an oral English class with a Japanese English teacher and a foreign teacher, having the chance to experience the local culture from the foreign teacher. However, Chinese students seldom have this opportunity to communicate with a foreign teacher in English lessons in senior high school yet. Because of the different ways of exercising oral English, Chinese students and Japanese students have different levels of speaking skills as a result.

Question 5: (China)

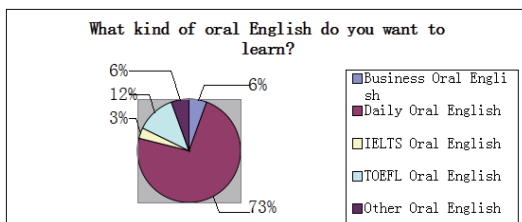


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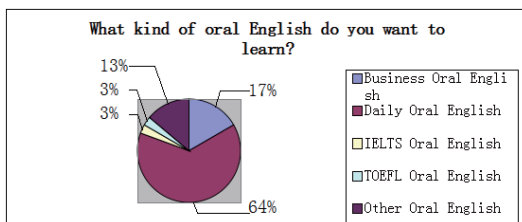


About the linguistic environment for learning oral English, Chinese students (70%) and Japanese students (68%) have almost the same answer. The answer "Just so so" seems the simple answer, but we should consider the real problems of oral English teaching environment seriously as English teachers. That is, how can we provide various activities in the class and extend the oral learning and exercise after class in students' real life in the future teaching. Therefore, we as oral English communicators should provide a real English environment as possible as we can.

Question 6: (China)

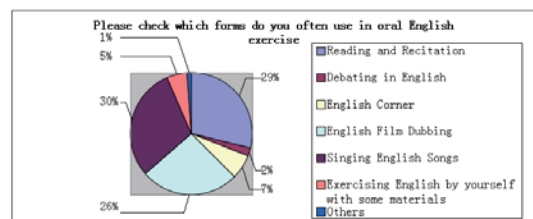


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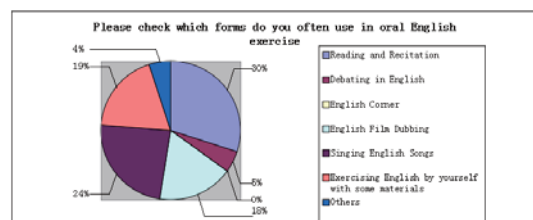


From this survey question, we can find that there are different objectives about learning speaking English between Chinese students and Japanese students. One of the big differences is the objective for the Business Oral English, Japanese students want to learn some skills about Business English for their future career, while, with the development of economy and globalization in China, more and more Chinese students want to accomplish their further study in other western countries, so they want to enhance their oral English ability in their high school period. This is the biggest differentiator between the high school students in China and in Japan as the objective for oral English learning. However, there is the same objective we can find in the charts to learn oral English between Chinese students and Japanese students: Both of them hope that they can grasp skills of using oral English in their daily life. In other words, both of them want to improve their ability of utilizing oral English to communicate with others in daily life.

Question 7: (China)



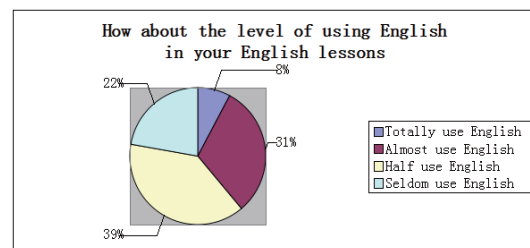
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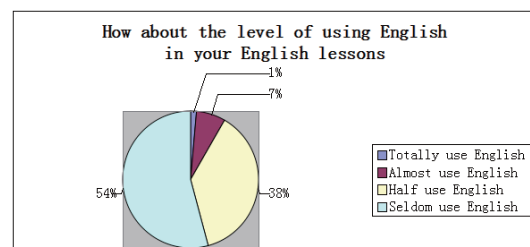
For the aim of improving their own speaking English ability, different students have different ideas and methods to do by themselves. As the charts show, we can easily search out that Chinese students will strengthen their oral English skills mainly through Reading and Recitation, English film Dubbing and Singing English Songs. With the similarities, Japanese students are eager to

exercise spoken English in the form of Reading and Recitation, Singing English Songs and Exercising English by themselves with some materials. Although there is a little difference in exercises, both Chinese students and Japanese students are familiar with Reading and Recitation even Singing English Song to reach the high level of using oral English.

Question 8: (China)

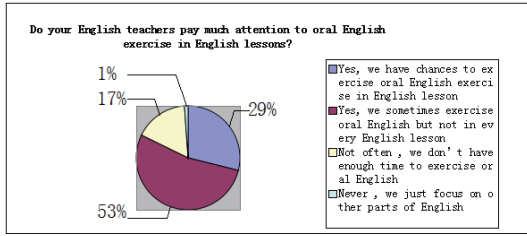


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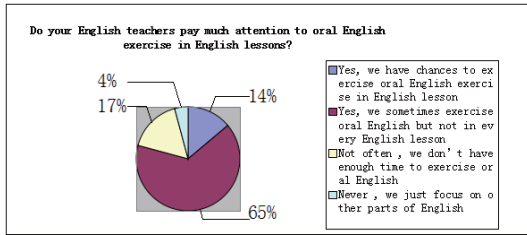


By comparing the data of survey from China and Japan, we can find out an interesting trend in the field of oral English teaching: in China, almost 22 percent of students believe that English teachers seldom use English in their classes; by contrast, approximately half of the participants of this survey selected the same answer in Japan. The exaggerated gap is the selections of “the most use English” between the two countries students in the bi-linguistic teaching in their English lessons. 31 percent Chinese students hold that English teachers almost use English in their English lessons, while, only 7 percent of Japanese students chose this selection based on the same situations. Therefore, as qualified English teachers, we should keep the balance of using English and Chinese or Japanese according to the real situation carefully.

Question 9: (China)

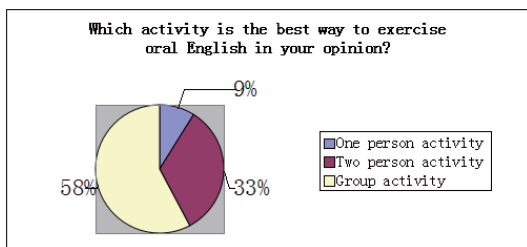


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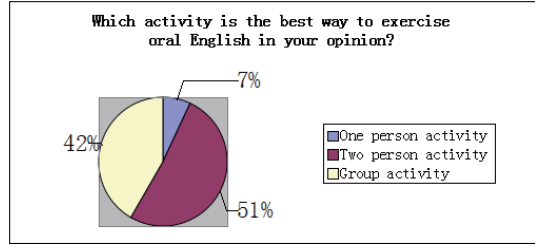


Concerning the question “Do your English teachers pay much attention to oral English exercise in English lessons?” students in two countries are amazingly consistent in the answer “Yes, we sometimes exercise oral English but not in every English lesson” in the proportions of 53% and 65% in China and in Japan respectively. This means that English teachers sometimes have to use mother language to introduce the new grammar as well as some knowledge upon skills for exams. This is necessary for students to enter good universities in their future. Nevertheless, the oral part also should be concentrated on and English teachers need improve their own abilities of teaching oral English as well.

Question 10: (China)

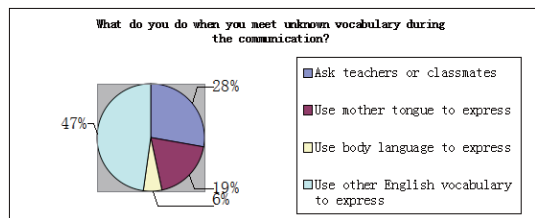


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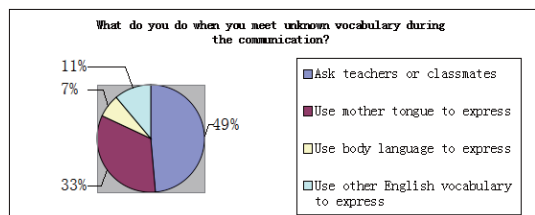


Activity is an important part of speaking English class to all the English teachers both in China and in Japan, and this part is an interaction for S-T or even S-S communication in English lessons. Although students are all in Asia, they have different answer about this question: the number of Chinese anticipants who thought Group Activity was the best way to exercise oral English reached 58 percent of the total approximately. On the contrary, the number of Japanese anticipants who believed Two Person Activity was the best method to improve speaking skills occupied 51 percent of the whole numbers of anticipants in this survey. Therefore, teachers as English communicators should consider which kind of activities is fit for their students and think about how the different activities can be mixed together in their class for an interesting atmosphere for students as possible as they can.

Question 11: (China)



(Japan)

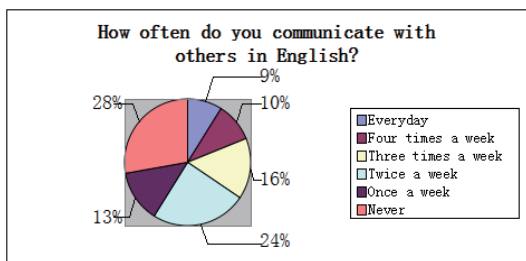


From the above data, we can understand the truth that Chinese students in senior high school would like to use other English words to express

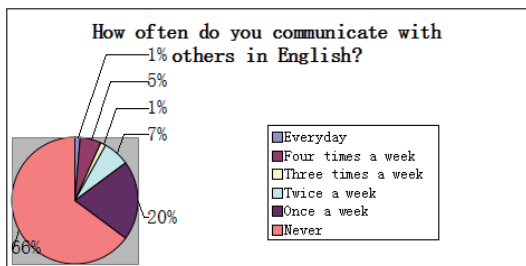
their opinions when they face the limitations of English vocabulary. It is a necessary process to improve their speaking ability to a large extent and will make great progress through expressing trouble by their own efforts.

On the other hand, Japanese students in high school tend to ask teachers or classmates by contrast. This may be a good way to obtain the knowledge of the language and meaning of the vocabulary immediately but they lose a chance to challenge themselves to face the limitation upon the foreign language. Therefore, from the perspective of English teachers, inquiring others and challenging oneself are both significant for students. If necessary, we should keep the balance of the two parts. Also, oral English teachers should cultivate students' abilities of using limited vocabulary to express their opinions.

Question 12: (China)



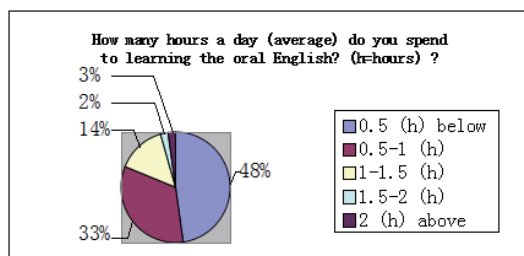
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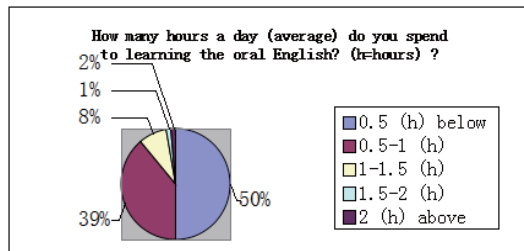
As the data illustrates in the charts, we can search the truth that, no matter in China or Japan, high school students seldom have opportunities to communicate with others in English. For one thing, students in Asia will use their mother tongue to communicate with others in daily life. Unfortunately, they hardly get a chance to communicate with foreigners in high school at most once a week. That is the reason why most of the students answered this question on the

last selection in China and Japan (28% and 66%) respectively. However, by contrasting these data, we can easily find that Chinese students had much more chances to communicate with others than Japanese students averagely. 24% of Chinese students who took part in this survey were convinced that they would communicate in English with others twice a week equally. Therefore, some oral activities are needed in traditional English classes in order to provide opportunities for students to use spoken English and improve their communicative abilities and skills at the same time.

Question 13: (China)

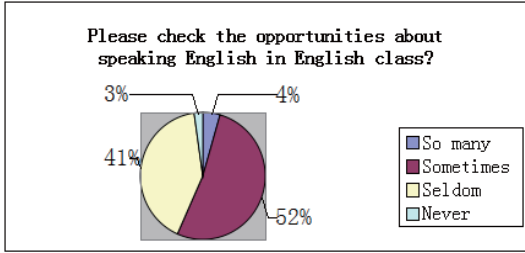


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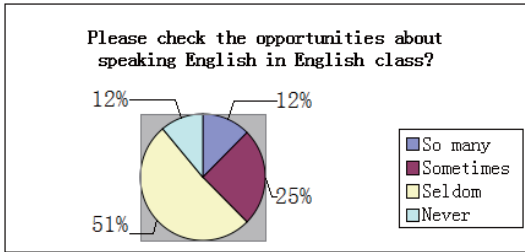


As we see in these charts about Question 13, we are astonished that 47% of Chinese students and 50% of the Japanese students only spend 0.5 hour per day to learn oral English. We cannot deny the students did not spend enough hours to study English in Asia. This problem, not only in China but in Japan, will lead to the insufficiency of oral English skills and the declination of the English usage. Thus, teachers also should ask students to do some interesting oral English homework to extend the time of speaking English in students' daily life.

Question 14: (China)

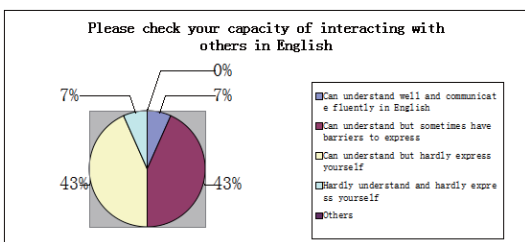


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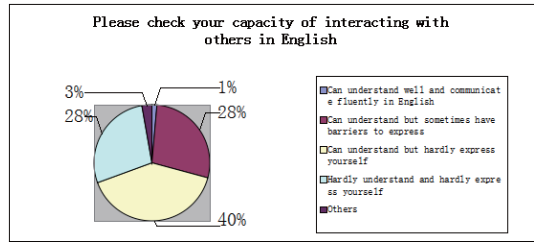


These data are the most significant for English teachers who focus on the interaction between T-S. Concerning Question 14, we can collect the data from the selection of "Seldom" which was chose by Chinese students and Japanese students (41% and 51%) respectively. But in the situation of Chinese school, there was 52% of the total participants believed that they had some opportunities to speak English in their English class rather than to listen to English from their teachers only. This means Chinese students in senior high school have much more chances to speak English than their peers in Japan. Maybe the forms are different in these two countries, but the aim of various activities is to ask students to grasp the skills and be cultivated by English atmospheres gradually. Thus, English teachers should create a great variety of opportunities for students to open their mouths in English in oral English class actually

Question 15: (China)



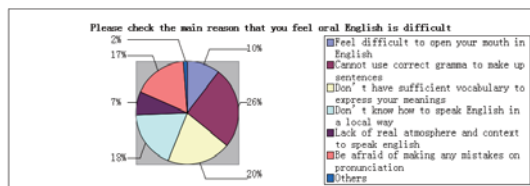
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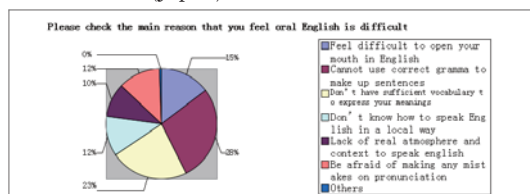
This question is based on the background of students' ability of using English for interacting with others. From this investigation as mentioned above, we can find that the Chinese students who chose the section "Can understand but sometimes have barriers to express" occupy 43% , and at the same proportion, other Chinese students thought they hardly expressed themselves in English unfortunately. By contrast, Japanese students have various feedbacks about the same question. Approximately 28% participants thought they had some barriers when they used English to express their opinions. And about 28% of students did not have confidence about English ability. Sometimes they considered they could not express their own ideas in English and even hardly understood some English comments in their class. However, compared with Chinese students on the selection "Can understand but hardly express yourself" , 40% of Japanese students chose the same option in their real situations.

From this aspect, we should consider how to inspire students to use English without any worry when they express themselves even with a few errors. Teachers must have skills of triggering students in a psychological way. For instance, teachers should know how to set up a great relationship in their class as well as to interact with students during the whole oral English. Then, they should select right activities fitting for students' level and make sure students are interested in these topics so that they are willing to share their ideas in English with others.

Question 16: (China)



(Japan)



About this question which is the most interesting one from my own perspective, there is a high research value to discuss as one of reference resources in my opinion. From students' real difficulties during their study oral English we should summarize the main point and provide effective solutions in our class. Comparing the data from China and Japan, we cannot find out the students who, no matter in China or Japan, are falling into trouble about using correct grammar to make sentences. In the two countries, this percentage is 26% (China) and 28% (Japan) respectively. That is not to say that other difficulties are not necessary to analyze for the better oral English teaching.

3. Conclusion

Oral English teaching has been becoming a significant part of English education. In order to search out the difficulties during the oral English learning process, I divided the survey in two times: one is in China and the other is in Japan. Through this survey, I have found out several differences between Chinese students and Japanese students in the area of oral English learning. I toured the oral English lesson in a high school in China and analyzed the forms which were used in that class. Using these meaningful data, I came to the conclusion about some skills of oral English teaching from various aspects to improve students' skills of the oral part.

Teaching oral English in EFL classes is different from reading classes or writing classes in several

aspects. Because these conversation classes need to be smaller and ask the students to spend much of the class time talking to each other, and teachers may find out much more about each student than they would in other kinds of English classes. Teachers and students often develop a more friendly relationship as well. The more teachers know their students, the better teachers are able to shape the class according to their needs. Teachers need to consider students' age, interests, educational background, motivation, culture background, personality and language proficiency. Getting to know students does not always ensure that teachers can teach the class to the students' needs or wishes, but it is certainly an important step.

Regardless of where teachers teach or whom teachers are teaching, a speaking class needs a topic to discuss. Choosing a topic is not hard, but choosing a good topic that will create a successful conversation or discussion is an absolutely hard task for a great number of teachers. Perhaps the most essential planning task is selecting the topic of the discussion activity for the EFL class. Clearly, the topic should be the one that the particular learners are fascinated in because even the best designed activity cannot be successful if the topic is just a little or not interesting to the students. In a learner-centered syllabus, both teaching and practice materials should center on the needs of the learner. When teachers are selecting the topic, some of the more important factors to consider are the age of the learner, the purpose of learning English, the proficiency level of the learner, and the cultural background of the learner.

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