

English Language Teaching in Practice

Teaching observation and observation report

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1. Context

The target of this report is represented by undergraduate International Business students who attend a 'Business English Presentation Skills' class at Coventry University. It must be mentioned that this module is a mandatory one and it aims to help students develop their presentation skills. One of the assignments of this module requires students to do a group presentation. The intended outcomes of this module include students' ability to discuss about a business topic in a professional way, to identify reliable academic references, to evaluate business topics and nevertheless, to be able to present complex business language skills.

This paper will focus on classroom management. Firstly, it will look at the features of an effective classroom management (i.e. motivation). Secondly, it will focus on group/pair work activities and finally, it will look at questioning styles.

2. Classroom management observations

Scholars argue that "classroom management refers to ways in which both the physical and the affective dimensions of the class are arranged in order to provide an environment that promotes successful teaching and learning" (Richards & Farrell 2011 :77). The aim of the observed lesson is to teach presentation skills. For this lesson to be effective, teacher took into consideration several key features to facilitate student's interaction and to provide opportunities for the use of target language. The context of the lesson is relevant for the students, as they study International Business. Based on research, it can be argued that the teacher met the features of an effective classroom management because the lesson kept students interested by problem-solving activities. Moreover, there are used varied tasks, co-operative learning, "instrumental motivation", task-based learning and open-ended activities (Klapper 2006 :205). Also, scholars state that "classroom management contributes uniquely to student motivation" (Schiefele 2017 :124).

2.1 Group work

Research shows that group dynamics is important in the language classroom as it "can turn out to be such a pleasant and inspiring environment that the time spent in there is a constant source of success" (Dörnyei & Murphey 2003 :3). The lesson includes three groups of 7-9 students arranged in ad hoc clusters of desks and chairs (Appendix 2); this seating arrangement gives the students "autonomy and responsibility" (2003 :82). The lead-in activity starts with a "whole-class approach" (Klapper 2006 :208), which includes a warm-up activity and a brief recap of the previous lesson (Appendix 1). The positive effects of the group work during the

observed lesson are the following: students get easily engaged with the topic, there is learner-independence and the activities are more flexible. By doing collaborative tasks, the STT is increased and the lesson becomes challenging for the learners. Research shows that grouping makes the students feel more comfortable in the classroom as it creates a safe environment, it reduces treat level and anxiety, gives learners' confidence and it provides opportunities to practice the speaking skills by using the target language (Goh 2016).

It can be argued that during the classroom observation, group work has a “clear purpose and a specific outcome”, as the demands of the activities vary according to “the nature of the group” (Klapper 2006 :212). Also, scholars state that group setting allows the teacher to walk around class and provide effective feedback; on the other hand, research shows that teacher has little choice when it comes to the size of the rooms and available shapes of furniture there is not an ideal arrangement of the seats and group setting; therefore, group setting it may be a difficult approach for students who do not face the front of the class (Appendix 2). Research shows that “experienced teachers have a repertoire of procedures [...] that enable them to arrange student groups [...] and to respond to interruptions and disruptions appropriately” (Richards & Farrell 2011 :78). In order to provide a more interactive approach, teacher uses pair-work activities during the lesson (Appendix 1). Research shows that pair-work is useful, easy to organise, flexible and gives students freedom to discuss their opinions. During the observed lesson, pair-work provides speaking (i.e. fluency/accuracy) and listening practice. Moreover, it is interactive and provides language acquisition which leads to a “comprehensible input” (Klapper 2006 :210). An important observation (Appendix 3) of the group activities during the lesson is that group were too numerous, therefore many students did not get involved into discussions.

2.2 Motivation techniques

Research shows that motivation represents a great stimulus for language learning. The main aim of the motivation during the observed lesson is to engage the students to use the target language in their group/pair discussion. However, the students of the observation class use to talk in Chinese/Korean in their groups (Appendix 2); as a result, the target language does not represent a “normal medium of discourse” (Klapper 2006 :226) in this class. Based on the field notes (Appendix 3), it can be argued that the teacher plays different roles during the class, in order to balance the use of the target language. First, the teacher is a “leader” as he does the most of the talking at the beginning of the lesson with the purpose of activating the schemata.

Secondly, the teacher is an “organiser”; at this stage of the lesson, students are given effective learning possibilities in order to get a better understanding of the tasks. Lastly, the teacher is a “resource” for this class; the tutor walks around groups and provides support with language where needed (2006 :207).

It can be argued that the students feel motivated during the observed class because teacher uses several motivational practices and authentic materials (Appendix 4) in order to meet students’ needs. For example, the purpose of the warm-up activity (Appendix 1) is to activate the schemata and it requires the students to discuss about the usefulness of several office objects. This is an autonomous activity as it allows the learners to discuss freely, to share their personal beliefs over the topic and to acquire new information; therefore, this task represents an effective way for students to gain more knowledge (Scrivener 2011). Also, the main task (Appendix 1) is enjoyable and “creates a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom”; throughout this activity, students are required to read a short description of the a TV show (Appendix 4); by doing this task, the learners focus on particular language items, they practice their top-down reading skills in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the sample (Scrivener 2011). Moreover, the first listening task (Appendix 4) keeps the students ”goal-oriented” because provides an example of the importance of both voice and intonation during a presentation and allows students to practice their fluency by using the target language; Also, students’ collaborative activities and the “motivational feedback” gives students confidence and helps their self-esteem (Dörnyei 2001 :28). It must be mentioned that teacher uses ‘display’ questions and always avoids the ‘closed’ ones. Moreover, students are never nominated to answer before they question is fully asked. As a time-management strategy, the questions are spread for the entire group (Klapper 2006). Another motivation tool is represented by the fact that students are given “guided practice” (Goh 2012 :73) during the practice activity (Appendix 1); throughout this activity they are given guidelines on how to approach the task. For example, they are asked to listen to an audio-recording of a presentation and to reproduce while timing each-other. The purpose of this task is to point out the importance of the speech rate, the punctuation and the intonation.

As a final observation, it can be argued that the main key feature of an effective classroom management is interaction, as it involves both engagement and continuity. All language-based activities should be authentic in order to encourage the students’ use of the target language inside and outside the classroom. Research shows that “teachers need to engage students in using the target language to express their own personal meanings, interests and identities” (Ushioda 2012 :83).

References:

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Appendix 1

Lesson Plan

Time	Stage / activity	What you will do	Why you'll do it	What the Ls will do	Interaction
	Lead-in <i>Warm-up activity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students are asked to sit in groups - Students are shown several office objects - Students are asked to discuss the usefulness of the objects - Students are given cards with the name of the object - Students are required to persuade their groups that the object on their card is the most useful one 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To activate schemata - To raise students' interest. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ls will get into groups and discuss the relevance of the objects. 	<p>T – Ls Ls - Ls</p>
	Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students are asked to share their opinion with the rest of the class and argue why their object is useful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To encourage Ls to speak in front of the class - To give Ls the opportunity to practice their speaking skills, their accuracy and their fluency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Every group will share their opinion with the class. 	<p>T – Ls Ls - Ls</p>
	Recap Activity of Previous Lesson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students are asked to have a short discussion with their groups about the previous lesson - Students are asked to work together to fill the gaps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To revise the previous lesson - To encourage group work - To give Ls an opportunity to practice the target language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ls will work in groups and discuss the task 	<p>T-Ls Ls – Ls Ls - T</p>

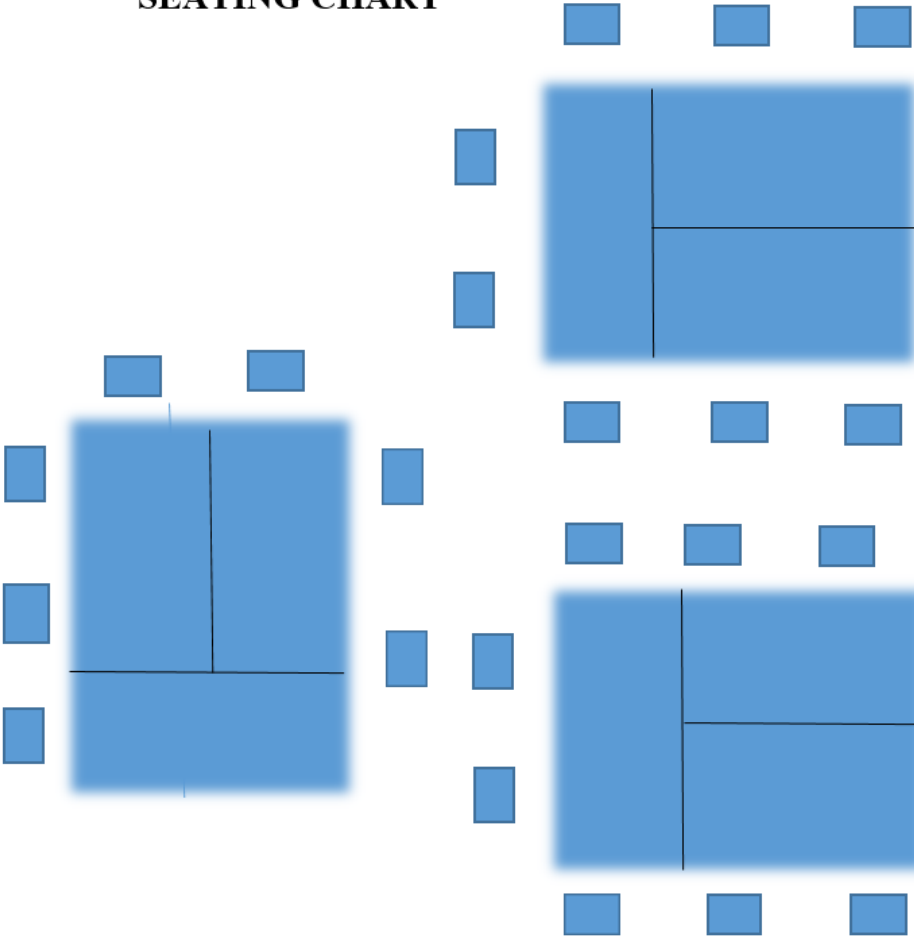
	Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students are nominated to share their answers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To encourage Ls to practice their accuracy - To practice for future group presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ls will discuss answer in their group. - Ls will share their answers with the class 	<p>T – Ls Ls – Ls Ls-Ts</p>
	Introducing the new topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students are delivered the new topic - Students are asked to this the importance of the voice in their groups - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To practice the speaking skills - To use Ls knowledge background 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ls will discuss in groups about the importance of the voice in a conversation 	<p>T-Ls Ls-Ls</p>
	Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students are nominated to share their opinions with the class - Students are given more explanation about voice’s importance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To check Ls knowledge - To introduce them to the topic - To provide extra information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ls will share their group discussion with the rest of the class 	<p>T-Ls Ls-T</p>
	Teaching activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students are requested to fill the gaps - Students are introduced to oral presentation features and required skills - Students are provide useful key words related to presentations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To introduce Ls to oral presentation features - To give Ls new information - To personalise the following tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ls will do the gap filling - Ls will learn about key features of oral presentation 	<p>T-Ls</p>
	Listening Task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students are asked to listen a monologue - Students are asked to discuss about the voice used in the presentation with the person next to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To engage the Ls - To encourage Ls to express their opinions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ls will listen to a short recorded presentation - Ls will focus on speaker’s voice - Ls will discuss the voice in pairs 	<p>T-Ls Ls-Ls</p>

	Practice Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students are given a written sample of the listening activity - Students are required to punctuate the text where needed (Appendix 4) - Students are asked to work in pairs and read the presentation. - Students are asked to time their partners while they read the presentation sample 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To increase STT - To encourage Ls to get involved in discussion - To personalise the activity - To practice reading skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ls will read and punctuate the monologue - Ls will work in pairs - Ls will read the monologue and time themselves - Ls will reverse the roles - Ls will predict the topic 	T-Ls Ls-Ls
	Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students are asked to share their timings - Students are provided extra information about speech rate based on research - Students are asked to volunteer in order to read the article - Students are asked to time the volunteer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To provide more examples - To give extra information - To provide example of voice and volume 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ls will work in pairs - Ls will share their timings with the rest of the class 	T-Ls Ls-Ls
	Main task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students are asked if they know anything about ‘Dragon’s Den’ television programme - Students are given handouts - Students are asked to read the first paragraph in order to find out what the text is about - Students are required to talk about the idea of a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To engage Ls to the lesson - To increase STT - To practice listening skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ls will read a short paragraph about ‘Dragon’s Den’ show - Ls will talk about the meaning of a dragon in their cultures - Ls will watch a video of the show - Ls will answer the questions from the handout 	T-Ls Ls-Ls

		<p>dragon in different cultures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Students are asked to watch a video and answer the questions from the handout (Appendix 5)			
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Appendix 2

SEATING CHART



Appendix 3

Field Notes – *General Observations* of the classroom

- **Before the lesson begins, teacher asks the students to rearrange the seats in order to keep three tables together.**
- **Students are allowed to sit where they please.**
- **Teacher shares the outcomes of the lesson.**
- **Teacher has the role of the leader; he initiates the conversation in order to engage the students in conversation**
- **Teacher gives oral instructions for every activity of the class**
- **Students do not use the target language while they work in groups/pairs; they speak Chinese or Korean**
- **Teacher walk around class when students discuss and requires his students to use English**
- **Teacher never interrupts students' group discussion; teacher always provides feedback at the end of an activity**
- **Groups do not have a speak person. Teachers points students' names while asking for answers**
- **Students practice accuracy and fluency**
- **Teachers asks the students' to reflect about the previous lesson**
- **Teacher provides extra explanation if the students do not engage with the activity**
- **Teacher gives several examples before every activity**
- **Teacher does not point out a speak person before the question is asked**
- **Students clap at the end of every activity to encourage eachother**

Appendix 4

Practice activity – handout

Presentation Skills: Using the voice



*How would you deliver the text in the box below?
Consider pausing, pronunciation and emphasis.*

*good afternoon everyone I'm Sam and I work for XYZ Services
a web designer based in London many thanks for inviting me
to speak to you today in my talk I'm going to describe how you
can enhance your online marketing using some amazing new
software which I will demonstrate later in this presentation if
you have any questions I'll be happy to take them at the end of
the talk so what are the potential benefits of updating your
website let's look at some data from a recent report*

Appendix 5

Main task – handout

Dragons' Den

Dragons' Den is a reality television programme featuring entrepreneurs pitching their business ideas in order to secure investment finance from a panel of venture capitalists. The show originated in Japan.

Listening 1

Watch the opening sequence and complete the table:

The Dragons	How did they make their fortunes? What sectors/companies are mentioned?	How much are they worth? What figures are mentioned?
Peter Jones:		
Deborah Meaden:		
Duncan Bannatyne		
Theo Paphitis:		
Richard Farleigh:		