A survey research of non-english major university students' perception toward small-group work in english learning

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ABSTRACT

English Language Teaching (ELT) in Taiwan has been transformed from traditional mechanical learning to communicative approach, which stresses the importance of communicative competence. Education in Taiwan still remains traditional large classes. Learning opportunities and resources are reduced by large population in the classroom. Small-group work, a kind of informal group, is not permanent in the class for developing students' problem-solving and social skills, and it can be used to stimulate communication and negotiation among students. It can increase not only the opportunity of interaction but also improve students' motivation and maximize students' efforts in a relaxed and unthreatened learning environment. The purpose of this study is to research non-English major university freshmen's perception toward using small-group work in English classes which can or cannot (1) improve students' motivation in English leaning, (2) increase students' English use opportunity and English learning achievement, and (3) help students develop social skills. In addition, (4) the advantages and disadvantages of small-group work were also explored. Questionnaire and student interview were used to investigate what non-English majors think about small-group work in English learning. The participants of this research were 282 non-English major freshmen at Da-Yeh University. The questionnaire was distributed by the researcher in the English classroom or the researcher entrusted English teachers to pass the questionnaire; afterwards, 18 participants were selected by the researcher to do oral interview. The data collected from the questionnaire were coded and analyzed by SPSS software for Windows. The results reveal not only descriptive statistics but also the comparison of the difference among different academic majors and levels' perception toward small-group work. The results indicate that it is worthy applying small-group work in the English classrooms at university. Most of the participants approved the effects of small-group work in increasing their English learning motivation and participation, reducing learning anxiety, providing more opportunities to practice English listening and speaking skills, improving social relationship, and promoting social skills. Some drawbacks of the arrangement of English courses at university were also explored. Competitive learning environment, larger classrooms, insufficient English credits, and teachers' lack of understanding of cooperative learning would affect non-English majors' achievement of English learning. This study provides a clear picture of non-English majors' perception of English learning, which can help language center, English departments, and English teachers at university improve English learning and teaching environment more completely.

Keywords : small-group work ; English learning motivation ; English use ; social skills ; Cooperative Learning ; communicative competence

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