

How to Manage Group Work in ESP Teaching

Enliang Li

*School of International Education, Jiangsu Maritime Institute, Nanjing, Jiangsu, China, 211170
1725126364@qq.com*

Abstract: *At every stage of lessons, the teacher needs to increase the amount of student participation so that everyone has a chance to be involved. “Student to student” and “teacher to student” interaction can be a part of every lesson through the use of group work. Good application of group work techniques makes learning more effective and help teachers become more effective. Group work can bring a dynamic appeal to the ESP classroom. This paper focuses on the advantages and disadvantages of using group work, proposes the practicable ways of managing group work and their application.*

Keywords: *Group Work; ESP Teaching; Feedback; Correcting Errors*

1. Introduction

Each student possesses different knowledge and a different style of learning^[1]. By working with other student at a similar level, he can learn from each other's mistakes and benefit from each other's insight. Varying the group arrangements will let the teacher see which students work well together and which students have specific learning needs. Students can enjoy and benefit from this style of studying when they realize that it is controlled, and that they will be required to report back with the results of their discussions, meanwhile the teacher is carefully paying attention to each group as students work. This method does suit the aims of very stage of the lesson, however planning a mix of quiet, individual study as well as interactive work should cater for the learning styles of all students, especially in the ESP field.

2. Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Group Work

In spite of feeling intimidated for weaker students and leading to disruption, the group work may have following advantages but not limited.

- They increase the amount of student talking time and minimize teacher talking time.
- They allow natural spoken interaction (hesitation, agreeing, asking for information, unfinished sentences).
- They enable learning by doing more motivating for students and teacher.
- They give students opportunities for greater independence, with less teacher control.
- They increase interactivity and promote natural discussion in real-life situations.
- They provide a variety of learning experiences in different situations.
- They help build up a good classroom atmosphere and improve classroom dynamics.
- They involve some problem-solved or project-based outcome in English for Specific Purpose[2].

3. Managing Group Work

Managing group work can be tricky and teachers may understandably feel threatened by the prospect of “losing control” of their class. However, students will not learn to develop their social-linguistic competence if they are not permitted a degree of freedom in the classroom. Group work can bring a vital appeal to the classroom. There are many factors to be considered when managing groups.

3.1. Giving instructions

Giving instructions is crucial to group work. Teachers who are not familiar with organizing interactive tasks may underestimate the challenge of making sure that instructions are both clear and understood. It can be very demoralizing for everyone if group work fails. It is worthwhile taking a few minutes to check that everyone knows what the task involves rather than students wasting time wondering what to do. This checklist of tips will help teachers ensure that their instructions are understood [2].

---Be clear about the aims and the timing of each stage of group tasks. Prior to the lesson, test the instructions by reading them aloud. If the wording is ambiguous, change it.

---Make sure that the language used for giving instructions is not above the students' language level. Use short, simple sentences.

---Give oral instructions before dividing the class into groups. Students cannot concentrate on listening if they are moving around or speaking to their partners.

---Before starting the activity, check that students understand by asking individuals to translate into their own language.

---Do a sample answer in front of the class to demonstrate what is required.

---For complex tasks or with elementary groups, demonstrate the activity in front of the class with one of the more able students.

---For longer tasks or with large groups, write reminders on the board so that the students do not have to keep asking what to do.

3.2. Arranging groups

Arranging groups can be done in different ways, depending on the layout of the class and the furniture. If students are encouraged to form their own groups, it is likely that they will gravitate towards the same people every time. Encourage students to mix by choosing different techniques for grouping, for example by allocating a number between one and four to each student then grouping them by number. To communicate properly, students need to be able to see each other so encourage them to move into circles or to sit round a desk. If it is inconvenient to move the classroom furniture, have the students move their chairs into groups instead or, if writing is not required, ask them to stand up and move into groups. Try to limit the size of groups as it is difficult for more than ten people to make demonstrations in a group.

3.3. Monitoring work in progress

While students are working, it is important to monitor their work carefully without interfering[3]. At this stage, teacher talking time should be minimal to allow maximum student talking time. The teacher should move quietly around the room sit behind each group in turn, listening carefully to students' discussions, taking notes of main errors or language points that need to be covered and checking that all students are interacting and using English to do the task. Although students may at first be distracted by the teachers presence, they will soon be familiar with the procedure and will realize that they should not ask for help unless absolutely necessary during these activities. If the task involves more than one stage, the teacher should make sure that the groups keep to the time allocated for each task.

3.4. Dealing with different levels

There is inevitably a range of ability in every class so the student-centered teacher should be aware of the different levels and be prepared to make arrangements that cater for all needs[1]. From time to time, students should work in a mixed ability groups as this reflects "real life" working conditions and gives less able students the opportunity to learn from the stronger members of group. However, students who are confident in their abilities often tend to dominate weaker students so it is often more advisable to group students by ability. In the event that groups with a higher level of English finish before weaker students, the stronger students will need supplementary activities to keep them focused while others finish the task, for example:

---students check their answers together and then with members of another group,

---students swap their written work with a partner, checking each other's work. This could be a general check on aspects such as punctuation, vocabulary use, tenses, etc, or a specific check directed by teacher,

---the teacher provides a follow-on task which builds on the original activity. This could be in the form of a skill based activity which will need to be checked as well, or a few short language based exercises that can be completed quickly in the class.

Groups of weak students also need to be monitored. They may become discouraged if they perceive that other students are constantly waiting for them or feel pressurized by not having the time they need to complete an activity [3]. If this is a problem, it may be necessary to adapt tasks for the lower levels. In this case, prepare variations of the task at two different levels with appropriate instructions for each task. Appoint a group "secretary" to read out the instructions and explain the task to the group. Alternatively, keep the instructions the same but grade the material so that weak students have easier tasks to do.

Most of these techniques can also apply to pair work as much as group. There are two types of pair work: open pairs and closed pairs. Open pair work is when the whole class listens while two students demonstrate a model or give answers, for example. Selecting students from different parts of the room for open pair work makes students more likely to pay attention in the class. Closed pair work is when every student is allocated a partner and the whole class works together at the same time. Like group activities, closed pair work provides the chance for increasing language practice within the class time. Pair work is generally easier and faster to set up than group work and can be used for virtually any type of practice. Often all it requires is for one student to turn to a partner. Trying out various combinations of pairs will prevent the predictability of always working with the same partner. Students can turn round and work with the person sitting behind them, move and work with someone at the opposite side of the room, or can be allocated a partner by the teacher.

3.5. Feedback

Feedback takes place when the teacher comments on students' work, giving an analysis of strong points and areas for improvement. Feedback is usually carried out at the end of an activity and is especially important after the production stage when students have been working independently of the teacher. For fluency based group work, it is better to save correction of errors for the feedback session rather than interrupt students during the activity. Regular follow-up of production tasks will get students into the habit of reflecting on their work and will help make them aware of their own errors. However, it is very important to use feedback time positively so that students do not feel continually criticized for their effort. Give students a sense of their own progress by giving praise for good work by reminding them of what they have learned. Teacher-led feedback, oral feedback from groups, written feedback from groups, and Identifying errors' feedback are common-used techniques of feedback[4]. The suggestions for feedback reinforce the inductive learning approach and contribute to cooperative study.

3.6. Correcting errors

The traditional method of error correction is when the teacher points out and corrects the students' mistakes as they arise, with the expectation that students will learn directly from this process [4]. This puts the students in a passive role, however, and may inhibit them from speaking for fear of failure. Also, if students are not encouraged to think about and correct their mistakes, it is unlikely that they will retain the right answer for very long, especially if there are many corrections. Mistakes are a natural part of language learning so feedback on fluency based tasks should focus on the most important problem areas rather than every single error [5].

It is important to correct errors that relate to the new structure during every stage of lesson, however this needs to be handled sensitively. The teacher can help the students to realize that errors are inevitable in learning. It is also beneficial for students to get into the habit of analyzing the reasons for some of their mistakes. The students are trying to transfer patterns from their first language into English and cognate words that mislead because they appear to be similar to words in other languages but have different meanings.

--- "False friends" warning: Have a "warning" list of the most common first language and English

cognates or false friends on the wall as a reminder to students about the differences. Put the words in the context of sentences and encourage students to memorize them.

---Colour coded sentences: To help students with recurring problems of English word order, write a few examples of one construction on the board, using different colors for different parts of speech. Show the students the position of the target item in same colors consistently to represent separate parts of speech and colour code new vocabulary as well, if the technique helps your students.

---Self correction: If you think that a student's error is a "slip of the tongue", encourage him to correct himself by echoing his mistake, drawing attention to the error by exaggerating it with a surprised expression and questioning intonation.

---Silent correction: Instead of immediately correcting a student's error, repeat it slowly, "counting off" each word on your fingers, shaking your head when you reach the error and indicating that the student should correct it himself.

---Peer correction: If a student makes a mistake and is uncertain how to correct himself, ask another student to try instead. This works best if there is a good, co-operative atmosphere in the class. Do not try this if it is likely to

There are some commonly used techniques in the ESP class management. Those techniques are aimed at helping students revise language they should know by means of self-correction[2].

---Teacher-led feedback: To tackle a persistent language problem that occurs among the majority of students' work, note down a variety of examples of the error that you hear during group work then write them down on the board once the group work is over. Correct the first example and check that class understands the correction. Then elicit corrections for each of the subsequent examples, asking different students to make the necessary changes on the board.

---Oral feedback from groups: If the aim of group work is to provide answers to a task, tell each group to elect a representative to report their comments to the class. Allow a few minutes for students to prepare for this by checking their final answers after finishing the task. One group representative should start by reporting their answers while the others listen and compare their answers. If the other groups have any differences, they should take it in turn to present their ideas to the class, discussing which versions are correct. The teacher may have to intervene to correct any problems that the trainees are unable to resolve themselves.

---Written feedback from groups: As an alternative to oral feedback, appoint group "secretaries" to write the answers on the board. If space allows, two or more secretaries can write on the board at the same time. Instead of writing from their notes, the other group members should dictate to the secretaries, checking that no errors are written. Once all the groups have written up their answers, the teacher can draw attention to any differences and can ask the class to try to correct any major problems.

--- "Identifying errors" feedback[6]: To make feedback more positive, write a variety of phrases on the board which are taken from students' work, some correct and some containing errors. Put the students into groups and ask them to read the phrases carefully and identify those containing errors. Then ask them to try to correct the errors.

4. Integrating Maritime Topics

English teachers at maritime establishments should not feel that they are "teaching in a vacuum" with no connection to the teaching in other departments. Ideally, the ESP lesson will be supplemented with content-based input from the syllabi of other departments. This will ensure that the English that students learn at college incorporates technical subjects as a context for studying language. English teaching should also support the type of language skills that students need for other areas (eg report writing, note taking, pronunciation of SMCP, listening for detailed comprehension, skim reading, etc) as well as those skills that they will need at sea. The suggestions given below emphasize the importance of collaboration between staff of various disciplines. Most of the activities promote task-based learning of technical subjects through the medium of English, an approach that should be encouraged at all levels throughout the cadets training.

It is vital that English teachers who have limited knowledge of technical aspects of maritime are given real opportunities to liaise with staff from other departments in order to increase their understanding. Technical teachers will also benefit from improving their knowledge of English.

Collaboration between departments should be ongoing and will require formal approval, co-ordination, assessment and review to be effective.

When planning the curricula for a new term, ask heads of department to arrange a meeting with the aim of linking the English teaching syllabus into other subject areas. Ask heads of department for regular, time-tabled sessions when English teachers and technical teachers can observe each other's class. In addition to observation, ask heads of department if it is possible for English teachers to co-teach with technical teachers in order to integrate content and language learning. Students will benefit from seeing the relevance of English to their vocational training. English teacher should consult with the technical teachers who they are designated to work with to assess which technical material could be adapted for language teaching. English teachers should also find out how technical subject teachers prepare students for the practical skills they will need at sea.

On a regular basis, ask pairs or groups of students to give presentations to the class in English about a topic they have learned about in other subject areas. This will give them the chance to consolidate their learning from other departments and to revise technical terminology in English. Give a group or pair of students a particular technical area to research before the session. The researching student may make notes if they want to but need not write a formal report at this stage. Meanwhile, tell the other students to brainstorm as many questions as possible on the topic. Arrange for groups of students to "teach" groups of cadets in the year below them about an aspect of a technical subject in English, under supervision. This could take the form of a presentation using visual aids, a discussion, a practical demonstration, etc and will provide a genuinely communicative situation that should motivate all students.

5. Conclusions

For group work to be successful, students need to understand the value of cooperative learning. Students who share the same first language often do not like speaking a foreign language in front of their peers for various reasons. Shyness, embarrassment, fear of making mistakes or personality differences may cause group work to fail. Some students may consider group work to be unproductive or uncontrolled, especially if there are lots of technical terminologies they are not accustomed to it[4]. With the repeated encouragement, students can come to accept that speaking English to their peers is a normal and necessary part of active learning. This may require the teacher to demonstrate a positive attitude towards cooperative learning, explaining that time spent in group work increases the opportunity for students to actively practice their English.

Acknowledgements

Research Project on Higher Education Reform in Jiangsu Province (2021)

References

- [1] Ma Jingbo. (2020) *Student-centered College English Teaching Model*. *Journal of Mudanjiang Normal University*, no. 5, p. 73-75.
- [2] Guo Yingping. (2017) *ESP and College English Teaching*. *Journal of University of Shanghai for Science and Technology*, vol. 39, no. 3, p. 207-211.
- [3] Wang Bingying, Chen Jiamei. (2014) *College English Teaching Team Building Based on ESP Curriculum System*. *New Curriculum Learning (Middle School)*, no. 9, p. 31.
- [4] Li Yifan, Cui Yuhang. (2022) *Construction of College English ESP Curriculum System under the Background of "Four New"*. *Economist*, no. 6, p. 171-172+174.
- [5] Jiang Hua, Wang Xiaojing. (2022) *Research and Practice on Curriculum Construction of English for Special Purposes (ESP) in Applied Colleges and Universities*. *Modern English*, no. 7, p. 70-73.
- [6] Xie Li. (2022) *Research on the Innovation Theory of ESP Curriculum Deep Learning Teaching Pattern in Higher Vocational Education under the Background of "Three Education" Reform*. *Journal of Hubei Open Vocational College*, vol. 35, no. 5, p. 5-6.