Challenging Exploratory Experiment: Improving Communication Skills through an Internship in Singapore

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Abstract

In order to increase business, not only large-sized Japanese enterprises but also small- and mid-sized companies have been making inroads into foreign countries due to domestic limitations of sales and cutbacks in personnel expenses in order to increase profits. However small-sized companies’ budget is usually limited, often restraining them from spending money on in-house English training. Therefore, it is ideal that universities train students to improve their communication skills in English before they graduate and enter these companies. An overseas internship is one way to solve this problem. In this research changes in listening capability were focused on using reports which were written by students who participated in an overseas internship to Singapore. Significant improvements were found when analyzing these student’s pre and post internship listening capabilities.

Keywords: ESP, Internship, Listening Skill.

1. Introduction

According to recent surveys including the International Labour Organization, the NEET rate of the young is increasing. It indicates that 25% of the young in the world aren’t in education, employment or training. The reason of this can be said that a recession is affecting lives of the youth. However on the other hand, some point out that the necessary skills employers look for don’t match the skills young people have today. There is a difference between what is being offered by young people and what is actually required. Although companies used to have in-house training in order to cover the gap, they haven’t offered it in late years. Japan is no exception in regards to this world trend. Economic activities have been quickly globalized, and the needs for good communication skills have become essential in many cases. Contrary to this fact, companies, particularly small-and mid-sized companies, are usually lacking in financial resources. Under these circumstances, it would be appropriate that hands-on, practical education should be done in institutions of higher education in order to fill the gap. However, with an already crowded curriculum today, training communication skills in higher education is no easy task. It is essential to make students understand the future needs of English and motivate them to feel the necessity of English in daily life. In this research, the efficacy of an internship abroad, outside the regular academic curriculum is examined. Authors especially focused on issues of pronunciation and listening, which were found to be usual area of communicative trouble between staff within businesses.

2. Listening Ability

Four students were brought to a two-week internship in Singapore. One of them evaluated that no listening skill was improved at all. This student couldn’t communicate with local people because of insufficient listening skills. Three other students evaluated that their listening skills had improved to some extent after the program. Therefore they rated themselves at the level that they could understand English if its pronunciation was clear even though there were cases where they were not able to follow what people said with a normal speed.

3. Facts from Reports

When reading reports that students wrote about the internship, the student who mentioned her inability of listening wrote about only her incompetence of listening and her English not to be able to be understood. On the other hand all three other students wrote the report from an analytical point of view. Their reports can be organized as follows:
- English of announcement and information in public places is rather easy to understand. However it is difficult to understand English used by the local people in food courts and also sales clerks.
- The English speaking speed of Chinese, Malay and Indian speakers is very fast, and it is difficult to differentiate words beginnings and endings, hence hindering comprehension. However, the spoken English of Burmese people and local
people who can speak Japanese can be occasionally understood. From the two points above, the Japanese EFL speakers have a hard time understanding English in scenes of places filled with mainly local people mainly. This problem is congruent with what business people face in an English speaking business environment.

Having an awareness of the problems mentioned above, the three students who wrote about the improvement of their listening capacity on their reports analyzed issues of individual pronunciation. The analysis can be summarized as described below.

- There are omissions of subjects and also Chinese words at the end of sentences are often added. Some Malay and Chinese words are also sometimes used. There are some sounds, which are not pronounced at all, or poorly pronounced, such as k, d and t. Due to this, even a relatively easy and frequently used word such as the word “sad” is difficult to hear and comprehension may be lost.

4. Conclusion
According to students' reports, it is necessary to have analytical point of view in order to improve listening skill.

References

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