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A Project-Based Application-oriented Language Teaching Research

Youwen Zhang[1]

[1] Zhejiang University of Finance & Economics Dongfang College, Zhejiang China, email:zyw12398@163.com

Abstract

Based on the examination washback mechanism, the study is to carry out college English application-oriented teaching reform practice, unify the diverse core themes in textbook learning through project tasks in the network and classroom teaching, and emphasize the close connection between language learning and language practice. Project tasks involve the establishment of a series of task documents, task implementation, and task reflection. Project tasks are carried out closely following the core idea of the improvement of workplace capabilities, project data can be integrated into a semester language learning course. The study provides task samples for language teaching and initial experience to adapt to other relevant elective courses, and provides students with additional learning motivation and deeper learning capabilities.

Keywords: Washback Mechanism, Application-based Teaching, Project Tasks, Task Documents

1. Introduction

College English is a general university course, which is a basic course that almost all college students in China need to learn. Foreign language instruction is always an important part of modern education, and is always closely related to the development of the country. At present, China's economic development has entered a new normal, and the country's development requires more highly qualified international talents than ever before. According to the "Guide to College English Teaching", the cultivation of students' English application ability and comprehensive cultural literacy is an important training goal of English teaching. At the same time, with the official release of "Chinese English Proficiency Scale", it has put forward refined measurement standards for the cultivation and application of language ability in teaching. The new training goal is very focused on the cultivation of students' basic ability and cultural literacy, so the classroom teaching design based on applied concepts is particularly important, so that learners have the awareness and ability to learn.

2. Application-based Instructional Design Based on the Washback Mechanism

ETIC refers to the English Test for International Communication，it is a certification system that assesses English communication ability in the workplace. ETIC aims to serve as a benchmark for employers to select

employees who are confident and competent to communicate in English in an international environment. At the same time, ETIC helps colleges promote teaching and training comprehensive abilities including critical thinking, intercultural communication, and solving contextualized problems, etc. in language classrooms. The design concept of ETIC based on market and application can provide a good testing and evaluation platform for applied teaching. As one of the first batch of national ETIC test units in our country, our university has conducted the school-wide ETIC test several times in a row, and the frequency of student's taking the test has increased year by year. In order to achieve the teaching objective of the College English course, we combined the ETIC to design classroom teaching, and fully utilized the examination washback mechanism to optimize teaching design and enhance language learning efficiency.

The research in washback theory and practice from early 1990s have proposed different theoretical models, including Hughes' (1993) Washback trichotomy, Bailey's (1996) basic model of washback and Green's (2007) model of washback, incorporating intensity and direction, and a variety of empirical studies conducted (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1997; Cheng 2005; Hawkey 2006; Green 2007; Qin 2012; Xiao et al. 2014).

ETIC examines English communication ability, the ability to analyze and solve problems and the ability of cross-cultural understanding and expression. We put the concepts of excellent classification and practical orientation in ETIC into the daily teaching design, so that the teaching is close to the actual needs and practical principles.

1) In teaching belief, through the combination of intensive teaching and situational teaching, to create a emulational environment for language use and cultivate language application awareness during the teaching process. Intensive teaching means that the teacher should grasp the language points and content framework as much as possible, and use refined language to enable students to understand the teaching content and difficulties. It is not necessary to teach students all the details of the course, but to teach students how to learn, so that they can carry out self-study and discussion, and have enough time to think about and solve difficult problems and practice more, they can understand and digest knowledge learned in the classroom. Situational teaching is supported by emulational language conditions, to complete language tasks and implement language teaching in an emulational language environment, so that teaching tasks and teaching content are based on daily life and working setting, and task design is oriented to actual needs and practical applications.

2) In teaching design, College English is divided into two courses as a foreign language communication ability module: College English Listening and Speaking, College English Reading and Writing. English listening and speaking classes aim to improve students' language listening and oral communication skills, while college English reading and writing is to train students' English reading and writing skills. To meet different needs of international exchange activities in different fields, ETIC offers 7 tests，ranging from basic level to simultaneous interpreting level, its contents cover the daily contacts in workplace, international business exchange activities, translation of professional documents, simultaneous interpretation in meetings and conversations etc.. In speaking and listening class, teaching content and task design appropriately refer to the questions and content of the ETIC, simulate the working environment and design real teaching cases to be incorporated into the teaching project, let students experience and use language to solve problems. In reading and writing course, to incorporate business communication and task implementation in the teaching projects, the language output ability and language practice ability are targetedly honed, and let the feedback effect of the exam and the washback mechanism give students the best positive guidance for learning and teaching.

3) In teaching mode, relying on the Unipus system of the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, it uses a combination of online teaching and offline teaching to solve the problem of insufficient teaching time due to the reduction of class credits and improve the teaching network. Constructing an online self-learning platform in college English basic teaching, as a supplement to conventional teaching, online teaching plays an important role in the entire teaching process. The effective combination of network teaching resources and multimedia classroom teaching can greatly improve students' learning interest and learning efficiency. By using the teaching resources on the Internet, students can learn and strengthen the teaching content by themselves. In addition, students can communicate with teachers at any time on the Internet. The combination of online and offline methods can not only avoid the time and location limitations caused by the traditional teaching model,

but also improve the students' computer control ability and language use ability. Students 'learning styles change from passive to active, which can mobilize students' self-learning ability.

4) In teaching methods, strengthening practical teaching to cultivate students' ability to use language and solve practical problems is the ultimate and optimal pursuit of application-oriented teaching reform. In traditional teaching experiments, many teaching and evaluation systems focus on verification, repetition and reproduction of what students have learned in the classroom. This kind of teaching experiment can improve students' knowledge acquisition and knowledge management ability to some extent, but it lacks in using knowledge flexibly to solve problems. It cannot cultivate students' application ability, lack flexibility and creativity. In order to change this situation, the primary task of college English teaching is to cultivate students' application ability. Project task-driven teaching is a good way to solve such problems. The course content is incorporated in the project, in proposing tasks, analyzing tasks, completing tasks, communication and summary, through the implementation of tasks, students use the acquired knowledge to improve their ability to solve problems in the real world, and intensify practical teaching to achieve the improvement of language use ability. At the same time, through task-driven mode, teachers can be regarded as leaders and facilitator in learning, and students can be transformed into the main body of classroom tasks.

3. Implementation of Instructional Design

College English courses are offered from first-year freshmen in college, teaching students basic knowledge about language theory and practice, such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation. The course aims to help college students master and use language tools to cultivate the ability to obtain information and exchange information, and possess critical thinking and an international perspective to examine the world. The goal of the curriculum reform is to develop a teaching model, stimulated by the examination washback mechanism, to cultivate students' interest in using English and enhance their ability to solve practical problems in English.

College English textbooks are composed of different theme units. Through the connection with the professional orientation of the ETIC, to make full use of the emulational workplace language environment to practice vocabulary and language knowledge points in text learning. The seemingly disconnected themes in various texts are linked together to enhance students 'language efficiency and workplace experience in the course learning; by providing a framework that showcases the themes of workplace activities, it emphasizes the close connection between the working environment and language learning, thereby increasing students' interest and motivation in learning languages; at the same time, the task-based project implementation model allows students to enter a simulated language environment, which is an important place to develop problem-solving skills and critical thinking, thereby inspiring them to continue to study higher-level courses and learn to use English to develop undergraduate project research of the major.

In order to achieve these goals, two courses College English Reading and Writing and College English Listening and Speaking adopt a mixed online and offline teaching model of "Classroom Learning" + "Self-Learning". Online study uses the computer-aided foreign language digital teaching platform Unipus and the mobile terminal self-learning App platform for independent learning and teaching interaction; offline, it is to make full use of the exam washback mechanism to integrate two teaching paths to implement task-driven teaching activities, and respond to improve teaching efficiency. In short, the project-driven hybrid teaching method can provide a variety of learning management for college English courses, from a wide range of textbooks and extra-curricular knowledge intensive training to practical application projects based on ability enhancement, learning content and skills ascension are varied. For this course, the task-driven project implementation model and the online and offline mixed teaching model provide an excellent balance between two valuable goals of good experiential learning and a wide range of topics covering.

Each task involves the design and implementation of a learning system that can enhance the sense of substitution of language learning and the immediacy of language practice. These tasks also provide an opportunity for students to not only solve the topic of language learning, but also solve the core problems of language use. Teachers can choose a task to use in the classroom, and then interact and implement part of the task or

subsequent tasks on the Internet. Network tasks are not to replace regularly scheduled assignments, but to supplement and enhance them, while teachers may need to adjust the number of extracurricular assignments to avoid overloading students.

Tasks can be in the form of textbook or extra-curricular knowledge combined with the ETIC workplace English for application design. Students can choose from a variety of fields for a variety of training projects for workplace simulation, such as recommending products and services, oral communication tasks with customers, in response to the need of letters or e-mails reply, or writing business recommendations based on the information provided in the form of written communication tasks. This kind of theoretical knowledge combined with practical application of project implementation can enable students to better practice and enhance their ability in speaking, analyzing business data and conducting business briefings. Studies have shown that the choice of background or problem domain for assignments and examples used in the classroom can have a huge impact on students' motivation to learn, which in turn impact their learning quality（Wilensky，1991）. A problem domain that a student relates to and finds relevant leads to deeper understanding and hence smoother transfer to other domains, something that assessment of our work supported.

We have carefully designed the specific content of the text, and the experimental project for the task implementation of workplace English can be tightly integrated into the teaching of college English for a semester and become a systematic cluster. Regarding task-driven teaching, the specific experimental course operation mode is shown below.

Phase 1: text extraction and data preparation

The contemporary college English is basically a university general course, so the relevant learning content is mainly aimed at the development of basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. After learning the words and text in accordance with conventional teaching methods, we ask students to understand and think about which vocabulary and sentences may be used according to the workplace context, and form a training data set. This preparation is actually to give learners a basic concept of language use space and scene transition, this conversion plays an important role in information retrieval and vocabulary search, it allows learners to get psychological preparation and material preparation of being familiar with the workplace language environment. Learners can also use online materials to improve these word data, so that they can obtain a full reserve of language materials. In the first few preparation activities at this stage, teachers are particularly advised to assist students' preparation. After several practical exercises, learners will quickly use different feature extraction methods to prepare data files.

Phase 2: develop task documents grouped by subject

The purpose of this stage is to develop a collection of task documents belonging to different workplace themes. The first is the determination of the theme of the workplace. We can refer to the ETIC about the different levels of the preset for the use of workplace English to determine the different topics. Then, to combine Unipus and network materials to organize group learning activities, each group is responsible for different topics, and each topic is composed of at least 3 to 5 document collections. Since these tasks with different topics will be used for learning and classification implementation at a later stage, they are best to form a specific structure. Different task documents are at different levels in different topic hierarchies, and there is a distinction between the difficulty and the depth of the subject. An example of the structure of such a task document is as follows: (a) Each unit has at least five different topics related to spoken and written exercises, and each topic has at least 3-5 document sets. (b) Each document should contain at least a certain amount of text, such as 20 words, 30 sentences, or a number of paragraphs. The learner has the preparation for the extraction of words and sentences in the previous stage, and can easily understand and prepare the initial data of the task document without too much guidance. Teachers should also prepare the document data of the speaking, writing and listening comprehension task before the stage of classroom task implementation.

Phase 3: Task implementation

At this stage, through the arrangement and implementation of document tasks to create an emulational language environment and workplace practice, and finally form a model of language experiment data set. These models

were subsequently used for two purposes: (1) to improve the structure and classification accuracy of task topics, and (2) to expand the applicability of new task items.

Entering the topic of classroom tasks, the implementation phase includes the following steps. (1) To preprocess document data for oral practice and listening comprehension. Make the necessary connection between the spoken and listening comprehension task documents, and verify the consistency of the documents created in phase 2 of the project, and use class notes for reflective analysis. (2) To create a context. Through the introduction of company's business background and operation, create a learning situation that is as realistic as possible related to the current learning theme, and make the situation as intuitive and vivid as possible, so that the learner can enter the learning situation with "real tasks". (3) To determine the task. In the created situation, select the authenticity event or problem related to the task document as the central content of spoken or written communication, let students understand, analyze and solve the current real problem. (4) To learn autonomously and collaboratively. Teachers provide students with relevant clues to solve the problem according to the task, guide students to use relevant language materials and connect relevant information materials in classroom communication and group activities, and emphasize the cultivation of the self-learning ability in communication and written activities, at the same time, advocate discussions and idea communication between students, through the confrontation of different points of view, supplement, correct and improve each student's solution to the current problem. And lead some sections of the task and listening materials into the Unipus learning platform to continue and deepen the content of classroom learning, strengthen the effect of language practice, and supplement the lack of offline learning time simultaneously.

In the final stage of the project task, the teacher writes a report on the language experiment to evaluate the learning effect. The effectiveness of these projects is evaluated through a multi-level evaluation system composed of teachers, students, and advisory committees. The assessment process includes both formative assessment and final assessment. The content includes a detailed statement of the experimental data (language input data, language output data), task implementation solutions or results, and interpretation and analysis of existing problems, as well as an evaluation analysis about test scores and ETIC examination score at the end of the semester. Think about the real needs of students and the best mode of knowledge transfer, and how to create a good environment for expanding knowledge and capabilities. Finally, a practical language experiment model is constructed according to the task objectives, preparation, steps, implementation and results.

4. Reflective Thinking of Teaching

In teaching feedback, we will compare the data before and after incorporating the ETIC into the examination and evaluation system, and analyze the washback effect of the examination mechanism on the teaching action and effectiveness. The investigation contents include teaching content, teaching organization, teaching materials, language used in the classroom, teacher-student communication characteristics, classroom atmosphere and other internal elements of the teaching, as well as external factors such as the washback effect of the examinations accepted by the administrative department, teachers and students. At the same time, a comparison will be made between the ETIC preparation category and the non-preparation category to identify the differences caused by ETIC. In addition, the classes taught by different teachers, the classes of students with different language levels, and the classes of different types of schools will be compared to distinguish other factors that may cause discrepancy in different classes.

5. Conclusion

We explore a language learning experiment project with the unified theme of task documents, which is a teaching method that combines the test washback mechanism with task-driven concepts, and emphasizes the close connection between the internal mechanism of language learning and external teaching practice. Through a set of adaptable language experiment projects, workplace application abilities can be integrated into language teaching courses in emulational language context, thereby providing a framework that can be used to enhance students' learning experience. The project is developed for a specific application ability system，when we take

the improvement of workplace practical ability as the theme of the language experiment project, we are also creating a framework and applicable models that can be adapted to other topics in the course and even other related elective courses.

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