

Applying Production-oriented Approach to College English Education: An Action Research

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keywords: language teaching, College English education, POA, classroom teaching

Abstract: To make the effectiveness of teaching theory and pedagogy, it needs to practice in the real classroom. The teachers are practitioners and decision-makers in the school, sometimes who are directly related to the success or failure of teaching reform. This study will take action research which is useful tool for change and improvement in College English teaching classroom to improve practice. It is a better way to be a researcher in the classroom, who can examine and analyze teaching policies and theories. They can find problems and explore ways to solve them in practice rather than leading by education policy and teaching theory

1. Introduction

In the last 40 years, College English education has had many achievements with foreign language educators and scholars (Wang, 2013). College English curriculum has been refined and updated, teaching textbooks and materials have gradually been utilized widely. Language assessment has become more diverse; computer assistance has fulfilled the traditional language teaching classroom. However, confirming with the College English education's significant achievements, it is still in the way of the reforms in the new ear. It stills has the accused of the low effectiveness of college English teaching.

College English education at this stage has mainly focused on three parts: first, "why to teach," which means College English teaching has the objectives and orientation deviation. Some language scholars advise that English teaching should focus on commutation skills (Wang, 2013). Others have different understanding and advocate that College English education should cultivate English for academic purposes rather than language competence (Shu, 2017). Second, "what to teach," which shows that teaching content is deviation. Some scholars advocate that College English education should shift from learning to using, from English for general content to English for specific content (Cai, 2012). The third one is "how to teach." It is common in the College English classroom, and teachers pay more attention to knowledge input than practice and communication (Wen, 2014). It is urgent to understand the clarify the College English education objectives (why to teach) and consider the right content (what to teach). The most important thing is finding the proper or better way to show in a specific situation (how to teach).

To make the effectiveness of teaching theory and pedagogy, it needs to practice in the actual classroom. The teachers are practitioners and decision-makers in the school, sometimes directly related to the success or failure of teaching reform (Burns, 2011, p99). Therefore, as a front-line teacher, I choose action research which is a "useful tool for change and improvement" (Cohen, Manion &

Morrison, 2018, p440) in the College English teaching classroom in this study to "improve practice" (Elliott, 1991, p 49). It is a better way to be a researcher in the classroom who can examine and analyze teaching policies and theories.

Production-oriented Approach (POA) is a new innovational foreign language teaching theory and method advocated by Chinese language scholar Wen (2014) and her research group in the new era of language learning. POA has developed through three periods from "output hypotheses", "output-input hypotheses", and "production-oriented approach". The teaching objectives of language teaching are based on teaching theory, which is related to the Chinese situation. The teaching hypothesis has provided the Approach of designing the language teaching progress; the lesson procedure is the step and method to achieve the teaching objectives.

2. POA in College English Education

POA has brought a tremendous international impression for foreign language teaching theory and method. Wen and her team have presented it at many international conferences. Their research paper named the production-oriented Approach: A Pedagogical innovation in university English teaching in China in one chapter on *Faces of English: Students, Teachers, and Pedagogy* (Lillian & Hyland, 2017). It has explained the application of the new theory and Approach in College English Education. Chinese English education scholars thought POA could solve the common problem of "separation of the teaching and using," lower effectiveness in College English education. It also can bring theory support for College English teachers in the practice and reform in the classroom.

The study and practice of innovation theory and pedagogy of POA have become significant projects in the Ministry of Education. It has around applied the POA in foreign language education system, based on the applying of POA reform study and action research about using POA in College English classroom. Recently, more and more researchers have increased, focusing on textbook editing, teaching design, teaching assessment, teaching module, and language competence development. It is the new teaching theory and pedagogy in College English education. Language teachers still need practice in College English Education curriculum construction, teaching assessment, and students' intercultural communication competence.

Therefore, following the principle of 'fitness for purpose' in this study, I want to use proactive action research with the core research question of how to practice POA in a College English classroom.

3. Action research

Action research is a methodology for researchers or teachers to "understand and generate knowledge about educational practices and their complexity" (McAteer, 2013, p21). Action research has related the ideas of reflective practice for the practitioners in social content, which combines the "action" and "research" (Burns, 2011). Action research aims to change three things "practitioner's practices, their understandings of their practices, and the conditions in which they practice". Action research might be the third way to find "better" than "real," compared with other educational research paradigms like positivism research and interpretivism research.

Action research is a kind of research carried out by the practitioners through planning the study, practicing and refining the research. Generally speaking, action research begins to find a problem in teaching in the classroom; the aim is to solve the problem with the relevant questions. McNiff (1988) described action research in five steps: (1) find an issue in the teaching process (2) assumption a method to solve the problem (3) carry out this method in teaching process (4) collect information and data for the assessment (5) find the new question based on the evaluation and reflection and prepare for the next period. The five-step is the response to the specific problems that arise in the teaching process. Schmuck called it responsive or reactive action research. In the study, Schmuck mentioned, besides

responsive action research, it has another type of action research called proactive action research.

Unlike responsive action research, proactive action research is based on other practitioners' practice and research, beginning with a new teaching approach or method. The practitioner finds the new Approach and demonstrates the new Approach, assuming it can change the problematic situation through research design, data collection, and assessment. These two types of action research have different starting point; it reveals the mixed response to the change in the teaching practice. The former is passive to the move, and the latter is learning from training and reference by past experiences, acting positively.

The University has implemented the new College English reform, following the guidance in 2018. College English is divided into two parts: first-year students who study College English for general purposes and second-year students who study the Module Curriculum. There are three types in this module curriculum: general English, English for the particular purpose, and intercultural communication. This action research carries out in the College English Curriculum in a double-class University. College English is one of the compulsory disciplines, which applied for three semesters of the first and second year, non-English significant students.

This research action chooses the course *General English* and *Introducing Chinese Culture in English* in the intercultural communication module. The module courses are different from the former College English course. The teaching objective of the module course focuses on cultivating English competency and the communication ability to talk about Chinese culture in English. The module teaching content is about Content-based instruction. Each unit selects the traditional Chinese Culture topic such as Chinese philosophy and religion, Chinese art, Chinese literature, Chinese Kungfu, etc. The new textbook contents have a more extended passage and more vocabulary. This culture course uses the traditional teaching method, warming up activities, explaining the glossary, and asking the student to prepare the topic to deliver the presentation.

Introducing Chinese Culture in English is for the second-year course university students. Their average English result from National Examination is above 136 (total score 150), and they have already passed the CET4 in the first semester. The students have higher English competence and communicative competence. The first-year students are more motivated to talk about Chinese Culture in English, but they lack teaching methods. Students used to depend on teachers than learning by themselves. There are still problems with using the language, such as accuracy, fluency, and pragmatism.

After one year of teaching practice in this class, I found that the course adopts the "content-based" teaching method, and the teaching subject chooses the Chinese culture related topic. It has improved the problem of College English problem, which is a lack of cognitive challenge. By using the project learning method, students can complete the project research task and cultivate their cultural consciousness and intercultural communication ability. However, reflecting on the teaching, I still felt dissatisfied. The most apparent problem is the significant separation of the "input" of the class (the study of the text) and the "output" (the student's completion of the project). Some students with a weak language foundation often encounter bottlenecks in completing projects. It is sometimes helpless, and there is a massive gap between the poor quality of students' output and the shortness of the study. To get out of the teaching dilemma of "learning and using separately". To explore practical ways to improve teaching practice, which is the motivation to use POA (Production-oriented Approach) in the class.

The planning stage of this study is just the second semester of this course, and it has not yet formed a learning model. *Introducing Chinese Culture in English* is still under the college English curriculum. It should guide the main objectives of the College English course when using the POA "Production-oriented Approach" in classroom practice.

This research adopts proactive action research, which is different from the response action research in choosing a research classroom. The response action research begins with one specific problem in the

classroom. It needs to fix the practice site to solve the problem in action research. Proactive action research begins with new methods and aims to continuously optimize the design and practice of new ways (Zhang, 2013). Basic speaking, in this study, I will carry out second years University students. The two stages of action research will take in the College English course for Grades 2018 (second semester of sophomore year). One is the previous College English course; another is in the module course (Introducing Chinese Culture in English). Another stage is designed and implemented as a unit of teaching design by the POA (Product-oriented Approach) in collecting data and evaluation.

The two-stage action research chooses one unit of teaching practice in a different class, under consideration of research ethics. It is the practice period for a new method in classroom teaching; the practitioner needs time to put the teaching theory into the teaching process. It might be a significant challenge for designing the teaching plan, modifying the teaching procurements, and collecting action research data. Doing action research can ensure the effectiveness of Education, teaching objectives, and student's learning needs, doing action research in a different classroom.

The first stage of action research will carry out in the General English classroom to refine the previous teaching plan under the new teaching approach. Then in the second stage of the action research, try to use the Approach in a new teaching module course. One reason that is carried out in different classrooms and classes is avoiding the new Approach to influence the original teaching plan. Another one is to have enough time to prepare the new teaching practice.

4. Conclusion

With the development of action research, action researchers attach importance to quantitative research methods. They believe that action research can adopt qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research methods (Zhang, 2016). Researchers have also used a mixed approach to action research (Wen, 2014) cited examples of action research using hybrid research methods. These case studies have discussed the necessities for the intervention of the action by using quantitative research before the action research. Alternatively, use it to test for "change" and provide evidence for evaluating action effectiveness after experimental design.

The action research in the College English teaching classroom is aim to "improve practice." It is a better way to be a researcher in the classroom who can examine and analyze teaching policies and theories. It can help me find problems and explore ways to solve them in practice rather than lead by education policy and teaching theory. I need to practice this new theory and pedagogy in the actual classroom. It is not the end of the study; two action research stages are not enough to practice the new theory. I should action the framework of my design and, through a reflection of the practice process, prepare for the next stage. To make my College English classroom better and better.

Acknowledgement

This study was funded by the Fundamental Research Funds of Educational Reform in Dalian Maritime University (Grant No. YJG2021517); Fundamental Research Funds of Educational Reform in Dalian Maritime University (Grant No. 2020Y78); Fundamental Research Funds of Educational Reform in Dalian Maritime University (Grant No. JF2021Y13).

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