

The Reform and Practice of Level-based English Teaching Based on POA

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Abstract: The level-based English teaching has always been a hot issue in the teaching reform. Based on the practice and reform of level-based English teaching in Xi'an Fanyi University, this paper discusses the teaching model which is in line with the students' actual situation, and takes the theory of POA as a guide. At the same time, it puts forward the strategies to solve the potential problems in order to further optimize the teaching model, meet the demands of students at different levels and improve the quality of college English teaching.

Key words: POA; college English; level-based English teaching

1. Background

For a long time, due to different geographical and educational backgrounds, the English level of students in the same administrative class in College English class differs, and this difference even polarizes frequently. In order to solve the contradiction between teaching and learning, as early as in 2003, the Department of Higher Education clearly pointed out: "graded teaching has been proved, by years of teaching practice, to be beneficial to students with different foundations to improve their English level. It concretely embodies the principle of teaching students in accordance with their aptitude." In 2004, the Department addressed again that "all colleges and universities should determine the teaching objectives based on the actual situations of their schools, and create conditions to encourage students to, by their own conditions, adjust the learning objectives to higher requirements [2]." In 2007, the Ministry of Education released the latest College English Curriculum Requirements: "Since China is a vast country, the situations varies greatly among regions and colleges. College English Teaching should implement the principles of classified guidance and teaching students in accordance with aptitude so as to meet the needs of personalized teaching. Thus, College English Teaching requirements is divided into three levels, namely, general requirements, higher requirements and highest requirements [3]." In 2020, the College English Teaching Guide (2020 Edition) was released. The Guide still divides the teaching objectives of College English into three levels: foundation, improvement and development [4]. In order to implement the principle of "classified guidance and teaching students in accordance with aptitude", Xi'an Fanyi University (XFU) has carried out the reform of graded teaching in English courses since September 2020. In view of this, this study, based on the theory of "production-oriented approach"(POA), explores and optimizes the graded teaching mode in line with the English level of students and the actual situation of English teaching in XFU.

2. Level-based Teaching Reform-Taking XFU as an Example

Level-based teaching reform in XFU targets 2020 undergraduate students (excluding students of English), totally about 2500 students from 23 provinces and municipalities across the country. The

statistics of their English scores in the college entrance examination of 2020 shows that the highest score is 128, the lowest score 14. 510 students are above the pass line of 90 scores, with an average score of 98.18, only 20% of the total number; the number of students between 70-89 scores is 1133, with an average score of 79.45, less than 45%. The score of rest are 69 or below, with an average score of 55, about 35%. It can be seen that students' English level is uneven, with huge individual differences. 80% of students fail to reach the passing line, and the proportion of students at low level is large. If we continue to carry out English teaching in the traditional classes, both teachers and students will face great challenges and difficulties. Therefore, we have to combine students' abilities of actual English learning and knowledge acceptance, to determine different objectives and programs. At the same time, various teaching activities should be organized to reflect a certain level in the teaching, practice and evaluation of the course content, so as to meet the needs of students at different levels and achieve the goal of development and progress for students at each level.

Based on the English scores of 2020 undergraduate students, we set the grading line at the score of 87. The total number of class A is 570, with an average score of 95.8, about 30% of the total. The curriculum of level-based English teaching is revised to Online + Offline Teaching mode, with the process assessment implemented in each term. The A/B teaching classes formulate different objectives, contents, progress, etc. During the teaching process, the proportion of CET-4 related knowledge is increased, of which the proportion of class A is relatively large, so as to meet the examination needs of students at different levels and cultivate their comprehensive ability.

3. Level-based College English Teaching Based on POA

POA is a theory proposed by Professor Wen Qiufang, which is applicable to foreign language teaching in Chinese universities [1]. The theory advocates the teaching concept of "Learning-using Integrated Principle", and combines the teaching concepts of "Learning-centered Principle" and "Whole-person Education Principle", believing that production activities are both driving means and teaching objectives, while input activities are facilitating means [5], and the proper combination of input and output finally realizes effective teaching process and results [6]. According to the Hypotheses of "Output-motivated", "Input-enabled" and "Selective Learning", the POA advocates the teaching process of "Motivating-Enabling-Assessing", aiming to improve students' problem-solving ability in English learning. In this teaching process, the teacher plays a role of bridging or transmitting, passing learning content to students by steps and plans, putting forward questions, obtaining feedback and giving evaluation. The three stages complement each other and are linked together to produce effective communication between teachers and students, so the traditional teacher-centered mode is broken, so as to stimulate students' interest in learning, improve students' English output ability, and achieve the purpose of effective classroom.

3.1 Motivating

3.1.1 Motivated by the Completion of Teaching Objectives of Each Unit

According to the characteristics of the textbook, the teaching objectives of the units are mainly communicative goals and language goals. After the teaching tasks are confirmed, on the one hand, the relevant communicative tasks are needed to be completed under the guidance of the communicative goals; on the other hand, the output task which is aimed at mastering language points, such as words, phrases and grammar, should be completed. Considering the actual situation of the university and the fairness of students' English scores in administrative classes, the teaching

Class A and B of Grade 2020 of XFU plans to adopt the same textbook - “iEnglish” (Basic & improved) within two years, but they have different teaching objectives and teaching plans.

Class A: teachers design output tasks according to the content of the unit, so that students can effectively communicate on related topics in daily life, learning and future work. Students can write short compositions or reports according to unit topics; Students can master and apply relevant reading skills, and basically understand English newspapers or magazines, as well as English literature and materials related to their majors.

Class B: teachers design output tasks according to the content of the unit, and students can have simple oral or written communication on familiar topics. Focusing on basic knowledge, students can master basic vocabulary or grammar, and read comprehensive literature related to their majors with the help of dictionaries.

3.1.2 Motivated by CET-4

Students have different needs for English level exams. CET-4 is an important standard to measure the quality of college English teaching. Taking CET-4 as an motivated output part of the teaching process can provide targeted guidance to students and stimulate students’ enthusiasm in learning English, so as to effectively improve students’ learning efficiency and the passing rate of CET-4.

Class A: special practice of CET-4 are added to both offline and online courses. On the basis of the design of output tasks, teachers adjust the traditional teaching content and progress, increase the class hours of the explanation and practice of CET-4, make use of the winter and summer vacations to organize lectures, including listening and other special exercises in order to prepare for CET-4. For listening part, students are required to practice every day, and other special exercises are completed regularly and quantitatively according to the time nodes assigned by the teacher, so as to ensure the continuous learning of the preparation of CET-4.

Class B: students are encouraged to prepare for CET-4; the output tasks related to CET-4 are designed according to the course arrangement and the specific situation of students of various majors; students can select the practice of CET-4 according to their own levels; students who have better performance in Class B should be paid special attention to and given extral guidance.

3.2 Enabling

In the process of “Enabling” of POA, firstly teachers should clarify the output tasks, let students clearly understand the unit objectives and the steps and relevant requirements to complete the output tasks, and encourage students to make the first output attempt, so as to find the difficulties and problems that may be encountered in completing the output tasks, and clarify the learning direction for the next stage; secondly, micro activities are designed according to the objectives of the output task. Through the participation of micro activities, students can independently choose to learn relevant vocabulary, phrases and syntactic knowledge, so as to make full preparations for the final output task. Finally, students are encouraged to complete output tasks, and teachers give evaluation and inspection so as to remedy and reflect on teaching. In fact, in the “Enabling” stage, every activity designed by teachers also includes a process of “Motivating-Enabling-Assessing” which contributes to the final output task. The figure is shown as follows:

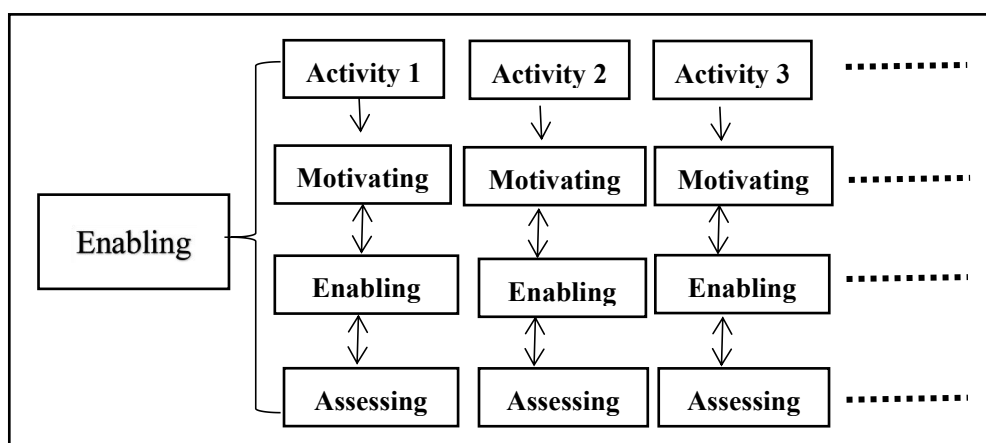


Fig 1. The Process of “Enabling”

In the level-based teaching reform, according to the different levels and needs of students, teachers design reasonable and feasible output activities based on motivating goals, and give students sufficient input information to guide and help students to complete tasks, so that students at different levels can achieve their own output goals. It is mainly manifested in two aspects.

3.2.1 Enabling Activities Aiming at Unit Tasks

In this part, the teacher refines the unit tasks according to the corresponding class hours and sets activities and assigns related tasks according to three parts which are before-class, in-class and post-class. All activities and tasks are guided by the final output tasks, and each task reflects the teaching objectives originally set according to the unit.

3.2.2 Enabling Tasks Aiming at CET-4

In order to meet students’ needs for examination and improve the passing rate, teachers have increased the class hours of the training of CET-4 in the overall allocation of class hours. For the content of this part, teachers carry out special explanations and comprehensive training for students according to the modules of CET-4, and issue relevant tasks, so that students can fully understand the rules of the examination and related problem-solving skills. Meanwhile, students learn to apply them while doing exercises.

According to the actual situation of the university, teaching classes of the same level in different majors may have slightly different designs of output tasks. This difference is mainly reflected in class B. For example, compared with students of other majors, students majoring in art have a very weak foundation in English. For the knowledge on the textbook, they can strengthen the language foundation, such as the learning of vocabulary, phrases and syntax. At the same time, for students at this level who are far from the requirements of CET-4, the standards of examination can be considered to be lowered on the setting goals of CET-4. Furthermore, the design of output tasks can be biased towards strengthening basic knowledge. Thus teachers can select relevant tasks suitable for the professional needs of art students so as to improve their interest in learning English.

3.3 Assessing

The “Assessing” part in the teaching process can effectively test and ensure the teaching effect. The assessment of College English of XFU adopt a combination of process assessment and final assessment. The “Assessing” process of POA includes immediate assessing and delayed assessing,

which are mainly reflected in the process assessment. Process assessment adopts a combination of online and offline assessment: online learning includes completing all online tasks, such as online discussions, online tests, online group tasks, etc; offline includes students' classroom performance, such as attendance rate, offline homework, etc. The theoretical system of POA pays attention to the joint participation of teachers and students. Therefore, in the process of process assessment, three methods can be used to evaluate the relevant output tasks: self-evaluation, mutual evaluation and teacher evaluation. Through evaluation and reflection on teaching, students can correct and consolidate their knowledge. The final assessment refers to the final examination. The proportion of process assessment and final assessment accounts for 50% of students' final grades respectively. The purpose of adopting diversified evaluation methods is to test the learning effect of students in many aspects, improve students' autonomous learning ability and group cooperation ability, and emphasize the importance of daily learning.

4. Problems and Strategies of Level-based English Teaching

So far, students of Grade 2020 of XFU have completed four- semester courses of College English . Both the students' initiative and enthusiasm in learning English and the passing rate of CET-4 have achieved good results, which proves that the effect of level-based English teaching reform is very significant. However, the level-based teaching reform is not only to optimize the teaching mode, but also to find the teaching problems.

First of all, the level-based teaching model helps to improve the phenomenon of “not enough to eat” or “too much to eat” of students in traditional classes. However, due to the actual learning situation of students, the initial level-based line is set at 87 points. So there is still a gap between students below 90 points and students in higher grades in class A. In addition, there are also differences between students in Class B, which are mainly reflected in the gap of achievements between students in art majors and students in other majors. Therefore, even after teaching based on levels, there are still differences between students in the same class or between classes at the same level.

Then, after students took CET-4 in the second semester, some students in Class A have passed the examination. For the class with a higher passing rate, such as Class A of Financial Management, the passing rate was about 45%. Students who have passed CET-4 in the next two-semester English learning mainly show two situations: one is the Buddha-like study without the pressure of passing the examination; One is to continue to sprint for CET-6 or English for Postgraduate Admission Examination. In view of this, it is obviously unable to meet the needs of all students if teachers continue to use the plans and strategies of the first two semesters. Even worse, some students will gradually lose their interest and motivation in learning English.

Based on the above problems, in the process of level-based teaching reform, teachers should also continue to explore, cooperate and seek teaching methods suitable for students at different levels. In light of the differences between students in the same class at the same level, teachers can adopt the dynamic-rolling management mode, paying attention to the weak students in Class A as well as students who have made great progress in Class B, tracking them in time and making dynamic adjustments when necessary to ensure that all students can study effectively in an environment suitable for them. As for the differences between classes of Class B, teachers can further refine the classification, locating the students in art majors as grade C, adopting different textbooks, and

setting College English learning goals that meet the actual learning conditions of students under the guidance of the teaching system of POA.

In addition, for students with different exam requirements after the first CET-4, teachers should adjust the teaching plan appropriately according to the actual passing rate of the classes, and meet the requirements of the vast majority of students in the setting of class hours for CET-4. For some students who want to pass CET-6, additional guidance can be given to them after class or online, such as establishing a group of CET-6, posting relevant materials and assignments of CET-6, etc, which aims to encourage and help students to establish confidence in the exam and prepare for the exam.

5. Conclusion

The reform of level-based English teaching is a measure to meet the requirements of the development of disciplines and the actual needs of students. In the level-based English teaching reform, guided by the POA theoretical system, teachers should constantly optimize the teaching mode, clarify the relevant tasks of students at all levels in each teaching process according to the actual learning situation of students, reasonably formulate students' learning plans, create a good learning atmosphere, and ensure students to carry out effective learning, so as to meet students' language learning needs, and then fundamentally solve the contradiction between teaching and learning.

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