

Application of Level-based Teaching and Formative Assessment in College English Teaching

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Abstract—The traditional large-class teaching mode and summative assessment method neglect the individual differences of students, causing the polarization more and more serious. Through the construction of the level-based English teaching mode and diversified formative assessment methods, students' studying initiative can be fully mobilized. English level-based teaching mode of college pays attention to distinguishing students' individual differences and classified guidance, which improves students' motivation and self-confidence in learning. The formative assessment method objectively evaluates students' learning process, emphasizes classroom participation and hard working, and narrows the gap between students of different levels. The application of level-based teaching and formative assessment in college English teaching has effectively improved students' comprehensive application ability and provided experience for college English teaching reform.

Keywords—college English; level-based teaching; formative assessment; teaching reform

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, with the economic globalization and the increasingly close cultural exchanges among countries, English as a language tool has become the common language of many countries, which promotes the language exchanges and cultural integration between people in different countries and regions. "College English Teaching Guide" (2017 edition) emphasizes the importance of learning and using English to understand the scientific and technological progress, management experience and ideas from foreign countries, to learn and understand the world's excellent culture and civilization, to enhance the national language strength, to effectively disseminate Chinese culture, to promote extensive contacts with people of all countries and to enhance the soft power of the country. [1] This requires the teachers to further deepen the reform of college English teaching, provide high-quality foreign language education for college students, effectively improve students' English communication and application ability, change the traditional examination which emphasizes on examining students' memory of language points, consolidate students' language foundation, and comprehensively and systematically improve students' abilities in English listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Traditional college English teaching adopts the "full class" teaching method, and the summative assessment which is

determined by the scores of students' final examinations, making the classroom teaching tedious and ignoring the individual differences of students. It is difficult to arouse students' studying initiative and enthusiasm in learning, which leads to poor teaching effect of teachers and generally low English proficiency of students. In order to break through the bottleneck and predicament of English teaching and improve the students' learning attitude, learning habits, classroom participation and comprehensive language application ability, the level-based teaching mode and diversified formative teaching assessment methods should be established so as to provide reference and experience for the reform of college English teaching.

II. EXISTING PROBLEMS IN COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING

A. Fail to Teach Students in Accordance with Their Aptitude Because of Great Differences among Students

The students in the same class have different learning abilities and uneven English foundation. Most universities divide classes according to students' majors. Students show diversity and various levels in knowledge structure, cognitive ability, learning habits and attitudes. In English teaching, universities set the same teaching objectives for students at different levels, adopt the same teaching materials and plans, and carry out teaching, classroom management and assessment in a unified way. This does not respect students' individual differences and development, nor does it follow the principle of classified guidance and teaching students in accordance with their aptitude. This also makes it more difficult for teachers to teach and manage the classroom, and the assessment methods fail to objectively evaluate students' learning process, such as the degree of classroom participation, the change of learning attitude, and the improvement of learning ability, which can easily lead to the decline of students' learning enthusiasm and the polarization of students.

B. Students are in a Passive Subordinate Position

College English teaching tends to adopt the large-class teaching mode, which can not take every student into account. Teachers are in the dominant position in the process of classroom teaching. They adopt the traditional "full classroom" teaching method, focusing on the teaching of knowledge points and theory. Students receive learning tasks passively and pass exams by rote. Most of the students have

passed the examination, but their practical application in English, especially in English listening and speaking, has little improvement, and they still can not effectively use English for communication and learning.

C. Poor Classroom Interaction

Classroom activities are not easy to be carried out in traditional large-class teaching. The interaction between teachers and students and among students is very limited, which can not meet the needs of foreign language learning. In fact, the interactive teaching mode is more suitable for foreign language teaching, which is more helpful for teachers to carry out classroom activities. Only in the practice of interactive communication and situational simulation can students improve their English level effectively. Traditional English teaching and assessment methods only train test-oriented talents, which not only deviates from the goal of higher education personnel training, but also fails to cultivate students' comprehensive ability to use English. Under this circumstance, students are prone to lose interest in learning and produce a negative mentality. It often happens that students are tired of learning English or directly abandon their studies.

III. CONSTRUCTING THE LEVEL-BASED COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING MODE

A. Advantages of the Level-based Teaching Mode

American cognitive psychologist Gardner proposed that human intelligence mainly consists of eight kinds of intelligence: linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, sports intelligence, music intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, introspective intelligence and natural observation intelligence.[2] According to Gardner's theory of multiple intelligence, learners differ in their intelligence strengths and weaknesses due to innate aptitude, growth experience, educational conditions and other factors.[3] Level-based teaching according to students' actual English proficiency, which breaks up the classes based on their majors, will be more conducive for teachers to choose different levels of teaching materials, set different teaching objectives, and use different teaching methods according to students' individual differences and their English proficiency at different levels. Students can discover potential characteristics in a given time, achieve maximum development and progress, and quickly improve their English performance. To a certain extent, it also follows the principles of classified guidance, teaching according to aptitude and student-oriented education. Level-based teaching according to students' different situations helps students adjust their learning methods in time in line with their own learning level, actively participate in classroom activities and interaction, and complete English learning tasks, so as to improve their English comprehensive ability rapidly.

B. Establishment of the Level-based Teaching Mode

The establishment of the level-based English teaching mode is mainly carried out from four aspects: the level-based classes, the level-based teaching objectives, the level-based teaching materials and the level-based teaching methods.

- The classes are classified by students' levels. At present, in many domestic English proficiency tests (excluding TOEFL, IELTS and other international language tests), the English scores from College Entrance Examination objectively evaluate the students' English proficiency and English learning ability. Therefore, according to the student' English scores from the College Entrance Examination, the level-based English teaching can be carried out, which break the traditional mixed classes with students at different English levels in the same class. Each class should have a small class with no more than 30 students. Practical experience shows that small class teaching is more conducive to the development and implementation of teaching activities, and more conducive to the improvement of students' performance. On the basis of classification, it is further divided into two levels, level A and level B. The classification is by no means unchanged, which will be adjusted and upgraded periodically according to the change of students' performance. This will stimulate students' enthusiasm and motivation for learning and encourage them to strive for the top.
- The teaching objectives are classified by students' levels. In order to meet the needs of level-based teaching, the teaching objectives should be divided into A and B levels, and the English proficiency requirements of students at different levels should be defined. English proficiency requirements can be linked to the "Chinese English Competence Scale" implemented on June 1, 2018. The scale defines the English proficiency levels of Chinese English learners and users, and describes the performance characteristics of each proficiency level. [4] Teachers can refer to the scale to determine the English proficiency requirements of students at the two levels, and then formulate teaching objectives. According to Krashen's affective filtering hypothesis, learners can only acquire the language if they have strong motivation, confidence in learning and low anxiety.[5] Therefore, setting different levels of goals will better help students at different levels achieve goals that match their abilities within the prescribed time, further stimulate students' learning motivation, and avoid losing enthusiasm because of low goals or giving up because of high goals which are too difficult to achieve.
- The teaching materials are classified by students' levels. In accordance with different levels, different levels of textbooks should be selected, and be matched with students' English proficiency and English learning ability. For students with higher English proficiency, teachers can choose more difficult textbooks to match higher-level teaching objectives and better tap their

learning potential. For students with lower English proficiency, teachers can choose textbooks with lower difficulty and emphasis on the training of basic English competence. At the same time, teachers can choose the textbooks with more fun to improve students' interest, enthusiasm and self-confidence in learning.

- The teaching methods are classified by students' levels. The theory of multiple intelligence emphasizes that teachers should analyze students' intelligent differences and individual differences. According to differences, teachers rationally formulate teaching methods suitable for students' intelligence development and assign corresponding teaching tasks.[2] Therefore, teachers design different teaching strategies in accordance with the differences of students at different levels, use different teaching methods, assign different learning tasks and teach students in accordance with their aptitude. Based on Krashen's i+1 input hypothesis, teachers should choose language input slightly higher than students' level according to students' English proficiency, so as to improve their language acquisition effect. [5]

C. Potential problems in Level-based Teaching

In the process of the level-based college English teaching, the following problems should be faced and solved in time.

- The level-based English teaching may have a negative impact on poor students, including their learning motivation, learning confidence, emotional attitude and other subjective emotions.
- The level-based English teaching will have a bad influence on the formation of class cohesion. Breaking the traditional grouping of classes, students form mixed classes temporarily in English class, lacking time to run in and understand each other, which will also affect the design and arrangement of classroom activities.
- The level-based English teaching may fail to give full play to its advantages. Although many universities adopt the level-based English teaching mode, they still follow the traditional teaching mode of cramming, which remains unchanged in the teaching mode and methods.

IV. IMPLEMENTING DIVERSIFIED FORMATIVE TEACHING ASSESSMENT

A. Advantages of Formative Teaching Assessment

- Formative teaching assessment can alleviate the negative impact of poor English performance on students' psychology. It can alleviate students' frustration, anxiety, fear and even inferiority. These negative emotions will have a negative impact on students' learning motivation, learning attitude, learning ability and learning habits, which is not

conducive to the acquisition and construction of knowledge points and theory. The formative assessment affirms their efforts and time spent in learning.

- Formative teaching assessment can evaluate students' learning process more objectively. For different levels of students, different evaluation criteria are adopted, which replaces the traditional summative assessment methods and no longer relies on the results of an examination to determine who has passed or failed. Formative teaching assessment focuses on students' comprehensive abilities such as learning habits, learning enthusiasm, classroom participation, learning attitude, learning ability and teamwork ability. It can effectively improve students' overall English performance and comprehensive language application ability, and narrow the performance gap among students of different levels. Diversified formative teaching assessment methods enable students at all levels to receive objective and effective evaluation and feedback.
- High-quality formative teaching assessment will help students improve their academic performance. This kind of evaluation method can not only improve the overall English level of students, but also narrow the gap among the students. For the students with poor English performance, its help is more significant.[6] This is an equally important exploration of English teaching reform for college English teaching, aiming at improving students' overall English level rapidly and breaking through the difficulties of English language learning.

B. Implementation of Formative Teaching Assessment

In college English teaching, formative teaching assessment should not only effectively help teachers evaluate students' learning process and existing difficulties, but also help students understand the various items of performance assessment, their own learning progress, set up learning goals and learning directions, and cultivate their ability of independent learning. Based on formative teaching assessment, the composition of the overall assessment of English courses may include attendance, classroom participation, homework, task presentations, formative tests, final examination, etc.

- Attendance: Emphasis is placed on students' learning habits and attitudes, the establishment of a regular attendance summary and feedback system, and the improvement and implementation of rewards and penalties for the attendance.
- Classroom participation: It includes two aspects: individual performance and group performance, in order to stimulate students' classroom participation and cultivate their team cooperation ability. The scores for classroom performance can be synthesized according to the evaluation from teachers and students, and published regularly. Students as evaluation participants clearly understand the criteria and operation of scoring,

understand the gap, and define the direction and objectives of future efforts in a much clearer way.

- Homework: This is a retrospective reflection on what students have learned in class. Assignments are usually carried out in the form of compositions, videos, audios, micro-films and so on, focusing on the cultivation of students' comprehensive language application ability.
- Task presentations: It can include presentations, reports of learning outcomes, etc., focusing on developing students' ability to analyze and summarize and learn independently. The scores for task presentations are given by teachers, groups and students, and published in real time. Students learn about their own performance and other students' accomplishment of tasks in class or after class, find out the shortcomings and make up for the shortcomings. In this way can students learn from the strengths and make up for the weaknesses.
- Formative tests: The tests are conducted regularly to assess students' learning at different stages and their mastery of knowledge points. The assessment of English proficiency should include four aspects: listening, speaking, reading and writing, comprehensively evaluating students' learning progress, finding problems in time, and adjusting teaching focus and progress.
- Final examination: This is a comprehensive examination of the students' study at the end of the semester. But the proportion in the overall assessment should not be too large, to be less than 50% of the total score, so that students pay more attention to their performance and accumulation in normal times. In addition to the regular closed book examination, the examination forms can also include oral tests, term papers and other forms.

For different English courses, the "Chinese English Competence Level Scale" can be used as a reference and the score proportion of each component of the overall assessment can be adjusted according to the corresponding curriculum. Diversified formative teaching assessment methods, no longer relying on the results of an examination, affirm the efforts and time which students have spent in the learning process [7]. Students at all levels can be objectively and effectively evaluated and get the feedback in time, further promote the establishment of the student-centered teaching mode, and encourage students to learn and reflect independently.

V. CONCLUSION

Economic globalization promotes frequent exchanges between Chinese and Western countries and among people from different countries, and puts forward higher requirements for the effectiveness of English teaching and the improvement of students' practical English application ability. Level-based college English teaching and formative assessment are effective attempts to promote the reform of college English curriculum. Level-based college English teaching mobilizes students' studying initiative in learning, gradually improves

students' English proficiency at all levels, and enables students to gain more confidence and progress. The formative assessment methods objectively evaluate the students' learning process, get rid of the lack of flexibility and practicability of the closed book examination, and enables the students to objectively evaluate and improve their abilities in all aspects of English listening, speaking, reading and writing. The establishment of the level-based college English teaching mode and diversified formative assessment methods highlights the students' principal position, respects the students' individualized development, and follows the educational principles of teaching students according to their aptitude and guiding them by classification. It improves the students' comprehensive English application ability with effect and promotes the improvement of English teaching quality.

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