

Cultivation of Students' Critical Thinking Ability through CLIL Mixed Teaching Model

—A Case Study of “An Introduction to English Literature”

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Abstract—National Standards in 2018 put forward the higher requirements for both college or university students and teachers majoring in foreign languages. The four elements in CLIL model are highly consistent with the targets. Our research group selected two parallel classes of English majors in the third year of Kunming University to carry out experimental research in the course of “An Introduction to English Literature” by using the instruments of the questionnaire, test paper, interview, classroom observation and daily assignment. Through the experiment, we found that the implementation of CLIL mixed teaching model can increase students' learning interest and improve their critical thinking ability. Hopefully, our research can shed some light on the reform of the foreign language classes for college or university English majors.

Keywords—National Standards; CLIL mixed Teaching Model; An Introduction to English Literature; learning interest; critical thinking ability

I. INTRODUCTION

National Standard in 2018 said that students majoring in foreign languages should have the following abilities: foreign language using ability, literary appreciation ability, the cross-cultural ability, critical thinking ability, certain research ability, innovation ability, information technology application ability, independent learning ability and practical ability.[1]37 It also said that one of the qualities of foreign language teachers is to have a solid foreign language basic skills, teaching, learning design and implementation ability, classroom organization and management ability, and can apply the modern educational technology, as well as have the capacity for reflection and reform. [2]6 The four elements in CLIL model are highly consistent with the targets.[3]576Based on this foundation, our research group designed and carried out experimental research on the cultivation of students' critical thinking ability through CLIL mixed teaching model in the course of “An Introduction to English Literature” .[4] Hopefully our research can shed some light on the reform of the foreign language classes for college or university English majors.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Previous studies of CLIL in foreign countries

CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) is a teaching model that uses a foreign language as the teaching language to teach non-linguistic subjects. This model has changed the traditional English classroom teaching goal of teaching language knowledge and training language skills. Through interaction between teachers, students and context, the classroom is constructed into a social cognitive context. [5]This CLIL teaching model was based on the French full-immersion education model in Canada in the middle of 1960s, which further evolved and developed on the basis of the CBI teaching model and began to be applied in European countries in the 1980s, and had achieved effective results and extensive promotion.

B. Previous studies of CLIL in China

The time of introducing CLIL into China was after the year of 2010, and then it began to be widely used in the year of 2013 in the reforming field of science and engineering subjects, later on that of college English teaching courses. In terms of theoretical introduction, some scholars believe that CLIL teaching model in Europe provides a new perspective for foreign language teaching method and is the new trend of modern foreign language teaching. [6]Some scholars even consider whether CLIL as a foreign language teaching concept can be incorporated into the national standard or not. In terms of the application of CLIL to the college English reform, most of the studies are just preaching the theory, and only a few belong to empirical studies. Compared with the reform carried out in the college English class, the teaching reform in the English major class in China lags behind, which is still staying at the level of CBI teaching reform mode as a whole. So far, the exploration of CLIL model in the English major class is just at the initial stage. In view of the above research status of CLIL at home and abroad, the topic of this study, “Cultivation of Students' Critical Thinking Ability through CLIL Mixed Teaching Model- a Case Study of *An Introduction to English Literature*”, provides a new perspective and has great researching space and value.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

A. Research hypotheses

Two hypotheses are put forward in this study:

(1) The Application of CLIL Mixed Teaching Model to *An Introduction to English literature* can stimulate students' interest in learning and enhance their initiative enthusiasm in learning. (2) The Application of CLIL Mixed Teaching Model to *An Introduction to English literature* can ultimately contribute to the cultivation and improvement of students' critical thinking ability.

B. Research subjects

This study selected two parallel classes of English majors in the third year of Kunming University in Yunnan province as the research subjects. There are 31 students in one class and 32 students in the other class. These students all come from different prefectures of Yunnan province, and most of them are girls except a few boys. The average score of the students in the two classes in pretest paper at the end of the last semester respectively is 69.5 points and 68.7 points. Based on the big similarity and subtle difference between the two classes, our research group put the class with 31 students as the control class and the class with 32 students as the experimental class at random.

C. Research instruments

1) Questionnaire

Two questionnaires are designed by the research group in the study and handed out to both of the experimental class and the control class. Questionnaire 1 is to check about the current situation of students' learning interest, initiative enthusiasm and critical thinking ability. It's also a survey of teachers' current teaching methods or teaching models in literature courses. Questionnaire 2 is to check about the change of students' learning interest, initiative enthusiasm, the cultivation and improvement of students' learning critical thinking ability, their opinions and suggestions on teachers' current teaching methods or models in this course as well.

2) Test paper

Similarly two test papers are designed and used by the two groups during the study. Pre-test paper is the final examination paper for the students in the first semester when they learned the course *An Introduction to English literature (I)*. Post-test paper is the final examination paper for the students in the second semester when they learned the course *An Introduction to English literature (II)*.

3) Interview

As a supplement to this experimental study, the interview can help the researcher understand the attitude, gains and suggestions of the experimental class students towards this experiment in a further step. After the experiment, five students from the experimental class were randomly selected for this interview, the purpose of which is to further understand the feedback of CLIL mixed teaching model in the course of *An Introduction to English Literature II* during the 16-week teaching experiment based on the questionnaire survey. The interview outline consists of three parts. The first part focuses on students' gains or progress after the experiment. The second

part is about the problems or obstacles encountered by students during the experiment. The third part shows students' suggestions on the CLIL mixed teaching model.

4) Classroom observation and daily assignment

The significance of classroom observation is to promote the professional development of teachers. Its beginning and ultimate goal all point to the improvement of student's classroom study.[7]157 In the real classroom, teachers' teaching and students' learning are intertwined. Students construct their own learning methods through listening, dialogue and communication with teachers and their classmates, thus improve their learning behaviors, and obtain new cognitive and emotional experience. It can be said that teachers' classroom behavior, students' learning habits and classroom environment all affect students' learning. With the deepening of teaching reform and the gradual rise of classroom research, classroom observation as a way of studying the classroom began to attract the attention of the academic community and the favor of teachers. Our research group also takes this way as one of our research instruments.

Lorin Anerson (1990) put forward a six level model of cognitive competence which consists of memorization, comprehension, application, analysis, evaluation, and creation in a hierarchy rank.[8]52 Daily assignment in the study mainly includes two types, one is questions for discussion, the other is paraphrasing. They are focusing on the cultivation of students' memorization, comprehension, application, analysis, evaluation, and creation. But sometimes, the daily assignment can be essay writing in no less than 500 words if we finish a unit about a particular genre of writing.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Implementation of CLIL mixed teaching model can stimulate students' interest in learning and enhance their initiative enthusiasm

Questionnaire 1 and 2 are designed for both groups of students to use before and after the experiment, and students can tick more than one answer according to their real situation. If their answer is not included in the choices, then they can give the answer in the other column. Here is the sample of Questionnaire 2:

1) What do you think of the teaching process?

A. not any different from the others

B. different from the others

C. systematic

D. disorganized

A. Other _____

2) What's your opinion about the materials used in class?

A. Interesting and relevant to our life

B. not interesting and irrelevant to our life

C. authentic and creative

D. repetitive

E. appropriate to our needs

F. Other _____

3) What's your general feeling about the teaching approach employed in class?

- A. The teacher talked all the time and I didn't have any chance to express myself
- B. It's student-centered and I had enough opportunity to express myself
- C. Group work was really good and useful
- D. It involved a variety of activities
- E. There was no or few group work and involved few activities
- F. Other _____

4) After having been exposed to the approach for a semester, what's your current state in learning literature?

- A. I am gradually becoming interested in learning literature
- B. I still lack an interest in learning literature
- C. My motivation in learning literature has been increased
- D. My motivation in learning literature has not been increased
- E. My ability to read and analyze literary texts has improved
- F. My ability to read and analyze literary texts has not improved
- G. Other _____

Sixty-three questionnaires were handed out and recovered, all of them were valid. According to the data, we have the findings: 93% Students from the experimental class thought the teaching process is systematic and different from the others; 87% the materials used in class are appropriate to our needs, 85% authentic and creative, 86% interesting and relevant to our life; 93% The class was student-centered and I had enough opportunity to express myself; 89% Group work was really good and useful; 95% It involved a variety of activities; After having been exposed to the approach for a semester, 94% I am gradually becoming interested in learning literature; 93% My motivation in learning literature has been increased. On the contrary, the percentage of students from the control class in the same angle is lower.

Besides the questionnaires' proof, the result of the interview with five students chosen at random from the experimental class also supports the idea that implementation of CLIL mixed teaching model can stimulate students' interest in learning and enhance their initiative enthusiasm. The interview outline is listed in the following:

1. Are you satisfied with CLIL mixed teaching in the course of "An Introduction to English Literature 2" in this semester? What have you learned most from this course?
2. Do you think CLIL mixed teaching in the course of "An Introduction to English Literature 2" is conducive to the cultivation and improvement of your critical thinking ability? Please give an example to illustrate.
3. What problems did you encounter in CLIL mixed teaching class?
4. What suggestions do you have for CLIL mixed teaching in the course of "An Introduction to English Literature 2"?

Furthermore, the record of classroom observation from the experimental class gives us the same positive result as well.

Teaching feedback and evaluation should be emphasized in daily teaching. Many teachers only emphasize on the teaching process and ignore the teaching results. Have students really grasped the knowledge from the classroom? Does teaching effectively improve students' learning ability? [9]150 In order to avoid the mistake, we carried out 4 times of the classroom observation which gives attention to the teacher and the students at the same time. As for the teacher's teaching, we focus on two aspects: the teaching content and the teaching methodology. Through the observation, we can see the teacher's teaching has realized the following aims on the whole: 1. Having clear and appropriate teaching objectives; 2. Core knowledge is mainly presented to different students by asking, inspiring, discussing and lecturing; 3. Establishing a proper link among the previous, present and later knowledge, and being able to consolidate the previous knowledge; 4. Giving more time and effort to the difficult and confusing points according to students' feedback; 5. Rational use of teaching materials and other teaching resources; 6. Trying to stimulate students' interest in learning and carrying out inquisitive teaching model such as the Socratic questioning; 7 Trying to use a variety of ways to mobilize the enthusiasm and the desire for knowledge of students, and to relate the knowledge in class to students' daily life. As for the students, the picture of their learning is like this: 1. Their cooperative organization has various forms, and can effectively complete the tasks assigned by teachers before class and they can present their product in the form of group report or in single performance; 2. They can actively participate in class group discussion and speak actively; 3. They are willing to actively share their reading experience or all kinds of video audio pictures and other materials that they have collected from different channels; 4. Under the guidance of teachers' illustrations and inspirations, different students can find their unique thoughts and ideas from different angles about the same question or phenomenon.

B. Implementation of CLIL mixed teaching model makes a contribution to the cultivation and improvement of students' critical thinking ability

As above mentioned, Pretest is the final examination paper for the students in the first semester when they learned the course *An Introduction to English literature(I)*. Posttest paper is the final examination paper for the students in the second semester when they learned the course *An Introduction to English literature (II)*. The types of questions in the two sets of papers are the same which includes the following parts: I. Choose the relevant match from column B for each item in column A. (10%) II. Complete each of the following statements with a proper word or a phrase according to the textbook. (10%) III. Each of the following statements below is followed by four alternative answers. Choose the one that would best complete the statement. (20%) IV. Explain the following terms. (20%) V. Interpretation: Read the following selections and then answer the questions. (10%) VI. Writing: In interpreting fiction, we largely rely on analysis of such elements as plot, structure, character, setting, point of view and tone, theme, style, irony and symbol, etc.. Choose one or two of the elements to analyze a novel no less than 500 words. (30%) Before carrying out the experiment, students' scores are very similar in the pretest paper, i.e. the average score of the class with 31 students, later on divided as the control class is 69.5 points and that of the

class with 32 students later on divided as the experimental class is 68.7 points at random. At the end of the experiment, students' scores are different in the post-test paper. The average score of the control class is 71.8 and that of the experimental class is 86.5. The details are like this: From Part I to Part III, almost all of the students from both the control class and the experimental class did the job very well because these three parts only focus on checking their memorizing ability. Part IV and Part V showed some difference between the two classes due to students' different ability of memorization and comprehension: The average mark of Part IV in control class is 13.8, and that of the experimental class is 17.4; the average mark of Part V in control class is 4.1, and that of the experimental class is 6.9. The biggest difference of the two classes lies in Part V. The average mark of Part VI in control class is 16.5., and that of the experimental class is 24.2. This is possible because essay writing not only needs students to use their ability of memorization and comprehension, but also requires them to make use their capability of application, analysis, evaluation, and creation, which are in the higher level of critical thinking ability. Thus the result can prove that the implementation of CLIL mixed teaching model can make a contribution to the cultivation and improvement of students' critical thinking ability.

Actually, Part VI is from students' daily assignment after they finished unit one about the fiction. Description of scoring criteria is like this: 1) 30 points for clear points of view, full argumentation, clear semantics, fluent language, no punctuation, grammar and spelling mistakes; 2) 26-29 points for clear points, sufficient argumentation, clear semantics, smooth sentences, a small number of grammatical spelling errors; 3) 21-25 points for clear points, insufficient argumentation, clear semantics, smooth sentences, no grammatical spelling errors; 4) 16-20 points for basically clear in opinion, insufficient in argumentation, clear in semantics, and the sentence is basically smooth, with a few grammatical errors; 5) 11-15 points for basically clear, lacking argumentation, clear semantic meaning, the sentence is basically smooth, a few grammatical and spelling mistakes; 6) 6-10 points for vague idea, lack of argumentation, clear semantic meaning, the sentences being basically smooth, a few grammatical and spelling mistakes; 7) 1-5 points for vague idea and lack of demonstration, but the semantics being basically clear and the sentences being basically smooth; 8) Zero for not responding or writing content totally not relevant to the topic requirement.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the two hypotheses mentioned in part III, the group members of this research designed two questionnaires, pre and posttest papers, the interview questions, classroom observation and daily assignment, and carried out the class experiment during the 16 week (from March to June in 2019) in the second semester of English major students in their third year in Kunming University Yunnan province. After collecting and analyzing the data, the group members of this research have two findings, one is that the application of CLIL mixed teaching model to *An Introduction to English literature* can stimulate students' interest in learning and enhance their initiative enthusiasm in learning. The other finding is that the

application of CLIL mixed teaching model to *An Introduction to English literature* can ultimately contribute to the cultivation and improvement of students' critical thinking ability.

In conclusion, CLIL mixed teaching model is an effective way of increasing students' interest in learning literature and cultivating their critical thinking ability. Based on the above findings, the implications of the research can be listed as the followings: First of all, with the development of science and technology, the information exchanges between students and teachers, and among students are not only confined to the face to face communication in class or in daily life, but also can happen in virtual space such as QQ and We-chat space. So besides the class teaching and learning activity happening in reality, it's time for the teacher to make the best use of this new channel so as to arouse students' interest in learning to a great extent. Secondly, teaching lesson plan can be a key issue to the successful experimental research which requires a delicate and careful design when considering how to apply the 4Cs into it. Finally, successful experimental research is a big challenge and good chance for the experimenter, which needs the teacher not only having a wide and profound knowledge about the professional contents, but having a sound knowledge about the new theory being used. Although this empirical study was carefully designed and carried out smoothly in general, some limitation still inevitably existed. For instance, the study sample involved only a small number of research subjects, the result from which is not so convincing. Anyway, we hope our research can provide an example for reference to foreign language teachers who want to implement the reform in his or her class.

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