



The Application of PBL in TESOL Education

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Abstract. Problem-based Learning (PBL) is a teaching method in which students learn by engaging in real-world and personally meaningful projects actively. In Project Based Learning, teachers provide more opportunities for students to develop their problem-solving and critical thinking abilities. Students work on a project over an extended period of time (from a week up to a semester), which engages them to solve a real-world problem or answer a complex question. Through this method, they demonstrate their knowledge and skills by creating a public product or presentation for a real audience. This paper introduces PBL and the relationship between PBL and (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) TESOL education, along with considering the possible risks in PBL application with proposed solutions.

Keywords: PBL Teaching Model · TESOL · Learning Quality

1 Introduction

To meet the requirements of society, there is an urgent need for the reform of TESOL education. Under the background of the old teaching method, teachers only impart knowledge points instead of caring about students. Students only study blindly and do not participate in the class actively. Students are passively involved in the class, which is one of the significant problems of the traditional teaching method.

PBL teaching model, as a newly introduced way of teaching, has solved some of the problems of the traditional teaching method. Based on the advantage, this paper reviews PBL's existing problems and its application to TESOL education. The application of PBL in TESOL education has gradually aroused attention in the education field. PBL teaching model focuses on developing students' self-learning ability. Although some problems are still preventing it from developing faster, the teaching model itself benefits students a lot.

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2 PBL and the Summary of Current TESOL Education

2.1 The Implication of PBL

With the development of society, the requirement for talent training is getting higher. The traditional teaching method has some defects in some situations, which hindered the development of education seriously. In order to satisfy the social need for practical talents, the PBL teaching method has gradually been used in the field of education.

PBL is short for problem-based learning. John Dewey, an American educator, first introduced the PBL to the public and his theory aroused a large amount of attention. PBL was first used in Me Master's university by Barrows, an American professor of neurology. It was widely used in the field of medical science at first.

Problem-based learning teaching methods break the limitation of the class. The teacher only gives the questions to the students to solve. Students solve the problems by thinking, discussing, and expressing. According to Chi, the PBL teaching method makes students focus on the class more and cultivates students' abilities such as self-study, language expression, and a sense of cooperation [1]. As a new approach to teaching, PBL has solved some of the problems of the traditional way of teaching effectively, and it has some good effects on students.

Nowadays, some researchers find that PBL teaching methods apply to language teaching. It can improve teaching quality and it is very suitable for the criteria of English learning [2]. Hence, how to balance the PBL and the traditional class is an essential question for teachers.

2.2 The Current Situation of TESOL Education

In order to satisfy the requirement of society, TESOL education plays an essential role in training qualified people to meet the needs of the country. Students themselves are the decisive factor in PBL class. The teaching methods in TESOL education adapt to the needs of society. At the same time, some problems of TESOL education have been exposed to the public under this trend.

2.2.1 The Way of Teaching

The former ways of teaching are lacking interaction with students. And the PBL teaching model solves this problem efficiently. What teachers do is pass knowledge to the students directly. This kind of method adapts to the requirements of the examination, but it prevents students from thinking independently.

2.2.2 The Lack of Language Environment

In order to make students understand more the knowledge points, most teachers prefer to explain them in their mother tongue. At the same time, students are not used to speaking English in their daily life. According to Li, the language environment is a significant part of language learning [3]. It is very difficult for a non-native speaker to learn a language deeply.

2.2.3 The Learning Enthusiasm of Students

Because of the way that teachers teach, some English classes, especially in high school are boring. At the same time, a large number of assignments makes students' interest in learning English decrease gradually. Students without enthusiasm for learning English are the basic problem in the education field.

Based on the problems below, PBL teaching methods have been introduced to the public. By using this teaching model, educational reform in our country has been promoted a lot.

3 The Significance of PBL to TESOL Education

3.1 The Effect on the Process of Teaching

The PBL teaching method does not synchronize with the traditional teaching model, which has higher demands on teachers. Additionally, teachers of the same subject or even different subjects should cooperate with each other. PBL teaching requires the majority of teachers to invest more energy and time. For example, a PBL project can be combined with English, art, computing, and other subjects. Teachers should master the basic knowledge when preparing lessons to select typical cases.

PBL teaching method sets up the concept of student-centered, teacher-guided, and student-independent learning. It focuses on ability cultivation instead of knowledge teaching, group discussion instead of class teaching system, student-centered instead of teacher-centered, and "asking questions, collecting data, group argumentation, and teacher summary." It needs teachers to lead students to learn. PBL teaching no longer gives priority to the teacher's teaching, in which students' learning is not passive. Hence, the teacher must change the traditional teaching concept, not only teach students how to learn, but also let students improve their interest in learning, the application of knowledge to the practice, And learn to communicate and cooperate well with others in this process. Barrow described the qualities a PBL teacher should possess as follows: "The ideal instructor should be both a subject expert and a guidance expert; A lesser mentor, if not a subject matter expert, should at least be good at coaching; The worst mentor is an expert on a subject who is bad at coaching" [4].

3.2 The Influences on the Process of Learning

According to Gu, the PBL teaching model is the integration of multidisciplinary, and improving comprehensive ability is one of the most important objectives of educational reform [5]. As a scientific and effective way of teaching, PBL teaching methods can make students give full scope to their ability of self-study, cultivate students' ability of inquiry, and increase their comprehensive learning ability.

Compared with the traditional way of learning, students are supposed to gain more chances to express themselves with the PBL teaching model, and teachers only play the role of supervision and guidance. PBL teaching model breaks the limitation of traditional rules in class. Teachers encourage students to solve the problems by discussing them

together. In the process of discussion, students can learn how to adapt themselves to the class and how to respect others when there are different opinions.

Presentation and evaluation are two other essential parts of the PBL teaching model. Generally, one of the universally acknowledged ways of learning is to teach others and make them understand teachers' imparted knowledge. Hence, when students show their research results, on the one hand, it can cultivate students' presentation skills and make them have a deep understanding of the knowledge point. On the other hand, teachers' encouraging evaluation can make students more confident.

Under the PBL teaching model, although students cannot fully absorb the knowledge point as fast as under the traditional teaching model, the learning method that students have gained in the learning process is truly helpful.

3.3 The Cultivation of Learning Quality

The PBL teaching model corrects students' learning attitudes towards English. Because of problem-based learning, students have the chances to interact with their classmates and it is well known that communication is one of the most important factors in studying English.

The PBL teaching model keeps students' minds active. During the process of interaction and the presentation, most of the students are eager to make others understand their ideas. Students' mind is active while they are expressing themselves. At the same time, while listening to others, the quality of respect is gradually be developed.

The PBL teaching model lays a solid foundation for teachers to mobilize the class atmosphere so that students' interest in English can be increased a lot. According to Chen, students are in the position positive and they must orient themselves to teachers [6]. Hence, students may not benefit a lot from this attitude. Under the background of problem-based learning, students can express what they have thought and nobody would deny them directly. It completely cultivates the interest of students and it makes them more confident in themselves.

4 Practical Application of PBL

4.1 How to Apply PBL in English Teaching

The teaching goal of College English is to stimulate students' potential, to be able to use the language independently and flexibly, to be active in learning, to be responsible for their learning, to solve problems, and to gain knowledge and experience through their own and team efforts. It is essential to teach practical English instead of superficial knowledge. The new PBL teaching mode greatly cultivates students' creativity, improves their subject status, and promotes students to look at problems and solve problems with a critical view [4].

Take *Integrated English Course* as an example, previewing and discussing the unit theme is a very important link. It guides students to think independently. PBL teaching mode is student-oriented, emphasizing the cultivation of self-learning ability. Teachers need to use modern scientific and technological means to promote college English teaching. Teachers can design problems according to the teaching objectives, key points, and

difficulties of the units, and can also share multimedia materials related to the units in advance in class to improve students' interest and initiative and stimulate students to think independently. Teachers can design projects reasonably according to the content of the unit, and carry out activities based on the teaching plan. Teachers need to deeply combine the cultural orientation in the unit with the current hot topics in society and combine the actual life of students with the subject content. Finally, teachers need to assess a student through diversified evaluation methods so as to achieve the best results [7].

4.2 Possible Risks in PBL Application

In the domestic teaching environment, there are some hidden problems in PBL mode.

First of all, in terms of teachers, domestic teachers generally lack relevant concepts and qualities. Since there is no unified syllabus and textbook for PBL courses, so teachers must independently develop PBL courses according to the situation of schools, students, and teachers themselves, and develop teaching objectives suitable for students' development. However, in the absence of relevant teaching materials and training, most teachers cannot design projects well, which leads to the superficial implementation of PBL, which cannot achieve the desired effect. The answers to the questions promote students' independent learning. Meanwhile, many teachers have the problem of over-guiding students [4]. They lack confidence in students' learning ability and still adopt traditional teaching methods, and will interfere in the selection and design of questions, resulting in excessive explanation and one-sided discussion. On the other hand, some teachers worry that students will take the "wrong directions" in the process of independent inquiry when they encounter new problems. Hence, they will play the role of the filler of knowledge, which is also excessive guidance.

PBL provides a great opportunity for students to practice teamwork. Successful group work is one where group members can help each other learn from each other and complete complex tasks together, thereby deepening their understanding of core concepts. In group work, there can be imbalances. For example, some introverted students have difficulty expressing themselves, while some excellent students do more tasks. This is unfair to all members. In addition, sometimes group cooperation is largely a mere formality. There is the only division of labor but no cooperation among students. Group members lack the exchange of views and only achieve the conditions of "group" without real cooperation. Consequently, it is difficult to achieve the real purpose of PBL.

Also, due to the influence of the traditional teaching method for a long time, the majority of students have been used to inputting teaching. Students generally are not initiative. In PBL teaching, students often need to find a large number of references before and after class and use these documents to analyze and solve problems by themselves or participate in group discussions, which will inevitably make many students feel pressure and complex tasks, thereby producing resistance. In addition, China is still implementing exam-oriented education, students attach great importance to the score, thus causing another obstacle to launching the PBL.

5 How to Solve Potential Problems

5.1 Transformation of Teacher-Student Relationship

In the traditional way of teaching, the relationship between teachers and students is settled. And it is very difficult for teachers and students to change in such a short time.

Under the background of PBL, teachers and students act in their roles. But one different thing is that what teachers will do is understand students' opinions and lead them to solve the problems. This requires a higher level of teacher teaching quality. Another different thing is that when students are delivering their speeches, they play the role of teachers.

As a teacher, it is necessary to attach importance to students in class. In order to have a better classroom atmosphere, what teachers do is design a reasonable plan to arouse the interest of students in learning English. At the same time, encouragement and guidance are also significant.

As a student, starting from themselves is a good way to avoid potential problems. For most of the students, the study is only for examination instead of improving themselves. In the PBL class, students can communicate with each other. And this way of study steers clear of some problems such as "mute English." Meanwhile, the PBL teaching model is a good way to improve students' comprehensive quality.

According to Zhang, the essence of English teaching is communication [8]. If students and teachers can treat the process of class as communication, the purpose of PBL teaching model is achieved.

5.2 Cultivation of Students and Teachers

PBL is a kind of teaching method which requires high-quality teachers [9]. As a new open teaching mode, it is highly demanding for teachers' teaching skills. Teachers should not only master the professional and the course content and also be familiar with related discipline knowledge. PBL teachers must have high knowledge of cognitive psychology, educational psychology, thinking psychology, and behavioral science, in addition to excellent professional skills. Teachers should renew and broaden the scope of knowledge and enhance the innovation consciousness, renew the teaching concept and improve the teaching ability.

The more important is to put forward the issue of problem-solving ability, strict logical thinking, and good organization and management. Teachers should help students improve their ability of autonomous learning and be familiar with the teaching objectives and students' abilities, so as to design the whole teaching process, which is also the basic premise of PBL teaching.

For another thing, PBL requires students to initiatively participate in the entire teaching process. From the beginning of raising questions and hypotheses, students need to consult a lot of relevant information, and actively communicate with other students, so that they can work together to reach the best conclusion [9]. In order to improve students' enthusiasm for PBL courses, students should first understand the importance of it, as well as the whole teaching model and teaching purpose. PBL centers on ability improvement, involving rational exploration, cognitive strategies, and emotional fields. As long

as students understand the true meaning of PBL, they can further actively participate in PBL discussion and achieve the teaching purpose.

6 Conclusion

As a novice way of teaching, the PBL teaching model solves some of the problems of the traditional way of teaching. Not only does it increase the quality of the teacher's class, but it also arouses students' interest in learning English. PBL teaching model is student-oriented, emphasizing the cultivation of self-learning ability. As a teacher the PBL teaching model puts forward higher requirements for teachers. The PBL teaching model requires students to have the ability to solve problems during the discussion and presentation, and the learning quality as well. The combination of the traditional teaching methods and the PBL teaching model applies to TESOL education very well. During the process of PBL class, students can cultivate their spoken English when they are expressing their ideas. Also, it gives them have the capability to present and become confident. Most important of all, the comprehensive capability, which is one of the essential parts of an English learner, gets the exercise in the process of learning. In the future, the PBL teaching model will be warmly welcomed by the education field, and it can be widely used in TESOL education. By changing the way of teaching, the learning method, students' comprehensive quality has been greatly improved as well. The PBL teaching method, which is highly matched to the TESOL education, has a high degree of the practical application of effective, and it achieves the purpose of the inform of education. The good use of PBL will have a far-reaching impact on future development.

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