

Issues of English Teaching Practices and Their Implications for Teaching Strategies

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Abstract: Foreign language education in China has evolved significantly in response to the economic, political and cultural changes in China - Chinese foreign language education has entered a new era. There is no shortage of old and new problems presented in the process of foreign language teaching practice. The problems can be divided into three categories: those of language application, those of combining theoretical and practical methods, and those of evaluating the effectiveness of methods and models. Although instructional strategies do not solve all problems, they provide ideas for teaching practices that go a long way toward avoiding problems and bringing positive results to the entire teaching system

Keywords: Issues, English teaching practices, Teaching strategies.

1. Introduction

The National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) and the Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Comprehensively Improving the Quality of Higher Education clearly point out that China's higher education should change from extensible development to connotative development, make quality improvement the core task of education reform and development, and comprehensively implement the quality of undergraduate teaching and teaching reform in colleges and universities.

As an important part of China's higher education, English majors actively integrate into the national strategy and seek a development path with quality and quantity.

Under the leadership of the Ministry of Education, China has implemented a series of progressive measures such as the introduction and improvement of textbooks, curriculum reform of English majors, and the creation of additional undergraduate and doctoral degrees in English [1]. The author believes that moving from textbooks to courses to degrees is not only good for attracting students but also for recruiting ambitious teachers from all over the world. Clearly these types of initiatives have had a significant effect. The main field of foreign language teaching research in China is university English teaching, and relevant theoretical research focuses on teaching models and independent learning; empirical research mainly involves second language acquisition, learning strategies, academic English, English writing, etc. [2]. Some scholars have even summarized the past, depicted the present, and expanded the future from the perspectives of foreign language teaching theory[3], foreign language assessment[4], artificial intelligence technology [5], analogical architectural thinking [6], the integration of Chinese culture[7], and research reviews within two decades [8]; this adds more directions and options to the development of foreign language teaching. Problems are always found in the midst of reform, the most concerning of which are problems in actual teaching. For example, theory and practice are not combined, foreign languages are difficult to apply in reality, how to cut through the effectiveness of evaluation methods and models, and a series of other problems. In this paper, we will start from the problems and use a series of

teaching strategies as a means in order to expect to add to the solution.

2. Definition of Foreign Language Teaching Problems

Zhang, Zhai, and Zhang [9] divided the problems of foreign language education and teaching into two categories: one is the macro-level education and teaching problems, and the other is the micro-level education and teaching problems. The macro-level problems are related to the mechanism of foreign language education and the national strategy, while the micro-level ones are the practical problems encountered by front-line teachers in real teaching. The former is a matter of strategy and direction, while the latter is a matter that collides with actual teaching and has more research value.

Having distinguished the size of the problem in the first part, it is logical to distinguish the priority of the problem in the second part. In this section, Zhang, Zhai, and Zhang defines real problems as those that may have a serious impact on teaching effectiveness, are somewhat common, and need to be solved urgently.

2.1. Classification of Specific Foreign Language Teaching Issues

According to Zhang, Zhai, and Zhang's classification, the problems can be divided into three categories: the lack of language application, the difficulty of combining theory and practice, and the problems of evaluating the validity of methods and models of entry points.

The first problem with the lack of language application is phonetics and intonation, followed by logical thinking, and finally, basic knowledge. The standard for mastering a foreign language should be: to express oneself completely using the logical thinking of the foreign language. This requires the learner to transform input into output based on the harmonization of the three. However, at this stage, due to the large class size, the strong Chinese language context, and the few platforms for everyone to exercise output, this problem still requires teachers to help students grow quickly in a limited time.

The majority of the cases are also theoretically and

practically disconnected. Since the national reform of foreign language teaching, the flipped classroom type of teaching method has appeared in many university classrooms. In this mode of teaching, students study outside the classroom to understand basic information and discuss deeper issues, leaving valuable time in the classroom for teacher-student interaction. This model is designed to save time for both students and teachers to exchange ideas and to practice oral and expressive skills. This is a win-win situation in theory. However, students and teachers have autonomy, and in the absence of autonomy for both sides, the content of this model gradually evolves into PowerPoint readers and classroom paddlers. The real concept of flipped classroom is misinterpreted and even makes people rebellious. The author believes that even in universities, new ideas need to be led by a guide for effective training. This requires not only the experience of front-line teachers but also experts and scholars who study foreign language teaching to design an organic system for it.

The third issue concerns the evaluation methods for the application of the theory and the validity of the model. Some people will mechanically believe that questionnaires and examinations are the two instruments that are effective as well as direct ways of assessment. The author believes that other simple and effective methods should be developed in addition to these two.

For example, when a university English teacher uses Professor Wen's [10] production-oriented approach to teaching, he/she does not explain to his/her students the theory or the origin for the output-oriented approach. Not only are the students unfamiliar with the theoretical concepts, they also question and are dissatisfied with the different style of teaching from the traditional fill-in-the-blank approach. While the questions in the questionnaire are no more than students' evaluation of the teacher's teaching style, their evaluation of the classroom, and of the school. These questions do not touch on the teaching philosophy and students cannot give positive feedback from the essence of the teaching philosophy. Not to mention the ordinary midterm exams and the memorized exams like the final exams that put the textbook knowledge in the test papers.

2.2. Significance of the Study

It is not difficult to see from the above questions that in the actual teaching process, these three types of questions promote each other to form a recyclable system. Solving the problems and thus proving the feasibility of the theory not only improves the level of foreign language teaching in China but also contributes to the improvement of foreign language proficiency of college students. Further, the theory not only contributes to the talent pool from a national strategic perspective but also adds to the localized foreign language teaching theory in China. However, it is still worthwhile for scholars to conduct scientific research on how to use teaching strategies to alleviate or even solve these problems.

3. Overview of Teaching Strategies

The concept of instructional strategies has remained a hot topic in teaching and learning since it was introduced in the 1970s. Domestic and international scholars have commonalities and characteristics in their interpretation of teaching strategies. The commonality is that they all acknowledge that teaching strategies are teaching tools optimized for accomplishing teaching tasks in certain

situations. This includes the selection of teaching materials, the discretion of specific teaching methods, and the arrangement of the teaching process. The discrepancy in scholars' understanding of instructional strategies lies in their lack of consistent understanding of some basic concepts such as instructional design, instructional concepts, instructional methods, and instructional models. Therefore, some people think that teaching strategies are new teaching theories, some think that they are teaching methods, and some even think that they are teaching models[11].

We can first understand the meaning of the strategy in a literal sense. The interpretation that comes from an English dictionary is 'a plan that is intended to achieve a particular purpose' in a countable way or 'the process of planning something or putting a plan into operation in a skilful way' in an uncountable way. From this literal meaning we can predict that teaching strategies are part of a whole teaching process. It is the lubricant that assists in the accomplishment of specific teaching tasks. If teaching strategies are considered as a single teaching philosophy or a teaching model or a concrete teaching method, not only will the benefits of teaching strategies not be obtained, but also the thinking will be solidified and lead to a conceptual deadlock.

Some scholars have provided additional insight into the specific content, characteristics, and structure of instructional strategies. He[12] specifies teaching strategies from six characteristics of teaching strategies: directivity, operability, overall comprehensiveness, control, flexibility, and hierarchy, and four aspects of teaching strategy structure: guiding ideology, teaching objectives, implementation procedures, and operating techniques. According to Zhang and Yu[13], the basic meaning of instructional strategy can be expressed as follows: Instructional strategy is an integral part of instructional design, which is a plan of instructional procedures and measures to be taken to accomplish instructional goals and meet students' cognitive needs in a specific teaching context. Yan[14] established a new definition of the former: (1) instructional strategies are subordinate to instructional design; (2) the development of instructional strategies is based on specific teaching objectives and teaching objects; and (3) instructional strategies have both conceptual and operational functions. According to Huang, Shen, and Xin[15], teaching strategies are the teachers' unique intellectual understanding of the problems that arise in the teaching process. The monitoring strategy is in the overall position, the judgment strategy is in the leading position, followed by the planning strategy, the execution strategy is in the third position, and finally the evaluation strategy. The author considers this structure to be the more practical one. This structure not only helps teachers to select and use teaching strategies appropriately in the teaching process but also to self-monitor and reflect on the arrangement of teaching strategies. By comparing the differences in English learning ability between American minority students and Chinese students, Hua[16] concluded that Chinese students are test-taking motivated while American minority students are communicatively motivated. She concludes that foreign language teachers can only adopt strategies related to students' learning motivation if they understand it.

The above is a summary and classification of the connotation, characteristics, and structure of teaching strategies by scholars. We can distill that the differences in scholars' views still focus on whether instructional strategies

are theoretically or methodologically oriented. The author believes that the definition of method or theory is not necessarily clear-cut. Foreign language teaching first has to be viewed with a developmental perspective. Although the boundaries of this issue are blurred now, they will become clear in the future when efforts are made to use extended foreign language teaching strategies. Secondly, Comrade Deng Xiaoping once said: No matter black cat or white cat, the one who can catch the rat is a good cat. This saying also applies to the use of foreign language teaching strategies, no matter it is a method or a theory, it is good to provide new ideas and open new horizons for foreign language teaching at this stage.

4. Conclusion

Teaching strategies, as the lubricant of the teaching process, need to be used flexibly by foreign language teachers. Not only can they respond to problems in teaching in the short term, but they also lay the foundation for a long-term foreign language teaching career. The above strategies can bring some ideas to solve the three major problems before. However, the author observes that: the application of more refined teaching strategies is currently presented by scholars in the form of techniques. The author ponders that: this must be caught in a dead end of practice before theory or theory before practice. The old Chinese folk saying: cross the river by feeling the stones, step steadily before taking a step. Whether theory or practice first, this requires bold practice on the part of the teacher.

Acknowledgment

We thank library teachers, my thesis advisor - Ms. Cha Ya, and the monographs of the scholars cited in this thesis.

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