

Research Article

Exploration of Academic English Listening and Speaking Teaching Mode for PPE Majors Based on POA

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Abstract

In the era of globalization, PPE (Philosophy, Politics and Economics) is the preferred “composite major” in the field of humanities and social sciences in the world to cultivate new interdisciplinary high-level applied talents. In order to support this interdisciplinary program in the university, academic English courses are offered to PPE majors to meet the students’ interdisciplinary research demand in the world. As part of college English teaching reform carried out in China, academic English courses have been offered in universities for many years, among which academic English listening and speaking courses are not highly valued instead. In order to cultivate multi-talented students who can effectively use English to communicate in academic exchanges in the international field, we attach great importance to the teaching approach of academic English listening and speaking. This paper analyzes the problems in present courses and finds that improvement and innovation should be made in its teaching content and teaching approach. This paper aims to explore the integration of Production-Oriented Approach (POA) and project based blended teaching method in teaching the Academic English Listening and Speaking. Action research methodology will be applied in this research. The teaching design is developed to explore an effective way to help students cultivate the communication skills in the academic study and exchanges.

Keywords

PPE (Philosophy, Politics and Economics), Academic English Listening and Speaking, Production-Oriented Approach (POA), Project Based Blended Teaching, Action Research

1. Introduction

In order to adapt to the new trend of talent demand in the era of globalization, respond to the call for breaking down the barriers of disciplines, and promote the cultivation of interdisciplinary talents with high quality, Shanxi University integrates the best teaching resources and establishes PPE (Philosophy, Politics and Economics, or PPE) in 2023, aiming to cultivate high-level talents with an international perspective and Chinese cultural self-confidence. PPE is the optimal choice of the world's humanities and social sciences to culti-

vate new interdisciplinary high-level talents, and it is a very popular undergraduate program among the top universities in the world.

In order to support this interdisciplinary program, the university offers Academic English courses to PPE majors. Academic English courses are an important part of the college English teaching reform, which aims to cultivate students' ability to use English as a tool for their professional study and research, to develop their international academic communi-

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cation skills, and to prepare them for future participation in international academic communication activities in their areas. In recent years, the proportion of academic English courses in China's college English curriculum has been increasing. In addition to the academic English reading and writing courses, academic English listening and speaking courses have been also offered but enough attention is not paid to it. In fact, students' weak comprehensive English skills are unable to meet the needs of professional learning and research as well as international academic exchanges. Cai made a survey of undergraduates and professional teachers in 17 colleges and universities across China, which shows that both sides have a strong demand for academic English proficiency, especially listening and speaking [1]. Qiu & Yang discusses the teaching difficulties of rich teaching content and less class time at present, and discusses the curriculum design of the academic English listening and speaking course by combining modern technologies such as the Internet and smart devices [2]. However, the construction of academic English listening and speaking courses also faces many problems, such as lack of effective communication and critical thinking cultivation, students' weak awareness of cross-culture, which has led to the phenomenon of "separation of learning and use" [3]. Thus, it is difficult to stimulate students' interest in learning. Besides, students are still unable to meet the foreign language needs in professional learning and research. Therefore, this paper aims to explore a new mode of academic English listening and speaking teaching, taking the cultivation of students' language proficiency, critical thinking and cross-cultural competence as the teaching objectives so as to prepare them for their future academic exchanges.

2. Domestic and Overseas Research Trend

For the exploration of the academic English listening and speaking course, Ma explored the teaching process with the integration of POA and competency-based progressive project for the high-level undergraduate students in the second year of the undergraduate program [4]. Cai discussed the classroom activity design in the enabling session of the advanced academic English listening and speaking course for the first-year undergraduate [5]. However, the exploration of the teaching model of the academic English listening and speaking course for PPE majors has not yet been seen. In view of this, this project will explore a new teaching model for developing academic English listening skills and oral academic communication skills for interdisciplinary majors.

In order to meet the urgent needs of cultivating the interdisciplinary and innovative talents in China, the importance of the cultivating students' listening and speaking skills for academic purpose is becoming increasingly prominent, which can fully assist them in professional learning and research in the future. Therefore, this teaching mode and its effect will be

explored, constructed and verified continuously.

3. Research Methodology

This research is designed with Production Oriented Approach (POA) and project-driven blended teaching mode, and it is proposed to use action research and aims to make continuous improvement during the experiment.

3.1. Rationale

3.1.1. Production Oriented Approach (POA)

POA is a native Chinese teaching theory proposed by Prof. Qiu-fang Wen to address the dilemmas and shortcomings of China's foreign language teaching, such as "emphasis on input but not output", "separation of learning and use", and so on. Its theoretical system is divided into three parts: teaching philosophy, pedagogical hypothesis and teaching process [6, 7].

The Learning and Use Integration in POA's teaching philosophy advocates that in classroom teaching, the design of teaching tasks and the arrangement of teaching activities should be linked to the ultimate communication purpose, so as to achieve the integration between input learning and output application. The pedagogical hypothesis of POA suggests that it should follow the sequence of output-input-output, taking the completion of output tasks as the motivation force and ultimate goal of students' learning in the classroom. The teacher provides input materials that can enable students' output, and selects important and useful parts of the input materials according to the needs of output.

The teaching method has three key steps. First, Motivating, in which the teacher designs authentic communicative scenarios and tasks of potential communicative value to stimulate students' hunger and desire to learn; second, Enabling. The teacher, referring to the output objectives, maximizes the use of teaching materials, together with a certain number of supplementary materials (textual and audio-visual materials), guides students to obtain the wanted information on content, language and structure, maximizes the scaffolding for the output. Meanwhile, the teacher also focuses on cultivating the students' critical thinking ability, and encourages them to consult the literature independently in order to express their different points of view in a reasonable and justified manner; Third, Assessing. For their output, the teacher guides students to do timely and delayed assessment, and the delayed assessment is Teacher-Student Collaborative Assessment (TSCA) [8] in order to achieve the purpose of learning by assessing.

3.1.2. Project- Based Blended Teaching Model

Project-based teaching has been widely discussed and applied in European and American educational circles since the 1970s. Its theoretical basis is the constructionism

learning theory, which states that “it is only when students begin to actively construct their own understanding by adopting and applying ideas implicit in the learning material that they can develop a deeper understanding of the learning material itself” [9]. Compared with the traditional method of memorizing knowledge points, project-based teaching has obvious advantages in enhancing students’ learning motivation, critical thinking ability and practical problem solving ability, etc [10]. The research in enacting project-based teaching in humanities has been tried out, which demonstrates the skills and qualities learners might develop are exactly those valued most by the project of new liberal arts construction that is initiated by the China Ministry of Education to set a new direction for the development of liberal arts in higher education [11].

Project-based learning is based on learner-centered principles and the supportive role of the teacher, in which students engage in activities under the guidance of an instructor so as to complete a project with an authentic context [12]. Stoller & Myers (2019) devised five steps to guide teachers in planning, implementing, and evaluating projects, which include: preparation (teachers and students work together to identify the topic), information gathering (students complete), processing (students organize and analyze the data with the guidance of the teacher), presentation (students present the results of the project with the guidance of the teacher), and reflection (students and teachers reflect together). The framework also includes a preparation phase (teacher and students work together to define the theme), information gathering (students complete), information processing (students organize and analyze data with teacher guidance), information presentation (students present the results of the project with the teacher's guidance), and reflection (students and teacher reflect together) [13].

This course is offered to help freshmen improve their English listening and speaking skills, gain a preliminary understanding of stylistic features of academic English, guide students to integrate language learning, specialization, critical thinking and intercultural communication. In addition, students do not have the practical experience of launching a project. To help them overcome the problems that they will have in carrying out a project, we design the progressive project teaching method. The projects selected for the first semester were based on the unit theme and the contents of the audio and video materials in the textbook, and the students were guided by the instructor to search for literature and have discussions to discover the topics of some academic value. Projects in the second semester can be based on the unit theme in relation to their own specialties, because at this stage students have accumulated some experience in carrying out projects, improved their listening and speaking skills, and, more importantly, have gained a deeper understanding of their specialties. The presentation of the projects can be in the form of oral reports, debates and speeches.

Blended teaching focuses on combining the advantages of traditional classroom teaching with those of E-learning, which empowers teachers to play a leading role in guiding, inspiring, and monitoring the teaching and learning process, and stimulates the creativity, initiative, and motivation of the students as learning subjects [14]. Blended assessment model are constructed by applying technology in different stages of assessment in blended classroom teaching to better help teachers carry out assessment practices and provide students with personalized feedback in a timely manner, so as to realize the integration of technology-integrated teaching and assessment [15]. In the face of the double pressure of the compressed class time and the difficulty of the content itself, teachers should familiarize themselves with various digital teaching means, as follows:

(1) Utilize online resources:

Teachers carry out online teaching to provide students with richer learning contents. For example, teachers use the Rain Classroom platform to supplement audio-visual materials and micro-lessons related to the unit theme, deepening students' understanding and improving their independent learning ability.

(2) Digital evaluation:

For output activities in the form of project reports, news broadcasts and keynote speeches by students in the class, teachers can use Questionnaire Star to invite students to complete inter-group evaluation (the scoring questionnaire is made in advance by the teacher according to the evaluation criteria).

(3) Data analysis and teaching optimization:

Using digital information technology can collect students' learning data for data analysis and learning assessment. For example, teachers can use the online learning management system to record students' learning performance, learn about students' learning progress and learning situation, and thus adjust teaching strategies in a targeted manner in order to improve the teaching effect.

3.2. Methodology

Action research is applied to study the effectiveness of the teaching model in the course and continuously improve and adjust it based on observation, reflection and interviews, and eventually develop a practical and effective teaching model. In the past two decades, action research paradigm is gradually being integrated into college English classroom practice and teachers' own professional development research with increased recognition and attention in China [16].

4. Initial Course Design

The implementation of the new teaching mode expands the pedagogical process of POA. Total motivation → Project motivation → Project Enabling → Multi-dimensional assessing → Reflection.

4.1. General Motivation

It is conducted at the beginning of the semester, in which the teacher introduces the teaching objectives of this course, the teaching contents and the corresponding projects for the whole academic year that the students had to accomplish, so that the students could find out that this teaching mode was different from that in the traditional English classes before and that it was characterized by cultivating the students' ability to apply the language.

4.2. Project Implementation

The implementation of the individual unit project is carried out in a process of motivation → enabling → assessing → reflection. The motivation task for each project can be oral reports, debates, presentations, etc.

Take the oral presentation of the project as an example, the steps are as follows:

(1) Project motivation

Teachers first do the project introduction and clarify the requirements. Students learn about their knowledge gap which stimulates students' desire for knowledge;

(2) Project Exploration

Teachers guide students to understand the theme of the unit, encourage students to carry out independent exploration, such as searching for relevant literature and watching related academic lectures and videos, etc. At the same time teachers cultivate students' critical thinking skills, encourage students to analyze and express their agreement or disagreement boldly and reasonably, and finally determine the topic. Complete Subtask 1-- submit the exploration topic and implementation plan.

(3) Project Enabling

During the lesson, teachers train students' academic listening and speaking skills. Discourse structure, content and language of the audio and video materials in the textbook are focused; teachers continue to guide the students to explore the theme by supplementing materials with Chinese characteristics to guide the students to recognize the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western cultures and to interpret different cultural phenomena and communicate across cultures in an appropriate and effective way.

(4) Report Writing

Improve the results of project explorations, and complete Subtask 2-- complete the oral presentation draft of the project.

(5) Peer assessing and draft revision

According to the assessing criteria for oral presentation co-constructed by teachers and students before, a peer-to-peer assessing is conducted within the group. Based on the results of the pre-assessing, we will revise the draft and the teacher will provide feedback on this.

(6) Project Presentation

Students make presentation in class or submit presentation video to the online platform. In either case, teachers and students will assess the presentation according to the evaluation

criteria, which is inter-group evaluation.

(7) Project Assessing

Teacher's assessing includes timely evaluation and delayed evaluation and the latter is Teacher-Student Cooperative Assessing (TSCA) of production tasks. Teachers select typical samples and discuss the assessing results with students.

(8) Reflective Journal

Teachers invite students to write a reflective journal to summarize the problems, difficulties, gains and shortcomings they encountered in the whole process.

5. Research Objectives and Key Issues to Be Addressed

5.1. Research Objectives

As mentioned above, this study integrates POA with a project-driven blended teaching methodology to develop a teaching model which is applicable to our undergraduate PPE majors. Its objectives are divided into four levels:

- (1) To develop an efficient teaching model for the academic English listening and speaking course in line with teaching objectives of PPE majors, and to guide students to integrate the input and output of English knowledge and skills, which is "learning by doing, learning by using".
- (2) This teaching model, through multiple progressive cycles, guides students to integrate language learning with professional academic research and develops students' oral academic communication skills.
- (3) The teaching activities are designed to integrate language learning with critical thinking and cross-cultural competence, and to cultivate students' multiple abilities.

5.2. Key Issues to Be Addressed

PPE is a new major in our university, in order to cultivate disciplinary talents with strong English application ability, this group is eager to find a teaching mode that can achieve the established teaching objectives, after analyzing the school situation, learning situation and teaching situation, we will make the first exploration of the teaching content and teaching mode of this course, aiming at cultivating the students' ability to carry out international academic exchanges with a proven teaching mode.

6. Main Features and Innovations of the Program

As an important part of the reform of university English teaching, Academic English courses are getting more and more attention in the field of education, but most of the Academic English teaching focuses on Academic English read-

ing and writing, and not enough attention is paid to the Academic English listening and speaking courses. In fact, many professional teachers believe that students' English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills are unable to meet the needs of professional learning and academic communication, especially students' listening skills are insufficient; students are deeply impressed by their weak comprehensive English skills in their professional learning, and they are unable to be competent in academic communication.

Abbreviations

PPE Philosophy, Politics and Economics

POA Production-Oriented Approach

Author Contributions

Tingbo Song is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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