

A Research on Academic English Teaching Mode From the Perspective of CBI

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Content-based instruction (CBI) effectively combines language skills with subject. According to CBI teaching concept, teachers can improve students' academic English ability by effectively designing academic English classroom activities. In this paper, the author tries to integrate the teaching idea of CBI in the course of academic English teaching, so as to cultivate students' ability to communicate in academic English.

Keywords: CBI teaching approach, project learning, task-based learning, case-study

Introduction

The economic development of China has put forward higher requirements for talents who are able to communication in international contexts. In colleges and universities, nowadays General English, which aims at mastering English as a language for communication, has long been unable to meet the language needs of students. Therefore, how to cultivate English application ability of students has attracted more and more attention. At present, most College English courses still focus on humanistic quality and cultivate language skills such as reading, listening, translation, writing, etc. College English teaching in many colleges and universities is still based on general English, with the purpose to have a command of the common core of languages and hardly involve the professional knowledge of different disciplines.

In College English teaching, many students are not satisfied with the content of College English classroom teaching, or even give up college English learning. However, after entering the senior year, these students cannot understand the professional courses taught in English. As a result, they cannot understand professional lectures related to their major. They feel difficult to write English papers, and are reluctant to participate in academic conferences in English. Basic academic abilities, such as reading English academic documents, writing abstracts and outlines in English, are not available.

It is a common fact that the publication of academic papers in international academic journals must be written in English, and the reading of papers in international academic conferences should also be communicated in English. Therefore, academic English requires the students to reach a higher language level and skill requirements for English language learning. Such requirements in language and communication skills, even for English-speaking learners, require professional guidance and systematic learning. In this paper, the author tries to integrate the teaching idea of content-based teaching approach with English for academic purposes (EAP) teaching theory in the course of academic English reading and writing, so as to cultivate students' ability to communicate in academic English.

Content-Based Instruction (CBI) Teaching

CBI originated from the “immersion” teaching experiment in Canada in the 1960s. This teaching concept for second language teaching draws on the theories of second language acquisition and cognitive psychology. It was introduced to China in the mid-1990s, which attracted the attention of educators. CBI teaching refers to “basing language teaching on the teaching of a certain subject or a certain subject content, combining language learning with subject knowledge learning to improve students’ subject knowledge and cognitive ability, and promoting their language level”.

CBI teaching philosophy emphasizes learning language through subject content, rather than learning language for the sake of language, which can stimulate learning motivation of the students and achieve “learning by using”. Leave and Stryker think that CBI teaching has three remarkable characteristics: taking subject knowledge as the core; using real language materials; and the curriculum must meet the needs of different student groups. According to the three characteristics, CBI teaching organically combines specific subject knowledge, real language materials, and students’ needs. Its teaching mode can be divided into theme mode, course mode, auxiliary mode, and special topic mode. Teachers can adopt different teaching modes according to specific teaching requirements, while theme mode is the most commonly used mode.

Problems Existing in Current Academic English Teaching

First of all, EAP course is a branch of English for specific purposes (ESP). At present, the development and construction of ESP courses for special purposes are relatively mature, but there is still a gap between the construction and research of ESP courses in China and those in other countries in the world. In China, almost all ESP courses do not offer relevant English courses according to the majors of students, and they usually fail to cultivate students’ professional language use and communication skills in an academic way. EAP is divided into English for general academic purpose (EGAP) and English for specific academic purposes (ESAP). General academic English focuses on the commonness of English in all subjects, that is, to cultivate students’ oral and written communication skills in academic English. As the students in academic English courses come from different majors, with their previous course be English for general purposes (EGP), consequently most students find it is too difficult for them to adapt to the class in the short term.

Secondly, with the increasing level of science and technology, computers have been normalized in foreign language teaching, and academic English, as a course with strong application, needs to introduce more advanced modern teaching equipment, so as to establish three-dimensional teaching and improve the authenticity of course teaching. However, although academic English is currently offered in many colleges and universities, the compilation of three-dimensional teaching materials still needs to be improved, and the multimedia materials supporting the teaching materials are quite scarce, let alone the three-dimensional teaching materials for academic English for College English. At the same time, in the daily teaching of academic English, most classes have built multimedia facilities, but the use of multimedia in teaching itself is not sufficient.

Academic English Teaching Modes From the Perspective of CBI

The teaching objective of academic English course is quite different from that of other College English courses. How to adopt appropriate teaching methods and teaching models is the focus of the course. In order to improve the efficiency of both teaching and learning, project teaching and task-based teaching are used.

Project Teaching Method

With project being the focus of teaching, project teaching method promotes the learning from the side of students by involving them in specific project activities. Project teaching emphasizes students' subjectivity and initiative, and pays attention to cultivate their problem-solving ability and teamwork spirit. In the project teaching, students usually organize their own learning activities according to the project requirements provided by teachers, complete the actual tasks, and finally present the project results.

In the class of academic English, students are divided into groups according to their professional background. At the beginning of the semester, group members work together to select a research topic according to their academic interests. After deciding the appropriate research topic for the whole group, they then start to cooperate and find the documents related to the group projects for group reading. During this course, group members are required to report on what they have read and learnt from the academic documents. After that, they need to hand in a written outline and abstract to the teacher for guidance. At the end of the semester, a research report of about 1,500 words is needed to be the result of the semester project.

By participating in project activities, students can combine what they have learned in class with practical application and improve their interest and motivation in learning. Project-based teaching emphasizes the dominant position of students in the learning process, and encourages them to exert their independent thinking and creativity. Through project design and implementation, students can choose their own learning content, and formulate their learning objectives and programs, thus improving their learning motivation and participation. Project teaching can promote the cross-integration and comprehensive application between different disciplines, and cultivate the students to have a better command of interdisciplinary learning ability and comprehensive literacy.

Task-Based Teaching Method

The purpose of task-based teaching method is to cultivate students' ability to use language. In task-based teaching, teachers should design operational teaching activities as tasks focusing on specific teaching purposes. Students use English as tool to realize language communication in interaction and actively complete tasks. The communication process is centered on meaning co-construction and students in groups complete the learning task together. Task-based teaching method emphasizes "learning by doing, learning by using". The tasks are designed to achieve authenticity of learning activities and learning materials in order to encourage students to use language creatively.

Through cooperation with peers, students learn knowledge in the process of completing tasks, improve their subjective initiative, consolidate their knowledge, and cultivate their ability to solve practical problems. In the academic English class, teachers make full use of the Internet to create a network-based academic English learning environment for academic English learning. The rich information resources and fast communication methods on the Internet provide real academic channels for students to carry out cooperative learning, which is conducive to students to master the language and skills of academic English quickly and effectively.

Case-Study Teaching Method

The most basic idea of case teaching is to cultivate students' ability to use language through real language materials and language activities, emphasizing students' autonomous learning and the multi-interaction. As teaching materials, cases are combined with themes. Through the interactive teaching process between teachers and students, students can understand the concepts or theories related to teaching and cultivate their high-level

ability. Thinking in the process of case teaching is open, and there are many different answers to the questions in discussions. Teachers choose appropriate real cases according to the teaching content and teaching theme, so that students can think and analyze the problems individually or through group cooperation in order to find solutions to the problems.

It is the first step for teachers to select cases according to teaching objectives and teaching themes. Whether the case teaching is effective or not is closely related to whether the case selection is appropriate. Appropriate cases should firstly be targeted and purposeful, which can guide students to have a clear grasp of academic language. Case analysis and discussion are usually conducted within groups. According to the analysis of each member, the group builds up complete understanding, and at last one member will be responsible to make a speech on behalf of the group. In the process of case analysis, there is also strong interaction between teachers and groups to encourage students to participate in analysis, discussion, and expression. After the case discussion, the teacher should make a summary and give a brief evaluation of the students' performance. In order to train students' academic English writing ability, students are also required to write an analysis report in groups.

Conclusion

Attaching importance to academic English and arranging academic English courses scientifically are helpful to cultivate more professional and technical personnel with academic ability. In order to better meet the learning needs of college students and improve their international competency in professional fields, we should further actively explore and study the teaching mode of academic English in view of the differences in students' level and the different requirements of various professional disciplines.

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