

Research on the Approaches to Optimize Classroom Interaction

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This paper, exploring pre-class tasks in college English class, aims to optimize class interaction. The findings of research indicate that scientifically designed pre-class tasks can activate students' prior knowledge and enhance their classroom participation. In addition, pre-class task design with the principles of interest, relevance and task continuity, together with classroom evaluation incentives and the dynamic adjustments of teaching strategies, can significantly alleviate class silence and improve the quality of teacher-student and student-student interaction.

Keywords: class interaction, pre-class tasks, teaching optimization

Introduction

College English, a compulsory basic course in universities, aims not only to impart language knowledge but also to cultivate students' comprehensive English application abilities and autonomous learning abilities. However, in practical teaching, common problems such as dull class atmosphere, passive student participation, and insufficient teacher-student and student-student interaction are prevalent (Xie, 2006; Teng, 2009; Zhou, 2002). Teachers deliver lectures unilaterally while students listen passively, which weakens students' learning motivation, reduces their opportunities for language practice, and seriously restricts teaching effectiveness (Li, 2008).

The author encountered the above problems when teaching *English Reading and Writing* course to non-English major sophomores in a university in Beijing. The course uses *A Handbook of English Writing* compiled by Ding Wangdao and Wu Bing, with 2 class hours per week for one academic year. Initial attempts to improve classroom interaction achieved unobvious and unstable effects.

To solve the above problem, the author adopted action research in 2024 and 2025 respectively, taking pre-class task design as the core to break classroom silence and optimize classroom interaction (Cheng, 2011). Teaching interventions were carried out to improve pre-class task design strategies.

Theoretical Foundation and Research Design

Theoretical Foundation

The research is based on Task-based Language Teaching and the Theory of Prior Knowledge Activation in second language teaching. Nunan (2001) pointed out that prior knowledge is an important foundation for students to understand new knowledge, and teachers should integrate students' learned knowledge with new knowledge when designing teaching activities. Wang & Cheng (2006) proposed that teachers should activate students' prior knowledge through diverse classroom activities, enabling students to make adequate emotional, content and linguistic preparations before learning new knowledge, which provides direct theoretical guidance for pre-class task design.

In addition, the “task continuity” principle proposed by Nunan (2011) requires all tasks in the teaching process to be interrelated and progressive, with subsequent tasks based on previous ones to avoid isolation. This principle becomes an important basis for the integration of pre-class task design and classroom teaching links in this study.

Research Objects and Methods

The research objects are two classes of non-English major sophomores in a university in Beijing, with their English proficiency generally around the CET-4 level.

The main research method is action research, supplemented by interview and classroom observation. The author, as both a teaching practitioner and a researcher, designed pre-class tasks and implemented teaching interventions, recorded students’ participation and interaction performance through classroom observation, interviewed students their attitude to pre-class tasks, sought for the problems of teaching design, and made adjustment for pre-class tasks.

The Process and Results of Action Research

This research carried out three rounds of teaching interventions to tackle the problem of class silence with timely reflection and changes after each round to achieve gradual adaptation between pre-class task design and class interaction.

The First Round of Intervention: Basic Pre-class Task Design

The core goal of the first round was to guide students to do pre-class preview and activate their prior knowledge. In *English Reading and Writing* course. Students were asked to self-study new writing strategies and apply these strategies when analyzing reading samples. The researcher also explained the importance of the pre-listening stage to students and designed simple theme-related tasks, such as group discussions after watching a subtitle-free short film.

There came up some effects: students who completed pre-class tasks were more active in classroom speaking, and the number of active participants in group discussions increased significantly. However, several problems emerged: some students failed to complete pre-class tasks due to ignorance of their correlation with classroom teaching; pre-class tasks took too much classroom time, crowding out core teaching time; pre-class tasks were disconnected with new knowledge. As a result, some students returned back to silence in the knowledge teaching stage and some of them complained the weak relevance to subsequent training.

The Second Round of Intervention: Optimizing Pre-class Task Content

Targeting to solve the problems in the first round, in the second round, the researcher focused on optimizing pre-class task content under the principles of interest and knowledge integration. Interesting and readable reading samples were prioritized, and students were asked to sort out the similarities and differences between new and learned writing strategies by drawing mind maps.

Students were informed that class evaluation was linked to the completion of pre-class tasks, and students’ performance at class would be recorded as part of their semester scores. This round achieved remarkable effects: more students participate class discussion. Besides, mind maps turned out to be useful for students to reduce the difficulty of comparing the learned and new knowledge and better understanding. However, problems remained: the disconnection between pre-class tasks and classroom teaching was still unsolved, classroom time was not enough to cover more classroom activities including class discussion, and some students still refused to participate due to insufficient learning motivation.

The Third Round of Intervention: Integrating Pre-class Tasks with Classroom Teaching

The third round took Nunan's (2011) "task continuity" principle as the core to solve the disconnection problem and to deepen the in-depth integration of pre-class tasks and classroom teaching. Meanwhile, measures to optimize classroom time management strategies were tried. Specific measures included: focusing on the key points of pre-class task discussion to reduce ineffective time consumption; strengthening task relevance and clearly informing students of the internal connection between pre-class tasks and subsequent teaching, etc.

This round achieved significant teaching effects: more students completed pre-class tasks, class silence was greatly reduced, and teacher-student and student-student interaction was significantly enhanced. Students not only took the initiative to speak more but also raised questions actively. Classroom time management became more reasonable, and the teaching progress was effectively guaranteed.

Reflections on the Problems of This Action Research

Through three rounds of progressive action research, teaching interventions centered on pre-class task design effectively optimized class interaction and reduced classroom silence. However, several urgent problems were identified in this process.

First, it is difficult to balance classroom discussion time and teaching schedule progress. Students' diverse questions and suggestions disrupted the teacher's time plan. Second, students' individual differences in class participation still exist. A small number of students with weak English foundation and low learning motivation still refused to complete pre-class tasks and participate in class interaction; present task design and evaluation incentives could not effectively stir up their enthusiasm. Third, there are multiple contradictions in the selection of pre-class task materials. It is not always easy to find reading samples that match accurately and simultaneously the writing strategies to be learned, the language proficiency of students, and the students' interest.

Suggestion for Optimizing Class Interaction

To activate prior knowledge, to highlight the relevance between new and prior knowledge, and to integrate interest into reading are basic for pre-class tasks design. The "task continuity" principle is the key to solving the disconnection between pre-class tasks and classroom teaching. Pre-class tasks, whose content is closely connected to subsequent knowledge teaching and skill training, are indispensable step of classroom teaching.

Evaluation incentives help to motivate students to complete pre-class tasks and participate in classroom interaction. Completion of pre-class tasks and class interaction performance should be included in evaluation system, and timely affirmation and encouragement to students' active participation, especially for students with low English proficiency, help to enhance their confidence in learning. Besides, teachers need adjust teaching strategies dynamically based on classroom observation and students' feedback, taking into consideration students' individual differences. They should also adjust discussion time according to the actual situation of class interaction, design personalized pre-class tasks for students with different levels of learning motivation.

Conclusion

This research conducts three rounds of action research on progressive teaching interventions on the approaches to optimize college English class interaction with pre-class tasks. The results indicate that scientifically designed pre-class tasks are an effective starting point to optimize college English class interaction and to reduce

classroom silence. Pre-class task design combined with classroom evaluation incentives and the adjustments of teaching strategies can significantly enhance students' class participation and the quality of class interaction, thus improve teaching effectiveness. This research also verifies the importance of action research in teaching practice. The cycle of action research enables teachers to observe, identify and then solve problems.

It should be noted that the optimization of college English class interaction is a long and complex process that cannot be completely solved by pre-class task design alone. Challenges such as time management and individual differences among students are both essential to enhance teaching effectiveness. But some concerned issues run counter to course curriculum and teaching resources. It demands continuous and unremitting efforts in the field.

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