A Study on the Teaching Effect of Content-based ESP Course for Art Design Majors

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Abstract. Based on the theory of Content-based Instruction, this study applies the Six-T’s approach to Art Design English course and is aimed to find out its teaching effect on student’s motivation and language competence. A comparison is made between classes that take conventional Art Design English courses and classes that take the courses designed within the theoretical framework of Content-based Instruction. The quantitative analysis proves that the Content-based teaching mode enhances students’ learning motivation and improves their language competence, thus accomplishing the purpose of Art Design English course.

Introduction

The integration of language and content instruction is advanced in the 1980s (Mohan, 1986; Stryker & Leaver, 1997; Met, 1999), and the teaching concept based on it is called Content-based Instruction (CBI) Teaching Mode. The teaching mode is supported by a number of theories, such as Communicative Function Theory, the Schema Theory, Stephen Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition, Cognitive Learning Theories, and the Constructivism Learning Theory, and has been applied into teaching practice successfully (Benesch, 1988; Brinton et al, 1989; Ready & Wesche, 1992; Kasper, 1994, 1997; Burger & Chrétien, 2001; Chumpavan, 2001).

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching based on CBI theories is applicable, effective and significant. According to Wang Shouren (2011), ESP Courses are content-driven and form-based. The purpose of ESP teaching is to train learners’ ability to communicate on topics regarding a certain major in their second language; language training and academic study should promote one another. Yu Liming and Han Jianxia (2012) hold that the aim of CBI teaching mode is more than enabling students to learn the language form. Rather, it is to help learners to learn the sustained content, or, the super-text, to command the language. In the meanwhile, the language form repeatedly appears in the text, thus the learners can better grasp the language form. If we can define ESP as the extension of EGP, then the need for ESP will encourage CBI teaching (Kong Fanxia, Wang Xin, 2015). In classes guided by CBI concept, students focus more on getting involved in assignments and activities, and they show more attention and enthusiasm in spoken communication (Heidari-Shahreza, 2014). Recently, many ESP courses have been developed based on CBI teaching concept, such as the project-oriented ESAP course (Kucherenko et al., 2015).

CBI teaching mode features four key points: 1. Teaching is based on disciplinary knowledge; 2. Authentic language material is adopted; 3. New information is learned in the class; 4. Course design meets the different needs of students (Yuan Pinghua, Yu Liming, 2008). As different CBI teaching modes have evolved, Crandall and Tucker (1989) review some project-based teaching modes where English is used as the target language. In 1989, Brinton specifically divides them into three: Course Mode, Assisted Mode and Theme Mode. In 1999, Myriam Met further divides them into five, and researches on two of them: content-oriented mode and language-oriented mode. To make CBI instruction more practicable, Stoller (1997) illustrates the application of 6-T approach in teaching (6-T refers to Theme, Text, Topic, etc.)
Sufficient researches have proved that, the teaching mode guided by CBI is applicable in College English classrooms in China, and it can effectively promote the construction of localized ESP courses (Han Geling, 2009; Yuan Pinghua, 2010, Kong Fanxia and Wang Xin, 2015.) Meanwhile, it is found that the number of researches on ESP for art majors has risen, and the subjects cover a wide area, such as the necessity of ESP for art majors(Zhao Hui, 2009; Zhang Lisi, 2012); how to teach ESP courses aimed for art majors (Guo Yanling, 2011, Wang Jue, 2015, Mao Fengfan, 2015), etc., Yet as far as the theoretical framework is concerned, quite a few number of researches on ESP teaching mode for art majors have been carried out from the perspective of CBI theories. In fact, art students, art design students in particular, account for a large percentage among Chinese college students. Besides, their learning pattern (including learning style, motivation of learning and so on) is relatively unique when compared with other majors. Thus, this paper aims to take ESP teaching aimed at art majors as the subject, analyze CBI-oriented ESP teaching mode and its teaching effect by making a comparison between the teaching mode guided by content-based instruction and conventional ESP teaching mode.

Research Method

Questions to be answered

The paper aims to investigate the teaching effect of CBI-guided ESP courses for art design majors and plans to find out the answer the following question:

1. Does CBI teaching mode affect students’ motivation for College English learning?
2. Does CBI teaching mode affect students’ language competence?

Research plan

Qualitative and quantitative methods are used to investigate the effect of CBI teaching mode on students’ motivation and language competence. Quantitative method includes questionnaires and tests (exam papers before and after experiment are both from CET-4 simulation tests with the same coefficient of difficulty); qualitative method includes classroom observation and interviews.

120 students are chosen to conduct a 15-week experiment. The students have selected Art Design English as their optional class. They are randomly divided into four classes, each made up of 30. Two classes are experimental group that receives 15 weeks of CBI-guided teaching and two are the control group that take conventional ESP courses aimed for art design majors.

Course Design and Application

Based on Stoller’s 6-T approach in teaching (1996), the course is designed and applied into the 15-week teaching. The Content-based instruction comprises 5 units. For each unit, according to the features of art design, the THEME is artwork design aimed for the market. The TEXT is from the book compiled by English Teaching & Research Section, Hubei Institute of Fine Arts. The project assignments are arranged according to the learning progress, the content in the text, as well as the discussion result of the English teacher and relevant art design teacher. The THREAD connects all the authentic situations designers face from the very beginning where an order from the client is made, to the design & revision phase where the work is created and revised (rounds of communications between the client and designer are made) until the final step where designers deliver presentations on the work to clients and clients give feedback). All the TOPICs supporting the THEME enable the students to finish the project assignments in realistic simulations.

Teaching Effect

Motivation

After taking CBI-oriented courses for 15 weeks, statistics show significant difference in motivation between the experimental group and control group (t=2.231, p=.029). The experimental group show
stronger motivation and are more eager to learn \( (t=2.188, p=.027) \). But there is insignificant difference between the two groups in terms of motivation intensity (as is shown in Table 1).

### Table 1. Descriptive Investigation Result on Students’ Motivation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Before Experiment</th>
<th>After Experiment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental Group (N=60)</td>
<td>Control Group (N=60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation intensity</td>
<td>Average Score (standard deviation)</td>
<td>2.07 (.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to learn</td>
<td>Average Score (standard deviation)</td>
<td>1.99 (.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Average Score (standard deviation)</td>
<td>2.02 (.23)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P<.05

### Language Competence

Table 2 shows that, before the experiment, no significant difference between the experimental group and the control group was shown \( (t=.947, p=.421) \); after the experiment, the statistics on language competence of experimental group is higher than that of the control group. \( (t=2.512, p=.035) \)

### Table 2. Descriptive Investigation Result on Students’ Language Competence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Before Experiment</th>
<th>After Experiment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental Group (N=60)</td>
<td>Control Group (N=60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Average Score (standard deviation)</td>
<td>6.23 (1.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Average Score (standard deviation)</td>
<td>16.00 (1.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Average Score (standard deviation)</td>
<td>19.47 (1.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>Average Score (standard deviation)</td>
<td>5.78 (1.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Average Score (standard deviation)</td>
<td>47.48 (7.68)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P<.05

In addition, Table 2 shows significant difference between the two groups in terms of writing and reading section, which are two typical indicators of students’ command level of the second language \( (t=2.537, p=.021; t=2.629, p=.032) \).

Tests targeted at testing students’ spoken English are not conducted due to limited time. But questionnaire are used on students after the experiment to find out whether improvements have been made. 70.56% of the students from the experimental group think that there is improvement in spoken English; 75.13% of the students are more willing to express their thoughts regarding their majors in public situations than they were before the experiment; 86.54% of the students think they are more confident.

### Conclusion

The investigation result shows that CBI-guided ESP teaching mode is effective in enhancing students’ motivation and language competence. The teaching mode emphasizes commanding the language...
through specific content, and the conventional focus in language teaching has shifted from language itself to relative content based on a certain area, so that students’ interest is significantly enhanced. As a vital component in the following-up teaching system for undergraduates, Art Design course is aimed to cultivate students’ independent learning capacity. In addition to helping students further understand their academic area, the course also enables them to solve language problems independently by using certain learning strategies and to proactively acquire and reserve language knowledge for future professional scenarios. By comparison, conventional ESP courses are still conducted in the teacher-guided pattern, thus language learning and disciplinary knowledge are separated.

CBI-guided ESP course combines the learning of language and disciplinary knowledge. Through creating specific assignments targeted at future professions one by one, students begin to naturally integrate language skills and disciplinary knowledge, and their roles are shifting from passive recipients to active information processors. They process information from one form to another, thus “surpass the information that is given” (Bruner, 1971). While solving problems in finishing projects, they categorize information in the second language and naturally improve their listening, speaking, reading and writing ability (Stryker & Leaver, 1997).

ESP courses guided by Content-based concepts and theories aimed for art design students can lead students to learn and accomplish in the most suitable way thus improve their overall learning ability. This study proves that CBI-guided ESP course is applicable and effective.

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References


