Design and Research on the Application of Flipped Classroom in Business English Teaching in Higher Vocational Education

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Keywords: Business English; Flipped Classroom; Blended Learning; Teaching Model.

Abstract. In order to provide real Business English learning context, to greatly improve teaching and learning efficiency, to cultivate students’ autonomous learning ability, research on flipped classroom teaching is made in this paper. Background theories for flipped classroom are briefly discussed. A new flipped classroom teaching model is designed and constructed. Business English Curriculum under the new model is further designed and presented. And the new teaching model is also applied in Business English teaching. To assess the application effect of the new flipped classroom teaching model, a survey is conducted and presented at the end of the probationary period. Questionnaire and interview are applied. The results show that the newly-developed model has many advantages over traditional teaching. The new model reconstructs Business English learning process into three phases; it breaks through the limitations of time and space and allows for individualized learning; the follow-up assessment system provides instantaneous feedback and ensures personalized teaching and learning. Drawbacks and challenges of the new model are also pointed out. E-learning resource is not rich enough to meet the demands of students at different levels. The assessment function is to be improved to reflect students’ learning more exactly and objectively.

1. Introduction

Business English in the Higher Vocational education is a specific-purpose English. Neither is it a purely language teaching nor a simple addition of “language” and “business”. It is a business-contented English language teaching, possessing its own characteristics and rules. In addition to the two essential natures, that is, the nature of Language and the nature of Application, Business English has such characteristics as being compound, being occupational, being applied and regional. The fundamental in cultivating Business English talents is to realize the integration of students’ business knowledge and English language ability, and to improve the competitiveness of students in the workplace. The present teaching methods applied in Business English teaching in Higher Vocational Colleges are relatively traditional and backward, which leads to low teaching efficiency and quality. There exist many problems in practical teaching in Business English [1].

Firstly, most of the Business English class is still not students-centered, but teacher-centered and teacher-dominant. Students still accept knowledge passively and their learning enthusiasm is not aroused. Teachers know very little about each student, and personalized teaching or teaching students in accordance with their aptitude is impossible. Teaching methods are outdated and not diversified. Students show little interest in learning. Secondly, most Business English teachers focus their teaching on traditional academic English language. Students lack a clear learning objective in the learning progress. Thirdly, it is difficult for the Business English teachers to integrate English language into business knowledge because teachers themselves lack practical working experience in business environment. All the factors hinder the reformation of Business English teaching.

It is proposed in National Medium and Long-term Educational Reform and Development Program (2011-2020) that information technology has a revolutionary influence on education development and should be highly valued [2]. Information technology has brought about disruptive change in all the aspects and progresses of education. Development of information technology is always changing our learning ways and habits. Meanwhile, it is also continuously changing the teaching and learning
model. Business English teaching aims to cultivate students’ integrated ability to use English, and to cultivate and output Business English professional talents for the society. With the development of information technology, many new type of teaching model appear in the reformation, one of which is flipped classroom [3- 4]. Based on Constructivism theory and modern information technology, flipped classroom teaching has gained more and more attention. This paper has made a research on the application of flipped classroom in Business English teaching.

2. Research Theories

2.1 Constructivism

Constructivism advocates teaching philosophy based on the concept that learning is the result of mental construction; students construct their own understanding by reflecting on their personal experiences, and by relating the new knowledge with what they already know. Each student creates his or her own schemas or mental-models to make sense of the world, and accommodates the new knowledge by adjusting them. One of its main principles is that learning is search for meaning; therefore a teacher must help the student in discovering his or her own meaning. Constructivism insists that a complete learning process should include four factors, that is, students, teachers, teaching materials and media. In the process, it is the students who take the most responsibility and it is also the students who construct and complete the main part of learning process. Teachers’ responsibility mainly lies in designing students’ constructing process, providing learning materials and organizing activities. In a word, teachers play an auxiliary role; teaching materials provide students with learning content; media helps the teacher build the learning environment, acting a bridge in the interaction between the teacher and students.

Constructivism emphasizes the critical importance of learning environment. It holds that an ideal learning environment can facilitate learners in achieving their learning goals and that an ideal learning environment is a place where learners can freely use a variety of tools and information resources to explore and learn autonomously [5]. Constructivism advocates creating a real language environment for students. Being immersed in a real work situation with rich real language can facilitate students’ language internalization and speed up the process of language acquisition. Modern information technology is the best tool in Business English teaching to create a real business environment, to provide rich and vivid teaching content, to help learners construct their knowledge.

2.2 Blended Learning

The concepts behind blended learning first developed in the 1960s, but the formal terminology to describe it took its current form in the late 1990s. One of the earliest uses of the term appears in a 1999 press release, in which the Interactive Learning Centers, an Atlanta-based education business, announced a change of name to EPIC Learning. The release mentions that "The Company currently operates 220 on-line courses, but will begin offering its Internet courseware using the company's Blended Learning methodology". The term "blended learning" was initially vague, encompassing a wide variety of technologies and pedagogical methods in varying combinations. In 2006 with the publication of the first Handbook of Blended Learning by Bonk and Graham, the term became more concrete. Graham defined "blended learning systems" as learning systems that "combine face-to-face instruction with computer mediated instruction" [6]. Researcher Norm Friesen, in a report titled "Defining Blended Learning", suggests that, in its current form, blended learning "designates the range of possibilities presented by combining Internet and digital media with established classroom forms that require the physical co-presence of teacher and students". Since blended learning was introduced into China by Professor Kekang He in 2003 [7], it has aroused the attention of domestic scholars. With the development and popularization of information technology, blending learning mode has been introduced into academic field. The concept of blended learning is shown in Fig.1.
Blended learning is a connection point of traditional teaching and E-learning and integrates the advantages of them [8]. It is realized as a combination of a face-to-face environment and E-learning. It aims at creating the most efficient learning environment.

Both E-learning and Face-to-Face teaching has pros and cons. Through E-learning, learners can autonomously arrange their study time and place, and even can choose learning contents. E-learning allows students to work at their own pace, making sure they fully understand new concepts before moving on. E-learning gives full consideration to the learners’ learning style and learning habit, and allows for personalized education. Face-to-face teaching enables teachers to know the students’ learning and how much they have grasped, and then to regulate the teaching progress and teaching methods and contents. Blended learning is a connection point of traditional Face-to-face teaching and E-learning and integrates the advantages of them. It is realized as a combination of a face-to-face environment and E-learning [9]. A classroom environment that incorporates blended learning replaces the traditional model where a teacher stands in front of the classroom and everyone is expected to stay at the same place and it naturally requires learner to demonstrate more autonomy, and independence in order to succeed. The most important thing in blended learning is how to balance the teachers’ guidance and monitoring role and students’ initiative and creativity. It aims at creating the most efficient learning environment.

3. Design and Research on Flipped Classroom in Business English Teaching in Higher Vocational Education

3.1 Constructing Flipped Classroom Teaching Model for Business English

Based on modern information technology, flipped classroom teaching is a new type of teaching mode of blended learning [10]. Flipped classroom teaching has changed the traditional teaching mode in which teacher is class-dominated and students are the passive to listen. In this model, Business English teaching is divided into three phases: previewing before the class, learning in the class and reviewing after the class. The new model of Business English flipped classroom teaching is illustrated in Fig. 2.

In the first phase, teachers provide students with learning resources, such as micro teaching video, audio, animation and courseware on the autonomous learning platform. And students preview and learn autonomously before class. In the second phase, that is, during the class, teachers focus on illustrating the key points and answering students’ questions put forward during their preview through collaborative leaning and interactive communication. In the third phase, students review, do exercises and make summaries on the autonomous learning platform after class. The model makes full use of the advantages of blended learning. Not only does the model emphasize students’ autonomous E-learning before and after class, it also emphasizes teachers’ guidance and answering questions during the face-to-face teaching and learning during the class. The second highlight of the model lies in the assessment and evaluation function. In each phase, the model assesses and evaluates students’ learning. The third highlight of the model lies in constructing students’ personalized learning environment.
In the model, as course planners, learning resources providers, online and face-to-face guiders and tutors, teachers play a very crucial role in the teaching quality.

3.2 Designing Business English Curriculum

Flipped classroom emerged and was developed in China in recent years. In order to make full use of flipped classroom in reforming Business English teaching in higher vocational education, detailed discussion and design of flipped classroom are urgently needed.

Firstly, flipped classroom reconstructs Business English learning process. Generally, students’ learning process comprises two phases. Message is delivered and transformed in the first phase. The delivery and transformation is realized through the interactions between teachers and students as well as among students. Absorption and internalization occur in the second phase and is achieved by students themselves after class. In traditional teaching model, students often feel frustrated and are likely to lose learning motivation because there exist no guidance and help from teachers and peers in the second phase. In flipped classroom teaching model, the learning process is reconstructed. Message delivery and transformation is carried out and finished before the class, and in this phase teachers provide students with micro-lecture videos and online tutoring. Absorption and internalization occur through interaction in the class in the new model, which is totally different from that in traditional model. Teachers grasp the students’ learning difficulty before face-to-face teaching, and then provide personalized guidance.

Secondly, flipped classroom breaks through the limitations of time and space in traditional classroom teaching. In flipped classroom teaching model, teachers are responsible for preparing learning resources and providing business English-related situational resources; students are free to choose learning time, space and even way. Whether watching micro-lecture video or preview or review, students can decide on the learning time and space themselves. Micro-lecture videos on the new model have a variety of functions such as suspension and playback, which can be self-controlled by students and help them study autonomously. Each video has a specific topic. It is convenient for students to search and review after a period of time.

Thirdly, student’s learning is better assessed and evaluated in time in the model. Students can make self-assessment easily via the use of computer-based qualitative and quantitative assessment modules in the model. Several assessing questions are followed after the micro-lecture video, which can fairly judge whether or how much the students have understood the content. Having not grasped well, students can watch the video again or even for several times till getting a good understanding. On platform background, teachers get all the data on the students’ learning and self-assessment, which ensures that teachers can provide each student with personalized guidance in the followed face-to-face teaching process. After face-to-face teaching, the model evaluates student’s learning again, and then in accordance with the assessment result the system will intelligently provide each student with reviewing materials. The follow-up assessment system enables students to have personalized learning materials, and also enables teachers well understand students learning.
3.3 Flipped Classroom Teaching Model’s Application Effect Assessment

A survey is conducted in the research to investigate the application effect of the new model. Two survey tools are used. One is questionnaire and the other is interview. Students’ questionnaire is designed and sent out to the subjects. In the questionnaire, the assessment contents cover three aspects: learning resources, learning activities and learning experience. The survey sent out 40 questionnaires and withdrew 40 questionnaires, in which 38 were valid. The results are shown in Fig. 3.

![Survey Result on the Application Effect of Flipped Classroom](image)

Figures in Table 1 show that most of students are willing to accept the new model of teaching, that their learning experience satisfaction is very high. Students interviewed point out that the efficiency in face-to-face class is highly improved because of the autonomous preview before class, and that the pressure is also largely reduced, and that learning objective in the class is much clearer and focused. Moreover, students show high satisfaction with the abundant learning activities provided by the new model. Students interviewed comment that in flipped classroom teaching model, teachers organize the teaching more carefully and they have gained much more attention in e-learning and face-to-face teaching than in traditional teaching.

Unfortunately, the satisfaction survey result on learning resources is not ideal as expected. Teachers spent large quantities of time and energy in collecting business English related materials and recording micro-lectures videos. But the satisfaction from students is not high. The main problem is that the difficulty coefficient of learning resources is not big and clear enough, and cannot meet the requirements of students at different levels.

4. Summary

In order to provide real Business English learning context, to greatly improve teaching and learning efficiency, to cultivate student’s autonomous learning ability, research on flipped classroom based on blended learning is made in this paper. A flipped classroom teaching model is constructed and the new teaching model is also applied in Business English teaching. This paper then conducts a survey on its application effect in real teaching and learning process. A subjective assessment is also made.

The research and survey results show that the new flipped classroom teaching model does own unique advantages. By using the new flipped classroom teaching model, students can work on their own with new concepts and frees teachers up to circulate and support individual students who need individualized attention. The use of information and communication technologies has been found to improve student attitudes towards learning. Tests are automatically scored and instantaneous feedback is provided. Student logins and work times are also measured to ensure accountability. In a word, the model has greatly improved the teaching and learning efficiency, greatly improved students’ autonomous learning ability, and has achieved the research objective set up previously. Some problems are also found in applying the new model. Firstly, the new model has a strong dependence on the technical resources or tools with which e-learning experience is delivered. These tools have a meaningful impact on the learning experience and need to be reliable, easy to use and up to date. The second aspect of the new model that is challenging is learning materials and resources.
The micro-lecture videos are not enough and can’t meet the demand of all the students at different level. Thirdly, the assessment and evaluation function in the model is to be improved to reflect students’ learning more exactly and objectively. Much more research and deeper exploration needs to be made to make full use of the advantages of flipped classroom teaching and to make the new model more adaptable to the Business English teaching status quo.

5. Acknowledgment

This research was conducted with the support of 2017 Application-oriented Curriculum Construction Project of Beijing Union University (12205561107-016).

6. References


