Application of Anchored Instruction in Higher Vocational ESP Course

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Abstract. In order to improve students’ English application ability, the anchored instruction method is applied to ESP course in higher vocational colleges. Taking the ESP course of International Shipping Agency as an example to create a real problem situation, students are encouraged to learn actively, solve problems collaboratively, and evaluate and reflect on their learning, in the hope of making contribution to the reform of English teaching in higher vocational colleges.

Introduction

ESP, short for “English for Specific Purposes”, is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learners’ reasons for learning. [1] The international shipping agent industry has strong international and professional characteristics, shipping agent employees often need to use English to solve practical problems. In order to meet the needs of students engaged in ship agency work, our college has offered ESP courses for International Shipping Agency (ISA ESP for short). Applying constructivist anchored instruction to ISA ESP can simulate work situations and introduce real tasks or problems. In the process of students’ independent learning and cooperation in solving problems, they can improve their language ability and professional ability.

Applicability of Anchored Instruction in ISA ESP

Anchored instruction is a teaching method under the direction of the theory on constructivism. Constructivism argues that the meaning of knowledge exists in context, learning should be combined with situational social practice. Anchoring teaching is a typical situation teaching method. Using this teaching method can enable students to produce learning needs in a complete, real problem situation. Fully mobilize the initiative of students, and help them realize the meaning construction of the knowledge they have learned.

For example, in the work of ship agents, agents need to deal with a lot of related affairs from the ship’s arrival in port to the ship’s departure. How to effectively accomplish these affairs becomes a problem in the real situation. In order to solve these problems, the students must grasp some auxiliary knowledge and skills, such as use Microsoft Excel to make some forms and do some simple formula calculations, familiar with shipping agency software, make PowerPoint for reporting etc. At this point, teachers can use embedded teaching to enable students to master relevant knowledge and skills, and eliminate learning disabilities.

In the work of ship agents, some problems are more complicated. For example, in order to conduct import and export formalities for a ship, ship’s agent must declare the ship’s information to the port inspection departments, and accompany the officers from relevant departments board the ship to conduct examinations.

When dealing with this problem, ship’s agent need to know the relevant rules and regulations of the port inspection departments, familiar with dozens of ship’s declaration forms and certificates. In addition, ship’s agent should be able to communicate smoothly with the foreign captain.

The complexity of this problem makes it difficult for students to solve problems alone, which requires them to work together in groups, construct knowledge in the process of solving problems, and learn the skills of cooperation and communication.
Anchored instruction should design the learning and teaching activities around a certain “anchor”. In the higher vocational education, “anchor” should be a task or problem designed according to the real working situation. The author has collected a large number of real data from shipping agency, arranged the corpus according to the timeline of “Prior to ship’s arrival—Ship’s arrival—During ship’s stay in port—Ship’s departure”, designed the work items, and created the “anchors” in ISA ESP, such as the following:

- Prior to ship’s arrival: Long-term shipping agency appointment; Voyage shipping agency appointment; Estimated port disbursement; Guide to port entry.
- Ship’s arrival: VHF communication with captain; Conducting import formalities for a ship; Arrival report.
- During ship’s stay in port: Berthing report; Make out a lay time statement of facts; Daily report; Agent service.
- Ship’s departure: Conducting export formalities for a ship; Departure report; Trip account.

Application of Anchored Instruction in ISA ESP

There are five key steps in anchored instruction. Take the “Conducting import formalities for a ship” unit in ISA ESP as an example, the application of anchored instruction is as follows:

Design the Real Situation

Teachers can set a real problem situation, such as: M/V (Motor Vessel) “A” has docked at berth 16 in Tianjin Xingang. Boarding agent has arrived at the wharf in advance and prepared to board the ship. He should check the information with the captain and assist the captain in providing the declaration documents and certificate of M/V “A”.

In order to guide students enter the situation quickly, teachers can play a video of a boarding agent go on board to communication with the captain. This video can make students to feel the true scene and professional requirements of the job intuitively. For example: In the process of communication, we should keep smiling, clear speaking, speak at moderate speed, take a note of important matters and so on.

Set up the Problem

In the condition of students who have entered the study of knowledge, in order to enable students to face a realistic problem need to solve immediately, teachers should select the real problems as the center of the learning content, like “Suppose you are a boarding agent, what should you talk to the captain after boarding the ship?” Students will give their answers based on the sample information in the video and their own knowledge. The answer may be some keywords, such as “as your agent”, “fill in some forms”, “import formalities”, “official departments”, “ship’s arrival condition”, “necessary help” etc.

Thus, the main contents of communication between captain and boarding agent are drawn out, such as: indicating you are the boarding agent from the shipping agency and you will provide captain with all the necessary help to make the loading/discharging operation of the ship smoothly. Asking the captain inform the ship’s arrival information and the matters need to be done while the ship is in Tianjin. Thus, the problem to be solved in this lesson is that preparing an English dialogue with the above main contents and grasp the vocabulary and means of expression.

Independent Learning

In the process to solve problems independently, students’ experience the real problem-solving skills, this experience is gained through their independent study. In the textbook, there is an English dialogue about the import formality for a ship. Teachers can prompt students to learn this dialogue by themselves and mark the common sentences related to the boarding work, for instance:

- Nice to see you, Captain. I’m the boarding agent from ...
- As your agent, I will provide you with all the necessary help to make the loading/discharging operation of your ship smooth.
• There are some forms for different official departments, such as customs office, quarantine service and the like.
• Can I have your arrival condition, please?
• Is there anything else you’d like me to do for you?
• I must apply to have a new tonnage dues certificate for 30 days.
• The ship chandler is needed to supply some provisions.
• I will manage to arrange them in time. [2]

After students read these sentences, they have to record the key vocabulary, such as “loading / discharging operation”, “customs office”, “quarantine service”, “ship chandler”, “tonnage dues certificate” etc. This self-learning process requires teachers to guide and organize. Teachers need to answer questions to solve students’ problems. In order to measure the effect of students’ independent learning, teachers can also provide a short dialogue in English and hollow out the key words for students to test themselves.

Through the independent learning and self testing, students can master the professional knowledge about boarding work in a certain degree, and exercise their ability of reading English. However, English speaking and writing skills need to be done through cooperative learning.

Cooperative Learning

In this step, teachers need to design the situation for the students to simulate the English conversation between captain and boarding agent about the import formality for M/V “A”.

This grouping scenario simulation activity consists of three parts. First of all, teachers ask each group to prepare a dialogue in English, which include the keywords involved in the boarding work. In this way, students are encouraged to use their acquired expertise and language knowledge to construct their own understanding of the context and to exercise their English writing ability. Secondly, members of each team play the role of captain and boarding agent, simulating the dialogue. The students who play the role of boarding agent have to take a note of the important information in the dialogue, such as the ship’s arrival information, entrusted matters and so on. Through situational simulation dialogue, students are familiar with the work process and language environment of the boarding agent, and improve their oral English expression ability.

Learning Achievement Evaluation

Through cooperative learning, each group produces its own learning achievement and displays the achievement separately. Next, enter the evaluation and summary phase. According to the working requirements of boarding agent, teachers set the evaluation standard. Each group reviews each other according to the evaluation standard, and then comments by the teacher. Each group should fill in the evaluation results in the “group activity record”.

Reflection and Summary

Under the guidance of teachers, students reflect on the evaluation results and discuss, in order to complete the boarding agent work, what professional knowledge and qualities, commonly used English words and phrases should be mastered, then, summarized by the teacher. Finally, each group draws the result of the discussion into a mind map, and put the mind map, the dialogue and the “group activity record” into the “group growth record bag”.

Conclusion

The application of anchored instruction in Higher Vocational ESP curriculum has many advantages over traditional specialized English teaching. It stimulates the students’ interest in learning and the spirit of active exploration. In the teaching case, the work of shipping agency changes from abstract description to visualizable and vivid situation. Solving problems in the real situation can enhance students’ sense of substitution, and improve students’ ability of using English and solve problems. Therefore, we should try our best to create a practical and real English learning
environment for students and maximum improve the practical in English learning, so as to get the purpose: to learn in order to practice. [3] Of course, the teaching and learning of ESP courses have put forward higher requirements for teachers and students. In order to achieve good effect of teaching, it is necessary to continue to explore in teaching practice.

References

