

Exploring Task-Oriented Teaching in College English Reading: A Case Study in Vocational Colleges

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Abstract: For a long time, under the influence of traditional teaching methods, English reading teaching is mainly based on imparting grammar knowledge and vocabulary, although teachers and students spend a lot of time and energy on reading comprehension, but the effect is not obvious, and even the basic requirements of the syllabus are difficult to achieve. This article takes the reading material “Is your job at risk of automation” from the vocational theme unit of the English course at Hubei Communications Technical College as an example, this study explores the specific application of task-oriented teaching model in teaching English reading at vocational colleges and its effect. The exploration covers five stages: task-motivating in pre-reading stage, task-promoting, task-producing and task-evaluating in while-reading stage, task-expanding in post-reading stage. The research suggests that the application of task-oriented teaching model in college English reading classes at vocational colleges is feasible. It can not only alleviate students’ anxiety but also enhance their confidence in learning English, while cultivating their core English competencies.

Keywords: Vocational Colleges; College English Reading, SQ3R; Task-oriented; Exploration of Teaching Models

1. Introduction

In the current era, China's higher education is flourishing. Deepening educational reform and enhancing teaching quality are crucial focuses. Curriculum construction and reform are at the core of university education, presenting challenges in terms of curriculum design, teaching methodologies, and teaching content. Particularly, the reform of teaching methodologies and models requires the

integration of teaching, learning, and practice to facilitate the improvement of students’ abilities [1]. Task-oriented teaching models advocate for all classroom activities to serve the purpose of effective learning, posing a challenge to the prevalent “student-centered” approach both domestically and internationally.

The concept of “student-centered” approach was introduced into the field of foreign language teaching in China around the end of the last century and the beginning of this century [2]. Task-oriented teaching transforms the previous predominantly theoretical knowledge transmission approach into an interactive and communicative teaching method focused on completing tasks and solving learning difficulties. It shifts the emphasis from knowledge impartation to independent exploration, maintaining students’ active engagement by expressing their understanding of shared inquiry questions and offering unique perspectives to ensure the smooth accomplishment of tasks. In other words, task-oriented teaching involves assigning relevant tasks based on teaching requirements, subdividing overall tasks into smaller ones, and integrating teaching content into each task. Under the guidance of the teacher or through student-led exploration, students are encouraged to propose problem-solving approaches [3]. The principles of task-oriented teaching involve a progressive sequence of steps: creating a context, setting tasks, completing tasks, and evaluating task performance. Each level of the task is complementary and indispensable in the teaching process [4]. Task-oriented teaching models are guided by both students’ vocational competence needs and teaching tasks, emphasizing the focus on students’ learning rather than teachers’ teaching, application of knowledge rather than knowledge transmission, and process-oriented evaluation rather than

summative evaluation. The task-oriented teaching model achieves an organic unity between teacher-centeredness and student-centeredness.

The SQ3R method, proposed by American psychology professor F.P. Robinson in 1946, is a reading technique that emphasizes learners' subjectivity and proactiveness. The acronym SQ3R stands for the first letter of five words: Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review. These represent the five stages of the learning process: Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review. Each stage has the following specific learning objectives: Survey: This involves quickly scanning the material, focusing on titles, opening sentences of paragraphs, headings, and other prominent features. It helps develop a basic understanding of the material, predict the main content, infer the author's intentions, and identify the theme of the text, setting the stage for further reading. Question: Pre-reading questioning aims to clarify the purpose of reading, ensuring that learners have a clear objective in mind. The titles of the reading material act as a guide for generating questions, which mainly revolve around the "6W" (who, when, where, what, why, how). Read: Reading is the core stage of the SQ3R method. During the reading process, it is important to engage the eyes, mind, and hands, meaning taking notes while reading to achieve the best reading results. Recite: After comprehending the reading material, learners engage in recitation, which can be done through oral expression or summarizing in written notes. This not only reinforces learning outcomes but also serves as a means to verify their understanding. Review: Timely review after class is essential for consolidating newly acquired knowledge. Sharing and discussing what has been learned with peers helps to retain the gained knowledge more clearly and completely [5].

2. The teaching status of English reading courses at Vocational Colleges

2.1 The Reading Materials are not Highly Consistent with the Professional Context They are Learning, and cannot Stimulate Students' Interest in Learning

The author conducted a questionnaire survey of about 160 students in four classes whose major are Road and Bridge in Hubei

Communications Technical College about their interest in reading English, and the results showed that nearly 70% of the students were not much interested in reading the content of the textbook because they thought that the content in the textbook was not suitable for the professional learning context. The problem of teaching materials is mainly manifested in the outdated reading materials and the lack of modernity of the topics. The content of reading textbooks is out of step with the times, and students lack relevant background knowledge and are therefore less interested in reading.

2.2 Students Lack Reading Skills

In the teaching of English at vocational colleges, due to many factors, teachers usually adopt the traditional teaching mode, that is, teacher-centered, focusing on English language knowledge and skills, and outdated teaching methods. The main processes of college English reading teaching at vocational colleges are: article structure analysis, key word explanation, difficult sentences and key structure explanation, and knowledge point practice. Teachers rarely teach the theoretical knowledge and skills of English reading in class, resulting in students lacking an overall understanding of the text when reading in English. Through a questionnaire survey of nearly 160 students in four classes whose major are Road and Bridge, the author found that the main obstacles in students' English reading learning are: encountering a large number of unfamiliar vocabulary while reading; Read slower; low reading efficiency; Does not use reading skills. Some students, after getting the English reading materials, hurriedly read through the entire text without reading the title of the article; Some students cannot extract the topic sentence of each paragraphs, always read word by word, can not grasp the framework of the article; Some students like to read aloud when reading, or read silently in their brains, which seriously affects the reading speed and problem-solving efficiency; still Some students stop reading when they encounter new vocabulary or difficult grammar, and develop bad reading habits when they encounter new vocabulary or difficult grammar.

3. The Necessity of Implementing the Task-Oriented Teaching Model in College

English Reading Teaching at Vocational Colleges

In the traditional English teaching model, students often lack interest in learning English, resulting in lower English teaching efficiency. In order to enhance English teaching efficiency and cultivate students' ability for autonomous learning, it is necessary for teachers to change the traditional teaching methods, enrich teaching approaches, innovate teaching models, and improve their own professional level and comprehensive qualities [6]. Most students in vocational colleges are lively, active in thinking, and enthusiastic about expression. They prefer acquiring new knowledge through imitation. They are often multi-dimensional learners, leaning towards a learning style of "learning by doing" or "doing while learning". They possess a certain vocabulary and reading skills, but their ability to efficiently apply reading strategies could be improved. Therefore, in the college English reading classroom at vocational colleges, teachers should adopt a task-oriented teaching model: Screen the reading materials before class, and select those that are highly compatible with the student's professional situation; In class, teachers pay attention to the teaching of reading strategies and guide students to use them, and let students consolidate their reading achievements in time after class in order to enable students to fully engage in every stage of the teaching, experiencing a complete teaching process before, during, and after class. This approach can alleviate students' anxiety, enhance their confidence in learning English, and simultaneously foster their core English competencies.

4. The Specific Application of Task-Oriented Teaching Model in College English Reading Classrooms at Vocational Colleges

The focal point of this lesson revolves around the theme of "Career", with the reading material exploring the question: "Is your job at risk of automation?" This topic aligns with the content covered in both the "Career Planning" and "Professional Spirit" sections of the Higher Vocational Education Program for English Majors (2021 Edition) and meets the requirements outlined in the Marine Engineering Talent Training Program for

marine engineers on ocean-going vessels, emphasizing the importance of professional competence and spirit. The three-dimensional teaching objectives of this lesson encompass knowledge, skills, and ideological goals. The knowledge objectives include students' mastery of target vocabulary related to the reading theme and proficiency in utilizing the SQ3R reading strategy. The skills objectives focus on students' ability to proficiently apply the SQ3R reading strategy to comprehend texts and efficiently extract information. The ideological goals aim to instill in students the ambitious ideal of becoming skilled craftsmen contributing to our great nation through their expertise and innovation, while recognizing the significance of self-management and career planning awareness. The emphasis of this lesson lies in enabling students to grasp the target vocabulary related to the reading theme and to master the SQ3R reading strategy. The challenge lies in cultivating students' ability to apply the SQ3R reading strategy proficiently and engage in effective reading. To achieve the teaching objectives and overcome the challenges, the teacher adopts a five-step teaching model based on constructivist learning principles, incorporating task-motivating, task-promoting, task-producing, task-evaluating, and task-expanding, taking into account the cognitive patterns and vocational competency requirements of higher vocational students. To start, during the pre-class task-motivating stage, the teacher will share videos related to the reading theme on the vocational education platform and provide reading materials, exercises, and a vocabulary bank. Students will familiarize themselves with the reading material in advance and complete the exercises. They will also practice reading aloud and study the target vocabulary to enhance classroom learning efficiency. During the in-class task-promoting stage, the teacher will proceed through several steps. First, the teacher will create a workplace scenario: Wang Lei, a marine engineering student, finds himself contemplating as he studies the segment on unmanned drone cabins for ships - is the job of a marine engineer truly at risk of being replaced by artificial intelligence? By setting up this workplace scenario, the teacher inspires students' interest in learning and prompts them to ponder: in the face of the

competition between humans and robots in the labor market, how should we, as future workers, respond? In the second step, students will watch a promotional video featuring Zhang Dongwei, an exemplary skilled worker, to learn about the spirit of craftsmanship and establish the ambitious ideal of becoming skilled craftsmen who excel in their craft and embrace innovation. The third step involves a review of the SQ3R reading strategy, with the teacher guiding students to work collaboratively in small groups and apply the strategy. Outstanding representatives from each group will present their findings in class. This step aims to provide a scaffolding framework, stimulate reading momentum, and empower students to produce meaningful outcomes. In the fourth step, the teacher will address common errors encountered during the self-directed learning stage, aiming to flip the pre-class tasks and overcome challenges associated with independent learning. During the task-promoting stage, the teacher's role as a scaffold becomes particularly evident. On one hand, based on a comprehensive understanding of the students' learning situation, the teacher needs to decide the degree of assistance to provide. According to sociocultural theory, the "who" and "how" of scaffolding should be tailored to correspond with the students' language proficiency. Offering excessive help can hinder the development of students' autonomy, while providing insufficient help may limit their learning efficiency. Therefore, the teacher should consciously reduce their scaffolding role gradually while simultaneously increasing students' sense of learning responsibility [7]. During the in-class task-producing stage, students work in groups and autonomously apply reading strategies to complete tasks, assessing their usage of these strategies. They employ a mind map to structure their articles, summarize the content, and present outstanding group reports in class. This comprehensive approach stimulates students, strengthens the effectiveness of their reading, and reinforces their reading achievements. In the task evaluation stage, a combination of teacher and student evaluations is utilized to construct a diverse assessment framework. This aims to provide timely feedback on students' learning outcomes in the reading segment and effectively enhance their

motivation. However, due to time constraints, the teacher may not be able to evaluate all students' output during the class. As a result, the evaluation of the output can be categorized into immediate and delayed assessments [8]. Lastly, during the task-expanding after class, students autonomously review the content they have learned to further consolidate their knowledge. They engage in self-checks across various aspects, including language knowledge, skill application, multicultural understanding, language thinking enhancement, and personal development goals. Through self-assessment, they evaluate their learning effects, make necessary adjustments and plans for their own learning, and achieve a refined level of self-directed learning. Simultaneously, the teacher publishes additional reading materials, audio, and video learning links on the vocational education platform to expand the depth and breadth of learning. This stimulates further contemplation among students, promotes the spirit of craftsmanship, and cultivates their awareness of career planning.

5. The Application Effect of Task-Oriented Teaching in College English Reading Classes at Vocational Colleges

After the class, data collected through the vocational education cloud platform demonstrate that students acknowledge the effectiveness of the five-step teaching model: task-motivating, task-promoting, task-producing, task-evaluating, and task-expanding. As a result, their motivation for independent learning has strengthened, and their ability to extract information from reading has improved. Furthermore, upon completion of this class, students have developed a deeper understanding of the spirit of craftsmanship, striving for excellence. They have also contemplated their future career choices, fully leveraging the educational function of the course. This integration of ideological education and English language teaching has been successfully achieved, effectively merging the two aspects into a cohesive whole.

6. Conclusion

The task-oriented teaching model aims to create a virtuous cycle of teaching that centers around task-producing as the objective, task-motivating as the guiding thread, task-

promoting as the main battleground, task-evaluating as the focal point, and task-expanding as the fueling station. By doing so, it achieves teaching goals, breaks through difficult points in teaching, and truly realizes an organic unity with teachers taking the lead and students as the main participants. However, due to variations in students' levels, some students may "exhibit a lack of engagement" during group activities. In the future, we will continue to refine our layered teaching design plans to provide more personalized learning experiences for each student.

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Research on the Effect of task-oriented Teaching Mode on the Improvement of English Core Competence of Higher Vocational Students: A case study of Marine Engineering of Hubei Communications Technical College

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