

Study on the Application of PBL in Senior High School English Reading Teaching to Cultivate the Intercultural Communicative Competence

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Abstract

The new curriculum standard requires the teacher to cultivate students' intercultural communicative competence and forming intercultural awareness in English teaching. English reading texts play an important role in English teaching, which contain multiple cultural knowledge. Different from the traditional English reading teaching which only focuses on cultivating students' language ability and improving students' scores, ignoring the development of intercultural communicative competence. Project-based learning can promote students' learning interests and effectively assist teachers in cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence by guiding the students to solve problems in reading teaching. By introducing intercultural communicative competence and project-based learning mode, this paper presents the connections between the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence and project-based learning mode in reading teaching, analyzes strategies for the application of project-based learning and teaching design, and explores how to cultivate intercultural communicative competence in senior high school English reading teaching based on project-based learning.

Keywords

The intercultural communicative competence, reading teaching in senior high school, project-based learning.

1. Introduction

The globalization has promoted the communication between China and other countries, promoting process of intercultural communication. Intercultural communication does not only rely on the fluent using of the foreign language but also the deep understanding of the background of the foreign culture and its rules in the language use and the custom. English as a widely used language in the world can be an effective tool for intercultural communication and understanding the cultures in English-speaking countries becomes more important. For English teaching, the educators are required to cultivate the students' intercultural communicative awareness and develop the competence. It is clearly pointed out in the new curriculum standards by the Ministry of Education in 2017 that students are able to understand the outstanding achievements of civilization in different countries and compare the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures as well as to develop the competence of intercultural communication after finishing the learning contents [1]. English reading teaching occupy a great of time in class and it plays an important role in English teaching in senior high school. It can develop students' competence of thinking and broaden students' visions about some knowledge through learning the reading text. Reading texts contain a wealth of language and cultural knowledge and teachers can sufficiently analyze the cultural background knowledge in different methods to help students understand and it can further improve students' intercultural communicative competence. In reading class, students can express their

thoughts according to the questions, which can develop their oral expression in English to form a fluent communication. And the cultural introduction before learning the reading text in the class can help students better understand the teaching contents and students are able to make a comparison between Chinese and English-speaking countries' cultural improve the intercultural communicative competence. The project-based learning (PBL) as an innovational learning and teaching model in English class can provide the guidance for teachers and students in reading class to develop the intercultural communicative competence. This paper adopts a theoretical description to demonstrate that what is intercultural communicative competence and its relation to PBL and how to cultivate the intercultural communicative competence of junior high school in English reading based on PBL.

2. The Element of the Intercultural Communicative Competence and Importance of Its Cultivation in English Teaching

2.1. The Element of the Intercultural Communicative Competence

Intercultural communication refers to the communication between people with different cultural backgrounds [2]. Different regions have different social development, so the cultures are totally not the same. In English teaching, the intercultural communicative competence is the students' abilities to understand the information in the text, process the detail information, integrate and extract textual and phonetic knowledge in the process of learning English. In this way, they can communicate in English in a fluent way and process the information in these materials skillfully. Coperias described in his paper that Byram pointed out in 1995 that intercultural communication competence contains five elements which are composed by knowledge, the ability to do works, individual attitudes and values, learning ability and the critical thinking about own and others' cultures to the elements [3]. The intercultural communicative competence is formed by three elements which include motivation, knowledge and skills [4]. In conclusion, knowledge about different cultures is vital for a good communication. Understanding customs, backgrounds and rules of communication in other countries can avoid some unnecessary cultural shock during the communication. In intercultural communication, students' attitudes about other cultures can directly influence the quality, effect and process. For other cultures which are totally different from own cultures, students are required to understand these cultures in the principle of respect and to compare Chinese cultures with foreign cultures to improve cultural confidence.

2.2. Importance of the Cultivation the Intercultural Communicative Competence in English Teaching

In the recent years, the new curriculum standard emphasizes the educators should focus more on the cultivation of students' intercultural communicative competence but most of teachers still pay more attentions on the test scores and ignoring the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence. Under the circumstances, students' intercultural communicative competence is extremely low. In previous teaching, the educational goal of the teaching in our country is to prepare for the examinations by pumping the knowledge to students to improve their reading, comprehension, writing abilities. However, the abilities of oral expression and the use of language are totally terrible and not to mention the understanding of the knowledge about the culture background. In the model of teaching, although students can master the language knowledge but the fluent use of English to have an intercultural communication are still needed to be improved.

Firstly, cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence aims to help them deeply understand the logical thinking of English. When students learn to use English thinking to learn English, they can further improve their cognition of English. The teacher cultivates students'

intercultural communicative competence in English teaching, so that students can have a deeper understanding of different languages and cultures. In this process, it can make the students interested in the content in class and finally improve the enthusiasm of students to learn English. Secondly, at present, there is a trend of integration in the world economy and exchanges between countries are gradually frequent. With the increasing of the cultural exchanges between countries, it is necessary to cultivate intercultural communicative competence in order to communicate without difficulty. Learning English is not only to master the knowledge of language but to use it expertly as a communicative tool. In order to have an efficiently communication with people from different cultures, the learners are required to understand the cultural background of English-speaking countries and form an intercultural communicative awareness. The cultivation of intercultural communicative competence is important in English learning. According to Ji, Bennett and Alfen pointed out in 1999 that intercultural communicative competence contains the competence of transcend national centralism thoughts, being good at appreciating other cultures, behaving appropriately in one or more cultural contexts [5]. Students can learn how to speak like a native speaker and further to enhance the language skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the intercultural communication, students can not only know about the cultures from English-speaking countries but also spread Chinese culture to the world. During the process, students can understand Chinese cultures more to improve the patriotism. Except for learning the English language knowledge, students are required to understand the cultural connotation in English. And students can have an efficiently and moderately communication with people from English-speaking countries.

3. The Connotation of PBL in Senior High School Reading Teaching and the Cultivation of Intercultural Communicative Competence

3.1. The Definition of PBL

Different Scholars give different definition of PBL. Buck Institute for Education defined PBL as a process of exploring the complex and realistic problems as well as a set of systematic learning method which students can master the knowledge and skills by solving the problems in a project, implementing and planning the object of the project, presenting the work and discussing the result [6]. However, Ke pointed out that PBL is a teaching method in which students as the center of teaching are able to finish the project by group working to build the knowledge and enhance the competence in a real situation [7]. PBL is a combinational model of teaching and learning. Teachers assign the authentic questions to the students and take them as the main body. Students acquire knowledge and improve their ability through active exploration, searching for information, determination of goals, formulation of plans and exchange of result. It stresses the center status of students and the guiding role of teachers [8]. These can be concluded that the implementation of PBL needs the cooperation of teachers and students. On the one hand, the teacher in PBL is the designer for the project and guide students to finish their work. On the other hand, students can finish the project by thinking independently. PBL can be divided into five steps. The first is the determination of project. The second is the planning of the project. The third one is the implementation and the fourth one is the presentation. And the final step is the assessment from teachers and other students. PBL is gradually entering the English teaching classroom. In this method, the teacher can use and optimize efficiently the resource in learning to promote and develop students' abilities.

3.2. The Importance of PBL in the Cultivation of Intercultural Communicative Competence

In Project-based learning, students plan their project through searching for information and deeply understand the materials. In the process of project, students are able to develop some dialectical thinking and critical thinking. During this process, students can improve the language skills and the ability to use knowledge. Group-working is an essential part in PBL which can enhance the cooperative and communicative competence. Cultivating the intercultural communicative competence can be maximized in PBL. Firstly, through finishing the project with an intercultural theme, students can gradually understand the background information from a sort of materials and widen the horizon of world cultures which are different from Chinese culture, forming an intercultural awareness to view the other cultures in an objective way. Secondly, PBL can be conducive to improve the knowledge of the language and language skills which is an indispensable skill for intercultural communication because the planning and finishing of project require students' knowledge and practical ability in language. Thirdly, the group cooperation is required in PBL. In some international schools, Chinese students have the opportunity to work with foreign students to finish a project. Students can engage in realistic intercultural communication, developing the intercultural communicative competence. Fourthly, PBL as an innovational model can promote students' interests in interculture and urge them more actively participate in the project to develop their competence of intercultural communication. Finally, project-based learning aims to solve the problem. Students are able to develop their abilities to solve problems in a cultural theme and to learn to respect different cultures in face of intercultural challenges. To be concluded, PBL different from the traditional teaching and learning methods can improve the all-around development of intercultural communicative competence.

3.3. The Significance of PBL in Senior High School Reading Teaching

Project-based learning is student-centered and oriented to real problems, advocating "learning by doing" [9]. PBL in English teaching can be adopted by several ways. The teacher who adopts PBL can develop students' ability and improve their learning by guiding them to explore, finish the work, group work, experience in real situation and summarize the knowledge. In the process of reading teaching in senior high school, the teacher aims to cultivate students' excellent reading ability. The teacher should play the role of a guide and an organizer to help students solve the problems in the project and complete the project. And the teacher should also be an evaluator to encourage students to reflect in the process of presentation. Different from these traditional learning models, the application of PBL in reading teaching is able to change the student's attitude to learning English from the passive model to the positive model. Li have concluded that compared with traditional teaching method, the project-based learning method can more effectively stimulate students' reading motivation and improve students' reading interest [10]. In the process of learning English reading based on PBL, students can benefit from the direct experience in doing project and gain the indirect experience from the group presentations and the assessment. PBL can drive students' thinking and exploration based on the meaningful questions, which can fully awaken students' experience and cognition. Students need to complete the project through group working, information collecting, and integration of the information. Li summarized that due to the interdisciplinary characteristic, PBL can provide students with multiple channels for searching information in the process of the project, which can enrich the reading quantity and help to have access to the latest reading materials [11]. Furthermore, PBL is a model suitable for the psychological development and personal features of senior high students, which can be efficient to develop students thinking ability in reading. In conclusion, PBL has a unique advantage in English reading teaching

because it promotes students' learning in an active way and students can develop the reading ability in this model.

3.4. Rules of PBL in Senior High School Reading Teaching to Cultivate the Intercultural Communicative Competence

PBL can play a vital role in senior high school reading teaching to cultivate the intercultural communicative competence based on its innovational model. The change of students' attitudes to learning English reading can improve the learning effect. In the application of PBL, there are five rules to be emphasized. First, when planning the general direction of a project for students, the teacher needs to determine the key point in the cultural knowledge background and language skills. In English reading teaching, the cultural content in the reading text is taken as the key knowledge module and the cultivation of cultural knowledge and language ability is carried out according to the current teaching situation. Different project themes need to be designed according to the ability of students in different learning stages. Secondly, in project-based learning, challenging questions need to be put forward. Each step in the project should have learning significance to cultivate students' intercultural communicative competence. Therefore, the design of project question needs to be full of exploratory and innovation. And the teacher can give guidance for students to understand the purpose of PBL and master the correct learning method. Thirdly, the teacher should pay attention to the authenticity and feasibility of the project in PBL. It requires the teacher to determine the main direction of PBL and pay attention to whether students can combine with reality to cultivate their intercultural communicative competence. Fourthly, the teacher should respect the subjectivity of students in PBL. PBL requires students to make their own choices and plans. The teacher play a guiding role in the process and should not interfere with students' plan. Students understand actively the intercultural knowledge to improve the deeper understanding of cultural background. Fifthly, teacher need to guide students to solve problems and give the assessment to guide students think in a positive way and reflect. For the deficiencies in the project, teacher can ask students to modify and improve to establish the cultivation of the intercultural communicative competence.

4. The Guiding Strategies and Design of the Application in Senior High School English Reading Teaching to Cultivate the Intercultural Communicative Competence

4.1. The Guiding Strategies of Cultivation of the Intercultural Communicative Competence in English Reading Teaching in Senior High School Based on PBL

Firstly, in the process of PBL, the teacher gives students more chances to join in the project by themselves and create a great learning atmosphere. Although PBL emphasizes the student-centered learning, the teacher should give students some guidance if necessary. Different from the traditional teaching method, PBL needs the students' active participations and form an active learning awareness. Therefore, the teacher should be a good guider in students' learning to create a sound learning atmosphere where students can have a real experience in the project. Secondly, the teacher needs to join in students' group working to timely understand students' project design intention and direction and guide the group students who deviate from the theme to find the right project design direction. In project-based learning, the teacher gives timely suggestions to help students improve their learning enthusiasm. Thirdly, after the presentation session, the teacher needs to make a correct assessment and guide students to understand their project completion correctly. A variety of assessment can be adopted to increase the multiplicity. At the same time, it is necessary to avoid hurting students' self-esteem

and self-confidence. The teacher should not only put forward opinions on students' shortcomings in the project but also encourage students' learning process and encourage students to be more active in the next learning. According to Jiang, the method of comparative analysis of culture and introduction of culture are two main ways to cultivate students' intercultural communicative competence in English reading teaching [12]. In the model of PBL, teacher can extract the cultural elements in the reading text and integrate these elements into the projects of different themes. For example, a reading text with a theme of the new year in western countries. Teachers can organize students to carry out the project with a theme on the comparison of cultural differences between Chinese and western new year, guiding them to have a deep understanding of the new year in different countries from multiple perspectives and understand the Chinese profound traditional culture through the comparison, so as to enhance students' cultural confidence and national pride. Students can present their project in different forms, such as playing a video, having a speech, role play and so on. In this process, students' intercultural communicative competence can be improved by the state of deep intercultural experience. Students can reflect from the process and outcome of the project to form a multicultural perspective. In the process of doing the project, students will form new understanding about the other culture through the information collecting and. And they will learn to understanding one thing from multiple perspectives and being tolerant of other cultures.

4.2. The Design of the Application of PBL in Senior High School English Reading Teaching to Cultivate the Intercultural

Language competence, thinking competence and communicative competence can be developed in the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence. The process of teaching English reading are divided into several steps based on PBL to develop students' intercultural communicative competence. Qiu divided the process into five steps, such as proposing projects, formulating project, the implementation of project, the project presentation and the assessment of project [12]. The following teaching design example focus on High School Hints, the reading text in Unit 1 A New Start on high school textbook Book 1 of New Standard English approved in 2019 and published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, to demonstrate how to cultivate the intercultural communicative competence in English reading teaching based on PBL.

Step1: Proposing the project

Proposing the project is a process of the determination of the teaching goals. In this process, teachers are required to put up some further discussing questions which are suitable for students' learning levels and cognitive abilities, making clearly the object of the project. These questions with a student-centered principle should be moderately difficult, which are beneficial to students to carry out independent learning. Teachers should propose with elements from real life to promote students' interests in exploration. For example, the reading text High School Hints' in Unit 1 A New Strat on the Book 1 takes the life and learning in the high school as the topic, giving some advices for freshmen about the challenges in the high school from the perspective of a graduate. The thematic context is about people and themselves, mainly focusing on high school life and learning. This reading materials are interesting because it has a close relation with senior high students. Therefore, it can greatly mobilize the enthusiasm of students to complete the project in the teaching process. By learning the knowledge of the unit, especially the reading text, students are able to take the advices given in the text and adapt to the high school life as soon as possible. They can also compare the similarities and differences between Chinese and American students' high school life by concluding their own life and the American students' life described in the text, and broaden their visions to form intercultural awareness. In this step, the teacher can put up with some challenging questions to guide

students to think deeply and critically. And these questions are designed to cultivate students' intercultural communicative competence, which can deepen students' cultural knowledge about the similarities and differences between Chinese and American students' high school life. According to the theme of the reading text, the teacher can ask the following questions:

What was your first impression about your senior high school life?

Have you ever met some challenges when you first came into the senior high school?

How did you solve or deal with the challenge you met?

Do you know the senior high school life of American students?

What are the similarities and differences between the senior high school life of Chinese and American students?

Which one life do you prefer? And why?

All of these questions provide thinking ideas for students to determine their project.

Step2: formulating the project

Formulating the project means to make a plan for teaching. Teachers can divide students into several groups according to their ability level, which indicates that each group is composed by students with different ability levels. And then the teacher asks students to read the text and think about these questions asked by the teacher. The teacher can guide them to solve these questions one by one. For example, according to What was your first impression about your senior high school life? have you ever met some challenges when you first came into the senior high school, students can answer these two questions in their own experience, which can increase the interests. About the question like, do you know the senior high school life of American students? Students can get the information by reading the text and search for more details online to solve the problem, which can urge students to understand the culture in American high school and enrich their knowledge. The comparison between Chinese and American high school students needs the group students to think and conclude and at this process they can form a multiple perspective to think the other countries educational culture and learn to respect the culture different from their own.

After understanding these questions clearly, students can have a specific object of the project. According to the content of reading text, teacher can ask students to present the similarities and difference between the senior high school life of Chinese and American students by the different form. Before the students design their projects, the teacher should give an example of the project to help students understand the rule of PBL. The teacher can present a poster about the comparison of the Chinese and American senior high school students' life. When students are reading text, they can think about these questions and think carefully how to design the project base on these questions. Students first extract the information form the text and figure out what is Lisa's challenges as a freshman and her ways to solve them and try to figure out the challenges and solutions in senior high school according their own experience. And finally, students can compare the similarities and differences between Chinese and American senior high school students' life. But the materials in the reading text are not enough to support students' projects. Each group are asked to collect more information about Chinese and American students' information in senior high school to finish their project by different ways, such as searching on the internet, interviewing other freshmen and doing a questionnaire. In this process, the teacher should arrange the time in doing each part of the project in a appropriate way. Otherwise, the teacher should help every group to divide the work in the project. Collecting the information, analyzing the data, making up the information and discussing are required to be assigned to each group member. Every group's project is different and it aims to develop students' abilities form multiple aspects. In this process of collecting information, students are able to understand the knowledge about the senior high school life of American

students to form a right emotional attitudes and valuation about the learning life in the other culture.

Step3: Implementation of the project

Implementation of the project is the implementation of teaching plans. The brainstorming is a common way used in this part. Students need to use their imagination to complete the project. In this process, students can actively explore the questions in this project. There are two parts in the exploration of this project. One part is the collection of information and the other one is the information integration, making the project by a form. Collecting all kinds of materials and pictures and analyzing the information collected, each group are able to find out how the life of American senior high school students look like and conclude the similarities and differences between the senior high school life of Chinese students and American students. In these processes, students are able to have a deep understanding of the different senior high school life and enhance their language ability to express their opinions in English, which extremely improve the intercultural communicative competence. The deep understanding of the similarities and differences between American and Chinese senior high school students can help students to communicate with the American student more easily and help them to understand the culture background in American students' learning. Every student in each group can improve their ability through the process of implementation. For example, some students who have no idea about the American senior high school students' life will broaden their visions about the different life environment in different cultures. And students who have ever know the American students' senior high school life will further to compare the similarities and differences in the senior high school life of Chinese and American students to form a respect thinking for the different culture and to develop their intercultural communicative competence.

Step4: The Project Presentation

The presentation of the project actually is the students' learning outcomes. The teacher should make a time management to determine the length of presentation time. the forms of presentation can be different and multiple. Students can present their project by a poster, a guide, a video, a performance, a role play and so on. The flexibility of the presentation form of the project can develop students' imaginations and maximize their self-thinking ability. Different presentation can convey different intercultural communicative perspectives, which can constantly update students' understanding of the intercultural knowledge. In this process, each group present their project according to the information they collected in some way, which can further to enrich the intercultural knowledge from different presentations. In the process of presentation, the teacher should make sure that every group member has the opportunity to express their thoughts in English and it can improve their language skills in communication, enhancing their confidences. The teacher can ask some questions based on their presentation to help them clear thoughts, like what do you learn from the project and what can you know something about the intercultural communication from the project. Students can comment the completion of other groups' project to reflect on their own project. The purpose of the presentation of the project is not to compare which groups' work are better, but to give opportunities for students to communicate and discuss, so that students' intercultural communicative awareness and thinking can be further improved and the cultivation of the students' intercultural communicative competence can be developed.

Step5: The Assessment of the project

Evaluating the outcome of the project is the judgement of learning effect. Through the presentation of the project, the teacher can give the assessment of the project from each group and have an understanding about their learning effect to judge whether the project promotes the intercultural communicative competence. In the project-based learning, students do their project with a theme of comparison of the similarities and differences between Chinese and

American high school students and they are required to present in a form. And reflection form the assessment can help the teacher to improve their teaching methods and give students some suggestion to do the project better next time. The assessment of the project is an important index to evaluate students' learning results. In this process, multiple ways of assessment can be used, such as the teacher's assessment, the student's assessment and the student's self-assessment. In the project-based learning with a theme of comparison of learning and lifestyles between Chinese and American high school students, teacher can ask students to have a self-assessment first of their performance and talk about their feelings in the whole project-based learning. The teacher then evaluates the whole project activity and gives the suggestions to the students. Teachers should formulate reasonable and clear assessment index, giving full play to the role of the teaching assessment in promoting teaching and achieving the integration of teaching, learning and assessment, which can contribute to the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence. And the teacher can evaluate the group from the aspects of project completion, operation process, language expression abilities and so on. Figure 1 is an assessment table to help the teacher to evaluate the students' performance. And students also can give an assessment by the table to form a comprehensive evaluation. At the end, the teacher can have a conclusion about the project which students present in the class and repeat each knowledge point to help students further strengthen the intercultural knowledge learning.

| Items | Teacher's assessment | Students' assessment | Self-assessment |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| The project completion | | | |
| process | | | |
| Language expression | | | |

Figure 1: An assessment table

5. Conclusion

Project-based learning, as an innovative teaching and learning model, can play an active role in English reading class in senior high school. However, when the teacher adopts the method of project-based learning, they should make it suitable for the cognitive development of students and interesting for high school students. And the teaching materials should be complete, which means the materials can covers all cultural elements. Moreover, the teacher should have a high quality of cultural background knowledge and the intercultural communicative competence so as to give a real help and guidance to students in project-based learning. In senior high school English reading class, PBL can greatly mobilize students' learning enthusiasm to explore the intercultural knowledge and let students take the initiative to cultivate their intercultural communicative competence by solving practical problems. The cultural elements in the reading text are explored in specific forms from these specific questions so as to deepen the students' cultural understanding of the theme in the reading text and enhance the awareness of intercultural communication. In project-based learning, understanding cultural background knowledge is important. The teacher can guide students to explore and collect cultural background knowledge for communication and exchange, which is conducive to expanding cultural knowledge, cultivating cultural awareness, and finally developing students' knowledge and communicative competence in a intercultural environment. In a conclusion, PBL is of great significance and value to the cultivation of the intercultural communicative competence in senior high school English reading teaching.

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