The Empirical Study of the Task-based Approach in the Foreign Trade Correspondence and Documents Teaching

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Abstract

The foreign trade correspondence and documents are a core skill course in business English. The teaching content mainly includes the writing of all kinds of correspondence in the import and export trade and the production of the foreign trade documents. This requires the students to be familiar with the process of import and export trade, and master certain English writing skills and foreign trade terminology, which can make the students handle all kinds of letters and documents well. Based on task-based language teaching theory, this paper constructs the task-based teaching mode of foreign trade correspondence and documents through the classroom observation, questionnaire survey and interviews to investigate the task-based approachin foreign trade correspondence and documents of the course implementing effect, teacher's role and the factors affecting task-based teaching effect.

Keywords

Task-based Teaching Method; Foreign Trade Correspondence and Documents; Teacher's Role.

1. Introduction

The foreign trade correspondence and documents are a core skill course in business English. The teaching content mainly includes the writing of all kinds of correspondence in the import and export trade and the production of the foreign trade documents. This requires the students to be familiar with the process of import and export trade, and master certain English writing skills and foreign trade terminology, which can make the students handle all kinds of letters and documents well. As a practical course, teachers should pay more attention to training students' practical skills in teaching. The author applies task-based approach in foreign trade correspondence and documents of the course teaching, according to the process of import and export trade, simulate real business situation design business correspondence and documents writing task, let the student through independent to complete the task master foreign trade knowledge and writing skills, can improve their professional quality and professional. At the end of the course, the author evaluated its effect through classroom observation, questionnaire survey and interview, in order to provide reference for the teaching of foreign trade correspondence and documents.

2. The Task-based Approach

The task-based approach is a learner-centered approach to teaching. It emerged in the 1980s and has been widely used in language teaching. The task-based approach aims to make students master the knowledge of language and improve their ability to use the language in the process of completing tasks. Many foreign scholars and linguists such as Duff P., Long, Michael h. and Crookes, Graham, Foster and Skehand, have studied the task-type teaching method in many aspects. Willis, J. (1999) put forward three steps to implement the task-based approach: pre-task, task-cycle, and post-task. Feez (1998) pointed out that the learner is in the process of participating in activities and completing tasks, and grasps the language through communication and purposeful interaction. The empirical study of Suzuki & Collins (2007) shows that learners prefer task-oriented teaching methods compared

with traditional teaching methods. In the recent years, more and more articles have been written about task-based teaching methods, and many teachers have introduced task-based teaching methods into the practice of language teaching. Guo Naizhao (2011) and Ma Ping (2011) discussed the use of task-based teaching methods in basic English teaching in college English and English majors. Their results show that task-based teaching is a more effective teaching method than traditional teaching methods in English teaching, which helps teachers to carry out teaching activities, improve the teaching effect, stimulate students' learning interest and enthusiasm, and improve their comprehensive ability to use English.

3. The Research and Design of the Task‑based Approach of the Foreign Trade Correspondence and Documents

3.1 The Research Purpose

In this study, the task type teaching method is applied to the teaching of the foreign trade correspondence and documents, and the task teaching mode of foreign trade correspondence and documents is explored, and its actual effect is evaluated in order to accumulate the experience and lesson and then to provide reference for the teaching of foreign trade correspondence and documents.

3.2 The Research Questions

This study discusses three problems in detail: the first one is the task-based approach in foreign trade correspondence and documents of the course implementing effect, the second is the teachers' role positioning and the third is the factors affecting task-based teaching effect.

3.3 The Research Objects

There are 339 students in the English major of the department of foreign languages in the department of foreign languages of Guangxi Talent International College , with a total of 339 students, of which there are 183 students in class 12, and 156 in class 13, 6 classes.

3.4 The Research Method

(1) The Classroom Observation

Through the classroom observation, the completion situation of the correspondence writing and document production tasks by the study objected is studied.

(2) The Questionnaire Survey

The second and third part of the questionnaire adopts Likert scale. Each question is provided with "very disagreeing", "disagree", "general", "agree", "agree" and "very agree" with five choices, one, two, three, four and five. After collecting data, the average score and standard deviation were calculated. The average score of 3 is divided into three points, which indicates that the research object has a general identification with this option, and below 3 indicates that the research object is not quite sure of the choice. After completing all the teaching tasks of the course, the teacher distributed questionnaires to the subjects in class.

(4) The Interview

30 students were selected from the grade 13 to learn about the actual situation of tasks and the implementation effect of task-based teaching methods in order to provide qualitative data for research.

4. The Implementation of Task‑based Approach

4.1 The Task Design

According to the process of import and export trade, the teacher simulates the real business situation of foreign trade, and designs correspondence and documents, which specifically includes establishing business relations, inquiry, offer and counter-offer, placing the orders, making the sales contracts and the sales confirmation, handling the disputes, filling in the letters of credit, commercial invoice and the packing list, etc.

4.2 The Implementation Process of Task-based Approach

The implementation process of the task in this study is mainly based on the three main stages of task-oriented teaching in Ellis (2006), namely pre-task, during task execution, and post-task.

5.   The Research Results and Discussions

5.1 The Classroom Observation Results

The results of the classroom observation are as follows: 1. After the assignment, students are generally more proactive and ask teachers for help in time. 2. There is more interaction between students and teachers. After completing the task on their own, most students can find and perfect the deficiencies by discussing with the group members and teachers. Few students seldom communicate with teachers on task completion. 3. The students can apply the knowledge that they have learned in the previous stage to the task. The task is better completed.

5.2 The Analysis Questionnaire Survey Results

(1) The Design of the Tasks

The design of learning task is the core of task-based teaching. The design of learning tasks should take into account the needs of learners, and also be challenging to stimulate students' achievement motivation, while taking into account the students' general English level and knowledge level. In this study there are 339 experimenters, about 94% of the students thought the task of writing and making orders set up the teacher meets their English level and the level of foreign trade knowledge, and about 95% of the students said the task set by the teacher conforms to the actual working situation and actual work demand of the import and export trade. The above two survey results indicate that the design of the task is more reasonable, which ensures the implementation effect of the task-oriented teaching method to a certain extent.

Effect of the task-based teaching method

In terms of the effectiveness of the task-based approach, more than 95.5 percent of the students admitted that it was effective to carry out the task-based teaching methods in the teaching of foreign trade correspondence and documents. The results of the survey show that, in improving English writing skills, professional language sensitivity and vocabulary, English grammar, English comprehensive application ability, foreign trade knowledge level, team spirit and learning interest, etc., the task-based teaching methods have more positive effects, such as table 1.

Table 1 Effect of the Task-based Teaching Method

Effect	Average score	Standard deviation	Very disagree(1)		Disagree (2)		Generally (3)		Agree(4)		Very Agree(5)	
			Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
An effective teaching method	4.39	0.63%	2	0.59%	2	0.59%	11	3.24%	171	50.44%	153	45.13%
Improve your English writing skills	3.90	0.73%	3	0.88%	6	1.77%	72	21.20%	198	58.41%	60	17.70%
Improve terminology sensitivity and vocabulary	4.02	0.69%	1	0.29%	3	0.88%	68	20.05%	192	56.64%	75	22.12%
Improve English grammar	3.79	0.75%	3	0.88%	5	1.47%	103	30.38%	177	52.21%	51	15.04%
Improve the comprehensive English application ability	4.00	0.63%	2	0.59%	1	0.29%	51	15.04%	225	66.37%	60	17.70%
Improve the knowledge level of foreign trade	4.24	0.55%	0	0	3	0.88%	14	41.30%	231	68.14%	93	27.43%
Cultivate team spirit	4.04	0.78%	5	1.47%	4	1.18%	53	15.63%	186	54.87%	91	26.84%
Improve your learning interest and initiative	4.11	0.64%	1	0.29%	1	0.29%	41	12.68%	204	60.18%	90	26.55%

(3) The Role Positioning of the Teachers

The task-based approach is a learner-centered teaching method. In the process of task implementation, the learners need to complete the tasks assigned by the teachers. The survey results show that the role of teachers is still very important, mainly including: (1) to make the reasonable design of tasks and sufficient explanation before the task. (2) To provide necessary guidance during the mission

implementation phase to answer students' questions. (3) To evaluate task completion status in a timely manner and provide the suggestions for improvement.

Table 2 The Role Positioning of the Teachers

Teacher's role	Average score	Standard deviation	Very disagree(1)		Disagree (2)		Generally (3)		Agree(4)		Very Agree(5)	
			Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Before the task is carried out, the teacher should set up and fully explain the tasks	4.44	0.58	0	0	0	0	15	4.42%	160	47.2%	164	48.38%
In the mission implementation, the teacher should provide necessary guidance to answer students' questions	4.66	0.51	1	0.29%	0	0	0	0	109	32.15%	229	67.55%
After the task is completed, the teacher should timely evaluate and provide the suggestions	4.67	0.52	1	0.29%	0	0	2	0.59%	104	30.68%	232	68.44%

(4) The Factors Influencing the Implementation of Tasks

In terms of the impact factors of mission execution, this study mainly investigates five aspects, including whether the task design meets the actual needs of relevant work, whether the task design conforms to the learner's English proficiency and foreign trade knowledge level, whether the teacher fully explain the task before the task, whether the teachers provide necessary guidance during task execution, and whether the teachers timely evaluate and respond to task completion. The specific findings are shown in table 3.

Table 3 The Factors Influencing the Implementation of Tasks

The Factors Influencing the Implementation of Tasks	Frequency	Percent
Whether the task design conforms to the learner's English proficiency and foreign trade knowledge level	228	67.26%
Whether the teacher fully explain the task before the task	269	79.35%
Whether the teachers provide necessary guidance during task execution	271	79.94%
Whether the teachers timely evaluate and respond to task completion	233	68.73%

The data of table 3 shows that whether the teachers adequately explain tasks and whether the teachers provide the guidance and suggestion can have a great impact on the enthusiasm of the learners to perform tasks. Therefore, to enable the students to carry out the tasks actively, the teachers need to set up the tasks reasonably and fully explain relevant knowledge points to meet the learning needs of learners. When the students perform tasks, they should provide appropriate guidance, answer students' questions, and guide students to review and discuss in groups. The timely feedback and suggestion for improvement should be provided upon the completion of the task.

6.   The Interview

After the course, the researchers took 30 students from the six classes in grade 13. Five experimenters in each class were interviewed for unstructured interviews to understand the actual situation of tasks and the effect of task-based teaching methods. On the whole, students have been given a more positive evaluation of the task-based teaching method. At the same time, for the role positioning of the teachers, the specific suggestions also is put forward, including that the teachers explain in detail the relevant knowledge in the pre-mission stage, the teachers provide the guide during the mission and provide the feedback after the task is completed.

7. Conclusion

In this study, according to the business process of import and export trade, the teachers have designed more specific and operable practical tasks, simulated real foreign trade business situations, and designed more specific and operable practical tasks to create more practical opportunities for students, which makes the students master language knowledge and business knowledge in the process of completing tasks, improve their practical skills and independent learning ability. By integrating teaching objectives into learning tasks, students are guided to complete their tasks independently, the teacher is transformed by the teaching of knowledge into the promoter of learning and the student is transformed from the passive receiver of knowledge into the active agent of the task, which also helps to improve the teaching effect and stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm. Of course, in order to achieve the desired effect, it is necessary to set up the teacher's reasonable setting of the task and carefully guide the students.

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