Practice and Reflection of English Major Courses under the Background of Teacher Certification Examination—A Case Study of English Teaching Methodology

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Abstract: *In the context of the national examination for teacher certification, curriculum reform of English majors in particular have raised concerns. The course of English Teaching Methodology, as one of the core courses for English major, has a key role to play in its practice and reflection for improving the quality of teaching. This study examines the English Teaching Method course in detail, analyzing the particular strategies employed in the design of the course content, the teaching methods and practices used, and the processes of reflection and improvement associated with the course. It is hoped that this study will provide some practical experience for the reform and some ideas for reference in other English major courses.*

Keywords: English Teaching Methodology, Teacher certification, English competency.

1. Introduction

In recent years, local colleges and universities have undergone a gradual transformation into application-oriented undergraduate colleges and universities. This shift has led to an increased emphasis on courses that are both practical and vocationally oriented, ensuring that students receive a well-rounded education that balances theoretical knowledge with practical skills. Currently, most of the college students are eager to get certificates, which on one hand can enrich their study life and add points to their resumes; on the other hand, it can also pave the way for their future career and get the qualification of engaging in related professions. As English major, in addition to the professional English level certificate, for these students, the teacher's qualification certificate, as a national unified examination, as well as a vocational skills certificate, naturally become their first choice.

The English Teaching Methodology course occupies a distinctive position in the field of English language teaching, particularly in primary and secondary schools. It is a course that has a proven track record of enhancing the teaching abilities of its participants and promoting teacher development. The course serves as the primary vehicle for the cultivation of proficient English educators at the primary and secondary levels, as well as a pivotal avenue for the advancement of pedagogical expertise among those engaged in the teaching of English.

From the perspective of those undertaking the written examination for certification as a teacher, the content of the third examination subject, English subject knowledge and teaching ability, exhibits some degree of overlap with the content of the English teaching methodology course. Accordingly, this study employs the English Teaching Methodology course offered to English majors as a case study, with the objective of analyzing the integration and optimization of the course content through the teaching practice conducted during the current semester. This approach is intended to address the imbalance between theoretical and practical aspects of the course, and to improve the quality of teaching.

2. Relevant Theories

2.1 Overview of the National Examination for Teacher Certification

The current reform of the teacher certification examination system represents a pivotal moment in the professionalization of teachers in China. As indicated in the notice released by the General Office of China's Ministry of Education in 2013, the implementation of a national unified examination system for teacher qualification certificates is imminent. This system will require both teacher-training students and non – teacher - training students to pass the teacher qualification examination, commencing in 2015. This will necessitate the possession of subject teaching ability, a grasp of the subject or area of specialization to be taught, an understanding of the fundamental principles and techniques of instructional design, instructional implementation and instructional evaluation, and the capacity to apply them correctly in instructional practice. Furthermore, a system of periodic registration must be implemented.

According to the national examination syllabus for teacher certification issued by the Department of Teacher Education of the Ministry of Education, the examination consists of two parts: written examination and interview, in which the written examination subjects are comprehensive quality, educational knowledge and competence, and subject knowledge and teaching ability. Educational knowledge and ability requires students to master the basic knowledge and theories of education, teaching and psychology to solve practical teaching problems; subject knowledge and teaching ability requires students to have specialized knowledge of the subject and subject teaching knowledge and ability. Interviews are structured and conducted in the form of trial lectures, which test students' practical teaching abilities in multiple

dimensions.

Therefore, such relevant pedagogy courses need to be combined with the actual teaching situation in primary and secondary schools and the content of the national examination, and the teaching content should emphasize both contemporaneity and practicability, focusing on the cultivation of students' theoretical literacy in education and teaching as well as their practical abilities.

2.2 Theories of English Language Teaching

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the basic theories and methods of English teaching, it is necessary to explore the practice and reflection of the course content of English Teaching Methodology. Among the most significant of these are task-based teaching and contextual teaching, which are widely used in English language teaching and have a considerable impact on the direction of such practice.

Task-based language teaching is a method of instruction that is centered on the completion of language tasks with practical significance, with an emphasis on the acquisition of language knowledge and skills by learners. In task-based teaching, educators devise a series of tasks aligned with the teaching objectives and content, and require learners to utilize the language competencies they have acquired to communicate throughout the completion of the tasks, thereby facilitating the enhancement of their language abilities. This pedagogical approach has the potential to stimulate learners' interest and enthusiasm for the subject matter, while simultaneously enhancing their ability to use language in authentic contexts. The introduction of task-based language teaching in the English Teaching Methodology course enables students to gain a deeper understanding of the practical aspects of language teaching and to enhance their ability to apply this knowledge in the classroom.

In contrast, contextual teaching is a method that focuses on language teaching in real or simulated situations. The approach emphasizes the combination of language learning and real-life situations, enabling learners to perceive, understand and use language in concrete contexts. Contextual teaching facilitates the cultivation of learners' contextual awareness and communicative competence, thereby enabling them to utilize the language they have acquired with ease when confronted with authentic communicative scenarios. Integrating the principles of contextual teaching into the curriculum of English Teaching Methodology can assist students in recognizing the practicality and relevance of language instruction, thereby enhancing their capacity for designing effective pedagogical approaches.

The theory of English language teaching also encompasses a multitude of additional pedagogical approaches and techniques, including cooperative learning and independent learning. Each of these methods has its own distinctive characteristics, but they are all grounded in a learner-centred approach that acknowledges and responds to the individual differences and learning needs of each learner. In the teaching practice of the English Teaching Methodology course, educators should adopt a flexible approach to selecting appropriate teaching methods and strategies, aligning them with the specific circumstances of students and the desired learning outcomes. This allows for the most effective and impact teaching to be achieved. Concurrently, educators must engage in continuous reflection and improvement of their pedagogical approaches to ensure alignment with evolving educational contexts and learner needs.

2.3 Theories of Course Evaluation

In actual practice, the evaluation of courses must be conducted throughout the course of the entire teaching process. Pre-course evaluation enables teachers to gain insight into their students' learning requirements and existing knowledge, thereby informing the design of the teaching and learning process. In-course evaluation allows for the monitoring of students' learning progress and the collection of real-time feedback, which can then be used by teachers to adapt their teaching strategies in a timely manner. Post-course evaluation provides a comprehensive summary and reflection on the entire teaching process, offering teachers valuable insights and experiences that can inform future improvements in teaching practice. Such comprehensive evaluation enables educators to gain insight into students' learning processes in a timely manner, facilitating the continuous refinement of course content and pedagogical approaches to enhance the quality of instruction.

It is of particular importance to maintain objectivity and efficacy in the evaluation of the English Teaching Methods course. In order to ensure the objectivity of the evaluation process, it is essential to avoid the potential influence of subjective bias and human factors, thereby guaranteeing the fairness and accuracy of the evaluation outcomes. Validity necessitates that the evaluation accurately reflect the course's teaching efficacy, thereby offering invaluable guidance for pedagogical enhancement. In order to achieve these two goals, a variety of evaluation tools and methods may be employed, including questionnaires, classroom observation, and analysis of students' work, in order to collect comprehensive and objective evaluation data.

The evaluation of the English Teaching Methodology course is of great consequence. By employing a scientific evaluation system and practical application, issues in teaching can be identified in a timely manner, lessons can be learned, and the course content and teaching methods can be optimized continuously. This will lead to an improvement in the quality of English major courses and the cultivation of English teachers who are well-suited to the needs of society.

3. Analysis of the English Teaching Methodology

3.1 Course Objectives and Orientation

This course is centered on the fundamental aspects of curriculum, teaching, and textbook research. Its objective is to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the primary issues currently facing China's secondary school English curriculum. The course strives to equip students with the essential theoretical tools and practical methods required to become effective contributors to the ongoing reform of secondary school English teaching in China. The course

places an emphasis on theoretical leadership, with the objective of enhancing the capacity for effective teaching design through a combination of theoretical and practical approaches. It seeks to establish a foundation for cultivating students' ability to reflect and summarize, while simultaneously enhancing their ability to apply theoretical knowledge in a practical teaching context.

The course employs a spiral process, beginning with theoretical awareness and progressing through implementation, application, teaching reflection, and practical innovation. By examining the evolution of English teaching methodology and the foundational tenets of various schools of thought, students are equipped with the ability to engage with diverse theories and models of teaching methodology in a critical and informed manner. This enables them to select an appropriate methodology for a given audience and set of objectives, ensuring a scientific and reasonable approach. Integrating the latest information on English teaching reform, students will analyze the teaching concepts of the English Curriculum Standards for General Secondary Schools, including the teaching objectives, teaching methods, use of teaching materials, and teaching evaluation.

Additionally, the curriculum incorporates a multitude of practical teaching scenarios, as well as simulated practical, discussion, and inquiry-based learning activities. These are conducted with students at the center and in small groups, fostering collaborative learning. During these activities, students are encouraged to reflect on their own English learning experiences, observe and analyze exemplary English classroom records, and gradually develop and enrich their own pedagogical theories through group-based inquiry and discussion.

3.2 Course Content Design

The English Teaching Methodology course content has been designed on the premise that it will meet the requirements of the national examination for teacher certification, while also addressing the actual needs of students.

In designing the teaching process, an effort is made to adhere as closely as possible to the standards set forth in the English curriculum and to the requirements for teaching in primary and secondary schools. The traditional teaching materials are combined with extracurricular reading texts in a scientifically rigorous manner, and the English teaching model is innovated and improved. The content of the texts and the teaching methods are made consistent and unified so that students may be guided with specific teaching objectives and tasks to a deeper understanding and learning of the content of the texts. Furthermore, regular practical activities, such as classroom observations, are incorporated into the curriculum to facilitate students' comprehension of theoretical concepts and enhance their ability to apply them effectively in teaching practice.
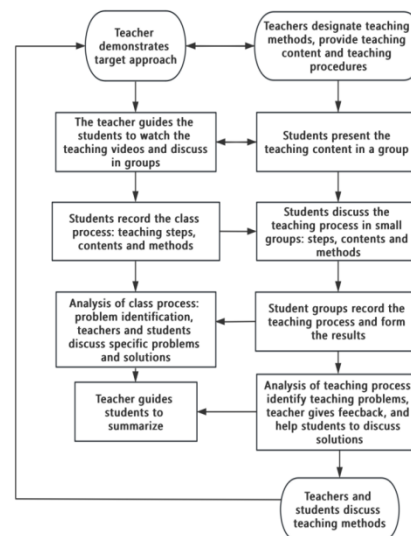

Figure 1: Teaching design of the classroom instruction

The specific teaching process is shown in the figure 1. These two teaching processes are an active system. Each unit of instruction and each class can also be an active system. A group activity between the teacher and students in a class can also be an active system. Taking group activities as an example, the teacher designs the rules for group activities and the division of tasks for each member of the group based on the teaching objectives decided upon in discussions with the students before the class. At the same time, the teacher needs to provide relevant intermediary aids to support the activities, such as textbooks and teaching aids. In group activities, each class needs a member to act as the lead teacher. Because theoretical knowledge is relatively boring, if it is just through reading books and teachers' explanations, it is difficult for students to form intuitive thinking, and it is also difficult for them to understand how to operate in the actual classroom. Therefore, based on understanding of the course, the two processes complement each other during the teaching process.

3.3 Teaching Methods and Practices

In the practice of teaching methods, the student is always placed at the center of the teaching process, with the goal of creating a positive and interactive learning environment. This is achieved through the use of effective teaching strategies, such as heuristic teaching. By posing questions and setting situations, students are prompted to engage in active thinking, thereby cultivating the ability to analyze and solve problems.

A case study on task-based teaching has been selected on the basis of the concept of contextual teaching (see figure 2). The design of meaningful language tasks provides students with guidance as they master language knowledge and skills in the process of task completion. This case study illustrates the particular operational process of task-based teaching and also reflects the learning attitudes and outcomes of students under this teaching method.
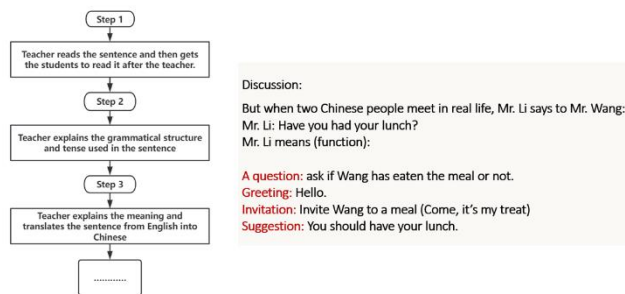
Figure 2: The teaching process of the content

First, it is the contextual inspiration. At the beginning of the course, giving two questions closed to life. "What do you say when you see your best friend?", "How do you usually greet each other when you meet your best friend?" This served as the key to the class introduction, and was followed by the screening of a fascinating video clip of a meeting of Middle Eastern scholars, in which the scholars mentioned that Chinese people often greet each other with "Have you eaten?" when they meet. This unique cultural phenomenon not only guides students to deeply understand the diversity and depth behind the word "communication", but also triggers their resonance with the spirit of humility and care in Chinese culture, which has imperceptibly permeated the essence of ideological and moral education.

Then, the class enters the stage of collaborative exploration, which is designed to facilitate students' ability to use language and deepen their internalization of knowledge. During this phase, an interactive teaching scenario was carefully constructed: "If you were the teacher, how would you teach the students the sentence 'Have you had your lunch?'" Furthermore, the framework of the teaching method, the implementation path, and the discussion material were clarified, and students were encouraged to engage in active exchange of ideas in English within groups to explore effective teaching strategies collectively. This process not only serves to enhance students' linguistic abilities but also facilitates the development of their innovative thinking and teamwork skills.

At the final stage of the process, feedback optimization and cyclic practice are implemented. To achieve a comprehensive enhancement of the quality of instruction, a diversified evaluation and optimization mechanism has been implemented. Following the presentation of the results by the designated group, other groups are encouraged to proactively pose questions and provide feedback, thereby fostering an environment of active classroom engagement. Additionally, comprehensive records are maintained of the key aspects of the classroom, with a variety of cases designed for different teaching content. The advantages and disadvantages of various teaching designs and styles are then compared and analyzed, with the objective of ultimately refining the teaching method that is most suitable for the content of this unit. The crucial point to emphases is that the successful implementation of said process does not mark the conclusion, but rather the commencement of a new and re-initiated cycle of practice. It is possible to return to the problem-solving stage, based on new insights into teaching and student feedback, and make continuous adjustments and optimization to teaching strategies. This forms a teaching cycle system of continuous improvement and upward spirals.

In the teaching methods and practices employed in the course of English Teaching Methodology, there is an emphasis placed on the application of heuristic teaching and inquiry-based learning. Furthermore, there is a strong focus on the exploitation of modern information technology to enhance the quality of teaching resources. Additionally, there is a notable attention directed towards the management of the classroom and the interaction between teachers and students. These efforts are collectively aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of teaching and developing students' comprehensive qualities and abilities, in order to equip them with the necessary skills to meet the new requirements and challenges presented by the national examination for teacher certification.

4. Reflection and Implication

During the implementation of the program, questionnaires and student feedback were utilized as primary instruments for the extensive collection of students' opinions and suggestions regarding the program. The feedback provided a deeper insight into the students' learning needs and revealed the actual situation regarding teaching effectiveness. For instance, some students indicated that certain course content was overly abstract and challenging to comprehend and retain. Others expressed a desire for more practical applications to facilitate the integration of theoretical knowledge into pedagogical practice.

In light of the feedback provided by students, the course content has been meticulously revised and enhanced. In order to facilitate comprehension of the more abstract and challenging material, additional case studies and demonstrations have been incorporated to assist students in developing intuitive knowledge and understanding. The structure and sequence of some chapters have also been adjusted to align more closely with students' cognitive patterns and learning habits. Furthermore, we have implemented novel and ambitious approaches to teaching methodology. To illustrate, the flipped classroom teaching mode has been introduced, whereby students are permitted to attain a foundation of knowledge through independent study prior to the class, and are then able to direct their attention to problem-solving and practical operations within the classroom setting. This pedagogical approach not only fosters students' intrinsic motivation to learn but also demonstrably enhances their academic performance.

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