The Influence of Interprofessional Collaborative Learning on the Ability of English Majors

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Abstract: With the advancement of globalization, English has become increasingly important in social interaction and there are higher expectations for the ability of English majors, which is the challenge that educators now are confronted with. Interprofessional collaborative learning is a new model which strengthens the main role of students and enables them to develop abilities in an interdisciplinary context. Research reveals that applied appropriately, this learning model can enlarge students' scope of knowledge, sharpen their awareness of social theory, increase their thinking levels, improve their language and communicative skills and promote students' interest of learning. English teachers should be aware the significance of this learning model, do research into it and actively introduce it into their language teaching.

1. Introduction

With the gradual expansion of economic globalization, English plays an increasingly important role in promoting economic development, and English teaching is confronted with greater challenges, which urges English teachers to carry out a series of teaching reforms to make sure that the teaching and learning approaches used are beneficial to develop learners' abilities so as to meet the needs of personal and social development. Interprofessional collaborative learning model has been creatively introduced into the process of English students' autonomous learning. This model makes up for the shortcomings of the traditional learning model and gives full play to students' subjective initiative.

2. Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning is a teaching form to strengthen the main role of students, which is widely used in classroom teaching in Europe and America. Over the past three decades, peer assisted learning has developed in different schools and models abroad, with different names, such as "peer tutoring", "peer learning", "peer education", "peer assessment", etc. Its theoretical basis is interpersonal theory, which rises after functionalism. The collaborative learning model based on this theory provides a more reasonable model for language learning: learners support and trust each other, and each individual's achievements are closely related to the efforts of other members, especially in the acquisition of cognitive skills, the acquisition and understanding of information,

the formation of conceptual knowledge and the solution of problems. Compared with competitive and independent learning, collaborative learning model is more conducive to the improvement of learning effect.

Collaborative learning is a learning method based on equal or matched peer relationships, which enable students to learn and master skills together through peer questioning, positive mutual influence and mutual help[1]. During the learning process, learners analyze, think or evaluate possible problems, organize and put forward suggestions to solve problems, and gradually form effective cognitive strategies by listening to their peers' statements or reading their peers' works. This process increases the opportunities for interaction between learners and creates a social atmosphere, in which ideas are formed and expanded. Also, mutual evaluation means students can understand the criteria for assessment and apply the criteria to evaluate the performance of others appropriately. Compared with the traditional knowledge acquisition process, the knowledge obtained via this method is easier to be applied to practical use.

From the perspective of constructivism, knowledge is not passively accepted, but constructed by cognitive subjects and others on the basis of social interaction. Constructivism advocates learner centered learning under the guidance of teachers, that is, it not only emphasizes the cognitive subject role of learners, but also does not ignore the guiding role of teachers. Teachers are helpers and promoters of meaning construction, not imparters and indoctrinators of knowledge. Students are the active constructors of meaning, rather than the passive recipients and indoctrinated objects of external stimuli. Students should become the active constructors of meaning[2].

3. Interprofessional Collaborative Learning

Interprofessional collaborative learning is a new type of collaborative model, under which students from different majors and schools form collaborative teams or groups for the common purpose of a specific project. While doing the project, members take advantage of their own professional knowledge and skills and work together to accomplish a verity of tasks, and their performance will be assessed as a team.

This learning model is widely used in the field of health care. Scholars have employed different methods to conduct research in different disciplines and among different subjects in terms of health care practice, teaching and learning.

For instance, in a piece of research carried out in Texas, selected charts from 58 rural hospitals and facilities are reviewed via teleconference at four to six meetings per week representing a variety of specialties and service units. Physicians, pharmacists, hospital administrators, and health care students participated in these calls. Learning from error allows them to learn from each other[3]. According to another study conducted in a medicine and health vocational college in China, compared with those in the control group, students in the experimental group adopting an interprofessional collaborative learning method are better at judgment ability, strain ability, team cooperation ability and nurse-patient communication ability[4]. Interprofessional collaborative learning also promotes the development of participants' research ability. The rationality and advantages of completing research projects by members from different majors have been proved in the research by Jiang Banghong[5] and his colleagues. According to the study, while students from different majors collaborate in research programs, the members have different knowledge and skills to contribute to the project so a wider range of areas can be tackled. Also, they take various roles so more information can be gathered and relevant topics can be covered in more depth.

The model is also applied in the teaching of other fields though not so frequently. For example, Huang Biyan[6] attempts to use the approach in the course "Chinese Folk Culture". Students majoring in Chinese Language and Literature, Journalism, English, Thai Language, and

Broadcasting and Hosting collaborate to apply and conduct research projects. Similarly, in Zhao's research[7], game design and development majors cooperate with members from School of Computing and School of Art and Design to complete projects. In both cases, the barriers between traditional disciplines have been broken down, and consequently, the integration of professional knowledge and the combination of theory and practice have been achieved. Meanwhile, participants are proved to be developed in interdisciplinary knowledge, practical ability, communicative competence and team spirit.

4. Interprofessional Collaborative Learning of English Majors

Although interprofessional collaborative learning has been proved to be an effective way to develop students' ability and skills in an interdisciplinary context, there are very few studies concerning the interprofessional collaborative learning of English majors.

Findings of recent research reveal that interprofessional collaborative learning promotes the development of language and communicative competence of English majors. In the research carried out in Honghe University[8], English majors are invited to join the class of non-majors and form groups with them. In these collaborative groups, English majors work as the leader and support the language learning of non-majors. In a way the role of English majors has shifted from learners to teachers. What's more, this learning model has extended the group mutual aid learning from in the classroom to the outside of the classroom. Over the period of one semester, the language proficiency of both majors and non-majors has been improved. With the help of English majors, students from others colleges are better at the language. Meanwhile, English majors also benefit from the collaboration because they work harder and gain better understanding of the language in order to help others. As a result, their communicative ability is practiced and improved as well.

Cross-major collaborative learning also proves to have a positive effect on the development of English majors' thinking ability. In the study conducted by Zhao[9] in the context of a network-based extracurricular program, 40 students are divided into two groups, control group and experimental group. Topics of hot issues are given each weekend for discussion on a specific learning platform. The difference is that for the control group, discussion is carried out among English majors, while for the experimental group it is among majors and non-majors. The changes in thinking levels are tested in terms of argumentative writing, speech contests, and critical thinking. Results reveal that the score of thinking level of experimental group is significantly higher than that of the control group in all the three aspects, and the improvement can be attributed to the following factors: cross-major online chat can enlarge students' scope of knowledge, sharpen students' awareness of social theory, improve students' language skill and promote students' interest of learning. Research result also reveals that the thinking level of English majors, especially those in the control group, is comparatively low at present, and it is suggested that classroom teaching leave enough thinking space to inspire and guide students and this can be coupled with elaborately designed extracurricular activities to promote students' thinking.

5. Application of Interprofessional Collaborative Learning in College English Teaching

As a major, English has always been considered to be characterized by interdisciplinary features, and how to develop students' interprofessional ability has always been a problem confronting educators. Interprofessional collaborative learning can address this problem to some extent as it can promote the ability development of English majors in several ways. However, the advantages of this learning model have not been fully used. To successfully apply this learning model into English teaching, the following issues should be taken into consideration.

First of all, administration officials and English teachers should be aware of the significance of

this learning model and take actions to promote it. Nowadays, cross-major cooperation has become increasingly common, but compared with cooperation in other disciplines, interprofessional collaborations of English majors are much fewer. To promote its popularity, both administrators and teachers have a role to play. Administrators should make policies and fund programs of cross-major cooperation, while teachers should actively introduce this learning model and offer opportunities for learners to participate. Meanwhile, teachers should imporve themselves, acquiring knowledge of this learning model and increase their own disciplinary ability, so that they can ensure the successful implementation of the collaborative grograms.

In addition, the collaborative project should be scientifically designed and managed. Otherwise, the planned goals can not be successfully achieved. While planning, teachers should take into consideration these factors, including the existing knowledge and skills of English majors, the theoretical basis, the problems to be solved, the methods employed, the majors involved, the stages of the projects and the expected results. During the process, teachers should trace the progress to make sure the project is smoothly carried out and on an ongoing process of improvement. Guidance should be offered to participants when necessary. At the end of the project, teachers should assess whether the designated goals are accomplished, and summarize the strengths and limitations of the project for further research.

Last but not least, a scientific and effective evaluation system that combines formative evaluation and summative evaluation should be established. The former assesses students' normal performance during the process, supporting an ongoing process of improvement. The latter represents a measure of competency or mastery. The purpose is to test whether the English majors improve their performance and benefit from the project. Teachers should make sure that learners are clear about the system so that they will be motivated. Applied appropriately, the system is certain to have a positive and effective impact on both English majors and Non-English Majors' academic achievements and self-efficacy, so as to play a positive role in promoting both sides.

6. Conclusion

Interprofessional collaborative learning is a new type of collaborative model, under which students from different majors and schools form collaborative teams or groups for the common purpose of a specific project. This model strengthens the main role of students and enables them to develop abilities in an interdisciplinary context. Research reveals that applied appropriately, this learning model can enlarge students' scope of knowledge, sharpen their awareness of social theory, increase their thinking levels, improve their language and communicative skills and promote students' interest of learning. English teachers should be aware the significance of this learning model, improving their comprehensive quality to do research into it and actively introduce it into their language teaching to help students grow.

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