Application Research of Formative Assessment in University English Teaching—A Case Study of EAP Course at Qingdao City University

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Abstract: University English teaching holds a crucial role in the foundational theoretical courses of higher education. The effective evaluation of this course not only unleashes students' potential but also facilitates their learning. Institutions like Qingdao City University, dedicated to nurturing applied talents, often employ conventional assessment methods, particularly in Academic English (EAP) courses, heavily reliant on summative assessment. Unfortunately, this approach tends to curb students' proactive learning initiatives, resulting in a limited application of language knowledge. The shortcomings of a singular and one-sided summative assessment become apparent in this context. To enhance teaching outcomes and align with educational goals, this paper advocates for a paradigm shift in English teaching within applied universities. The proposed approach involves integrating professional settings into the curriculum and implementing a formative assessment system. This would not only address the limitations of the current evaluation system but also foster a more dynamic and engaging learning environment, better preparing students for real-world applications of their English language skills.

1. Introduction

The basic requirement for talent cultivation in applied universities, according to national guidelines, is to establish majors in accordance with the needs of socio-economic development. The focus is on nurturing high-quality, professional, versatile, and applied talents for regional and local societal development. The "University English Curriculum Teaching Requirements (Trial)" (2004) states that teaching assessment is a crucial component of university English course instruction. A comprehensive, objective, scientific, and accurate assessment system is essential for achieving course objectives. It serves as a significant basis for teachers to obtain feedback on instruction, improve teaching management, and ensure teaching quality. Simultaneously, it acts as an effective means for students to adjust learning strategies, enhance learning methods, and improve learning efficiency. The "University English Curriculum Teaching Requirements" (2007) further emphasizes that educational administrative departments at all levels and higher education institutions should consider the assessment of university English course teaching as a vital component in evaluating the undergraduate teaching standards of the school. University English, as a crucial component of applied university education, emphasizes the development of English application skills as a top priority. The reform and

development of university English teaching, especially in EAP, are critical to the success of English education in universities. Currently, the prevailing assessment method in applied universities in China is summative assessment. In the context of the reform in university English teaching, the transformation of student assessment methods becomes particularly important. Assessment serves as a vital means for teachers to understand the achievement of teaching goals, identify problems, improve teaching methods, and enhance students' comprehensive abilities. Therefore, in the realm of university English EAP teaching, attention must be given to how to assess students' English comprehension abilities, especially in evaluating the attainment of EAP classroom objectives, unit objectives, and semester teaching goals. Monitoring students' English learning processes, analyzing their learning activities, and refining teaching analysis are essential for promoting the overall improvement of students' English proficiency.[1]

2. Summative Evaluation and Formative Evaluation

Evaluation can be classified into two fundamental types: summative evaluation and formative evaluation.

Summative evaluation primarily examines the achievement of teaching objectives over a specific period, such as a month. Mid-term and final exams in teaching assess the attainment of comprehensive English proficiency goals for the semester. The English proficiency exams for college levels four and six are evaluations of English language skills throughout the entire university phase. Reading comprehension holds a significant weight in the four-six level tests, covering aspects like understanding the main idea, grasping details, making inferences, guessing word meanings, applying strategies, and logical analysis.[2]

Simultaneously, in terms of material selection, academic English for EAP (English for Academic Purposes) reading must not only consider the schematic differences among students from different regions but also pay attention to the difficulty of the text during mid-term and final exams. The standard should generally be set at a higher level of demand. On this basis, it is essential to ensure that the selected materials are relevant to the topics covered in the semester's course texts. Language knowledge should encompass the vocabulary and grammar learned during the semester, and the type and structure of the text should fall within the scope of the semester's study. The tested skills should include the main skills learned during the semester. Evaluation must respect the students' subjective position, consider their cognitive differences, adopt diverse means, and adhere to the principle of authenticity to the greatest extent possible. However, in many applied universities, the evaluation is often broadly divided into 30% to 40% for regular grades, combined with 70% or 60% for final grades, forming the overall summative evaluation. Furthermore, there is an evident imbalance in the composition and quantification of regular grades.

In contrast to summative evaluation, formative evaluation places more emphasis on students' autonomous learning processes and can be closely integrated with professional knowledge. The goal of formative evaluation is to observe, monitor, manage, and analyze students' English learning behaviors, understand the level of development of their language abilities, adjust teaching designs, and cultivate the enhancement of students' comprehensive abilities. It is not about assessing the achievement of English learning objectives.[3] Considering the teaching objectives of applied universities and the characteristics of formative evaluation, diverse assessments should be implemented in college English reading teaching, with increased emphasis on formative evaluation.

3. The Application of Formative Assessment System in University English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Teaching

In "An Exploration of Formative Assessment in University English Teaching at Independent

Colleges," Liu Yunjia discovered that relying solely on a single assessment method has several drawbacks through a comparison of two assessment approaches at her institution. In the context of teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) at Qingdao City University, the utilization of a formative assessment system is exemplified in the reading instruction of the university's EAP course. Reading, in this case, can be broken down into pre-reading tasks, while-reading processes, reading skills, the use of reading strategies, classroom participation, and post-reading tasks. Classroom assessments should evaluate the achievement of reading goals at each stage and in each aspect.[4]

The academic English EAP course distinguishes reading into flipped classroom reading, student independent reading, and classroom reading. For pre-class flipped classroom reading tasks, students can be assessed through in-class exercises published via learning apps. Classroom reading tasks can be evaluated using methods such as multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blank exercises, information matching, true/false questions, chart completion, and Q&A, etc. Balancing with independent reading tasks, writing feedback can be employed to develop students' abilities in information integration and key information extraction, enhancing their writing skills. Additionally, modern technologies such as creating courseware and producing short videos can be utilized to train students in organizing information.

The aim of formative assessment is to promote students' comprehensive understanding abilities. Teachers need to observe improvements in students' capabilities, and students themselves should be aware of their progress. Therefore, attention should be given to various teaching tasks, such as the use of reading strategies and comprehension.

The teacher can, through observation, dialogue, feedback, and other means, achieve the purpose of obtaining and evaluating the attainment of interim goals. This helps the teacher understand whether students truly comprehend textual information, analyze text, proficiently apply learned knowledge to evaluate textual information, express their own opinions based on known textual information, and adjust teaching arrangements accordingly. By the end of the class, teachers can assess students' classroom participation, writing effectiveness, issues encountered in reading and writing, and the application of corresponding strategies in the processes of listening, speaking, reading, and writing through methods such as thematic discussions, student self-evaluation or peer evaluation in group tasks, questionnaires, scales, etc.

In the final formative evaluation throughout the semester, self-assessment, learning reflection diaries, and other methods can be used to monitor and evaluate students' learning processes and outcomes. The achievement of teaching goals depends largely on the level of student participation in class. In applied universities, students' English foundations vary, and their initiative in learning is often low. Therefore, teachers need not only to help students prepare relevant knowledge through flipped classrooms before class but also to promote collaborative learning through Team-Based Learning (TBL) during class. Post-class learning reflection diaries can also assist students in reviewing and reflecting on the learning process, consolidating knowledge.

A notable feature of formative assessment is that teachers focus not only on students and teaching before and during class but also after and outside of class. The emphasis is not just on teaching outcomes but more importantly on the entire teaching process. The goal of formative assessment in university English education is to diagnose problems students encounter in the language learning process, improve students' comprehensive English abilities, promote the enhancement of EAP (English for Academic Purposes) teaching and practical application capabilities. The data obtained from formative assessment can be used to refine teaching designs and improve reading instruction.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, Wang Duqin pointed out in his work "Teaching English Reading" that in English

reading instruction, teaching objectives, instructional activity design, cultivation of learning strategies, and assessment of learning outcomes should complement each other. And promoting a diversified assessment system in the teaching of applied university English EAP courses is imperative. As a foundational course for cultivating applied talents in university, the EAP course should not only improve the summative assessment system but also fully utilize and leverage the role of formative assessment in university English teaching. By developing diverse forms of formative assessment, teachers can stimulate students' learning initiative and enthusiasm, integrate with professional settings, and lay a solid foundation for the application of English in professional fields.

References

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