Application of Experiential Learning in College Foreign Language Teaching

Qiming Zhuang *

College of Textiles and Clothing, Qingdao University, Qingdao, Shandong, 266071, China

* Corresponding author: 2021204766@qdu.edu.cn

Abstract. Experiential learning is a new way of learning. In recent years, the research on experiential learning has been deepening, which has had a certain impact on the traditional teacher-centered teaching mode. As for subject education, language is a subject with strong situational application, and its educational model has also changed under the impact. The student-centered learning concept changes the original teaching. Compared with the traditional teaching mode, experiential learning has its unique innovation and many advantages but also has its limitations. In terms of application, languages are essential tools for cross-cultural interchange, so learning a foreign language is of great importance. However, the process of trying to master it has many challenges both for students and teachers. The integration of experiential learning into foreign language teaching has changed the role of teachers in the previous education system to some extent and also put forward new requirements for students. The starting point of this paper is based on the research status of experiential learning and the current situation of college foreign language teaching and analyzes the application of experiential learning in college foreign language teaching. This paper also introduces the advantages of experiential learning in foreign language teaching compared with the traditional mode, which are creating a language environment, stimulating students' learning initiative, and improving students' language application ability.

Keywords: experiential learning, college foreign language learning and teaching, application of experiential learning, advantages of experiential learning.

1. Introduction

With the development of globalization, people are often required to master not only their native language but also a common foreign language. The meaning of language goes far beyond a tool of expression but is the key to opening the international door. But nowadays, language teaching in universities is often unsatisfactory. Take China as an example. Chinese universities offer public English electives, but teachers' pay more attention to developing students' ability to listen, read, and write rather than speak. This has resulted in a very embarrassing situation that is a large number of students in the exam-oriented education, but after going abroad they always find out what they have learned is dumb English. Thus, it is very important to increase students' application experience which fits in with the definition of experiential learning that can be simplified as as learning by doing.

According to Kolb (1984), "Learning is a process, in which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" [1]. Based on the experiential learning theory, studying has been divided into four parts, which are doing, sensing, observing, reflecting, thinking, and planning. An outstanding feature of this theory is that different stages are associated with specific learning styles [2].

It has been proved that there is no guarantee of a successful and positive learning experience just by taking a foreign language course to immerse students in a foreign language environment. Motivation should be taken into consideration when it comes to what factors affect foreign language learning. Kolb's learning cycle encourages students to apply various learning strategies at every different stage of the learning process. Learners tend to take responsibility for their learning and are encouraged by their initiative as they move from one stage to the other, which means the experiential learning cycle provides flexibility for the teacher as well as the learner. It helps to build a learners-centered learning process. Therefore, an active involvement in the experiential learning cycle can promote effective language learning [3].

Based on the analysis of the current situation of college foreign language learning, this paper studies the adaptability of experiential learning to college foreign language learning from the aspects of teachers as well as students and introduces in detail the powerful role of experiential learning in promoting college foreign language learning.

2. Current Situation of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

2.1. The Importance of Mastering a Foreign Language

There is no doubt that language is not only an important component of culture but also an essential means of cross-cultural interchange. Language as an application tool brings together all the achievements of a particular language group. Each language has its specific cultural environment, and each cultural environment is different. Therefore, learning another language is very different from learning your mother tongue. Learners need to learn a foreign language from a completely different perspective than their native language. In the process of learning foreign languages, students will find that their cross-cultural understanding ability is gradually improved, which is also very useful for improving the perspective of interdisciplinary communication. There is no doubt that language, as the most effective tool for human interaction, can help learners to understand a different culture more efficiently. Learning a foreign language allows students to acquire both linguistic and sociocultural knowledge, improve their cognition of society, and clarify how and why they say certain things [4].

From the aspect of individuals, learning foreign languages is not only for the needs of internationalization but more down-to-earth, to expand our knowledge. As Chinese natives, students need to acknowledge that a lot of Western science and technology are ahead of them, and many good articles and research books are written in foreign languages. To further explore and improve their knowledge and professional skills, they must first try to control a foreign language well.

The reason why students learn foreign languages is to form higher than the general level, relatively more professional foreign language ability. Learners should be based on achieving professional interaction goals, and finally achieve professional and cross-cultural communication competence. At the same time, students can use the knowledge they acquire to develop more complex professional skills, as well as the moral qualities needed in the application, and actively participate in social life by virtue of their own abilities, which is essential for further personal and professional development.

With the development of globalization, new challenges have been provided to learners as well as teachers. For instance, masters in the future are required to have the communication competence of a foreign language that enables integration into the multi-linguistic and multi-cultural professional environment. The ability to study languages and countries is an integral part of communication skills, which includes knowledge of lexicographic units with ethnic and cultural semantics and the ability to use these words in speech in a wide range of intercultural communication situations. That puts forward higher requirements for students' study of theoretical knowledge and application of practical knowledge [5].

To sum up, it is indeed necessary for individuals to master a foreign language.

2.2. The Difficulties Faced by Students When Learning Foreign Languages

The challenges students encounter in learning foreign languages are mainly divided into psychological and physiological aspects.

It has been proved in research that the existence of anxiety is a very common problem that appears in most of the disciplines of learning. Given the nature of anxiety and its consequences, and although there are commonalities, learner-induced anxieties are limited to specific subjects. Anxiety in foreign languages is certainly a unique anxiety. Many studies suggest that the concern about foreign languages lies not only in abstract concepts but also in reality [6].

To talk about learning a foreign language, engineering students tend to be extraordinarily passive. If the language is mainly taught in the classroom instead of used in the society where teaching takes place, then it is considered a foreign language which means that learners do not have enough environment to implement the use of foreign languages. Therefore, most of them do not create awareness of learning a foreign language. Most students who study at technical colleges focus only on their technical and subjective skills and do not realize the significance of commanding a foreign language, such as the most common one, English, in their academic careers. The first problem engineering students may encounter is difficulty in communicating in English cause they often ignore the importance of reading other literary and technical materials written in English. They are guided to learn something that is written in their native language and such a position will lead to a more unbalanced situation between their major and foreign language learning. This will form a vicious circle that is not conducive to foreign language learning which we'd like to prevent [7].

2.3. The Challenges Teachers Faced When Teaching Foreign Languages

The environment of teaching a foreign language has changed from teacher-oriented to student-oriented. In foreign language teaching, the role of teachers is no longer the absolute authority, and the teaching method of teachers is no longer the golden rule that cannot be changed. In experiential teaching, the teacher's position is more like a facilitator of students' learning rather than an absolute leader. On the contrary, it is not the teacher who should take the initiative, but the student. This puts forward higher requirements for teachers instead of the most basic demands like understanding different language teaching techniques and having the ability of using the language accurately according to various situations of teaching. As educational researchers and leaders, teachers should make a forward-looking and systematic plan for foreign language teaching. Teachers should understand the role of language in international relations and build up the ability to critically analyze, evaluate, adapt, and create new training materials to play their role. They should be able to organize and implement a series of courses to ensure continuity of membership and talent.

As the classroom remains the main place for language learning, it becomes especially important to identify factors that enhance the achievement of the language in the classroom. Motivation, attitudes, anxiety, self-esteem, tolerance of ambiguity, risk-taking, cooperation, and competition proved to be key variables that explained individual differences in foreign language learning [8]. If learners want to acquire a foreign language, the process they have to go through is necessarily complex and multifaceted, and it will be influenced by both learners and the environment [9].

3. Integrating Experiential learning into College Foreign Language Teaching

3.1. The Characteristics of Experiential Learning

The definition of experiential learning varies, and different scholars analyze how to learn from experience from their own perspectives. But whatever the definition of the form, it is centered around a center, that is, experiential learning is a way for people to learn through the experiences they gain in real life.

The center of experiential learning is not experience. In contrast, experience is just the first link. Students sometimes can't achieve the goal of positively learning by direct experience, but to gain knowledge after they analyze what they have gone through and the causes of their failure. The process is called reflection. The ability to reflect on an experience, and on initial reactions to the experience, is the "missing link" that defines the relationship between experience and learning.

Traditional teaching and training should be based on the transfer of knowledge/skills, but this does not fully take into account individual development and potential. Because traditional skill/knowledge transfer often (mistakenly) assumes what a person needs to learn and how best to learn it. Experiential learning is an effective way of determining one's growth and potential, and an often overlooked way of educating and developing people of all ages. It can be customized based on factors such as personal style, prejudices, strengths, and direction. As a result, it is more likely to have a cumulative emotional

impact than traditional formal training or teaching, especially in terms of self-confidence, self-esteem, personal worth, and sense of purpose [12].

3.2. The Impact of Experiential Learning on Students

Experiential learning engages students intellectually and emotionally as complete persons and learners from direct experience. Experiential learning focuses on the present moment and learns by doing something meaningful and doing something meaningful. It forces students to learn by being directly exposed to what we learn, not just observing, reading, listening, or thinking [13].

Most of the time, people naturally learn from their own direct experience. People feel the world and explore knowledge in real life all the time, so experiential learning is everywhere, and the experience gained in real life will have an impact on students' behavior, attitude, and even personality. Experiential learning not only emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge but also attaches great importance to learners' physical and mental input in the learning process, encouraging students to explore and stimulate their inner potential. Part of the backbone of experiential learning is the direct experience that students have already gained. Based on these direct experiences, students can spontaneously establish their learning framework, which can independently meet the requirements of each student and suit each student's learning style, which can mobilize the enthusiasm of students and achieve better learning results.

Experiential learning is not just about the learner's personal practice; simply doing something is not enough. Experiential learning requires learners to spontaneously connect real-life experiences with specific knowledge, which means that students should reflect on themselves after experiencing life. By doing so, students are more likely to connect past experiences with current knowledge, to achieve systematic learning. This requires students to be responsible for their own learning, if they lose the sense of responsibility for their own learning, then as language learners, they will lose the autonomy of language use. Once you fall into a passive situation, it will become more difficult for language learning and progress, and it will be difficult to reach a high level of application [14].

3.3. The Impact of Experiential Learning on Teachers

The concept of experience-learning requires high personal participation, strategies, and learning styles in learning activities and professional development activities, which places greater demands on teachers and further improves the professionalism of teachers in teaching activities. Teachers with a positive attitude to participate in the investigation of the curriculum, and study the curriculum, not only to students to pay but also to enhance their own ability, can benefit from it. As the guide of students' learning careers, teachers should play a leading role in mastering professional knowledge to a higher level and conducting more detailed and comprehensive research in their academic field. Teachers need to establish the concept of lifelong learning and shape the possibility of their future sustainable growth. After all, although experiential learning gives students more space for self-learning than traditional education models, the requirements for teachers are not reduced but increased. Therefore, teachers also need to learn theoretical knowledge more actively, actively participate in practice, and make continuous progress. Therefore, the learning experience is the main component of the professionalism of the English teacher and is the basis for effective teaching of English [12, 14]. The teacher is in charge of organizing some of the most influential tests in the untested birth of each person. In other words, the "good book" promotes, promotes, and maintains students with more valuable academic records, and the "bad cake experience" distinguishes students from the accumulation pole that is not yet overwhelmed. An experienced individual learning teacher can better understand the real nature of the challenges students face when it is not a means of teaching the mother tongue.

In order to achieve better classroom results and let students learn more knowledge, teachers who practice experiential learning often need to make more preparations before the beginning of the course and carefully plan the teaching content. Teachers should be familiar with every stage of teaching, make detailed plans, predict the difficulties that may be encountered in the teaching process, and

prepare coping plans in advance. Teachers should uphold open thinking, design teaching links with both creativity and interest, create a space for students to communicate, so that students can freely share their ideas and feelings, and truly be inclusive [14].

4. The Advantages of Experiential Learning in College Foreign Language Teaching

4.1. Create Language Environment

The use and learning of foreign languages is a social activity. They happen best when it means consultation and students collaborate with other students. Most people try to learn and master a language with the basic goal of being able to understand conversations and communicate. If communication is to be taken as the purpose of teaching, educators need to help students establish the connection between foreign language teaching and life in the teaching process, and use foreign language in the real communication space. If this is done, students will have a level of mastery of the foreign language that can be applied in life and natural conditions.

Creating a language environment refers to creating a comprehensive environment for students to listen, speak, read, and write, among which the oral environment is particularly important for the difficulties faced by Chinese students. Engineering students face English communication problems first because of the lack of attention to reading other literary and technical material. Engineering students do not usually get time to focus on experiencing some English communication videos.

They are guided to learn something that is written in their native language and such a position will lead to a more unbalanced situation between their major and foreign language learning. As a result, it is difficult for them to learn later in their careers cause an outstanding engineer should draw on advanced knowledge from other countries. They may even feel helpless in their careers because they are unable to pass on their knowledge to the wider community without knowledge of English. They also struggle to be promoted or rated.[7]

Hence, it is important to create a communicative environment with students from fields like Economics, Computer Science, Power engineering, and others. It is necessary to constantly provoke speech-cognitive activity of students using the communicative tasks of verbal communication.

4.2. Stimulate Students' Learning Initiative

The General High School English Curriculum Standard (2020) noted that attention should be paid to learners' emotional factors in English learning and guide students to actively deploy various English learning strategies to improve English learning efficiency. Currently, English language teaching in China focuses more on transmitting language knowledge. It neglects the students' affective factors and the cultivation of self-regulated learning strategies application ability in foreign language learning. Foreign language learners' self-regulated learning and foreign language enjoyment have been a cynosure in second language acquisition [15]. Self-motivation means the whole body is involved in the emotional aspects of the mind and even if the pressure or stimulus comes from the outside, the feeling of presence, reach, and understanding comes from within.

Experiential learning can achieve the purpose of "edutainment". The happiness described in edutainment first means that teachers make the teaching process lively and interesting, flexible and attractive; The second is that students really experience this fun and turn passive learning into active learning. The "joy" of experiential learning emphasizes the second meaning, that students have initiative.

4.3. Improve Students' Language Application Ability

In the traditional education model, students rarely have the opportunity to apply their knowledge to solve practical problems, so they are very unfamiliar with the application of language in real-life scenarios. Even in simple everyday situations, learners have difficulty choosing the right language to

express their ideas. This is the reason why Chinese students get high marks in English proficiency tests, but find it difficult to express themselves in foreign languages in reality. For those who choose to learn English as a second language systematically, the purpose of learning English is not simply to take an exam, but to interact with others. This purpose is different from that of many other disciplines. Learners acquire English skills in order to use the language as a tool for learning other types of knowledge and for effective communication.

Experiential learning provides learners with the space to use language, which changes the drawbacks brought by the original monotonous theoretical learning. In the process of experiential learning, through the mobilization of self-awareness, learners can gradually realize that language learning needs to be completed through practice, and the process of language learning can not be accomplished overnight or on paper, but step by step, talk more and do more.

5. Conclusion

Experiential learning plays an indispensable part in promoting foreign language learning in college. It enables learners to improve themselves while gaining experience by establishing a reflective feedback mechanism. Experiential learning not only increases students' initiative and creativity, but also cultivates self-learning methods, teamwork skills, and the ability to apply what they have learned.

However, the application prospect of experiential learning in the exam-oriented education model is not clear. The scope of experiential learning is still limited to open classrooms. Most education and training, in education and work, remain traditional, narrow, highly regulated, and inexperienced.

Language learners rarely learn on their own. On the contrary, the application of speech is social, and the student not only adapts to the new code that appears before him but also realizes new and different cultural expectations, social norms, and practices. In the context of experiential learning, the social construction of speech, the social participation of students, social participation, and the mechanism of speech learning should be deepened. Experience learning that strongly modulates critical self-reflection can be a beneficial vision to help students adapt to the continuous transformation of social meaning and the self in new contexts. The next research should be on how experiential learning appears in the field of foreign language learning in the form of specific teaching methods and show how this specific method can improve students' self-efficacy.

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