

Reform and Innovation of Higher Vocational Business English Reading Teaching Based on ESA Theory

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Abstract

ESA theory breaks through the traditional teacher-led teaching, builds up student-oriented teaching and trains students' autonomous learning and practical ability. From the perspective of ESA theory, the paper clarifies the connotation and characteristics of ESA theory, discusses the feasibility of ESA theory applied to business English reading teaching, analyzes the main problems of higher vocational business English reading teaching, and puts forward new reform strategies, including creating scenario to introduce teaching objectives, constructing business English cultural background knowledge, analyzing the reading article comprehensively, designing practical activities after reading and evaluating reading learning results, in order to improve business English reading teaching level.

Keywords

ESA Theory, Business English Reading, Teaching Reform

1. Introduction

On November 5, 2023, General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed at the Sixth China International Import Expo that "China will continue to make economic globalization more open, inclusive, balanced and beneficial to all" (People.com.cn, 2023). This shows that China pays more attention to improving the quality of its foreign trade and optimizing its structure. Business English is an essential communicative language in foreign trade activities and an important guarantee to ensure the smooth development of business activities. On the one hand, business English is a language specifically used for business activities. In business activi-

ties, people need to use specific vocabulary, usage, and expression methods in order to communicate more effectively. On the other hand, business English also requires learning how to apply appropriate etiquette and cultural awareness among different countries. Avoiding misunderstandings and conflicts caused by cultural differences is an important part of successful business communication. Therefore, higher vocational colleges need to carry out the reform and innovation of business English teaching, constantly improve the training system of business English professionals, improve the teaching quality of business English teaching, and cultivate a higher level of business English applied talents to serve the society.

Business English learning involves four modules of listening, speaking, reading and writing ability, among which the cultivation of reading ability is the key to improve learners' business English level. Reading can expand a learner's vocabulary. Having rich vocabulary can help learners express themselves more fluently, which is beneficial for the improvement of spoken business English. Besides, reading can effectively cultivate learners' language sense, which can help improve the level of business English writing. What is more, reading can help students understand Western customs and culture and broaden their horizons. The cultivation of cultural awareness is an essential part of Business English. However, the traditional business English reading teaching puts too much emphasis on the authority of teachers and textbooks, and students lack of learning initiative, resulting in poor teaching effect. ESA teaching theory is a student-centered teaching theory centering on the three elements of engagement, study and activation, which can effectively improve the teaching level of business English reading. In the teaching process, how to use ESA theory to promote the teaching reform of business English reading in higher vocational colleges is an urgent problem for higher vocational business English educators to think deeply.

2. Connotation and Characteristics of the ESA Theory

2.1. The Connotation of the ESA Theory

ESA theory is a student-oriented English teaching theory proposed by Jeremy Harmer in *How to Teach English* monograph. Harmer believes that learning a language requires three elements: the language environment, interest in language learning, and opportunities to use the language. The connotation of ESA theory refers to the three essential elements of English teaching proposed by Jeremy Harmer: Engagement, Study and Activation (Peng, 2022). Students learning language in class is different from the way of learning language in society, so teachers need to know how to stimulate the students' learning interest in the classroom, let them study the relevant language materials and have the opportunity to use the knowledge, it really help to improve their English learning ability and level, to promote the development of business English teaching to a deeper level.

2.2. The Three Major Elements of the ESA Theory

2.2.1. Engagement

Engagement aims to stimulate students' interest in learning, design interesting, inspiring and challenging teaching activities, and attract them to actively participate in the classroom, so as to move into the next stage of the learning process more smoothly. This means that teachers should think about how to mobilize students' initiative in learning, so that students actively into the classroom learning activities. Teachers can input a variety of language materials activities consistent with their teaching objectives, such as watching pictures, listening to music, playing games, discussing with others and other activities. These activities use visual or auditory use to arouse students' interest in language materials (He, 2018).

2.2.2. Study

Study focuses on learning the language. Under the guidance of teachers, students can either learn new language knowledge or review the language content they have learned before. Language knowledge includes mastering pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure and discourse. The process of students "learning can adopt diversified methods, including students" summary of language characteristics and rules, group discussion and cooperative vocabulary learning. This stage is mainly to cultivate students "ability of independent learning, guide students to find problems and solve problems in the learning process, and stimulate students" potential to complete learning tasks.

2.2.3. Activation

Activation refers to the test of whether students can flexibly use the language knowledge mastered in the learning stage. Under the guidance of teachers, students are required to have good learning and application ability, and to be able to use the learned language knowledge to various business English practice activities. Students can participate in two ways of simulating the real situation in class and practicing the real scene of the training base, including role playing, debate, poetry, painting, speech contest and other activities, and apply the knowledge learned in class to practical activities to achieve the purpose of English practical ability.

3. The Feasibility of Applying ESA Theory in Business English Reading Teaching

Business English reading course is an important basic course in the business English teaching module. Its main teaching goal is to improve students' English reading ability and expand students' business English knowledge. ESA theory can not only meet the needs of student-oriented teaching, but also improve students' thinking ability and application of English reading.

First of all, ESA theory focuses on stimulating students' original emotional experience and cognitive schemas, making reading teaching more vivid and in-

teresting. By actively participating in various activities, students can feel the fun of reading, so as to cultivate their interest in reading and develop good reading habits. Secondly, under the guidance of ESA theory, English reading teaching not only encourages students to learn vocabulary and grammar, but also cultivates students' overall perception of the language. By reading different types of text, students can learn the characteristics of the rhythm, and intonation of the English language, so as to enhance their understanding and perception of the language, and enhance their reading analysis ability and comprehension ability. Thirdly, in the reading teaching, ESA theory focuses on cultivating students' critical thinking and logical thinking ability. Through in-depth analysis of reading texts and using language knowledge, students can practice their thinking logic and improve their ability to analyze and solve problems. Finally, the ESA theory encourages students to learn and use the cultural information behind the reading text during their reading process, which helps to enhance students' understanding and respect for different cultures. By reading articles from different cultural backgrounds, students can broaden their horizons, promote cultural exchanges and improve their cross-cultural communication skills.

Therefore, the application of ESA theory is feasible in the teaching of business English reading, which helps students learn to skillfully use various reading skills, cultivate correct reading habits, and improve students' reading thinking ability (Lu & Yu, 2022). Teachers can properly adjust and transform the order of engagement, study and activation to explore the most effective English teaching mode of business reading, so as to realize the high-quality development of English reading teaching.

4. Main Problems Existing in Higher Vocational Business English Reading Teaching

4.1. Teachers' Vague Teaching Objectives

Business English reading is a course based on business economic and cultural knowledge, which has the nature of specialized use. Business English takes English as the medium, teachers teach around business activities, and its reading teaching method has its particularity and professionalism. When teaching this course, due to the lack of clear and comprehensive teaching objectives, most teachers only pay attention to the explanation of the language knowledge points in the reading article, ignoring the nature of the course and the application of business English knowledge in the reading materials. It is precisely because of teachers' vague positioning of teaching objectives that the teaching of business English reading has some disadvantages and causes its poor teaching quality.

4.2. Teachers' Outdated Teaching Methods

At present, in the higher vocational business English reading teaching, most teachers still use the indoctrination teaching method. The teacher first explains the vocabulary and phrases in the unit reading article, then explains the complex

sentence pattern and sentence pattern translation in the reading, and finally completes the reading exercises after class. In addition, teachers just analyze the sentence structure and the grammar phenomenon in the sentence. The teaching method makes students confined to the understanding of the original literal meaning and lets students habitually passively accept knowledge, which are not conducive to the student understanding of the whole article, and can't achieve the goal of business English reading teaching.

4.3. Students' Lack of Interest in Learning

The articles of business English reading course mainly involve the business knowledge, business terms and complex sentence structure. However, many higher vocational students 'English professional knowledge is not solid. They do not understand the relevant business theory knowledge and lack of relevant professional vocabulary. It is so difficult for them to analyze complex sentences that they can't understand the reading article deeply, which makes students feel confused in business English reading class, and lack interest in reading learning and so on.

4.4. Students' Bad Reading Habits

Many higher vocational students in business English reading class with the bad reading habits such as pen reading, audio reading, lips reading, and so on. In addition, there are some students who have a new word while reading. They immediately look up the dictionary, which will let students to focus on a word or language point, rather than from the whole understanding of the reading. So students just stay in a basic understanding level for some words or sentences and lack good reading logical reading ability, which will lead to low reading efficiency and poor reading effect.

5. The Reform Strategies of Higher Vocational Business English Reading Teaching under ESA Theory

5.1. Teachers Create Scenario to Introduce Teaching Objectives

American linguist Krashen (1985) believes that in the language input hypothesis, human beings acquire language by understanding information, and the understandable input of learners is essential in the learning process. In order to input the teaching content of business English reading, before reading, the reading article content is presented in the form of scene creation. Students are required to collect relevant reading background materials and guide students to discuss them in class, and then introduce the reading theme of this lesson. This will make students very interested in the topic task assigned by the teacher, and also make students fully devoted to the classroom learning. For example, when the teacher talks about a reading topic, such as Business Travel, he can let students simulate scenario of business travel: Students are divided into different groups to complete the scenario. They need to finish the tasks, including the preparations

to be made before the business travel, the choice of travel transportation, the accommodation in the hotel, the main local scenic spots, and share the feelings of the business trip. Teachers can create such situations to introduce teaching objectives, combining theoretical knowledge and practical application so that students can actively participate in English reading class, which can cultivate their independent reading and learning ability (Lu, 2021).

5.2. Teachers Construct Students' Business English Cultural Background Knowledge

According to ESA theory, teachers should take students' needs as the starting point of teaching, and stimulate their desire for learning by understanding students' internal and external needs for English learning. Due to the lack of most students' reading cultural background knowledge, teachers guide students to think about the reading article by answering some logical reading questions, which contributes to the construction of reading background cultural knowledge. In this process, teachers need to pay special attention to the expansion of reading content and solutions to reading problems. They can use WeChat platform to share students' business English cultural background knowledge, which helps students to understand cultural knowledge conveniently. On the platform, teachers share Chinese and western festivals, folk customs, myths and other cultural background knowledge with students, so that they can form a systematic study of Chinese and Western thinking, cultural concepts, history and other aspects (Zhang, 2023). Therefore, teachers need to make full use of the learning resources on the network according to the needs of students, which will not only provide students with richer reading materials, but also make business English reading teaching closer to life and reality, and also help students to better understand more business English cultural knowledge. Students with these knowledge of business English culture will complete business English reading more easily and accurately.

5.3. Teachers Guide Students to Analyze the Reading Article Comprehensively

In the process of reading, teachers should guide students to think deeply about the content of reading. First of all, the teacher asks students to complete the quick reading, browse the full text and master the general idea of the article. Meanwhile, students are forbidden to look up the dictionary when they encounter new words, but students can mark the new words. After reading the article, students are required to complete the multiple choice questions of reading the article, and check whether the students' answers are correct. The multiple choice questions that students make more mistakes are the knowledge points that need to be explained. Secondly, the teacher explains the new words and professional terms in the text, analyzes the composition of the long difficult sentences and the sentences that students make many mistakes in, and interprets the difficult sentences to ensure that students can fully understand the text. Finally, the teacher

leads the students to review the full text, divides the article into several parts, and guides the students to systematically extract the business English knowledge structure chart in the reading article, which helps the students improve their reading analysis ability and understanding ability.

5.4. Teachers Design Practical Activities for Students after Reading

Teachers should design a variety of practical activities after reading, including retelling, role playing, business English debate competition and business simulation situation and other activities. Students will apply the reading knowledge to various practical activities. The ultimate goal of business English reading learning is to apply what have been learnt to practical business scenarios. For example, when the teacher explains about dining culture reading article, he lets the students show the familiar scene of dinner of Chinese ordinary families. Then the teacher shows students a video about Americans and Australians dinner scene. In contrast, students will find the different cultures between them. So they know even in the same scene, cultural habits are also different, which can help students respect and understand the cultural differences of foreign countries (Zhang, 2022).

5.5. Students Evaluate Their Own Reading Learning Results

Students need to summarize the knowledge of business English reading and evaluate the reading learning results. Students can divide the evaluation into two stages. In the first stage, through group cooperative learning, the group members share the learning results of reading. The group leader organizes each member to actively participate in the mutual evaluation, discuss others' learning results, and finally select the best reading learning result (Yang, 2021). In the second stage, after the group mutual evaluation, students can design text error correction, so as to strengthen then the understanding of the text. By evaluating the reading learning results, students can constantly stimulate their internal motivation of learning and improve their learning applying ability.

6. Conclusion

This paper mainly discusses the feasibility of applying ESA theory in business English reading teaching, analyzes the main problems of higher vocational business English reading teaching, and proposes the reform strategies of higher vocational business English reading teaching under ESA theory. Teachers can flexibly apply the three elements of engagement, study and activation in the actual English reading teaching in order to effectively improve the teaching level of business English reading and cultivate a higher level of business English applied talents.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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