

A Study of English Service Learning under the Theory of Second Language Acquisition

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[Abstract] “Real -life” communicative use of language is an effective second language teaching method. Service learning under the theory of second language acquisition is an important way for English majors to improve their professional skills. Students’ positive self-consciousness in the process of service learning can increase the possibility of their self-control, confidence, and belief in the future. Therefore, this paper has the potential positive significance to improve the practical ability of English majors and their ability to develop lifelong careers.

[Keywords] second language acquisition, service learning, English majors

Introduction

Second language acquisition (SLA) can take place in either a naturalistic or an instructional setting but may not necessarily differ according to the setting. The goal of SLA is the description and explanation of learners’ linguistic or communicative competencies. To this end, the researcher must examine aspects of the learner’s usage or use of the L2 in actual performance by collecting and analyzing either samples of learners’ languages, reports of learners’ introspections, or records of learners’ intuitions regarding what is correct or appropriate L2 behavior. The acquisition of an L2 feature may be considered to have taken place either when it is used for the first time or only when it can be used to a high level of accuracy (Ellis, 1994, p.15)

Service learning offers students immediate opportunities to apply classroom learning to support or enhance the work of local agencies that often exist to effect positive change in the community (Knapp, 2010, p.208-224). The National Youth Leadership Council defines service learning as "a philosophy, pedagogy, and model for community development that is used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards."

One of the best-known theories of second language acquisition was American linguist Krashen’s Monitor Theory. It is a comprehensive, influential, and controversial theory, and it has greatly influenced the second-language teaching method named the Natural Approach. It consists of five hypotheses: The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1978, p. 283-300). For English teachers, it is important to master some rules of second language acquisition and apply them in practical teaching; this can not only improve their professional level but can also help them grasp students’ characteristics better in the process of language learning and realize the strategies of English teaching and integration.

The Significance of Second Language Acquisition and Its Theory in Foreign Language Learning

American linguist S.D. Krashen (Krashen) in the early 1980s, put forward the famous second language acquisition model, the "monitoring mode," which includes the following: (1) the Acquisition and Learning Hypothesis; (2) the Natural Order Hypothesis; (3) the Monitoring Hypothesis; (4) the Input Hypothesis; and (5) the Affective Filter Hypothesis. Krashen summed up his five major hypotheses and made a detailed description and argument; he also affirmed the important position of the input hypothesis. He believed that

the input hypothesis "may be today's second language acquisition theory, the only one of the most important concept" (Krashen, 1982, p. 9). It addresses a key question in language learning, namely how to acquire a language, especially a foreign language. Second language acquisition theory systematically studies the process of second language acquisition, including psychological processes, cognitive processes, and linguistic processes. The second language acquisition theory is also used in other areas of research, such as linguistics, neurology, sociolinguistics, pedagogy, statistics, and so on.

In recent years, the second language acquisition study of this subject has made rapid development. This area focuses on the characteristics of learners and their roles in the acquisition process, and it focuses on two major issues: the first explores the common features of the learners in the learning process; the second explores the individual differences of learners. Specifically, these studies mainly focus on the following topics: mother tongue and second language acquisition, language input and second language acquisition, cognitive theory and second language acquisition, universal grammar theory and second language acquisition research, individual differences and second language acquisition and classroom teaching and second language acquisition. China's Foreign Language Research Circle has different views on the effect of second language acquisition theory on foreign language teaching.

The author of this paper believes that foreign language teaching in China must start from the specific situation of Chinese foreign language teaching and establish its own foreign language teaching theory system. Foreign language teaching theory should take a cautious attitude in the process of absorption and reference and should take full account of the special circumstances of Chinese students to learn foreign languages. The second language acquisition theory is especially helpful for foreign language teaching, especially for college English teaching. Second language acquisition theory can be used as a guide to college English teaching. It can make the students get more places and opportunities to use the target language directly, make the students immerse themselves in the target language environment, carry on meaningful communication, and encourage the students to participate in solving the problem and completing the tasks in communication activities. In other words, a foreign language teaching environment that is conducive to the acquisition of language for students should have the following characteristics: focus on content naturally, students can participate in communication directly, and the content should be specific and not too abstract, to provide students with a variety of models to imitate.

College English Major Students' English Learning Problems

In the process of second language acquisition, learners' communicative competence improved in the curriculum teaching under the development of the appropriate culture and appropriate language scene. Seltzer (1998) believed that the application of service learning in ESL classes should follow Wingspread principle and the four standards that the United States Congress enacted in 1990: (1) meet the demands of community; (2) combine the curriculum objective with service; (3) build bridges between the university and the community; and (4) reflect students' reflection.

This train of thought has more emphasis on the design concept of service learning and inheritance without fully considering the characteristics of language teaching and learning. There is no consideration of the many problems arising from language learning under different social environments. Through the research on the combination of service learning and second language acquisition, this approach can promote learners' language learning (Hellebrandt & Varona, 1999). To investigate the effect of service learning guiding into traditional ESL teaching, the conclusion shows that service learning is an effective method for the acquisition of English and English culture; it promotes the students' ability of language communication, especially language fluency, as well as building the understanding of the concept of culture far beyond the effect brought about in the traditional classroom.

For the application of service learning in foreign language courses, Chinese scholars have tried practice research of English education in the primary and secondary school. In the aspect of foreign language

education in colleges and universities, Lifang Chen (2004, p.118-119) has investigated the practical basis of the application of service learning in EFL education in Chinese universities; he pointed out that the common phenomenon of exam-oriented education killed the flexibility of foreign language learning and learner's initiative; he explored the feasibility of the introduction of EFL education in service learning from three aspects: the relationship between teacher and student, the relationship between class and service, and the relationship between school and community. It is found in the literature review that service learning has already combined with Chinese university language courses, and research has gradually shifted from early introduction and review to empirical research.

Course Design of Service - based English Learning

The application of practice-based learning in language courses and the experience of designing service-oriented learning courses have prompted many language teachers to become the advocates of service-based learning as a language learning method. In foreign language teaching and learning, (1) this curriculum design tries to make up the defects of traditional language class lack of social environment; (2) language learners need to be associated with the community through experiential learning; and (3) in the process of interacting with the community in a planned way will create an environment for the learners to participate in the real world.

Therefore, the service-oriented English curriculum in the foreign language teaching environment in China is based on the English curriculum, integrates service-based learning strategies into curriculum and learning experiences, enables teachers who have planned to design service projects to meet the needs of community-based English learning, and promotes students' participation in the language service activities in an organized way in the real environment. Through the reflection of service activities, a deep understanding of curriculum and English learning, the awareness of language culture and cross-culture, and foster the public awareness and social responsibility is fostered.

The basis of service, based on learning in foreign language teaching, is the national standard for foreign language education projects customized by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages in 1999, also known as the United States "5C" foreign language learning standards: culture, connections, comparisons, communities, and communication, and the core is communication. They are regarded as America's foreign language learning objectives

In the process of second language acquisition, learners' communicative competence is improved. The teaching of the course is carried out in the context of appropriate culture and language. Seltzer (1998) argues that applying service learning to ESL classes should follow the Wingspread principle and the four standards promulgated by the US Congress in 1990: (1) meet the demand of community; (2) integrate curriculum objectives and service; (3) build bridges between the university and the community; and (4) reflect the reflection of students. This idea emphasized more the inheritance on the design of service-oriented learning, but did not take full account of the characteristics of language teaching and learning, and it did not take into account the different social environments of language learning arising from many problems. The study of service-based learning and the combination of two-language classroom shows that this method can promote the learners' language learning effect.

Foreigners Visiting Activities under the Theory of Second Language Acquisition

For the researchers, the formation of the concept of service English learning is a process of gradual development. Based on the principle of the authenticity of language learning, the researchers try to import real language activities in English major "integrated English" course.

A. Study Design

Make a real visit by the dialogue strategies learned in the course to obtain a random selection of

foreigners in Anshan streets and gather content about the foreigners' impressions of Anshan. Students are required to design the problem by themselves; each student visits a foreign person. A team of three people will complete the visit and record the visiting process in three minutes of audio or video. Then, participants will share their experiences in the form of presentation and oral presentation, learned reflectively. Schoolwork as the academic assessment of the practice teaching links into the usual performance evaluation. The aim of the activity is to solve the problem of the lack of language communication in English teaching from the real context. Through the practice and reflection experience of language, the English majors will have a better understanding of the relevant language skills in the course and explore feasible methods and ideas for the further development of this kind of teaching activities.

Pattern 1: Import the course of service learning; students visit the foreigners with the related knowledge learned in "Integrated English" course. Then, participants share their experiences in the form of oral presentation. Course performance is included in grades.

Pattern 2: Service learning as part of the curriculum: students interview foreigners, make a deep exploration of various topics, including culture, accomplish the actual logging, and write reports as a team. Learners' performances in the activity are a part of the curriculum assessment (25%).

B. Study Objects

Before and after the experiment, the students received the same questionnaire to examine the effect of the combination of service-based learning and curriculum. Research was carried on the Grade 14 students at the Foreign Language School of Anshan Normal University as the research subject. Two classes were selected as the sample; the researcher was the teacher of the course. This study involved 47 students; 27 students were in the experimental Class 1 from the first class in Grade 14. They attended Pattern 1, which imports service learning in the Integrated English course. Twenty students attended the service learning program in Pattern 2. All the participants were the second-year English majors; their ages and education backgrounds were similar. The students' English level was average; their oral English abilities add certain differences. There were some specific performance problems for some students in communicating with foreigners, such as fear and insufficient confidence. However, there is no problem in daily communication, so we can do some deep research on some problems.

C. Research Findings

This leading study is mainly to participate in the pre-test and post-test questionnaire survey; the questionnaire consists of 20 items, which includes four aspects: language learning and application, non-linguistic factors, emotional attitude, and cultural and cross-cultural factors. Each has five items.

The non-linguistic factors, the affective attitudes, and the cultural and cross-cultural factors of the learners in language learning and application are significantly different. Language learners are beginning to think about a variety of learning methods, such as the combination of language use and real-life situations. Reflection as an important learning tool to participate in the process of language learning. From the reflection, learners could discern that service-based learning can promote and establish mutually beneficial relationships with the communities. The service-type learning process reflects the obvious non-linguistic factors, and the multi-faceted ability participates in the process of language learning, such as cooperative ability, problem-solving ability, communicative ability and so on; similarly, this learning experience promotes the learner's multi-ability development.

There have been positive changes in the learners in terms of learning motivation and self-confidence. Through the discussion with the students, the experiencing real situation and social service brings the learners great satisfaction. In the cultural and cross-cultural context, learners' self-identities are increased, some inherent thinking changes, and the individuals' service-oriented learning experiences result in the acquisition and reflection of language and culture. That is, the language-learning method is to use language, and the cultural learning method is to experience culture.

Conclusion 1: Service learning and teaching can promote learners to know themselves, their school, and their society.

Conclusion 2: The improvement of English learners' language abilities is contained in the change of learning strategies. At the early planning stage, the students chose words carefully when writing letters, which shows an improvement in their awareness of language usage strategies. Meanwhile, there is, also, an improvement in the ability to solve problems. The learners were very anxious when they were uncertain about the visiting foreigners. Especially when some groups finished the interview, the members of other groups who did not finish the interview would be full of self-doubt, and they would complain about the difficulty of the activity, some of them wanted to give up, and some of them would ask for help; however, most of the learners solved the problem through pragmatic strategies. This is the important expression of enhancement of language competence.

The impact of simple language practice is far larger than the original idea. The impact covers students' enthusiasm for participation, difficulties in the implementation of the process, cultural conflicts in language communication, suggestions for the development of foreign nationals in Anshan, the learners' recognition of self, Anshan, China, and Chinese culture. The learner's spirit of cooperation, confidence, and language proficiency have been fully shown. This seemingly simple language practice reflects the significance of service learning, thoughts about how to integrate the real practical activities into the academic curriculum, and, through the form of serving society, strengthening the knowledge and skills learned in the classroom (Wang, 2015, p.96-99).

Practice Teaching Based on "Service Learning"

The postmodern narrative strategies that appear in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, such as repetition, parody, collage, and montage make it a successful work of literature. In the novel, Billy travels back and forth between the earth and the planet Tralfamadore, and the time travel makes everything meaningless, no matter sickness and death, happiness and sadness. The obscure novel cannot bring any wonderful feelings to our comprehension. Instead, it challenges people's basic understanding of spirit again and again.

A. Study Design

This study uses the form of comparative teaching intervention to explore the changes of students' English listening and speaking proficiency and communicative strategies by the experimental group (implement teaching intervention based on service learning; that is, in conventional English knowledge and skills teaching, organize and guide the students to take part in the English service learning activities in the 67 Anshan Middle School), and in the control group (implement regular college English course teaching, that is course teaching of English knowledge and skills).

B. Research Participants

There are 60 English majors from Anshan Normal University that attended this experimental research; thirty students were in the experimental group, and 30 students were in the control group. The two groups of students had passed TEM 4 tests before the start of the experiment. Students of the experimental group not only studied English knowledge and skills at school in the fifth semester, but also participated in English service learning activities on the weekends in the 67 Anshan Middle School; they had English class while students of the control group only had regular English knowledge and skills learning in the university.

C. Content and Reflection

According to the questionnaire survey and interviews based on the service learning given to teachers and students, we identified the service contents as follows: to understand the present situation, educational ideology and the education idea of basic English, middle school students' English learning self-efficacy

status; participation in the interaction between teachers and normal school students and between students and the service objectives of the community school; participation in classroom observation, teaching design, having classes, class evaluation, counselling, and service learning activities, such as homework.

Reflection is an important way to improve normal school students' English levels and form their teaching abilities. In the process of service learning, through reflecting, the relations between English teaching theory and practical teaching, these normal school students formed a set of valuable service learning experiences (Faereh, 1983, p. 55). The plan was revised and adjusted according to the situation and the progress of the activity. At this stage, the teacher, as a mentor and inspirer, counselled the students from the side, linked service activities to the school curriculum, helped students deal with the difficulties encountered in the service learning, and provided the necessary guidance and incentives. Through reflection, the normal school students felt, generally, that the factors influence their teaching effects not only included the ability of classroom management, classroom instruction, teaching material processing, and the design of practice teaching, but also English subject knowledge abilities, such as, the ability of systematic and coherent English grammar. This provides a basis for the reform of normal education in colleges.

D. Function and Effect

Through the eight-month service learning, the two groups of students were significantly different in listening and speaking, communication strategies, and teaching practice skills, as seen at the end of the experiment. The experimental group achieved the following results: (1) understood the situation of primary and secondary school education, the society, and the students' needs; (2) improved teachers' professional consciousness and civic duties; (3) strengthened the link between educational theory and teaching practice, and formed a certain teaching practice ability; (4) mastered a variety of reflective teaching means and had a certain education learning ability.

Implications and Conclusion

Service learning is an effective learning method. The difference between service learning and other educational methods is that the service-based learning cannot be realized in the classroom, the campus, and the subject. Service learning involves partnerships between universities and communities and can affect students from many perspectives. Service learning can make an inventory of the theory to help students understand the relationship between theoretical knowledge and practice (Haiying Cao, 2009, p.57). English as a foreign language taught in class makes teachers face greater challenges. Language teachers need to carefully create courses with rational planning from the perspective of linguistics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, cross culture, education resources, etc., to meet the needs of students, courses, and communities. In this way, service learning can, in the individual experience, achieve the goal of language acquisition and personal growth through the interaction with the environment. In a word, Chinese English educators need to prove the feasibility and effectiveness of service learning with the empirical research method in Chinese foreign language teaching environment.

The learning ability of language learners is higher than that of control group learners with the same language proficiency. The service-based learning model can stimulate learners to know the language knowledge and enhance their corresponding language knowledge learning abilities. Service-based learning goes beyond the classroom and returns to the classroom, and this learning process also constitutes a learner's experience-based learning cycle. It is hoped that through the concrete analysis of empirical research, this study can promote the combination of service-oriented learning and the English teaching environment in China and provide a reference for interested teachers.

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