To Develop Outstanding English Teachers

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Abstract: The purpose of the paper is to enhance the effects of the course of Teaching English Grammar and Vocabulary in order to improve the students' English grammar and lexical knowledge and their teaching skills as well. The characteristics of the project are student-centered learning, scaffolding instruction, problem-based learning, and project-based learning. Through the process and reflections, this project equips the students with professional and occupational abilities: Students not only learn the professional knowledge of grammar and vocabulary teaching but also apply the theory and methods to lesson plan writing and teaching practice with computer and digital files.

Keywords: grammar, vocabulary, teaching demonstration

1. Introduction

English ability has become required both at school and in the job market. For all the skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), grammar and vocabulary are basic and important abilities. Grammatical mistakes and wrong word choices may cause communication breakdown and even misunderstanding. The students in the English department not only have to produce correct English but also need to know how to teach, especially if they would like to become teachers. Actually, some of the students have already been teaching English at cram schools. If they do not show correct grammar and lexical usage and teach appropriately, their students' English performance will be poor, and this is a disaster.

To avoid or to reduce the disaster and to promote the students' English abilities and teaching skills, the course Teaching English Grammar and Vocabulary is offered. This course is elective and students taking it generally have motivation and interest; nevertheless, the effects of the course on the students are imperative. In addition, when the author was the chair of the department, she had many opportunities to interact with the job market, like the publishers and cram schools; then, she realized that qualified English teachers are in need. Therefore, the purpose of the project is to enhance the effects of the course in order to improve the students' English grammar and lexical knowledge and their teaching skills as well.

2. Related Literature

The theoretical backgrounds of the paper are based on:

2.1 Student-centered Learning

Students' needs, abilities, interests, and learning styles are focused, with the teacher as the facilitator. Under the influence of progressive education and psychologists in the 19th century, some educators have largely replaced traditional teacher-centered curriculum approaches with "hands-on" activities and "group work", which the students determine on their own what they want to do in class. Scholars like John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky whose collective work focused on how students learn is primarily responsible for the move to student-centered learning. It allows students to actively participate in discovery learning processes from an autonomous viewpoint. Various hands-on activities are administered in order to enhance successful learning. Distinctive learning styles are encouraged in a student-centered classroom. Thus, different approaches like audiolingual, TPR, suggestopedia, and so on are administered in class for contents of grammar and vocabulary.

2.2 Scaffolding Instruction

Scaffolding instruction as a teaching strategy originates from Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and his concept of the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD*).* "The zone of proximal development is the

distance between what children can do by themselves and the next learning that they can be helped to achieve with competent assistance" (Raymond, 2000, p.176). Scaffolding teaching strategies gear to support learning when students are introduced to a new subject. In order for learning to progress, scaffolds should be gradually removed as instruction continues, so that students will eventually be capable of demonstrating comprehension independently. For example, a sample lesson plan is provided before teaching demonstration in which students need to design their own lesson plan.

2.3 Problem-based Learning

Problem-based learning (PBL) was developed in the late 1960s and has been the most influential innovation in medical education during the past 40 years (Wood, 2008).

In problem-based learning, a small group of students (usually 6 to 8) is presented with a problem (Smith, et al., 1995). Students discuss and analyze the problem, and try to allocate tasks among group members to solve the problem. When the group members meet again, they share new information and knowledge. The group may accept the solution(s), or resolution of the problem (Wood, 2004). The instructor usually serves as a facilitator. The facilitation is not knowledge driven, but focuses on metacognitive process (Savery and Duffy, 2001).

The student-directed PBL encourages active learning, and often includes peer teaching. The programs are resources intensive and time consuming, and bring pressure to group members to learn collaboratively (Azer, 2001).

2.4 Project-based Learning

Project-based learning is a comprehensive approach to classroom teaching and learning that is designed to engage students in investigation of authentic problems (Blumenfeld, et, al., 1991). Within this project-based context, learners searched for information resources that would accompany their project ideas (Land and Greene, 2000). Projects involve students in solving authentic problems. During the process of building real solutions by working with others, students' learning interest can be increased. Since the students need to formulate plans, track progress, and evaluate solutions, project-based learning can enhance deeper understanding and improve competence in thinking (Blumenfeld, et, al., 1991).

3. Procedures

The procedures of the project were conducted as follows: (1) Diagnose typical difficulties of the learners on grammar and vocabulary and bring out solutions collaboratively. (2) Consolidation exercises are presented for different levels of meaning and usage. (3) Teaching demonstration—students of different teams adopt different teaching methods to teach one aspect of grammar. Each team hands in a lesson plan of their demonstration which can be on campus and off campus. (4) Through reflections on the process of the project, improvements are suggested and included in the portfolios. The materials are uploaded onto the system of e-learning.

The participants were 75 juniors and seniors of the English department who enrolled in the course. They were divided into 14 groups of four to six members.

The computer technology which enhanced learning included You-tube clips, PowerPoint files, on-line links, and so on.

The sections about diagnosis of difficulties on grammar and vocabulary together with the consolidation exercises were evaluated by the instructor researcher, and the parts of teaching demonstrations were peer evaluated by the students. Thus, the students' knowledge of grammar and vocabulary was enhanced and their teaching skills were developed.

4. Results and Discussion

With the encouragement of the creative teaching project, the course Teaching English Grammar and Vocabulary is more interesting and effective than before. Digital teaching materials such as the PowerPoint files have been uploaded to the e-learning system for future reference. An experienced teacher in cram schools (e.g. the Giraffe, Joy English, Melody, Kid Castle, and other private English language teaching institutes) and public schools was invited to give a talk to introduce the similarities and differences among the institutes and share her teaching methods and materials. The students liked

the event and found it helpful. Students' expectation and confidence in their future occupation are assured as well.

One of the most critical differences between student-centered learning and teacher-centered learning is in assessment. In student-centered learning, students participate in the evaluation of their learning. This means that students are involved in deciding how to demonstrate their learning. Developing assessment that supports learning and motivation is essential to the success of student-centered approaches (Pedersen & Doug, 2004). The students' performance is evaluated both by the teacher researcher and the peers. During the weekly meetings, there are Q-&-A sessions, and the students who provide appropriate answers get rewards. At the end of the course, students hand in portfolios by which the whole process and effects of the course are reviewed and reflected.

5. Conclusion

This study has focused on students' needs, and based on their abilities, scaffolding has been provided. That is, students' difficulties have been diagnosed, solutions brought out, and samples provided.

In all, this study has accomplished the following aspects:
- This project **fulfills the need of the job market**: Schools, especially primary schools and junior highs, and cram schools need qualified/excellent English teachers with grammatical and lexical proficiency and good at teaching skills.
- This project **equips the students with professional and occupational abilities**: Students not only learn the professional knowledge of grammar and vocabulary teaching but also apply the theory and methods to lesson plan writing and teaching practice.
- This project **provides opportunities for students to understand similarities and differences among cram schools and public schools** in terms of the teaching methods and (digital) materials.
- This project **provides opportunities to cooperate with the relevant business**: Students can **practice teaching** for example at Joy English, and the skills can be **transferred** to the business as **in-service training.**

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