

Research on the Evaluation of the Implementation Effect of Curriculum Examination Reform: Taking the Course of “Introduction to Language” as an Example

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Abstract: “Introduction to Language,” as the core course of the English major, mainly reveals the basic laws of language, enabling the students to have the ability to apply linguistic theories to explain language phenomena and solve specific language problems. This course is highly theoretical and has a certain degree of difficulty. The evaluation of student grades has always been based on examination reform, but several problems have been encountered during the implementation process. This article analyzes the current situation of the reform and implementation of the “Introduction to Language” course examination in applied universities and puts forth suggestions and specific measures to improve the assessment of the course, aiming to enhance the teaching effectiveness of the course and scientifically and comprehensively evaluate students’ abilities.

Keywords: Introduction to Language; Examination reform; Implementation effect

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1. Introduction

“Introduction to Language,” as a core course for English majors, is offered to undergraduate and junior college students majoring in English at our university. This course covers important content in phonetics, vocabulary, semantics, language and cognition, language and society, pragmatics, language and culture, etc. It has a strong theoretical foundation, and students generally find the content boring and difficult to learn. Based on the actual learning situation of students, this course has always been evaluated by combining process assessment and final papers through examination reform, but the effect is not ideal. This article analyzes the current situation of the reform and implementation of the “Introduction to Language” course examination in applied universities and proposes suggestions and specific measures to improve the assessment of the course, helping students establish a correct learning attitude and promoting the improvement of teaching effectiveness.

2. Current situation of examination reform in the course of “Introduction to Language”

Whether it is a process assessment or a final paper, the assessment of the “Introduction to Language” course encountered some problems. The final paper cannot reflect the students’ actual competency well, and there is serious plagiarism in some students’ papers. The evaluation of the final paper score is not very distinguishable. The lack of written assessment at the end of the term has led to students being more casual in class and believing that following the lesson or not has little impact on the examination results. Bryan and Clegg agreed that curriculum assessment has a significant impact on students’ learning engagement ^[1], and this impact is no less than that of classroom teaching by teachers ^[2]. The setting of course assessment methods is of great importance in mobilizing students’ learning enthusiasm and encouraging them to engage in learning. Xiong and Liu expanded the reading volume of linguistic works for students, enhanced their reading and comprehension skills for theoretical works, and practiced combining real-life language phenomena to train and cultivate students’ ability to actively discover, analyze, describe, and explain real-life language phenomena ^[3]. Liang and Yang illustrated that this course serves as the postgraduate entrance examination. In addition to classroom teaching and other aspects, reforms should also be carried out in the area of examinations ^[4]. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the exam reform plan and effectiveness of this course in recent semesters, identify its shortcomings, and then propose improvement plans for the next stage. This course is aimed at senior undergraduate students majoring in English and those who have been upgraded to undergraduate students majoring in English. Through investigation and research, corresponding adjustments will be made to the course examination reform based on the actual situation of students. It is of great significance to guide students to participate in efficient learning in the classroom, understand relevant abstract concepts, and absorb the content of the lesson, to improve their linguistic literacy and lay a solid foundation for their later development.

3. Problems in the reform of the “Introduction to Language” course exam

By analyzing the effectiveness of the exam reform in the previous semesters and combining it with teaching practice, the problems in the exam reform of this course are described below.

3.1. Outdated and single formative assessment form

This course has always adopted the form of examination reform, with formative assessments mainly focusing on student attendance, classroom performance, homework, etc. However, these assessment forms are relatively single and the assessment methods are relatively outdated. In teaching practice, students have a good attendance rate, submit homework in a timely manner, and the teacher records their classroom performance in detail. However, there are also issues with insufficient differentiation of students’ formative performance and low student participation. Formative assessment is conducive to a timely understanding of the learning situation and students’ effectiveness in the learning process. Only by formulating a reasonable formative assessment plan can its important value be fully realized. Lei believed that formative assessment methods should be diversified. In addition to attendance, discussion, and homework, more methods such as completing papers and conducting social surveys can also be used in basic humanities courses to test learning effectiveness ^[5]. It is imperative to analyze the formative assessment part of the course examination reform, further optimize the assessment module, and improve students’ participation, understanding, and application of knowledge through diversified assessment forms. Zhao and Zhuang believed that in the teaching process, irregular classroom tests or mid-term exams can also be organized to help students promptly understand their shortcomings and problems in knowledge and skills mastery, thereby increasing their investment in learning ^[6]. Therefore, incorporating

some classroom tests appropriately into classroom teaching can test student learning outcomes and reflect their comprehensive knowledge and skill levels.

3.2. Simple and rigid course summative assessment methods

There are two reasons contributing to the facts that the final paper cannot well reflect the actual competency of the students and the students are more casual in class, and the evaluation of final paper scores is not very distinguished. Firstly, the subjectivity of the assessment content is strong, lacking scientific design, and the assessment results do not truly reflect the actual competency of students; the second reason is that the final paper assessment format is simple and rigid, which cannot reflect the actual learning situation of students throughout the teaching process, nor can it motivate students to engage in targeted review. Zhang and Yuan believed that in professional courses, assessment with strong fairness and emphasis on student participation, effective feedback on key and difficult knowledge points, and assessment of course requirements can significantly promote students' time investment in learning^[7]. This puts forward more specific requirements for the assessment of the course, and it is necessary to conduct a final paper assessment of the course based on the course objectives and classroom content.

4. Suggestions and reflections on improving the assessment of the “Introduction to Language” course

Based on previous research and analysis, combined with practical teaching in applied universities, the following are suggestions and reflections on improving the assessment of this course.

4.1. Reasonably setting assessment plans based on course objectives

Wu conducted a descriptive quantitative analysis of the relationship between university course assessment and objectives, and found the current situation and problems of inconsistency between assessment content and course objectives^[8]. It is important to reasonably set assessment plans based on course objectives. The course objectives play a leading role in the setting of the course assessment plan. Firstly, the assessment content is determined based on the course objectives, and then various assessment stages and corresponding scoring standards are determined. Objective 1 of the “Introduction to Language” course requires students to master a certain amount of linguistic basic knowledge and theories and establish a scientific language perspective. This goal emphasizes the students' understanding and mastery of the basic knowledge of this course, which corresponds to the content of Units 1 to 9 of “Introduction to Language.” Specifically, it includes introduction, phonetics, morphology, semantics, pragmatics, language change, language and society, language and culture, and other content. Through course learning, students can accurately express basic knowledge of English linguistics, explain linguistic terminology or related linguistic phenomena in books on their own, and provide examples. This section mainly focuses on the summative assessment, which accounts for 50–60% of the course assessment. In the final exam of the course, there will be a certain proportion of term explanations and essay questions, etc. Terms explanations mainly cover the linguistic proprietary nouns that each unit needs to focus on; essay questions start from specific language phenomena and require students to apply linguistic theories to interpret them. For example, students are asked to interpret a sentence from *Romeo and Juliet*: “Even if a rose is not called a rose, it does not lose its fragrance.” This can be analyzed from the arbitrariness of language, as there is no necessary connection between language symbols and the things they refer to. Students can also expand their explanations based on their own life experiences. In actual teaching, teachers will also consciously emphasize the key content of each unit and consolidate it through classroom stage tests, so that students can

have a deeper grasp of key knowledge.

Course objective 2 requires students to have the ability to apply scientific methods of linguistics to comprehend, analyze, appreciate, and explore practical language phenomena. This goal requires students to pay attention to language phenomena in daily life, improve their abilities in abstract and systematic thinking, and use linguistic research methods related to this course to explore the mysteries of language. This section mainly focuses on formative assessment, which accounts for 10–20% of the course assessment. Students can write their own thoughts and experiences by reading the chapters in the linguistics book *A Little Book of Language* they are interested in. This book describes some interesting language phenomena from different perspectives using simple and popular language. For example, as mentioned in books: “Why sometimes what makes us angry is not what the other person says, but the way they speak?” and “What are the benefits of talking to oneself?” can be interpreted in relation to pragmatics and language function in linguistics. Through this form of practice, students have improved their abilities to perceive, analyze, appreciate, and explore practical language phenomena. Course objective 3 is to cultivate students’ critical thinking skills, to be able to collect materials around relevant topics and viewpoints, and to provide sufficient evidence and reasonable arguments. This goal requires students to engage in exploratory learning, fully utilize their subjective initiative, and improve their abilities in information collection and analysis. This section mainly focuses on formative assessment, which accounts for 10–20% of the course assessment. This section requires students to engage in group cooperation, form their own opinions through the process of collecting information, organizing data, judging and analyzing, and finally give a classroom presentation. The topics given by the teacher mainly include “linguistic phenomena in news reports,” “linguistic phenomena in movies,” “linguistic phenomena in advertising,” “language and politics,” “language and culture,” etc. In addition, in order to better grasp the real-time learning situation of students, stage tests, attendance, and classroom performance are also included in the course assessment, accounting for 10–20% of the course assessment. Standardizing student attendance and classroom performance can guide students to improve classroom participation and cultivate good learning habits.

4.2. Correct use and optimization of formative assessment methods

Pan once pointed out, “The assessment of academic performance in universities plays an important role in students’ learning, teachers’ teaching, student enrollment management, and educational evaluation. It is necessary to further improve the assessment system through measures to make the assessment of academic performance of university students play a more positive role”^[9]. Formative evaluation is a dynamic assessment of student learning. Optimizing formative evaluation can help students improve their learning enthusiasm, stimulate their desire to actively explore knowledge, and promote the improvement of teaching quality. In the teaching process, assigning appropriate learning tasks to students based on the teaching content and progress is conducive to promoting their understanding and mastery of knowledge. The formative assessment content of this course mainly includes reading experience, exploratory learning, and stage testing. Teacher assigns linguistics extracurricular reading books to students after class, and students write their English reading experiences after reading relevant chapters. The teacher evaluates their writing according to the content and form of the language. In exploratory-based learning, teachers assign exploratory-based learning tasks to students based on each unit. Students conduct language application surveys and discussions in groups, and present them in the form of group presentations. Teacher gives scores based on their presentation content, level of cooperation, Power Point presentation content, layout, structure, and aesthetics. Through extensive data collection and in-depth analysis, students have improved their ability to search for information, analyze problems, and showcase their abilities to the public. Two stage tests will be conducted on students at different

stages of the course, with question types including fill-in-the-blank questions, term explanations, and essay questions. Teachers grade students based on their actual answers. Students can learn about the key points of the course in advance, and also review and reflect on the content they have learned to understand their own learning status.

4.3. Emphasizing and improving summative assessment

In the past, courses with strong theoretical foundations were generally evaluated in the form of final papers, taking into account the foundation of students. This project is based on the shortcomings discovered in the early practice, and the outcome assessment is conducted in the form of a test paper, forming a preliminary final exam question bank and further enriching course resources. At the same time, based on the actual situation of applied universities and the learning situation of students, the final exam matches the current level of students, preventing situations where the difficulty is too high or low. Students participate in the unified open-book exam, which mainly includes true/false questions (30 points), term explanations (25 points), reading comprehension (15 points), and argumentative questions (30 points). There are three subjective questions, with 10 points for each subquestion, and are scored based on multiple dimensions such as discourse content, structural form, and language norms. Through summative assessment, students are disciplined and motivated to improve classroom participation and efficiency, as well as stimulate their enthusiasm for the final papers.

4.4. Integrating formative assessment with summative assessment

Based on actual teaching experience and the results of early exam reform, an organic combination of formative assessment and summative assessment is beneficial for improving teaching quality. The specific content is as follows: classroom attendance (10%) + reading experience (10%) + exploratory learning (10%) + stage tests (20%) + final exams (50%). On the basis of previous exam reforms that used final papers as a result-based assessment, the exam reform plan has been improved, and the result-based assessment has been conducted in the form of paper-based assessment. According to the nature of the course, the examination method is determined as open-book or closed-book: if the course is a compulsory course in the major, the final examination is a closed-book examination; if the course is an elective course in the major, it is an open-book examination. Gan mentioned that we should handle the selection, weight, and detail of teaching content based on a full understanding of the actual level and learning situation of linguistic knowledge mastered by students, determine the key and difficult points of teaching, and achieve classified teaching^[10]. There is no doubt that all the formative assessment and summative assessment are based on the key and difficult points of teaching.

By adjusting the exam reform of this course, not only can most students pass the exam according to the actual situation of students with poor foundation and high difficulty of the course, but it will also have a certain constraint and incentive effect on students through the final exam, thereby improving classroom participation and efficiency. “Introduction to Language” is a very important course for students, especially undergraduate students who have plans to pursue further studies. Improving the course examination reform is not only beneficial for classroom teaching, but also lays a solid foundation for students’ later development.

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