The Construction of Formative Assessment Mode in Ethnic Minority Classes in Universities^{*}

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From analyzing the current situations of formative assessment of ethnic minority students' college English in China and abroad, this paper gives the specific problems, the significance, and the research values of constructing the research. It tries to construct the formative assessment mode of ethnic minority class's college English on the basis of multimedia teaching, systematically and comprehensively investigates and analyzes the formative assessment's impacts upon the fostering of ethnic minority students' autonomous learning abilities, the impacts upon language learning and teaching, and the impacts upon the ethnic minority students' academic achievements and learning motives. The aim of this paper is to comprehensively enhance ethnic minority students' college English teaching qualities and the system of tests and assessments. The project based on relative theories and principals like language acquisition theory, humanism theory, constructivism theory, formative assessment, and summative assessment. According to the distinctiveness of ethnic minority college English teaching in science and technology, we are trying to construct the formative assessment system of ethnic minority college English teaching on the basis of multi-media network teaching mode. We comprehensively and systematically investigate and analyze the construction of the formative assessments' impact upon the cultivation of ethnic minority students' autonomous learning abilities, the impact upon language learning and teaching, the impact upon students' academic achievements, oral scores, and students' learning motivations.

Keywords: formative assessment, ethnic minority students, construction

Introduction

College English assessment system is an important aspect of college English class teaching. For ethnic minority college English teaching of universities, especially universities from science and technology, the comprehensive, objective, scientific, and fair assessment system plays an important role in realizing ethnic minority college English curricular aims and reforms.

In order to help students promptly raise English comprehensive applying ability and attain optimal learning effect, we should draw up assessment system comprehensively, objectively, scientifically and accurately, and we suggest that teaching assessment should be divided into formative assessment and summative assessment. (Department of Higher

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Education, Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 1)

With the reform of college English teaching mode, the traditional teaching assessment mode aiming at the summative assessment has been questioned and challenged. "In the classroom settings, teachers are constantly conducting various kinds of assessments to draw inferences about their students, for example, their knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors, etc." (WANG, 2006, p. 78). Therefore, with the reform of the summative assessment, we should adopt new teaching assessment mode in ethnic minority groups, aiming at the students. Not only should we teach common language knowledge and skills, but also we should attach importance to fostering language applicable skills and autonomous abilities, namely, the wholly new teaching mode, so that, we can construct the objective and fair formative assessment system that is suitable for ethnic minority college English teaching. This project is to construct scientific and specified autonomous learning assessment mode of ethnic minority college English, which can objectively and comprehensively assess students' language knowledge abilities and oral abilities and can adapt new requirements and fostering objects of multi-media teaching mode, so that, there will have more comprehensive and talented people adapted with modern society.

The Specific Problems of the Research

Ethnic minority class is the important part of universities of science and technology in China, its college English courses and assessment validity are the special levels of teaching. "Ethnic minority students in China are the precious talent resources. They are the backbones of promoting the blending of national cultures, enhancing national unities and safeguarding country's unification" (WEI, 2010, p. 55). In 1990s, many universities including our university recruited ethnic minority students in order to satisfy productive forces levels in ethnic minority regions and social and economic conditions, which makes important contributions to economic and cultural developments in ethnic minority regions. It fosters the talents in ethnic minority regions with fast speed as well. Due to the weakness of ethnic minority students' English bases, ethnic minority students cannot adjust to the test and assessment mode of final examination base carried out in Han students. So, ethnic minority students have to apply to the traditional examination mode made by teachers of ethnic minority classes. The disadvantages embody that ethnic minority students have applied to traditional summative assessment mode for many years. The summative assessment mode under test base is inconsistent with college English talent mode under the new situations. In order to guarantee the final test and assessment achievements of ethnic minority students, teachers of ethnic minority classes have to simplify and patternize the tests, which leads to the phenomenon that ethnic minority students pay more attention to scores instead of knowledge. Students in ethnic minority classes go over test and assessment contents by blindly remembering keys to the learning contents, which lack the truth of college English test mode and assessment system in essence and will bring certain difficulties in constructing college English formative assessment mode, the reform and the assessment of class teaching.

Ethnic minority students have the same textbooks with the Han college students. Due to the difficulties of the textbook, ethnic minority students have the resistance to the English learning. For instance, they can not comprehensively understand the passage contents of the textbook. Ethnic minority students can not finish the after-class questions by themselves because of the large quantities of new words and grammar. The difficulties of the viewing, listening, and speaking textbook lead to the fossilization of ethnic minority students' oral English learning. Therefore, they lack English comprehensive abilities in finishing oral test assessment by computer.

There is no suitable courseware adapted to ethnic minority college English teaching. Teachers of teaching ethnic minority students should make a new set of listening and speaking courseware according to the special characteristics of ethnic minority students. The listening contents in listening and speaking courseware should begin with certain simple dialogs or short passages. The audio material of listening contents should range from being slow to fast, making the ladder mode. The dictation part should begin with words and sentences step by step, and there should be the recording materials, so that, teachers and students can proofread and have the references. The oral part can add to some reading and recording functions. Its contents can be coordinated with the cultures and folks, etc., in ethnic minority regions, which basically foreshadows the construction of English oral formative assessment of ethnic minority students.

Ethnic minority students have barriers to Han language, especially some Uyghur ethnic group students in Xinjiang, who have very low English bases. The English level of them is in the basic stage; they have difficulties in understanding basic grammar, let alone understanding the teachers' teaching. Hence, ethnic minority classes' English teachings continue to apply to traditional force-feeding teaching method, which leads to the lack of new reform measures, like modern foreign language teaching concepts and task-based teaching methods. As a result, the English listening and speaking abilities and English comprehensive applicable abilities of ethnic minority students are comparatively weak. For most ethnic minority students, learning English will experience tests of second language acquisition and even third language acquisition. Given the three aspects mentioned above, it is necessary to construct and explore ethnic minority college English formative assessment system with ethnic minority specialties, enhance comprehensively college English teaching qualities and test and assessment system, and enhance ethnic minority students' comprehensive English applicable abilities, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating.

Research Significance

This project has the great theoretical and practical significance. Not only can it promote ethnic minority students in science and technology to get the advanced development, but also it can explore a route of college English teaching application in country's ethnic minority classes. Teaching assessment is an important aspect of realizing college English teaching objects. For ethnic minority college English teaching in science and technology, it is very important to develop and reorganize the formative assessment and the summative assessment. Therefore, the introduction of the formative assessment concept will provide a kind of chance for organic combination of ethnic minority college English teaching and assessment. At the same time, it is the necessary part in the process of networking language teaching as well. Reforming and innovating the current ethnic minority college English assessment measures will be an important subject in the process of college English teaching reform recently.

Theoretical Basis

In 1967, the philosopher Scriven from Chicago firstly mentioned the concept of formative assessment in the process of discussing the curricular reform. According to Scriven, the formative assessment means we use the processing teaching fruits to proofread teaching plans and exert necessary supplements or arrange learning contents according to individual real situations. It is the performance in the process of students' daily English

learning. It is the developing assessment made on the basis of the observation, recording, and reflection of students' autonomous learning process. Its purpose is to stimulate students to learn and help students effectively control their own learning process, so that, students can obtain the feelings of achievement, enhance self-confidence, and foster cooperating spirits. Formative assessment ranges students from accepting the assessment passively to becoming the master of assessment and the active participant. Later, the formative assessment was applied to teaching assessment practice by American educator Bloom. He thinks:

Using diagnostic function of assessment to provide feedback information for teachers and students in the process of teaching is called formative assessment. It corresponds to summative assessment which is carried out after a stage of teaching, and it adjusts learning behavior that happened. (as cited in Allal & Lopez, 2005)

Black and William presented that formative assessment corresponded to summative assessment in 1998. They attach importance to students' learning process and development, and promote students' autonomous learning by providing assessment feedback. They think that "formative assessment is a part of learning. Students ought to be active in their own assessment and to imagine their own learning by understanding how to learn well" (Black & William, 1998, pp. 7-8).

In recent years, some people in domestic educational circle made great contribution to the ethnic minority English teaching reform in China. Ethnic minority English teaching reform made great achievements in our country's universities in the course of literature review and paper works. Compared with foreign abundant formative assessment empirical evidence, our country's formative assessment is comparatively limited. The implement method of the formative assessment has no specific and systematic explanation. Furthermore, the recent research aims mainly at theoretical research of conception and construction. The stage of theoretical discussion has been being mature.

However, the literature reviews and reference materials of college ethnic minority college English teaching assessment system are very limited. The research of ethnic minority college English teaching assessment system is merely still in the first stage. We hope the research of this project can play important role in later ethnic minority college English teaching reform and can promote it as well. We should construct new college English formative assessment system with special characteristics adapted to ethnic minority students from theories and practice, so that, it can promote our country's college English reform to have the advanced development.

Research Contents and Construction Mode

Research Contents

With the help of network information technology, this project can effectively use college English formative assessment ways in ethnic minority college English classes, such as, network class assignments, autonomous-learning electronic platform, the handing-in English compositions in network, the resource information of network quality classes, the electronic courseware, the electronic files, the electronic mails, and so forth. "The web allows the students freedom to conduct learning at their own pace and spend appropriate time in improving certain skills that they are weak at" (LI, 2005, p. 91).

We try to construct ethnic minority college English teaching formative assessment mode on the basis of network, combining the summative assessment and the formative assessment, and examine its impacts and effects from empirical evidence. The key content is to confirm the essence of assessment, the methods, and

measures of assessment, and try to construct this assessment system. From the empirical evidence, this mode will be examined whether it can effectively enhance ethnic minority students' activities, initiative, and creativity in the process of their autonomous learning, whether it can arouse students' interest in learning English autonomously, whether it can enhance students' autonomous-learning academic achievements, whether it can arouse teachers' activity of reform and exploration to the contents and ways of college English teaching, and whether it can greatly adapt the new requirements of multi-media network teaching mode and fostering aims.

Innovations

In the process of college English teaching of multi-media networks, this project comprehensively and systematically investigates and analyzes the impacts and effects of formative assessment mode upon English language learning of ethnic minority students, the impacts and effects upon students' English comprehensive academic achievements, the impacts and effects upon students' network platform autonomous learning contents and students' academic motives, and so forth.

Among various innovative endeavors in college English education, it is hoped that the Web, the newest educational environment delivering all our learning media, could be used creatively to remold the traditional unitary instructor-led approach in China and thus improve the learning efficiency and ease the constraints of lack of English teachers in present China. (LIU, 2005, p. 94)

Therefore, according to the main characters of multi-media networks teaching mode, the formative assessment and the summative assessment will be combined and the formative assessment mode of the ethnic minority college English teaching will be constructed on the basis of the multi-media network teaching. Moreover, teachers who are in charge of ethnic minority classes should take advantage in their management functions in classroom.

The teachers' management function includes determining learning goals, making decisions about materials, deciding how the materials will be used, keeping records, evaluating progress, allocating time to tasks, deciding on what tasks will be done, and who should do them, what groupings the learners will work in, etc. (DONG, 2005, p. 101)

After the formative assessment in ethnic minority college English teaching, its test results will be more accurate and credible than the test results of the traditional summative assessment. It will comprehensively and systematically embody students' English language acquisition abilities and their oral levels. The formative assessment measures with ethnic minority features will arouse students' interests in learning English autonomously.

Conclusion

Ethnic minority classes are the important parts in our country's universities, and their English teaching is a special part as well. In the college English teaching reform of network teaching mode, it is very important for ethnic minority college English to carry out effective formative teaching assessment modes. The formative assessment is an innovation of English test. "The interpretation and proper use of test information are the basis of checking students' learning outcomes and the effectiveness of teaching as well as detecting students' weakness, which are the primary goal of giving tests" (GAO, 2004, p. 74). With the profoundness of college English teaching reform modes, the ethnic minority college English teaching assessment has been concerned greatly. For

ethnic minority students, the acquisition and application of language abilities can not be resolved simply by final examinations. Therefore, it is necessary to have the formative assessment on the basis of the original summative assessment. Hence, this research combines the formative assessment and the summative assessment of ethnic minority college English teaching on the basis of multi-media network, with regard to the special features of ethnic minority college English teaching and the characteristics of analyzing the formative assessment. The scope of this project is shrunk into ethnic minority's special groups. From analyzing the characteristics and modes of the formative assessment, it aims to explore the necessities and feasibilities of ethnic minority college English formative assessment in the environment of multi-media network, and calls on more teachers who work for ethnic minority students in universities of science and technology to attach importance to this important aspect of the teaching process.

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