The Effect of Language Proficiency on the Teaching Knowledge Acquisition of English Student Teachers—Comparison of Three Repetitive Lessons

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Based on the framework of classroom teaching learning process analysis, this study explores the relationship between language proficiency and the acquisition of teaching knowledge in the sample of three English repetitive lessons in senior high school by two English student teachers. After quantitative and qualitative analysis, it was found that the higher the level of language, the greater the improvement of teaching knowledge; the student with high language level has made rapid progress in teaching design, slow progress in teaching management and student learning, while the progress of the student with low language level is slow in all aspects. This study has important reference value for pre-service foreign language teacher education.

Keywords: student teacher, language proficiency, teaching knowledge, repetitive lessons

Introduction

Teaching has been wrongly defined as imparting more objective knowledge. After the Renaissance, with the promotion of Western pedagogy, people gradually realized that teaching is a skill-based job. Successful teaching requires not only solid subject knowledge of teachers, but also skilled subject teaching knowledge that makes subject knowledge be processed and translated into comprehensive knowledge that students can understand according to their needs (Zou & Chen, 2005). Subject teaching knowledge is the integration of subject contents and educational disciplines, which can best distinguish the differences between subject experts and teachers (Shulman, 1987). The similarity of teaching contents and tools makes foreign language teachers different from other subject teachers. As far as other disciplines are concerned, teaching tools are the mother tongue familiar to both teachers and students. The teaching process is to teach and acquire teaching contents in the mother tongue. However, in foreign language teaching, both teaching tools and teaching contents are foreign languages. Foreign language teachers should help students construct a brand-new language and culture system with unfamiliar language in the case of serious lack of social culture, language environment, and pragmatic significance, which

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puts forward higher requirements for foreign language teachers’ language proficiency and teaching ability. However, the majority of foreign language teachers in China are foreign language learners. They are still in the process of language development. They usually do not have the language level of the native speakers. The dynamic characteristics of interlanguage make their foreign language knowledge particularly easy to change, and this change will undoubtedly affect the development of their foreign language teaching knowledge (Zou, 2013). English normal students are not only learners of foreign language knowledge, but also beginners of teaching knowledge. Will the change of language knowledge affect their learning of teaching knowledge? This paper probes into this question.

**Literature Review**

In the middle and late 20th century, it became the focus of teachers’ research to explore teachers’ professional development from the perspective of knowledge. Teachers’ knowledge has become a hot topic in the field of teacher education all over the world. Schulman, a professor of pedagogy at Stanford University, and his colleagues pioneered that teachers should master seven kinds of knowledge: subject knowledge, subject teaching knowledge, curriculum knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, student knowledge, educational environment knowledge, and knowledge about educational purposes, goals, and values. Among them, subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge account for a large proportion; they are the core of teachers’ knowledge, and there is an important relationship between them (Shulman, 1987). As the successor of Schulman’s pedagogical knowledge theory, Grossman and his colleagues (1990) carefully observed and compared the classes of English teachers with different levels of subject knowledge, and found that teachers with solid subject knowledge have high penetrating ability, are familiar with the vertical arrangement and horizontal connection of the subject in different grades, and understand the relationship among the knowledge points in the subject, so they will not only can not copy the structure of textbooks, but also can take effective representations according to students’ actual level and on-the-spot reaction to help students establish links between knowledge points, so that students can gradually enter and master unfamiliar content with familiar content as a starting point. While teachers with poor subject knowledge only organize teaching content strictly according to the arrangement of textbooks, the knowledge points expressed are isolated and fragmented, so they can not establish the knowledge structure schema of the subject, which makes it difficult for students to learn, and in order to avoid touching on the knowledge they lack, teaching content is limited to textbooks, at the same time teachers-centered method is adopted to avoid student’s questions. Berg (1998) made a qualitative study of an experienced ESL teacher’s grammar knowledge and grammar teaching knowledge, and found that the teacher’s grammar knowledge is closely related to his grammar teaching behavior. Ball and McDiarmid (1990) have proved through experiments that a good professional foundation is a necessary condition for excellent teachers. The above research shows that teachers’ subject knowledge plays a decisive role in their teaching strategies, teaching contents, and teaching quality. However, the existing studies mainly focus on the classroom teaching of in-service teachers, and lack of research on the learning process of pre-service teachers.

Repetitive teaching refers to “teachers teach the same or similar content in the same or similar teaching environment facing different teaching objects” (Chen & Zou, 2016, p. 65). Because of the following advantages, it is regarded as an effective medium for normal students to learn teaching knowledge: First of all, the multiple
variables involved are controlled. Only the teaching objects and teaching methods are changed. The teaching content and teaching environment are invariable factors, which reduce the interference in the process of teachers’ learning and are conducive to the rapid progress of normal students. Secondly, it provides students with targeted learning opportunities. Normal students’ omissions, problems, and difficulties in the previous teaching will force them to actively seek solutions to deal with the subsequent teaching. In the cycle of discovering and solving problems, normal school students have the opportunity to use theory to guide practice and practice to test ideas, thus exploring and generating their own teaching practice knowledge. Existing research has proved that repetitive teaching can promote the acquisition of teaching skills of normal school students (Chen & Zou, 2016; Xie & Zou, 2015). In view of this, this study takes three repetitive classes of two English normal students with different language proficiency as samples to explore whether language proficiency will affect the learning effect of teaching knowledge of English normal students.

Research Method

Research Subjects

The subjects are two female students in the fourth grade of English teachers’ major in a university: Song Wei and Zhao Min (alias). Song Wei passed TEM-4 with 85 points in the second grade and Zhao Min passed TEM-4 with 62 points in the third grade. This study defines their language proficiency as two levels: high (H) and low (L). They have studied “pedagogy”, “psychology”, and other courses, but have no teaching experience. They are beginners of teaching skills. This research is based on the teaching practice in the first semester of the fourth grade, and the teaching practice will be carried out in the second semester. Therefore, they are highly motivated and have no feelings of resistance.

Research Design

This study was conducted in the first grade of L Middle School, which has nine parallel classes. Class 1-6 were randomly selected as the experimental units. Song Wei teaches once in Class 1, 3, 5 and Zhao Min in Class 2, 4, and 6; each of them teaches three times. Firstly, the subjects go to L Middle School to listen to the class, get familiar with the students’ situation, teaching facilities, and so on, and communicate with the middle school teachers to determine the teaching content and time. Then, the subjects begin to prepare lessons and make teaching plans. During the teaching period, the university curriculum teachers, middle school contact teachers, and the other three English teachers in the middle school attended the class and scored according to the scoring rules of classroom teaching. After the class, the subjects filled in reflective reports, and the teachers and some of the subjects were interviewed and recorded.

Data Collation and Analysis

The research data include three lesson plan designs, classroom videos, reflective reports, interview recordings, and scoring rules table. The table is based on Zou Weicheng’s (2013) framework of classroom teaching and learning process analysis. It has four dimensions and 18 scoring items, each with five points and a total score of 90 points. Among them, teaching design dimension contains four items, accounting for 20 points; teaching management dimension contains four items, accounting for 20 points; teachers’ language dimension contains seven items, accounting for 35 points; students’ learning dimension contains three items, accounting for
15 points (see Table 1 for details).

According to the four dimensions in this table, the researchers used quantitative analysis to compare the changes of three repetitive teaching processes of normal school students with high and low language proficiency.

Table 1

| Scoring Rules |
|----------------|
| **Dimensions** | **Focus** | **Score Items** | **Score** |
| Teaching Design | Teaching Objectives | Clarity of presentation of teaching objectives |  |
| | Teaching Steps | The logic of teaching steps |  |
| | Textbook Analysis | Utilization of the characteristics of teaching materials |  |
| | Instructional Tools | Effectiveness of instructional tools |  |
| Teaching Management | Beginning, Ending, Transition, Activity Organization, Use of Teaching Materials and Equipment, Overall Activity Coherence | Targeted management, multitask management |  |
| | | Opportunity for promoting activities and fluency degree |  |
| | | Degree of mobilizing students and student’s participation |  |
| | | How to deal with accidents and how to use teaching equipment |  |
| Teacher Language | Instructions, Interpretation, Communication, Response, Demonstration, Evaluation, Volume, Rhythm, Language Accuracy, Confidence, Body Language, Vision, Mother Language Ratio | Lead-in |  |
| | | Instructions |  |
| | | Explanation |  |
| | | Demonstration and display |  |
| | | The use of mother language |  |
| | | Teachers’ response to students |  |
| | | Management |  |
| Student Learning | Learning Style, Learning Time, State of Concentration & Preparation | Way of dealing with tasks |  |
| | | Degree of involvement in learning |  |
| | | Sense of harvest |  |

**Results and Discussion**

The text given by the two normal students is the Reading & Vocabulary section of “My First Ride on a Train”, Volume 1, Unit 3 of Compulsory English for Senior One, published by Foreign Language Research Press. The knowledge goal of this unit is to let students master some vocabulary of transportation and related things, and grasp the method of describing tourism experience. The goal of ability is to train students’ micro-reading skills. The teaching emphasis is: describing the skills of traveling and using past participle as attributive. The difficulty of teaching is how to use the past tense to describe a trip.

We calculated the average scores of each dimension and the total scores of three teaching sessions. The results are shown in Table 2.
As can be seen from Table 2, with the increase of the number of classes, the scores in every dimension and total scores of the two normal students are gradually increasing. This result is consistent with other scholars’ research on the effectiveness of repetitive teaching. In order to better understand the changes, we calculated the fractional difference between each teaching session. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

|                | Teaching design | Teaching management | Teacher language | Student learning | Total         |
|----------------|-----------------|---------------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------|
|                | 2-1  | 3-2  | 3-1  | 2-1  | 3-2  | 3-1  | 2-1  | 3-2  | 3-1  | 2-1  | 3-2  | 3-1  | 2-1  | 3-2  | 3-1  |        |
| S. W.          | 4.4  | 1.6  | 6    | 3    | 3.2  | 6.2  | 3.3  | 1.8  | 5.1  | 2    | 2.2  | 4.2  | 12.7 | 8.8  | 21.5 |
| Z. M.          | 2.2  | 2.2  | 4.4  | 2    | 2.4  | 4.8  | 1.7  | 2.3  | 4    | 0.8  | 1.4  | 2.2  | 7.3  | 8.7  | 16   |

It is not difficult to see from the total column of Table 3: First, the higher the language level, the greater the improvement of teaching knowledge. Second, although the two normal students have been making progress, Song Wei has made the greatest progress in the second teaching; Zhao Min has made progress step by step, in another word, in her three teaching sessions, she made almost the same progress each time, and there was no big jump in her scores.

The interview results show that learning attitude is the primary cause of this phenomenon. After each class, Song Wei asked many students and teachers about her teaching defects and how to correct them. She collected many valuable opinions and suggestions, and then revised the plan repeatedly with the help of a lot of information. Zhao Min’s attitude of getting feedback is not positive enough. She did not take the initiative to communicate with other teachers and students. She only asked the opinions of university curriculum teachers. Secondly, the degree of self-confidence is different. The higher the language level, the stronger self-confidence. Under the trend of self-confidence, Song Wei dared to approach teachers and students on her own initiative, and asked them to analyze the disadvantages of her teaching. Zhao Min, on the other hand, is inferior. She only communicates with familiar university curriculum teachers and puts himself in a relatively closed environment. Thirdly, the degree of reflection is different. Song Wei’s reflection is more comprehensive, not only has the macro problems of education idea, teaching link, and so on, but also has the details such as the transition between links. Zhao Min’s reflection is relatively narrow, focusing mainly on micro-details, but less on macro-issues. Fourthly, there are different demands on self. Song Wei said she had the habit of trying her best to do everything well and after preparing for class, she practiced in front of the mirror several times. Zhao Min’s request to herself is not to seek the best, as long as there is progress on it, and after preparing lessons, she only went through it twice in her mind. Under the influence of these factors, Song Wei has made remarkable progress in a short time, while Zhao Min needs longer time and more opportunities.
Comparing the scores of each dimension carefully, we can also find two points. First, the total rise of each dimension is proportional to the language proficiency. Second, Song Wei made a great leap in teaching design and teacher’s language in her second teaching, but her scores in teaching management and student learning increased step by step; Zhao Min’s scores in all dimensions increased step by step. This is mainly due to the difference in language proficiency, which results in different attention allocation. Because of the fear that her expression is incorrect, not fluent and will be disgraced, Zhao Min spent most of his time and energy on the teacher’s language in the course of preparing lessons. She did not pay enough attention to other aspects, did not prepare adequately, and lacked the generation in presupposition (Wang, 2009). But with the repetition of teaching, language problems are gradually solved, attention is liberated and redistributed, so when the teacher’s language has made great progress in the third class, her scores in other dimensions are also improved. On the contrary, Song Wei does not need to pay too much attention to language expression. She can distribute her attention equally and give full attention and preparation to all aspects. Therefore, her scores in all dimensions are higher than Zhao Min’s. Teaching design belongs to the category of presupposition, and teacher’s language is the basic skill of the teacher himself. Both of them are under the control of the individual teacher without the cooperation of others. So Song Wei can improve greatly in these two aspects in her second teaching. However, teaching management and student learning involve both teacher and learners, which is not decided by the individual teacher. At the same time, she fails to adapt herself from the student to the teacher in a short time. She also lacks the mastery of students’ psychological and cognitive level. Therefore, her scores in these two aspects are increasing step by step.

The above is a quantitative comparison of the three teaching and learning effects of the two normal students. Now through the collation of the reflection report and interview recordings, we discuss the similarities and differences of the two normal students’ teaching and learning qualitatively.

The teacher’s evaluation of the two normal students confirmed the above results. They believe that Song Wei grows up much faster than Zhao Min and acquires more teaching knowledge than Zhao Min. The greatest difference between them lies in the two aspects of teachers’ language knowledge and teaching content. As far as teacher’s language is concerned, Song Wei’s classroom language is mostly English, and the language expression is accurate and fluent. Zhao Min’s English use frequency is low, and there are many grammatical errors. As far as teaching content is concerned, Song Wei timely supplements the relevant knowledge not appearing in the textbook, while Zhao Min only refers to the knowledge points in the textbook, without any expansion or extension. There are also some differences in other aspects. From the point of view of teaching attitude, the two normal school students are very nervous in the first class. They almost stand on the platform for the whole class, their eyes are evasive, and they dare not look at the students. But in the second class, there is a big gap between them. Song Wei’s nervousness is obviously reduced, and she starts to walk away from the platform and has eye contact with the students. Her facial expression was relaxed and had a little smile. In the third lesson, Song Wei was completely relaxed and could easily complete the teaching plan, and had more interaction with the students. Zhao Min’s nervousness was greatly alleviated in the third class. She began to step down from the platform and have eye contact and interaction with the students. In terms of teaching methods, they are quite different from each other even in the first class. Song Wei’s teaching methods are flexible: When explaining grammar, she usually guides the students to discover the rules; when dealing with vocabulary, she often uses English synonyms.
and antonyms to make students perceive the meaning of words; when consolidating linguistic knowledge, she adopts semi-controlled activities that take into account meaning expression to promote communicative practice; when dealing with texts, she guides students to discover and understand the language through context analysis or word splitting methods. The homework given by her mainly focuses on the cultivation of thinking ability, such as imitation. Zhao Min’s method is more rigid. No matter teaching words or grammar, she mainly adopts the method of direct explanation and presentation. The text processing is sentence-by-sentence translation. Homework given by her in the first class is to recite the text or copy words. But through three lectures, they both made progress. Song Wei was able to adjust the teaching methods according to the needs of students. Zhao Min also began to adopt the guiding method slowly from the second class. For example, when dealing with grammar, she changed from telling directly to giving students some useful tips to help them find and summarize grammar phenomena or rules. In terms of teaching design, Song Wei’s logic is stronger. From the first lesson, she followed the teaching ideas from macro to micro. In the following two lessons, she constantly adjusted and perfected the teaching steps to make it more conducive to promoting students’ acceptance and application of new knowledge. Zhao Min’s original instructional design, contrary to Song Wei’s, adopted a micro-to-macroteaching process. However, with the help of the instructor, Zhao Min quickly changed her instructional design in the second lesson and further optimized it in the third teaching process.

The students also gave different evaluation to Song Wei and Zhao Min’s teaching. Most of the students in Song Wei’s class gave her high recognition. They thought that her spoken English was excellent, her knowledge was wide, her teaching ideas were clear, and her explanation was clear and thorough; they have learned a lot in her class. Some students in Zhao Min’s first two classes have a low recognition of her and think that they have not learned much useful knowledge, but the evaluation to the third class is much better.

In addition to the learning attitude and self-confidence mentioned above, the interviews and reflective reports of Song Wei and Zhao Min show some other reasons for their different teaching and learning effects: Song Wei has strong self-learning ability, likes extensive reading, likes thinking and summarizing, and is good at summarizing experience and lessons; Zhao Min’s learning is more passive, seldom actively absorbs extra-curricular knowledge after completing the learning tasks assigned by teachers, and has no habit of reflection. At the same time, the two have different learning experiences. Song Wei graduated from a model high school. The teachers in it have advanced teaching ideas and methods. Zhao Min came from a very ordinary middle school, where the teachers are blindly pursuing the promotion rate and mainly adopt the cramming teaching method. Based on this, we see that the teacher’s personal learning experience has a great impact on his or her teaching. It is urgent to cultivate primary and secondary school teachers with advanced teaching concepts and methods, otherwise it will cause a vicious circle.

**Conclusion**

This study shows that language level is closely related to the acquisition of teaching knowledge: the higher the language level, the quicker and more comprehensive improvement of teaching skills; language level and learning attitudes, methods and habits that determine language proficiency directly or indirectly affect the learning of teaching knowledge by English student teachers. From this, we can see in the process of training normal school students, teacher educators should not only attach importance to the imparting of knowledge and
the training of skills, but also deeply understand and analyze the various factors affecting learning efficiency, and
timely correct and guide them, so as to effectively improve language level, fundamentally promote teacher
learning, shorten the growth cycle, and lay a good foundation for the future lifelong learning and development of
normal school students.

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