

Integrating Task-based Teaching and Testing in College English Context

Mojun Du

School of Foreign Languages, East China Jiaotong University, Jiangxi 330013, China
**Corresponding author e-mail: dumojun@163.com*

Abstract: *The purpose of the current research is to improve the current traditional teaching style in college English classrooms and analyze the problems and phenomena that students exhibit in the current language teaching classrooms. Then, based on the analysis of these phenomena, the project tracked the original causes, conducted certain investigation, and created a new foreign language teaching model that integrates task-based teaching and testing based on the standard-referenced testing theory and the existing research findings.*

Keywords: *Task-based Teaching and Testing, College English Context, Language Assessment*

1. Introduction

Since the reform and opening up in China and the increasing frequency of international communication, foreign language teaching and testing have received widespread attention, but the formative assessment methods that have emerged in recent years have received mixed reviews in China. Therefore, it is important for testing professionals to reform college English tests and improve the validity of college English tests so that they can measure the true level of candidates and provide a basis for judging whether students can meet the requirements of the syllabus and teaching objectives, and promote the development of college English teaching with effective formative assessment methods, which will eventually have a positive impact on the content and mode of talent training.

Experts and scholars at home and abroad have conducted a series of studies on formative assessment tests. According to Li (2008), the negative repercussions of large-scale standardized testing of foreign languages have led to a new understanding of the potential role of formative assessment. Although foreign scholars have conducted a lot of research around classroom formative assessment and achieved some results, many practical problems remain unsolved. Among them, the validity validation of classroom formative assessment has become one of the focal points of these debates. Whether classroom formative assessments can serve as an effective supplement to summative standardized tests depends to a large extent on the quality of classroom assessments. Therefore, it is imperative to build a valid quality assessment system for the assessment of college English classes. The research on the validity of classroom formative assessment is in its initial stage in China, especially the specific methods and procedures for validating the validity of formative assessment based on task-based tests still need to be further explored.

2. Review of Literature

At the same time, we recognized that the lack of effective classroom assessment was particularly detrimental to the teaching of English at the university level, and the task-based language tests are a useful supplement to formative assessment. In her book "A Study of Task Difficulty in Task-Based Language Testing", Shaoqian Luo (2012) explains task-based language testing as follows: "Tasks" are considered to be an effective tool for evaluating learners' language skills, but the question of how to determine the difficulty of tasks has been an open one. The study "Task Difficulty in Task-Based Language Testing" systematically investigates this issue based on a large amount of data, and constructs a task difficulty analysis framework with "input-information processing-output" as the core, and uses a series of comprehensive factors to analyze the difficulty of the test tasks. This study provides a reliable theoretical basis for analyzing task difficulty in language testing and a template for test-takers to select tasks.

Some scholars believe that research in task-based test validity validation has been gradually carried out in China, and preliminary results have been achieved, such as Huang Rui (2013), who found that the validation of construct validity of task-based performance assessment examples in terms of content validity through a survey study, intervention and differential cohort studies not only achieved validity validation of criterion-referenced language tests, but also addresses the criterion of differentiation between mastered and non-mastered groups, which is the concern of criterion-referenced language tests. Other scholars have adapted language tests from real language use tasks and they found that their validity was not significantly different from that of the CET4; the internal consistency of the questions and the reliability of the parallel questions were also in the trustworthy range; in terms of theoretical-based validity, there was a significant correlation between the cognitive strategies embodied in the task-based tests and the score levels related to the specified analysis criteria, and the scores of the listening, reading, writing, and listening aspects of the task-based tests were significantly correlated with the scores of the relevant scenarios. There was also a high correlation between the scores on the listening, reading, and writing aspects of the task-based tests and the relevant applications in the actual scenarios. This suggests an intrinsic correlation between theoretically based validity and the results exhibited in terms of scores.

In contrast, the research on criterion-referenced language tests has lagged behind, with scholars such as Huang Rui (2013) and Zou Shen (2008) conducting more in-depth studies. Zou Shen (2008) argues that school-based language tests, mostly based on criterion-referenced theory, and language teachers should be involved in the whole process of criterion-referenced testing because the criterion tests themselves are usually closely related to the language teaching syllabus and the criteria in criterion-referenced assessments come directly from the teaching objectives. Criterion-referenced assessments are often used to diagnose specific areas of learning in which individual students are stronger or weaker, whether they have mastered what they have learned, etc., and to provide a basis for remediation planning. Therefore, formative assessments conducted inside and outside the classroom need to be carried out within a criterion-referenced framework, which can have a positive countervailing effect on teaching and learning. Huang Rui (2013) argues that criterion-referenced language tests and norm-referenced language tests are common methods used to interpret test takers' scores in the contemporary language testing field, and that it is more relevant to emphasize and explore a criterion-referenced language test calibration approach with the teaching task as the goal and the syllabus as the guide. Therefore, we need to use criterion-referenced language testing to expand or promote the positive countervailing effects of the test. In terms of test content and format, the CRLT (Criterion Referenced Language Test) requires both a complete response to the syllabus and consistency with the instructional objectives and requirements (Zou Shen 2006). Secondly, task-based tests have characteristics such as authenticity and interactivity. Choosing the appropriate language test based on the instructional objectives ensures the consistency between the test and the instructional objectives and enhances the criterion-referenced property of the test. From the point of view of score interpretation, such task-based language tests with criterion-referenced properties in the classroom are closer to the criterion-referenced requirements, so that teachers and students can get effective feedback from score interpretation and thus have a positive contribution to the test-reversal effect.

Although these studies have conducted a series of discussions on criterion-referenced theory, task-based language test validity, and formative assessment validity theory, respectively, it has a very broad area for further research and exploration in terms of the relevant research content conducted in the college English environment, especially in the research of task-based teaching and testing integration based on criterion-referenced theory to improve formative assessment. In particular, it is necessary to study the effectiveness and diagnostic effect of formative assessment based on criterion-referenced theory. Therefore, the research have made further attempts to investigate the integration of task-based teaching and testing under the guidance of criterion-referenced theory in the specific context of college English. As the research on task-based teaching and testing continues, we find that although there are studies on task-based test validity verification and criterion-referenced language testing, these studies are relatively independent, and how to link the three organically under the guidance of criterion-referenced theory and apply them to classroom teaching and testing in the College English context will help to analyze the positive impact of task-based testing on college English teaching. It will help us to establish a new teaching and testing model that meets modern teaching and testing standards and bridges the gap between foreign language teaching and testing, which will have an extremely positive countervailing effect on college English teaching. For these reason, we focus on prompting the integration of task-based teaching and testing as the innovation and entry point of the topic, and study the topic of the integration of task-based teaching and testing.

3. Methodology

The main focus of this project is to investigate task-based language learning and assessment conducted by non-English majors inside and outside the college English classroom, in an attempt to integrate the formative language assessment model with the student learning model, to conduct a unique attempt to integrate language learning and testing, and to conduct a more effective on-campus language testing and assessment model of college English guided by criterion-referenced theory. The project proposes to use a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, including tests, questionnaires, interviews, and the design of student academic portfolios, to immerse students in the task-based teaching and testing process and to experience the new formative assessment approach.

3.1 Participants

Based on the analysis of the data from the questionnaire, the project selected a representative sample of 20 participants from each of the 126 students in our school to participate in the qualitative survey. The main teaching methods and formats used in this process were interviews and questionnaire data. In addition, the research team prepared task-based test questions to test the students and conducted a detailed data analysis.

3.2 Teaching Objectives.

An analytical inductive approach was used, i.e., repeated interviews, survey data and language tests were used to find out how well Chinese students were taught and tested in the classroom.

3.3 Formative Testing Model

Through interviews and task-based tests, we can gain a deeper understanding of what kind of teaching and testing models are suitable for Chinese college English classrooms, which in turn provides supporting evidence for a comprehensive analysis and ultimately provides data to support the conclusion of an integrated task-based teaching and testing model for foreign language teaching based on criterion-referenced theory.

3.4 Creating an Integrated Task-Based Teaching and Testing Model Based on the Criterion-Referenced Theory

The purpose of the above investigation, teaching and testing in the university English classroom is to find a more suitable English language assessment method for Chinese students at this stage. Secondly, it helps to improve the current formative assessment, and to promote the teaching effectiveness of the foreign language classroom teaching. The ultimate goal of this research is to create a task-based teaching and testing model based on criterion-referenced theory, in which students are evaluated in a comprehensive and ongoing manner based on their performance in the daily teaching and learning process. In other words, the integration of task-based teaching and testing will have a positive countervailing effect on non-English majors and will be beneficial for students to develop effective learning patterns and for teachers to develop positive teaching and assessment patterns.

3.5 Focus and Difficulties of the Study

The focus of this research is to improve the traditional teaching methods in the College English classroom, analyze the problems and phenomena shown by students in the current language teaching classroom, then analyze the root causes based on these phenomena, and finally create a task-based teaching and testing model based on the results of the investigation and the analysis of the causes based on the criterion-referenced testing theory and the existing research results. The difficulties of the study are : (1) to publish a series of task-based college English textbooks, (2) to establish a task-based teaching and testing website, and to create a task-based language teaching and testing shared class, and (3) to create a foreign language teaching model that integrates task-based teaching and testing, and to use reasonable scientific and statistical methods to verify its validity, practicality, reliability, and good repercussions.

4. Results of Data Analysis

4.1. Preliminary Description

4.1.1 Subjects

The subjects of the preliminary study are non-English majors from our university. The students who participated in the survey should all be the first year students of non-English majors in our university; all of them are in contact with the college English course for the first time. 60% of the students come from large, medium and small cities, and 40% come from rural areas.

4.1.2 Questionnaire

The group used an open-ended questionnaire to collect information about Chinese students' perceptions of the task-based teaching classroom as regard to the traditional assessment methods. The data obtained from the open-ended questionnaires were analyzed and categorized to obtain data on students' perceptions of task-based teaching and testing. Based on these data, we developed the questionnaire, "Integration of Teaching and Testing Based on Criterion-Referenced Theory," which will be assessed using a five-point scale of 1-5 for all assessment scores. The questionnaire asks students to talk about their intuition of task-based teaching and testing in four aspects of the teaching process: (1) teaching methods; (2) classroom organization and management; (3) teacher-student relationship (including student-centered or teacher-centered); and (4) teaching characteristics.

4.2. Qualitative and Quantitative Research Findings

4.2.1 Questionnaires

A series of tests and related questionnaires for the "Study of Task-based Testing and Test Integration Based on Criterion-referenced Theory" were developed.

4.2.2 Paper Based Portfolios

The production of Paper Based Portfolios for Undergraduates was also used as a way to collect data related to the students in the process of conducting task-based formative assessments. In fact, in this project, the paper-based portfolios were the central tool for the implementation of the task-based test, which was used throughout the teaching and assessment process to prepare for the final summative test.

4.2.3 Statistics

The data from the above questionnaires were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 24.0) to determine the language learning characteristics of the students after two years of integrated learning and testing. An analytical induction method was used, i.e., repeated interviews, survey data and language tests to find out how Chinese students were doing in the classroom with task-based teaching and testing.

4.2.4 Objectives

1) To analyze the feasibility and reliability of criterion-based task-based teaching and testing in general universities by categorizing the data obtained from the questionnaire and analyzing its characteristics. 2): to gain a deeper understanding of what kind of teaching and testing models are suitable for Chinese college English classrooms, and then provide supporting evidence for a comprehensive analysis, and finally provide data to support the conclusion of an integrated task-based teaching and testing model based on the criterion-referenced theory.

4.3. Creating an Integrated Task-Based Teaching and Testing Model Based on the Criterion-Referenced Theory

The purpose of the above survey, teaching and testing in the university English classroom is to find a more suitable English language assessment method for Chinese students, to improve the current formative assessment, and to promote the effectiveness of teaching in the foreign language classroom. The ultimate goal of this research is to create a task-based teaching and testing model based on criterion-referenced theory, in which students are evaluated in a comprehensive and ongoing manner based on their performance in the daily teaching and learning process. In other words, the integration of task-based teaching and testing will have a positive countervailing effect on non-English majors and will be beneficial for students to develop effective learning patterns and for teachers to develop positive

teaching and assessment patterns.

5. Conclusion

The current CET (band 4/6) are norm-referenced, and it determine the relative position of individuals in a group by measuring relevant domains and content, whereas the current school-based tests in many colleges and universities use formative assessment, where student performance is not interpreted by comparing it with other test takers, but by comparing it with a particular standard or scale. And Students need to meet certain criteria to pass the examination. Therefore, the research on the integration of task-based teaching and testing based on criterion-referenced theory created a new teaching model and a new testing model, which integrates task-based testing into formative assessment.

Secondly, the adoption of task-based teaching and testing models in the teaching and testing process is an innovation to the previous teaching and testing system. Current school-based tests are still influenced by structuralist-psychometric and comprehensive testing methods, and the testing process lacks authenticity. The authenticity of task-based language tests is reflected in the test materials, tasks, situations, and evaluation of results, which is an excellent complement to the current formative assessment. Task-based language tests are still new to language testing, and this research is itself a comparatively new topic. This study will help us to create a foreign language teaching and testing model that is in line with China's national conditions. This model will allow us to adopt practical and effective teaching and testing methods according to the current situation of foreign language teaching and learning in China, as well as to enable Chinese foreign language learners to develop their own learning styles and strategies.

6. Discussion

This topic helps to further expand the relative research of task-based teaching and testing and create conditions favorable to the establishment of a criterion-referenced task-based foreign language teaching and testing theory. Task-based teaching and testing helps to promote the construction of harmonious relationships between teachers and students in the process of foreign language teaching and learning, and to create tasks with great practical meaning and authenticity. At the same time it helps to improve communication between teachers and students, build a harmonious teacher-student relationship and cooperate with each other in order to improve the efficiency of foreign language learners in China. At the same time, the application of modern educational technology helps to build task-based college English teaching materials and resource-sharing websites, to change the learning style of our students who are bound by traditional education in the process of foreign language learning, and to see foreign language teaching and testing in a new perspective.

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