An Empirical Study on "Telling China's Stories Well" in College English Course

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Abstract: *Telling China's stories well is an effective way to respond to the concerns of the world and show a true, multi-dimensional and comprehensive China to the complex international community. It is also an important part of the current ideological and political education in higher education institutions. This paper is to investigate the feasibility of telling China's stories well cultivation in college English course. In an empirical study based on POA, a teaching practice is conducted and the participants' feedback verify that through effective classroom design, it is fairly feasible and effective to integrate telling China's stories well in college English course. The findings of this paper provide some reference and enlightenment for the design of ethics cultivation activities in college English course.*

Keywords: *Telling China's Stories Well; College English Course; Production-Oriented Approach*

1. Introduction

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China clearly states: "We will stay firmly rooted in Chinese culture. We will collect and refine the defining symbols and best elements of Chinese culture and showcase them to the world. We will accelerate the development of China's discourse and narrative systems, better tell China's stories, make China's voice heard, and present a China that is credible, appealing, and respectable." [1] Therefore, it is of great significance to accelerate the construction of China's discourse and narrative systems, tell China's stories well, disseminate China's voice well, and present a credible, lovable and respectable image of China. Meanwhile, learning how to communicate with the outside world, telling China's stories well, and fully introducing and presenting China to the world is one of the important contents of ideological and political education in universities. By mastering the capacity of telling China's stories well, college students can demonstrate China's cultural soft power and enhance China's international image worldwide. It is also conducive to strengthening students' confidence in national culture.

In recent years, the research on "telling China's stories well" cultivation has been a popular topic in the academic circle. Nevertheless, from the perspectives of subjects, methodology, and results, the investigation presents the following limitations: it mostly focuses on international exchanges or political courses, with insufficient integration with English courses; most studies the necessity of "telling China's stories well" from a theoretical perspective, with little attention to the teaching status quo. Judging from the number of related papers in CNKI in the past three years, the research results of ideological and political education of college English courses based on the perspective of "telling China's stories well" are relatively few, and the research quality and level need to be improved.

2. The Significance and Purpose of the Research

This paper is to conduct an empirical study in college English course with respect to cultivating the students' initiative and English proficiency to tell China's stories well. It is unanimously agreed that cross-cultural communication ability should be incorporated in the whole education system of college. It is of great significance to instill cultural confidence into the college students during the process of foreign language acquisition. This paper is to investigate the feasibility and effectiveness of telling China's stories well cultivation in college English course.

This research is to be conducted in the course of English listening and speaking. As a compulsory course for all the students in the subject university (Beijing International Studies University), the English

listening and speaking course is a practical platform for students to conduct cross-cultural communication training and "telling China's stories well" cultivation. This research is conducive to improving college students' critical thinking and cross-cultural communication ability, and enhances the students' cultural identity and cultural confidence.

3. Literature Review

In the foreign language acquisition course "English listening and speaking", a pragmatic method named production-oriented approach is applied in the full swing.

Production-oriented approach (POA) is an important teaching and learning method. This approach was proposed by the team led by Prof. Wen Qiufang in 2007, and fully illustrated in 2015, [2] emphasizing the learner's active participation in productive activities. It focuses on enabling learners to engage in real or simulated production processes to develop their skills and knowledge. For example, in language learning, the production-oriented approach encourages students to actively produce language output such as speaking and writing rather than just passively receiving input.

The production-oriented approach often involves setting specific tasks or projects that require learners to apply what they have learned to solve practical problems. This helps to enhance learners' motivation and sense of achievement as they see the tangible results of their efforts. [3]

The production-oriented approach is an innovative teaching method with the following basic principles: output-driven principle, input-enabling principle, selective learning principle, and evaluation and feedback principle. Most importantly, POA attaches great importance to evaluation and feedback. Teachers provide timely feedback on students' output results to help them understand their strengths and weaknesses and make continuous improvement. Evaluation can be in various forms, including teacher evaluation, peer evaluation and self-evaluation. Through evaluation and feedback, students can continuously adjust their learning strategies and improve their learning effectiveness.

The production-oriented approach has been applied in many colleges and universities and achieved remarkable results (Zhang Lingli, 2017[4]; Zhang Wenjuan, 2017[5]). With output tasks as the goal orientation, students' learning becomes more purposeful and driven. Teachers also provide "scaffolding" according to students' needs to facilitate the completion of output tasks. Deng Hailong, (2018) [6] conducted comparison between the production-oriented approach and the task-based teaching approach in his study. With more application, the research scope of POA have expanded from English teaching to international Chinese language teaching and non-English language teaching (Jiang Xiaoxiao, 2019[7]; Zhu Yong, Bai Xue, 2019[8]).

To sum up, POA emphasizes the integration of learning and application, closely combines input and output, and focuses on cultivating students' comprehensive language application ability and key abilities (including language ability, learning ability, critical thinking ability, cultural ability, innovation ability and cooperation ability, etc.), which helps to improve teaching effects and students' learning results. POA's application is still in continuous exploration and development. In the future, it may be more widely applied and deeply studied in more disciplines and educational stages.

4. Research Design

4.1 Research Question

This study investigates the feasibility and effectiveness of "telling China's stories well" cultivation in college English listening and speaking course. This course is conducted in grade one, BISU, focuses on improving students' English listening and speaking proficiency.

4.2 Research Subjects

The participants are 32 college students majoring in Chinese Teaching from the School of Culture and Communication at Beijing International Studies University. They are Freshmen and have learned English for about 9 years. They are able to understand moderately difficult articles and materials published in the English-speaking countries and express their ideas in general English. In other words, they are pre-intermediate English learners. To investigate the feedback, the author also chooses 4 focal students from the class. Detailed data are presented in the research procedure part.

4.3 Research Methods

In order to find out the feasibility and effectiveness of telling China's stories well cultivation in English course, three research methods are adopted in this research. Questionnaire, the instrument of quantitative study, served as one of the main research methods in this study. Recordings of small group discussion served as the instruments of qualitative study in this research. Besides, this research adopts interview as the supplementary research method. Each of these three research methods is introduced as follows.

4.3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire utilized in this research is Satisfaction towards Telling China's Stories Well Cultivation in College English Course, which is used after this experiment.

This satisfaction questionnaire designed by the author consists of four dimensions, which are general attitudes towards TCSW cultivation, benefits of TCSW cultivation activities, attitudes towards the instructor and internalization during the experiment. Each dimension has 5 items. There are 20 items in total. The questionnaire asks the participants to rate on a 5-point scale (1= Very Unsatisfactory, 2= Unsatisfactory, 3= Neutral, 4= Satisfactory, 5= Very Satisfactory). This questionnaire is completed by all the subjects involved. 32 valid questionnaires are collected. The results of these two questionnaires are analyzed by SPSS 26.0.

4.3.2 Recordings of Small Group Discussion

Small Group discussion is a common class interaction activity at Beijing International Studies University, therefore students are familiar with group discussion. In this telling China's stories well cultivation, many activities take place in small groups. According to Xu (2011) [9], interaction strategy training improves students' overall participation and interactive participation. To make small group discussion in the class more effective, the researcher does small group interaction strategy training before this experiment. The training contents are based on the research results of Xu (2016) [10], in which she put forward seven functions of peer scaffolding in Chinese English learning background. After being trained, students realize that effective group discussion would facilitate internalization of our target.

4.3.3 Interview

After the analysis of the results of the satisfaction questionnaire, the qualitative data is collected from the complementary interview with four open-ended questions. Questions in the interview can be divided into four categories: comments on telling China's stories well cultivation, comments on the group work, self-evaluation on telling China's stories well, and comments on POA. The collected answers are analyzed to find out the reasons and participants' thoughts towards small group discussion. Before each interview, the researcher asks the interviewee's permission for recording. All the four focal students agree to be recorded. These interviews are recorded and transcribed by the author.

5. Research Experiment

To test the feasibility and effectiveness of telling China's stories cultivation in English listening and speaking course, an empirical study is conducted. The traditional teaching focus in this course, listening to key background information and polishing pronunciation, is still upheld. The research experiment is based on the routine teaching. The tenet of the combination design of telling China's stories cultivation and the course is to merge this cultivation in the whole process of foreign language acquisition.

5.1 Driving Activities

First of all, the teacher familiarizes the students with some China's great achievements. In this unit, the input is chiefly about China's utilization of renewable energy. The following background information is provided to the students: China is already leading in renewable energy production figures. It is currently the world's largest producer of wind and solar energy, and the largest domestic and outbound investor in renewable energy. Also, China is currently the world's largest photovoltaic market. China's photovoltaic industry is the largest worldwide. With this recognition, it's easier for the students to understand the following audio-visual materials. The teacher plays an English news video clip on "renewable energy in China", and then poses practical questions related to the video, such as "If you were a journalist, how would you report this event in English?" and "Why is China vigorously developing renewable energy sources and what are the concrete benefits?" This helps students understand the learning objectives and

the practical significance of the output tasks.

To stimulate students' interests, the teacher gives a scaffolding question: "When it comes to renewable energy, what energy sources can you think of?" The students then conduct group discussions and share the difficulties and challenges they encounter when watching English videos. They also address their own ideas on China's achievements on renewable energy and its future prospect. The students also need to complete a gap-fill question based on China's renewable energy achievements in group.

5.2 Enabling Activities

Then the teacher chooses appropriate English viewing, listening and speaking materials according to the output tasks. For instance, in this unit the output task is to give a formal presentation on China's BeiDou navigation system in English. First of all, the students review a famous English speech video. Then the Status Quo of BeiDou navigation system is provided: "So far, China has 45 BeiDou satellites in orbit and the scale of its BDS industrial system exceeded 400 billion yuan ($62.92 billion) by the end of the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) period. Up to 2022, China has completed the construction of its first industrial system of the BDS after 27 years of work." as input materials for students. The students are to have in-class discussion on the topic and they are to design their speech in group.

Then listening training activities get started. The teacher plays audio materials and let students engage in activities such as filling in blanks while listening, answering questions, and summarizing the main ideas to improve their listening comprehension. In this unit, the teacher plays a video clip of "How is China's BDS different from other global navigation networks?" from CGTN twice. The students, in groups, are to fill in the key information in the clip and answer questions related to the content after listening.

Next in-class activity is oral imitation exercises. The teacher plays the video clip again and let the students practice oral imitation. Students can imitate the pronunciation, intonation, speed, and expressions of the characters to improve their oral expression and language sense. Then the students are to have free discussion on their particular ideas in presenting the topic.

After that, the teacher organizes the students to carry out group cooperation activities such as role-playing, situational dialogues, and group discussions. The students conduct role-playing (a Chinese college student and some foreigners) in groups and communicate in English. In group activities, students can learn from each other and help each other, improving teamwork and language application abilities. What's more, the students are to record their presentation and analyze it in group to figure out ways of improving it.

5.3 Assessment Activities

After completing the output tasks, the students are to evaluate their own performance as self-assessment. They can evaluate themselves from many aspects such as listening comprehension, oral expression, language accuracy, fluency, and confidence. In this self-assessment, the students may identify their strengths and weaknesses, and provide references for future learning.

The teacher also organizes the students to conduct peer assessment. Students can watch each group's output work and then evaluate from aspects such as language expression, content integrity, and creativity. Peer assessment can let students view their learning results from different perspectives and also cultivate students' critical thinking and cooperation spirit.

Finally, the teacher provides comprehensive feedback on students' output tasks, highlighting the strengths and areas for improvement. Some open questions like, "How will your foreign counterpart react to China's BeiDou navigation system?" may be posed to evoke the students' further thinking.

Also, in this research, we find that the students rather prefer the teacher to use grading rubrics to objectively evaluate their performance. This extra finding may indicate the students somehow prefer objective evaluation as well.

6. Results and Discussion

The experiment of telling China's stories cultivation in English listening and speaking course lasts for two weeks. After this experiment, we analyze the corresponding Satisfaction Questionnaire, recordings of the students' small group discussion, and interviews with four focal students. Besides, the

students film another version of presentation on BeiDou navigation system as a routine in-class performance record.

6.1 Students' Feedback on Telling China's Stories Cultivation

6.1.1 Questionnaire of Satisfaction towards this Cultivation

To learn about students' satisfaction to this cultivation in English listening and speaking course, the author designed the Satisfaction towards Telling China's Stories Cultivation questionnaire. All the students participating in this experiment are involved in this investigation.

First of all, the reliability is examined by SPSS 26.0 after the satisfaction questionnaires are retrieved from the participants. Reliability is examined by using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. As shown in Table 1, all of these items are above 0.70, which indicates that its reliability is above a commonly acceptable level.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics on the Satisfaction Questionnaire of Experiment

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.869	20

To have a deeper understanding about students' thoughts on and satisfaction with the practice of this cultivation, questions with a 5-point Likert scale ask about participants' satisfaction from four perspectives and the responses are shown in Table 2. All together 32 copies of questionnaires are collected. Here are the results.

Table 2: Students' Satisfaction towards Telling China's Stories Cultivation

Attitudes towards This cultivation (n=32)		Benefits of This Cultivation Activities (n=32)		Attitudes towards the Instructor (n=32)		Experience of Internalization (n=32)	
M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
4.407	0.229	4.092	0.358	4.439	0.208	4.021	0.863

As it is shown in Table 2, the overall feedback of 32 students is good, for all the means of four dimensions are higher than 4.0. Especially the feedbacks of Benefits of This Cultivation Activities and Attitudes towards the Instructor are pretty positive, which means the practice of telling China's stories well cultivation in college English course is fairly successful. The means of these two dimensions are higher than 4.4. The standard deviations of these two dimensions are the lower than those of the other dimensions, which means the students' attitudes are much similar. However, the feedback on the dimension of experience of this cultivation's internalization is lower than the other three dimensions, which means the students are not quite sure of their inner change in this aspect, which means this cultivation is necessary to be continued. The reasons for this may go into two possibilities: on the one hand, the internalization is a progressive, long process, and it's not as apparent as other changes; the students need more comprehensive cultivation and reinforcements. On the other hand, the standard deviation of the internalization dimension is much higher than those of the other three dimensions, which indicates that the students hold varied attitudes toward the internalization dimension. Above all, these findings indicate that telling China's stories well cultivation in English listening and speaking course is feasible and effective.

6.1.2 Interview Analysis

To investigate the students' concrete evaluations of this cultivation experiment, the author adopted the semi-structured interview method which mainly focuses on the following dimensions: comments on the cultivation during experiment, comments on the group work, self-evaluation on national confidence improvement and comments on theme based POA.

Four open questions are asked in the face-to-face interview by the author:

1) What's your general idea about this cultivation in English listing and speaking course?

2) Do you think the group discussion activities are effective?

3) Do you think this teaching practice helpful to improve your national confidence?

4) Do you prefer the Production-Oriented Approach?

Four focal students are interviewed. Here are some of their answers in detail.

The answers of the participants are translated into English and some typical answers are shown as below.

"I think this teaching practice is fairly good, because I really want to learn about some China's achievements in English, and this practice is a good start". (S1-Q1)

"I love the content of study, I'm proud of BDS and I think it's a miracle and very important for China in this unstable world". (S3-Q1)

"The cooperation in the group discussion was alright, but not good enough. I can confidently communicate with my group members though sometime I need to remind them to focus on the topic". (S2-Q2)

"I used to prefer study individually, but the group activities gradually arouse my interest because they help me understand others' ideas, sometimes even my own opinion". (S4-Q2)

"I think this teaching practice is very helpful for me to recognize China's achievement and I think the two aspects mentioned (renewable energy and BDS) are closely related". (S3-Q3)

"I think it's a must for all the college students to know more about motherland, and that's the basis for us to convey our ideas to the world". (S2-Q3)

"I do not regard it much different from what we usually do in this course, maybe the teacher tries to give us a smooth transition, anyway, I like the teacher's feedback and I think POA works". (S4-Q4)

"I think POA is a promising trend in English teaching, because it can help us develop practical language skills and build confidence in our ability to use English in real-life situations". (S1-Q4)

The semi-structured interview suggests that the Production-Oriented Approach holds great promise in language teaching. Interviewees may have highlighted several advantages. For example, they might have mentioned that POA focuses on real-life language production, which makes learning more meaningful and engaging. Students are motivated to learn because they can see the practical applications of what they are learning. This helps students acquire language in a more targeted and efficient way. Moreover, the feedback and evaluation mechanisms in POA also works well.

6.2 Discussion

According to the results of questionnaire and interviews, it's apparent that this cultivation of telling China's stories in English listening and speaking course is worthwhile and enlightening. From the teaching practice and students' feedback, the teaching design is accepted by the students, and the original teaching objectives have been achieved.

From this research we may conclude that teachers can effectively incorporate telling China's stories well cultivation into teaching practice. As the world becomes more globalized, the demand for effective communication in real-life situations continues to grow. Telling China's stories well is of great significance and it may enhance China's image and soft power in the world. By sharing positive and inspiring stories about China's history, culture, achievements, and values, the country can build a more favorable image on the global stage. Well-told China's stories can attract people from around the world to learn more about China, fostering cultural exchanges, cooperation, and mutual understanding. It's a practical and valuable attempt to integrate telling China's stories well cultivation in English listening and speaking course with production-oriented approach.

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