A Report of Strategy-Based English Class Designated for Third Language Learner

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Abstract

This paper is an educational report about an English course that focuses on SBI (Strategy Based Instruction). This course is specially designed for undergraduate and college students who need to submit TOEIC (Listening & Reading) grades when applying for higher education. When English was taught to students who did not major in said language, I examined if SBI-focused teaching methods would positively affect students' learning ability, which should result as an improvement in their TOEIC grades. In terms of the analysis, I used students' final grades of the first semester's English RII class (including initial mock exam scores, homework, quizzes, word tests, class participation, final exams, etc.), as well as an English class for non-English major college students. Studies have found SBI-focused teaching has a positive impact and feasibility on English education and can effectively improve students' ability to improve on the TOEIC test.

Keywords：English education, test strategy, education, grading policy, teaching

I. Introduction

To analyze the factors that may affect students' English testing

performance, the author used data from a course called "English R". According to the syllabus of "English R", the purpose of this course is to help students with weaker English skills to improve on TOEIC testing strategy and the overall score, especially in the listening and reading sections. Students, not limiting to those who are planning to take TOEIC for their school applications and job hunting are welcomed.

In this class, students will focus on solving up-to-date TOEIC problems. The instructor will guide students and provide detailed answers and explanations to the problems being solved. The instructor will also distribute handouts and homework to students as supplements to their after-class learning. After completing the course, students are expected to make significant progress on their listening and reading skills.

In terms of grading, the following factors will be valued throughtout the semester : 20% for participation, 20% for homework, 20% for quizzes, 15% for Midterm Exam, and 25% for the final exam.

II. Class arrangement base on the content of TOEIC

According to Hardan (2013), there are many different types of language learning strategies, and every category of the strategies is unique in its way (p. 1725). As a result, it is crucial to find the most suitable learning method depending on the learning content and objectives. As stated before, this class helps students who are going to take the TOEIC test, so in the following paragraph, a brief explanation of the testing range and content will be introduced.

There are two major parts to TOEIC, Listening and Reading. Based on the students' survey after the first mocking test, many students think that there are way too many unfamiliar vocabularies in the exam.

The second most common finding is the duration of the listening portion is too long, and the reading-contents are too dense. The latter one can be effectively improved through practice, so I focused more on word accumulation by introducing root and affix during my teaching, and offered a selection of problem sets for students to practice.

As stated above, the main task is to design a class focusing on vocabulary memorization. According to Ma and Wang (2010), it is essential to build a strategic learning mind for students. So, the instructor will enhance the class based on Cohen's SBI model during the class (p. 74).

Students in this class are international students whose mother tongue is Chinese. Their goals are to obtain a higher TOEIC score. The instructor studied the language background of every enrolled student through one-on-one interviews before starting the class. As a second language learner, the English education I had received in China was very exam-oriented – with the intention of passing the English portion of "Gaokao", which is the National Higher Education Entrance Examination in China. As a result, English study in China focuses more on difficult grammars, but with a low requirement on vocabulary, listening, and reading skills.

To form an effective and comprehensive class in order to introduce test strategies and improve listening and reading scores, the instructor adapts the following strategies to cultivate below capabilities :

In Terms of Vocabulary Learning

Memory and practice strategy : Make the vocabulary list into a vocabulary practice sets

Recitation strategy : memorize words by memorizing unknown vocabulary in the article

Word-building strategy : learn vocabulary with the help of etymology, roots, affixes and other knowledge

Context strategy：in the process of reading or listening, guess the meaning of words based on the known information in the context

<u>In Terms of Listening Practicing</u>

Focus on new words strategy：Focus on new words, phrases or sentences in the material and understand the pronunciation

Listening and reading strategy：listen while reading silently or read aloud what you have heard

Theme pre-listening strategy：analyze and related material information, predict listening content, such as through pictures, background information, relevant text, etc.

<u>In Terms of Reading Practice</u>

Grammatical analysis strategy：Ask for grammatical analysis when encountering long or difficult sentences

Logic combing strategy：logical analysis and understanding based on context

Extensive reading strategy：Make extensive use of all the English reading resources available for extensive contact, such as：magazines, books, newspapers, online publications, etc.（Ma and Wang, p.75）

III. Methodology for memorizing vocabularies in English R

To provide students with efficient methods of memorizing vocabularies, the instructor chose "17 Days to Finish GRE Words" written by Yang Peng（2015）and "Yingyu Cihui Suji Daquan 1 – Cigen + Cizhui Jiyi Fa" written by Minhong Yu（2019）. Yang and Yu are both popular English teaching professioals from New Oriental. New Oriental is the largest English training institution in China, and many students refer to these two best-selling books when preparing for studying abroad in English-speaking

countries.

The book "17 days to finish GRE words" tells about a new method of word memorization, which is called the "quick method of memorizing words." The principle of this method is multiple repetitions. Now I will briefly introduce this method iontrudced by the book. GRE stands for Graduate Record Examination, an examination for most of the graduate school applications in the United States, and the amount of vocabularies required by GRE is the largest compared to other exams. Yang (2019) first divides all the words needed for GRE into 51 lists, each list contrains about 121 words. When memorizing, memorize up to 3 lists of new words every day ; but at the same time, students need to review the words they memorized before, which are marked with pound sign as shown in Figure 1. This method does not pursue accurate spelling or accurate translation of

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
List 1-3 *List 1-3	List 4-6 *List 1-3 *List 4-6	List 7-9 *List 4-6 *List 7-9	List 10-12 *List 1-3 *List 7-9 *List 10-12	List 13-15 *List 4-6 *List 10-12 *List 13-15	List 16-18 *List 7-9 *List 13-15 *List 16-18	List 19-21 *List 10-12 *List 16-18 *List 19-21
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
*List 1-3 *List 13-15 *List 19-21	List 22-24 *List 4-6 *List 16-18 *List 22-24	*List 7-9 *List 19-21 *List 22-24	List 25-27 *List 10-12 *List 25-27	*List 13-15 *List 22-24 *List 25-27	List 28-30 *List 16-17 *List 28-30	*List 18-20 *List 25-27 *List 28-30
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
List 31-33 *List 1-3 *List 31-33	*List 4-6 *List 22-24 *List 28-30 *List 31-33	List 34-36 *List 7-9 *List 34-36	*List 10-12 *List 25-27 *List 31-33 *List 34-36	List 37-39 *List 13-15 *List 31-33	*List 16-18 *List 28-30 *List 37-39	List 40-42 *List 19-21 *List 40-42

Figure 1

Note. From "Yingyu Cihui Suji Daquan 1 – Cigen + Cizhui Jiyi Fa," by P. Yang, 2019 Beijing Language and Culture Univiersity Press, p. 27. Copyright 2019 by P. Yang.

words but aims to quickly reflect the general meaning of words when students see them in the test. The following picture shows the partial memorizing form according to Yang's book.

The instructor of "English R" will ask the students to memorize the vocabularies after class as their homework assignment. According to TOEIC's official vocabulary book, the instructor have adjusted the number of words and adapted Yang's approach.

2019	10 月					
月曜日	火曜日	水曜日	木曜日	金曜日	土曜日	日曜日
30	01	02	03	04 1, (1)	05 2, (1,2)	06 3, (2,3)
07 4, (1,4)	08 5, (2,4,5)	09 6, (3,5,6)	10 7, (4,6,7)	11 8, (1,3,7,8)	12 9, (2,6,8,9)	13 10, (3,7,9,10)
14 11, (4,8,10,11)	15 12, (5,9,11,12)	16 13, (6,10,12,13)	17 14, (7,11,13,14)	18 15, (1,8,12,14,15)	19 16, (2,9,13,15,16)	20 17, (3,10,14,16,17)
21 18, (4,11,15,17,18)	22 19, (5,12,16,19)	23 20, (6,13,17,20)	24 21, (7,14,21)	25 22, (8,15, 22)	26 23, (9,16, 23)	27 24, (10,17,24)
28 (11,12)	29 (12,13)	30 (14,15)	31 (14,16)	01	02	03

Figure 2. Schedule for memorizing vocabularies

Note. The table above is the new time schedule for memorizing vocabularies created by the instructor

Minhong Yu's "Root + affix memory method" provides the method of memorizing words used by students in English-speaking countries and introduces 333 root affixes commonly appeared in exams. Learning root and affixes is an effective way to assist students to understand the meaning of vocabularies. Besides, this method of learning can help students to classify vocabularies into different categories based on the word origins, which significantly improves the efficiency of word memorization. The above methods will be widely used by the instructor when introducing new words in class.

IV. The result（grades of students before and after SBI）& Conclusion

Table 1. Initial practice test score and other exam scores throughout the semester

	模擬	模擬	模擬		
	Listening	Reading	Total	Exam 1	Exam 2
BNxxx544	42	24	31	47	65
BNxxx541				44	60
BNxxx508	42	35	38	58	73
BNxxx027	58	12	31	66	63
BNxxx526	67	35	48	65	75
BNxxx014	67	76	72	99	100
BNxxx026	33	41	38	55	70
BNxxx035				71	61
BNxxx515	67	65	66	57	73
BNxxx539	42	29	34	58	68
BNxxx514				78	78
BNxxx530				83	78
BNxxx515				100	95

Table 2. Other grades of students throughout the semester

HW	Partici	Attend	Bonus	Quiz 1	Quiz 2	Exam 1	Exam 2
33	10	0	22	60	47	65	46.15
83	15	5	63	20	44	60	72.75
67	20	0	24	63	58	73	77.65
17	10	0	44	71	66	63	45.75
0	15	0	52	0	65	75	72.35
67	20	0	0	95	99	100	82.1
93	10	0	0	68	55	70	65.65
100	10	5	83	68	71	61	75.4
67	20	0	75	85	57	73	73.65

60	10	0	0	61	58	68	62.35
100	15	5	24	78	78	78	82.4
83	20	5	86	86	83	78	91.65
83	25	5	85	98	100	95	103.15

Note. Exam 1 and exam 2 are vocabulary tests, and both table 1 and table 2 are generated by the author

As stated before, most students who are taking this course have enough grammar knowledge to handle the test. Since the TOEIC test only consists listening and reading portions, and it is taken in the form of multiple-choice questions, improving vocabulary is the top priority. After completing a semester of study and memorizing vocabularies by applying the methods introduced in the previous section, students' grades increased significantly. By comparing different tests scores, we have obtained the following scatter plots :
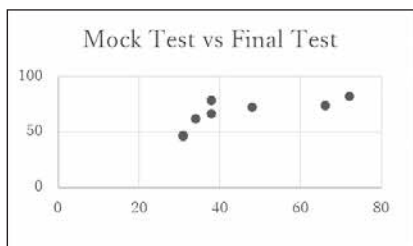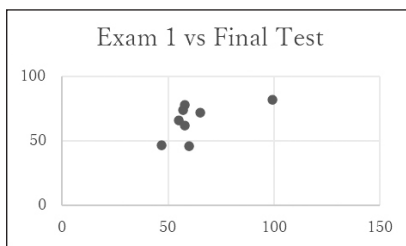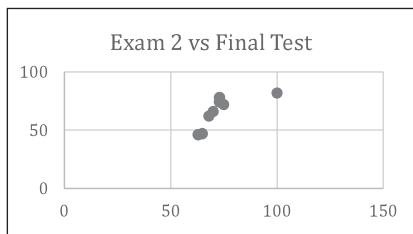
Figure 3

Mock Test vs Final Test

Figure 4

Exam 1 vs Final Test

Figure 5

Exam 2 vs Final Test

Note. Figure 3, 4 and 5 are generated by the author, both vertical axis and horizontal axis represent scores

"English R" is a course that requires adequate practice, and demands students to spend a significant amount of time in memorizing vocabularies. By looking at the above scatter plots, which are drawn based on students' scores, we can tell there is a positive correlated relationship between the score of the mock test and the final exam. The above graphs show a great improvement in students' testing scores, especially on their listening and reading portion. By looking at the other two scatter plots, Exam 1 vs. Final Exam and Exam 2 vs. Final exam, we can tell there is a clear positive relation can be seen in both of them. Examinations 1 and 2 are pure vocabulary tests, and there is a steeper relationship in the Exam 2 vs. Final test graph. As a result, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the impact of vocabulary on the performance of this course is vast and proportional.

V. Class Evaluations the instructor received from the students

According to the result of "class evaluations" conducted by Kyoto Seizan College for all teachers and students in the 2019 Fall Semester, the author or the instructor of "English R" received the following teaching evaluation base on the following questions :

<English RII>

・Did this class help you learn and grow?

・Did the teachers proceed with the lessons with enthusiasm?

・Is the teaching material used in the class appropriate?

・Did the faculty respond appropriately to your questions and consultations?

・Did teachers take measures to improve the educational environment?

In the above questions, the percentages of students who answered "I agree" were 75%, 92%, 92%, 83%, and 92%, respectively. On the other hand, in the whole Department of Buddhism, the percentages of students who answered "I agree" were 73.5%, 82%, 79%, 76%, and 75% (Kyoto Seizan College, 2020).

VI. Future Improvement

Since it is the first year for the instructor to teach "English R" as a new graduate, the lack of experience is inevitable. The class started at the end of September and was shortened from one year to only one semester. Additionally, although the initial enrollment of the class was thirteen, there are several absences from the first day of the class, making the effective sample size in the final score analysis smaller. To effectively reduce any bias that may be present in our analysis, we should consider the following：1. Expand the data duration by using students' scores from a whole school year, instead of one semester；2. Consider doing the analysis again when we have accumulated a bigger sample size.

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