

A Study of Strategies to Improve English Teaching Efficiency Based on Transfer Learning Theory

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ABSTRACT

The improvement of students' learning speed and quality is essential to English teaching, which is able to make English teaching more effective. In order to help students make great progress in learning speed and quality, English teachers are supposed to understand the relevant theories of educational psychology and apply them to real teaching practice. There is a close connection among the various knowledge points of English. The learning of new knowledge depends on students' mastery of old knowledge, and the process of learning new knowledge is the process of transfer learning. The application of transfer learning theory to English learning can help students understand the connection between old and new knowledge, making it easy for them to be more effective to acquire new knowledge as well as they can work more on deep learning. On the basis of explaining the theory of transfer learning, this paper uses the literature research method to retrieve relevant academic sources on CNKI, collect and analyze data and literature on the application of transfer learning theory to English teaching since 2010. In the following part, the paper summarizes the main contents on the application of the transfer learning theory in English learning and teaching from three aspects: positive and negative transfer of mother tongue, factors affecting English learning transfer and the application of strategies of transfer learning theory in English classrooms. At the end of the paper, several suggestions will be given on the problems existing in the research and how to be more effective in English teaching based on the transfer learning theory.

KEYWORDS

Transfer learning; Strategies; English teaching and learning; Teaching efficiency

1 Introduction

Transfer Learning refers to the effect of one type of learning on another. It is a phenomenon that a person uses the previous learning experience and knowledge structure to understand and elaborate the new information. If one type of learning has a positive effect on another, it is positive transfer. On the contrary, it is negative transfer with negative effect. In addition, transfer learning can also be divided into forward transfer, reverse transfer, horizontal transfer, vertical transfer, etc. Forward transfer refers to the impact of previous learning on subsequent learning, while Reverse transfer refers to the impact of subsequent learning on previous learning. Speaking of horizontal transfer, we are talking about the effect of various learning contents at the same level in terms of difficulty, complexity and generalization between the previous learning and the subsequent learning. When it comes to vertical transfer, the interaction of learning experiences between different levels of generalization is emphasized. As one of the essential theories of educational

psychology, it has a long history of development. Woiff's theory of formal discipline holds that transfer is spontaneous and unconditional, which can be achieved as long as the various faculties of the human are improved. However, the science supporting the claim is lacking because no scientific experiments were conducted. Thorndike put forward the theory of identical element, arguing that only when there exist identical elements between the original learning situation and the new learning situation, can transfer occur, and the transfer is conditional and concrete. Judd summed up the generalization theory through underwater target experiments, and believed that the principles gained from the study experience were the main reasons for the transfer. Ausubel proposed the theory of cognitive structural transfers, arguing that the meaningful learning is generated on the basis of the original cognitive structure.

With the continuous development of transfer learning theory and the progress of English discipline, more researchers have focuses more on the application of transfer learning theory in English teaching, and the most representative study is the influence of mother tongue on learning a second foreign language, namely, language transfer. Positive and negative transfer, horizontal and vertical transfers are involved in language transfer. For example, people who have acquired English are more likely to acquire French; Learning Chinese pinyin is conducive to the learning of English phonetic alphabet, and this type of transfer belongs to the positive transfer. On the other hand, "Chinglish", which often appears in English writing, is a negative transfer of Chinese to English learning. Therefore, based on transfer learning theory to analyze and sort out the factors that affect transfer learning in English can help teachers understand the principles of transfer, actively apply the positive transfer to English learning, avoid the influence of negative transfer, and effectively use the transfer law, so as to improve the teaching efficiency. At the same time, it is also beneficial to students to understand the connection among various English knowledge points, learn English in a more relaxed and effective way and improve their self-confidence, comprehensive ability and learning efficiency.

2 Analysis of the Main Contents of Transfer Learning Theory in English Learning

This study found that many scholars in China have mainly focused on the positive and negative transfer of the mother tongue ; factors influencing transfer learning on English and strategies to apply transfer learning theory to English teaching. Therefore, this paper will analyze the main contents of the research from these three aspects.

2.1 The Effect of Mother Tongue Transfer on English Learning

The similarity between the mother tongue and English can promote the learning of English, which is the positive transfer of the mother tongue. The difference between the two can hinder the learning of English, which is the negative transfer of the mother tongue. Mother tongue has a deep effect on the acquisition of English, so it is necessary to pay more attention to transfer learning of mother tongue and avoid negative transfer. For example, An YU(2019) believed that in order to better apply the positive transfer of mother tongues to English teaching, teachers are supposed to find the identical elements between the two languages. Secondly, the commonalities between Chinese and Western cultures can also promote the learning of English. Thirdly, it is crucial to better understand the sentence structure of the mother tongue in order to realize the syntactic transfer between the two languages. For example, several main syntactic structures of both Chinese and English are the same. Finally, the accumulation of knowledge in the mother tongue can help students acquire English more quickly. In order to avoid the negative transfer of the mother tongue, it is necessary to understand the sentence structure, language mode, and ways of expression of

English. Besides, it can be useful for students to learn about cultural differences in different languages to help them form the English mindset. ZHANG and WU (2018) held the idea that there is a positive phonetic transfer between Chinese and English through analyzing the positive transfer of the mother tongue in English learning. For instance, the pronunciation of some English phonetic symbols is similar to Chinese pinyin. In summary, English teachers are supposed to explore the commonalities and promote the positive transfer between the mother tongue and English in order to guide students to acquire English through the mother tongue. At the same time, it is also necessary for students to pay attention to cultural differences between two languages so that it can be easy for them to avoid the negative transfer of the mother tongue.

2.2 Factors Influencing Transfer Learning on English

The transfer learning ability of English learners will inevitably be influenced by various factors, such as the commonalities in learning materials, the original knowledge structure of learners, the fixed mindsets of learners and the guidance of teachers. In his research, LI (2014) believed that the transfer learning ability of English learners is closely related to three factors. Firstly, the influence of the mother tongue, which refers to the positive and negative transfer of the mother tongue on English learning. Secondly, the influence of learning situations. It can be easy for students to acquire English if there exist the similarities between previous and subsequent learning situations. Therefore, teachers should create English learning situations where students will be able to immerse themselves in English learning. Finally, for English learners, their own subjectivity flexibility also play an important role in the English transfer learning. English teachers need to focus more on the cultivation of English learners' habits, so that they can consciously and actively discover the similarities and differences between their mother tongue and English under the guidance of teachers. XU (2022) held the idea that the factors influencing the transfer learning in foreign language teaching mainly include students' learning interest, learning motivation, generalization ability, learning environment and teachers' personal character. ZHENG (2021) concluded that students' previous knowledge, generalization level and metacognitive level will promote English transfer learning. In conclusion, there are various factors influencing English transfer learning, which need to be analyzed deeply from the subjective and objective perspective in order to promote the positive transfer of English learning and improve the teaching efficiency of English teachers and learning efficiency of students.

2.3 Strategies to Apply Transfer Learning Theory to English Teaching

Teachers are able to teach more effectively and students can integrate various knowledge with practice with the help of transfer learning theory. As for how to apply this theory in English teaching, SUI (2019) proposed the following teaching strategies for the impact of mother tongue transfer: firstly, English teachers should be able to consciously highlight the similarities and differences between the two languages; Secondly, English teachers are supposed to emphasize the connection between the mother tongue and English. In that case, students will have the ability to speak English naturally; Last but not least, it is necessary to improve students' expressive skills and English mindsets through a lot of practice. By summarizing and analyzing the factors influencing transfer learning on English, ZHENG (2021) come up with three strategies to promote the transfer learning on English. First of all, it is vital for English teachers to guide students to make full use of the positive transfer of the mother tongue so that their learning efficiency can be improved. At the same time, students are supposed to find the similarities and differences between two languages to avoid the negative transfer of the mother tongue. Additionally, the metacognitive level of students also plays

an important role in English learning. LI (2014) put forward the following strategies to promote the positive transfer on English learning. Initially, students should be guided to make good use of the advantages of the mother tongue in pronunciation and other aspects. Secondly, English teachers need to create learning situations and help students to apply what they have learned to real-life environments. What's more, it is necessary to enhance students' initiative in learning English.

3 Problems in the Study of Transfer Learning Theory in English Learning

Speaking of the theoretical perspective, the studies on English learning based on transfer learning theory mainly focus on the mother tongue transfer, and the research scope is narrow, which put great emphasis on English instead of connecting with any other subject to do a research. In terms of research methods, literature research method and case analysis method are used. It turns out that the research methods are relatively simple, and few studies combine quantitative and qualitative methods. When it comes to research contents, the transfer of the mother tongue in sentence structure and culture as well as factors influencing transfer learning on English, which are considered superficial, are emphasized by most researchers.

4 Analysis of Strategies to Improve English Teaching Efficiency Based on Transfer Learning Theory

4.1 The Transfer Laws should be Used Flexibly to Adapt to Different Teaching Situations

A theory comes from practice and serves practice, so the transfer learning theory needs to be applied to English teaching practice to make a difference. Moreover, English classes are not static, and teachers need to design teaching activities according to different lesson types. Therefore, the same type of transfer learning will inevitably not be able to meet all teaching activities, which means English teachers need to use transfer laws flexibly so that students can improve their learning efficiency.

4.2 Information Based Education should be Advocated to Achieve Immersive Learning

The continuous development of information technology has brought great challenges to traditional foreign language teaching. WEN (2019) argued that the artificial intelligence and big data will reshape language education. It can be seen that only the use of traditional English teaching methods can no longer meet the requirements of English teaching in the information age. Therefore, teachers should learn teaching theories actively and carefully, combine what they have learned with information based teaching. Besides, it is vital for English teachers to take the initiative to create learning situations for students. For example, students can be encouraged to have conversations with a computer or people, which would increase their opportunities to communicate in English and improve their cooperation ability and transfer learning. Last but not least, English teachers are supposed to guide students to listen, speak, read and write so that they will be able to truly immerse themselves in English learning.

5 Conclusion

As the instructional subjectivity, each student has his or her own uniqueness and great potential for development. As for English teachers, it's their duty to guide students to learn by themselves.

Additionally, students should be encouraged to engage in inquiry-based learning, especially self-exploration of the culture behind their mother tongue and English. In this case, students' initiative and motivation to learn English will be enhanced and their ability to do transfer learning will be improved as well. Thirdly, students need to take the initiative to summarize the knowledge points in English learning so that their generalization level can be improved and their English mindsets can be formed under the guidance of the teacher.

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