PROCEEDINGS ARTICLE

A Textual Analysis Study of the Value of Language Learning Task Clusters

Jingjing Ji[1,*]

[1] *School of Teacher Education, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China*

ABSTRACT

Language learning task clusters, as the "original" of the Chinese mother tongue curriculum, have great value at the level of language curriculum and teaching. This article compares 35 articles from authoritative journals in China that discuss the value of language learning task clusters and analyzes the characteristics of language learning task clusters from a constructive perspective to provide a reference for foreign researchers.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Language learning task clusters" are an original concept of the Chinese mother tongue curriculum, which initially appeared as "curriculum content" in the Chinese Curriculum Standards for Ordinary High School (2017 Edition). The standard defines it as: "Language learning task clusters" are task-oriented, with learning projects as the carrier, integrating learning contexts, learning contents, learning methods and learning resources, and guiding students to improve their language literacy in the process of using language. Several learning projects form the learning task cluster [1].

The Chinese Curriculum Standards for Ordinary High School (2017 Edition) stipulate that there are 18 learning task clusters in high school, and the objectives and content of each learning task cluster, as well as teaching tips, are elaborated in the standards. The latter version of the Language Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) inherits and innovates the reference to "language learning task groups": it not only retains the reference to "language learning task groups" as a way of organizing and presenting course content, but also

divides six learning task clusters into three categories: "basic learning task groups", "developmental learning task groups" and "extension learning task groups". It is not only related to the content of language courses, but also linked to development of language teaching materials and reform of language teaching methods. As a major research result in the Chinese language education field, "language learning task clusters" come from practical exploration and theoretical summary, and they are also adapted to the needs of students' language learning in contemporary society. Therefore, the "language learning task group" concept is worthy of promotion, attention and discussion.

Based on the research of language education experts, primary and secondary school language teachers and researchers, front-line teachers and administrators, this article compares the discussions of the value of "language learning task clusters" by experts in the Chinese language education field. What's more, the purpose of this study is to provide an overview of the discussion of the value of language learning task clusters by Chinese language education experts and to provide an appropriate analysis, with the aim of making language teaching task clusters more known to international educational researchers.

*Corresponding author. Email: 212021045@njnu.edu.cn

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The sample selected for this study consisted of 35 articles published in "Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index", "the Core Journal of China", and other journals with high recognition in the field of language education in China. When we examine these 35 articles, we find that there are more opinions that agree with "language learning task clusters" and fewer opinions that question their value.

2.1. Affirmation of the Value of "Language Learning Task Clusters"

The views that affirm the value of "language learning task clusters" can be divided into two categories: those that consider them to be an important contribution to language curriculum development and those that consider them to have pedagogical value.

2.1.1. Affirmation From a Curriculum Perspective

Researchers believe that the value of the "language learning task clusters" at the curriculum level is mainly reflected in its contribution to the integration of curriculum content, the nature of the language curriculum, and the new development of the curriculum organization, while a few viewpoints explore its value from the perspective of the postmodern curriculum.

10 out of 35 articles expressed a positive view of the contribution of language learning task clusters to the integration of curriculum content. For example, learning task clusters include both specific learning content and language practice activities and their appropriate learning styles, integrating learning contexts, learning content, learning methods, and learning resources, and reconstructing the content system of language courses [2]. This is the third major transformation in the organization of language course content after "disciplinarity" and "modularity" [3]. The reason why researchers have paid so much attention to the role of language learning task clusters in the construction of language curriculum content is that curriculum content is relevant to nearly all aspects of language curriculum construction.

First, language learning task clusters are used as course content to reflect the practical, contextual, and integrative characteristics of language courses. The proposed learning task clusters create favorable conditions for promoting language learning to return to its comprehensive and practical nature [4]. The design of "learning task clusters" in the curriculum not only reflects the contextual and comprehensive nature of language learning, but also reflects the diversity and goal of learning tasks [5].

Second, the realization of the paradigm shift in language curriculum can take the establishment of language learning task clusters as an opportunity. The language learning task cluster has a special value in promoting the paradigm shift of the language curriculum. It responds to the concept of "literacy-based, integrated, practice-oriented, and context-driven" that has been repeatedly emphasized in today's curriculum reform. In this way, the "task cluster" is more like a concept-first product that undertakes the mission of promoting the paradigm shift of the language curriculum [6]. The language learning task clusters reject the "subject-based curriculum view" and hold high the banner of "student-based and social practice based" curriculum, opposing the linear arrangement of subject knowledge and skills, which has important significance for curriculum transformation [7].

Third, because the compilation of the Compulsory Education Language Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) inherited the spirit of high school language curriculum standards and referred to the experience in the implementation of the high school language standards, the language learning task clusters as curriculum content have, to a certain extent, assumed the task of bridging primary and secondary schools in the language curriculum structure. The six learning task clusters at the compulsory education level all seek to articulate with the general high school in the fourth academic period in order to highlight the coherence and consistency of the language curriculum in primary and secondary schools [8].

Fourth, textbook development is also largely influenced by the cluster of language learning tasks. The selection and organization of curriculum content is a core element in the preparation of current high school language standards and textbook writing [3].

In addition, other scholars have examined the value of language learning task clusters from a postmodernist perspective. The "learning task clusters" in the "new standards" are very much in line with the core ideas of the "4R curriculum model" of Dole in terms of top-level design, and they tend to be consistent in terms of value pursuit: in It has richness in the curriculum content dimension, regression in the curriculum implementation dimension, and relevance in the curriculum scope dimension [9]. The most important feature of the postmodern view of curriculum is the existence of a unity of certainty and uncertainty in the relationship between teaching implementation and teaching effectiveness. Language learning task clusters are characterized by openness, contextualization, and integration, and thus there must be generative instructional content in the implementation of teaching and learning. Teachers

173

Athena Transactions in Social Sciences and Humanities, Volume 3
Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Education Studies: Experience and Innovation (ICESEI 2022)

cannot fully grasp the generation of generative content in teaching, nor can they fully control it, so the generation of a large amount of generative content in the language learning task group and its impact on the teaching effect presents an uncertainty [7].

2.1.2. Affirmation From a Pedagogical Perspective

The views that affirm the value of language learning task clusters at the pedagogical level focus on both teachers' teaching and students' learning.

Focusing on the value of learning task clusters for teachers' teaching argues that teaching under the guidance of language learning task clusters is a departure from traditional teaching styles. Thematic learning in the context of learning task clusters is a breakthrough and transcendence of traditional single-language teaching or unit theme teaching [10].

Focusing on the value of learning task clusters for students' learning, it is argued that language learning task clusters give the initiative of learning to students. The implementation of "learning task clusters" makes students an active "go-getter" to complete tasks, combining reading and writing through the expansion of the classroom to the outside of the classroom, and uniting book reading with other kinds of learning, allowing students to actively "foraging for food" to fundamentally improve students' language literacy [11]. Accordingly, many researchers have mentioned that language learning task clusters that give students ownership of learning can achieve the ability to enhance students' core language literacy. Unlike teachers' indoctrination, students use their own wisdom to find appropriate methods and use a variety of effective forms to solve problems through practice, thereby accumulating experience in language use, increasing language competence, and improving language literacy [12].

2.2. Questioning the Value of "Language Learning Task Clusters"

Skeptics of the value of language learning task clusters suggest that they can disrupt the language teaching and learning paradigm and create difficulties for teachers. Contrary to the view that "language learning task groups can break through and transcend the traditional language teaching paradigm," some researchers argue that "language learning task groups can disrupt the language teaching paradigm. The task group approach is in urgent need of change: first, it is task-driven and neglects the role of the classics. Secondly, they focus on the learning of grand themes and neglect the construction and use of language.

Third, it focuses on the presentation of activities and neglects the reconstruction of language knowledge behind the activities [13]. There are also some views that language learning task clusters can create problems for teachers to teach because of the disconnect between the writing of textbooks and the writing of curriculum standards. Strictly speaking, curriculum standards are superior and textbooks are inferior, and textbooks need to be written according to the standards, but the actual situation in China is that "textbooks come first". This poses great difficulties and challenges for front-line language teachers, who need to do a good job of transforming and developing curriculum content when teaching. This kind of translation ability is something that most front-line language teachers do not have and are unlikely to have [7].

In conclusion, most researchers affirm the value of language learning task clusters at the curriculum level. One of the main sources of its other curricular values is that the learning task clusters unify the language curriculum content. In addition, researchers are divided as to whether learning task clusters play a positive or negative role at the pedagogical level. The positive role of language learning task clusters in teaching and learning needs to be promoted by many parties, including the development of teaching materials and the efforts of both teachers and students. A comprehensive examination of research on the value of language learning task groups reveals that researchers' perspectives are limited. However, the language learning task group is an innovative idea suitable for language education in China, which was proposed by language education experts in China on the basis of integrating the essence of various educational theories, and its value or lack of analysis should be confirmed from various perspectives.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Constructivism emerged in the 1980s in response to the failure of traditional teaching to cope with the advent of the information age, and was influenced by postmodernism, neo-Marxism, feminism, and other theories. As the founder of constructivism, Piaget proposed that "knowledge does not originate in the object, nor in the subject, but in the action of linking subject and object interactions" on the basis of the rejection of a priori theory and empiricism. In the later development, constructivism gradually developed into two major branches: personal constructivism with Piaget and von Glasersfeld as its representatives, and social constructivism with Vygotsky and Paul Ernest as its representatives,

which emphasize the creative role of individuals themselves in the construction of personal knowledge and the importance of social interaction and culture in construction of individual cognition. Contemporary constructivists have brought new developments to constructivism: their view of knowledge holds that knowledge is only an interpretation of the real world, not an accurate representation of it, and cannot be the final answer to a question. The dynamic nature of knowledge makes it impossible for learners to use it in solving specific problems; they need to recreate it according to specific problem situations. Thus, based on the knowledge perspective, the constructivist view of learning believes that students' learning should be contextualized, actively constructed, and socially interactive. And their view of teaching and learning is consistent with the view that teachers should create ideal learning environments for students that meet these conditions.

From the perspective of constructivist views of knowledge, learning and teaching, language learning task groups have unique value. For a long time, language education in China emphasized the learning of static knowledge, treating knowledge as "standard answer", due to the serious "decontextualization" of language learning. However, context must be involved in language learning because the basic nature of the language curriculum is pragmatic, so that students can learn to use language is the basic goal of the language curriculum, and language use and language use context go hand in hand, language learning without context is destined to be ineffective. Amid the calls for language teaching reform, language learning task groups have emerged. In response to the lack of context in language learning, language learning task groups emphasize the integration of learning contexts, learning contents, learning methods and learning resources. In the process of integration, not only the role of context in learning is brought into play and language knowledge is integrated, but also the active constructive and social interaction of language learning is realized: learning in context avoids the tendency of abstracting and simplifying knowledge and enables students to actively transform and transfer old and new knowledge, which is the active constructive nature of learning; learning resources include human resources, teachers and students work together to form a learning community, so that students' learning occurs in mutual promotion, and here the social interaction of learning is reflected.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

From the above studies on language learning task groups, we can draw the following conclusions. First,

language learning task groups have considerable value in language curriculum construction, especially in the unification of language knowledge. Second, language learning task clusters have both positive and negative effects on teaching and learning; they give the initiative of learning to students and improve their language literacy, but they can also bring damage to the kind of language teaching and learning. It can cause problems such as the disconnection between teaching and materials. Third, from the perspective of constructivist theory, language learning task clusters are characterized by constructivist views of knowledge, learning and teaching.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

5.1. Discussion

The current research on the value of language learning task clusters has a slightly narrow perspective, and its value and shortcomings need to be explored from more perspectives. In addition, the analysis shows that the value of the current language learning task clusters has not been fully reflected mainly because the writing of the teaching materials and the teaching ability of the teachers have not been matched with them. Therefore, in the face of this situation, the key to making the future language learning task clusters more valuable is to make it land in teaching, which poses new challenges to textbook writing and teachers' teaching ability.

5.2. Limitation

The limitations of this study lie first in the fact that the number of selected articles related to the research topic is not large enough and the examination of existing studies is not yet comprehensive. Secondly, the limitation of the author's vision is also a major limitation of this study.

REFERENCES

[1] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. Chinese Curriculum Standards for Ordinary High School (2017 Edition, Revised in 2020) [S]. Beijing: People's Education Press, 2020, pp. 8.

[2] Wu Xinxin. Task-Based Learning: The Reconstruction of Content in Chinese Curriculum in High School [J]. Educational Science Research, 2018(11): 76–81.

175

Athena Transactions in Social Sciences and Humanities, Volume 3
Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Education Studies: Experience and Innovation (ICESEI 2022)

[3] Guan Xianqiang, Mu Xiaoyong. Learning Task Clusters: A Course Content Reconstruction That Returns to the Qualities of Language Practice [J]. Language Planning, 2018(10): 17–21.

[4] Zheng Guihua. The Value, Structure and Implementation of Chinese Learning Task Clusters in Compulsory Education [J]. Curriculum, Teaching Material and Method, 2022, 42(08): 25–32.

[5] Cheng Xiang. A Few Thoughts on "Learning Task Clusters" [J]. Language Planning, 2021(11): 72–74 & 80.

[6] Rong Weidong, Li Wenwen, Zhang Yaoyou. Language "Learning Task Clusters" Unification [J]. Bulletin of Chinese Language Teaching, 2022, 16: 14–18.

[7] Rong Weidong, Li Wenwen, Zhao Zelong. The Doctrinal Interpretation and Practical Reflection of Language Learning Task Clusters [J]. Journal of Teacher Education, 2022, 9(02): 101–112.

[8] Liu Fei, Huang Wei. Reconstruction of Chinese Classroom Teaching System Under the New Curriculum Concept: Analysis Based on the Chinese Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) [J]. Journal of Tianjin Normal University (Elementary Education Edition), 2022, 23(04): 1–6.

[9] Liu Fei. Interpretation of "Learning Task Clusters" From the Perspective of Postmodern Curriculum [J]. Journal of Tianjin Normal University (Elementary Education Edition), 2020, 21(01): 26–30.

[10] Liu Fei. Topic-Centered Chinese Teaching Designing Based on Learning Task Clusters [J]. Jiangsu Education Research, 2019(11): 8–13.

[11] Zhao Zhiwei. On the Psychological and Reading Rationale of "Learning Task Clusters" [J]. Language Planning, 2021(13): 26–30.

[12] The "Yes" and "No" of Language Learning Task Clusters: Interview With Professor Wang Ning of Beijing Normal University [J]. Language Planning, 2019(01): 4–7.

[13] Wu Guozhen. Changes of Secondary School Chinese Teaching Pattern With "Learning Task Clusters" and Its Countermeasures [J]. Journal of Teaching and Management, 2021, 28: 59–62.