

A Research on The PAD Class Teaching Mode in Chinese College English Courses

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Abstract: With the rapid development of information technology, the integration of network information technology and college English courses has fundamentally changed the essence of college English teaching. College English class teaching has also changed from traditional English class in a network environment. Professor Zhang Xuexin from Fudan University proposed a new teaching mode -- PAD class teaching mode. This teaching mode is composed of three basic links: teacher's presentation, students' assimilation, and discussion. This research applies the PAD class teaching mode to college English teaching to explore the effect of this mode on improving the quality of college English teaching.

Keywords: PAD class; PAD class teaching mode; Chinese college students; PAD class teaching

1. Introduction

This study is mainly related to the PAD class teaching model of College English Courses supported by networked IT systems in China, Chinese College English classroom teaching needs to be optimized. The research background is mainly from two aspects: foreign language teaching informatization supported by IT systems and College English teaching reform. With the promotion of information technology, the model for college English teaching has been reformed. During several rounds of this teaching reform, Lanzhou University of Arts and Sciences, as one of the institutions participating in the reform, has deeply realized the changes brought by the reform and the necessity of further optimization of College English classroom teaching supported by networked IT infrastructure.

It is believed that language can be a very important resource for a country in the process of modernization^[1]. In the past fifty years, English as a foreign language has received increasing attention and popularity in China. English is a required course in 9-year compulsory education (six years primary school and three years secondary school) and the class-time of English is as much as that of Chinese in high school even though Chinese is the mother language. In addition, the subject score of English is the same as Chinese in the National Higher Education Entrance Examination (commonly called GaoKao) in most of China. English is also an important subject in the National Postgraduate Entrance Examination and the Doctoral Admission Test.

However, the time and effort that Chinese students spend in learning English do not match the English ability they acquire. Therefore, students' English ability in China is called 'deaf and dumb English' due to the lack of communication skills compared with language knowledge such as vocabulary usage and grammar rules^{[2][3]}. Moreover, innovation in teaching methods is imperative because traditional methods have had difficulty continuing to adapt to the current EFL education environment in China, and the education community is calling for a new method that is in line with the Chinese culture of teaching and learning. The Presentation-Assimilation-Discussion (PAD) class addresses this situation.

2. Literature Review

The PAD class is a teaching procedure comprising 'Presentation', 'Assimilation', and 'Discussion'. Compared with a traditional class, the PAD class advocates allocating part of the class time to students for independent learning and cooperation with peers after the teacher's presentation^[4]. It is a combination of traditional lecturing-oriented, teacher-centered methods and discussion-oriented, learner-centered ones^[5] presented by the teacher individually and independently with their unique learning style^[6], as illustrated in Figure 1. Thus, the group discussion will be a prepared, directional, high-quality discussion^[7], rather than a blind one. The PAD class

was proposed in 2014 to deal with the arguably tedious and boring nature of the traditional teaching model in college, and it was well-received by students. It spread rapidly to many subjects in basic education and is now well-known in many parts of China. At the same time, it was widely applied to EFL classes as a new teaching method. There are two forms of the PAD class: the brief version is called in-class PAD, which means that all sections of the PAD class are completed in one class, while the complex version is called the cross-class PAD which refers to the sections of PAD being completed in at least two classes. Most important, the presentation and the discussion can only be done in class while the assimilation can be done after class. The teachers can also apply the ‘mini in-class PAD’ flexibly, which means the PAD class can be implemented in 3 or several minutes, one-minute presentation, one-minute assimilation, and one-minute discussion.

3. Theory

3.1 Presentation

The primary principle of the PAD class is to teach before learning (Jing, 2017). The long history of Confucian culture has had a big influence on certain aspects of Chinese education^[8]. The teacher is thus seen as a person who passes down the truth, imparts knowledge and removes doubt.

There are, however, certain essential differences between the presentation in PAD and lecturing in the traditional way. Firstly, the length of time is different. The presentation should only take up one third or half of the class time instead of taking up the whole class time as in ‘whole-class teaching’, because the teacher should set aside time for students to study independently and for group discussion. Secondly, the content is different. The presentation of the PAD class is ‘concise teaching and leaving blank’ (CTLB)^[5] compared with the traditional way where all the knowledge points and details on the lesson plan are delivered to the students one by one. ‘Concise teaching’ means that the teacher should give a presentation which is ‘concise’, ‘guiding’ and ‘framed’, the content should be background information, knowledge framework, crucial concepts, and theories, which are linked to previous knowledge. The purpose of this part is to tell students ‘What to learn’, ‘why to learn’ and ‘how to learn’. ‘What to learn’ obviously means the learning content of a specific lesson, ‘why to learn’ points out the value and significance of the content, and the function in the knowledge system while ‘how to learn’ refers to providing learning strategies and tactics for students to learn more efficiently in the next steps. ‘Leaving blank’ in a presentation means not giving students all the information directly, but stimulating students’ imagination and the spirit of exploration through questions, prompts, and suspense.

Given these principles, a preview before the teacher’s presentation in the PAD class paradigm is not necessary^[9]. The preview, in general, refers to self-learning before the new lessons or before the teacher’s presentation. In other words, the students review the new lesson, on their own without the teacher’s instruction, which can lead to differences in students’ understanding of new knowledge. For example, students’ previews before the teacher’s presentation could lead to misunderstanding of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical features.

3.2 Assimilation

Assimilation in the PAD class is a period for students to think and explore quietly on their own with clear goals, i.e., complete the tasks assigned by the teacher after the presentation. It is an undisturbed process of thinking and learning individually and independently to fully understand and comprehend the content presented by the teacher. In other words, the assimilation stage is achieved by completing tasks silently.

These tasks need to directly connect with the content of the presentation and are characterized by Zhang (2016)^[5]:

Pertinence — there should be a direct correlation between the tasks and the content of teachers’ presentations. Tasks should guide students to review the framework, fully understand the main concepts, fill the blanks left by the teacher.

Stepladder — the task list should reflect the level of knowledge difficulty, from simple to complex and from easy to difficult.

Fundamentality — a basic section should be included in the tasks and this part should be completed by all students confidently.

Challenging — tasks should also include difficult parts to stimulate students’ desire to explore.

Selectivity — tasks should be optional and completed by students according to their understanding of the teacher’s presentation.

Openness — the questions set in the tasks should not have rigid answers but should be flexible and varied.

Individualization — tasks should try to meet the characteristics of individual students, and personalized interpretations should be expected in order to have unique contributions in the following group discussion.

3.3 Discussion

The last section of the PAD class is discussion, which generally includes two steps: students’ discussion within the group and

whole-class communication^[5]. At the beginning of the discussion, teachers should give a quick review of the previous content and the requirement of the tasks in several sentences as an introduction to the discussion, and then students should be encouraged to discuss within groups of 3-4 members based on the task sheets. After the discussion stage, teachers can facilitate whole-class communication. The initial form of discussion is information exchange, so in order to form a prerequisite for exchange, learners who participate in the discussion should have basic information and opinions before they can communicate, which is why the PAD class advocates ‘delayed discussion’. Conversely, in ‘instant discussion’, students have not constructed their own opinions, it is difficult to effectively exchange with their peers, and there is no obvious boundary – the discussion is easy to deviate, which is not conducive to the length and quality of the discussion. In delayed discussion, the students work on the same task sheet, and this task sheet is closely connected with the teacher’s presentation. Therefore, the views, ideas, confusion, and troubles encountered by the students in the assimilation stage might be interrelated or even the same, so that the delayed discussion will be more effective and save time as, especially for some simple and easy questions, students will soon come to a consistent solution.

4. Conclusion

By redistributing teaching time, the advantages of teaching and discussion are integrated. The PAD class teaching mode has been favored by many Chinese scholars and teachers since it was proposed. Practice has shown that the PAD class teaching mode can effectively mobilize the enthusiasm of college students and improve learning efficiency.

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