The Application of Autonomous Learning in PAD Class under Informatization Teaching Background for University English Extended Courses

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Abstract. Based on the informatization teaching background and the PAD Class teaching paradigm (Presentation-Assimilation-Discussion), this paper aims to carry a research of a reform and practice for the university English extended courses. This paper summarized the informatization teaching, PAD Class teaching paradigm and autonomous learning, showing the autonomous learning teaching design under PAD Class teaching paradigm for university English extended courses, so as to discuss the course design under this teaching paradigm. With the use of the informational technology, the PAD Class teaching paradigm being in accordance with the students learning psychology, could help mobilize the enthusiasm of the students’ autonomous study activity, which could better carry out the teaching activities.

1. Introduction

School education is the major sector of education [1]. In the recent decades, different teaching paradigms have been used throughout Chinese classroom, because “core to school education is classroom teaching and central to classroom teaching is the teaching paradigm [2]”. However, under the background of informatizational world, it is not easy to choose a paradigm that fits the e-learning era and Chinese classroom. More importantly, autonomous learning ability should be cultivated among university students. On the contrast, the fact is that Chinese students got used to the traditional teaching paradigm in high schools so they expect the teachers to say more in the class rather than discussing with their peers. In 2014, a new teaching paradigm was proposed by Professor Xuexin Zhang, which enables students to perfect their autonomous learning through assimilation before discussion with others [3].

As a tool connecting to the world under the “One Belt One Road” background, English learning still plays a very important role in today’s university classrooms. English extended courses in different fields are popular among students. This paper reviews the informatization teaching background, PAD Class teaching paradigm, autonomous learning pattern under this teaching mode, and demonstrates a class design of autonomous learning pattern for extended English courses by using the course “Tourism English” as the example. In the end, this PAD Class paradigm should be worked out effectively under the informatization background and worth popularizing in other courses.

1.1 Informatization Teaching

Back in 1993, Clinton Administration proposed a National Information Infrastructure program to different domains, one of which was in education. This started the era of informatization worldwide. Over the decades of reform and opening-up, China’s national strength in education has grown substantially. More and more schools employ funds to the development of informatization teaching infrastructure. Teachers and students are likely to finish the teaching and studying process by means of computer and network. Education informatization is the utilization of information technology to facilitate the diversification and improvement of education contents, methods, and forms [4].
The use of the informatization teaching infrastructure is not enough for nowadays classroom. More and more universities have started to apply different kinds of platform systems to teaching and studying. With the development of China’s education informatization construction, campus networks have gradually turned to the application of information technology in practical education from information infrastructure construction [5]. The resources of the installed platform purchased are very important.

In the English classes in Guangdong University of Foreign Studies South China Business College, different platforms were used, such as Bingoenglish writing system for the automatic correcting of composition and translation, Unipus platform for autonomous learning. Then, a new version of Unipus comes out as well as a new iWrite system, similar to Bingoenglish writing system. Platforms are keeping updated and there are many more to choose. However, there are still some problems puzzling teachers and students when using the platforms. Why do we teachers need to use platforms? Is it fit for our teaching patterns or is it becoming a burden to students, more extra assignments on the computer? More importantly, are these the real informatization teaching?

These questions and others were examined carefully by various of researchers and different teaching paradigms with different informatization teaching were studied. Different scholars favor different teaching paradigms. Next, a new teaching paradigm, proposed by a Chinese scholar Xuexin Zhang, fitting Chinese classroom and Chinese students’ psychological characteristics, would be introduced.

1.2 PAD Class Teaching Paradigm

The essence of the PAD Class paradigm can be seen from this abbreviation, in which P means presentation, A assimilation, and D discussion. This newly teaching paradigm is actually a combination of traditional lecturing teaching paradigm and a newer discussion one. Teachers spend half of the class time doing presentation of the main points and difficult points of the chapter while the students take the other half doing discussions, followed by an interactive discussion among the teacher and the students. Many teaching paradigms also have the discussion part. However, the ability of the students varied. Not all of them know what to discuss in class, especially in an English class. Hence, the effect of the discussion pattern does not always work. Moreover, classroom learning in universities are no longer the same as that in high schools. Students need independent and individualized learning. To solve this problem, an assimilation stage of individual learning is asserted between the teacher’s presentation and students’ discussion. With the help of the assimilation part, assignments and questions are prepared beforehand so that every student should have something to discuss, e.g., what have you learned in your previous class, what problems were you facing when comprehending the teaching contents, how do you feel about the assignment, and so on.

This kind of teaching paradigm fits almost every subject. It cannot be said that the PAD Class teaching paradigm is so perfect that every class should follow this pattern, but since its first proposal in 2014, it has already gained national popularity in China and has successfully put into practice by thousands of college teachers in different grades of different subjects, with the support of around 45 provincial funds. The success of the PAD Class pattern relies not simply on the combination of traditional lecturing and discussion, but on the base of psychological and pedagogical rationales to explicate its effectiveness in enhancing active learning. In the usual discussion classroom, the students are asked to do discussions right after teacher’s lecture, which violates the basic psychological principles of learning. One needs time to think and assimilate the knowledge. Otherwise, the discussion is lack of depth.

1.3 Autonomous Learning Pattern in PAD Class under Informatization Teaching Background

In the PAD Class paradigm, the teacher should not teach too much because if the teacher presents too clear and too profound, the students would not have the space and time to assimilate and to think on their own. The essence of presentation in PAD Class is to concise teaching and to leave blank. In this
way, students are required to do autonomous learning. The main content of the assimilation part after class should be reading, reviewing, independent thinking and finishing homework. With the guide of the teacher’s presentation on the main points of the chapter, the students have more time for study after class so as to finish the in-depth thinking assignments. The purpose of these assignments is to guide the students to do autonomous learning by reading and comprehend textbooks thoroughly and perhaps the extracurricular supplementary materials found by themselves.

However, since the ability of the students varies quite differently, there should be some kind of system to monitor the students’ autonomous learning process. This is unlikely to be the teacher’s responsibility to monitor every student, for it would be a heavy burden for the teacher. But students’ own cognition consciousness are not always trusted for every one. They are no longer high school students. The ability of learning on their own is very important for their future study and career. Then, a supporting platform designed for PAD Class is needed, which is the DuifenE system.

In this system, it has a computer network version as well as a Wechat Official Account, which means the students could use the platform at any time anywhere as long as they have the access to the internet, e.g., using the college public wireless network or cell phone data. Then, the students would not have the excuses of not bringing their homework, nor having broken computers or poor internet access. Besides, this system could group the students in random just before the class begins so the students could discuss with different group partners. This guarantees that students could meet different classmates during their discussions. Moreover, this platform has the function to send private message through Wechat to each other, which help build the communication bridge between the teacher and the students, and the students could learn some more supplementary material sent by the teacher on their own whenever necessary. In the following part, a class design using PAD Class teaching paradigm would be introduced, with the use of the DuifenE system to help students do the autonomous learning.

2. Class Design of Autonomous Learning Pattern for Extended English Courses

Nowadays, students have various extended English courses to choose. This is not simply the college English like before. It is more academic. Lecturing on these kinds of courses in English are not easy for both the teacher and the student. Meanwhile, a suitable class design counts for a lot. Next, this paper would take the first unit of the course “Tourism English” as an example, to illustrate how would a complete PAD class paradigm be under the informatization background and how would this design accelerate students to do autonomous learning.

The textbook of this course is written by Hans Mol [6]. The topic of the example unit illustrated here is “What is tourism?” This unit contains four parts: vocabulary, listening, extending skills, and a summary of the vocabulary bank and skills bank. It is unlikely to finish all these parts in-class and omitting some parts makes the unit incomplete. In this case, adopting the PAD Class paradigm with the DuifenE platform is a good choice. The patterns of the PAD Class paradigm and the usage of DuifenE platform have been introduced at the beginning of the semester.

In this unit, listening skills like note-takings and the way to guess words in context like prefixes and suffixes are the unit goal. In the class, the teacher first introduce some learning strategies, then some listening practice would be done under the guidance of the teacher. After this, the teacher goes over the vocabulary skills of guessing words by explaining the meanings of different prefixes and suffixes. Besides, some extending skills on the textbook are mentioned briefly. Detailed courseware would be uploaded to the platform for the students to study by their own. Homework must be assigned and it must be uploaded to the platform in any format chosen by the students, e.g., doc, jpg, txt, etc. In the next week, students share what they have learned from the previous unit with their group members, discuss on the difficulties in their assignment, testing each other the questions they found from this unit. After that, some students would be chosen by the teacher to air what their group has done and make a small summary. Finally, the teacher would answer the general questions and make a summary.
Since the students have one week to prepare for the discussion part, they could talk more after the assimilation.

3. Summary

The PAD Class paradigm is still quite new for Chinese classroom. It cannot be said that this paradigm is so perfect that it has not shortages. However, compared to other forms of paradigm, this is quite practical and the effectiveness can be seen in quite short a time. Autonomous learning helps one to study in depth. But still, the students need the teacher’s guidance to accomplish this target. These work cannot be done just in class for the class period is only 80 minutes. Online resources are needed especially under the informatization background in recent years. With the use of the teaching paradigm and the platform, a better teaching and learning environment should be created. Researches should be done to provide more data to examine the objective effectiveness of this class paradigm.

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References


