The Construction of “Learner-Centered” Educational Model in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

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Keywords: Learner-Centered, Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, Learner Autonomy.

Abstract. The "learner-centered" teaching theory, though has received widespread attention and promotion, the teaching Chinese as a foreign language, due to the particularity and complexity of its learners, is confronted with many difficulties and challenges in performing "learner-centered" teaching theory. Based on the existing problems and malpractices of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, the paper analyzes the theoretical basis, manifestation mode and practical significance of implementing "learner-centered" teaching Chinese as a foreign language. The paper aims to strengthen the understanding of "learner-centered" in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, and provide reference for the future researches on "learner-centered" in teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

Introduction

Almost all teachers often think about how to teach students successfully. There are few educational theories or teaching methods that have not yet been introduced in China at present, and most teachers may apply one or some of them into the actual teaching operation. However, few of them have turned out to be a satisfactory implementation. In addition to the complexity of the teaching scenes, the reasons for it also include that many teachers fail to fundamentally understand the true principles of teaching theory concerned, which brings about a nominal and embarrassing situation. The purpose of this paper is to understand the "learner-centered" in teaching Chinese as a foreign language and to provide reference for the future researches on "learner-centered" teaching of Chinese as a foreign language.

The Theoretical Basis of "Learner-Centered" in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

Literally speaking, the "learner-centered" educational theory takes learners as the center and main body of teaching. However, it is not an easy thing to clarify the connotation of "learner-centered" educational theory. Based on the relevant theories and the previous research achievement, the chapter will make a simple sorting and review on the character and principle of "learner-centered" educational theory.

The Character of "Learner-Centered" Educational Theory

First of all, Transfer the Dominance of Teaching to Learner. In the traditional teaching, teacher is not only the subject of the teaching process, but the communicator, indicator and ruler of knowledge. Student, however, is not only the the object of the teaching process, but the recipient and the passive one of knowledge. Under the background of such system, teacher designs the teaching activity, selects and organizes the teaching contents in accordance with students' abilities, and teacher can even evaluate the students from their own standpoints. Therefore, we can say that the teaching activity cannot be performed smoothly without the instruction and supervision of teacher. Yet according to the "learner-centered" educational theory, learner can master the teaching dominance, and the learning plan is formulated and implemented by learner, learner can even make evaluation on the learning outcomes. But the precondition here is that what degrees of freedom shall be given to the
learner. The main reason for the failure of "learner-centered" practices in the past is to accommodate the learner's freedom indefinitely. The "learner-centered" education, therefore, definitely is not a full decentralization to learner, but a fact that the learner's dominance shall be recognized in a certain scope and degree. It is of crucial importance to balance the freedom of dominance.

Secondly, Pursue Individualized Education and Pay More Attention to Learners' Free Choice. The traditional teaching philosophy is mainly based on the theory of "stimulus-react". The so-called "teaching" actually is a process of helping learner to perform certain behaviors by virtue of outside stimulus. And the so-called "individualization" means that learners can produce the desired response through different clues and stimuli. Under the background of such "individualization", it is teacher who provides specific learning goals and designs the learning contents in advance. Yet "individualization" on the opening education means that learner can participate in the decision-making of learning goal. And teacher is responsible for creating and providing learner with an atmosphere in which learners can explore their own learning goals. Meanwhile, in order to fulfill their own learning goals, learners shall select and make full use of the existing environmental resources. Certainly, teacher does play an important role in the realization of learning goals. The learner also can ask parents and surrounding people for help if necessary.

Thirdly, the Active Participation of Teachers and Learners. As the subject in the "learner-centered" education, learner can actively participate in the design of learning activities, the implementation of learning activities and the evaluation of learning outcome, though, this does not, however, mean that teacher is merely a supervisor. On the contrary, there is a greater need for the active participation of teachers. Because unlike the traditional "teacher-centered" education, teacher shall put in more effort and patience to satisfy the learning needs of different learners. Teacher shall observe the learner's entire learning process, know about the learning difficulties and learning advantages and weaknesses, and be prepared to answer all concerned problems of learners.

Fourthly, Emphasize the Combination of Content and Experience and the Combination of Various Teaching Methods. The teaching subjects is strictly distinguished in the traditional teaching system. On the contrary, the opening education advocates that learning can not be divided as mathematics, language and politics and so on. A learning activity can contain many subjects, and the learning of a subject can also include many activities. In other words, the knowledge and experience learned by learner shall be associated with each other and form a coordinated and integrated whole. The "learner-centered" education mainly applies "discovery teaching" or "inquiry-based teaching" at present. However, the successful discovery and exploration are based on the necessary basic knowledge and skills. It is impossible to perform a successful discovery or exploration to a certain topic, if there is no relevant basic knowledge and skills. Most of these basic knowledge and skills, however, are learned by means of traditional pedagogy. It's also clear that it is very effective to teach and learn these knowledge and skills in a traditional way. Therefore, the coordination of multiple teaching methods is of great importance during the implementation of "discovery teaching" or "inquiry-based teaching".

The Principle of "Learner-Centered" Educational Theory

Firstly, the Principle of Self-Construction. Learner-centered education is based on the learning theory of constructivism. According to the learning theory of constructivism, learning is an active, constructive, goal-oriented and cumulative process (Shuell 1980). Constructivism pays more attention on learners' introverted motivation and the independent learning activity. It believes that knowledge is constructed and acquired in the interaction between individual and environment, and it is impossible to complete knowledge transmission without the active participation of learners. Therefore, the teaching goal is decided directly by the teacher in traditional teaching, yet it is formulated according to the learning experience and the result of the construction in the constructivist teaching.

Secondly, the Principle of Acquisition Learning Method. The learner-centered education focuses more on the learning method instead of learning something. Therefore, it emphasizes the
learning process, such as the exploration process and the discovery process, because in view of the vast knowledge system, it is impossible to teach students all knowledge during the limited time of school education. Students can only learn part of knowledge selected by school, and sometimes, even the selected knowledge fails to be taught to students well due to the limitations of school education. Thus it can be seen that, it is more important for learners to master the learning method rather than learning the knowledge itself in school education.

Thirdly, the Principle of Emotional Education. Emotional education consists of two points: One is that teachers shall give full consideration to students' emotional factors during the guiding process. And the other is that teachers shall teach students to adjust their own emotions. The former requires that teachers shall try to discover and eliminate the possible factor that may have a negative impact on the students’ emotion in advance, so that students can gain psychological comfort and be capable of performing their learning freely. The latter means that learning shall be implemented and promoted in a free and enjoyable atmosphere. The result that whether students can learn new information in school education shall not be a standard to judge the stand or fall of school education. But it is more important that whether students have improved themselves in school education and whether they have been inspired by various things, thoughts and knowledge.

Fourthly, the Principle of Self-Assessment. More and more scholars think that score evaluation produces more obstacles to learning instead of promoting learning. Holt (1964) pointed out that the score evaluation may give rise to children being deceived and make them forget the important content and lose confidence in their memory. As the above mentioned, if learners can decide the learning content and learning method independently, they shall understand and learn how to evaluate the learning performance. Only in this way can learners be cultivated with the responsibility for self-learning.

The Manifestation Mode of Implementing "Learner-Centered" in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

Based on the theoretical basis described above, the paper will discuss the application of "learner-centered" education model in teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

The implementation steps of “learner-centered” teaching Chinese as a foreign language is basically the same as that of the general teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Compared with the general teaching Chinese as a foreign language, the “learner-centered” teaching Chinese as a foreign language shall take into account the personal characteristic of students and ask for students' mutual participation. In general, teacher and learner, during the planning stage of teaching, shall participate in making learning goals together so as to perform learner's spontaneity and dominance. Teachers shall check on the learning goals to ensure that the learning goals can reflect correctly the characteristics and demands of students. Teachers also ought to guide learners to organize various proper learning activities and introduce many varied activities into the classroom teaching. Secondly, during the instruction-implementing period, “learner-centered” teaching doesn’t mean that the role of teachers is no longer important. Teachers shall control the implementation steps of all activities in the classroom so that learners are capable of performing self-study evenly. What’s more, teachers ought to promote students to make positive thinking and memories inspiration, and set a correct direction for learners' speaking and writing. Therefore, the instructional methods of teachers directly affect the "learner-centered" teaching effectiveness.

The discovery or inquiry-based teaching is of great importance for "learner-centered" in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Teachers shall guide students to think and imitate independently and make self-study. The same is true for grammar or cultural learning. With the help and guidance of teacher, learners shall perform the process of investigation, understanding, organization and evaluation independently or in groups, so that they can achieve the learning goals. What’s more, the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language performed in classroom shall be a process that can provide useful experience for learners. Students’ concerns, therefore, shall be put in the first place. Teachers shall guide students and interact with them in a relatively open atmosphere.
Besides, the "learner-centered" teaching shall be a teaching model that takes into consideration learners' differences. Because it is a teaching model that recognizes learners' individual differences in interests, abilities and concerns. It is of the utmost importance to manage time properly. To complete the same learning content, different learners may spend a different amount of time, which requires teachers to flexibly arrange the activity time to copy with the differences among learners. What’s more, the textbook of teaching Chinese as a foreign language shall take into account the characteristics of learners. For example, since there are great cognitive differences between children and adults, the textbook intended for children shall avoid being involved in much grammar knowledge, but mainly be based on their lively and active character and set up many interesting contents that can stimulate children's interest in learning. Yet the adult learners, who have formed a complete cognitive and abstract thinking ability, can make good understanding of complex grammatical rules. The language and cultural contents prepared for them shall be capable of inspiring their curiosity. And the learning content gives priority to the inquiry-based learning so as to guide learners to explore by themselves and deal with problems independently. In addition, the text content shall get close to daily life and be in line with the learner's cognitive ability, so that learner can learn in a real language environment. The exercises after class shall be the topic that needs to complete through mutual assistance and cooperation, so that it can cultivate learners' ability of self-study and cooperative learning. And also, due to the complexity of the target language and the effect of native tongue, different native speakers have different order of acquisition, which is also an issue Chinese language textbooks for overseas learners shall focus on.

The Practical Significance of Implementing "Learner-Centered" in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

"Learner-centered" educational theory is based on constructivist epistemology. As the the subject of learning in “learner centered” teaching model, learners can perform experiential and reflective learning in a collaborative and situated learning environment. The application of this teaching theory in teaching Chinese as a foreign language has special meaning for practice.

First of all, “learner centered” educational theory attaches importance to self-discipline and connectivity. Therefore, the “learner centered” in teaching Chinese as a foreign language can not only stimulate Chinese learners' sensory motor activity and mental activity, but also provide a social environment for Chinese learners to communicate with each other.

Secondly, the "learner-centered" educational theory stands for curriculum integration. As a "whole language" teaching, the language teaching here focuses on language users’ practical application of language. Therefore, the curriculum integration emphasized by "learner-centered" in teaching Chinese as a foreign language can be regarded as an organic combination of sub-branches such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, which can strengthen the practical application of Chinese. On the other hand, all subjects are based on language from the perspective of whole language teaching. Language can be improved effectively once it is linked to other subjects or learning activities. Compared with the traditional teaching Chinese as a foreign language, the "learner-centered" teaching Chinese as a foreign language can be more closely connected with other subjects, which helps learners to learn other subjects or disciplines that take Chinese as the language of instruction.

Finally, "learner-centered" teaching model underlines the active participation of learners. Therefore, "learner-centered" teaching Chinese as a foreign language can not only help learners be aware of their shortcomings timely, but assist learners in presenting themselves and improving their confidence and ability to take defeat. In addition, the "learner-centered" teaching Chinese as a foreign language is more beneficial to help the learners discover and explore the features of Chinese, and improve their interest in learning Chinese, master the methods of learning Chinese and achieve the goal of lifelong learning at last.
Summary

Based on the character and principle of "learner-centered" teaching theory, the paper attempts to find out a shortcut that is suitable for the application of learner-centered in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. The paper is of certain theoretical significance by deepening the understanding of learner-centered teaching theory. And simultaneously, it has some guiding significance and reference value for the practice of "learner-centered" teaching theory in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, which may stimulate further works about "learner-centered" in teaching Chinese as a foreign language in the future.

References


Reference to a chapter in an edited book: