

Effective College English Teaching Based on Student-Centered Learning

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Abstract

This article examines the challenges faced by Chinese university students in the general education course "College English" and proposes the APAD(Anticipate, Pre-teach, Activities, Delayed Feedback) teaching method to enhance learning outcomes. Grounded in student-centered learning(SCL) theory, this method addresses low student motivation by integrating online/offline learning and in-class/extracurricular activities. While effective, the model requires additional teacher preparation time for customized lesson planning.

Keywords

College English, student-centered learning, teaching model.

1. Introduction

The shift from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered learning(SCL) is widely endorsed in English education, yet its implementation in Chinese universities remains limited due to large class size, rigid curricula, and students' passive learning habits. Under this context, students are likened to passive receivers of knowledge and are constantly told what they need to know and perform(Tang, 2023)[1]. Most students, accustomed o teacher-dominated high school classrooms, struggle with self-directed learning. This paper proposes the APAD framework as a practical SCL solution for "College English" courses.

2. Background

2.1. Course analysis

"College English" is a compulsory course aimed at improving four core skills(listening, speaking, reading, writing) across six learning levels: 1. Knowledge (vocabulary/grammar mastery) 2. Comprehension (understanding speakers' intent) 3. Application (daily communication/article analysis) 4. Analysis (sentence structure/critical thinking) 5. Innovation (creative language use) 6. Quality (values/cultural competence).

2.2. Student analysis

As a general education course, College English is open to most undergraduate students. However, in many college classrooms, the knowledge is owned by teachers and students' participation in the acquisition of knowledge is minimal(Lojdova K, 2019)[2]. Weimer(2002)[3] described today's college students as anxious and tentative rather than empowered, confident and self-motivating, which means certain measures should be taken from the beginning of study to build up confidence, share responsibility and arouse interest. In addition, she also pointed out that students in universities can not perform well without structure and imposed control which shows a concerning fact that most students are accustomed to being told what to do and are reluctant to take charge of their own learning. Their ultimate concern is to get a good grade rather than acquiring skills that could help them in future learning and working.

3. APAD Method in Teaching

3.1. Anticipating Problems

Pre-class diagnostics(e.g., quizzes, surveys) identify knowledge gaps, reducing excessive Teacher Talking Time(TTT) and improving lesson targeting.

3.2. Pre-teach Vocabulary/Grammar

In conventional English classes, teachers often feel the need to cover the course content, which can lead to a neglect of meeting the objectives of the course. When teachers erroneously equate a good course with a rigorous course, they judge it only by seeing if the content is all covered. In consequence, students often fail to engage in activities actively and, inevitably, focus only on memorization rather than conceptualization, and gradually form a “binge and purge” approach towards examinations which works against students being successful, mature learners. To avoid such neglect, teachers should use multi-sensory lead-ins(videos, props, games) to spark interest and replace rote memorization with peer competitions(e.g., vocabulary races).

3.3. Activities

According to Per Dale(1969)' Cone of Experience[4], active participation (e.g., peer teaching, role-plays) yields better retention than passive lectures. When moving towards the pinnacle of the cone from direct and purposeful experiences to visual and verbal symbols, the degree of abstraction increases gradually, and with the teacher-centered approach, students become spectators rather than participants (Seels, 1997)[5]. Through SCL, students not only acquire knowledge, but also develop critical thinking skills, problems solving abilities, communication skills, and life long learning (Ali S, 2019)[6].

In Tyma's(2009)[7] experience with a media literacy class, many desirable outcomes, which would not have been achieved if the teacher remained center of the class, were achieved, as he shifted the decision-making in the class to empower the students and let them decide what they wanted out of the class. Baxter and Gray(2001)[8] also concur that class activities should involve students to actively engage in the learning process in order to achieve effective learning. For example, students can have a peer-learning activity in which they prepare and teach a 5-minute lesson on grammar to the class rather than sit and read the prepared material in silence. In addition, as Chung and Chow's(2004)[9] reported that Chinese students are uncomfortable with the idea of challenging the lecturers, it is necessary to pay attention to whether TCQs (Task Checking Questions) are given to confirm that students understand the activity, because they may not ask even when they are confused. The ultimate purpose of classroom activities is not to simply pass on information or to cover the course content; it allows students the opportunities to control their learning. As stated by Slunt and Giancario(2004)[10], student-centered approach require students to take responsibility for their learning, and through activities involve in the learning process rather than simply passively receiving information.

3.4. Delayed feedback

According to Weimer(2002), assessment should prioritize learning over scores. In this way, test anxiety can be diminished and the temptation to cheat reduces. Strategies that teacher could adopt include: 1. Delayed feedback(avoid disrupting discussion flow). 2. Diverse evaluation tools (e.g., e-platforms, audience response systems).(Kemmm and Dantas, 2007)[11] However, that is not to say traditional evaluation of learning should be abandoned completely. In a study done by Knight and Wood(2005)[12], the frequent in-class assessment promoted learning in a biology class.

4. Conclusion

The APAD model is a practical way of applying students-centered learning in today's English course in universities. and empowers students and mitigates traditional teaching pain points. It reduces the pressure of teachers in teaching, and returns the classroom to students. However, it demands higher teacher effort which could cause higher pressure for teachers. Future research should explore scalability in large classes and teacher training needs.

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