

The Integrated Application of PAD Class and Unipus in College English Teaching

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ABSTRACT

A new form of teaching mode called PAD Class has been quite popular with happy teachers and students in China because of its lively classroom atmosphere, pleasant teacher-student relationships, and satisfactory teaching effect. Unipus is an online platform for college English learning. The integrated application of PAD Class and Unipus in college English teaching is helpful to arouse students' interest in learning English, motivate students to explore their potentials, improve the teaching effectiveness, and promote the cultivation of international talents by blending online and offline English teaching.

Keywords: *PAD Class, Unipus, College English teaching, Integrated application*

1. THE BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO PAD CLASS

In 2014, Zhang Xuexin, a Chinese professor of psychology from Fudan University, proposed a new classroom teaching mode called PAD Class by combining the advantages of traditional classes and discussion classes. The core concept of PAD Class is to divide the total class time into two halves. Half of the class time is allocated to teachers for teaching, and the other half is allocated to students for internalization of the knowledge learned in class and interactive learning in the form of discussion. Similar to traditional classes, PAD Class emphasizes teaching before learning, with teachers giving lectures first and students learning later. Also, similar to discussion classes, PAD Class emphasizes interaction between students and interaction between teachers and students, and encourages independent learning. The key innovation of PAD Class is to stagger the time of teaching and discussion so that students have time to arrange learning independently after class and conduct personalized absorption. There are three steps in PAD Class, namely Presentation, Assimilation, and Discussion, which can therefore be referred to as PAD Class. These three steps are independent of each other in time, but they are closely related in learning content [1].

In essence, PAD Class reallocate rights and responsibilities in teaching. It endows students with the rights they deserve, encourages students to take their

due responsibilities, and shows the greatest respect for students so as to create a pleasant classroom atmosphere of democracy, dialogue, openness, and freedom, and hence makes the class harmonious, full of fun, and lively [2].

2. THE BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO UNIPUS

Unipus is an online platform for college students' independent English learning developed by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. It is used in combination with New Horizon College English Reading and Writing Course and New Horizon College English Audio-Visual and Speaking Course. The platform includes digital courses, teaching management, teaching interaction, teaching resource center, learning tools, and other functions [3]. On Unipus, teachers can take attendance, randomly select students to answer the questions in class, organize discussion, post lecture notes and other supplementary teaching resources, know about students' learning situation, monitor the learning process, assign online homework, design test paper, get the test grades, and so on. At the same time, students can conduct online learning, have discussion, ask questions, and complete homework and tests on the platform. Thus, the platform is helpful for students to solve problems in English learning and achieve learning goals with independent and free learning.

3. THE INTEGRATED APPLICATION OF PAD CLASS AND UNIPUS IN COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING

The detailed teaching procedures of PAD Class assisted by Unipus are as follows: In the first session, firstly, the teacher elaborates the key points in the textbook and assigns homework in the first period, and the students internalize and absorb the teaching content by themselves and complete the homework. Then the students discuss the homework in groups in the second period. Meanwhile, the teacher observes the group discussion and collects the remaining difficult problems among students. After that, the teacher may post the problems on Unipus Discussion Zone for the students to discuss, and the whole class may have a discussion in class or post their opinions on Unipus and try to give solutions to the problems. Finally, the teacher makes a summary of the lesson. In the second section, the teacher continues to explain key language points and skills which the students may have difficulty in learning by themselves. Then the teacher may release some supplementary teaching materials on Unipus for the students to read or practice so as to assimilate what has been taught in the class. At the end of the class, the teacher assigns homework for students to further digest the teaching content. In the third session, the students are divided into groups to discuss the answers to the after-class exercises of the previous lesson, and determine the topics they want to further explore in this unit. Then the students work in groups to search materials online or offline about the topics, conduct critical thinking and discussion, summarize the main ideas, and prepare a presentation to show the discussion results. After that, the teacher randomly selects several groups, and each group selects a representative to share with other students the essence of their group discussion results. Meanwhile, the whole class can communicate freely about the group presentation. After the class, the teacher releases some tests on Unipus for the students to consolidate the key knowledge points.

3.1. Classroom Teaching

PAD Class focuses on both the teachers' teaching and the students' learning. Before the class, students are not encouraged to review the lesson. In PAD Class, teachers give an overall introduction to the whole unit, and specify learning objectives. The principle of PAD Class is to mainly combine intensive teaching with "leaving white space" (allowing students some time to assimilate the knowledge). The intensive teaching does not need to be too systematic, comprehensive, deep, thorough, detailed, or interesting. It should be concise and instructive instead of covering all the content in the textbook. Teachers provide scaffolding for the students by making a presentation about the framework and key points of the lesson so that the students can understand

the most important and difficult points clearly. White space is an important technique of expression in traditional Chinese art, which is widely used in painting, calligraphy, poetry, drama, and other fields. In PAD Class, students are left room for imagination and exploration. Students take on tasks to "fill in the blanks" and deeply study the content which is not taught by the teachers. The learning resources selected for PAD Class can be paper materials and online resources.

Take New Horizon College English Reading and Writing Course as an example. The textbook used for this course is *New Horizon College English Reading and Writing* (third edition) published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. There are four levels for the course, and each level consists of 8 units. Each unit includes two parts: Section A and Section B. The main parts of the two sections are Background information, Detailed study of the text, Structure analysis and writing, Analysis of the whole text structure, Reading Skills, and Collocation. In the class, the teacher doesn't need to make a detailed analysis of the text content, paraphrase every sentence, or explicitly explain to the students all the long and difficult sentences in the textbook. The teaching focus is on reading and writing skills. During the period of teaching, active interaction between the teacher and students is not encouraged because students need time for internalized absorption and reflection based on the teacher's lecture. Also, the teacher may post some supplementary reading materials on Unipus for the students to read and further explore the theme of the lesson, ask students some questions for them to discuss in the second part of the class, or release some translation or writing exercises on Unipus for the students to practice and improve.

3.2. Classroom Discussion

3.2.1. Group Discussion

Only with a full understanding of students' English learning ability and individual differences can the teacher provide students with appropriate and effective learning tasks. The reasonable grouping among students is the premise and basis of smooth group discussion. The composition of team members should take into consideration the students' English language level, enthusiasm, English speaking competence, and other differences so as to offer them a platform for mutual learning and exchange. Through cooperation, team members' learning effect can also be improved. When grouping, the method of "heterogeneity within the groups" and "homogeneity between the groups" is adopted. Group discussion is usually appropriate for each group of 4 people in order that each person has an opportunity to fully express his or her ideas. Each group should include both male and female students.

According to the differences of ability, the rational ratio of the students in each group is 1:2:1, that is, one good student, two average students, and one poor student [4]. The forms of group discussion can be various. Students may retell what they are taught, evaluate their group work, compare different solutions, and exchange their learning tips.

3.2.2. The Whole Class Communication

The whole class communication includes three steps: the teacher's spot check, free questioning, and the teacher's summary.

After group discussion, students have a better understanding of the unit theme and what they've learned in the class. They may communicate with each other about their experiences and opinions formed in the process of internalization and group discussion. The teacher spot checks several groups and requires a representative in each selected group to share with the whole class their learning outcome or unsolved problems. During this time, the representative can ask students in other groups to answer some questions related to the topic so as to enhance the interaction between the students and boost their learning mutually.

The free questioning can be initiated by a student or a group, and communication is open to all students. If any student has any questions, he or she may put them forward, and the teacher may answer the questions immediately. It's also acceptable for a volunteer or an excellent student to answer the questions and explain to the whole class the reasons in brief and clear expressions. However, the Q&A session should be conducted within a limited amount of time. The teacher doesn't need to waste too much time to address each student's problems or answer everyone's questions. Selecting and dealing with only the common problems among the students are vital for the teaching quality and effectiveness. After the whole class communication, the teacher makes a summary of the students' performance in the communication or shows to the whole class some excellent samples of students' homework.

3.3. After-class Learning

The main contents of after-class learning include reading textbooks and supplementary reading materials, reviewing the lesson, thinking independently about the discussion questions, and completing homework.

The characteristic and innovation of PAD Class lie in homework assignments, including three parts, namely "Enlightening me", "Examining me", and "Helping me" [5]. The so-called "Enlightening me" refers to the content that the students feel the most beneficial or enlightening in the process of learning. "Examining me" means that during the learning process, the students

themselves may understand some key points which other students may not understand. Through the form of asking other students challenging questions, students can promote mutual learning; "Helping me" refers to some questions that the students themselves do not understand yet, and they want to turn to their teacher or classmates for help.

The teacher may assign the homework of "Enlightening me", "Examining me", and "Helping me" on Unipus for students to conduct peer evaluation. The homework may include simple review of the language points and further thinking on the basis of the teaching content, which can well guide students to internalize and absorb. The homework not only promotes students' internalization of English knowledge, but also cultivates students' critical thinking ability and self-learning ability.

In PAD Class, collective activities such as teacher's teaching, group discussion, and whole class communication are conducted in the class, while individual activities such as review, internalization and absorption, and homework are completed outside the class. Through the organic combination of discussion and homework, PAD Class extends the in-class learning to outside the class [6], increases the time for students to be exposed to English-speaking environment, and offers them more opportunities to practice English.

3.4. Evaluation

In PAD Class, one of the core educational ideas is that students should not be merely judged by academic performance. Whether the students can answer the questions correctly or get high scores in the examinations is not the most important. What really matters is whether the students are willing to think and reflect, and whether they work hard and make progress during the learning process.

Although teachers have the right to determine the grading and assessment methods for students' performance and homework, PAD Class weakens the importance of final examination and emphasizes students' daily study. The assessment of the course is based on a comprehensive and objective evaluation of students' participation in group discussion, performance of the presentations and communication, completion of homework, and the grades of in-class and after-class tests on Unipus. Thus, students do not need to cram for the final exam at the end of the semester, nor do they pass the exam by rote memorization. The students may pay more attention to the whole course content and try to find out the relationships between the knowledge points in the textbook by making mind maps. In this way, they can reduce the burden of reviewing for the final exam and the exam anxiety. Also, students' performance in group discussion is not graded or

evaluated in the class so as to avoid discussion for the sake of getting scores. Through active group discussion, students are trained to monitor themselves and make effective use of the discussion time. In addition, teacher's feedback is given according to the analysis of the data on Unipus about students' learning situation and the test grades, and the completion of assignments. This way of evaluation is beneficial to students' development and their physical and mental health.

4. CONCLUSION

PAD Class, as a new teaching mode initiated in China, has been rapidly promoted all over the country, in line with the motivation of flipped classes and MOOCs to provide students with extra time for independent learning and to improve the effectiveness of classroom activities [7]. Interaction and cooperation between students are advocated in PAD Class. Students carry out various activities in the form of presentation, group discussion, the whole class communication, and free questioning.

PAD Class truly embodies the teaching idea of "student-centered" learning and realizes the education idea of "teaching for not to teach" [8]. Through the effective classroom discussion, the students have improved their English speaking and listening ability. After the class, students read more information by consulting and studying materials, which can better cultivate their independent learning ability, improve their reading and writing skills, and lay a foundation for lifelong learning. Meanwhile, students expand their horizons and enhance the relationships between each other through exchanges and communication. The process of group discussion and the whole class communication is also helpful for students to discover and solve problems, through which students' critical thinking ability is also cultivated. Furthermore, relying on the Internet, with the help of Unipus, PAD Class is integrated into a digital, multi-media, multidimensional, and interactive teaching mode so as to achieve better teaching effect with fewer efforts. It is a brand new teaching mode, from how to teach to how to learn, which has a fundamental change in English teaching [9].

Therefore, it can be seen that the integrated application of PAD Class and Unipus can effectively motivate student's enthusiasm and interest in learning English, promote the cultivation of students' English competence, strengthen students' teamwork, improve the teaching quality, enhance the exchanges between teachers and students, and hence promote college English teaching reform.

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