Pedagogical Advice for Novice English Teachers in Non-key High School

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Abstract. The right use of teaching strategies is quite significant for novice teachers because this is the beginning period in their careers. The methods that the teacher used in English teaching will have a longstanding effect in shaping teachers' beliefs and values in the future. This paper will focus on teaching advice for novice teachers in non-key high schools. Teachers who just entered a new school will be unfamiliar with the student's study mode. The author listed some common problems in students' learning in the non-key high school such as little interest and confidence in learning English, bad study habits, and passive studying attitudes. This paper provided several solutions to handle the dilemma that most average students are struggling with, including raising students' awareness of speaking, encouraging extensive reading, and helping students increase their vocabulary. The application of the appropriate teaching methods can promote education equity. The low quantity and quality of the students in non-key high schools students may make the novice teacher adopt some wrong approaches which may cause the students unable to enjoy the same teaching in key high schools. Therefore, this paper can help students benefit from better education sources in some degrees.

Keywords: Pedagogical advice, non-key high school, novice English teacher

1   Introduction

Classes with large sizes and the variances between students' English levels can be a tough challenge for novice teachers to tackle. In class, they need to focus on the students listening behaviors, at the same time, the teachers have to pay attention to finish the teaching objectives in the regular time. So, it is rather hard for teachers to make adjustments to their teaching methods in the class. On the one hand, novice teachers are still undergoing the stage of getting used to becoming a teacher standing on the stage. On the other hand, the scarcity of actual experiences learned from various situations in class may make the teacher have difficulty handling the problems appropriately and timely. For novice teachers, it's good for them to accumulate experiences and learn from their past mistakes, while for students, they may suffer great physical or mental damage from the seemly small mistakes made by teachers.

The pedagogical advice is of great importance to novice teachers. Suitable advice can help novice teachers learn about the students' current studying habits quickly and make corresponding solutions as soon as possible. Over time, the novice teacher is no longer a new learner, and they are capable of adjusting the former teaching strategies to the approaches that are more detailed and tailored for their students. As a result, both the teachers and students can benefit from the successful usage of pedagogical advice.

Teachers should adopt different teaching methods and techniques for students in non-key high schools in China, considering the gaps between key and non-key high school students' English base, learning methods, studying patience, and concentration. Currently, there are only a small number of researches involving non-key high school students' teaching. A majority of pedagogical advice is concluded based on the condition of talented and smart students. So, more analysis on non-key high school students are needed. There existing a possibility that the teacher himself/herself is already a good learner in this subject which may also be the reason why they become the teacher, perhaps most of them lack basic understanding for students who have difficulty in learning English. By analyzing and finding the underlying behaviors of non-key high school students' behaviors, teachers can set the goals in a more specific direction for the students.

This paper consists of two parts. The first part is the current learning situations of these students, and the second part is an account of students' difficulties in learning different aspects of English studying from Listening, Speaking, Writing, and Reading, and gives detailed solutions. Solutions offered in this paper can set an example for novice teachers to follow at first and regulate their methods later in their careers.

The purpose of this paper is to provide some practical advice for novice teachers who have just entered a non-key high school and have difficulty in figuring out suitable teaching methods. In this paper, teachers can find the dilemma that most of the non-key high school students are facing and make comparisons with their students to figure out the best ways that suited the students.

2   Participant

All the participants studied in non-key high school A, located in a fourth-tier country-level city in China. High school A requires students to arrive at school before 6 a.m. and leave by 9:50 p.m. Students will usually have 2 English classes during the day and one class at night. The class size in this non-key high school contains 60 students where the number of boys outweighs girls by 20. A majority of the students will choose to study Science instead of Arts next year. The average age of the students is 16 years old. Participants in Senior 1 are just entered high school less than 6 months and are still not accustomed to the teaching mode in high school.

3   English Learning Situation

3.1   Students' Interest and Confidence in Learning English

Participants have little interest in acquiring more English, which can be embodied in the fact that teachers in high school A adopt Chinese to solve questions, instead of English, as students would be more frustrated if they need to do the listening and reading in English when trying to work out a logical problem at the same time. Besides, the participants' confidence in learning English is relatively low to students in key high schools. Students were afraid to answer questions in English even if the questions are asked in English. In class, a problem raised by the teacher usually received few responses from students. Students tend to bury their heads in the books and seldom raise their heads to look at the teachers.

3.2   Students' English Learning Habits

Students entered the non-key high school A with relatively lower scores than students in other key high schools. Their study habits needed to be improved and refined. The most conspicuous bad behavior of students can be shown in the small-scale use of Chinese-English dictionaries. While students relied too much on the teacher to give the meanings of the words and phrases. Moreover, students lack the awareness of taking notes timely in class. Teachers need to keep repeating the orders or the procedure they are going through such as turning to page 80 in the textbook or taking out the exam papers, so that the students can keep pace with the class and write down the key points in class.

3.3   Students' Attitudes towards Studying English

Only a minority of the students took the initiative in the beginning. However, as time passed by, they eventually gave up practicing every day compounded with heavy loads of other subjects. Most of the students took an inactive attitude toward learning English. They deemed that it is enough for them to only master the things that teachers had taught in class, and extracurricular practices are unnecessary. This wrong thinking mode can be attributed to their failure in Zhong Kao (high school entrance exam), which may make the students lack studying motivation and gradually resign to the low scores achieved in the exams. As a result, passive learning attitudes can lead to a vicious circle of low grades. Most of the students take a careless attitude toward their English scores and hold the value that studying English is not important, only paying much more attention to other subjects than English.

4 Pedagogical Advice for the Novice Teacher

4.1 Writing

Dilemma. Students are so dependent on the writing mode structure that the teacher gave in class. Over-dependence on the teacher can make students lose the ability to organize and reform a new format once the writing requirements have changed. Students will lose innovative inspiration through endless mechanical repeating training. English as foreign language (EFL) learners often associate English writing with repetitive drills carried out for the sake of practice and rote memorization in the controlled writing exercises common in EFL contexts, which can be demonstrated through their concentration on "establishing grammatical patterns, punctuation, and spelling." [1]. Ratnaningsih, E (2016) states that "The essence of teaching writing is guiding and facilitating students to work [2]."

However, high school A teachers seldom mark students' writing and give them feedback about grammar, punctuation, and main idea, which can be contributed to the large class size. In high school A, an English teacher is in charge of 2-3 classes containing at least 120 students. Teachers will be exhausted after the regular heavy workload, let alone give students extra tutoring. As a result, students hold a perfunctory attitude towards writing as no one would check their writing. Lacking timely feedback can make the students have misunderstandings in their writing, which will undermine their interests and confidence, and behave sluggishly in homework. Students in high school A also lack the basic background when writing a certain topic, which will make the main ideas in their writing irrelevant to the question.

Solution. In class, a novice teacher should try to find out ways to motivate students' willingness to think critically and dependently. The teacher should swift teaching mode from a "Duck-stuffing type of teaching" to students-centered teaching， fulfilling requirements after the new curriculum reform. Teachers should play a significant role in pushing the teaching objectives and a variety of activities are encouraged to be applied in class. Instead of giving students answers directly, teachers should lead the class to work out and summarize a structure together. By gradually understanding how to outline, students can harvest practical experiences from the training. The use of "Free writes" are encouraged to foster students' divergent and critical thinking. Richards and Renandya (2013) also point out do rapid" free writes" can encourage students to do the right brain progress [3]. Besides, picking several students to write down their structure about the writing on the whiteboard in class will help them learn from their peers' advantages and disadvantages. And students can draw a lesson from the last writing and make fewer mistakes in the next writing.

4.2   Speaking

Dilemma. The speaking part of the English subject is the only part that does not take into account in the College Entrance Exam, which means both the teachers and students will overlook the value of correct pronunciation and a well-organized articulation that can contribute to students' English learning. Students in high school A stuck in a dilemma where they cannot even pronounce each word correctly. The variances between students' speaking abilities make it impossible for the teacher to allocate more time and effort in checking if the students have mastered the words. Besides, students are afraid to speak in front of the class, they would rather answer in Chinese even if the teacher required them to speak in English.

Solution. The teacher should form a friendly atmosphere to encourage them to answer in English and give them more opportunities to exert their courage when he/she needs to speak English aloud. Most students are afraid to speak in an environment where they felt uneasy. What's more, the Think-Pair-Share strategy shall be used to elevate students' participation in class. Aprianti, D. & Ayu, M. (2020) clarify their opinion on the Think-Pair-Share strategy. The Think-Pair-Share strategy can make students work cooperatively with fellow students and help them manage their emotions when speaking in public [4]. The practice for teachers to operate is to let students talk in groups freely, instead of inviting only one of the students to speak in English.

Reducing their fear of talking in English first, then teachers should raise students' awareness about their speaking. Based on a study conducted by Tailab, M., & Marsh, N. (2020), it is noteworthy that shooting a video recording of their oral performance can boost the students' awareness in improving their oral English [5]. Recording a video of their own will greatly make students know their strengths and drawbacks when speaking English without feeling anxious. It is practicable and operable for a novice teacher when the teacher himself/herself may not know their students' level well enough. Rather than keep supervising the students if they are speaking with correct pronunciation, it is much more effective when students themselves realize their pros and cons in speaking and they can take action to fix it.

4.3   Reading

Dilemma. The senior high school students just transferred from middle school to high school, and most of them have not adjusted to the high school lifestyle, let alone the English studying mode. Most of the students are satisfied with using their current level to finish schoolwork and lack the initiative to recite English vocabulary.However, the student's current vocabulary database cannot support them to do the reading quickly and accurately. As a result, no matter how much reading practice the teacher gave to the students, students will become weary and unable to learn from their past mistakes. Vocabulary growth is quite urgent and necessary for students. A large vocabulary is

critical for all Second Language(L2) skills, academic abilities, and background knowledge [3].

Another observation is that students' reading habit is used to reading from top to the bottom. Students themselves do not have the awareness of using skimming or scanning skills, as teachers in class only tell them where to locate the answers. For teachers, teaching reading techniques may make them unable to catch up with the teaching objectives on schedule like other teachers do.

Solution. To improve students reading competency comprehensively, the approach of extensive reading is strongly advocated by many experts. As the study found that extensive reading can build a long-life reading habit for students [6]. The student's reading ability has been greatly improved after reading a large number of books [6].

Extensive reading can cultivate students' patience in English reading by skimming entertaining books and reducing their resistant emotions to homework. Then related reading techniques are necessary to deliver to the students which can help them in solving questions during the class. After class, the skills can be strengthened again through doing homework. Cho, Y. A., & Ma, J. H. (2020) argue from the learners' affective aspects demonstrate schema building and reading strategy instruction facilitated learners' extrinsic motivation, environment orientation, strategy orientation, and effort orientation [7]. Through the practice of extensive reading and reading techniques, students will be more engaged in reading and have a sense of achievement after the right use of techniques.

After students have mastered the basic steps methods in reading, more advanced approaches like cooperative integrated reading and composition (CIRC) technique and meta-cognitive strategy can be implemented in the novice teacher's teaching [8]. The two methods can make up the gaps between students in high school A and students in key high school.

4.4   Listening

Dilemma. In high school A, listening practices are broadcast every day during 20-mins class break and the students need to hand in their answers to teachers, which only serves as informing teachers that they've done the practice. Without referring to explanations and replay for the wrong answers, students only get the correct answers. As time went by, copying other peers' answers has become a common operation for most of the students there. Only a few of the classes with positive class atmosphere do the listening exercises honestly without copying other answers. And most students will not listen to English broadcasts at home influenced by many factors like family backgrounds, parents' education level and economic status, etc. The research found that the lack of vocabulary can be a burden for overall listening comprehension [9]. Students urgently improve their vocabulary for the sake of their English.

Solution. The frequency of doing the English practice can be reduced to 3 times a week from the previous 6 times, which will make students cherish every chance to do the exercises for it might be the only chance to improve their scores. Teachers need to use one lesson a week to analyze the common mistakes and replay the audio.

Another factor leading to the students' poor listening can be contributed to the difficulty in recognizing the words quickly and preciously. The solution is similar to the methods used in reading we have talked about. That method requires students to recite more words and they will get used to this mode automatically. As a novice teacher who just entered high school, it is of great importance for teachers to scrutinize the teaching materials and the exercises again. Because students will no longer maintain their attention in listening once the exercise is too hard or too easy for them. The teacher should find the zone of proximal development? as soon as entering the new class. Abdolrezapour, P., & Ghanbari, N. (2021) assume that a moderately difficult listening task can effectively empower the learners' self-efficacy [10]. Once they find the gist in doing the listening, followed by the mounting confidence, the students will become more willing to spend time improving their listening ability.

5   Conclusion

In this paper, teachers can find the dilemma that most of the non-key high school students are facing and make comparisons with their students to figure out the best ways that suited the students. When novice teachers grasp the basic practices they can act in class, they can gradually transform from the role of a "learner" to a "teacher".

The author summarizes four aspects of students' English learning dilemma from the "Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing" based on the observations of non-key high school-A students. Feasible approaches can help novice teachers get used to the new class quickly. However, due to the limited observation and collection of high school knowledge, this paper still exists limitations. The author only conducted the observation in only one high school, while the conclusion cannot be applied to all high school teaching. It is also possible that the student's English learning behavior did not persist and maybe after half-year they will shift from a passive role to a positive role in the study. Moreover, the author failed to consider other environmental factors that could influence students' English studying mode.

More studies are needed to focus on the feedback from the suggestions mentioned above and how the novice teacher adjust their teaching objective during the class. It requires more research to figure out what the actual needs of novice teachers in non-key high school are. Therefore, more targeted training and support can be provided for novice teachers.

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