

Analysis of Differences in Chinese and English Classroom Teaching

Haochen Shi^{1,a,*}

¹*School of Chinese Language and Literature, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China*

a. haochenshi@stu.hebmu.edu.cn

**corresponding author*

Abstract: With the Double Reduction policy and the globalization trend in the Chinese economic environment, the educational exchanges are becoming more and more frequent between the world and China. Based on the traditional teaching method, the classroom teaching in China is facing the demand for a transformation as students are completely different compared to twenty years ago with the help of information revolution. Since more and more teachers in China are trying to build a student-centered classroom, the comparative study of classroom teaching between China and the U.K. turns out to be a necessary subject. Based on this, this paper compares the differences between classroom teaching in China and the UK. First, through the observation of two different classroom teaching methods, the paper gives the description of two classroom teaching systems which contains the approaches and the content of classroom teaching. Second, through the comparative study, it investigates the causes, advantages and disadvantages of two teaching strategies to analyze the similarities and differences then provide potential ways can apply the existing experience to a Chinese classroom. Third, the paper provides suggestions for Chinese teachers to make the classroom more efficient with student-center approaches.

Keywords: Chinese and UK, comparative analysis, flipped classroom, teaching method

1. Introduction

The Chinese government issued the Double Reduction Policy to improve the education level in compulsory level and ease the burden of excessive homework for students, especially primary school students. The current research about the double reduction policy pays more attention to changes in specific teaching methods or course design in China, concentrating less on the comparison between China and other countries like United Kingdom. In the process of participating in teaching practice, the paper also found that there are many things to think about in classroom management. Does the free and loose classroom hinder classroom management? How to make the classroom free, humane and orderly? This paper will be based on the examples and cases described or analyzed in China and the United Kingdom to illustrate the difference between the two countries' classroom and teaching methods. The paper will specifically evaluate the cases from two countries by describing the details in both teacher and student aspects and analyzing the advantages and disadvantages, aiming to eventually make reasonable suggestions for Chinese classroom development under the Double Reduction Policy.

2. The Description of Chinese and U.K. Classroom Systems

According to the background and theme content of this paper, because of the issuance of the double-reduction policy, the curriculum settings, course design, teaching materials, teaching approaches, and assessment in different regions have changed from macro to micro, and also have corresponding impacts.

2.1. Characteristics of Chinese Classroom Teaching

2.1.1. Curriculum Design

Students are the center of the changes happening in this area, aiming to let more students participate in class activities. Therefore, it is obvious that the Double Reduction Policy is trying to make students define the class with two major methods: unit teaching and activity teaching. The approach of unit teaching, though it is not a brand new concept in education, still makes several significant changes in the official textbook designed by the government for compulsory education. Unit teaching should be considered as a potentially major change in teaching, as she mentions that a large unit is different from a textbook unit that serves as the organizational unit for course content [1]. Here, a unit is a learning unit, a learning event, a complete learning story, and therefore, a unit is a micro-course, the paper are concentrating more on building the connection between knowledge and experience. That is, when teachers are teaching students, they are creating a "theme" for students to study and even re-organize the material from the textbook. To be specific, as the textbook has shown, the whole book is overall designed for students to grasp the fundamental skills for communication at first, and then learn to use this language to communicate with others for specific purposes.

Also, the learning unit is made up of theme, function, and structure parts, which aim to provide students with knowledge of grammar and the phenomenon of English learning [2]. Through learning and understanding, appropriate practice, and innovative learning activities, the overall teaching activities of the theme unit can be integrated into scattered unit activity tasks into a clustered cognitive context to maximize the exploration of the theme meaning. Students can obtain knowledge achievements that go beyond the value of the school, that is, the ability to solve real problems. After completing this unit, students should be able to use the knowledge they have learned in school to solve real-life problems.

2.1.2. Teaching Approaches and Goals

Data on changes in teachers' teaching methods show that through training and teachers' professional development, traditional concepts and methods based on lectures are undergoing significant changes. The number of teachers who carry out teaching activities with new teaching methods is constantly expanding, and more teachers are willing to combine the two methods. Teachers using at least two methods in their classes have increased from 65% to 97% over the past ten years [3].

However, Chinese high school classes pay more attention to the learning of knowledge in individual subjects rather than the connection between subjects. Take mathematics class as an example. Teachers provide students with a lot of rigorous mathematical training, to allow students to master problem-solving steps and mathematical knowledge. Hence, there are not many connections shown between mathematics and other subjects [4]. At the same time, to reflect fairness in the college entrance examination, there will be few mathematics questions based on other subject content in this exam. Therefore, teachers rarely guide students in cross-domain learning in class. The main purpose of high school mathematics classroom teaching is to allow students to obtain high scores and achieve good results in vital exams, and also the evaluation of teachers is based on such results as the main criteria.

As a result, in most classes, students can't fully express their opinions, and teachers do not give enough time in class for students to think or let students feel and experience the process of generating knowledge in Chinese classrooms due to the requirement of efficiency.

2.2. Characteristics of United Kingdom Classroom Teaching

2.2.1. Key Concept and Formation of U.K. Classroom

In the U.K., "Every child matters" is a core concept of basic education, which means that in school education, every child is equal and teachers should respect every student's opinions and suggestions, allow every student to develop confidently with personality and expertise, and always encourage students [5]. The purpose of education is to create opportunities for every member of society to realize their potential and achieve excellence as mentioned in the "Education Reform Act 1988" which set the fundamental rule of Britain's educational system.

The following classroom teaching format can be seen in most British primary and secondary schools with 15-20 students per class. During class, teachers divide students into groups of 5-6 students and divide them into 3-4 groups according to the students' different learning conditions. In some classes, in addition to the subject teacher, there are 1-2 teaching assistants. Assistants are responsible for helping teachers conduct group tutoring, distributing teaching aids and various teaching materials. Some teaching assistants are responsible for providing individual tutoring to students with special needs in the classroom [5].

2.2.2. Layered Teaching Approach and Goals

After completing the grouping, it is completely layered teaching. Based on a teaching theme, each group has completely different learning tasks and learning content. It is the teacher who decides the learning tasks and content, and the teacher's decision is based on the student's learning level [6]. Children with similar learning levels are grouped into the same group. Different groups answer different questions publicly, and teachers give different evaluations. Of course, the commonality of evaluation is developmental evaluation. Classroom teaching in the UK is individualized teaching for individuals. Group teaching is the basic form of individualized teaching. Although teaching is conducted among groups of students, there are no unified and synchronous requirements. Students have the freedom to learn at their speed and in their way and the freedom to choose their study tasks as well. In such a small class teaching, the role of the teacher is more like a companion, creating an equal atmosphere for students. Teachers attach great importance to students' study habits. In the class, the teacher provides students with many opportunities to speak and respond to others' speeches, which can improve students' reasoning abilities [7].

Of course, In the U.K., schools attach great importance to grades as well. They attach great importance to GCSE and A-level examination results, as well as students' admission to prestigious schools. However they do emphasize the process of students' learning more compared with the results, which show more attention to the concept of individualized development of each child [5].

In conclusion, British classrooms focus more on learning abilities and the process of learning knowledge, rather than just the knowledge itself. Generally speaking, it is the ability to use knowledge and subject-learning methods to solve problems in more complex, more abstract, and more realistic scenarios. The high end of layering teaching is going deeper, harder depths within the same theme for all students [8].

3. Comparative Study of Chinese and U.K. Classrooms

3.1. Analysis of the Causes of Differences between Chinese and U.K. Classroom Teaching

There are many factors that help form the difference between the two countries and in this paper, the analysis mainly focuses on factors relevant to school.

Chinese students face much higher competition than British students. The examination pattern of China's high school entrance examination also determines that students need to master as much accurate knowledge as possible and make their answers as close as possible to the standard answers to get more points. , and the British education system places more emphasis on students' ability to think on their and work in groups. It is hoped that students can obtain conclusions in the process of inquiry and then master knowledge.

Another significant difference that leads to the different shapes of teaching methods is the class size, or the combination of the class-teacher ratio and student-teacher ratio [9]. Class size affects and restricts the appropriateness of teacher resource allocation to a certain circumstance. In China, there were 107 million students in primary schools, 6 million full-time teachers, and the student-teacher ratio was 16.67:1. 49 million junior high school students, 3 million full-time teachers, and the student-teacher ratio is 12.73:1 in 2020 [9]. The ratio in the U.K. would be 19.62 in primary school and 16.65 in junior high school [9]. This data brings the question that it seems that students in China have a lower student-teacher ratio which should bring them higher chance to participate in class or communicate with teachers in schools, however, the reality is the opposite.

Therefore, it is important to pay attention to another important factor: class size. In the U.K., the special policy stipulates that under normal circumstances, the maximum class size for primary schools is 30 students and the maximum class size for secondary schools is 24 students. In China, the number in primary school is 37.5, and in secondary school is 45.78, even ignoring the cases in cities like Hebei and Shandong which have tremendous class sizes of up to 60 students. Small class sizes are often seen as beneficial. Generally speaking, in a small-class teaching environment, teachers can pay more attention to students' personality characteristics and learning needs, reduce the time and energy investment in maintaining teaching order, and are more likely to innovate teaching practices, thereby improving teaching quality. Students can also get more classroom participation and individual tutoring opportunities, which is more conducive to strengthening in-depth communication and cooperation between teachers and students [6].

From the above analysis, it can be seen that due to the large number of students, Chinese classrooms have larger class sizes, and the pressure to manage the classroom in the classroom is higher than that in British classrooms. In teaching activities, teachers are more inclined to choose traditional teaching methods to ensure teaching efficiency and stability within the classroom. Therefore, although Chinese schools have a lower student-teacher ratio, teachers are more conservative in teaching design, and students do not participate in many activities.

3.2. Analysis of Advantages and Disadvantages of Chinese Classroom Teaching Methods

In China, basic education classroom teaching methods are mainly based on lecture methods, supplemented by traditional teaching methods such as discussion, question and answer, practice, observation, etc. These methods are the main methods for students to obtain indirect experience and they are the basic methods of teaching [3]. These methods have a strong advantage in real-time evaluation and response. Teacher evaluation can allow students to objectively view their grasp of knowledge, identify problems, find gaps and clarify directions. Relevant inferences based on evaluation affect teachers' teaching decisions [10]. Moreover, when students answer questions, teachers can give timely evaluation and sufficient encouragement, provide students with feedback

information to promote learning and evaluate students' answers promptly, whether they are right or wrong, which can eventually enhance students' learning motivation. Such advantages certainly help teachers solve problems that arise in the classroom in a timely manner, complete teaching tasks efficiently, and at the same time pay maximum attention to the learning situation of students in the class. Generally speaking, this method can complete the teacher's teaching tasks most efficiently and allow students to obtain satisfactory scores on the exam.

Nevertheless, such methods have significant disadvantages. Chinese schools have large classes, large numbers of students, and heavy teaching tasks. In the classroom, the teacher usually pushes all the students forward. In addition, the introverted and gentle personality of Chinese students makes task-driven problem-solving a little quiet and not open enough [11]. Most students think hard and dare not raise their hands to ask questions. Teachers are not available to explain their doubts one by one. As a result, teachers' individualized tutoring and evaluation of students in Chinese classroom teaching is weak.

Group cooperation is also one of the most common forms of activities in Chinese classrooms. However, limited by the teaching content and teaching time, teachers usually leave insufficient time for students to discuss in groups, and teachers rarely provide detailed instructions or regulations on "how to discuss" before group discussions. There is no evaluation in communication, no interaction in thinking, and, likely, learning will not happen.

In conclusion, For different students, teachers should comprehensively use a variety of teaching methods in classroom teaching to adapt to the needs of different students and meet students' personalized development.

3.3. Analysis of Advantages and Disadvantages of U.K. Classroom Teaching Methods

In British classroom teaching, truly effective teaching and learning is an open system. In other words, the class is not about a single answer and a single path. In personalized learning, everyone builds their learning structure [11,12]. These structures may be similar for children in the same group, but different teachers must have played a catalyst role. Teachers need to give students high expectations and always give them tasks above their level. Therefore, in their teaching, personalized learning is reflected in this way [13].

In British teaching activities, teaching behaviors are based on the requirements of the national curriculum syllabus. It can be found through observation that teachers observe students' learning in groups very carefully, and find categories that match the students' learning status in various evaluation forms with clear descriptions and classifications. Evaluations based on standards and evidence will serve as an important basis for guiding students' learning in the next stage and are also an important part of the academic reports provided to parents [14].

For the U.K., the main disadvantage will be the student structure, which means the more complex the student structure is, the more time and energy teachers have to invest in understanding the diverse student population [15]. The majority of special students are students with special needs, refugee students and non-native language learners.

An overemphasis on student assessment has resulted in teachers making too many corrections. In particular, teachers recommend greater flexibility in writing teaching plans that suit them and more opportunities to share and discuss teaching plans internally. Some school teaching departments require weekly lesson plans, which require them to spend time on weekends.

In conclusion, teachers in U.K. classrooms do spend more energy on individual development, however, it also brings more burden in teachers' daily work.

4. Suggestions

4.1. Student-Centered Activity Design

To help students better master knowledge, it is necessary to enhance teacher-student interaction in the classroom. There should be a three-dimensional communication method. At present, the communication between teachers and students in the classroom only exists on and off the podium. This kind of communication limits the emotions between teachers and students. Creative teaching breaks this traditional space limitation. Teachers can go off stage and communicate with students face to face, interacting in an open and relaxed environment, breaking down the spatial barriers between teachers and students. Organizing students into small groups and communicating with multiple people not only allows students to have a clear understanding of their acquisition of teaching content but also allows teachers to better understand students' confusion, thereby improving teaching efficiency. Creative teaching makes students' ideas visible to teachers, allowing teachers to adjust the teaching structure promptly and help students master knowledge as soon as possible.

4.2. Discussion Sessions with Proactive Thinking

The center questions of a single class should be complicated. The answers to these questions can be summarized by students forming groups to discuss, each expressing his/her opinions, speaking freely, inspiring each other, and complementing each other. Excellent students can enlighten other students, lead the students in the group to summarize during the discussion. In this process, students correctly guide others in the group and inspire others while they benefit from others, which is the essence of refined learning and the advantage of it. For group collaboration in the whole-class teaching process, teachers should adopt a heterogeneous grouping method, that is, the top students, average students, and weak students in the subject should study in the same group, and then use the peer teaching-learning method [16]. Moreover, when teachers carry out collaborative learning, they should stipulate the order in which the three types of students in the group discuss and speak. The weak students speak first, followed by the average students to supplement, and finally the high-achieving students summarize, which will gradually develop the habit of collaboration.

4.3. Refined Flipped Classroom

Student-centered instructional approaches, like flipped learning, not only help students learn the content but also provide opportunities to improve professional skills that today's competitive global market and changing work environment demand, also flipped learning contributes to students' professional skills such as life-long learning and critical thinking.

There is an example of project-based refined flipped learning in a fifth-grade science class. The theme of the lesson is 'Changes in Rocks'. Before the class, the teacher showed students videos of different rocks and assigned related questions for them to consider. Students worked in groups of five, dividing tasks and discussing to collectively address the questions. They summarized their findings into a report and presented it during the class. Finally, the teacher summarized the knowledge from students' presentations, and assigned additional tasks for extended thinking after the class, such as representing the process of rock weathering using a flowchart, which the students submitted in groups. The rationale behind flipped learning is to use face-to-face class time for complex exercises where students can interact with each other and with the instructor. This synthesis concluded that students enjoyed working with their peers and having the instructor available for help [17]. The flipped approach enabled a more power dynamic to step out of the comfort zone for both students and teachers.

5. Conclusion

Through the comparative study of the two countries, it is obvious that the policies and precious attempts in the U.K. are providing Chinese teachers with beneficial information and theoretical support to implement education reform. Due to the differences between China and other Western countries, teachers and schools need to improve the classroom teaching method by analyzing the cases showing up in every individual classroom and building the connection between the problems and current experience in research or study. Nowadays more and more teachers in public schools have the motivation and courage to carry out some experimental attempts with the help of schools and even the government, however as mentioned in this study, more active attempts are needed to fundamentally solve the existing problems to improve the quality and efficiency of education in China. Changes in classroom arrangement, teaching methodology, and teachers' mindset are expected to eventually lead to a revolution in the Chinese classroom, which will benefit teachers and students in return with a more efficient and diversified atmosphere.

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