

Study on the Feasibility of Applying "PAD Class" Model to Middle School English Teacher Training

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Abstract: *With the continuous deepening of educational reform, the professional development and continuing education of middle school English teachers have become increasingly important. Against this backdrop, this article focuses on exploring the feasibility of applying the "PAD Class" model in the continuing education and training of middle school English teachers. Currently, the continuing education of middle school English teachers faces many challenges, such as the disconnection between training content and practical teaching, monotonous training methods and etc. However, the "PAD Class" teaching model, with its unique characteristics like emphasizing teacher-student interaction and student participation, provides new ideas for addressing these issues. By implementing "PAD Class" model, the classroom participation and interaction of trainee teachers have been significantly improved, and their ability of self-directed learning and knowledge internalization have also been strengthened, thus greatly enhancing the effectiveness of training and injecting new vitality into the professional development and continuing education of middle school English teachers.*

Keywords: *"PAD Class" model; Middle School English Teachers; Continuing Education*

1. Introduction

Since the reform and opening up, the basic education curriculum in China has been continuously improved, and teachers play a crucial role in achieving reform goals and cultivating high-quality talents. Therefore, enhancing teachers' professional literacy and strengthening continuing education training are essential. Since the mid-20th century, teacher continuing education has become an important part of in-service teacher training, and it has been on the right track since the early 1990s. In 1999, the publication of the "Regulations on Continuing Education for Primary and Secondary School Teachers" comprehensively determined the content of continuing education and promoted its comprehensive implementation. However, during the implementation process, shortcomings in the training model have been exposed, and the training effect of middle school English teachers has also been affected.

2. Problems of the Continuing Education of Middle School English Teachers

As an important way to enhance teachers' educational proficiency and teaching abilities, the continuing education of middle school English teachers faces many challenges and problems in reality. These problems not only constrain teachers' individual professional growth but also affect the improvement of the quality of education and teaching quality.

2.1 The Utilitarian Purpose and Lack of Initiative in Participating in Continuing Education

Currently, middle school English teachers generally lack a sufficient understanding of continuing education policies and have a relatively narrow understanding of its forms and connotations. In many teachers' perceptions, continuing education is often simply equated with the traditional model of "listening to lectures and taking notes". They lack in-depth understanding of its diversified educational forms and modern teaching concepts.

In terms of participating in continuing education, most teachers rely passively on the arrangements of schools or superior educational authorities. They rarely actively seek, select, and strive for continuing education training opportunities that suit them. This dependent mindset reflects teachers' low initiative and enthusiasm in continuing education.

More notably, a considerable number of teachers participate in continuing education not primarily

for the purpose of improving their individual educational proficiency, teaching levels or research capabilities, but rather for utilitarian goals such as "promotion and advancement." They often view continuing education as a means to meet the criteria for career promotion or professional evaluation rather than a genuine opportunity for professional growth and self-improvement.

Therefore, most teachers participate in continuing education training primarily with a mindset of fulfilling a task. In their view, continuing education is more like a mandatory task rather than an opportunity to enhance their professional literacy. If career promotion and advancement do not require continuing education certificates, many teachers may not actively choose to participate.

2.2 The Lack of Timeliness and Ineffectiveness of Continuing Education

Currently, secondary school English teachers' continuing education faces a common and urgent problem, which is the lack of rationality in curriculum design. "In practical operation, it is not difficult to find that the courses offered often fail to effectively integrate with the teaching practice of secondary school English teachers. This disconnection is not only reflected in the teaching of theoretical knowledge, but also in the application of practical teaching methods and skills." ^[1] Teachers often expect to learn new teaching concepts and methods through continuing education in order to better guide their own teaching practice, but usually, they find that the content learned is far from their actual teaching practice and difficult to be applied directly.

At the same time, the existing continuing education courses have not taken into account teachers' personalized learning needs well. Each teacher has their own teaching characteristics and advantages, as well as their own confusion and challenges in teaching. However, "the current curriculum design is often too general and lacks sufficient consideration of the personalized needs of different teachers." ^[2] This makes it difficult for teachers to find the training content is closely related to their teaching practice, thus resulting in a reduction in the effectiveness of training.

The above problems have led to the teachers' weak sense of achievement from the training, which undoubtedly weakens teachers' enthusiasm to continue participating in training and greatly reduces the timeliness of continuing education for secondary school English teachers.

2.3 The Ineffectiveness of Evaluation Methods for Secondary School English Teachers' Continuing Education

Currently, comprehensive evaluation and closed-book exams are often used as evaluation methods for secondary school English teachers' continuing education. However, both of these methods are disconnected from the training content and fail to accurately reflect teachers' actual mastery of the training content. Closed-book exams are even less rigorous due to the ease of cheating.

As a foreign language, "the communicative applicability of English should be emphasized and developed, requiring teachers to have the ability to guide students in comprehensive language use." ^[3] Therefore, more attention should be paid to evaluating teachers' practical application abilities. However, in the current evaluation system, the detection of practical abilities only accounts for a small part. At the same time, the evaluation method of writing papers often becomes a mere formality due to teachers' lack of academic training. Overall, the existing evaluation methods are too focused on theory and neglect the assessment of teaching practice abilities, unable to comprehensively and effectively evaluate teachers' learning outcomes in continuing education.

3. Characteristics of PAD Class

PAD Class, a new teaching paradigm created by Professor Zhang Xuexin, divides classroom time into two parts: teacher's lecture and student's discussion. It emphasizes the process of internalization and assimilation, integrating both lecturing and discussion into the teaching model. This not only changes the teaching process but also comprehensively reforms educational and instructional concepts. Applying "PAD Class" model to the continuing education and training of secondary school English teachers can cultivate their teamwork spirit, promote communication, mobilize internal learning motivation, enhance comprehensive abilities and teaching quality, and promote reflection and growth.

3.1 Conducive to Arousing Intrinsic Motivation and Enhancing Learning Ability

The "PAD Class" model in secondary school English teacher training fosters fixed cooperative groups. Members interact extensively, sharing views, gains, and questions based on independent learning. Teachers voice opinions on specific issues encountered during learning or teaching, drawing from their own experience and teaching methods. In teacher-student dialogues, they exchange group perspectives and confusions with peers and trainers. Trainers address common high-level questions, fostering multi-level, inquiry-based learning. This model reflects teachers' subjective consciousness and promotes professional development, stimulating intrinsic motivation for learning. It mobilizes autonomous learning initiatives, enabling teachers to adapt learning attitudes, progress, and methods based on individual needs, fostering flexible, diverse learning forms. This deepens knowledge understanding and internalization, enhancing English teaching abilities.

In addition, there are varying degrees of differences in the trainee teachers' English knowledge structure, English learning abilities, and English teaching abilities. Adopting the "PAD Class" model allows all trainee teachers to participate in teaching activities. For example, during the independent learning phase, each trainee teacher can record their personal feelings, gains, and questions based on their own learning abilities, facilitating sharing and communication with teachers from the same group during group discussions. In the process of group communication, trainee teachers with different personalities, experiences, and ability levels can learn from each other, complementing each other's strengths and weaknesses, thereby enhancing their communication and cooperation abilities, deepening and consolidating the knowledge they have learned, and expanding their teaching methods and approaches.

3.2 Conducive to Promoting the Transformation of Learners' Learning Styles, Emphasizing Process-oriented and Individualized Learning

"PAD Class" model de-emphasizes the importance of assessment results and instead emphasizes the learning process, believing that "the essence of learning lies primarily in the process of learning." [4] Of course, emphasizing the learning process does not mean that conclusions are unnecessary or necessarily ambiguous; this reflects the dynamic development of thinking. In traditional classrooms, trainee teachers obtain assessment results through attendance or a few evaluations, such as course exams. On one hand, attendance does not necessarily correlate with course learning outcomes for these trainee teachers. On the other hand, exams often tend to become mere formalities, and exam scores are easily influenced by factors such as the content of the questions and on-site performance, resulting in a high degree of randomness and low evaluation accuracy. Exams tend to focus more on testing memorization of content and insufficiently assess trainee teachers' independent thinking abilities. In PAD Class, training teachers provide scores and feedback after each assignment submission, enabling trainee teachers to promptly understand their mastery of the learned knowledge. Through multiple interactions on assignments, training teachers can obtain a more objective, stable, and fair assessment of these trainee teachers' study progress. Such evaluation methods are usually more popular with learners, and the scores better reflect the learners' engagement in their daily learning and learning quality during the learning process. This avoids issues such as cramming before exams and lax examination discipline. Through several assignments, the learning performance of most learners can be observed more stably.

After the training teacher completes the classroom lecture, learners form a basic framework of the content covered in the chapters and understand the key points and difficulties. Based on this, learners can proceed to read the materials after class, study other content in the textbooks or handouts, and integrate it with the lecture content, significantly reducing the difficulty of after-class learning. During this absorption process, learners vary in learning abilities, speeds, and methods. How to learn, what to learn, and to what extent can be arranged and controlled by the learners themselves. When encountering doubts, they can record them and ask their peers or teachers during subsequent discussions. Learners who lack time or with insufficient ability can focus on covering the basic content taught and complete a comprehensive book review. Learners with ample time and high abilities can go beyond the content taught, read additional materials, and complete a reading journal that reflects a process of deep reflection. Therefore, this learning style is more suitable for secondary school English teachers participating in continuing education and training. Each trainee teacher can arrange their learning progress and depth based on their language proficiency, learning abilities, and the time and energy they can devote.

3.3 Conducive to Promoting Teachers' Reflection and Growth, Leading Them from Dedication to Excellence

Many teachers accustomed to traditional classroom models tend to follow routine patterns for decades, resulting in stagnation in their thinking, unchanging teaching methods, and limited progress in teaching skills and effectiveness. "The PAD Class model prompts teachers to break away from their 'sleepwalking' mode and engage in profound teaching reflection. This shift in teachers' roles has successfully driven their growth, encouraging them to move from dedication to excellence." [5] "PAD Class" model requires teachers to transform from being the controllers of traditional classrooms and impartors of knowledge, into facilitators and guides for learning. This role transformation implicitly places higher demands on teachers' professional abilities and comprehensive qualities. On one hand, teachers' instruction shifts from the "lecture-heavy" approach of traditional classrooms to the concise and focused teaching characteristic of the "PAD Class" model. It not only demands that instructors have clearer thinking and more logical organization, with more prominent key points, but also requires them to make more rational decisions regarding content selection, allocate class time effectively between lectures and discussions, and design assignments more thoughtfully. This prompts teachers to focus more on teaching and delve deeper into their craft. On the other hand, the transition from being the dominant authority to a facilitator and promoter means returning the freedom and power of learning to the learners, posing a challenge to teachers. In the interactive discussion section, learners have the opportunity to express themselves freely and question boldly. Confronted with their various confusions and questions, teachers also become aware of their own challenges and shortcomings, thus generating a strong desire for improvement.

Moreover, the educational interaction fostered by the "PAD Class" model breaks through teachers' habitual teaching mindset, triggering a profound sense of crisis and motivating them to engage in self-reflection. This consciousness of teaching reflection not only enhances teachers' awareness of professional development, but also prompts them to pay attention to educational laws and deeply contemplate educational issues. In other words, "PAD Class" encourages teachers to not only focus on the technical aspects of teaching, such as teaching behaviors, strategies, models, design, and effectiveness, but also delve into issues related to learners' development and the significance of education. The conscious integration of educational practice and teaching reflection further inspires teachers to continuously refine their professional competencies and explore the principles of education. English teachers in secondary schools participating in continuing professional training not only assume the role of learners but also carry the identity of educators, fostering awareness and habits of reflective teaching within the context of their continuing education classes, as well as mastering the methods and approaches for such reflection. For these teachers, this process in itself constitutes a significant component of their continuing education.

4. Feasibility Analysis of Implementing the "PAD Class" Model in Continuing Education for Middle School English Teachers

As societal development places ever-increasing demands on secondary English teachers, it is imperative for these educators to elevate their professional expertise through continuing education. However, in reality, these teachers bear heavy teaching responsibilities and family duties, which may affect their enthusiasm for participating in continuing education. Therefore, selecting an appropriate classroom training model is of great significance for motivating these teachers to actively engage in continuous professional development and to achieve favorable educational outcomes. Given the characteristics and advantages of the "PAD Class" model, it is highly suitable for the continuing education of middle school English teachers^[6].

4.1 Formation of Learning Groups

One approach to reform the traditional teaching is the adoption of discussion-based instructional methods. In the process of implementing the "PAD Class" model in the continuing education for middle school English teachers, the teaching organizer needs to scientifically group the participating members based on their learning abilities, aiming to make the member structure of each learning group more reasonable. The grouping should adopt the principle of "heterogeneity within the group and homogeneity between groups". Each group consists of four members, ideally composed with a balance of male and female participants and a mix of abilities. The ratio of ability levels should be 1:2:1, meaning 1 learner with strong ability, 2 learners with moderate ability, and 1 learner with slightly

weaker ability. Groups should be of comparable proficiency levels to facilitate class-wide exchanges on a relatively even playing field.

During the practical implementation, two points merit particular attention: 1. Learners should not be allowed to choose their own group members, as this may result in the grouping of already familiar students, or embarrassment for those who are less socially adept. The teaching organizer should determine the grouping plan, which students should follow. If possible, organize groups before the course starts via a platform, notifying students via WeChat, and print a classroom seating chart indicating group and student positions. After entering classroom, trainees sit in designated positions, typically grouped together. For movable furniture, group members can form a circle for discussion. For fixed furniture with low backs, they may sit in two rows for convenience. For high backs, three adjacent trainees form a group, with the middle as the discussion center. In PAD Class, teachers arrange seating based on pre-set groups and numbers, ensuring a neat, energetic classroom, effective communication, and a conducive atmosphere for collective learning. 2. Group compositions should not be changed frequently, as requiring learners to constantly adapt to different group members hinders the cultivation of team spirit and the enhancement of teamwork and communication skills. To increase the opportunities for communication and exchange between different group members, cross-group discussions can be implemented. During the limited training period, the grouping can remain fixed, but learners will have the opportunity to interact with other learners when participating in cross-group discussions.

4.2 Building Effective Classrooms

Against the backdrop of the information age, with rapid advancements in English educational technology and an ever-growing abundance of teaching resources, coupled with the myriad issues revealed by traditional classroom instruction, in recent years, we have witnessed a continuous stream of innovative teaching methodologies and models being introduced, such as MOOCs, flipped classrooms, micro-lectures, and PAD class (Peer Instruction). Therefore, effective classroom teaching have become a topic of great concern. To enhance classroom teaching quality and efficiency, teachers must update concepts and reevaluate effective teaching. Efficient classroom teaching accomplishes tasks, achieves goals, and has significant educational and social impacts. Middle school English teachers in national or provincial training programs have a precious two-month study period. Therefore, their continuing education should prioritize fostering efficient classroom teaching. Effectiveness should be judged by teaching outcomes and trainees' development, not merely by completed plans and tasks. Teachers must link theory to practice, fostering trainees' thinking and practical abilities. Streamlining the process and enhancing density allows trainees to acquire more knowledge in limited time, internalize it based on experience, and apply it to future teaching.

From educational philosophy to the implementation methods, the "PAD Class" model truly embodies the spirit of "student-centered" education. Students are respected as individuals, and their development needs are actively addressed. The "PAD class" model transforms the traditional classroom teaching, preserving the essence of conventional classroom teaching while incorporating innovative elements, and fundamentally alters the relationship between teachers and students. "Teachers have transitioned from their previous role as the sole authority in the classroom to become facilitators and guides in the learning process, while students have gradually shifted from being the initial 'receivers' of knowledge to 'discoverers' and 'communicators' of knowledge, highlighting their subject status." [7] Teachers and students become equal dual subjects, which can motivate students' learning initiative and internal motivation to a greater extent, achieving better teaching results. After returning to the classroom and completely shifting into the role of students, being "passively imparted knowledge," these trainee teachers will find it unfamiliar and difficult to accept. We should fully mobilize the classroom initiative of these trainee teachers, allowing them to lead part of the classroom time, which not only leverages their professional strengths but also respects their learning subjectivity. Meanwhile, it also allows them to fully leverage their existing teaching experience, thereby creating an efficient training environment^[7].

4.3 Creating a Teacher Practice Community

The lack of cooperation among middle school English teachers is a common phenomenon. Teachers tend to be closed off and isolated from each other, with most teachers content with teaching their own classes and completing their teaching tasks. They are generally unwilling to actively observe other teachers' classes or be observed and evaluated by others. Therefore, there is still insufficient in-depth

communication and cooperation among these teachers in teaching and research. It is common for them to be busy with personal goals such as completing school assessment tasks or title evaluations, and this fragmented situation is extremely unfavorable for teacher development. Creating or leveraging teacher practice communities is one of the effective ways for future middle school English teachers to achieve self-development. In his discussion on communities of practice, “Wenger particularly emphasized the important role of “collaborative learning” and “knowledge sharing” among teachers in promoting their professional development.”^[8] As learners, the middle school English teachers participating in continuing education are no longer isolated from each other but interdependent within the practice community. Due to their shared goals, interests, and experiences, these participating teachers, especially those from the same learning group, can participate in collective teaching reform projects or jointly apply for research projects. They can actively communicate, reflect on teaching practices, learn from each other's strengths, and jointly promote, build, and form supportive and promotional environments that strongly support the improvement of teachers' professional levels. Driven by a common vision, teachers within the practice community are willing to share resources, learn from and borrow from each other. The transmission of different teaching experiences and the collision of different teaching perspectives facilitate the generation of new practical knowledge, help inspire the participating teachers' passion for self-learning, strengthen the sense of cooperation among teachers, and promote the continuous improvement of teachers' professional skills^[8].

5. Conclusion

This study conducted an in-depth analysis of the feasibility of the “PAD class” model in the continuing education for middle school English teachers. The results show that it can effectively tackle the challenges of continuing education. After implementing the “PAD class” model, trainee teachers' participation and interaction have been significantly enhanced, which promotes knowledge transfer and self-study. This model addresses the issue of disconnection between training content and practical teaching, enriches training methods, and meets the actual needs of the trainee teachers. Therefore, the “PAD class” model is highly feasible in the training of middle school English teachers, providing new impetus for middle school English teachers' professional growth and deserving widespread promotion.

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