

Teachers' Roles in China's EFL Classes Adopting the PAD Mode

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Abstract—This paper reviews the shift of teacher role in light of the development and innovation of EFL instruction in China and analyses the EFL teachers' roles in classes adopting the PAD (Presentation-Assimilation-Discussion) mode. It points out EFL teachers play a wide range of roles in PAD classes to meet students' needs and contribute to their language learning.

Index Terms—teachers' roles, PAD mode, EFL classes

I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching mode has been a focus of innovation in China's English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction with much attention being given to teachers' roles played in classrooms. Teachers' roles in China have undergone great changes in the past several decades, especially those of the EFL teachers which have become very controversial with different teaching strategies and approaches introduced successively to English classes. In this paper, EFL teachers' roles will be reviewed in light of the development and innovation of English instruction in China and new perspectives of teacher role in EFL classes using the PAD mode will be demonstrated.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Teachers perform an undeniable and pivotal role in every educational system. Teachers' roles in China are highly valued both by the administration and the public throughout the history. The shift of teachers' roles in classrooms reflects not only the government's administrative decision, but also the public's expectation for students' achievement as well as the teaching professionals' understanding about teaching in different eras.

A. A Review of Teacher Role in China

The conventional notion of a teacher in Chinese history is that a teacher is a knowledge transmitter, as is concisely summarized in the very famous Chinese saying "A teacher is one who transmits truth, imparts knowledge, and resolves puzzles". Even after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), teachers were still considered to be the authority of knowledge and wisdom as can be seen in all kinds of terms used to describe teachers, such as "the engineer of human souls", "a bucket of water", "a candle", "a human ladder" etc (Cheng, 2014, p.803). This idea had significant influence on China's education in many aspects such as curriculum design, teaching paradigm, textbook selection, teacher-student relationship and so on.

After the implementation of China's reform and opening-up policy in 1978, how to enhance students' creativity and innovation to meet the development of the society becomes the focus of attention and it has been brought into people's awareness that teachers' role as a sole knowledge transmitter is no longer appropriate and enough to help students become individuals with more critical and creative thinking. In such social contexts, teachers are expected to take on multiple roles to facilitate students' learning and to help them become more adaptable to the fast changing world. Various terms thus are proposed to describe the new roles of teachers, such as the designer, the planner, the guide, the manager, the assessor, the mediator, the researcher, the tutor, the participant and so on.

B. Teachers' Roles in China's EFL Classes

Since the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy, China's EFL teaching has been more valued than ever before because English is regarded as a necessary tool to facilitate one's access to modern scientific and technological advances and as a vehicle to promote commerce and understanding between the PRC and countries where English is a major language (Cowan, Light, Mathews, & Tucker, 1979, cited in Cheng, 2014, p.803). English has become a compulsory subject from primary schools to colleges and universities in China and China's EFL teaching has gained unprecedented attention as it boasts to have the largest population of EFL learners in the world.

Influenced by the traditional idea of teacher as a knowledge transmitter, EFL teachers in China were originally supposed to be at the center of instruction in classrooms. Usually they spent "most of the class time explaining English vocabulary, syntax, and grammatical features in their native tongue (i.e., Mandarin), while students repeated and memorized them with the help of textbooks" (Hong & Pawan, 2015, p.31). Grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods were the dominant teaching methods in China's EFL classes.

But the shortcomings of such methods were soon realized by Chinese EFL teachers and researchers. After opening up to the world, China was in urgent need for large number of people with high English proficiency to fulfill diversified purposes in political, economic and cultural arenas when communicating with English-speaking countries. However, it turned out that most college students, after at least 8 years of English learning, were still unable to communicate with native speakers of English. These students who had been spoon-fed English knowledge by teachers standing and talking on the teaching platform lacked the ability of communicating in English in real life settings. Therefore, how to enhance students' communicative competence became the focus of the debate regarding EFL teaching. As a response to the discontent with the traditional grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach was introduced to China's EFL teaching practice. In the early 1990s, following the introduction of the new English Teaching Syllabus by the State Education Development Commission of China, which states that the aim of teaching English is to develop the students' communicative competence, great effort was made in applying CLT to English teaching in China. By the mid-1990s, CLT had become a general approach in teaching and learning of English in China. Meanwhile, EFL teachers' role as a knowledge transmitter was greatly challenged and has been changed since then towards more diversified ones.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach was originated from dissatisfaction with the traditional grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods in foreign language teaching and learning. With learner-centeredness and flexible teacher role as its striking features, CLT aims to foster students' competence in social interactions identified as communicative competence. EFL teachers adopting the CLT approach in classes are expected to develop adequate activities and opportunities for students to use English for authentic communication purposes. Therefore, "rather than being a model for correct speech and writing and one with the primary responsibility of making sure students produced plenty of error-free sentences", EFL teachers are expected to assume different roles, such as organizer, guide, participant, researcher, needs analyst, counselor and group process manager and so on to facilitate students' English learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p.98-99).

However, though the CLT ideology and practice have been highly influential in language teaching in many countries of the world, the application of CLT in China is not as desirable as it was expected. EFL teachers in China are confronted with monumental difficulties in applying it because of the political, social, educational, cultural, and linguistic realities.

As Richards & Lockhart(1994) points out, "Teaching is an activity which is embedded within a set of culturally bound assumptions about teachers, teaching, and learners. These assumptions reflect what the teacher's responsibility is believed to be, how learning is understood, and how students are expected to interact in the classroom" (p.107). In China's teaching context, most students have formed the habit since a very young age of listening to teachers' presentation attentively and taking notes in class as a good way of learning. The lecture method is greatly valued by schools, parents and students themselves. It is convenient and lets teachers most effectively convey the important information according to the lesson plan. As students in China are assessed mainly by the scores they get in taking standard public examinations, for example the National Higher Education Entrance Examination(commonly known as Gaokao), in EFL classrooms they rely heavily on teachers for explanation of fundamental grammatical rules and syntactic, semantic knowledge to help them get high scores in exams. Therefore, without the former teacher-dominated presentation of knowledge in the classroom, students often feel at a loss as to what and how to learn. Another most often cited phenomenon in China's EFL teaching is the large number of students in one class. Faced with usually about fifty or more students in one class, EFL teachers have difficulty in organizing proper activities and encouraging all students' full participation in class activities. At the same time, due to the lack of tier instruction system in China, students in the same class usually vary dramatically in their English proficiency. In student-centered and activity-based EFL classes, in most cases the top students dominate the discussion and benefit from the process while those students with limited English proficiency are often marginalized and disadvantaged. Besides, "the teachers' lack of language proficiency and culture knowledge, no familiarity with the new method, and the negative influence of Chinese educational traditions on teachers" (Liao, 2000, p.5) all pose difficulties that limit the application of CLT.

Obviously, in China's EFL teaching contexts, the CLT approach itself cannot come into full play and accordingly teachers' roles as described in CLT, though favorably expected, do not adequately fulfill their functions to contribute to students' language learning and development. Therefore, how to bring CLT into full play and let teachers play adequate roles in the process of enhancing students' English learning remains a big issue in China's EFL teaching.

The following discussion will demonstrate a new teaching mode adopted in many EFL classes of China today, in which teachers' roles are redefined and the CLT approach is incorporated with the traditional lecture method so as to better facilitate students' learning of English.

III. TEACHER'S ROLES IN EFL CLASSES ADOPTING THE PAD MODE

A. *The PAD Mode*

The PAD mode is a brand-new teaching mode which was proposed and adopted in classroom teaching in 2014 by Zhang Xuexin from Fudan University in China (Zhang, 2014). The abbreviation PAD stands for Presentation, Assimilation and Discussion, respectively referring to three fundamental steps involved in the classroom teaching

guided by this mode. According to this mode, the time for a class session is divided into two parts, with one part of class time allocated for teachers' **Presentation** of new knowledge and the other part of class time used for students' **Discussion** of the topics from the previous class session. The time outside the classroom between two class sessions is expected to be used by students to assimilate what they've learned in the previous session, which is described as the step of **Assimilation**. According to Zhang (2014), "different students absorb and assimilate knowledge at different speed and in different ways" (p.9). They need to complete the process of assimilation at their own pace. The time after class is therefore provided for students to conduct the assimilation by themselves. In actual teaching practice, teachers may or may not allow students assimilation time between the presentation and the discussion steps. If what teachers present to students is relatively simple knowledge, students are arranged to carry out the discussion of the relevant topics in the same class session, immediately after the teachers' presentation. Whereas, if what teachers present is difficult or challenging to students, discussion is arranged for the next class session, allowing sufficient time in between for students to reflect and assimilate after class. And in the next class session, the first thing to do is to organize all the students to get involved in discussion in pairs or groups. After that, teachers continue to present new knowledge designed for the session which is under way. And so on and so forth.

Since making its debut in 2014, over the past three years, the PAD mode has been gaining huge popularity in China's middle schools and colleges. Thousands of teachers of different subjects have adopted this mode in their own classroom teaching. Research has indicated that students show more initiative, creativity, and hence more progress in their learning in classes adopting the PAD mode (Zhang, 2014; He, Zhou & Shi, 2017; Liu, 2016; Zhang, 2016).

B. EFL Teacher's Roles in Classes Using the PAD Mode

The PAD mode is a combination of the traditional lecture method and the modern communicative method. The PAD mode used in the EFL classes combines the strengths of the traditional lecture method and the CLT approach. While retaining the lecture method as a key step in EFL classroom teaching, namely presentation, the PAD mode incorporates discussion step into the teaching process to provide students with enough opportunity to communicate with their peers and teachers. Meanwhile, the assimilation of knowledge by the individual student is given much emphasis and learner difference is fully taken into consideration so that all the students may learn and progress at their own pace.

Teaching is an activity that is composed of various instruction and learning activities. The teaching process consists of different steps. Teachers and students assume different roles in different activities of different steps. As is illuminated by Richards & Lockhart (1994), "The role of a teacher in the context of classroom teaching and learning may... be influenced by the approach or methodology the teacher is following" (p.101). In any teaching mode or approach, there exist implicitly particular assumptions about the role of the teacher and about how students should learn. In the PAD mode, students are treated not as passive receivers of knowledge, but as active learners who achieve language development through various scaffolded learning activities both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers assume a wide range of roles to contribute to students' language learning. EFL teachers' roles in PAD classes are discussed in the following sections.

1. A Designer

First of all, the EFL teachers adopting the PAD mode in their teaching are a designer who lays out the framework for all the learning activities and teaching materials. In addition to the general lesson plan for the English course to be dealt with, teachers also need to design carefully for each class session, making a decision about what language aspects should be presented to students, what language tasks should be given to students to help them with their assimilation after class, what kind of issues should be addressed in the discussion activities and so on. Thus, teachers give students a framework from which they can build and direct their own learning. In this designing process is involved teachers' careful analysis of both the teaching materials and students' needs, which is a key step to ensure that everything designed for each teaching step contributes to students' learning of English.

2. A Knowledge Transmitter

As has been mentioned above, in China's teaching context, teachers' presentation of knowledge in the classroom is still hugely valued. Usually teachers are regarded by students as an expert who knows the whats, hows and whys. When it comes to EFL learning, students rely heavily on teachers for knowledge about English grammar, syntax, vocabulary and so on. In primary schools and middle schools, even the pronunciation of new words needs to be demonstrated by teachers first with students reading after them in chorus. To accommodate the classroom teaching in China, the PAD mode reestablishes teachers' role as a knowledge transmitter among many other roles to facilitate students' learning. Acting the role of a knowledge transmitter, teachers perceive their students as individuals needing assistance in learning and conduct the instruction in an explicit way to ensure that students are provided with the knowledge they need for further learning. In the EFL classes adopting the PAD mode, teachers' role as a knowledge transmitter is called into full play. At the presentation step of a session, teachers highlight the important and difficult points designed for this session and present them in a clear and logical way to help students understand. These points may include tenses, syntax, semantics or functional phrases etc. At this step, students are expected to listen attentively and try their best to grasp the important information. This step is deemed necessary for students to get a basic understanding about certain language points so that they can do the follow-up assimilation and discussion much more easily.

3. A Facilitator

Teachers' presentation is valuable in promoting students' effective learning, but at the same time, students must take responsibility for their learning through active exploration. Teachers should have the faith that students have the capability of managing their own learning. Teaching is a process of developing and enhancing students' ability to learn. Teachers must facilitate students' learning through various means. In the EFL classes using the PAD mode, after the presentation step, the teacher-dominated teaching disappears and learning occurs through students' autonomous assimilation after class and cooperative group work or pair work activities of discussion in the next session. Teachers act as a facilitator most of the time. First of all, after the presentation of new knowledge teachers need to give students' proper tasks, which are carefully designed to facilitate students' assimilation of the language points after class and at the same time closely related to discussion activities in the next class session. Students are expected to assimilate at their own pace what has been taught in the previous session and finish the tasks after class to get ready for the discussion activities in the next session. The tasks assigned by teachers may, depending on the lesson subjects and learners' language proficiency, range from simple ones such as memorizing new words and phrases, making sentences with the expressions they learned, and rewriting a story etc. to more challenging ones such as summarizing main points of an article, listing pros and cons for a decision and arguing about a social issue etc. Students are encouraged to use various resources to better understand what has been taught in the previous lesson. Teachers may also suggest some learning resources to facilitate their learning. Another function of teachers as a facilitator is to keep the communication going between all members of the class when they perform various activities of discussion. At the discussion step, teachers explain how the discussion activity will be carried out and once the activity is under way, teachers retreat to let students explore the issues concerned by negotiating with each other either in small groups or in pairs. Once students start their communication, teachers are expected to walk around to check on individual groups to see if they are communicating effectively and give help where needed.

4. Other Roles

Apart from the three roles discussed above, teachers in EFL classes using the PAD mode play many other roles, such as an analyst, a participant, a guide, a problem-solver, a motivator and so on. Teachers are an analyst throughout the teaching process. To design for each class session, they analyze not only the teaching materials and students' English level, but also the classroom atmosphere and students' needs. At the discussion step, in addition to supervising the activity, teachers also occasionally take the role of a participant within different learning groups. As part of a group, teachers listen to other group members' ideas and share opinions with them. Teachers may also act as a guide sometimes when students have difficulty in carrying out their discussion by giving them some hints or suggestions. When students come across language problems or other problems in their discussion, teachers act as a problem solver. Meanwhile, teachers also act as a motivator when some students are too shy or reluctant to engage themselves in discussion by giving them encouragement.

All the roles discussed above may overlap. In an efficient EFL classroom adopting the PAD mode, teachers' roles shift flexibly from time to time to meet students' needs and support their learning.

IV. CHALLENGES FOR EFL TEACHERS

Teachers are the practitioner of teaching innovation. Any change in teaching will pose challenge to teachers. The PAD mode is an innovative strategy to address the classroom teaching in China's context. In the EFL classes adopting this mode, teachers are faced with great challenges.

First of all, they need to take a comprehensive perspective when it comes to teachers' roles in the teaching and learning process. Traditionally, teachers-as-knowledge-transmitters and teachers-as-facilitators present sharply contrasting perspectives of teacher role, which also indicate distinct hypotheses of how to meet students' needs. The PAD mode combines these two options. Instead of viewing the two options as opposing camps, the PAD mode treats them as complementary opportunities for teachers to enhance students' language learning. As a result, students can benefit both from teachers' explicit presentation and from their own exploratory, teacher-facilitated activities of assimilation and discussion. So teachers should be fully aware of the necessity of role shift when it comes to different teaching steps to meet students' needs.

Secondly, in the EFL classes using the PAD mode, teachers need to be equipped with time-efficient and engaging lecture skills at the presentation step as a knowledge transmitter. As time in class is limited, in the EFL classes using the PAD mode in particular, in which teachers have smaller amount of time for presentation compared with that in the traditional lecture class, teachers must have the capability to use limited time effectively. They're expected to be both effective and entertaining in passing on to their students relevant knowledge.

Thirdly, as a designer responsible for the whole session framework, teachers in the EFL classes using the PAD mode need to attend to every detail involved in their teaching as well as students' learning. They need to make decisions about which content to include at the presentation step, how to highlight the important and difficult points, and what kinds of activities and assignments are appropriate etc. Besides, tactful organizing strategies are also required of teachers for them to better facilitate students' learning at the discussion step. Attending to these details is time and effort consuming and therefore poses great challenge to teachers.

V. CONCLUSION

Promoting Chinese students' EFL learning is a complex matter. Many factors contribute to students' success or failure in the language learning, among which teacher role is a crucial one. What roles EFL teachers should play in supporting their students inside and outside the classrooms and what strategies should be used to promote students' learning are important issues deserving particular attention. The PAD mode takes a comprehensive perspective of teacher role and views teachers as someone who can actively contribute to students' learning in various ways. In the EFL classes adopting the PAD mode, teachers assume different roles at different steps to meet students' needs and various strategies are utilized to promote students' learning of English. It is of great significance not only in better helping students develop their English proficiency but also in promoting students' general development as social beings as they learn how to take responsibility for their own study at the assimilation step and how to cooperate with others at the discussion step.

Of course, many issues still remain to be explored about how to use the PAD mode more effectively and flexibly to serve the purpose of enhancing students' language learning in China's EFL classes. Especially with the development of information technology and its application to the EFL teaching, teachers are challenged to take on even more roles such as online resource provider or curriculum developer to facilitate students' language learning. In general, regardless of the roles EFL teachers assume, they need to keep in mind all the time the best interest of students and continue to seek for better ways to promote students' learning. The variety of roles of EFL teachers in the classes adopting the PAD mode ensures that teachers can find ways to enhance students' language learning and help them develop as social beings.

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