AN INNOVATIVE ENGLISH TEACHING MODEL BASED ON MENTAL HEALTH THEORY

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Abstract

Mental health is a non-intellectual component that greatly affects the learning outcomes. The English teaching effect may be improved if mental health is considered in the teaching model. In this paper, the mental health is adopted to create an innovative English teaching model. First, the author analyzed the theoretical correlations between mental health and English language learning, and conducted a survey on the English learning conditions of college students in China. Based on the survey results, an innovative teaching model was designed on the theory of mental health. To verify its effectiveness, the proposed model was applied to the English teaching of students from a university in Jiangxi Province, China. The psychological states and test results of the students were analyzed in details. The results show that the students in the test class saw a 29.4% increase in test results and steady improvement to learning emotion, behavior and attitude, while those in the control class did not have any change; More than 80% of students in the test class always preferred the frequently used English learning strategies, while than 40% of students in the control class felt the same. This research sheds new light on the integration of psychological theories with English teaching.

Key words: Mental Health, English Learning, Integration Model, Comparative Experiment.

INTRODUCTION

The traditional Chinese teaching models focus more on students’ knowledge skills but have overlooked the fact that learners’ emotional experience may improve their learning effect. However, positive learning attitude and healthy emotion psychology are the root of the arousal of students’ interests in learning, the development of learning strategies and the improvement of learning methods. To concern students' mental health in the education reform, it will be more beneficial to the teaching effect (Chen, 2015; Bakic, Jepma, de Raedt et al., 1996). By far, many universities have set up the psychological health courses and even launched the psychological counseling clinics for those students who show a low interest in learning and hold an unenergetic attitude towards learning. It is undeniable that this is a way to improve students' mental health, but it will be more fruitful in time and space if the mental health education can be integrated into classroom instruction in various disciplines (Feng, 1988).

This paper aims to integrate English teaching with psychological education in order to implement the application of this innovative pedagogy and the verification of teaching effects. First, we analyze the intrinsic theoretical correlation between mental health and English language learning. Based on the principle of mutual integration, mutual promotion and harmonious development, an innovative teaching program is designed based on the survey conducted on the English learning situation of college students in China. It should develop the integrated English teaching in several phases in the practical application. Based on the statistical analysis of the psychological
states and academic performances of students in the experimental and control classes, the effect of the integrated teaching model will be concluded on the improvement of English language competence and healthy learning psychology (Pedrotti & Edwards, 2014; McKenna, 2010). The study reflects and spreads the English language teaching in China from "knowledge-based" to "people-oriented" models, and demonstrates the key role of mental health education in English education.

INTEGRATION OF MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION AND ENGLISH TEACHING MODEL

Proposal of integrated teaching model

The traditional English teaching classroom more concerns the students' exam results, it, however, ignores the cultivation of students' self-confidence, personal interests, learning motivation, learning beliefs and the life values. This phenomenon has led to the complete disengagement of mental health education from the English education in universities in China. As everyone knows, emotional factors relevant to mental health are the key to guiding, strengthening and promoting the English teaching effect. As emphasized in the English teaching objectives in the new phase, the English education should be designed to improve students' English learning performance and cultivating students' health psychology and effective learning strategies (Kop, Synowski, Newell et al., 2011; English & English, 2006).

Mental health and English teaching are interdependence and synergistic: on the one hand, mental health provides a guarantee for the smooth development of English education. English, as a second language rather than the native language, requires the backing from healthy psychology and active learning attitude towards learning plots to maintain students' interests in learning, allow them master the learning strategies and participate in communication and discussion; on the other hand, English teaching offers a platform for mental health education. Limited by time and space and other objective conditions, psychological health education should depend on other teaching classrooms as carriers. It is infiltrated in English teaching classrooms as a teaching platform for it (Almond, 2013).

English teaching and mental health education are scientifically integrated based on the mutual advance relationship between the two. To integrate the teaching models, it is possible to realize the intellectual and nonintellectual development of students, and the dual improvement of English learning content and emotions (Chur-Hansen & Vernon-Roberts, 2010). Via the integrated teaching model, it is easy to improve students' English learning performance, develop their positive learning attitudes, discard bad learning behaviors, create effective learning strategies, and strengthen the communication and hands-on skills.

Design of integrated teaching model

The schematic diagram of the integrated teaching mode is shown in Figure 1. The teaching content is designed to lay the foundation for the integrated teaching model. The teaching target is set to determine the direction of integrated teaching model. The pedagogical activities are organized as the core of rationally constructing integrated teaching model. The teaching evaluation is the key to optimizing the integrated teaching model (Setter, 2005; Yuan, 2013).

Figure 1. Schematic of the integrated teaching mode
(1) Teaching content and target

English teaching content includes vocabulary and grammar. Students’ listening, speaking, reading and writing skills should be improved by writing and listening training programs, reading comprehension, situational simulation, and other methods. Mental health education covers the interest cultivation, learning motivation mining, self-confidence creation, learning consciousness tempering, and learning strategy development, aiming at improving students’ skills in analysis, creation, writing, and autonomy (Shi, Lopez-Vargas, & Loayza, 2015).

(2) Pedagogical activities

Pedagogical activities are concrete processes in which the integrated teaching model is implemented. In essence, the purpose of learning languages is to improve the ability of language communication. In the teaching process, great attention should be paid to interactive elements to improve the two-way communication between students and students, teachers and students.

Table 1. The main pedagogical activities of
integrated education classroom

| Teaching activity type | Teaching activity content |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Analytical activity    | English reading, group discussion, word, phrase analysis, lexical analysis, syntactic analysis, test analysis, self-evaluation, mutual evaluation, etc. Storytelling, oral presentations, speeches, performance dialogues, retelling, role playing, reading, voice imitation, writing imitation, games, etc. |
| Practical activity     | Write English stories, story solitaire, performance dialogues, design questions, mock interviews, self-editing English tabloids, posters, drawing composing, etc. |
| Creative activity      | Be active, willing to express your initiative to ask questions to the teacher or ask for help from your peers. Be sensitive to English and be able to take the initiative to understand the English phenomenon inside and outside the classroom. |

The integrated teaching model should be embedded with a variety of pedagogical activities, as shown in Table 1, the main pedagogical activities are designed for the integrated education classroom.

To design the pedagogical activities, it is required to balance the students in analytical, practical and creative activities, encourage them to diversify learning methods, rationally develop activity plans, and learn by groups and division of labor. In the process, teachers should supervise the pedagogical activities reasonably but do not interrupt the students’ learning behaviors.

(3) Teaching assessment

Teaching assessment should highlight the dynamic principle timely intervened in the implementation of pedagogical activities to further adjust them (Sun, Wang, & Zhai, 2012, Ji & Lu, 2014). The students’ English learning competence should be assessed by exam results, while the student mental health should be quantified by evaluating phased emotion, behavior and learning attitude. Students’ learning emotions, behaviors and attitudes are quantified, respectively, as shown in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

Table 2. Learning emotion quantification

| Self-evaluator | Value |
|----------------|-------|
| Be active and willing to try in the learning activities. | 1,2,3,4 |
| Willing to approach the teacher and relax naturally and not nervously in the communication with the teacher. | 1,2,3,4 |
| I am happy to work with my classmates, to be willing to help and to find help from others. | 1,2,3,4 |
| Continued interest in the content of the textbook, the mood is high during the event. | 1,2,3,4 |
| After-school homework is completed carefully, and can be actively previewed and reviewed. | 1,2,3,4 |
| Be sensitive to English and be able to take the initiative to understand the English phenomenon inside and outside the classroom. | 1,2,3,4 |
| Note: This form can be reviewed by peers and teachers every week. | Total |

Table 3. Learning behavioral quantification table

| Self-evaluator | Value |
|----------------|-------|
| Frequently answer questions raised by the teacher. | 1,2,3,4 |
| Actively participate in group activities and be able to work with others. | 1,2,3,4 |
| The discussion was overwhelming and the members respected each other. | 1,2,3,4 |
| The division of labor is reasonable, the workload is shared equally, and all efforts are made from beginning to end. | 1,2,3,4 |
| Attention is concentrated and discipline is good. | 1,2,3,4 |
| In the case of unclear links, you can take the initiative to ask questions to the teacher or ask for help from your peers. | 1,2,3,4 |
| Be good at thinking and be able to express your own different opinions. | 1,2,3,4 |
| Note: This form can be reviewed by peers and teachers every week. | Total |
Table 4. Learning attitude quantification table

|                      | Value   |
|----------------------|---------|
| I think that English learning can promote learning in other subjects. | 1,2,3,4 |
| I think it is worth spending time learning English.     | 1,2,3,4 |
| I think English is very interesting and I have the confidence to learn English well. | 1,2,3,4 |
| I feel that learning English is easier than learning other courses. | 1,2,3,4 |
| I think ternary activities can develop my analytical, creative, and practical skills. | 1,2,3,4 |

Note: This form is for self-assessment and is reviewed every week.

There are not only teachers’ evaluation on students but also students’ self-evaluation and mutual evaluation between students. In this process, students will be encouraged to self-learn, effectively schedule the learning process and timely give feedbacks for the learning progress.

Pilot application of integrated teaching model

Experimental hypothesis

It is designed to perform an experiment on the comparison between the integrated and traditional English teaching classrooms to prove whether the integrated teaching mode play a positive effect on the students’ emotional attitudes towards the English learning, classroom behaviors and performances, development analysis, hands-on ability and creativity, the formation of effective English learning strategy and the improvement of English learning scores.

Experimental subjects

100 students in non-English majors are randomly chosen from a university in Jiangxi Province as experimental subjects. They are randomly divided into two classes: experimental class and control class, at a fairly English level. The control class adopts the traditional teaching model, and the experimental class carries out English pedagogical activities in the integrated mode of mental health education and English classroom teaching.

Examination of experimental results

The CET 4 questions bank is used as a test tool for English overall grades, and the statistical analysis of students’ mental health conditions are made by interview and assessment.

Experiment procedure

(1) Firstly, the subjects are required to conduct pre-test on English grades to determine what are students’ English levels and there is a significant difference before the test, and randomly divided into two groups without being informed of the reasons; students are also interviewed to make statistics of the subjects’ learning attitudes and the adoption of learning strategies, etc.

(2) The experimental class carries out the English teaching based on the integrated teaching model, and the control class follows the traditional English teaching method and schedule.

(3) The students in the experimental class are assessed and interviewed, and their mental health conditions are quantified under the integrated learning model by emotion, behavior, and learning attitude evaluations.

(4) Post-test the English grades, after the halfsemester of the pilot teaching, the CET 4 questions bank is also used to test the English grades of students in the experimental and the control classes.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Comparison with English exam results

The students’ average English scores and pass rates pre-tested and post-tested in the experimental and control classes are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Pre-test and post-test English score statistics

| Class          | Number | Pre-test | Pass rate | Post test | Pass rate |
|----------------|--------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Test class     | 50     | 62.5     | 31%       | 90.7      | 84.6%     |
| Control class  | 50     | 62.3     | 30.5%     | 72.1      | 61.9%     |

It is known from data in the table that the average English scores of students in the experimental and control classes in the pre-test are 62.5 and 62.3, respectively, and the pass rates are 31% and 30.5% respectively. There is no significant difference in two indices between two classes. While in the post-test, average score of students in experimental class is significantly higher than that in the control class. After a half-semester of pilot English teaching,
the average grade of students in the experimental class increases by 45.1%, while the average English score of students in the control class goes up by 15.7%, so that there is a gap of 29.4% between two classes. The gap in the pass rate between the two classes reaches 22.7%.

**Comparison with English learning attitude and behavior**

In the teaching assessment, teachers and students conduct self-assessment and peer response as required in Tables 2, 3 and 4, and quantify the results with 1, 2, 3, and 4 points. The evolutions in learning attitudes and behaviors of students in experimental class are shown in Figure 2.

![Figure 2. Classroom behavioral, emotion, attitude line diagram](image)

It is found from the statistical results in the figure that the students' learning emotion value as quantified goes steadily up, which means they become more and more active in learning and showing unflagging interests in the English classroom teaching content; the quantitative value of students' learning behavior gradually increases, and students are more independent to have a group discussion, and input much more energy in the class. The quantitative value of students' learning attitudes also shows an upward trend. They believe that English learning has a positive effect on their own learning skill and builds their own analytical, creative and practical skills. In contrast, the quantitative values of the learning behaviors and attitudes of students in the control class are not significantly different before and after the test.

**Comparison with adoption of English learning strategies**

The adoption of learning strategies reflects students' mental health status in English learning. When they can use different learning strategies, it means they hold a more positive and confident health psychology for learning disciplines. Figure 3 illustrates the adoption of cognitive strategies in the experimental and control classes before and after the test.

As shown in Figure 4, the adoptions of communicative strategies are compared between the experimental and control classes before and after the test.

It is found from the adoptions of cognitive and communicative strategies that two classes are comparable before the test, but differ a lot after the test in the integrated teaching model. More than 80% of students in the experimental class always prefer the frequently used learning strategies in English learning process, but less than 40% of students in the control class do so.
ANALYSIS OF TEST RESULTS FROM INTEGRATED TEACHING MODEL

As the test results demonstrate, the integrated teaching model will have a positive effect on students' English learning emotions and attitudes, classroom behaviors and performances, development analysis, hands-on ability and creativity, the formation of effective English learning strategies and the improvement of English learning grades. It makes the English teaching classroom more standardized and energetic in the classroom implementation process; the learning consciousness of the students is positively influenced, and students can actively participate in the classroom creation, analysis and experiment activities; the students' learning skills are further improved, and they will be able to join in English learning under the guidance of health psychology. The results from experimental comparison show that the students in the experimental class are better than those in the control class in terms of English grades and mental health status, so that the innovative English classroom integration model based on mental health guidance has a positive application effect.

CONCLUSION

This paper proposes the teaching model that integrates mental health and English teaching. The mental health guidance is infiltrated into the English classroom to reach the purposes of improving both healthy learning psychology and English performance. Here come concrete conclusions from comparative experiment:

(1) After integrating the teaching models, the experimental class has improved students' English performance more than the control class which implements the traditional English teaching classroom. The English teaching effect in the integrated teaching model is better than that in the traditional teaching model.

(2) Based on quantitative comparison and analysis of students' learning emotions, behaviors and attitudes, it is known that students in the experimental class have a healthier English learning psychology than those in the control class.

(3) In the integrated teaching model, diversified pedagogical activities cultivates students' richer learning methods and excellent learning skills, and students can better master the use of learning strategies in the English learning process.

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