

A Study on the Cultivation of Junior English Learners' Autonomy by Using Guided-Learning Plan

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Abstract—In recent years, with the development of curriculum reform in China, the cultivation of students' autonomous learning ability has become one of the main objectives of English teaching. Guided-learning plan model is based on the theory of autonomous learning, constructivism, and discovery learning. It is a feasible teaching model to cultivate students' autonomous learning ability by taking learning case as the carrier and guiding learning as the method. The author conducted a questionnaire survey on 120 students in a certain junior high school and interviewed 4 students and 4 teachers in Zhejiang, China. The results show that the student's performance in motivation, learning plan, methods and strategies, self-monitoring, and evaluation has been improved under the guided-learning plan model, which also proves the effectiveness of the guided-learning plan in the cultivation of junior high school students' autonomy in English learning.

Keywords—guided-learning plan, junior high school English learner, autonomous learning

I. INTRODUCTION

The new curriculum standard for English points out that one of the main objectives of improving English teaching is to cultivate junior high school student's ability to learn English independently [1]. Some scholars believe that elementary education should change the way that teachers teach and the way that students learn. It requests to cultivate students' self-consciousness and strive to achieve the goal of student-centered teaching. That means autonomous study is more and more important today. It is not only a vital teaching goal but also a necessary objective to promote students' future development.

Because of the new requirements of education, the traditional teaching models are not suitable for today's development of quality education. In the traditional class, teachers are the leaders and students are the listeners. Students just listen to what teachers say and do not use their brains to think deeply. These traditional teaching models are harmful to students because they hinder the development of students' autonomous learning strategies.

Therefore, the situation should be changed and guided-learning plan should come out.

The guided-learning plan is one of the effective teaching models to make full use of teachers' guidance to stimulate students' learning motivation and interests. It is student-centered and encourages students to compete and cooperate to cultivate students' autonomous study.

Autonomous learning ability is one of the basic learning abilities to English learners. The application of guided-learning plan in junior high school is of great significance for today's educational reform and students' future development. Firstly, the guided-learning plan carries out the requirements of the new curriculum standard. What's more, in the model of guided-learning plan, students are in principal position so that it helps students to cultivate cooperative and autonomous study. Finally, guided-learning plan conforms to students' cognitive and physiological characteristics.

All in all, guided-learning plan plays an important role in the development of students' autonomous study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last century, many western scholars have put the cultivation of students' autonomous learning ability as the focus of education. At that time, the theory of guided-learning plan has come out. Zimmerman [2] believes that learners are autonomous only when they are active participants in metacognition, motivation, and behavior.

In the mid-1970s, the discussion of autonomous learning began to be hot in the field of foreign language education. In the 1980s, Holec [3] formally introduced the theory of autonomous learning into foreign language teaching. He believes that autonomous learning refers to having clear learning objectives, detailed learning plans, correct learning methods, and can monitor the learning process and evaluate the learning results. The core of his theory is that learners can be responsible for themselves and solve problems by themselves.

Bruner [4] put forward the discovery learning model. He pointed out that students should also think independently and get new knowledge and discover it actively rather than passively. That is one of the important elements of guided-learning plan.

The model of guided-learning plan is gradually being introduced to China. The definitions vary from expert to expert. Zhang and Chen [5] believe that learning plan refers to the material that teachers and students jointly design to guide students to study themselves to acquire knowledge. Zhang [6] and Ding [7] also hold the view that guided learning means guiding students to learn independently. Rong [8] believes that guided learning refers to the process of students' self-construction of knowledge structure under the guidance of teachers and learning plans.

In 1997, the mode of guided-learning plan was first put forward by Jinhua No. 1 Middle School in Zhejiang Province. The model of guided-learning plan is different from the teacher's teaching plan and the student's exercise book. Hong [9] pointed out the basic model of English guided-learning plan and introduced the specific operation, which laid the foundation for the study of English guided-learning plan. Lyu and Wang [10] put forward that guided learning plan is generally divided into four steps in the study of guided-learning model in the cultivation of middle school students' English abilities. The research on the compilation of guided-learning plan in English is deeper [10].

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is designed to realize the current situation of junior high school students' autonomy in English learning and whether guided-learning plan can improve the autonomy of students in English learning. To clarify the above issues, two research methods were conducted: questionnaires and interviews.

On the whole, 120 students participated in the questionnaire survey, and 4 students and 4 teachers were interviewed for further analysis.

In order to make the research more scientific, before sending out the questionnaires and conducting the interviews, the author has looked up various literature and consulted some experienced teachers. After that, the author designed the questionnaires and the outline of the interview.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part mainly shows the results and discussion of the research questions presented. The research findings revolve around the current situation of the applying of guided-learning plan and the effect of the implementation of the guided-learning plan on the cultivation of students' autonomous learning. The data of the questionnaires is made up of five aspects: Motivation, learning plan, methods and strategies, self-monitoring, and evaluation.

A. Students' Basic Information

The subjects of the investigation are 120 students from grade seven to grade nine in a certain junior high school in Zhejiang, China. Of these students, 57 are male, representing 47.5%, and 63 are female, accounting for 52.5%. The basic information is presented in Table I.

TABLE I. STUDENTS' BASIC INFORMATION

Categories		Numbers	Percentage
Gender	Males	57	47.5%
	Females	63	52.5%
Grade	Grade seven	42	35%
	Grade eight	41	34.2%
	Grade nine	37	30.8%

B. Motivation

In the questionnaires, Questions 3 and 4 are related to students' interest in English learning which indicates students' motivation after using guided-learning plan. The results are presented in Fig. 1.

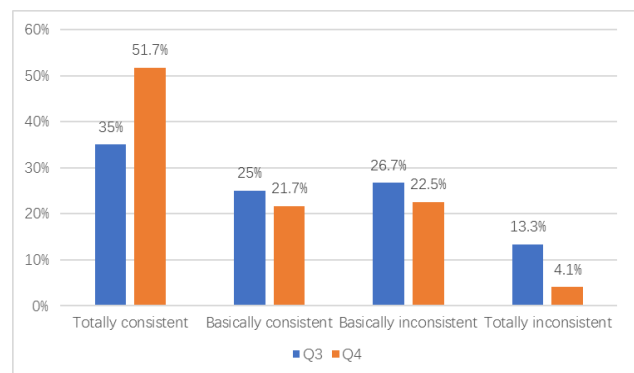


Fig. 1. Students' interest in English learning.

When asked "I love English lessons more than before", it can be claimed from Fig. 1 that 60% of the students love English lessons more than before when using guided-learning plan while 40% of students do not change their love of English. The data show that after using guided-learning plan, more than half of the students love English learning better than before.

When asked "I have more confidence to learn English well", the answers show that three-quarters of the students have more confidence in learning English well. Only a quarter of the students do not have much confidence in English learning.

It can be concluded that guided-learning plan plays an important role in students' English learning. After applying guided-learning plan, students' interest in English learning has increased rapidly. Students' learning motivation improves so they love English more than before and have more confidence in learning English. In general, positive learning motivation helps learners to study autonomously.

C. Learning Plan

It is essential for junior learners to have their own learning plans when learning English. Making learning plans by learners themselves indicates that they have the ability to study independently. Fig. 2 shows whether students spend 20 minutes on the preview.

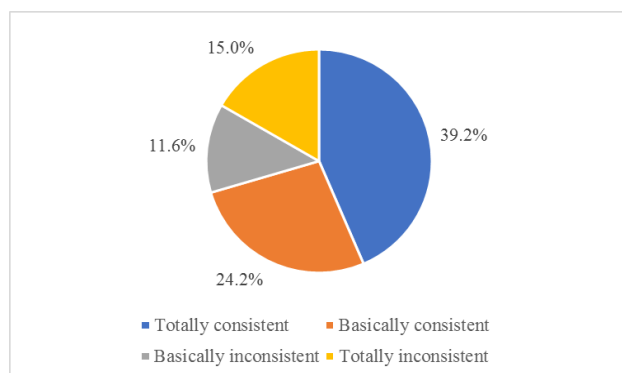


Fig. 2. Time for preview.

When asked “I spend more than 20 minutes in English preview”, the data shows that 73.4% of the students spend more than 20 minutes in preview while 26.6% of the students spend less than 20 minutes. It can be claimed that the majority of the students spend more time on preview. In pre-class preparation, guided-learning plan is a tool to guide students to preview scientifically and systematically. Therefore, using guided-learning plan, students try to realize and think about the material of the class carefully instead of just looking through the textbook.

From the interview, two students said that it helps them to preview the language points so that they can realize teachers’ words easily in class. They also think guided-learning plan helps them a lot in English learning. However, three students think that some activities in guided-learning plan are too difficult or not suitable for them.

When asked “My preview is more comprehensive, including all the questions the teacher has to talk about in class”, the data shows each option is nearly equal. That means, on the one hand, students’ ability of preview improves, on the other hand, students still need teachers’ guidance. Nearly half of the students think they preview the class comprehensively and have thought about all the questions the teacher has to talk about in class. So, these students consider that guided-learning plan is effective and helps them in class preparation. However, different students are at different learning levels. Also, the pace of study varies among students. Therefore, half of the students hold the view that they do not preview the class comprehensively. It tells us that students still need guidance from teachers, at the same time, we cannot deny the vital role which guided-learning plan plays in class preparation.

When asked “I can make my own learning plan and carry it out”, practically 60% of the students think they can make their own learning plans and carry them out according to the plans. Nearly 40% of the students are on the opposite side. It can be concluded that after using guided-learning plan, more students are willing to make study plans and improve their ability of making plans properly. What’s more, they study according to the plans. That means 60% of the students are more self-disciplined and autonomous. Without a doubt, guided-learning plan plays an important role in the process. Yet, 40% of the

students cannot make study plans properly or cannot do as scheduled. That means teachers should pay more attention to underachievers and help them to study in a planned way.

As a whole, guided-learning plan improves students’ ability to plan learning which is a very basic element of autonomy. Therefore, in this aspect, guided-learning plan can heighten students’ autonomous study. At the same time, students still need teachers’ patient guidance.

D. Learning Strategies and Skills

When meeting difficulties, different people react differently. Autonomous learners will try their best to solve the problems instead of running away from them. The following items in Fig. 3 are related to students’ strategies and skills in English learning.

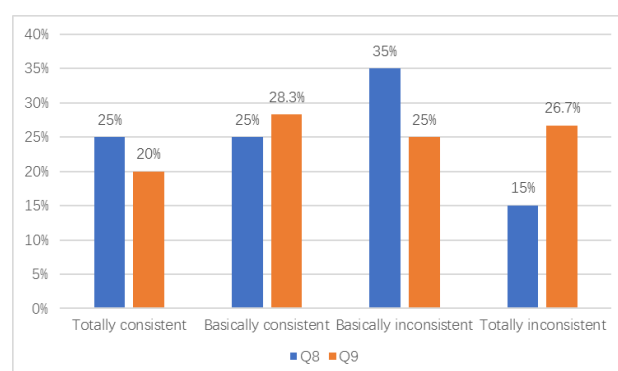


Fig. 3. Strategies used by students when facing difficulties.

When talking about “I’d like to consult my teachers when I meet with difficulties” and “I’d like to talk with my classmates when I meet with difficulties”, the data show that 50% of the students would like to consult teachers when they meet with difficulties and 48.3% of the students would like to talk with classmates. When using guided-learning plan model, students are encouraged to talk with partners or work in groups. It helps students to cooperate with others and improve interpersonal skills. It has changed the situation where students only listen to the teacher’s lectures, allowing them to learn independently and succeed with the help of the teachers. Therefore, it can be claimed that guided-learning plan improves students’ autonomy in English learning to a certain degree. There are still half of the students not willing to ask teachers or classmates for help.

From the data related to Questions 10 to 12, over half of the students don’t know the learning objectives of each English class, over 60% of the students think their ability to sort and summarize knowledge points and difficulties still can be improved and two-thirds of the students hold the view that they will continue to consult relevant materials for learning after class. The data show that although some students can realize the learning objectives before the class and summarize the knowledge points and difficulties by themselves with the help of the guided-learning plan, many students’ learning strategies still have room to be improved. Students’ level of knowledge and ability may be the main reason. It’s difficult for underachievers to entirely master the key points and

difficulties. However, for over 30% of the students, guided-learning plan is helpful for autonomous learning from pre-class, while-class, and post-class three aspects.

E. Self-Monitoring

One of the basic elements of autonomy is self-monitoring. Autonomous learners know how to control themselves. In Fig. 4, Questions 13 to 16 show whether students can monitor themselves in English learning.

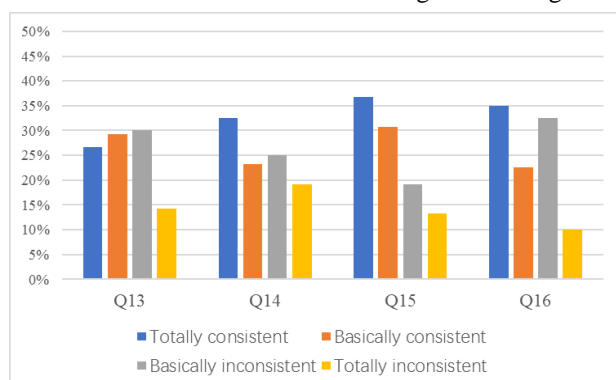


Fig. 4. Students' self-monitoring.

When asked “I will take the initiative to read and review even when the teacher does not leave homework”, “When there are other things that conflict with English learning, I will coordinate and complete the learning task”, “I will try to find the answers of the difficult questions and never give up easily” and “I can summarize the previous stage of English learning”, the data show that more than half of the students will read and review autonomously even when the teacher does not leave homework, more than half of the students will coordinate and complete the learning tasks when there are other things that conflict with English learning, most of the students will try to find the answers of the difficult questions and never give up easily and more than half of the students can summarize the knowledge structure of English learning. It can be concluded that more than half of the students can successfully monitor themselves after using guided-learning plan. Therefore, in this aspect, guided-learning plan can improve students' autonomy in study gradually.

However, there are still nearly half of the students who cannot monitor themselves well. There are many possible reasons. One big reason may be students are in middle school and they are so active that it's not easy for them to calm down to think. Another reason may be the compilation of the guided-learning plan is not suitable.

In the interview, one teacher said that guided-learning plan still has some problems that should be perfected. For example, during the implementation of guided-learning plan, some students pretend to talk about the questions but actually they are chatting.

Consequently, the application and compilation of the guided-learning plan can be improved.

F. Evaluation

Evaluation is indispensable in English learning which is usually forgotten by learners and teachers. It reacts to

learners' advantages and disadvantages so that learners can correct their mistakes according to the evaluation.

From the data related to Questions 17 to 20, the majority of the students hold the view that their teachers will evaluate their study in time in class, more than half of the students think that their teachers do not just evaluate their learning ability on the basis of the test results, two-thirds of the students consider that they will evaluate the learning situation with their classmates and two-thirds of the students think they will constantly reflect and evaluate themselves. The data shows that the evaluation method is changing from outcome evaluation into diversified evaluation including self-evaluation, teacher evaluation, and classmate evaluation. It helps students to reflect on themselves and correct mistakes in time. Therefore, it can be claimed that guided-learning plan, in this aspect, can promote students' learning activity and autonomy.

V. CONCLUSION

In the paper, the author talks about the relationship between guided-learning plan and autonomy. Firstly, the author talks about the development of the guided-learning plan and the theory foundation. Then, the author does research and analyzes the data to prove that guided-learning plan can make middle school students study autonomously. Finally, the author gives some suggestions on the implementation of guided-learning plan.

After analyzing the data from the questionnaire and interview, the author finds that the application of guided-learning plan can make students study from passivity to initiative. In terms of learning knowledge, they know the learning objectives, key points, and learning process well. As for learning strategies, autonomous learners have plans to arrange their own learning and monitor their own implementation plans. After class, autonomous learners are willing to summarize and communicate with teachers and classmates when meeting problems. They become fond of discussion and cooperation, which fully shows that students' awareness of autonomous learning has been stimulated, and autonomous learning has been internalized into their own learning habits. In a word, guided-learning plan helps students to study autonomously.

However, some problems are found in the investigation. Guided-learning plans still have room to become better. Students' self-monitoring and learning strategies are not as good as expected. Therefore, the implementation of the guided-learning plan needs the joint efforts of teachers and students.

This paper still has some shortcomings. The number of students in the research is not large enough so that the data may be accidental. The research of the guided-learning plan can be further studied.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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