
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Review of Dogme Approach: Principles and Practices

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| ABSTRACT

As an emerging teaching approach, Dogme is proposed to protest against the over-reliance on coursebooks and technologies in language teaching and is compatible with a conglomerate of contemporary teaching approaches. According to Dogme, language teaching should not rely too much on teaching materials but should focus on communicative activities that could satisfy students' actual needs and interests. In this paper, the theoretical principles of Dogme are briefly summarized by discussing the similarities and differences between Dogme and several contemporary teaching approaches, and then major studies on Dogme are reviewed and summarized by discussing its suitability. The findings are that (a) Dogme is more suitable for high-level second language learners, but findings about its suitability for low-level learners are inconclusive; (b) inexperienced teachers are unable to use Dogme exclusively, and it is more suitable for them to integrate Dogme's principles into the traditional materials-based lessons; (c) the combination of Dogme and mainstream teaching methods in different educational environments is comparatively effective and is widely welcomed by teachers and students, and (d) studies on the suitability of Dogme in the technological era are still in its infancy, with limited research results. The previous studies on the universality of Dogme have failed to support each other. Therefore, further research is needed.

| KEYWORDS

Dogme; conversation-driven; materials-light; focus on emergent language; suitability

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, the rapid development of science and technology has had a certain impact on second language (L2) learning and teaching. At the same time, there appears to be a large number of language-teaching materials. In addition to the textbooks in print, "there is an embarrassment of complementary riches in the form of videos, CD-ROMs, photocopiable resource packs, pull-out word lists, and even websites, not to mention the standard workbook teacher's book, and classroom and home study cassettes" (Thornbury, 2000: 2). In front of the huge amount of teaching materials, the language classroom was not student-centered, but centered on teaching materials, and over-relies on various forms of materials. Studies found that teachers' over-reliance on teaching materials may be the real reason for their failure to engage students in meaningful interactions (Cunningsworth, 1995; Cadorath & Haris, 1998; Sayed, 2016). In such a case, Scott Thornbury (2000) proposed a new English teaching method called Dogme Language Teaching (hereafter referred to as Dogme), which is seen as a panacea to cover the shortage of current L2 teaching methods (Sayed, 2016). The term Dogme came from Dogme 95 movement launched by two Danish directors in the film industry in 1995. The movement sought to relieve the film's reliance on technology, special effects, and fantasy, emphasizing authenticity. Specifically, the movement was against all illusory elements, hoping for filmmakers to focus on the true story and its meaning to the audience and return to the original nature of the film. To further achieve this goal, the two directors proposed ten rules for Dogme movies called the "Vows of Chastity". The first rule was that shooting should be done on the spot, with no props and sets. Applying this rule to classroom activities means that teaching should be based on the resources that teachers and students bring to the classroom and what happens in the classroom (Thornbury, 2000). Dogme films also banned

the use of music (unless the music is available in the actual scene), optical processing, or filters, which in class means that the only source of listening material should be from the teachers and students themselves. Dogme is considered a movement, a method, and even a teaching philosophy (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009). Dogme opposes the over-reliance on extra materials and technology for language teaching, believing that the excessive use of materials will hinder real classroom communication. It aims to liberate teachers from the shackles of excessive reliance on teaching materials and create real communication in the classroom (Banegas, 2012), so it is also called teaching unplugged (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009).

This paper first briefly outlines Dogme's principles by comparing similarities and differences between Dogme and several other contemporary popular teaching methods. Subsequently, this paper discusses the suitability of Dogme to different levels of students, teachers, and educational environments. Finally, this paper further explains the shortcomings of previous research on Dogme and provides some suggestions for the future development and application of Dogme.

2. Three principles of Dogme

Dogme is developed based on the compatible idea (Nguyen & Hung, 2020), absorbing the essence of several contemporary teaching methods such as communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based language teaching (TBLT), total physical response (TPR), etc. Thornbury and Meddings (2009) proposed three basic principles of Dogme, namely the conversation-driven principle, the materials-light principle, and the principle of focus on emergent language.

2.1 The Conversation-driven Principle

Dogme is greatly influenced by the CLT. Based on similar views of language learning, they both attach importance to the cultivation of communicative competence. CLT holds that the main function of language is to interact and communicate (McMeniman, 1992), and only activities containing real language communication can promote learning. Similarly, Dogme believes that language develops through social communication and real interaction, which is mediated through dialogue. Dialogue is not a product of learning but a necessary condition for learning and is the center of language learning (Nguyen & Hung, 2020). Dialogue prompts learners to communicate based on the entire context rather than a series of prefabricated speech blocks or structures in an isolated environment (Hills & Nadu, 2015). Dogme and CLT are slightly different in the design of the dialogue content. CLT believes that activities involving an "information gap" should be designed in a dialogue to get new information from the other person. Dogme emphasizes the authenticity of dialogue, believing that the content of dialogue should be determined by students according to their own needs rather than designed and controlled by teachers. Dialogue manipulated by students themselves could motivate them and promote the emergence of natural language (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009).

2.2 The Materials-light Principle

Both TBLT and Dogme emphasize the importance of learners' needs and interests. TBLT believes that learning is a process of satisfying the internal needs of an individual, and these needs would function as learning motives and cannot be predetermined by teachers or teaching materials (Richards, 2001). In addition, Dogme supports the teaching view of TPR (i.e. the humanism teaching view) and believes that language classrooms should be student-centered for the overall development of human beings (Richards, 2001). Dogme emphasizes the central position of learners in teaching activities, advocates the principle of light teaching materials, and believes that over-reliance on teaching materials and scripted teaching will restrict the creative development of teachers and students. Most studies evaluating English textbooks claim that all coursebooks have certain limitations and deficiencies, and no textbook can be applied to all situations, all teachers and all students (Charalambous, 2011). Abdelrahman (2014: 148) pointed out that most textbooks are based on the traditional view that "students are consumers of knowledge" and presented new information to learners directly by stimulating their memory system without allowing them to think and create independently. Similarly, studies showed that despite the undeniable advantages of coursebooks in language learning, over-reliance on these materials and technologies hinders students from interacting with their teachers (Stewart, 2008; Weiss, 2009; Coyle, Yanez & Verdu, 2010). Weiss (2009) pointed out that the so-called intelligent classroom has lost a lot. For instance, the creativity and interaction of students and teachers decline significantly. Furthermore, active learning is strangled, and the classroom becomes silent, with an emphasis on memory. Influenced by several current teaching methods, Dogme advocates the materials-light principle. As Thornbury (2000: 2) said, language classes should return to the original state, just "a few chairs, a blackboard, a teacher and some students". Some researchers misinterpret the principle of light textbooks as a simple rejection of all published textbooks and learning materials. Dogme is not anti-material or anti-technology but refuses materials that do not conform to the Dogme principles and techniques that cannot be learner-centered and based on real communication (Thornbury, 2009).

2.3 The Principle of Focus on Emergent Language

Another important theory that prompted the birth of Dogme is Emergentism. Emergentism began in the 1970s as a movement against prescriptivism and argued that language learning arose from the interaction of social input and implicit language patterns. Emergentism believes that if students are placed in the right linguistic environment and encouraged to be actively engaged, the internal mechanisms of the language system will be activated, and language will emerge naturally rather than learned (Nguyen &

Hung, 2020). Additionally, when learning a language, learners can adjust the language structure according to the conversational pattern to improve their language processing ability (McCauley & Christiansen, 2019). According to Dogme, language emerges mainly in two cross-level ways, namely, communicative activity and language output. Specifically, communicative activities in the classroom could trigger interaction between students, and then language emerges naturally in the interaction. As Ellis (2014) said, similar to the way young children learn their first language, second language learners acquire the target language mainly through incidental learning rather than intentional learning. Dogme puts more emphasis on the nature and emergence of dialogue, allowing learners to create the content and objectives of language curriculum (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009), and thus supports the principle of emergent language. Emergent language refers to the unplanned language that appears naturally in the interaction between teachers and students. Larsen-Freeman (2006) once described the emergence of language as follows, simple learning mechanisms can have access to real language information, then operate in human perceptual and cognitive systems, and exist as part of the human social environment, so it is enough to promote the emergence of complex language representations.

3. Applicability of the Dogme

The author searched "Dogme" as the topic in the Web of Science database, and 79 Dogme-related papers were obtained. The comprehensive analysis shows that academic research on Dogme is still in its infancy. It is, therefore, very necessary to summarize the theory and practice of Dogme. This paper intends to review and conclude studies on Dogme from the following four aspects.

3.1 The suitability of Dogme to students of different levels

One of the problems that Dogme faces comes from the immediate need for students to frequently output their target language, which can accumulate a lot of stress and frustration, especially in the non-English context, if learners' language and communicative competence are not good enough (McCabe, 2005). The study found that students' reluctance to communicate actively is because they know that the local teaching context (e.g., exam-oriented education) requires them to listen more than speak more, which thus reduces their motivation to communicate (Tan & Phairot, 2015).

To explore the suitability of Dogme for students with different L2 levels, several studies were conducted (Xerri, 2012; Bryndal, 2014; Sayed, 2016; Coskun, 2017; Solimani et al., 2019; Sarani & Malmir, 2019). Solimani et al. (2019) discussed the effects of two teaching methods (i.e. the Dogme approach and the flipped instruction) on the oral performance of high-level English learners in Iran. In the teaching activities using Dogme, the teacher first asked the students to talk about their known words and phrases about a certain topic and then divided the students into two groups to communicate. At the same time, the teacher showed the relevant dialogue mode and the new words and phrases emerging in the group communication on the blackboard to build support for students' further discussion. Finally, the teacher asked the students to express themselves with new words and phrases. Assessment of oral performance by classroom observation, questionnaire, interview, and paper post-test showed that both methods could improve learners' oral performance, and Dogme was more beneficial for high-level learners. Consistent with the results of Solimani et al., Mohamed (2019) found that the teaching activities of Dogme could significantly improve the oral performance and self-efficacy of high-level English students. Significantly, high-level English participants said that they could express themselves very confidently when speaking in class. Sarani and Malmir (2019) explored the influence of Dogme and CLT on oral performance and willingness to communicate in Iranian learners with different English levels through controlled experiments. The results found that Dogme was more effective in improving oral performance and communication willingness among advanced English learners, and CLT could enhance the oral performance of medium-level English learners. Additionally, there was no significant difference in oral performance and willingness to communicate between the two methods in the low-level English learners. Most high-level and middle-level learners held positive attitudes toward Dogme. In conclusion, there is enough evidence to show that Dogme is beneficial to high-level L2 learners.

In terms of low-level English learners, some scholars have expressed concern about the effectiveness of Dogme (Bryndal, 2014; Smith, 2004; McIver, 2009). Bryndal (2014) adopted Dogme teaching activities to introduce and teach new words related to the topic of family, aiming to further investigate students' evaluation of Dogme. The results showed that students preferred Dogme compared to traditional textbook-based teaching. She wrote in her after-school assessment that though the Dogme approach was successfully conducted in pre-intermediate classes, it may not be suitable for lower-level students. Sayed (2016) explored the influence of Dogme on students' oral English and paper writing. Forty-eight low-level English learners from the School of Education and Arts at a university in Saudi Arabia were randomized into experimental and control groups. The Dogme approach was used in the experimental group, in which the teacher did not prepare any teaching plan but adopted dialogue to carry out teaching activities. In contrast, the conventional teaching method was employed in the control group, in which teaching activities were carried out based on conventional writing materials. The results showed that the oral and paper writing performance of the experimental group was better than the control group, proving the suitability of Dogme to low-level English learners. Coskun (2017) explored the evaluation of Dogme by teachers and students in a Turkish exam-oriented environment. Participants were three non-native English teachers at three Turkish universities and 38 junior English learners with A2 level (CEFR) in three intensive English classes. Three teachers were asked to design the classroom activities based on Dogme principles. One teacher asked the

students to express their viewpoints on the controversial sentences presented on the blackboard. The second teacher set up an island scenario in the classroom and encouraged the students to actively discuss ways to escape from the island. The third teacher required the students to recommend good destinations to travel to in the summer. The year-long study showed that most teachers and students held positive attitudes toward Dogme, believing that classroom activities without textbooks were fun and effective. In addition, a minority of students with lower English levels said they could not adapt to Dogme teaching activities.

In conclusion, previous studies have shown that Dogme is more suitable for high-level English learners, while its suitability for low-level learners is inconclusive and needs further study.

3.2 The suitability of Dogme for teachers with different language backgrounds

Thornbury and Meddings (2009: 21) encouraged teachers to use the Dogme approach in the English classroom to “experience another way to become a language teacher”, but due to the flexibility and urgency of Dogme, teachers are easy to be labeled as lazy (McCabe, 2005). Due to the emphasis on emergent language, teachers need to conduct classroom activities without prior planning, which does not mean that teachers do not need to prepare lessons but put higher requirements for teachers. Comprehensive language knowledge, accurate awareness of learners’ needs, and mastery of teaching skills and classroom activities are all essential for the successful use of Dogme.

However, inexperienced non-native teachers may be limited by inadequate English proficiency to satisfy the immediate needs of students in class and thus cannot successfully use Dogme. Even if communication and interaction occur in the classroom, teachers still cannot guarantee the informative and educational significance of these conversations because they are not sure what type of dialogue is more effective (Harmer, 2007). In addition, the stress on teachers is more worrying in larger class settings (McCabe, 2005; Hills & Nadu, 2015). Therefore, teachers using Dogme should be equipped with high creativity, rich practical training, and effective teaching experience. At the same time, some researchers (Nguyen & Hung, 2020) argued that it is wrongly believed that the Dogme approach may disadvantage non-native and inexperienced teachers because it is materials-light. Although some teachers could not get completely separated from the exam-based courses and textbooks, most of them accepted the employment of Dogme. Both non-native and native speakers supported that Dogme might ease the burden of lesson planning (Coşkun, 2017). Moreover, Dogme not only allows non-native teachers to follow the textbooks but also provides opportunities for them to communicate and interact in English (Xerri, 2012). Additionally, non-native teachers might be free from their over-reliance on coursebooks and, therefore, able to play a proactive role in communicating with their students (Sayed, 2016).

Xerri (2012) made the first attempt to use Dogme in the exam-oriented context, and the results showed that Dogme could help teachers further reflect on their career development. Bryndal (2014) wrote in the Dogme after-class evaluation that, as an experienced teacher, she was able to handle the emerging language of students in time and believed that teaching without too many textbooks was a kind of liberation. Coskun (2017) interviewed three teachers employing Dogme and found that one teacher had a positive attitude towards Dogme. The other two teachers said that the emergent need of middle school students for instant conversations in real language and the lack of English proficiency caused great pressure on them, so they preferred the traditional teaching method based on teaching materials. Batan and Khaider (2020) explored the teachers’ views on Dogme through semi-structured questionnaires and found that most teachers supported the dialogue-driven principle and the principle of focus-on emergent languages but refused to reduce the use of textbooks and techniques, which they regarded as necessary in language teaching. The analysis showed that it is stressful to independently use Dogme in the English classroom for less experienced teachers who support the integration of Dogme’s principles into the textbook-based method. At present, Dogme-related research pays more attention to the suitability of this method to students of various levels, while its suitability to teachers with different language backgrounds has not yet been investigated thoroughly.

3.3 The suitability of Dogme in different educational backgrounds

Hills and Nadu (2015) questioned the suitability of Dogme in different educational environments, pointing out that Dogme originated in Europe, whose classroom environments and teaching conventions were completely different from other parts of the world. Classroom capacity, examination pressure, social culture, and other factors in a non-European educational environment can affect the effectiveness of Dogme. In some exam-oriented courses, the suitability of the Dogme approach is often questioned because teachers are not interested in new methods that are not directly related to academic grades (Nguyen & Hung, 2020). For instance, some teachers questioned: “How can I use Dogme to help students prepare for the exam?” (Worth, 2012).

Worth (2012) used open-ended questionnaires, group discussions, and interviews to examine the views of nine Japanese learners on Dogme and textbook-based teaching methods in the exam-oriented education environment and found that learners had a positive attitude towards the combined method of traditional material course and Dogme. Dogme could provide oral practice, while textbook-based teaching provides grammar exercises, which can complement each other. But when asked, “Which method

is more helpful to pass the exam?" the students agreed that textbook-based courses were more effective. Xerri (2012) demonstrated the potential advantages of Dogme in exam-oriented courses by non-native English teachers, indicating that the exam-oriented courses embedded in Dogme can help students cope better with the exam. The combined method could cover the shortage of the conventional coursebook-based method, making students aware that the most important thing, besides taking exams, is that they can communicate in English. Coskun (2017) found that teachers and students disagreed about the effectiveness of the single application of Dogme in an exam-oriented educational setting in Turkey. One teacher confirmed the suitability of Dogme in Turkey and recommended embedding Dogme in a grammatical-based syllabus. The other two teachers expressed concern and found it difficult to use Dogme in exam-oriented education settings and with low-level students. Similarly, some students held a negative attitude toward the use of Dogme, believing that exam-arranged textbooks should be employed. Some other students believed that Dogme could be integrated into the mainstream English classroom in Turkey but should not be regarded as a dominant teaching method. In Turkey, the exam-driven English syllabus (Sahin, 2007), conformists' expectations of the teaching model, and classroom capacity make teachers' and students' attitudes towards Dogme vary. Sketchley (2011) also believed that Dogme should be embedded in mainstream textbook-based courses.

It is not difficult to conclude that though previous studies are not enough to prove the universality of Dogme in different educational environments, relevant studies have shown that Dogme can make up for the defects of exam-oriented courses, not only enabling teachers and students to take into account the structure required for the examination but also letting students participate in real learning activities to help students establish interpersonal relationships. Even though teachers cannot apply Dogme totally or independently to all curriculum types, it can still help teachers become more proactive in a diverse teaching environment (Nguyen & Hung, 2020).

3.4 Contemporary Suitability of Dogme

Another question raised by many researchers is how to apply Dogme to contemporary technology-mediated learning (TML). Chapelle (2019) defined technology-based learning as an online classroom learning model in which the interaction between learners and learning materials and peers and teachers is completed through information technology. TML is a general term that includes different methods for the use of computers in learning and teaching, such as computer-aided learning (CAL), computer-mediated communication (CMC), etc. Teachers can use these tools to define an online "manageable environment" in which learners can access learning resources, practices, other learners and teachers, and research and assessment tools. This "environment" enables online social interaction between teachers and students, showing the possibility of computer-assisted use of emerging language, which is consistent with Dogme's emphasis on emergent and natural dialogue. In addition, advances in science and technology can provide teachers and learners with a wide range of materials from which teachers and students can select the materials most relevant to the principles of the Dogme approach.

The proponents of Dogme increasingly recognize that new technologies (especially Web 2.0) may coincide with Dogme's interactive, learner-centered language learning principles (Ushioda, 2011). Porter (2014) explored how to use Web 2.0 to trigger the occurrence of meaningful conversations in Dogme teaching. Based on WIKI online platform (a free editing website that provides users with opportunities to develop themes, activities, and language content), the study divided participants into two or three groups, with each group preparing one chapter of learning content and conducting corresponding classroom activities. The results showed that in terms of topics, participants were willing to choose socially controversial and political topics (e.g., "sexuality", "plastic surgery", and "drinking culture") based on their interests and needs. In terms of content, some of the material participants selected for their online chapters covered local current events and anecdotes. In addition, some groups could respond to the immediate needs of other groups in the classroom on time, resulting in meaningful dialogue. The study showed that participants could use Web 2.0 to organize their materials and carry out classroom activities, not only to face controversial social issues but also to meet the unique needs and tensions highlighted in the limited classroom space.

At present, the research on the suitability of Dogme in the technology era is still in its infancy, with few research results. With the development of technology, Dogme can be combined with different technical tools, and educators can also combine Dogme with other teaching methods, such as flipped instructions and e-learning environments.

4. Conclusions

This paper mainly expounded on the previous research status of Dogme, first briefly analyzed three Dogme principles, and clarified the similarities and differences with several contemporary teaching methods. Subsequently, the suitability of Dogme was discussed from four aspects by analyzing and summarizing the Dogme-related studies. The results showed that Dogme well integrates the advanced ideas of contemporary second language teaching and thus is conducive to guiding teachers and learners in the classroom according to their needs and interests. The materials-light view provides a practical route for English teaching and builds a bridge between the theory and practice of language teaching.

The successful application of Dogme is influenced by many factors. From the previous studies, it can be concluded that there are still many controversies in Dogme, which still need to be further studied. First, most previous studies used qualitative research methods such as questionnaires and interviews to investigate the suitability of Dogme, while few studies measured the suitability of Dogme through quantitative research methods such as experimental design. Therefore, future studies should enrich experimental design and test methods. Second, most studies focused on examining the role of Dogme on learners' oral performance. However, language ability includes not only oral English but also listening, reading, and writing skills. Future studies should pay attention to the applicability of Dogme to different language skills. Third, most of the previous studies were small in research scale and single in research background. For example, previous studies concentrated more on college students. Therefore, future studies should involve more educational stages (e.g., primary and secondary school students) and educational backgrounds to further explore the suitability of Dogme. Fourth, although the application of Dogme in the digital age has been noticed by some researchers, it is still in its infancy with rare results. Several topics are waiting to be explored in the post-methods era, for example, how does Dogme use social media resources; can teachers conduct Dogme activities independently in computer-aided, mobile-assisted, and AI-based environments? Further studies are recommended to investigate the effectiveness of Dogme for different students and educational backgrounds, which is helpful to enrich the research results of Dogme and develop its practical significance.

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