

Exploration of University English Teaching Practice in the Context of the Information Age

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Abstract: In the new era featuring rapid development of information technology and in-depth globalization, university English teaching, as an important part of higher education, is confronted with unprecedented opportunities and challenges. The advent of the information age has broken the time and space constraints of traditional teaching and reshaped teaching models, resource forms and evaluation systems. On this basis, this paper conducts a study on university English teaching practice in the context of the information age, systematically analyzes the core problems existing in the teaching process, deeply explores the important value of university English teaching practice in the information age, and then puts forward targeted optimization strategies. It aims to promote the in-depth integration of university English teaching and information technology, and provide theoretical references and practical experience for the reform of university English teaching.

Keywords: Information age; University English; Teaching practice; Teaching reform; Integration of information technology

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1. Introduction

As an indispensable public basic course in higher education, university English not only undertakes the basic task of imparting English language knowledge and cultivating students' language application ability, but also shoulders the important mission of fostering students' cross-cultural communication competence, international vision and lifelong learning ability. It serves as a crucial bridge connecting students with the global knowledge system and the professional world. The accelerating process of globalization has put forward higher requirements for talents' English proficiency. Enterprises and society need students not only to have solid basic English knowledge, but also to possess the comprehensive ability to solve practical problems and conduct cross-cultural communication in English, which poses new challenges to university English teaching practice^[1]. Therefore, it is of great significance to deeply explore the paths of university English teaching practice in the context of the information age.

2. Problems existing in the current university English teaching practice

2.1. Outdated teaching concepts

Some university English teachers adhere to the teaching concept of “teacher-centered and knowledge-imparting core”, equating English teaching simply with the instillation of basic knowledge such as vocabulary, grammar and sentence patterns. They ignore the cultivation of students’ comprehensive English application ability, autonomous learning ability and cross-cultural communication competence, which runs counter to the information-age teaching concept of “student-centered and ability-oriented”. In the information age, students have increasingly diversified channels to access English learning resources, no longer limited to textbooks and classrooms. They can learn independently through online courses, English movies and TV plays, academic journals, intelligent learning software and other means. However, some teachers fail to transform their teaching concepts in a timely manner, still regard themselves as the leaders of teaching, neglect students’ dominant position, and fail to fully guide students to carry out autonomous and cooperative learning with the help of information technology^[2].

2.2. Single teaching methods

The innovation of teaching methods is the key to improving teaching quality. Nevertheless, current university English teaching methods are still relatively single, and the integration of information technology and teaching is not in-depth, making it difficult to stimulate students’ learning interest and initiative. Most university English classes still adopt “lecture-based” and “instillation-based” teaching. Teachers dominate the whole teaching process, while students passively accept knowledge without opportunities for active thinking and active participation. The classroom atmosphere is dull, failing to arouse students’ learning enthusiasm. Although some colleges and universities have introduced information technology tools such as multimedia equipment and online teaching platforms, most teachers apply information technology superficially, using it as an auxiliary teaching tool to display courseware and play audio and video. They fail to give full play to the interactive and personalized advantages of information technology to achieve in-depth integration with teaching content and methods^[3].

2.3. Low utilization efficiency of teaching resources

Although the information age has provided abundant resources for university English education, the existing educational resources still suffer from insufficient quantity, repetitive content and low utilization rate, which can hardly meet students’ personalized learning and teaching reform requirements. The main English education resources in most schools are textbooks, teaching auxiliary materials and popular online courses. These resources lack pertinence and uniqueness, and are not well integrated with students’ majors and career characteristics, making it difficult to satisfy the learning desires of students in different majors. The quality of educational resources varies greatly. Some online resources are outdated, erroneous, or dull, lacking systematicness and authority, which troubles the guarantee of teaching quality^[4]. In addition, some schools fail to effectively integrate and optimize their own resources. Various resources are scattered on different platforms without a unified management and sharing mechanism, increasing the difficulty for teachers and students to search and use them, and reducing the utilization rate.

3. Important value of university English teaching practice in the context of the information age

3.1. Facilitating the innovation of teaching models

The advent of the information age has provided technical support for the innovation of university English teaching models, promoting the transformation of university English teaching from “traditional lecture-

based” to “personalized, interactive and blended” models and effectively improving teaching effectiveness. Restricted by time and space, the traditional university English teaching model has relatively fixed teaching content, progress and methods, which can hardly meet students’ personalized learning needs. The application of information technology has broken time and space constraints, constructing a blended teaching model of “online + offline” and “in-class + after-class”. It allows students to learn independently anytime and anywhere, realizing the extension of teaching time and space^[5].

3.2. Enriching the supply of teaching resources

Information technology in the information age has facilitated the enrichment and optimization of university English teaching resources, breaking the limitations of traditional teaching resources and realizing the diversification and sharing of teaching resources, which can effectively meet students’ personalized learning needs. Abundant English learning materials on the Internet, such as original English books, academic papers, online courses, English films and TV works, and audiobooks, have greatly broadened the boundary of teaching content. Students can access more authentic and vivid English language materials, enhancing their language perception and cross-cultural communication competence. Meanwhile, information technology supports teachers to integrate and develop personalized teaching resources according to teaching needs and students’ characteristics, such as special learning resources designed for students of different majors and English levels, to meet their personalized learning demands^[6].

3.3. Cultivating students’ comprehensive abilities

The information age has put forward higher requirements for talents’ abilities. As an important means of talent cultivation, college English teaching plays a vital role. In the current era, its importance lies not only in teaching students how to learn English knowledge, but also in equipping them with good comprehensive English application ability, independent inquiry ability, international communication ability and modern information technology literacy to meet the needs of social reform and development. In English teaching, with the help of operational situations constructed by information technology, students learn English in real dialogue scenarios to improve their listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating abilities, avoiding the dilemmas of “mute English” and “exam-oriented English”^[7].

4. Countermeasures for university English teaching practice in the context of the information age

4.1. Renew teaching concepts and establish students’ dominant position

The renewal of teaching concepts is the premise for promoting the reform of university English teaching practice. Facing the development requirements of the information age, university English teachers should take the initiative to renew their teaching concepts, establish the teaching concept of “student-centered and ability-oriented”, and keep teaching concepts in step with the development of the times^[8].

First, teachers should transform their roles from “teaching subjects” to “learning guides, facilitators and collaborators for learning subjects”, reduce one-way imparting, emphasize students’ active learning, give play to students’ subjectivity in learning activities, pay attention to students’ internal needs and development changes, respect students’ personality characteristics, and provide help suitable for their learning characteristics for different students^[9].

Second, teachers should establish a sense of “lifelong learning”, actively pay attention to the development

of information technology and the trends of English education and teaching reform, be willing to accept new concepts and teaching methods, and continuously improve their professional literacy and information processing ability to adapt to the educational and teaching practice needs in the information age. Colleges and universities can regularly organize teachers to participate in information technology training, teaching seminars, field visits and exchanges, providing learning opportunities for teachers and improving their literacy. Meanwhile, they should clarify the role positioning of college English teachers in the digital age, abandon “exam-oriented education”, take cultivating students’ comprehensive English application ability, cross-cultural communication competence, autonomous learning ability and digital thinking as the core teaching objectives, and adjust teaching content according to students’ majors and employment directions to make it closer to students’ actual needs and social development needs^[10].

4.2. Innovate teaching methods and deepen information technology integration

The innovation of teaching methods is the key to improving the quality of university English teaching. Combined with the technical advantages of the information age, teaching methods should be innovated to deepen the in-depth integration of information technology and university English teaching, and construct a personalized, interactive and blended teaching model^[11].

First, actively promote the blended teaching model, taking advantage of online teaching and traditional classroom teaching to form a teaching model of “online autonomous learning + offline interactive guidance”. In this model, online teaching mainly focuses on students’ autonomous learning, preview and review. Teachers can assign pre-class learning tasks, distribute learning materials, carry out online discussions, correct homework and answer questions through online teaching platforms, and grasp students’ learning status in real time with the data statistics function of the system to accurately locate weak teaching links. In traditional classroom teaching, teachers can design situational and interactive classroom activities such as English performances, group discussions, speeches and situational business negotiations through multimedia equipment, virtual simulation technology and other means to improve students’ language application ability through active participation^[12].

Second, supported by advanced educational technology, improve educational quality and promote personalized and intelligent development of education. Use artificial intelligence technology to develop intelligent teaching auxiliary systems, such as intelligent question-answering systems, personalized learning recommendation systems and English pronunciation evaluation systems, to provide students with personalized learning guidance and services, help them timely identify their knowledge deficiencies and effectively improve learning effects. Similarly, virtual simulation technology should be adopted to generate simulated English scenarios such as international conferences, business negotiations and cross-cultural communication, allowing students to conduct training in virtual situations to enhance their cognitive ability in cross-cultural and cross-language use. In addition, new teaching methods such as cooperative group learning and project-based learning should be tried to enable students to take the initiative to participate and research together, so as to cultivate their team awareness and innovation ability. For example, some English projects can be set for student groups to complete, and students can gradually improve their comprehensive English application ability and cooperation ability by collecting materials online, writing project reports and presenting results. Furthermore, teachers should teach students in accordance with their aptitude based on different English levels, learning interests and major characteristics, adopt hierarchical teaching and provide classified guidance for students, so that all students can receive the most suitable education for their development and make progress^[13].

4.3. Optimize teaching resources and improve resource utilization efficiency

High-quality teaching resources are the foundation for improving the quality of university English teaching. Combined with the characteristics of the information age, the supply of teaching resources should be

optimized to build a diversified, personalized and shared teaching resource system and improve resource utilization efficiency^[14].

First, integrate existing educational resources such as textbooks, teaching aids, online courses and bilingual videos, select, classify and sort them out to form a unified teaching content database, realizing intensive management and shared use of resources and facilitating resource retrieval and use for teachers and students. Meanwhile, pay attention to updating resources and improving resource quality, continuously adding the latest English learning and teaching resources to ensure their effectiveness and credibility.

Second, develop personalized teaching resources and produce targeted professional English materials and vocational English materials according to students' strengths and job needs, such as scientific and technological professional English materials, humanities education English materials, business English textbooks and postgraduate entrance examination English learning materials, to meet the learning needs of different majors. Professional teachers or industry professionals can also be invited to jointly develop teaching resources suitable for majors and industries to enhance their applicability and accuracy.

Third, strengthen education on students' effective use of various resources, teach students methods to screen, integrate and use information, help them quickly find the most suitable learning content from the massive information and avoid the misunderstanding of information overload. Establish an evaluation mechanism to judge the quality and effectiveness of teaching resources, and adjust resources according to feedback to improve resource utilization efficiency. Colleges and universities can encourage teachers and students to jointly develop and evaluate resources, and continuously improve educational quality and adaptability in the virtuous cycle of "generation-utilization-evaluation-optimization"^[15].

5. Conclusion

In summary, the advent of the information age has brought unprecedented opportunities and new challenges to the reform of university English teaching practice. In the context of the information age, to promote the high-quality development of university English teaching practice in the information age, teachers should start from three aspects: renewing teaching concepts, innovating teaching methods and optimizing teaching resources, establish students' dominant position, deepen the in-depth integration of information technology and teaching, build a diversified, personalized and shared teaching resource system, and continuously improve teaching effectiveness. With the continuous development of information technology, university English teaching practice will embrace more innovative opportunities. We should continue to deepen teaching reform, promote the comprehensive upgrading of teaching concepts, methods, resources and evaluation, and realize the in-depth integration of university English teaching and information technology.

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