

Pathways of Cultivating English Pre-service Teachers' Educational Research Competence in Application-oriented Universities from the Perspective of Dynamic Assessment

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ABSTRACT

The teachers' professional development of compulsory education requires pre-service teachers to possess educational research competence. Application-oriented undergraduate colleges and universities undertake the key task of cultivating English pre-service teachers; however, there are some systematic deficiencies in cultivating students' scientific research competence. English pre-service teachers need to master both language skills and educational research methods simultaneously. However, the traditional static evaluation model is ineffective in identifying the bottlenecks in their ability development. The theory of dynamic assessment emphasizes the promotion of students' abilities through continuous teaching interventions and immediate feedback, providing a new approach to optimizing the cultivation pathways. Therefore, based on the perspective of dynamic assessment, this paper explores a practical scheme for cultivating English pre-service teachers' educational research competence in application-oriented universities, aiming to establish a sustainable mechanism for ability development.

KEYWORDS

Dynamic assessment; English pre-service teachers; Application-oriented university; Educational research competence

1 Introduction

The reform of teacher education requires universities to cultivate research-oriented teachers. The Ministry of Education's "Several Opinions on the Reform and Development of Normal Education" emphasizes that research and teaching ability are important foundations for the professional development of teachers. For English pre-service teachers in application-oriented undergraduate universities, the subject's particularity exacerbates the difficulty of cultivation: the lack of English academic writing ability, the unsystematic mastery of educational research methods, the disconnection between theoretical learning and practical application, and other factors restrict the formation of their scientific research competence. Therefore, this paper will explore the cultivation pathways from the perspective of dynamic assessment in order to form a replicable experience of cultivating pre-service teachers.

2 The cultivation foundation of educational research competence

2.1 The cultivation background of educational research competence

With the continuous advancement of curriculum reform in elementary and secondary education in China, higher requirements are being set for the specialization of teachers, and cultivating research-oriented teachers with scientific research abilities has become the core goal of teacher education reform^[1]. Normal school students possess a dual identity as undergraduates and future educators, and their scientific research competence directly impacts the quality of teaching and the depth of their career development. "The Guidelines on Strengthening Educational Scientific Research in the New Era" and other documents issued by the Ministry of Education require that normal education must adhere to the combination of scientific research and teaching and improve the academic level in the cultivation stage of normal school students, tamping scientific research ability is not only the implementation of policy requirements but also the inevitable path to promote the professional growth. However, existing primary and secondary school teachers are generally faced with the dilemma of weak scientific research competence, which is typically manifested in the disconnection between practice and theory and the difficulty in transforming research results into practical applications. This phenomenon is directly related to the lack of pre-service cultivation. Many teachers have not established a systematic and scientific foundation in academic thinking and methods during the pre-service stage, which reflects a lack of educational research competence in schools.

2.2 The significance of educational research competence

It is of theoretical and practical value to strengthen the cultivation of English pre-service teachers' educational research competence. At the theoretical level, this cultivation plays an important part in the theory of teachers' professional development. The current curriculum reform requires teachers to transform into research-oriented educators. This orientation makes the cultivation of scientific research abilities in the pre-service stage an inevitable extension of normal education theory. At the practical level, this training can accurately identify the weak points in the training process by scientifically evaluating the current situation and the causes of the normal students' scientific research ability. Based on

the diagnosis results, improvement strategies for the scientific research ability of normal students are proposed, which can directly help students enhance their scientific research literacy and conduct education and teaching research more efficiently in the future. These practical experiences will form a generalizable cultivation program and provide a reference model for cultivating normal English talents in similar universities ^[2].

3 Current situation of English pre-service teachers' research competence in application-oriented universities

3.1 The current situation of educational research competence cultivation in universities

Currently, three structural contradictions exist in the cultivation of scientific research abilities among English pre-service teachers in application-oriented undergraduate universities. At the level of course teaching, the course content is primarily limited to the specification of the graduation study format, and the essential difference between academic research and practical exploration is not distinguished. Although students master the rules of literature citation, they seldom consider how to identify genuine educational problems, which leads to a deviation in topic selection from the actual needs of English teaching. At the level of guidance mechanism, there is a separation between educational practice and scientific research training. Teaching practice focuses on teaching skills, and students often lack guidance from a scientific research perspective when observing classroom phenomena. The guidance of graduation study focuses on the later text revision, and teachers are less involved in the early problem mining and scheme design. These situations lead to the repetition of topic selection, misuse of terminology, and loose logic in students' graduation studies, which reflects a lack of training in scientific research concepts and practical ability ^[3].

3.2 The development needs of English pre-service teachers' research competence from the perspective of dynamic assessment

Based on the concept of "continuous improvement" in normal education, the cultivation of scientific research competence needs to break through the limitations of traditional summative evaluation and establish a three-stage progressive mechanism. The basic cognitive stage (lower grades): Its core requirement is to establish a scientific thinking framework through curriculum reconstruction, focusing on guiding students to understand the research value behind the teaching phenomenon rather than mechanically dismantling the thesis structure. Practice Transformation Stage ((middle grades): The key is to transform the teaching practice into a career of scientific research training. Students are required to complete the closed loop of "phenomenon observation—problem refinement—scheme design" with the assistance of the instructor during the internship. When recording teaching diaries, they should simultaneously annotate potential research directions and design a micro-research plan after observing classroom interactions. At the stage of product refinement (senior grade), teachers should reduce the instruction on grammar patching, focus on training research logic construction ability, and ask students to use teaching practice cases to support their arguments. They should also transform classroom experimental data into research evidence.

4 The innovation points and difficulties in the cultivation of English pre-service teachers' research competence

4.1 The core difficulties and challenges

However, there are two core obstacles to breaking through in cultivating scientific research ability. First, students lack of awareness of scientific research. Many years of test-oriented training have made normal students accustomed to accepting knowledge rather than engaging in problem inquiry. Most students equate "Scientific research" with the academic paper for graduation and lack sensitivity to problems encountered in daily teaching. This requires that curriculum reform must increase training in diagnosing teaching phenomena, cultivating students' research thinking that traces causes from results. Second, there is a gap in the guidance capabilities of teachers. Among the English major teachers responsible for cultivating, some lack experience in basic education research. Their guidance often focuses on paper formatting or language errors, making it difficult for them to provide core support to students in areas such as research design and data interpretation. To address this issue, it is essential to establish a mechanism to enhance teachers' educational research competence and bridge the gap in practical cognition through classroom observations in middle schools and collaboration on foundational education topics ^[4].

4.2 Interdisciplinary cooperation and innovation in practice

The innovation in cultivating English pre-service teachers' teaching and research competence lies in the adoption of diversified, comprehensive, and cross-cutting training paths, which can effectively help normal university students improve their educational research competence. Specifically, the training of scientific research ability can be divided into

operational goals: through the course of research methods and academic writing, real lesson analysis can be added, focusing on how to find teaching problems. In the stage of teaching practice, the daily teaching observation should be transformed into 1-2 scientific research questions, and a simple verification scheme should be designed. During the stage of graduate study, preliminary questions should be connected, and in-depth research is conducted using the collected classroom data. This design not only meets the requirements of “continuous improvement” for normal certification but also lays the foundation for students to grow into research-oriented teachers after graduation, thereby realizing the continuity of ability from graduation to career development.

5 The pathways of cultivating English pre-service teachers’ research competence from the perspective of dynamic assessment

In the practice of cultivating English pre-service teachers, based on the existing educational theoretical achievements, it is proposed that while strengthening students’ professional knowledge and skills in English, the construction of students’ scientific research concepts, awareness, knowledge and abilities should be cultivated through multiple approaches such as curriculum reform, educational internships and thesis internships. A platform for students to conduct educational research activities should be established, and an educational research environment should be created to effectively enhance the teaching and research capabilities of English undergraduate students^[5].

5.1 Reforming of curriculum content and teaching format

Taking the course “Research Methodology and Academic Writing” as a starting point, reforming the course content and teaching format, mastering theoretical knowledge of scientific research, cultivating students’ awareness of research, and establishing correct concepts of scientific research. In the past, courses such as “Research Methodology and Academic Writing” directly benchmarked the guidance for English graduation thesis writing. This reform enhances the course objectives, guiding students to understand and distinguish between the similarities and differences between a dissertation and a research thesis. Each element of the academic thesis is trained in modules to expand the academic vision and enhance the ability to write scientific research. In addition, while conducting training in scientific research paper writing, we should also carry out ideological and political education in the classroom, centred on fostering virtue through education, cultivating students’ qualities such as responsibility, dedication, integrity, and kindness, thereby achieving higher goals in higher education.

5.2 Carrying out a series of educational practice activities

A series of educational practice activities should be conducted to cultivate educational research competence, thereby enhancing confidence in educational and scientific research. Educational practice encompasses not only the assessment of students’ disciplinary ability and cooperative education ability but also requires the incorporation of scientific research practices into educational practice. It is an important part of cultivating research-oriented teachers who possess the ability to teach research. While participating in the educational internship at the internship unit, students expand their understanding of the current state of frontline educational research, learn to identify problems from real educational contexts and seek personal interests for independent research, which can serve as topics for their graduation study. Under the guidance of the internship teacher and the class teacher, students write teaching diaries, observe and study teaching behaviors, attend each other’s classes, and reflect on and discuss their own and their peers’ teaching practices. This process establishes a positive feedback mechanism that facilitates the transformation and internalization of theoretical knowledge, a prerequisite and foundation for developing educational research competence in typical university students.

5.3 Strengthening the guidance of thesis writing

With thesis writing as the core, we should strengthen teachers’ guidance, dynamically monitor the bottlenecks in students’ thesis writing, guide and promote students to conduct independent educational research and cultivate their preliminary independent research competence. Teachers should focus on cultivating students’ abilities in topic selection, research design and implementation, written language expression in thesis writing, and oral language presentation in a thesis defence rather than merely providing superficial guidance and correcting grammatical errors. The process of guiding graduation studies requires not only strengthening the management of thesis supervisors and organizing workshops for teachers involved in thesis guidance to enhance the effectiveness of their work but also necessitates that students acquire a series of scientific research skills. These skills include independently searching for and organizing literature, determining research topics, designing research proposals, selecting research methods, conducting field research, analyzing collected data, writing and revising theses, and defending their theses.

5.4 Building and improving the teaching and scientific research platform

To establish a comprehensive teaching and scientific research platform, we aim to create a positive research atmosphere at the departmental level, generate theoretical outcomes in educational research, and thereby promote the development and enhancement of teaching and scientific research capabilities. Creating a positive scientific research atmosphere is a comprehensive and complex task that requires the joint participation of the college (school), students, and faculty. The college can invite industry experts (or outstanding alums) to hold lectures on education, teaching, and scientific research, sparking students' interest in the field of education. Teachers can integrate Creation innovation and enterprise education, allowing individual students or student groups to complete educational research activities and encouraging students to publicly publish academic papers, thereby laying a solid foundation for their future research endeavours. More importantly, it is essential to conduct collaborative research among pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, and university faculty. This involves forming streamlined research groups that integrate theory and practice, applying for research projects, and achieving the transformation of educational research outcomes.

However, the dual system support of schools and colleges is a fundamental prerequisite for improving educational research competence. The school level can provide direction guidance through the special policy of teaching reform and explicitly incorporate "educational research competence" into the core training objectives of English pre-service teachers under the framework of normal professional certification; it provides an institutional guarantee for the key links such as curriculum adjustment, funds allocation and practice base construction. As the executive subject, the college reorganizes existing resources by adding a course in educational research methodology when revising the talent training program. It also establishes a regular dialogue mechanism between the educational research section and primary and secondary schools to ensure that research on teaching issues is integrated throughout the entire cultivation process. Optimize the teacher assessment standards by incorporating the effectiveness of guiding students' research into the evaluation system. This collaborative mechanism breaks through the limitations of past hierarchical fragmentation: schools set standards and allocate resources, while colleges connect with demand and design pathways that meet it.

6 Conclusion

The cultivation of English pre-service teachers' teaching competence is a systematic and long-term project. The aforementioned multidimensional paths, encompassing curriculum reform, educational practice, thesis guidance, and platform construction, along with the collaborative mechanism of dual institutional support from both the school and the college, have established a comprehensive and multifaceted cultivation system. Through the innovation of course content and form, the theoretical basis of students' scientific research is strengthened, the deep integration of theory and practice is promoted by the opportunity of teaching practice, the guidance of graduation studies is enhanced, and students' independent scientific research abilities are developed. Setting up and improving the scientific research platform, creating a strong scientific research atmosphere, and stimulating students' enthusiasm for scientific research and creativity. These measures complement each other and effectively break the dilemma of weak scientific research training in the traditional cultivation mode. They lay a solid foundation for cultivating research-oriented English teachers with solid professional knowledge, excellent teaching skills, and innovative scientific research literacy, providing talent support for improving the quality of basic education. This also injects continuous vitality and power into the cause of English education in China.

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