

Exploring the Path of College Foreign Language Teaching in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the opportunities and challenges brought by the digital era to college foreign language teaching. It delves into the current issues in college foreign language teaching, such as monotonous teaching methods, low student engagement, insufficient utilization of teaching resources, limited student practice opportunities, and singular assessment methods. By leveraging the characteristics and advantages of digital technology, a series of innovative approaches to college foreign language teaching are proposed, including utilizing online teaching platforms to conduct blended teaching, employing virtual reality technology to enhance language practice experiences, and utilizing intelligent tools to achieve diversified evaluations. The aim is to improve the quality and effectiveness of college foreign language teaching and cultivate students' comprehensive language proficiency and cross-cultural communication skills.

KEYWORDS

Digitization; Foreign language teaching; Reform

1 Introduction

The rapid development of cutting-edge technologies such as 5G communication technology, artificial intelligence, and big data analysis is driving the arrival of the digital era with unprecedented intensity. Information acquisition has become instantaneous, processing has become intelligent, and delivery has become personalized, bringing profound changes to people's daily lives. As a key link in social development and talent cultivation, the education field is also inevitably undergoing systematic transformation. The tide of digitization is penetrating into the entire process of teaching activities with an irresistible force. The empowerment of technology has brought new forms and development possibilities to curriculum design, resource construction, classroom interaction, and learning evaluation.

As an important component of the higher education system, college foreign language education bears the significant mission of cultivating students' cross-cultural communication skills and broadening their international perspective. However, in recent years, college foreign language teaching has been heavily criticized. Despite learning foreign languages for more than a decade, many students are neither proficient in reading original books nor able to communicate fluently with foreigners. Traditional foreign language teaching models often use fixed textbooks, with classes primarily focused on lectures, and students are evaluated through uniform testing. Both the teaching content and teaching methods exhibit numerous issues that are out of touch with practical needs.

Therefore, against this backdrop, to overcome the dilemma of traditional teaching models, it is necessary to actively adapt to the trend of digital development, utilize the Internet, artificial intelligence, and big data technology to empower teaching, making foreign language teaching more intelligent, personalized, and contextualized. This change involves not only the simple application of technological tools but also encompasses various teaching elements. It is necessary to continuously promote the deep integration of college foreign language teaching and digital technology. Doing so is not only an inevitable choice to solve existing problems but also an important path towards the future and talent cultivation.

2 Several Shortcomings in Current College Foreign Language Teaching

2.1 Monotonous Teaching Mode

Although modern technology has provided computers and multimedia equipment for classroom teaching compared to the simple teaching tools of "blackboard + chalk" in the past, these technologies and equipment only serve as "electronic blackboards" and "electronic chalks", and most of the time, they have not completely changed the traditional teaching mode. Most classrooms still follow teaching methods that have been used for decades, with teachers as the dominant force, standing on the podium and mainly imparting knowledge through teaching materials, blackboards, electronic courseware, and other teaching media. Students sit in the classroom, passively receiving knowledge by looking at the blackboard and textbooks. They learn whatever the teacher teaches. When there are many students in the classroom, teachers have no way to fully grasp whether students are learning or not, or how much they are learning. Under this teaching mode, it is difficult for students to feel that they should be the main body of learning, and it is also difficult for most students to generate internal motivation for learning. Some students who have already mastered the

relevant classroom knowledge before class may lack the willingness to listen and learn, while some students with poor foundations may not be able to keep up with the teacher's pace.

2.2 Students' Insufficient Engagement in the Classroom

This is due to the lack of diverse teaching methods, which makes it difficult for students to actively think and participate in classroom activities. The enthusiasm for classroom participation is generally low, and the classroom atmosphere often appears dull. Most students are accustomed to one-way listening, with strong inertia and a weak willingness to actively ask questions and express their views. Even when teachers organize some activities, only some students with better foundations tend to participate. Some students, due to their poor language foundation, are prone to fear of difficulty and lack of confidence. They are afraid of making mistakes and losing face, so they dare not speak up and avoid classroom interaction. In addition, due to the varying language proficiency levels of students in the same classroom, the teaching activities designed by teachers in class may not be suitable for all students. Students with good foundations may feel that the required level of the activities is too low, and they may also be unwilling to participate because they find it boring. In summary, students have relatively few opportunities to apply foreign languages, which hinders the development of their language proficiency to some extent.

2.3 Outdated Teaching Content

The teaching content of most foreign language courses mainly comes from publicly published textbooks, which are used for several years. In addition, the textbooks themselves undergo a cycle from compilation to publication and distribution. Therefore, in the context of rapid technological development and rapid information iteration, the teaching content often lags behind real-world needs and is difficult to keep up with the dynamic development of global language and culture. Such teaching content is difficult to stimulate students' interest in learning and is not conducive to enabling students to acquire a large amount of practical knowledge. Teaching often focuses on imparting grammar rules and emphasizing vocabulary memorization, with insufficient attention paid to systematically cultivating students' practical language application abilities. This can easily lead to the problem of students having strong exam-oriented abilities but weak practical communication abilities. Despite the increasing availability of digital teaching resources, they have not been effectively utilized in actual teaching. On the one hand, some teachers lack the ability to select and integrate courses when faced with vast amounts of online resources; on the other hand, the outdated hardware facilities in some schools limit the use of multimedia and online teaching platforms, preventing high-quality resources from fully playing their role.

2.4 Inadequate Language Practice Opportunities

The improvement of any language ability cannot be achieved without sufficient practical training. Language learning without practical application is just empty talk on paper, unable to truly achieve the purpose of language learning. However, in current teaching, students' opportunities to engage in real language use are still relatively limited, making it difficult to elevate the learning of book knowledge to the application of comprehensive language abilities. Most classroom exercises and activities revolve around predetermined teaching content, and compared to real life, the forms and scenarios are relatively monotonous, unable to create a language communication environment close to reality. Due to the limitation of class hours and teaching progress, it is also difficult for teachers to organize classroom activities where every student has the opportunity to fully participate. Although some teachers or student organizations hold extracurricular language practice activities such as English corners and speech contests, the proportion of students participating is relatively low, and these activities often lack systematic guidance and error correction. Students cannot receive sufficient help and support even when they encounter language usage problems during participation. Some of these activities have reasonable content design, while others fail to reflect the real language practical environment, and some activities are merely a formality. The language levels of students participating in these activities vary greatly, and students can only learn limited knowledge from each other's communication. Participating in such activities cannot truly help students learn how to use foreign languages authentically, and some students may even be misled by the incorrect language of other students, forming erroneous language knowledge. It can be seen that the need for real application scenarios in language learning is difficult to meet in traditional teaching, making it even more challenging to adapt to the increasingly diversified and personalized learning needs of contemporary college students due to different growth backgrounds, learning foundations, and career planning, affecting the effective improvement of students' language application abilities, and failing to meet the cultivation requirements of the new era for compound talents with cross-cultural communication skills, innovative thinking, and global vision.

2.5 Non-comprehensive Evaluation System

The commonly used assessment method for courses is mainly based on summative exams, while the assessment of process is relatively weak. At the end of the semester, the score of one exam is used as the student's course grade, leading to many students spending a lot of time practicing and learning various answering skills in order to pass the exam or obtain good grades. As a result, students often have strong exam-taking abilities, but struggle to flexibly use foreign languages in real communication, which deviates from the essence of acquiring language proficiency. The exam questions at the end of the semester include a large number of multiple-choice questions. Even if individual students do not understand the language points being tested, they can still complete the questions by guessing. A set of test questions cannot truly and comprehensively reflect the level of students' knowledge mastery and language proficiency achieved. Although there is now increasing emphasis on process assessment, the score of process assessment accounts for a relatively small proportion of students' final grades. This also causes many students to neglect the cultivation of language abilities in the learning process and blindly pursue high scores in the final exams, resulting in high scores but low comprehensive abilities.

3 Foreign Language Teaching Reform Empowered by Digital Technology

3.1 Changing Teaching Methods

Digital technology has brought innovation to college foreign language teaching methods, and teaching activities are no longer limited to the classroom. Online teaching platforms can break the constraints of time and space, enabling teaching activities to take place anytime and anywhere. Teachers and students do not have to communicate face-to-face, and online communication can achieve real-time interaction between teachers and students. Students can also discuss and learn from each other through online communication. Teachers can utilize various learning management systems to implement a blended teaching model combining "online autonomous learning + offline classroom teaching", integrating the respective advantages of online and offline teaching to achieve the best teaching effect. Intelligent teaching tools can also provide teachers with feedback on students' learning situations, allowing teachers to understand each student's learning situation based on this feedback and provide personalized learning suggestions and guidance. These targeted suggestions and guidance are more helpful to students, who can feel that they are being noticed and will be more motivated to learn. Students are no longer passive recipients of knowledge, but have become the subjects of learning.

3.2 Promoting Autonomous Learning

The development of the society places greater emphasis on students' autonomous learning abilities. Various digital learning tools and platforms also provide more support for students' autonomous learning. When utilizing platforms for learning, students can independently arrange their learning time and progress, and choose learning methods and locations that suit them. At the same time, online learning resources are interactive and interesting, which can stimulate students' interest and initiative in learning, and cultivate their autonomous learning habits and abilities.

3.3 Enriching Teaching Resources

In the digital era, the Internet has amassed a vast collection of foreign language teaching resources, encompassing various online courses, foreign language learning software, e-books, audio and video materials, etc. These resources, with their diverse forms and rich content, provide ample room for teachers' instruction and students' autonomous learning. Teachers can select and integrate suitable teaching resources based on teaching objectives and the actual situation of students, thereby enriching teaching content; students can also choose learning materials independently according to their interests and needs, broadening their learning channels. Compared with traditional textbooks, these learning resources, which keep up with the development of the times, are also more practical. Furthermore, as a new generation growing up in the Internet age, students are more receptive to information on the Internet.

3.4 Building Application Scenarios

Virtual reality and augmented reality technologies can create virtual foreign language environments, such as simulating scenes that occur in real life, like international conferences, shopping in malls, and hotel check-ins. Students immersed in these scenarios can gain cultural experiences even without going abroad. Compared to traditional teaching methods that rely on simple props, backgrounds, or hypothetical designs, these scenarios constructed by information technology are more realistic, can bring more fun to students' learning, enable students to immerse themselves more deeply, and are more conducive to cultivating students' language application abilities.

3.5 Improving Assessment Methods

Information technology has driven the upgrading of the evaluation system, making a diversified evaluation system possible. Learning platforms can automatically record process data such as students' online learning duration, task completion status, and homework accuracy, which can more accurately reflect students' learning engagement and progress. Through these data, teachers can comprehensively grasp students' daily learning situations. By combining students' online learning situations with their classroom performance, teachers can form process scores.

4 Conclusion

The existing issues in foreign language teaching have garnered widespread attention, with numerous scholars and frontline teachers engaging in the reform of college foreign language teaching. This reform will inevitably encompass the entire teaching process, with significant adjustments being made to various aspects that fail to adequately meet students' learning needs, including teaching methods, teaching content, practical sessions, and evaluation systems. To effectively address these existing issues, it is imperative to fully utilize the resources provided by modern technology and leverage its potential. This involves transitioning from a "teacher-centered" approach to a "student-centered" one, shifting from relying solely on textbooks to incorporating a wealth of supplementary resources, moving from focusing on written exam skills to increasing practical drills, and transitioning from neglecting process-based evaluations to embracing a diversified evaluation system. Only by deeply integrating modern information technology and exploring effective implementation paths for college foreign language teaching can we achieve high-quality development in the discipline.

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