

Original Paper

Research on the Construction of Deep Learning-oriented
College English Blended Gold Course in the Context
of New Liberal Arts

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Abstract

Comprehensively promoting the construction of new liberal arts is an inevitable requirement for the education and teaching reform of liberal arts majors in colleges and universities in the new era. Different from the traditional liberal arts, the new liberal arts can better serve the national development and regional social progress. Based on the background of the new liberal arts, this paper discusses its new requirements for College English. By investigating the current situation of College English blended teaching, the paper finds the deficiencies, and mainly analyzes the necessity of applying deep learning to college English teaching based on its concept. On this basis, it proposes new initiatives for building the deep learning-oriented College English blended gold course based on the new liberal arts from five aspects, namely, teaching environment, teaching resources, teaching process, assessment system, and teacher competencies, so as to promote the connotative and innovative development of the College English course and achieve the goal of all-round education.

Keywords

New Liberal Arts, deep learning, College English, blended gold course

Introduction

In August 2018, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) proposed the concept that “higher education should strive to develop New Engineering, New Medicine, New Agriculture, and New Liberal Arts” (referred to as the “Four New”). In April 2019, 13 departments including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, and the Ministry of Science and Technology officially launched the “Six Excellence and One Top” Plan 2.0, which has

started the “Four New” construction with that of the new liberal arts included, and pointed out the direction for college talent training as well as education and teaching reform.

The concept of deep learning was first mentioned by Ference Marton and Roger Saljo in their article *On qualitative differences in learning: I-Outcome and process* (1976). Based on the way learners acquire and process information, the paper categorizes learners into deep-level processors and surface-level processors, and develops the two concepts of deep learning and surface learning. Later, Biggs and Collis (1982), Ramsden (1988), and Entwistle (1997) and other scholars also studied deep learning from different perspectives. In China, the concept of deep learning was first seen in the paper *Promoting Deep Learning in Students* (He & Li, 2005). Deep learning refers to the learning in which learners critically learn new ideas and knowledge on the basis of understanding, integrate them into the original cognitive structure to interrelate numerous ideas, transfer existing knowledge to new situations, make decisions and solve problems. Domestic scholars such as Duan Jinju and Yu Shengquan (2013), Guo Hua (2016), Hu Hang and Dong Yuqi (2017) have also conducted research on deep learning. In recent years, deep learning has attracted more and more academic attention.

In June 2018, at the National Conference on Undergraduate Education at Higher Education Institutions in the New Era held by the Ministry of Education, Minister Chen Baosheng proposed for the first time to reasonably increase difficulty, depth and selectivity of courses, so as to truly transform the “water courses” into the “gold courses” with depth, difficulty and challenge. In August of the same year, “eliminating ‘water courses’ and creating ‘gold courses’” was officially published for the first time in the Notice on Implementing the Spirit of the National Conference on Undergraduate Education at Higher Education Institutions in the New Era issued by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2018). Referring to the “high-level, innovative and challenging” standards of gold courses, this study is based on the construction of the new liberal arts, and explores the construction of blended College English course oriented to deep learning, with a view to promoting the reform of college English teaching, improving the teaching effect and talent training quality, and serving the national and regional economic and social development.

1. New Requirements by the New Liberal Arts for the Teaching of College English

In November 2020, the Ministry of Education issued the *Declaration on the Construction of New Liberal Arts*, which points out that the new mission in the new era requires that liberal arts education must accelerate innovation and development. To enhance comprehensive national strength, build greater confidence in our own culture, foster a new generation, build higher education power, and achieve the integrated development of liberal arts education all require the construction of new liberal arts. The mission of the new liberal arts construction is to build a world-class liberal arts talent training system with Chinese characteristics (Ministry of Education, 2020). As an innovative concept, the new liberal arts keeps pace with the trend of the times and breaks through the traditional liberal arts

education model. It reshapes the nurturing value of liberal arts, emphasizes the cross and integration between disciplines, and has interdisciplinary attributes. Along with the gradual development of the new liberal arts, liberal arts courses, including College English, are also undergoing an important educational transition. The new liberal arts has the following specific requirements for College English teaching:

(1) Reflect the responsibility of liberal arts education in the times and highlight the value guidance of College English course. The new liberal arts requires that through the study of College English course, students are able to develop the ability of self-analysis, reflection and critical thinking based on respect to Western history and culture. They are trained to have an international vision and are able to develop firm confidence in the socialist system and culture on the basis of the comparison of Chinese and Western cultures. They are also able to take the initiative to inherit and carry forward the traditional Chinese culture and the advanced socialist culture, and develop a deeper love for the country and its people, so as to better tell China stories in English, convey China's wisdom and solutions, and better serve the community with a shared future for mankind.

(2) Promote the integrated development of disciplines and highlight the connection between college English and other disciplines. On the basis of mastering basic English language knowledge and English language skills such as listening, expression and communication etc., students will be able to break through the traditional liberal arts mode of thinking. The cross and integration of the College English course and other courses should also be paid attention to. In this way, students can understand certain knowledge of other subjects and specialized knowledge, broaden its breadth and depth, and be able to communicate in English on certain topics of their major, thus promoting the development of students' future professional competencies.

(3) Present the innovative development of liberal arts education and highlight that College English can keep pace with science and technology. The course should focus on cultivating students' practical ability and innovation ability, promote the cultivation of students' comprehensive competency, and broaden the caliber of talent training. At the same time, the College English course should effectively integrate advanced information technology into specific teaching practices, provide students with a smart learning environment, and promote the reform and innovation of teaching methods and modes, so as to enhance the teaching effect, improve the high-quality talent training system, and cultivate top-notch innovative talents who can meet the needs of the times and contribute to national rejuvenation.

2. The Current Situation of Blended Teaching of College English

In order to grasp the current situation of blended English teaching in our university, the research group conducted a questionnaire survey on a total of 183 students in 4 ordinary college classes of Grade 2021 in our university in July 2022. Respondents of the four classes are from the majors of Educational

Technology, Chemistry, Exhibition Economics and Management, and Intellectual Property. The respondents in the first two classes are science students, and those in the other two classes are liberal arts students. The four classes are similar in class capacity, and are taught by 4 different teachers as to the College English course. The teachers have the same titles and academic qualifications. Meanwhile, they are similar in age. The findings show that online and offline blended teaching is currently carried out in all the classes, which to a certain extent benefits students' English learning in style, time as well as space, and conforms to the trend of the teaching reform of College English in our university. However, some deficiencies still exist in the present College English blended teaching, which needs to be improved urgently. The deficiencies are as follows:

(1) The moral education function of the curriculum is not fully displayed. College English teaching has not fully involved current affairs, major knowledge, excellent traditional Chinese culture and unique campus culture, which is not conducive to students' acceptance of moral educational content. Moral education in the course is often preached obviously, and cannot exert an imperceptible influence on students' emotions, attitudes and values. Students study English mostly for the purpose of passing CET-4 (College English Test-4) and CET-6 or postgraduate entrance exams. They lack the ability to consciously spread Chinese culture and tell China stories in English.

(2) Curriculum learning can not meet the development of the major. As the lessons are mainly based on the textbook, and there are many teaching units, students feel depressed about the learning content. Online learning resources are mostly centered on unit themes, and mostly remain in the consolidation of language knowledge. Teachers' self-constructed resources are insufficient, lacking the integration of language knowledge and major knowledge. There is also a serious lack of personalized information resources. Extracurricular activities related to this course are not rich enough to meet students' expectations.

(3) The effect of online and offline integration is not ideal. Students mainly watch and learn online videos and micro-lectures. They feel that the use of platforms is a burden, which cannot fully activate their interest in online learning, resulting in the boredom of autonomous learning. Classroom teaching is mainly taught by teachers. Teaching methods are relatively monotonous. Students have low participation in the course. There are not many opportunities for individual presentations and students' collaborative learning, and there is a lack of effective interaction with the teacher and other students. Students' English learning mostly remains at the surface level of grasping language points, and their understanding of texts is superficial. They are also too passive to think about the profound connotations underlying the language, and lack in-depth understanding. Besides, teachers are not able to answer students' online questions, track their learning and provide online guidance in time. Incentives for online learning are insufficient, and students are easily distracted by irrelevant online information.

(4) The course assessment is not reasonable. The assessment of knowledge is emphasized, while the assessment of practice and moral elements is not paid enough attention to. The current assessment

involves five performances including that on Xuexitong App, Unipus, Utalk, iWrite etc. Although it covers the training of the five skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation, the assessment mostly focuses on textbook knowledge, and is relatively weak as to the application of the textbook knowledge to students' major, which is not conducive to the cultivation of students' ability to solve comprehensive problems. At the same time, the course assessment also lacks the reflection of moral elements, which can not realize the value guidance to students and is not helpful to whole-process education.

3. The Necessity of Applying the Concept of Deep Learning to College English Teaching

Through more than 40 years of development, deep learning is no longer just a way of learning to understand basic knowledge and skills, but more of a meaningful learning based on understanding and pursuit of the transfer. By deeply engaging students in learning and appropriately adopting advanced learning strategies, it promotes the development of higher-order knowledge and skills, and realizes the transfer of them in new situations or the generation of higher-order of them (Peng & Zhu, 2020). According to Bloom's classification of learning objectives, deep learning highlights that learners have a higher cognitive level, such as application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of the knowledge learned. It is necessary to integrate the concept of deep learning into the whole process of College English teaching, which is embodied in the following four aspects:

(1) Deep learning is conducive to students' in-depth learning of English. When students encounter new situations, they will actively establish connections between new knowledge and old knowledge based on their previous understanding of the old one. The construction of new knowledge and complex concepts is developed through the transfer and integration of previous knowledge. Deep learning is a meaningful learning process. It can improve students' ability to solve complicated problems in real situations and promote the development of an open and comprehensive knowledge system.

(2) Deep learning is conducive to students' collaborative active learning. By giving full play to their initiative, students develop intrinsic learning motivation to carry out autonomous learning. They actively search for relevant learning resources, explore their in-depth understanding of English knowledge and social and cultural phenomena, and make individualized learning plans to shape and improve their own cognition. At the same time, students can expand their knowledge through group discussions, joint completion of group tasks and other collaborative learning methods, thus realizing the sharing and in-depth exploration of knowledge.

(3) Deep learning is conducive to the cultivation of higher-order thinking ability. Zhu Kaiqun (2017) pointed out that in the adaption to knowledge economy, lifelong learning, information society and globalization era, "problem solving, critical thinking, open vision and innovation ability" are internationally recognized as higher-order thinking skills in the 21st century. As to some English learning unit, students get rid of the superficial understanding of the text, and deeply discuss the social

topics or phenomena related to the unit theme based on the comparison of Chinese and Western cultures. By analyzing the causes of the phenomenon, students judge whether it is reasonable or insufficient, and give a scientific judgment, so as to improve independent thinking ability, help to discover new problems, new viewpoints and new rules, and adjust their value orientation and behavior.

(4) Deep learning is conducive to students' positive emotional experience. According to Wu Yongjun (2019), while deep learning, students' commitment is thorough, which involves all aspects not only limited to thinking, but emotions, will, motivation, spirit and even body. By actively participating in deep learning, they can try to obtain the sense of satisfaction and achievement in acquiring new knowledge, and develop a love of learning as well as the learning attitude of active thinking, in-depth inquiry, daring to criticize, and actively creating. This positive emotional experience not only influences their exploration of knowledge and understanding of Chinese and Western cultures, but also helps to cultivate their positive attitudes and values.

4. New Initiatives of Constructing Deep Learning-oriented College English Blended Gold Course Based on the New Liberal Arts

The construction of the new liberal arts meets the needs of talent training in the new era of China, and plays an important role in promoting the reform of College English teaching, which also means that College English teaching should serve the national development and cultivate international talents having "proficiency in one language with multilingual competence and one specialty with multiple capabilities". Based on the above analysis of the current situation of College English blended teaching and the necessity of deep learning, exploring the construction of deep learning-oriented College English blended gold course under the background of the new liberal arts requires scientific planning and precise measures. The specific new initiatives are as follows:

(1) Adhere to technology enabling, and create a smart blended teaching environment. Increase investment in smart teaching infrastructure as well as the number of smart classrooms. Fully grasp the achievements of modern science and technology, such as 5G, big data, artificial intelligence, and blockchain, and apply them to the construction of the smart teaching platform for college English. Analyze the functions of various existing college English learning applications, develop immersive learning modules, and integrate each application to give full play to the concentrated advantages. Monitor students' learning data, scientifically analyze students' cognition based on the monitoring results, and automatically push teaching resources tailored to students' cognition, so as to promote deep learning. Through the application of robot language partner, students can get answers to their learning questions. Meanwhile, personalized learning services are provided to stimulate students' learning motivation and meet their diverse needs.

(2) Promote the integration of disciplines, and enrich blended teaching resources of College English. Based on the teaching themes of College English units, find its connection with students' majors, and

build a curriculum resources database that can mobilize students' learning interest and meet their needs for deep learning. Expand the type and quantity of blended teaching resources, which are not only limited to videos and animations, but also include China University MOOC, English version of Xuexi Qiangguo (an app: Learn more to make your country stronger), CGTN, courseware, exercise base, question base and so on. At the same time, blended teaching resources also include self-built micro-lecture resources, co-constructed WeChat public platforms, students' self-made V-logs, etc. These resources aim to take different students' learning preferences into account. Besides, they are clear in logic and step-by-step, presenting the advancing characteristics, which helps students to carry out systematic autonomous learning and promote their in-depth understanding of knowledge.

(3) Strengthen moral guidance and optimize blended teaching process oriented by deep learning. Moral education is carried out throughout the whole process of College English teaching giving full play to its educational function, so that students can build up their Chinese confidence and put forward Chinese solutions on the basis of understanding Western culture. Therefore, cultural exchanges between China and the West are promoted. Task-based language teaching (TBL), production-oriented approach (POA), heuristic teaching method and other teaching methods are adopted appropriately. In terms of blended teaching under POA, the teacher releases learning tasks through online learning platforms before class. Students learn vocabulary and text content on their own to gain a preliminary understanding of the main idea. They can expand their knowledge by reading extracurricular learning materials, and present online feedback on learning difficulties through preliminary attempts on the unit output task. In class, the teacher makes reasonable use of APPs according to the teaching content, and carries out group discussions, teacher-student interactions, project-based teaching, etc., so that students can solve the key and difficult knowledge in the lexical, syntactic and textual aspects on the basis of mastering the text structure. The teacher provides scaffolding to guide students to make in-depth interpretation of the text and explore the social and cultural phenomena underlying the text. Attention is given to the interconnections among disciplines. Students consult a wide range of materials, engage in active thinking, and complete each subtask. After class, students consolidate what they have learned, improve the unit output task, and make evaluations through the online platform. Based on what they have learned in the unit, the teacher provides major-related online learning resources to further guide them to conduct individualized deep learning.

(4) Realize assessment for learning, and build a multi-dimensional and open curriculum assessment system. College English teaching in the context of new liberal arts is not only limited to classroom teaching, but also actively develops extracurricular activities related to this course, promotes the integrated development of industry, academia and research, and realizes collaborative education inside and outside the class, so the evaluation subject is also expanded from the original teachers and students to mentors, off-campus institutions, and so on. Combining online and offline assessment, it should cover both formative and summative assessment. As to the evaluation index, both students' academic

performance and their emotions, value orientation and other moral elements should also be taken into account. The purpose of the above open and multi-dimensional construction of curriculum assessment system is to enable students to identify deficiencies in the learning process through assessment and to make continuous improvement in their learning, so as to promote their overall development.

(5) Advocate the update of concepts, and strengthen the comprehensive professional competencies of teachers. In order to create College English gold classes, teachers' teaching quality is very important. In the context of the new liberal arts, college English teachers should have noble professional ethics and deep love for education. They need to take the initiative to learn and actively participate in academic conferences, so that they can constantly update teaching concepts and master modern foreign language teaching theories. They need to expand their knowledge, pay attention to its connection with other disciplines or industries, and have the comprehensive ability to teach general English and English for special purposes (ESP). College English teachers should also master certain information technology, be good at using modern teaching tools, and strengthen the ability of courseware making, micro-lecture making, resources searching, etc., so as to lay a solid foundation for blended teaching. In short, the improvement of teachers' teaching research and teaching practice ability is a strong guarantee for teachers' professional competence.

5. Conclusion

In the context of the new liberal arts, the construction of deep learning-oriented College English blended gold course should adhere to student development as the center, continuously optimize the effect of online and offline blended teaching with the help of modern information technology, and guide students to carry out deep learning, so that they can solve real-life problems with the help of the English language, and realize both language learning and practical application. On the basis of promoting their academic quality, students should be educated to keep our country in mind, possess international vision and innovative spirits, and realize all-round growth, so that more innovative and interdisciplinary talents will be cultivated for society to serve the development of new quality productive forces. Since the construction of the new liberal arts is a long-term process, the research group also needs to make continuous improvement on interdisciplinary deep learning resources and teaching quality, so as to make the course meet the standards of "high level, innovation and challenge" and ensure every lecture is a gold lesson.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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