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A Tentative Exploration on the Use of Multi-media in College English Education

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Abstract

The use of multi-media in Chinese college English education is becoming more and more popular. Compared with traditional teaching model, there are many advantages in the use of multi-media, and the paper has listed three of them. At the same time, due to the limitation of time, space and money, practical problems exist in the use of multi-media. The paper suggested some ways to solve the problem and mke a objective prediction for the future of multi-media teachinng.

Keywords: Multi-media, College English Education, Student-centered, Supervision, Evaluation

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, with the development of higher education and the rapid growth of economic and cultural globalization, the mastery of English has become an increasingly important index to evaluate the level of a college student. To some extent, the mastery of English will determine the survival and competitiveness of every single person and even the survival and the competitiveness of the whole nation .The Chinese civilians have already realized the significance of English, that is why the tests which evaluate the comprehensive language ability like CET4 or CET 6 are so popular nowadays. At the same time, the Chinese government, such as the Ministry of Education, has shown great concern for English studying by promulgating some specific standards for English mastery. All these have posed a formidable challenge for domestic English teaching and domestic English teachers. The traditional English teaching methods, such as grammar-translation method, listening and speaking method, cognitive approach, communicative approach, have been unable to meet the need for English knowledge and English ability in the Chinese society, a new

type of teaching method- multi-media teaching gradually emerged, which has become a hot spot of English teaching in recent years.

The so-called multimedia technology refers to "a integrated technology of the digital collection, obtaining, compression, decompression, editing, storage and other processing of the text, audio, video, graphics, images, animation and other media information through computer , which can be manisfested later in a separate or composite form. " As for multi-media teaching, it is the application of multimedia technology based on the computer to deliver teaching messages, organise class discussion and implement self-study in aspects of images, interaction between people and computer, the playing of courseware, etc. And so the English teaching activities will be constructed with the help of information technology.   Along with the extensive use of computers, the rapid development of network technology, this teaching method has been and will become an important and major teaching carrier and the future direction of development for college English teaching . Back in 2007, the Ministry of Education issued a "College English Curriculum Requirements" which put forward suggestions for multimedia application: "The colleges and universities should make full use of multimedia and network technology, the   new teaching model should be introduced to improve the original teaching model which centered on teachers ...... in addition, while making full use of the modern information technology, we must also take full account of and inherit the outstanding part of the existing teaching model. " Thus, multi-media teaching will also be an important subject for English learning theorists, an unavoidable phenomenon of contemporary English teaching research.

2. Advantages Of Multimedia Teaching

The main advantages of multi-media teaching are: First, it can create an active classroom atmosphere and enhance students' interest in English learning.In the traditional teaching model, teachers are the givers of knowledge, who are in an active position, while the students are recipients of knowledge, who are in a passive position.This may easily lead to "cramming" phenomenon.In addition, teachers' explanations are often limited to be knowldge of grammar points, words and phrases , while the culture and history below the surface of language are ignored. The students are immersed in note-taking, recitation of texts and a lot of grammar exercises in order to pass CET4 or CET6 as early as possible.In the class, there is a lack of interaction between teachers and students. The former talk non-stop and the latter take notes non-stop. So the class atmosphere is dead; After class, students rarely get the effective guidance and supervision of teachers, which results in "learning without thought", so it is very difficult to efficiently improve their English standard. Since they have fixed thinking way that can see the minute details but miss the major issue, the students see English language as the combination of a lot of language units, paying no attention to   its historical or cultural implication, and it is difficult to arouse their real passion for English learning. The multi-media teaching can illustrate knowledge points through texts, images, sound, animation, and it can provide a lot of interesting practices, which not only can mobilize the student's curiosity and increase their participation in the activities , but also can make the communication between teachers and students more lively and smooth. For example, while explaining the English phrase: "apple of discord", the teacher can let students watch the video clips of the movie "Troy" , and then ask them to name a few major roles (Paris, Helen, Archilles).Then questions will be raised: "What kind of people started the Trojan War?" "What are the functions of each role?" Students may answer that the Trojan prince Paris should be responsible for the war, because he abducted the Greek queen Helen, and Achilles is the greatest hero on the Greek side in the war.Then the teacher tells them the story about the wedding of Archilles' parents by means of animation. The goddess Nemesis didn't receive the wedding invitation , so she intentionally threw a golden apple to the guests, claiming that the apple belongs to "the most beautiful goddess."Then three goddesses - the queen Hera , the goddess of wisdom Athena and Venus took part in the competition.They invited the prince of Troy, handsome Paris, as the judge, and lured

him in private, hoping to influence his judgement and be the winner of the contest.Hera promised to give Paris wealth and power, Athena promised to give Paris wisdom, and Venus promised to give him the most beautiful woman in the world, who is Queen Helen. And Paris' decision (Venus won the apple)led to the ten-year Trojan war.Then the teacher should ask students the same questions, and this time their answers and thoughts would be deeper and more serious than the previous ones. They also can guess out the meaning of "apple of discord" after hearing the story, which means something that causes conflict and fighting. Sometimes, the teacher can allow students to guess the fate of these three characters (Archilles was killed by Paris), which will introduce another phrase "the heel of Archilles" , which means the weakness of heroes.The way to tell stories and ask questions through multimedia technology can stimulate discussion, force the students to use their own brains and guide the communication between teachers and students, it can also really arouse their enthusiasm for the English language, and a long-term memory of English knowledge points will be obtained.

Second, Multi-media teaching can help achieve the effect of "student-centered" teaching. The traditional teaching methods include the use of blackboard, audio, video, teacher dictation, etc., It is a one-way communication to explain knowledge points. But the multi-media teaching can simulate the real environment of language communication, providing a precious opportunity for students to practise English, such as booking hotels, ordering in restaurant, receiving guests, etc.,   Through class discussion, role play, debates, etc. Students not teachers will be the major players of class activities and improve their language ability step by step.After class, through the construction of electronic communities, blog and other fashionable communication ways, students can continue to learn English in interpersonal communication. Sometimes multi-media tool can also serve as the supporting part of the textbook, providing students with systematic and well-prepared self-study materials. For example, Zhejiang University Press published English textbook——"New College English" in 2004, and a series of internet coursewares---NCE Online were given to the students for self-study.There are not only word games for students to review words, the online community for students to have social intercourse, the reference materials for students to expand their knowledge, but also rigorous evaluation mechanism to test students for every unit and every section. In addition, many sets of exam papers can be produced randomly, so students can easily make self-assessment. In this teaching environment, students are always the main body. They can choose their own learning content, learning rate of progress and make self-correcting, self-assessment, forming their own knowledge system and learning habits. In this process, teachers mainly function as a guide and a supervisor.

Thirdly, multi-media technology is an excellent tool for language output. English teaching operated by multi-media technology can provide large amounts of information and plentiful knowledge, which can strikingly enhance teaching efficiency and effect. Compared with traditional teaching way, multimedia teaching delivers messages through images, sound and animation, which is more direct and simpler . It can stimulate students' multiple senses and deepen memory, which is extremely beneficial for language output. Since class time is limited, the knowledge that the traditional teaching methods can provide is also very limited. However, with the help of multimedia technology in the English class, teachers can output knowledge points through various ways such video clips, pictures, English songs,etc. Students can get the auditory and visual stimulation repeatedly in the class, thus turning the knowledge points into long-term memory, and their comprehensive abilities like listening, speaking, reading and writing will be enhanced at the same time. In addition, students are allowed to download teaching materials after class, which can not only get rid of the limitation of class time, but also greatly liberate the minds of students.   So they can really focus on the thinking and discussion of teaching content instead of note-taking. Therefore, compared with the traditional teaching model, multimedia teaching is highly effective and efficient.

3. Disadvantages Of Multimedia Teaching

From the theoretical point of view, multi-media teaching.is superior to traditional teaching. However, for all significant advantages, in practise its practical effect may not be satisfactory. Obviously, the application of multimedia teaching methods have the following problems:

First, a lot of English teachers are not good at the use of multi-media. As the saying goes, "One can be a master only in his own special field.", English teachers may own excellent professional quality , but may not be familiar with the use of multimedia or the making of multimedia courseware. And multimedia teaching involves the use of various electronic devices like computer, projector and microphones , teachers are required to master the use of these devices and how to switch functions among these devices. When there is a minor technical problem, they can solve it in time. But English teachers often put their energy and time on expertise accumulation, and they can get the certificate to use multi-media easily after a two-hour training. So they are likely to make mistakes or waste class time since they are not quite familiar with the devices. And it is easy for them to damage the valuable devices. In addition, although many English teachers have passed the related examinations, the coursewares they made are very rough and dull, just a brief summary of language points. There is no enlightenment or fun in the courseware. As a result, it is difficult to attract students' attention throughout the class. In the end, the teacher will lose the control of the class atmosphere and class situation.

Second, there is no effective supervision and evaluation mechanism for students' self-study.Since the space and equipments in each university are quite limited, students have to conduct self-study on their own computer after class. As youngsters, they may not have a strong self-control to resist the temptations on the network and accomplish their task according to schedule. Although some students are very diligent, they are not clear about how to make up for knowledge deficiencies or how to effectively improve their English level. Usually they fall into a habit of doing exercises again and again, eventually killing their own enthusiasm for English learning. Even though they may pass some important examinations, English will remain to be a big headache for most of them.We can say that students' self-study needs teachers' supervision, guidance and evaluatiom, but because of the management system of Chinese universities , the contacts and communications after class between teachers and students are quite limited, , thus affecting the effect of English teaching.

Third, at the technical level, multi-media teaching must be conducted on the basis of electronic devices. In the actual teaching process, there may be something wrong with these devices, but maintenance personnel do not come in time, so the multi-media coursewares cannot be demonstrated, greatly damaging the effect of English teaching. In addition, although students can use U disk or other equipment to download teaching materials, the electronic viruses in these equipments may lead to breaking down of teaching equipment and even more serious problems. In the classroom, in order to play the courseware, the windows curtains should be drawn to keep the classroom dark, which will do harm to the eyes of students and make them tired and uncomfortable. Besides, dim lights makes it difficult for teachers to supervise the activities of students.

4. Countermeasures And Conclusion

In order to solve these problem and give full play to the advantages of multi-media teaching, the following measures should be taken.

First, each university should strengthen management, increase investment and maximize the advantages of multimedia equipment. All colleges and universities should fully deploy their own teaching resources, technicians, equipments and space; they should provide electronic reading rooms, electronic audio-visual

rooms, computer rooms and other facilities for students to maximize the effect of English teaching and English learning.

Second, teachers should improve their abilities to use multi-media devices and make multi-media coursewares. All colleges and universities should establish systematic and long-term training for teachers according to their own conditions. And teachers should upgrade their knowledge reserve and skills incessantly. There should be periodical evaluation of the coursewares made by teachers, or there should be contest of coursewares based on criteria of function, knowledge and delight.

In the era of globalization, along with the emergence of a variety of educational sites, the rise of social networking sites, a lot of communication tools like microblogging or MSN', the relationship between English education and multimedia will become closer and closer, but as Professor Guonong Nan pointed out in the article "Chinese Educational Technology in the 21st Century", "It is necessary to emphasize the reserach of multi-media application, but if you think multi-media can replace teachers, that is wrong." If we see things from the perspective of pure instrumentalism, multi-media teaching will become a toy that can display sound, light and animation. It will fail to attract students to think and discuss, and it will lead to the distraction of attention and lack of interest or other issues.After all, teaching is a person-to-person communication, only when teachers can use their extensive knowledge, pesonal charm and sincere attitude to influence and touch students, can multimedia tools be made best use of.

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