

Analysis of Benefits and Drawbacks of Network Teaching Platform of College English

--- A Case Study of Shanghai University of Engineering Science

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Abstract

Online teaching, as a new type of auxiliary teaching methods, is an important part of the current higher education reform. This paper takes the network teaching platform --- “Curriculum Center” of Shanghai University of Engineering Science for example, explores its benefits and drawbacks in College English teaching and learning.

Keywords: network teaching platform; advantages; disadvantages; College English

1. Introduction

Along with the rapid development of information technology, network teaching has become a new kind of teaching methods. In recent years, many universities invest a lot of manpower and financial resources in network teaching platform construction in order to improve the quality of teaching. The so-called network teaching platform means a computer network system which can organize, track, evaluate, send, present, manage learning contents and activities and promote interaction between learners

and teachers. (Li Jiahou, 2007) It has played a secondary supporting role in teaching process and management. This paper takes the network teaching platform --- “Curriculum Center” of Shanghai University of Engineering Science for example, explores its advantages and disadvantages in College English teaching and learning.

2. Network teaching platform of College English in Shanghai University of Engineering Science

College English is a series of required courses for all undergraduate freshmen and sophomores. It consists of College English Integrated, College English Listening and Oral English. The network teaching platform construction began in 2009. In 2011 Oral English was named the university-level excellent course. In 2012 College English Integrated and College English Listening also got this honor to be excellent courses. The network teaching platform has been working for five years and is going to apply for Shanghai municipal excellent courses.

The course content on the network teaching platform is divided into static and dynamic parts. The static part

includes an introduction (course objectives, course features, faculty, teaching methods, etc.) and a lot of teaching materials (curricula, teaching programs, electronic lesson plans, multimedia courseware, etc.). The dynamic part involves the teacher-student interaction including curriculum notification, course forums, surveys, online jobs, online testing.

3. Benefits

3.1. Enriching the teaching content

Compared with the traditional classroom teaching, the network teaching platform enriches the teaching content a lot. College English is a very practical course. Through a variety of communicative activities teachers help students practice their English and improve their communication skills. Good and effective language output is inseparable from a large number of high-quality language inputs. Therefore, to provide a lot of background information on each topic, arousing the collision of ideas is very necessary. Because the class time is limited, the informative input information can be shown on the network teaching platform. Students can make good use of the information on the platform before class, learn a lot of related words and expressions, and learn from others' opinions. All of these preparations are helpful to form their own unique perspectives. They may even discuss the related topics with their friends and roommates before class. This greatly improves their enthusiasm in the classroom, and improves the learning effects.

3.2. Enhancing teacher-student interaction

In the traditional classrooms, teachers and students communicate mainly

confined to the classroom. As the school bell rings, teachers and students are hurrying to the next class, they have very few opportunities to communicate. The online learning platform builds a good interactive platform for the teachers and students. Especially in curriculum Forum, there are no time and space boundaries. In addition, shy students are free of the nervousness and embarrassment from teachers. They can go on with the class topics which they are interested in. They can speak freely to dispel misunderstanding, share experiences and enhance the feelings. Questionnaire section can provide timely and accurate first-hand information for teachers to understand students' situation, such as whether they are satisfied with the textbooks, teaching content and pace. Teachers can use these data to make timely feedback on teaching and effective adjustment.

3.3. Develop students' self-learning ability

In a traditional classroom, the teacher teaches the same content, the same reading materials, in accordance with uniform course standards with no attention to students' individual differences, especially in big size classes. So it is difficult for students to get individual needs satisfied. The network teaching platform can provide students with colorful illustrations of learning resources. These multi-level sources of information can give students more free choice. And the freedom of choice is the premise of self-learning. Students are no longer the audience, passive recipients of knowledge, but active learners, because they can choose and decide what to learn.

4. Drawbacks

4.1. Not adapting to Oral English

Since the network teaching platform --- "Course Center" is a public course platform designed for all courses, it can not fully meet the requirements of each course. For example, in homework center, testing center, and forums, both teachers and students can participate only in the form of text input, but not in audio form. Students have to type in what they want to say letter by letter. The oral homework turns into writing jobs. Testing center can not be used in Oral English at all.

4.2. lacking an effective evaluation of students' learning activities

Scientific and effective evaluation is an effective means to urge the students to learn. In homework center, teachers can only grade students' homework with very brief comments, but can not annotate details. Such evaluations are generally vague, and there is no clear guidance. In addition, the network teaching platform does not have the students' self-assessment, peer assessment and other evaluation methods. There is no process records of students' learning time, homework completion, and their performance in the Forum. So it is not conducive to the students. In homework center, there is a "Paste" button which make it very easy for students to plagiarize other people's work and the online information.

4.3. Time consuming because of the unstable system

Network teaching platform doesn't run stably all the time. It is routine work for teachers to update and modify the teaching content in the network teaching platform. But they often find the old contents can not be rewritten out. The old and new teaching content occurred overlay with a messy scene. Students in

the course forum also complain that with the homework submission deadline approaching they still can not submit their work, and ultimately miss the deadline. There is also a serious problem when the number of online students is big, the network teaching platform running speed would become very slow, and even paralyzed. The unstable system not only consumes time and effort of teachers and students, but also dampens their enthusiasm. Network teaching platform even becomes an additional burden to them.

5. Conclusion

With the deepening reform of university teaching, network teaching platform construction will be put further forward. So how to Make best use of the benefits and bypass the drawbacks is worthy of our continuous exploration and reflection.

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