

RESEARCH ARTICLE

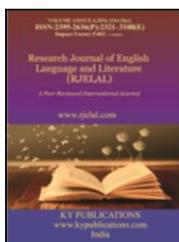


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THE RESEARCH ON THE APPLICATION OF SNS IN COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING IN THE WE MEDIA ERA

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ABSTRACT

SNS(Social Network Service) plays an increasingly important role in people's daily communication. WeChat, as a tool of SNS, is well received among college students. The author of this thesis conducted a research on how to use WeChat as an effective teaching tool to boost students' English learning interests, motivation, initiatives and autonomy, which leads to the improvements of their English language proficiency. This research got productive findings.

KEYWORDS: SNS, WeChat, College English Teaching

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With computers and Internet playing an increasingly important role in the change of teaching modes, the Internet-based teaching mode becomes the focus of research gradually. Since the 1970s, linguists and educators home and abroad have done research on English teaching modes based on Internet information resources. Nowadays, WeChat, a tool of social networking services, becomes one of the most popular communication media, especially among college students. But there is not much research on WeChat-based college English teaching mode and there is less practice in this field.

This thesis explores the correlation between WeChat-based courses and its effect on students' language learning. The quintessence of language teaching and learning is interaction. However, the interaction that occurs in WeChat-based courses is considerably different from what occurs in the traditional classroom setting. Therefore, a systematic study of the interaction in Wechat-based courses and a description of the functions, modes, means, as well as influence of

interaction upon language teaching and learning is also quite necessary. The aim of the thesis is to present a clear and overall description of the WeChat-based English teaching mode and a better understanding of the role of interaction in WeChat-based courses so as to facilitate the development of online instruction on campus.

1. Objectives

This research tries to answer the following questions:

- 1.1 Can the application of the new teaching mode result in any improvements of students' English language proficiency?
- 2.1 Are there any differences in the application of strategies used between the students who improve their English level in the integrated environment and those who learn English in the conventional classroom?
- 3.1 Are there any correlations between the strategy use and English proficiency? If yes,

what strategies influence students' English learning outcomes in the new mode?

- 4.1 What improvements can we make to perfect the new teaching mode so as to provide a better learning environment for students in their English study and at the same time promote their learning autonomy?

2. Subjects

The project "The Research on the Application of SNS in College English Teaching in the We Media Era" is implemented among the freshmen in Qingdao University of Science and Technology. The subjects of this research are non-English majors enrolled in School of Polymer Science and Engineering and majoring in Rubber Engineering in 2016, which means the subjects are nearly of the same age and their English proficiency are at similar levels. They are all native speakers of Chinese with similar educational background, and therefore make up a highly homogenous socio-linguistics group in regard to such variables as age, educational background, exposure to and proficiency in English. Thus the bias of unforeseen socio-linguistic variables that could affect their performance and vitiate the findings can be avoided. The subjects are divided into the experimental group (2 natural classes) and the control group (2 natural classes). The group means (123.465, 122.770) and standard deviations (4.876, 4.526) of the subjects' English performance in the entrance examination in college were pretty close, which means there were no considerable differences in the initial English proficiency between the experimental group and the control group.

3. Instruments

Both qualitative and quantitative data were applied in this research in order to find out the necessity, procedures and effect of teaching College English based on WeChat. The instruments used include questionnaires, interviews and tests.

3.1 Questionnaires: Questionnaire is a valuable means for research. The questionnaires in this research consist of three parts. The first part is to learn students' opinions about WeChat-based College English teaching mode. The second part focuses on students' attitudes to autonomous and collaborative learning ability. The third part is to

investigate the roles of teachers and students in WeChat-based College English teaching.

3.2 Interviews: Interviews were carried out before and after the research in order to study the research questions in a depth regarding the individual student's views about the learning effect of WeChat-based College English teaching mode.

There are three parts, six questions, in the interviews. The first part concerns about the understanding of WeChat-based College English teaching. The second part focuses on the participants' opinions about learning abilities. The third part was about the students' views and suggestions about WeChat-based College English mode.

3.3 Tests: The test before the research was held to check the comparability of the dependable variable between the experimental class and the control class. The test after the research was used to compare and contrast the outcomes of the new teaching mode and the conventional one to see if WeChat-base teaching mode has some advantages.

4. Experimental Research

This research carries out an experiment in the experimental class by the means of WeChat communication and problem-based learning mode. On the other hand, in the controll class, the teacher still uses the traditional classroom teaching mode.

The teaching experiment lasted for one semester, form September, 2016 to January, 2017, held in School of Polymer Science and Engineering, Qingdao University of Science and Technology. The specific steps of the experiments are as follows,

- 4.1** Two classes of the first-year college students are chosen for comparison, one class adopting WeChat-based teaching mode while the other traditional way of teaching.
- 4.2** Establish and design the objectives, strategies and teaching plans for WeChat-based English teaching mode.
- 4.3** From the first week to the sixteenth week, WeChat-based teaching mode was applied in experimental class while traditional teaching mode was used in controll class.
- 4.4** At the end of the semester, the effect of two different teaching modes will be compared and contrasted.

4.5 The data collected before and after the research was analyzed and evaluated as to the advantages of the two different teaching modes.

4.6 When referring to the application of WeChat - based college English teaching, three stages will be executed by the author and other two colleagues.

(1) Class preparation. The teachers assigned the homework on WeChat before the new lesson was begun. Students were asked to search some background information as well as some related materials about the topic of the new lesson on the Internet. The teacher also provided some interesting and valuable materials for the students to watch, listen and read before class.

(2) Classroom teaching. During the class, the students were required to give their own ideas and perspectives about the background information by the way of PPT or oral report. Students sometimes were divided into several groups to work together to discuss the questions or have a debate. The teacher summed up in the end and gave some complementary explanations.

(3) After class assignments. It is necessary for students to do some written and oral exercises after class in order to solidate what they have learnt in class. After class, teachers organize discussion among students on WeChat and also students hand in their assignments through WeChat. Teachers and students could have person-to-person communication on WeChat. By this way, students could sense teachers' attention to them and thus to boost their learning motivation and autonomy. This is learnt from the interviews of the students.

5 Conclusions

This thesis tries to explore the effect of applying WeChat-based teaching mode into College English teaching. The author has found that the WeChat-based College English teaching mode plays a significant role in improving students' learning habits and ability.

5.1 WeChat-based teaching mode is well received among the students: Students in the experiment have a positive attitude towards this new teaching mode. Through the analysis of the questionnaires and interviews of the students, it can be drawn that

students believe this mode arouses their interests and is helpful to learn independently. Under the guide of the new teaching mode, they can understand the passage in depth.

5.2 Students' autonomous learning ability has been improved: By the WeChat-based College English teaching mode, teachers and students themselves can offer a great deal of resources of authentic settings and it helps and encourages students to make plans for learning and make decisions independently. It also encourages students to set goals they hope to fulfill at the introduction stage, which urge them to plan their learning in order to achieve success. WeChat-based teaching mode sets up a convenient and flexible learning environment. Under the guide of this new teaching mode, students have chances to arrange their own learning styles. By this way, the students will be accustomed to learning by themselves but not as what teachers tell them.

It is quite important to note that the participants defined their own problems and addressed them, which show that they concerned and reflected on the problems they faced. This will facilitate critical thinking and improve their activity and interests in studying English. Participants either supported or challenged the ideas from other participants by dialogic discussion through WeChat, and at the same time they were motivated beyond the extrinsic motivation of course requirements. It seems that they have shared ownership of and genuine interest in their online studies.

5.3 Students' cooperation awareness has been enhanced: In the experiment, the cooperative learning strategies are adopted so that students can cooperate and communicate with each other. Team work is highly valued, from which their views are enlarged and their ability of using English is comprehensively enhanced.

5.4 Teachers' role has been changed: Teachers no longer dominate the class, but their roles cannot be neglected. In order to achieve the ideal learning effect, teachers must design a good framework under which students can arrange their own leaning. Besides, teachers' guidance and feedback is indispensable for students can know how to learn, what to learn and whether their learning is right or

not. Teachers' encouragement is also of great importance to students' learning process.

To summarize what has been mentioned above, the online learning forum established on WeChat can support the development of a learning community within the online environment to some extent and the students learning motivation, initiatives and autonomy is greatly boosted.

6 Implications

The findings of this research are not only significant for assessing a new English teaching mode, but also give some implications for the English teachers to adopt the Social Network Services to facilitate teaching and learning.

6.1 Integrate Social Network Services into English teaching and learning:

SNS has evolved into a indispensable assistant means for learning, on which students and teachers can communicate instantly, share passages, pictures, audios, and videos and organize discussions effectively. Even tests can be conducted on it. So we should attach great importance to the SNS and make full use of it in College English teaching.

6.2 Emphasize teachers' effect: Although teachers' role has been changed, it cannot be neglected anyway. A good design for the WeChat-based teaching is the key to achieve the ideal effect. The perceived aid from teachers greatly influences students' comfort and confidence in online learning. The teacher's role in the learning community consists of "encouraging critical reflection on workplace practices and group identity" (Gray, 2004:25). To be qualified in all the required roles, an online teacher has to possess certain kinds of skills and characters. Thomas made a "4P" checklist according to which a good online teacher should be: "positive", "proactive", "patient" and "persistent" (Shepherd, 2002:5).

6.3 Plan activities and set goals for WeChat-based teaching :

Since WeChat-based study for students is new and challenging, clear guidelines must be provided and the activities must be elaborately designed to make students more comfortable with the process and with sharing their ideas in SNS learning environment. Setting objectives can help students plan their own study and encourage them to get more involved in their study.

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