

Explore the English Online Course Construction in Open Universities

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Keywords: College English online course, Course construction, Open universities

Abstract: This paper analyzes the current problems of English learning and English online course construction in open universities on the basis of online education theories. Combining with the characteristics of the English teaching in open universities, the author put forward the approaches to realize the goal of online course construction and explored collaborative innovation mode of “Internet + resource” to optimize the English online course resources and improve the students' English learning autonomy.

1. Introduction

The Outline of the National Medium and Long Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) clearly states that the process of informationization in education should be accelerated, which reflects the importance of educational informatization. According to the national education reform and development plan, the Ministry of Education proposes to make full use of information technology in education and teaching, to meet the learning requirements of different learners, and to build a number of high-quality online courses. Open Universities, as the most important distance educational institutions in China, after 40 years of development have accumulated rich experience in resource construction, subject development, faculty reserve, personnel training, social services and so on. Combined with the rapid development of network technology and mobile terminal equipment, open universities have a better prospect in the new era. English course is a basic required course in open universities, but most open university students have a weak foundation of English and not much interest in English learning. How to establish an English online course suitable for open university students with the help of online teaching platform has become an important task for English teachers in open universities.

2. Problems in Current Online Course

By sorting out the social requirements on English competence and the current status of open university English course, some problems are revealed as followed:

English online learning platform is rich in resources like video, audio, micro-classes, animation etc., which requires the high quality of network facilities. However, the current network access cannot fully meet the learning needs, and network outages and slow downloading will likely arise when the students' simultaneous visits generate a huge amount of traffic, which literally affect the online learning experience.

Employers generally believe that English listening and speaking are more practical at work, while open university students' oral ability is relatively weak and online education inborn is short of listening and speaking training. Students are in real need to strengthen the training to satisfy the professional demand.

English online platform resources are far from perfection, lacking of individuality and innovation. The construction of resources mainly is mainly decided by teachers of open university who, in general, are relatively old with low degrees and incapable of providing cutting edge resources in varied forms. Many English online course resources are just the simple digitization of book knowledge, which are not refined enough, and neglect the students' learning interest and emotional experience. Such courses fail to reflect the nature and characteristics of English subjects, and

therefore lose the appeal of students.

Evaluation and feedback is an important part of teaching, but the open university English online course generally lacks a sound evaluation and feedback system, with no specific assessment indicators and online learning track record. The actual needs of students were not fully taken into account during the course construction so that it's hard to take advantage of online courses.

3. Goals of Online Course Construction

The goal of Open University English online course construction is to meet the students' needs of independent learning and change the current spoon-feeding teaching mode. Teachers design learning resources dynamically according to the students' learning characteristics. Students are free to choose what is suitable for them based on their respective learning ability, or they can be assigned tasks by teachers. All the students of different levels can find their places. At the same time, resource construction should take the characteristics of language learning into consideration. The ultimate goal of language teaching is to communicate, rather than have some knowledge of grammar and scattered words. Therefore, in the course of teaching design, grammar and vocabulary are incorporated into the relevant scenarios, through which students imperceptibly complete learning tasks. Besides, undergraduate students at open universities have to take a national English test for bachelor degree, so the design of English online courses should balance well between "test-taking" and "application". Test-taking should be added in the course construction as well by setting up some test modules for students to get prepared. Therefore, a qualified English online course should realize the following goals: practicality, interest, applicability, and test-orientated.

4. Fulfillment of Goals of English Online Courses

4.1 Practicality

Different from classroom teaching, online teaching lacks face-to-face guidance, all the teaching process is achieved through human-machine dialogue between students and teaching platform. Open University students have varying levels of English, most of them with a poor foundation, which requires that the teaching design of English online courses should be practical. First of all, the online platform should establish simple and user-friendly learning navigation, determine the main functional modules according to the open university students cognitive behavior teaching flow chart, make good connections, and finally judge their cognitive basis and learning habits according to the students learning data analysis to create a individualized virtual learning environment. In each module, the course guide is set up to provide an overview of the learning content, analysis of key points and difficulties, and the method of online learning.

Some learning material is too long for the open university students to digest at a time, so one text can be divided into several independent modules, each module lasting about 20 minutes. Each module has three parts: pre-class preview, text learning, and after-class review. Through pre-class preview students have a preliminary understanding of the background of the text, take notes for the important words and phrases and integrate them into the example sentences. The course assessment analyses the students' level, and make their learning more purposeful. Then heuristically introduce learning content, explain the text and key words and phrases intensively. In the after-class review, summary, exercise and test module are designed to reflect and conduct targeted and in-depth training.

4.2 Interest

Learning interest is the motivation of learning. only by stimulating students' interest in learning, can they autonomously take the initiative to understand, absorb and apply what they have learned. Incorporate the interesting resources into online courses and activity design step by step, present the learning content in the forms of images, animations, music, text and so on with multimedia technology to make it available for everyday learning. Good design inspires interest, and interest push the mission done. As the teaching tasks are mainly completed online, English listening and

speaking ability more difficult to improve compared with face-to-face teaching. To solve the problem, the course designers pick appropriate materials relevant to the texts from a large amount of pictures, and the technical staff help to make animations. Finally a number of micro-classes are created which improve the visual performance and enrich the audio-visual learning. Meanwhile, there's entertainment module for each unit in which English movies, TV series, pop songs and news are embedded to catch the eyes of learners.

4.3 Applicability

The English online course resources should realize the logic of “what is learned is what is practiced, what is practiced is what is tested, what is tested is what is applied”, but most of the current English teaching has not handled such a relationship well, resulting in the disability of English application even after years of learning. Therefore, the logical relationship between learning, practice, test and application should be identified in the course construction. The ultimate goal of English learning is to apply. The course designers should take full advantage of online platform and network technology to improve the teaching efficiency. Design the text and exercises in a more practical way, which enables the learners to get very authentic English expression within minutes. For example, in traditional teaching, it takes a teacher 20-30 minutes to revise a composition, while the online automatic revision only takes a few seconds. The greatly improved efficiency make the multiple writing training available in stead of once-a-week. At the same time, data analysis on students' exercises and testing results helps to identify the petrochemical errors that the resource optimization could be targeted at.

4.4 Test-Orientated

Since undergraduate students of open universities are confronted with the National English Test for Adult Education and the English Test for Bachelor Degree, the corresponding content related to the tests should be added in course construction. Based on the test papers over the years, the online platform should be equipped with a test simulation system. When each test is completed, the system will give the students timely feedback on the incorrect answers and explanations. For those students cannot understand, they can also communicate with teachers through the platform forum, and teachers are able to give one-to-one tutoring as well, which effectively enhance students' test-taking ability.

5. Conclusion

With the rapid development of Internet technology and social economy, online courses have become one of the most popular teaching methods, and open universities, which are at the forefront of online education, must keep pace with times. Therefore, the open university English teachers should be actively learning new modes of the online platform to improve their professional quality and teaching ability. The students' receptivity is taken into account as far as possible to maximum meet the personalized requirements. The course resources need to be optimized regularly in order to create a platform suitable for students' development and a helpful English teaching-learning atmosphere.

In this paper, the author proceeds from her own teaching practice and experience. Online courses definitely need to be further developed in the future and to create more profitable mode for both teachers and learners. There will certainly be many problems in this process, which requires the course builders and developers to inspect learning outcome in practice, and constantly improve and adjust it to fulfill the mission of open universities in this network era.

Acknowledgement

In this paper, the research was sponsored by the High-end Training Project for Teachers in Higher Vocational Colleges in Jiangsu Province (Project No. 2019GRGDYX033); Philosophy and Social Science Fund of Education Department of Jiangsu Province (No. 2018SJA0552); Philosophy

and Social Science Fund of Education Department of Jiangsu Province (No. 2018SJA0563).

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