
Research on Influencing Factors Analysis and Optimization Strategies of College English Teaching Reform

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Abstract: In the context of deepening globalization and digital integration, college English education serves as an essential component of higher education systems, bearing the critical responsibility of cultivating students' language application skills, intercultural communication competence, and global perspectives. In recent years, China's higher education sector has steadily advanced teaching reforms, with college English education reforms continuously evolving to deeper levels. However, significant challenges remain during implementation, preventing the full realization of initial reform objectives. This paper comprehensively analyzes core factors influencing teaching reforms based on current practices in college English education. Drawing from accumulated teaching experience, targeted optimization strategies are proposed to enhance reform effectiveness and facilitate the transition from knowledge transmission to competency development. These insights aim to provide practical references for universities in cultivating interdisciplinary talents with solid language proficiency, strong digital literacy, and enhanced international competitiveness.

Keywords: College English; Teaching reform; Influencing factors; Optimization strategies

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1. Introduction

With the continuous improvement of the internationalization of higher education in China and the ongoing advancement of the digital education strategy, society has raised higher requirements for the comprehensive English proficiency of talents cultivated by universities. As a compulsory public general education course offered to all university students, College English is not only an important way for students to improve their language skills and broaden their international horizons, but also a key link in cultivating students' cross-cultural communication abilities and international competitiveness. The Ministry of Education has always placed educational informatization and the cultivation of applied talents in an important strategic position, explicitly proposing to promote the reform of College English courses, enabling students to not only skillfully use English for effective communication in daily life and the workplace, but also to tell China's stories and spread the excellent culture of China through English. A thorough analysis of various influencing factors in the reform process of College English teaching, identifying the difficulties and pain points in the reform, and proposing scientific and reasonable

optimization strategies are of great theoretical significance and practical value for promoting the deeper development of College English teaching reform and improving teaching quality.

2. Analysis of the influencing factors of college english teaching reform

The reform of college English teaching is a systematic project involving many aspects. Its reform process and final effect are affected by many factors, which are interrelated and mutually restricted, and determine the direction and quality of the reform.

2.1. Policy-oriented factors

Policy guidance plays a pivotal role in steering the reform of college English education. Policies issued by the state and education authorities directly determine the overall direction and core objectives of teaching reforms. Documents such as the “College English Teaching Guidelines” and “Opinions on Deepening the Reform of School Foreign Language Education in the New Era” released by the Ministry of Education clarify the guiding principles, training objectives, and specific implementation requirements for college English teaching reform. These documents provide fundamental guidance and a basis for universities to carry out teaching reform initiatives.

The policy frameworks established by local education authorities and universities themselves directly influence the effectiveness of reform implementation. Some institutions strictly adhere to national policy requirements, aligning their institutional positioning and disciplinary strengths to develop concrete reform plans with clear timelines and actionable objectives, thereby providing robust policy support for progress. However, other universities adopt policies lacking specificity and practicality, merely replicating national guidelines without adapting them to their students’ characteristics or teaching realities, resulting in ambiguous reform directions and insufficient momentum during implementation. Additionally, enforcement mechanisms play a critical role in outcomes. While some universities have formulated comprehensive reform policies, the absence of effective monitoring and evaluation systems often leads to superficial implementation that fails to deliver tangible results.

2.2. Faculty team factors

The faculty team serves as the core driving force behind university English teaching reform. Teachers’ instructional capabilities, professional expertise, and reform-oriented mindset directly impact the implementation quality and ultimate outcomes of educational reforms. Currently, China’s university English teaching workforce demonstrates a favorable trend characterized by sufficient numbers and continuously optimized structure. However, there remain notable shortcomings in adapting to the demands of teaching reforms.

Firstly, some teachers maintain traditional teaching philosophies, still adhering to the conventional “teacher-centered lecture and passive student reception” model. They lack proactive awareness of adopting innovative teaching concepts and demonstrate low enthusiasm for participating in educational reforms, making it difficult to meet the demands for teaching model innovation. Secondly, there exists a noticeable gap in professional competence among teachers. Many educators require improvement in English language proficiency and intercultural communication skills, which fails to adequately address the need to cultivate students’ cross-cultural communication abilities. Additionally, a significant portion of teachers lack digital teaching competencies. Although digital teaching tools have been gradually integrated into classroom instruction, most teachers remain limited to superficial applications such as PowerPoint presentations and audio material playback, failing to fully leverage digital technologies’ potential in education. This inadequacy hinders their ability to meet the requirements of teaching reforms in the digital era. Lastly, the teacher training system remains underdeveloped. Many universities lack specialized training programs for college English instructors, particularly in reform-related areas like digital teaching and intercultural education. Insufficient training resources result in teachers struggling to acquire essential teaching methods and skills, thereby constraining the progress of educational reforms to some extent.

2.3. Factors of teaching model

Teaching models constitute the core of university English education reform. The limitations inherent in traditional pedagogical approaches remain critical constraints on educational innovation. Currently, most institutions still adhere to teacher-dominated classroom instruction, which exhibits an imbalance between foundational skill development and professional application. This one-way knowledge transmission not only diminishes the social dimension inherent in language learning but also hinders the cultivation of students' critical thinking and innovative capabilities. Furthermore, the prevalence of large-class teaching in higher education confines teacher-student interactions to superficial question-and-answer exchanges. This model prevents differentiated instruction tailored to individual student needs, while classroom activities rarely incorporate language-intensive scenarios like teamwork or project-based learning. Consequently, students demonstrate low learning initiative and engagement, making it challenging to effectively enhance comprehensive English proficiency. Although some universities have experimented with blended learning models, most remain in their early stages. Online and offline teaching remain poorly integrated, with digital resources merely supplementing offline content rather than creating synergistic educational outcomes. This fragmented approach fails to fully leverage the advantages of blended learning and cannot meet the demands of educational reform.

2.4. Individual student factors

Students are the core participants in college English education, where their foundational knowledge, learning motivation, and study habits directly influence the effectiveness of teaching reforms. Currently, there are significant disparities in English proficiency among university students. Some students possess strong language foundations, demonstrate keen interest and clear learning objectives, actively engage in teaching reform initiatives, and proactively enhance their English skills. Conversely, others exhibit weak language skills with deficiencies in listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities, coupled with low confidence and interest in English learning. Their lack of initiative and even resistance to changes make it challenging for them to adapt to the reformed teaching models and academic requirements.

Moreover, students' learning motivations exhibit a pronounced utilitarian tendency. Most students study English solely to pass the College English Test Band 4 and Band 6 examinations and obtain graduation qualifications, rather than to enhance their language proficiency or intercultural communication skills. This utilitarian approach diminishes students' initiative in learning, discouraging active participation in classroom interactions and practical activities, thereby undermining the effectiveness of educational reforms. Additionally, some students lack effective study habits and autonomous learning capabilities, becoming overly reliant on teachers' explanations and supervision. This adaptation challenge to post-reform requirements for self-directed learning leads to suboptimal academic outcomes, further hindering the progress of pedagogical innovation.

2.5. Teaching resource factors

Teaching resources serve as a crucial foundation for university English teaching reform. Adequate and high-quality teaching resources can provide robust support for advancing reform initiatives. Currently, although China's university English teaching resources exhibit a trend toward diversification, numerous challenges remain that hinder the smooth progress of teaching reforms.

Firstly, the textbook system exhibits significant shortcomings. The content update speed of existing textbooks lags behind disciplinary advancements and societal demands, while outdated professional terminology and academic expressions in some materials create a disconnect between teaching content and real-world academic or professional contexts, failing to meet students' practical skill development needs. Additionally, textbooks lack targeted content design, making it difficult to accommodate diverse academic backgrounds and foundational knowledge levels, resulting in low utilization rates. Secondly, digital teaching resources suffer from fragmentation issues. Although English learning apps and online corpora have expanded self-directed learning opportunities, the absence of effective resource screening mechanisms and systematic integration strategies often leads students to experience information overload and fragmented learning

experiences, hindering the formation of coherent knowledge systems. Furthermore, uneven resource allocation persists among universities, particularly in economically underdeveloped regions and local institutions with outdated teaching facilities and scarce digital resources, which fails to meet the demands of educational reforms. Meanwhile, inadequate inter-university resource sharing mechanisms prevent efficient dissemination of high-quality teaching materials, constraining overall teaching quality improvement and impeding comprehensive educational innovation progress.

3. Optimization strategies for college English teaching reform

In response to the various factors impacting university English teaching reform, and considering the current digitalization trends in higher education alongside practical teaching conditions, this study proposes targeted optimization strategies across five dimensions: policy support, faculty development, innovative teaching models, student guidance, and resource optimization. These measures aim to enhance the quality and efficiency of English education reform, ultimately achieving comprehensive improvements in teaching standards.

3.1. Strengthening policy guidance and improving reform support mechanisms

National and educational authorities should further refine policies for college English teaching reform. By aligning with the characteristics of education development in the digital era and societal demands for talent, they must clarify core objectives and key tasks to provide universities with concrete, actionable guidance for implementing teaching reforms. Local education departments should develop targeted policies based on regional university realities, strengthen supervision and guidance for teaching reforms, and ensure effective implementation of all reform measures.

Higher education institutions should develop tailored teaching reform plans aligned with their institutional positioning and disciplinary strengths, specifying reform objectives, implementation steps, and evaluation criteria. These plans must allocate reform tasks to all teaching phases and relevant departments to ensure systematic progress. Institutions should also establish robust monitoring and assessment mechanisms, conducting regular reviews to identify and resolve issues promptly, thereby achieving reform goals. Furthermore, universities should increase funding for English language teaching reforms, prioritizing investments in teaching equipment upgrades, resource development, and faculty training to lay a solid foundation for successful implementation.

3.2. Strengthening faculty development and enhancing teachers' comprehensive competencies

Faculty development serves as the cornerstone for advancing English language teaching reforms in higher education institutions. Universities should implement multifaceted strategies to holistically enhance educators' professional competencies and instructional capabilities. Priorities include strengthening pedagogical philosophy training through regular participation in specialized workshops on teaching innovation and academic exchanges. These initiatives aim to motivate faculty members to embrace contemporary teaching methodologies, transition from conventional instructional approaches, and actively engage in educational reforms. The ultimate goal is to establish student-centered learning models that prioritize competency development as the core focus of teaching practices.

Secondly, we should enhance the teacher professional development system by prioritizing training in English language proficiency, intercultural communication skills, and digital teaching competencies. Regular teaching seminars and peer observation activities should be organized to foster collaboration among educators, thereby continuously improving their instructional capabilities and professional expertise. Universities can partner with enterprises and research institutions to conduct specialized digital teaching training programs, equipping teachers with proficiency in AI tools and online teaching platforms. This initiative will facilitate the transition of educators from mere "technology users" to "learning designers." Additionally, universities should establish robust incentive mechanisms to recognize and reward teachers who actively participate in pedagogical reforms and demonstrate outstanding teaching outcomes. Such measures will ignite educators' passion for teaching innovation and encourage their proactive involvement in educational transformation.

3.3. Innovate teaching models to promote deep integration of online and offline learning

Innovating teaching methodologies stands as the cornerstone of university English education reform. Higher education institutions should transcend traditional pedagogical constraints to establish student-centered, competency-driven instructional frameworks. A primary strategy involves vigorously promoting blended learning models that integrate digital resources to create a seamless online-offline education ecosystem. Online instruction should emphasize knowledge delivery, self-directed learning guidance, and resource distribution, while offline sessions prioritize interactive engagement, practical training, and personalized mentoring. This integrated approach enables synergistic educational outcomes by leveraging the complementary strengths of both digital and physical learning environments.

Higher education institutions can adopt the “5S” teaching model based on POA theory (Situational Creation—Scaffolding—Collaborative Building—Motivation—Summary). By creating authentic language scenarios, this approach provides learning scaffolds, guides collaborative learning, stimulates students’ interest and initiative, and continuously enhances their language application skills. Meanwhile, universities should gradually phase out large-class teaching systems and implement small-group instruction to increase teacher-student interaction. Teachers can offer differentiated guidance tailored to individual differences, design personalized teaching tasks, and meet the learning needs of students with varying foundations and requirements. Additionally, institutions should strengthen practical teaching components by introducing virtual simulation scenarios, group discussions, situational simulations, and academic exchanges. These activities enable students to improve their comprehensive English application abilities and intercultural communication skills through practice, truly achieving the integration of language learning and practical application.

3.4. Strengthening student guidance to stimulate learning motivation

Students are the driving force behind educational reform. Higher education institutions should enhance student guidance to continuously stimulate learning motivation and cultivate self-directed learning capabilities. First, it is essential to strengthen English learning philosophy education, guiding students to establish proper learning attitudes, abandon utilitarian learning motives, fully recognize the importance of English acquisition, clarify personal learning objectives, and enhance proactive engagement and self-discipline in learning.

Secondly, to address the significant disparities in students’ English proficiency, universities should implement differentiated instruction. By grouping students into classes based on their language proficiency levels, institutions can design tailored curricula and objectives to meet diverse learning needs. This approach helps students with weaker foundations build confidence and progressively improve their English skills. Concurrently, universities should emphasize cultivating self-directed learning capabilities, guiding students to adopt scientific study methods and create personalized learning plans. This fosters students’ autonomous learning awareness and abilities, enabling them to actively participate in the learning process. Additionally, universities should enrich English learning activities through initiatives like speech competitions, English corners, and English culture festivals. These efforts create a positive learning environment that stimulates students’ interest and motivation, allowing them to enhance their English proficiency in a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere.

3.5. Optimize teaching resources and establish a high-quality sharing system

High-quality teaching resources serve as a crucial foundation for advancing English language education reform in universities. Higher education institutions should prioritize resource development to establish a comprehensive, efficient, and collaborative teaching resource system. First, optimize textbook systems by creating targeted, practical, and contemporary materials that align with societal needs and student characteristics. Regularly update content to incorporate specialized English and intercultural communication elements, catering to diverse academic backgrounds and learning levels. Additionally, encourage faculty to develop institution-specific textbooks and teaching materials tailored to classroom realities, thereby enhancing resource utilization and applicability to better support pedagogical innovation.

Secondly, integrating digital teaching resources by establishing a systematic digital resource repository involves

screening and organizing various online educational materials to enable categorized management and efficient distribution. This approach helps students overcome fragmented learning challenges and build a structured knowledge framework. Concurrently, universities should strengthen inter-institutional collaboration in teaching resource sharing through regional platforms that facilitate the exchange of high-quality educational resources, thereby enhancing overall teaching quality and ensuring broader student access to premium learning materials. Additionally, higher education institutions must increase investment in teaching equipment, implement timely upgrades, and optimize digital learning environments to provide robust support for digital education initiatives, ultimately driving continuous optimization and enhancement of teaching resources.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the reform of college English education constitutes a systematic and long-term endeavor. Its progress and outcomes are influenced by multiple factors including policy guidance, faculty quality, teaching methodologies, student characteristics, educational resources, and evaluation systems. Only through comprehensive consideration of these elements and coordinated implementation of reform measures can we break free from traditional teaching constraints, achieve a transformation from knowledge transmission to competency development in college English education, continuously enhance teaching quality, and cultivate interdisciplinary talents with linguistic proficiency, digital literacy, and global perspectives. This will provide robust support for advancing China's higher education internationalization and cultural power development.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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