
Research on the Pathways for Enhancing College Students' Autonomous Learning Skills in English Through New Media

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Abstract: New media's technical features offer a brand-new platform to reform College English Teaching, while students' independent study ability is a central factor to develop basic English skills. In terms of new media empowerment, this study explores the intrinsic relationship between new media technology and independent learning of College English teaching, points out some problems with resources construction at present, the separation of teaching methods from the results of education, and the inadequacy of assessment systems. To solve these problems by means of three aspects: construction of resource system, teaching methods, new teaching modes and improved assessment system, this research puts forward the idea of using science to promote the ability of independent learning in College English Teaching, which can provide some ideas or suggestions for promoting students' autonomous learning consciousness as well as improving the teaching level.

Keywords: New media; College English; Self-directed learning ability; Development pathways

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1. Introduction

Self-learning capability plays an important role in enhancing the all-around abilities of college learners, which should be one of the major goals in achieving learner-centered mode for university English teaching. In traditional way of teaching, most classes are taught inside the classrooms, inability to truly promote the autonomy of student's self-learning ability and lack of systematic training for it; thus, failing to satisfy the individualized demands of learning. By capitalizing on such strengths as vast resources, instant communication, flexible contexts, effective communication, and novel media can help break the barriers of time and space between teachers and students to realize self-learning. Based on practical university English classes, this paper explores how important and problematic are the use of new media for developing autonomous study abilities, systematically reviews evidence-based teaching practices, and suggests moving away from the traditional teacher-centered transmission of knowledge toward student-centered exploratory learning which facilitates students' lifelong mastery of English language proficiency.

2. The internal logic of new media empowering autonomous college English learning

2.1. The technical characteristics of new media align well with the needs of self-directed learning

Three major technical features of new media, interactivity, fragmentation and diversity are well-matched to a personalized, university English's self-demanding and perpetual demand self-directed learning. Self-directed learning entails that learners formulate customized strategies according to their English level and specific goals, while the abundant resources and smart recommendation functions of new media allow for accurate alignment with personal learning demands, thereby overcoming the constraints of conventional "one-size-fits-all" classroom teaching. Moreover, the time interactivity of new media can help the students obtain instant response, and eliminate their confusion in autonomous learning, overcoming limitations of individual learners. The key to university English self-directed learning lies in empowering students with academic autonomy, a goal effectively supported by the technological capabilities of new media. With respect to learning resources a number of new online programs and apps provide comprehensive training in listening, speaking, reading, and authoring that can address the diverse needs of self-directed learners. For learning approaches, new media supports integrated online and face-to-face study, releasing students from the limitations of classroom schedules and locations, thereby enabling genuine independent specificity of design, adaptability. It is this relationship between technology and audience that underpins much of what we see as the contribution of new media to self-directed learning.

2.2. The expansion and extension of new media in English self-learning scenarios

The traditional way of independent study in college English is to do homework after class, memorize words by heart and so on. with restricted opportunities for learning and in formats that are not engaging for students. New media technologies, by contrast, dissolve boundaries between classroom time and out-of-classroom time integrating the independent learning of traditional paper-based books, face-to-face classes into cyberspace and smart phones so that learners can listen anytime and anywhere during their spare time (e.g., commuting period) and/or free time (i.e., during a break). reading, listening to short videos/audio, or watching online lectures as a way of integrating independent study in their everyday life; and new media provides context-rich scenarios and situations to create a diversity of teaching and learning settings, including real-time access to global cultural experiences, English corner communities, or simulated conversations let the student learn in real-life conversation exchanges, overcoming the tedium in conventional methods. The extension of learning space makes university English autonomous learning not only be a process to acquire knowledge, more attention to cultivating language usage ability, the essence of university English teaching.

2.3. The activation and enhancement of English self-learning motivation by new media

Lack of intrinsic motivation is one of the main barriers for college students' autonomous English study. The interesting, interactive, and intrinsic attributes in new media can motivate and enhance students' autonomous motivation. New media provide the learning contents on different mediums, i.e., texts, images, sounds, videos, and animations, new media is better at holding student's attention than text-based material, reducing the boredom in autonomous study, moving students from passive consumers to active producers; besides positive feedback of the learners through reward mechanism such as check in system, points system and ranking on new media platform, promoting student's feeling of accomplishment, and the social aspect of such systems also encourages self-directed learning: learners may organize a group for studying in a community, participate in web-based check-ins, peer mentoring, and peer discussion groups to provide an enriching educational experience without the sense of isolation or laziness that may accompany self-study; and instantaneous evaluation of learning process and results enables learners to have an intuitive perception of the learning state and enhance self-motivation, thus forming "study → feedback → progress" positive spiral loop.

3. Practical issues in cultivating autonomous English learning in universities from the perspective of new media

3.1. New media learning resources are overly complex and lack systematic integration

The existing situation of online university English new media learning resources in the Internet is huge and diversified but not integrated systematically. Having the features of “dispersion” and “concentration”. The resources in different websites or APPs are dispersed, which range from elementary vocabulary, grammar resources to more complex IELTS, TOEFL training resources but they have no hierarchy connection, not forming an organic learning system that progresses gradually and in stages from simple to complex^[1]. It is thus hard for learners to easily find the corresponding resource according to its level of mastery when they learn independently, increasing trial-and-error cost; and the quality of some new media English learning resources vary greatly: some are out-of-date: unwillingness to give explanations which are not professional and/or grammar mistakes below a level necessary to make students learn on their own. In addition, universities do not have a new media resource library that is specially set up and targeted to the students’ English learning, and students mostly depend on commercial websites, which are focused on making money from ads and paywalls in ways that disrupt their own directed learning process and reduce their efficiency.

3.2. The disconnection between new media teaching applications and self-directed learning development

Although new media technologies have been widely adopted in college English teaching, most instructors merely utilize them as auxiliary tools for basic classroom activities such as courseware presentations and resource distribution. There remains a failure to deeply integrate new media with the cultivation of students’ self-directed learning capabilities, resulting in an imbalance between “emphasizing application” over empowering students. Teachers provide no structured direction for students’ self-directed learning with new media, neglect to formulate personalized study plans aligned with each learner’s needs, and do not impart practical strategies for using new media as a learning tool. Consequently, students often engage in blind imitation during self-directed learning without developing scientific study methods. This disconnects between new media application and self-directed learning also reflects the separation between online and offline instruction. Classroom teaching remains teacher-orientation, poor coordination between off-campus instructional materials and on-campus independent study materials so that the student’s web-based instruction is a “bolt-on” instead of a natural extension of the overall learning process. In addition, the teachers offer insufficient guidance in students’ new media learning processes, leaving students without timely professional help when they need it most if the program is not successful in retaining them. Facing challenges. Eventually, this will result in a low effectiveness for self-regulated learning as well as the lack of successful development of skills.

3.3. Lack of supervision and evaluation mechanisms for the self-directed learning process

New media-assisted university English self-learning has high autonomy and a scattered nature, but current colleges and universities lack systematic tracking and assessment of students’ independent study activities, which makes it hard to track students’ learning process and status. The majority of colleges or universities only take into consideration the score in the final exams when evaluating learners’ achievements in English learning, lack of feedback on the students’ independent work. Important elements like students’ active participation, scientific learning methods, and the quantification of learning efficiency is not effectively evaluated and monitored, leading to problems such as “check-in-based learning” and “superficial learning” of some students. The existing evaluation system has the following defects: too few dimensions, only considering the dimension of knowledge but not including students’ learning attitude, learning method and cooperative learning ability into evaluation criteria, which are unable to fully represent their independent learning skills; Besides, the lack of a feedback system makes it hard for teachers to monitor student’s performance and find out their problems instantly, which prevents focused monitoring and assistance^[2]. The result is that self-learning can easily fall into the trap of anarchy,

making competency development goals elusive.

4. Implementation principles for empowering university English self-learning through new media

4.1. The principle of targeted integration: Combining resource adaptation with personalized learning with the key to guaranteeing that new media learning resources exactly meet student's individual needs. In terms of integration and development of new media learning resources, universities need to take into consideration the general level of English language ability among its learners, academic discipline features and educational goals setting up a hierarchy, major oriented systematic resources system. It can make the student of different background, major get suitable study resources; avoiding homogenization and indiscriminate resource distribution, the principle of personalization also calls for leading students to make personalized new media self-learning plan according to their own needs, teachers need to use classroom assessment or survey to know every student's English basis, learning gaps, and goals, and help them choose the proper materials and develop their study plan based on new media tools. Materials and teaching plans should be flexibly adjusted according to the development of students, so as to ensure new media material is indeed suitable for personalized learning needs, achieving "teaching according to the capacity of individuals", thereby enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of self-directed learning.

4.2. The principle of synergy between technology empowerment and capability development integration

The general guideline should be that empowering technology and developing competence go hand in hand, which can make full use of new media resources to improve college students' independent study ability of English language without falling into a trap of "technological determinism" or "competence-orientation". ensuring that new media technology is a means of fostering student's independent learning skills and not an end in itself; and, during pedagogical practice, teachers need to make clear how new media technologies empower learners by connecting technology use and application to key components of independent learning. With new media technologies, students may acquire the ability of learning plan preparation, resources choosing, learning feedbacks analyzing and problem-solving abilities. Synergy principle also requires a close combination between new media technology, the contents of university English courses and methods of instruction, guaranteeing that empowering technologies can be used throughout the whole cycle of the independent learning, including designing and selecting resources for independent learning, executing it and evaluating its results, with a focus on the development of learners' independent learning skills. In this way, students will gradually develop scientific approaches towards learning and sustain their learning skills via new media; reciprocal support for technology-based capabilities and capability-based technologies.

4.3. The scientific principle of giving balanced importance to procedural guidance and result assessment

If we want to improve college students' independent study ability in English via new media, then we must follow the scientific rule that the two aspects should be coordinated: one hand guides the process and the other evaluates the result. In addition to evaluating students' independent study results, more attention must be given to directing, controlling and assessing the learning process itself. Learning autonomy is a process that takes time; what students learn how, attitudes, and initiative directly affect final results; therefore, teachers need to guide systematically in the entire process of new media-based learning. timely discovering and solving problems of students. Scientific means to build the "process + result" all-round evaluation system, breaking through the model of only examining scores as criteria for evaluating teaching outcomes. Evaluation needs to be based on not only the results (such as final exams and mid-term exams), but also the process, media use records, resource use rate, follow-up of the learning schedule, teamwork to more comprehensively and

objectively reflect the student's learning efficiency^[3]. Evaluation results need to be promptly released, that enable learners to identify gaps in the learning process, adapt accordingly for continuous improvement of self-directed learning.

5. Pathways for new media to enhance the development of autonomous English learning competencies in universities

5.1. Establishing a systematic and hierarchical new media learning resource system

addressing existing problems of heterogeneous/homogeneous resources fragmentation in order to offer learners quality individualized help regarding independent study. Firstly, integrate available high quality new media learning resources (by eliminating obsolete and poor ones) and create a rich, a coherent system of curriculum resources on words, phrases, sentence patterns, aural comprehension, oral expression, reading comprehension, composition skills from “fundamentals–proficiency–extension” levels; ensuring smooth development and natural integration of resources. Second, build an adaptive university English new media learning platform for students' English level academic disciplines, and learning needs to create a school specific repository of resources which includes curriculum aligned resources, instructor-generated teaching videos, customized exercise tasks, and teacher training support with smart recommendations providing individualized materials according to the student's level of English language ability and learning performance. Moreover, institutions need to increase their partnerships with high-quality third-party services that offer high quality EL content and.

5.2. An innovative autonomous learning teaching model for college English that integrates new media

To make full use of new media in improving autonomous learning skills, teaching models must be reformed so that new media is thoroughly embedded in college English education, replacing conventional “teacher-led lecturing” with a learner-centered model that blends online and face-to-face instruction. Teachers should redesign classroom content by focusing less on knowledge delivery and more on guide teaching knowledge points, answering questions, and training practical skills. Through the new media platform to provide learners with learning resources ahead of time, students could learn on their own before class; enter lectures with clear questions, and achieve integrated online-offline learning characterized by “pre-class self-study, in-class interactive practice, and post-class extended learning”. Moreover, a variety of autonomous learning frameworks need to be created through emerging media, including flipped instruction, individualized learning, and cooperative learning. For instance, new media communities may also be used to create online learning communities in which students interact via check-ins, discussion forums, and peer reviews to track and encourage one another. Live streaming and video conferencing features to hold a virtual English corner or simulate speaking sessions for better language acquisition via conversation. New med-based teachers need proper training in how to utilize the above features.

5.3. Improving the evaluation and supervision mechanism for self-directed learning processes supported by new media

A rigorous assessment and monitoring system is a fundamental guarantee for making new media play an effective role in promoting university students' independent study of English, only after having established a diversified “process + outcome” evaluation and monitoring system, centered on new media technologies while maintaining comprehensiveness and scientific rigor, address the challenges of inadequate supervision and simplistic assessment in self-directed learning, and thus realize the true potential of new media. Firstly, we need to take advantage of the technological strengths of new media learning platforms. With the help of their back-end data tracing and learning behavior record functions, we could monitor in real time and digitally document all aspects of students' entire autonomous learning experience. Thus, we can gather fine-grained information about the processes (e.g., time on task, resources used). learning plan progress, exercise accuracy rate, participation and contributions of students during web-based discussion threads, enabling instructors with the ability to monitor student progress dynamically, promptly recognize learning pedagogy and pace problems, and offer specific guidance to prevent autonomous learning from becoming laissez-faire. Second, we need to develop an evaluation

framework that deeply integrates multiple assessment stakeholders and dimensions: teacher assessments by the instructors, self-assessments of the students and peer assessments.

The instructors make professional assessment, while students perform self-assessment about what they have achieved or failed to do, and peers also make assessments for each other. While peers exchange ideas and determine problems by giving each other feedback. The assessment covers formative and summative aspects, where we give the same priority to the recorded process data from each platform. To final exam scores to deliver comprehensive and objective evaluations of students' autonomous learning capabilities and outcomes. At the same time, a prompt and effective assessment and feedback system needs to be developed. Instructors should routinely perform comprehensive analyses and syntheses of students' learning data, providing individualized learning feedback reports and specific improvement. Recommendations for self-study through new media tools to enable them to understand what they have not learned well or need improvement. This positive reinforcement fully motivates students' initiative in self-directed learning, create the right competitive and supportive learning environment, and help them to build up their sustainable self-learning habits.

6. Conclusion

With the fast development of new media technology, there are many new opportunities to develop students' autonomous learning abilities of English in colleges and universities, thus, it becomes the important impetus to reform college English teaching and attain the goal of cultivating students-oriented education. The present paper sets up the study schema from four perspectives, internal logic, practical problems, implementation rules, development paths, clarifying the basic direction and methods in practice to use new media to promote students' self-learning. Through the formation of an orderly, multi-tiered model, development of blended face-to-face/online teaching methods and improvement of formative and summative evaluation processes, this approach addresses current issues of resources, learning strategies, and assessment that exist in self-directed learning, thus making maximum use of technological advantages provided by new media; finally cultivating students' self-directed learning attitude. Provides them with scientific methods of study, fosters their long-term English learning abilities, and promotes the development of teachers' professional skills and students' comprehensive qualities together.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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