

Applying Innovative Spirit to Multimedia Foreign Language Teaching

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Abstract

It has become many English educators' common view as well as spontaneous action to implement multimedia-assisted foreign language teaching. It is the advanced media technology that has changed the former teaching pattern. However, will such a teaching pattern achieve success? Under new circumstances, multimedia foreign language teaching seems a challenge for teachers. Only with innovative educational ideas, innovative implementation of new technologies and methods will the teaching efficiency be improved and the teaching level be guaranteed.

Keywords: Multimedia, Foreign language teaching, Innovation

1. Introduction

In the recent years, people have become increasingly aware of the importance of learners themselves for the final result of learning. Therefore, self learning, that is, foreign language teaching practice centered on learners, has become a hot topic in current foreign language teaching. With the development of science and technology, multimedia technology is increasingly used in teaching, so is it in English teaching. As is pointed out in College English Curriculum Requirements (for trial implementation) issued by Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education, colleges are expected to make use of multimedia and network technologies as well as new teaching patterns to reform the former onefold class teaching pattern focused on teachers' explanation. In addition, students are advised to learn English with the help of the computer, which takes up 30%-50% of the total credit for the English course. This significant reform is in tune with the teaching idea centered on the learner, for which the application of the multimedia technology offers advanced teaching methods. Without doubt, the combination of multimedia and foreign language teaching has instilled vitality into college English in terms of teaching method and process. Then, does it mean that our foreign language teaching is quite successful? No. In practice, the multimedia technology still suffers from some drawbacks in itself in addition to some English teachers' misunderstandings of multimedia-assisted teaching as well as their laggard teaching ideas. As a result, there is an imbalance between high input and low output in some schools. I have come to realize in my teaching practice that whether multimedia English teaching can achieve success depends on whether a teacher has innovative spirit, owns innovative education ideas and employs teaching methods and means creatively.

2. Multimedia Teaching and the Innovation of Educational Ideas

As is well known, the traditional college English teaching pattern relies on a combination of a teacher, students, chalk, a blackboard and a cassette recorder in some cases while in multimedia teaching, the pattern including the teacher, students, the computer and courseware is employed which is guided by Constructivism. According to this theory, the learner is not only a passive recipient of knowledge but an active architect, therefore, only through students' active construction will the information they have obtained from the outer world be converted into their own knowledge. In this way, students will be active achievers and architects instead of passive recipients. As a vital branch of Cognitive Learning Theory, this theory seems particularly appropriate to be the theoretical basis for multimedia college English teaching. Actually, the traditional teaching pattern in which the teacher takes the dominance is challenged under the current circumstance of multimedia teaching. When conducting multimedia teaching, teachers have to innovate their educational ideas timely, otherwise the advantages of multimedia teaching cannot be exerted with only the combination of blackboard and chalk converted into that of technology and screen. As a result, foreign language teachers are expected to convert their traditional ideas, to update their concepts and to accomplish the conversion in their role. That doesn't only mean handing over learning initiatives to students, providing them with rich learning resources or changing the lecture-based class pattern into research-based pattern. Due to their dominant role in class teaching, teachers are supposed to start from the general teaching aims to reasonably employ multimedia, to arrange teaching content and class activities creatively and scientifically, to create an atmosphere for students' active learning, hence making multimedia an organic part in teaching as well as a powerful tool to improve teaching and satisfying teaching demands to the largest degree. Accordingly, teachers should employ courseware to conduct heuristic education while avoiding the cramming method preferred in traditional class, to properly manage students' class

learning, to change the former man-machine communication into teacher-student communication and student-student communication and to penetrate the heuristic method and the open method into the teaching process in order to improve students' involvement and enthusiasm.

3. Exerting the Advantages of Multimedia Teaching and Exploring New Patterns of Language Teaching

It is the advantages of multimedia English teaching that enrich the patterns, methods and means of language teaching, hence optimizing teaching resources to the largest degree as soon as enhancing the chances for success in language learning.

3.1 Positive Effects of Multimedia on Foreign Language Teaching

First, PPT courseware frequently used in multimedia teaching has increased the information volume in teaching as well as saved a large amount of time otherwise spent in writing on the blackboard and improved class efficiency. The saved time can be used for review, which helps to improve efficiency. In addition, the use of PPT provides greater clarity compared with blackboard, increasing visuality and visualization in teaching and playing a quite important role in attracting students' attention.

Second, by integrating sound, light, electricity, image and color into a whole, multimedia provides a multi-level teaching and learning pattern for both teachers and students. The interactive learning environment it provides enables the learner to acquire feedback timely, to learn about their learning result, to adjust their learning steps, pace and difficulty accordingly; the favorable language environment it offers give students an access to pure pronunciations and intonations as well as dialogues, which is of great help for students' language understanding, accumulation and imitation.

Third, the development in multimedia has caused great changes in foreign language teaching content. Teachers can integrate class teaching materials and display the same teaching content with a variety of information under the help of multimedia. For instance, teachers can download materials and use them at class after working up and editing them; they can also carve some satellite TV programs into disk to inform students of something new in the world; they can compose some existing teaching materials into a variety of audio-visual materials to increase class interest as well as students' involvement.

Fourth, the multi-dimensional multimedia information helps to cultivate students' associative thinking. Human thoughts are bouncing and associative. Sound, image, quality feeling and number will help people with their thinking and memory. Teachers can fully exert multimedia teaching's flexible information and alternative teaching methods in the teaching process. Taking the explanation of new words as an example, teachers may choose to ask students to listen to and read new words before giving them example sentences, or to insert some flashes, puzzles, songs or even some information from the internet into their teaching.

Fifth, multimedia teaching provides a platform for the communication between teachers and students as well as students and students. Teachers may solve students' questions in class or go on with their communication after class through online discussion or e-mail. Teachers can also correct students' homework on line. This also provides great convenience for the communication and discussion between students. Through their cooperative communication, students will have a profounder understanding of what they have learnt, broader learning ideas, a greater variety of learning methods as well as higher efficiency.

3.2 Problems and Solutions Related to Multimedia Teaching

In spite of the positive roles of multimedia-assisted English teaching, some errors and misunderstandings may occur in teaching practice, which are mainly manifested in the following aspects: first, assisting the traditional teaching pattern where the teacher takes the dominance in conveying knowledge with modern information technology. The courseware used by teachers, simple in design and lacking in innovation, mainly provides convenience for their demonstration at class while neglecting students' principal status, hence failing to fully exert the advantages of multimedia technology. Second, excessive use of multimedia effects, which produces flowers but bears no fruits, neglects exploring into teaching contents and designing class teaching, hence failing to achieve ideal effects. The following methods can be resorted to solve the above problems:

First, combine course type with multimedia. Currently, large English classes mainly involve listening, speaking, intensive reading and extensive reading. Different courses require different teaching methods as well as the assistance of multimedia technology. Teachers are supposed to be good at analyzing the characteristics of different courses and deliberately employing multimedia technology. The listening and speaking course should be focused on creating opportunity and atmosphere for students' communication in English. Teachers can combine communicative topics and sentence patterns with vivid and intuitive images, music and films as well as organize students to have dialogues, role-plays and discussions with multimedia in order to enhance students'

interest and enthusiasm. Intensive reading or extensive reading is intended to strengthen students' reading ability, to cultivate their correct reading habits, to enlarge their vocabulary and to apply language proficiently. In addition, teachers can accumulate those constantly-updated background knowledge and complementary materials available in multimedia courseware and the Internet into English material bank, which will make it possible for students to have extensive extracurricular reading and self-learning. After that, reports, demonstrations or discussions with the help of multimedia can be implemented in groups. In this way, much class time can be saved and the teaching goals can be achieved to some degree as well.

Second, combine different teaching stages with multimedia. In accordance with different key points and students' psychological features at different teaching stages, teachers should compose proper courseware by taking full advantage of the current teaching software, multimedia information resources and technological advantages based on their teaching demands in order to demonstrate the teaching content in a clear and attractive way. With the intensive reading course as an example, in the warm-up stage, teachers can select some parts from the teaching disk or collect some materials from the Internet or other media to make artistic and interesting images, music or videos which are accompanied by traditional class activities such as answering questions, discussions, oral reports and so on in order to stimulate students' desire for participation and interest in learning as well as to guide them to accept new knowledge. At the stage for text structure and content analysis, multimedia can be employed to demonstrate text structure and writing style in the forms of image, flash and sound intuitively and vividly in order to help students to quickly master texts.

At review classes, in addition to listening and speaking, translation, multiple choices and blank-filling questions, teachers can also turn to multimedia to design some activities promoting students to associate new knowledge with old one, improving interactions between the teacher and students as well as between students as well as students' practical application of language knowledge, such as organizing students to retell texts or key paragraphs based on pictures, to construct sentences with new words, to have intellectual competitions, knowledge competitions based on texts and so on.

Third, combine teaching and learning. Multimedia should be a method to assist teachers to convey knowledge as well as a cognitive tool to create situations for students for coordinative and active learning. Teachers should choose those examples and topics with temporal spirit and interest and closely related to students' interest to emphasize key points and difficult points in order to deepen students' understanding of knowledge. When designing class activities, teachers are expected to center on students and to exert students' principal status, to offer a free and loose learning environment for students starting from students' actual needs, to enhance class interactivity, to create opportunities for students to the largest degree to take part in class teaching more actively and to strengthen cultivating students' English application and self-learning abilities. First of all, a variety of tasks and activities in which students are expected to use English comprehensively to solve problems should be designed. Under the help of their teachers, students have cooperative learning in groups, learn texts and refer to materials with courseware and Internet materials, have extensive extracurricular reading and investigations and display their achievements through discussions, presentations, debates, speeches and so on. In this way, students can be encouraged to think spontaneously, to explore actively, to comprehensively use language and knowledge, hence learning how to learn.

Fourth, combine class teaching and extracurricular instruction. In accordance with students at different levels and the degree of their assimilation of class knowledge, teachers can instruct students to establish learning plans fit for themselves and conduct individual learning after class with teaching disks and Internet. As for those students poor at English, teachers should encourage them to have preview and review, to improve their training in basic skills and to finish some easy assignments. However, for those with good English basis, teachers can give them some tasks beneficial for their practical application ability in English as well as innovative thinking and encourage them to participate in a variety of extracurricular activities to improve themselves. With such a combination between class and extracurricular efforts as well as between students' independent learning and teachers' instruction and supervision, our teaching effect can be better guaranteed.

4. Conclusion

As a newly-emerged modern foreign language teaching form, multimedia foreign language teaching waits for the test of time. Without any problem in itself, its success depends on whether language teachers are initiative or not, whether they can fully exert the advantages of multimedia teaching to find and solve problems. As long as they deepen their research, sum up experiences and improve teaching methods constantly, multimedia will bring about more positive changes to foreign language teaching and therefore greater achievements will be made in our foreign language teaching.

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