

Enhancing Fundamental Capabilities for College English Teachers in the Context of the New Liberal Arts

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Abstract: *The construction of new liberal arts has put forward new and higher requirements for English courses and English teachers in universities, making them face new problems and challenges. In order to actively address these issues and challenges, English teachers in universities must first focus on the goals of the new liberal arts construction and the new positioning and development direction of English courses in universities, and then enhance their core competencies and professional qualities. Starting from the actual situation of English teachers in universities, this article discusses how to enhance the professional quality and core competencies of English teachers through four aspects: professional knowledge, teaching ability, information technology ability, and research ability under the background of the new liberal arts. This provides certain assistance for the personal growth and professional development of teachers, and lays a solid foundation for the development of the English discipline and the cultivation of composite excellent talents.*

Keywords: Fundamental capabilities, University English teacher, Teacher career, New liberal arts.

1. Introduction

The fundamental capability of teachers is an important foundation for education, determining the quality of teachers' work and the teaching quality of universities. Domestic scholars' research on the core qualities of university teachers mainly focuses on ideological and political literacy, teaching ability, learning ability, research ability, etc. In recent years, the ideological and political literacy of teachers has received widespread attention from domestic scholars. As key practitioners of moral education, teachers' ideology influences the fundamental question of 'for whom to cultivate people'. Wen Qing and Guo Yang (2023) found in their research that teachers lack awareness of ideological and political education in the curriculum, some teachers have lagging political consciousness, and some teachers lack professional abilities, which leads to teachers being unable to be strict with themselves in their work, thus setting a good example for students in teaching and interpersonal relationships. Their study proposes that teachers should follow the development trend of ideological and political education in the curriculum, improve their ideological and political awareness on the basis of deep exploration of ideological and political elements, and optimize and reform the physical education teaching plan in higher vocational education. Yuan Huiling (2023) explored the curriculum ideological and political teaching ability of university English teachers from the perspective of digital empowerment, and proposed that teachers need to actively apply digitalization to curriculum ideological and political teaching and fully tap into the unique advantages and values of traditional Chinese medicine universities to comprehensively improve the level of curriculum ideological and political teaching ability. The teaching ability of teachers is of paramount importance in determining the quality of teaching. Research on teacher professional development in foreign countries predates that in China. Firstly, some scholars tended to focus on qualitative research, including the concept, influencing factors, or other studies of this theory. For example, Hoyle, who was engaged in the theoretical research of teacher professional

development, believed that the professional development of teachers should be like this: at every stage of their teaching career, teachers can effectively master the knowledge and skills required for the professional practice process (Hoyle, 1980). In addition, some foreign researchers also hoped to conduct empirical research on the current situation and corresponding strategies of teacher professional development. For example, Christofridou Margarita and Kyriakides Leonidas sought effective strategies to enhance teachers' professional development, and found that dynamic approaches to teacher professional development could help teachers develop their assessment skills and improve students' learning outcomes through this approach (Christofridou & Kyriakides, 2021).

1.1 New Liberal Arts

The construction of new liberal arts has achieved the transformation and upgrading of traditional liberal arts, which is conducive to foreign language disciplines making new breakthroughs in the humanities and social sciences. One of the characteristics of the new liberal arts is innovation. The new liberal arts have put forward new requirements for current foreign language teaching, requiring teachers to innovate foreign language teaching based on the new changes and characteristics of student groups. In order to make up for the lag in textbook information, teachers should update their lessons on a timely basis and advise students to keep an eye on current events, politics, social development hotspots, and other challenges while transmitting traditional textbook knowledge. Both in terms of teaching material and methods and resources, teachers may innovate. Innovative approaches to teaching techniques and resources can be achieved by fusing contemporary theories of learning and foreign language instruction with those that are appropriate for Chinese university classrooms. To fully embrace students' subjectivity, teachers can employ a blended learning paradigm that integrates online and offline instruction, teacher lectures both inside and outside of the classroom, and student-directed learning. Teachers may raise the overall quality of their instruction by creating new courses, refining

existing ones, and improving their teaching strategies. We cannot stay up with the trends and get good professional development outcomes unless we engage in constant learning and innovation. As a result, innovation plays a significant role in the modern humanities under the new liberal arts.

One trait of new liberal arts is “innovation”. Its objective, aided by the era of contemporary technology, is to cultivate creative minds for the future. Moral education, or morality, the central value, need to be given top priority when new liberal arts are being constructed. Establishing a comprehensive liberal arts framework that can both meet the growth needs of China and uphold a global perspective is crucial. In light of the current circumstances, the development of new liberal arts and the active pursuit of new language development should serve as the guiding principles for foreign language instruction in China. The development of superior composite abilities and the establishment of a top-tier teaching staff are directly linked to the creation of new liberal arts. As a result, foreign language instructors ought to be up-to-date, actively research, and exhibit courage, inventiveness, and bravery in their profession.

2. Challenges

In order to understand whether English teachers in universities are familiar with the construction of the new liberal arts and whether their professional development can meet the needs of the new liberal arts construction, the researcher of the present study conducted a questionnaire survey and interviews with 62 English teachers from three universities, and conducted semi-structured interviews with five of them. The questionnaire and interview questions revolve around the meaning of the construction of the new liberal arts, the significance of the goals of the construction of the new liberal arts, the current status of the core competencies of English teachers in universities, the professional development of English teachers themselves and the current status of the development of this major in universities, the situation of professional development in universities, the requirements of the construction of the new liberal arts for English majors and English teachers in universities, as well as the paths and methods for improving the competencies of English teachers in universities under the construction of the new liberal arts.

Through data collection, analysis, and results from the two surveys, it was found that 89% of teachers were aware of the construction of new liberal arts, but 52% of teachers did not understand the specific content of the construction. They only knew the concept, but did not have much understanding of the specific content. Some teachers mentioned this concept because they had had applied for a project which hinted new liberal arts construction, etc. The results could be summarized from four main perspectives.

The findings show that English major graduates have relatively limited knowledge, with 58% of teachers graduating from English majors and learning relatively limited knowledge. In addition to basic English language knowledge and skills, they also include English related professional knowledge, mainly including English language literature, translation, English linguistics, etc. These

professional knowledge can no longer meet the needs of the requirements of the construction of the new liberal arts, which demand English teachers in universities to have an understanding of subjects beyond English. Teachers who learn interdisciplinary knowledge and skills can promote the development of new interdisciplinary majors and carry out teaching and research tasks in new areas. However, the questionnaire results show that 92% of teachers do not understand or learn knowledge from other majors or areas, reflecting their low interdisciplinary literacy. Due to unfamiliarity with interdisciplinary teaching, psychological reluctance to take the first step, and lack of communication opportunities between teachers from different departments, it is not conducive to the atmosphere of cooperation and mutual assistance among different majors, which makes it very difficult for English teachers in universities to achieve interdisciplinary teaching.

3. Development Path

3.1 Educational Literacy

The current international situation is constantly changing, and the ideological impact brought by modern technology has a profound impact on the group of university teachers. Teachers are the backbone of educational work. Without a high-level teaching staff, it is difficult to cultivate high-level innovative talents and produce high-level innovative achievements. Teachers bear the responsibility of imparting knowledge, cultivating abilities, and shaping a correct outlook on life to their students. According to our president Xi Jinping’s requirement, teachers should become “great masters”. We need to study real problems, focus on the world’s academic frontiers and major national needs, devote ourselves to solving practical problems, and be good at learning new knowledge, new technologies, and new theories. We must remain steadfast in our beliefs, always stand with the Party and the people, and consciously become staunch believers and faithful practitioners of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

The construction of new liberal arts to improve teachers’ educational literacy is a core competency for foreign language teachers in universities, which aims to achieve the educational function of cultivating students’ moral character in foreign language courses. Teachers themselves and the educational function of teaching include ideology, ideological beliefs, values, and political concepts. These require the guidance of socialist core values of China. Throughout the process of modernization in the world, a strong education country is a necessary requirement for achieving modernization first. Only by attaching importance to the primary task of cultivating virtue and nurturing people, can we comprehensively promote the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation through modernization. Therefore, the educational literacy of teachers is the key to achieving the goal of fostering moral character in education. A noble moral character requires every teacher to be extremely loyal to the cause of education and to have an unparalleled love for teaching and educating people. Teachers need to devote themselves wholeheartedly to their work, be willing to selflessly dedicate themselves to ordinary positions, and be willing to establish personal strength in mundane lives, to achieve a model of teacher ethics, and to infect and guide

students with their own sentiments. Firm ideals and beliefs, solid theoretical knowledge, generous benevolence, and noble moral character, all revolve around the standard of being a good teacher who satisfies the Party and the people. They are interrelated and interdependent, together forming the four dimensions of a good teacher. The prosperity of education leads to the prosperity of the country, and the strength of education leads to the strength of the country. University teachers have a great responsibility and should embark on a new journey, guided by the spirit of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, to explore the development path of teachers in the new era and promote the professional development of the teaching team. Put the mission of cultivating virtue and nurturing people first in one's own qualities, actively promote the development of disciplines, be a pioneer in educating people in the new era, and contribute educational strength in the new journey.

3.2 Teaching Ability

Teachers should also pay attention to employing appropriate theories to guide foreign language teaching. Foreign language teaching cannot be without a theoretical foundation in teaching. Therefore, teachers should pay attention to and learn advanced teaching theories and methods both domestically and internationally. For example, Professor Wen Qiufang's team, based on extensive practice in foreign language classroom teaching in Chinese universities, has constructed a foreign language teaching theoretical system with Chinese characteristics called the "Production-Oriented Approach" (POA). The theory, adhering to the learning centered and holistic education teaching philosophy, realizes a teaching process that integrates teaching, learning, and evaluation, and can effectively improve the quality of foreign language teaching in universities. This teaching theory provides teachers with clear guidance and direction, which runs through the process of teaching design and implementation. With the support of smart teaching platforms and the use of blended online and offline teaching models, personalized teaching can be carried out to meet the needs of different students and enhance their teaching abilities. At the same time, teachers should not only limit themselves to textbook knowledge, but also incorporate elements of critical thinking and moral education. While imparting knowledge and cultivating abilities, they should also guide students' values correctly and strive to achieve moral education.

3.3 Information Literacy

The rapid development of science and technology in today's world has made digitization, artificial intelligence, and network intelligence technology synonymous with the times. For humanities majors, there are both opportunities and challenges. The construction of new liberal arts requires foreign language teachers to update their information technology capabilities, use new information technology capabilities to enhance their professional knowledge and skills, and transform information technology into a driving force for both teaching and research. For liberal arts teachers, learning new advanced information technology skills is not easy. Teachers first need to change their mindset and attitude, and accept new things. There are many online platforms available today that provide convenience for teachers and

students. Teachers can use these platforms to assign tasks before, during, and after class, which can improve classroom teaching efficiency and effectiveness. As mentors and guides for students, English teachers need to keep up with the pace of the times, master the latest and most advanced information technology, stimulate students' interest and thirst for knowledge, and encourage students to learn independently. Therefore, foreign language teachers in universities should first recognize that strengthening their own information technology capabilities under the construction of new liberal arts can not only update their teaching methods and forms, enrich teaching content, but also play an important role in the development and improvement of their profession.

3.4 Research Literacy and Ability

In the context of the construction of the new liberal arts, English teachers in universities can only respond to the construction of the new liberal arts, promote academic exchanges and innovation, and advance and develop the foreign language discipline by enhancing their academic literacy and research abilities, actively participating in research, applying for research projects, topics, and funds, and writing academic papers. As the main force of foreign language academic papers, English teachers in universities can only respond to the construction of new liberal arts, promote the development of foreign language disciplines, and facilitate academic exchanges and innovation by enhancing their research abilities and actively participating in research. College English teachers should find their own research focus, clarify their academic interests and research directions, actively engage in interdisciplinary research in conjunction with the construction of new liberal arts, and tap into their research potential. Traditional and singular research is no longer the focus that English language teachers should pay attention to today. The theme of research projects must be combined with language related topics in China's national or local conditions. Therefore, English teachers need to frequently reflect on their shortcomings in scientific research and explore new research directions and fields. For example, big data can be used to explore the development of English language or teaching. Actively participating in scientific research and scientific research exchanges can reduce one's fear and difficulty towards scientific research, gradually become more familiar with scientific research procedures and content, always adhere to one's own scientific research, achieve one's scientific research dreams, and contribute to the development of oneself and the discipline.

4. Conclusion

In summary, the construction of new liberal arts provides both opportunities and challenges for foreign language teachers in universities. University English teachers need to understand the concept and goals of the construction of the new liberal arts, fully exert subjective initiative, enhance professional knowledge and skills, broaden their knowledge, actively learn other related professional knowledge, update teaching concepts, learn new teaching theories, apply new teaching methods, enhance information literacy and scientific research ability, cultivate lifelong learning habits, and make continuous efforts to cultivate new talents with both morality and talent in the new era. They should actively participate in

the construction and development of the foreign language discipline of the new liberal arts, and make continuous efforts for their own development and professional construction.

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