

Cultivating English Pragmatic Ability of College Students from the Perspective of Drama in Education

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Abstract: English is the preferred tool for promoting communication and cooperation among people around the world in the context of globalization. English learning should not only focus on knowledge accumulation, but also on the cultivation of communication skills. Chinese college students' English pragmatic abilities are insufficient, and appropriate ways should be found to improve them. Drama in Education, as a teaching method that applies dramatic factors such as music and performance to classroom teaching, is conducive to stimulating students' interest in learning, guiding students to cooperate with each other, and promoting students' communication practice. In the process of college English teaching, the use of Drama in Education to carry out teaching activities conforms to the needs of teaching method reform in the context of the new era curriculum reform, and plays an important role in cultivating students' pragmatic ability.

Keywords: Drama in Education; College English, Pragmatic ability; Application strategy

1. Introduction

Economic globalization has enabled people from all over the world to have more frequent and close communication, and English has also become the preferred tool for promoting communication and cooperation. In addition to mastering basic English knowledge, the comprehensive application ability of English learners also needs to be improved accordingly. The series of English teaching reforms carried out in China have also emphasized the importance of cultivating students' language communication abilities. However, there is still a situation where knowledge is emphasized and ability is underestimated in the current English teaching process. Schools and English educators should update their educational concepts, attach importance to students' English pragmatic abilities, apply appropriate teaching methods and strategies, and make up for the shortcomings in English teaching. Drama in Education, as a teaching method that applies dramatic factors such as music and performance to the classroom teaching process, conforms to the needs of teaching reform in the new era of curriculum reform, and plays an important role in cultivating students' pragmatic abilities.

2. Current Situation of College English Teaching

With the implementation of educational reform, the level of college English teaching has greatly improved. However, there are still problems in the process of college English teaching. From the actual situation of English teaching, it can be seen that college English teaching is still centered around basic language teaching, most teachers still focus on reading and writing during teaching. As a result, students may have stronger writing and reading abilities, but their listening and speaking abilities are still insufficient. At the same time, many universities have set passing the English proficiency test as a mandatory requirement for students to graduate. This measure can indeed promote students to actively learn English to a certain extent, but it also makes many students believe that as long as they pass the English test, they can complete the learning task of college English. Therefore, many college students only focus on problem-solving and learning exam skills when learning English, so their English pragmatic abilities are generally lacking.

3. The Concept and Importance of Pragmatic Ability

The concept of pragmatic ability originates from Chomsky's concept of "language behavior" in his view of language ability. Thomas first explicitly proposed the concept of pragmatic competence and defined it as the ability to effectively use language for specific communicative purposes and understand discourse in specific contexts.^[1] The Ministry of Education of China issued the

“China English Proficiency Scale” in 2018, which defined the concept of pragmatic competence for the first time. Pragmatic ability refers to the ability of language learners and users to understand and express specific communicative intentions by combining specific contexts, utilizing various knowledge and strategies, including pragmatic comprehension and expression abilities.

For a long time, Chinese university English has focused on teaching language knowledge, and learners’ pragmatic abilities are generally weak. Although most students can pass the English proficiency test, they still do not have sufficient language skills to cope with future learning and work. The current goal of college English teaching is not only to cultivate students’ solid English proficiency, but also to cultivate their ability to use English to obtain and exchange various information in different situations.

4. The Connotation and Development Status of Drama in Education

Drama in Education originated from the West, and different scholars have different definitions of it. The Drama in Education was first proposed by Heathcott. It is a teaching model that combines drama performance with school curriculum teaching.^[2] Through drama activities, teaching can improve students’ language proficiency and fully mobilize their subjective initiative in learning. The focus of Drama in Education is not on performance and form, but on how to guide learners to learn in specific contexts.^[3] In a word, Drama in Education is a teaching method that applies drama elements to education and teaching.

The research on Drama in Education in China started relatively late, and the practical experience in education has not yet formed a system. At present, the research on Drama in Education in China has gradually developed from a single theoretical reference to a stage of combining theoretical research and practical exploration from multiple perspectives. However, there is still little research that touches on the practical mechanism level of classroom mode construction of Drama in Education, and there is also a lack of research on strategies to enhance students’ pragmatic abilities through Drama in Education.

5. The Advantages of Utilizing Drama in Education to Cultivate College Students’ English Pragmatic Ability

Drama in Education has positive significance in language energy-saving teaching, cognition, emotion and motivation, individual differences and cooperative learning, imagination and creativity, etc.^[4] The application of Drama in Education is in line with the age characteristics of college students. Through various stages of learning, college students have already acquired a certain level of English foundation.

The application of Drama in Education in English classrooms follows the principles of wholeness, subjectivity, and creativity. As an innovative teaching method, Drama in Education conforms to the objective requirements of the transformation of classroom teaching methods and conforms to the curriculum and teaching concepts of the new era curriculum reform. The practical application in the English classroom not only enriches existing teaching models, but also meets the requirements of the unity of humanistic and instrumental nature of the English subject. It can serve as a breakthrough point for improving students’ pragmatic ability in teaching practice.

6. Application Strategies for Cultivating College Students’ English Pragmatic Ability through Drama in Education

6.1 Appropriately selecting materials for Drama in Education

Firstly, teachers should make full use of textbooks. Dramatic texts can be selected from textbooks, or highly narrative articles can be adapted for students to engage in theatrical activities. Although there are many benefits to using Drama in Education in teaching, it is not necessary to use Drama in Education in every class or article. Teachers need to design a variety of multi-level drama activities that can benefit students based on their characteristics.

Secondly, teachers should widely understand students’ opinions and select classic drama scripts that are in line with students’ interests, such as “Pride and Prejudice”, “The Merchant of Venice”, “Jane Eyre”, “Hamlet”, etc. Teachers should guide students to prepare well before class, carefully collect relevant materials on drama texts, understand the western culture contained in them, and add their own understanding, laying a prerequisite foundation for the creation of drama scenarios and the development of drama activities in the future.

Finally, teachers can select some English dramas or situational plays that have teaching significance and play them for students in the classroom, guiding them to imitate, adapt, and continue based on their own life experiences.

6.2 Flexible application of Drama in Education

The Drama in Education generally refers to the teaching method of applying drama or performance techniques to teaching, utilizing specific drama paradigm activities, and teaching through situational construction, story development, deep experience, and

reflection. The use of Drama in Education in activities is different from performing a complete play. Teachers choose different paradigm activities to construct scenarios based on different levels of educational goals, and guide participants to complete experiences and explorations in stages. The main forms of activities in Drama in Education include: language games, role-playing, simulation, mime, improvisation, reader theater, script creation, masterpiece reproduction, teacher in role, and so on. Drama activities are an effective way for college students to learn English, which can not only improve their English expression skills but also enhance their practical application abilities.

6.3 Evaluation of diversified theatrical teaching methods

Teaching evaluation is a key step, and the single evaluation method and indicators still exist in college English classrooms. When students participate in various aspects of using Drama in Education in the classroom, vocabulary, syntax, pronunciation and intonation, expression ability, pragmatic ability, and other aspects will change. A single teaching evaluation method is obviously not applicable. We cannot rely solely on quantitative exam scores to evaluate and manage all teaching content. Therefore, we should establish a diversified evaluation system, attach importance to cultivating college students' interest in learning English, cross-cultural literacy, and English pragmatic ability, rather than cultivating all students according to a single standard and model. We can focus on the evaluation of students' learning process, classify and integrate evaluation elements based on different teaching activities and requirements, pay attention to the teaching process, examine and record learners' behavioral performance and ability development in the teaching process, evaluate learning attitude, learning process, learning behavior performance, and the gradual progress of students' ability and literacy.

Conclusion

Communication and application are the most direct and important goals in English learning. In the English context constructed with the help of Drama in Education, students not only need to understand the grammar rules of the script sentences, but also need to use the script language appropriately. When performing, necessary body language strengthens students' memory of English vocabulary and sentences. If they want to complete the performance completely and vividly, students also need to have standard pronunciation and accurate expression. The Drama in Education can simulate English situations and realize many language functions, thereby promoting the cultivation of pragmatic abilities of college students. However, there are still shortcomings in the implementation of the drama teaching method in college English teaching, such as a lack of drama literacy among teachers and students, insufficient script resources, long teaching cycles, and difficulty in ensuring implementation effectiveness. It is worth researching and practicing by teachers and scholars in the academic field.

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