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A Study on the Current Situation and Strategies of College Students' Autonomous Learning Under the "Multilingual+" Mode in Public Foreign Language Education—Based on a Survey of College Students in Hunan Province

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Abstract

Driven by the concept of "New Liberal Arts and Comprehensive Foreign Language Education" and the national strategy for interdisciplinary talent cultivation, public foreign language teaching in Chinese universities has shifted to the "Multilingualism Plus" collaborative training model. Nevertheless, existing relevant studies mainly concentrate on macro perspectives and the supply side of teaching, with insufficient systematic empirical exploration of students' autonomous multilingual learning from the learner-centered perspective. Adopting a questionnaire method, this study selects 401 university students in Hunan Province as research subjects. It systematically investigates students' autonomous learning status from multiple dimensions including learning motivation, resource acquisition, learning strategy application, and interdisciplinary integration demands. On this basis, the paper summarizes the major learning difficulties and puts forward targeted optimization strategies. This research provides empirical evidence and practical references for improving the "Multilingualism Plus" teaching system of local university public foreign language courses and enhancing the overall quality of interdisciplinary talent training.

Keywords

New liberal arts; Multilingualism Plus; comprehensive foreign language education; autonomous learning; universities in Hunan province

1. Research Background and Research Questions

In 2019, China's Ministry of Education proposed the development concept of "New Liberal Arts and Comprehensive Foreign Language Education", requiring universities to abandon the single English public foreign language teaching model and build an interdisciplinary talent training system of "English + Less Commonly Taught Languages + Majors" (Ministry of Education of PRC, 2020). Meanwhile, the growing number of minor language candidates in basic education forces universities to improve the coherent multi-language teaching mechanism. Accordingly, the "Multilingualism Plus" teaching reform has become the core direction of public foreign language teaching

transformation in Chinese universities.

Existing domestic multilingual education research mainly focuses on three areas: curriculum system construction, teachers and teaching material development, and the localization of international theories including translanguaging and CLIL (Li & Shen, 2021). However, most studies concentrate on teachers and teaching management, lacking systematic empirical research on students' autonomous multilingual learning behaviors and effects. In particular, large-scale, follow-up empirical studies covering different types and levels of universities in China's inland provinces are scarce, with no comprehensive evidence system to reflect students' long-term autonomous learning status (Zhang, 2024).

In educational practice, college students face prominent and increasingly complex problems in multilingual autonomous learning. They usually set vague, short-term, and utilitarian learning goals, relying on traditional, inefficient learning methods with unreasonable time allocation and discontinuous learning rhythms. Although digital learning resources are abundant and accessible, their utilization rate is low due to fragmented content and insufficient systematic integration. Students also suffer from mutual interference between English and second foreign language learning, struggling to balance limited learning time and energy. Most critically, language learning is severely disconnected from professional study, resulting in the prevalent problem of "learning without application" and failing to support students' professional development.

Against these practical dilemmas and research gaps, this study adopts a student-centered perspective, taking universities in Hunan Province as the research context. Based on empirical investigation and theoretical analysis, it addresses three core research questions: What is the overall status and typical characteristics of Hunan college students' "Multilingualism Plus" autonomous learning? What core difficulties hinder their multilingual autonomous learning? How to construct an optimized multilingual autonomous learning strategy system adapting to the "New Liberal Arts and Comprehensive Foreign Language Education" strategy?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Overseas Research on Multilingual Education and Autonomous Learning

Foreign multilingual education research started early with mature theoretical systems and practical models. Scholars including Cen Williams, Baker, and García argued that multilingual learners should break the constraints of monolingual teaching frameworks, mobilize all linguistic and multicultural resources, and flexibly integrate and switch multiple languages in information comprehension, opinion expression, and creative output (Rado, 1976).

In autonomous learning research, European and American academia has formed a complete learning strategy evaluation system covering six dimensions: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Meanwhile, sound supporting systems including physical self-access centers, online learning platforms, and standardized credit management systems have been widely applied. With technological and institutional support, diversified, personalized, and sustainable learning services are provided for learners. Overall, foreign research has built a closed-loop ecosystem integrating theoretical foundation, teaching practice, support services, and effect evaluation (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981).

2.2 Domestic Research on Multilingual Teaching and Autonomous Learning

China's "Multilingualism Plus" public foreign language education research has developed rapidly since the release of relevant national policies in 2019. Current studies can be divided into three categories. First, teaching reform research represented by key universities, which explores innovative models such as "major + English + second foreign language" and curriculum ideological and political integration to meet the demand for international talents (Zheng, 2020). Second, theoretical introduction research, which introduces advanced international language education theories but lacks localized empirical verification in Chinese teaching contexts. Third, problem-solving research, which summarizes common difficulties including insufficient teaching resources, unreasonable curriculum settings, and backward teaching methods, and puts forward corresponding improvement measures.

Nevertheless, domestic research has obvious limitations in research perspectives and methods. Most studies focus on teachers and administrators, ignoring students' subjective learning experience. Large-scale empirical research covering different university types and disciplines is insufficient. There is also a lack of in-depth analysis on effective learning strategies, personalized resource matching, integration of language and professional learning, and intelligent teaching empowerment. This study conducts empirical research on multilingual autonomous learning of

college students in inland provinces, filling the regional empirical research gap and providing practical references for “Multilingualism Plus” education optimization.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Method

This study adopts a mixed research method combining standardized questionnaire surveys and semi-structured in-depth interviews to ensure data comprehensiveness and conclusion reliability. The self-designed questionnaire covers seven core modules: basic student information, learning motivation, learning resource application, learning strategy use, learning difficulties, integration of language and professional learning, and learning effect self-evaluation. After multiple rounds of revision and pre-investigation, the questionnaire effectively collects quantitative statistical data and captures authentic individual learning experiences.

3.2 Research Subjects

Stratified sampling was adopted to select research subjects, covering double first-class universities, provincial public undergraduate universities, private undergraduate universities, and vocational colleges in Hunan Province. The samples include students of literature, science, engineering, business, medicine, and other disciplines, as well as learners of English, Japanese, French, and other languages. A total of 420 questionnaires were distributed, and 401 valid questionnaires were recovered, with an effective rate of 95.5%, forming a representative research sample.

3.3 Data Processing

All valid questionnaires were coded and entered systematically. Descriptive statistics and cluster analysis were conducted with Excel to analyze sample characteristics. Interview data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically to explore implicit learning rules. Longitudinal learning behavior data were sorted and compared to summarize the phased characteristics of different student groups’ learning behaviors, providing multi-dimensional data support for research analysis and conclusion formulation.

4. Research Findings

4.1 Learning Motivation

Students’ multilingual learning motivation is dominated by intrinsic interest (68.3%) and external career development demand (59.1%), supplemented by continuous high school language learning (31.7%) and overseas study preparation (18.2%). However, most learning goals are short-term and utilitarian, focusing on course credits, language examinations, and basic communication needs. Few students formulate long-term plans for integrating language ability with professional development and academic research. In addition, learning motivation is unstable: initial interest declines significantly with the increase of learning difficulty in the middle stage, and the lack of continuous positive feedback leads to learning burnout and low learning efficiency.

4.2 Resource Utilization

Resource utilization has prominent problems: online learning content is fragmented and entertainment-oriented without systematic knowledge systems; high-quality customized resources matching university public foreign language courses and interdisciplinary professional learning are scarce; most students lack information screening ability, resulting in low resource utilization efficiency and unsustained learning.

4.3 Self-directed Learning Strategies

Students mainly rely on passive and traditional learning methods such as mechanical recitation and exam-oriented exercises. The application of advanced strategies with high metacognitive requirements is insufficient, including phased learning planning, systematic knowledge sorting, active oral practice, and personalized strategy adjustment. Students generally lack metacognitive abilities, are unable to actively plan, monitor, evaluate, and adjust their learning processes, restricting the improvement of learning efficiency. Advanced learning behaviors such as cross-language comparison and professional scenario language application are particularly rare.

4.4 Core Learning Constraints

Students face four major learning obstacles. First, time shortage: professional course pressure and various examinations compress multilingual learning time into fragmented segments. Second, language imbalance: the dominant position of English marginalizes minor language learning, causing conflicts in time and energy allocation. Third, language interference: simultaneous multi-language learning leads to confusion in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, reducing learning accuracy. Fourth, insufficient external support: students lack systematic learning guidance, real-time process feedback, a collaborative learning atmosphere, and authentic language application scenarios.

4.5 Integration of Language and Professional Learning

Over 70% of students have never considered the integration of language learning and professional development. Only a few students actively carry out professional language practices such as reading foreign literature, academic writing, and professional translation. The disconnection between language ability and professional application is widespread, failing to give full play to the practical value of multilingual learning (Wen, 2016).

5. Discussion on Underlying Causes

(1) Insufficient supply-side support. University teaching focuses on in-class knowledge transmission, lacking targeted support for students' after-class autonomous learning, including professional learning guidance, high-quality personalized resources, and whole-process learning evaluation and feedback.
(2) Inadequate student learning abilities. Students have not received systematic multilingual learning strategy training, with weak self-management and scientific planning capabilities for autonomous learning.
(3) Disjointed teaching systems. There is a lack of effective coordination between different language courses, between in-class teaching and after-class learning, and between language learning and professional practice. The single evaluation system relying solely on final written exams ignores process assessment and practical ability evaluation.

6. Optimization Strategies for Multilingual Autonomous Learning

6.1 Construct Hierarchical and Precise Resource Database

A multi-level learning resource system is built to meet differentiated learning needs. Basic-level resources cover core vocabulary, grammar, and daily dialogue for daily consolidation. Examination-level resources provide targeted training for mainstream language proficiency tests. Professional-level resources match different disciplines, including industry vocabulary, professional scenario dialogues, and academic writing templates, to promote the deep integration of language and professional learning.

6.2 Build Coordinated Multi-language Learning Mechanism

Adhere to the dominant position of English as the core international communication language, and take minor languages as the characteristic development direction. Formulate scientific time allocation plans to avoid resource conflicts between different language learning. Carry out comparative teaching of multiple languages to help students distinguish linguistic differences, eliminate negative transfer interference, and improve overall multilingual learning efficiency.

6.3 Promote Deep Integration of Language and Professional Learning

Match targeted languages for different majors: Japanese for media and animation majors, French for fashion design majors, German for mechanical engineering majors, and Spanish for international trade majors. Set up interdisciplinary elective courses such as professional foreign language listening and speaking and foreign literature reading. Carry out industry-themed multilingual seminars and practical projects including foreign-language product introduction, technical translation, and cross-border business negotiation simulation, realizing the organic integration of language skills and professional abilities.

6.4 Build Intelligent Autonomous Learning Support Platform

Integrate AI and big data technology to build a full-process intelligent learning system (Zhang & Zhao, 2024). Equip it with intelligent oral evaluation, writing correction, and personalized memory planning functions to provide accurate learning guidance. Build a whole-process learning management system to realize goal setting, progress tracking, data analysis, and growth report generation. Construct an online learning community to support peer matching, interactive communication, and experience sharing, creating a collaborative and sustainable multilingual learning ecosystem.

7. Conclusion

The "Multilingualism Plus" reform of university public foreign languages is a fundamental transformation of educational concepts and practices. Based on an empirical study of 401 college students in Hunan Province, this research finds that students have basic multilingual learning motivation and resource access channels, but suffer from insufficient autonomous learning ability, unreasonable learning strategies, poor time management, and serious disconnection between language and professional learning. To solve these problems, universities, teachers, platforms, and students need to cooperate to optimize the autonomous learning system and cultivate lifelong multilingual learning abilities. Limited by regional scope and sample size, this study only focuses on students in Hunan Province. Future research can expand the research scope, explore the differentiated learning characteristics of students in different regions and disciplines, and provide more targeted suggestions for the in-depth development of "Multilingualism Plus" education reform.

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