

Research on the Educational Functions of English Associations in Colleges and Universities

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Abstract: English association is an important part of associations in colleges and universities. The development of English association activities effectively extends the classroom teaching of English, which can stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning. This paper takes University A in Anhui Province as an example, analyzes the activity forms and educational functions of English associations in this university, and puts forward feasible countermeasures suggestions, so that English associations in colleges and universities could give full play to serve students and adapt to the needs of the society.

Keywords: English Associations, Activity Forms, Educational Functions, Suggestions.

1. Introduction

Under the guidance and management of colleges and universities, students' associations are registered organizations formed spontaneously and voluntarily by students with the same interests and hobbies, common needs and ideal goals [1]. As an effective platform for students to learn English, English associations have won the favor and praise of the majority of students with active learning modes, rich activity forms and harmonious communication atmosphere, which have also enriched the campus culture [2].

In recent years, with the acceleration of globalization, the importance of English as an international common language has become more and more prominent. English associations in colleges and universities are not only an important platform for students to improve their English proficiency, but also an important way to cultivate students' intercultural communication skills, innovative thinking and teamwork ability. However, at present, university English associations are still facing many challenges in their development, such as single form of activities, low participation of students, limited resources and other problems. Therefore, it is of great theoretical and practical significance to study in depth the educational function of university English associations and explore their development countermeasures.

2. Activity Forms of English Association

University A is a comprehensive university in Anhui Province. Under the leadership of the university's Communist Youth League, there are 75 student associations in University A, including ideological and political associations, academic and technological associations, innovative and entrepreneurial associations, cultural and sports associations, voluntary public welfare associations, self-discipline and mutual aid associations and others, with the proportion of 6.67%, 38.66%, 4%, 32%, 12%, 2.67%, and 4%, respectively. It can be seen that the school's academic and technological associations and voluntary public welfare associations accounted for a higher proportion. English associations include English Corner Association, Translator's Association and Model United Nations Association, which are registered by teachers and students of School of Foreign Studies in A

school and belong to the academic and technological associations. These English associations have been awarded the honorary title of "Top Ten Associations" and "Outstanding Associations" of A school for many times.

2.1. English Corner Association

English Corner Association is one of the largest student associations in Anhui Province, which has been established for forty years and is committed to cultivating the English language ability and cultural experience of students, and has been awarded the honorary title of "Vitality Association" in the Anhui Province. The association insists on carrying out weekly oral English corner, encouraging students to speak freely on a variety of topics; "FLTRP Cup" series of competitions comprehensively test students' comprehensive English proficiency; the Song Competition leads students to experience the charm of language and music; and the training of TEM-4 and TEM-6 improves the passing rate through practice.

For example, in one period of oral English corner, it skillfully integrated the study of traditional Chinese paintings with English speaking practice, attracting the enthusiastic participation of students, even some foreign students. Under the guidance of the foreign teacher, a student transformed into an English lecturer and vividly introduced the profoundness and variety of Chinese painting styles, and taught the basic techniques of painting in a meticulous way. The students were deeply attracted and picked up the brushes and waved them freely on the rice paper, experiencing the charm and challenge of traditional art, and together they wove a splendid scroll of cross-cultural exchange.

2.2. Translator's Association

Adhering to the tenet of "bringing translation closer to you and me, and letting you and me enter the world", the Translator's Association constantly optimizes its work, studies current political issues, and provides high-quality competitions for students who love translation. The association insists on carrying out weekly translation, selecting texts of different subjects to help students consolidate their translation skills; the Interpretation Competition simulates real interpreting scenarios and cultivates interpreting adaptability; the Translation and Appreciation Competition provides a platform for students

majoring in various languages to have a practical experience in translation; and the Vocabulary Memorization inspires students' enthusiasm for vocabulary memorization through interesting games and competitions.

Take an Interpreting Competition as an example, in which two rounds of Chinese-to-English and English-to-Chinese competitions were held on the theme of "One Belt, One Road". It not only helped students improve their interpreting skills, but also deepened their understanding of the Belt and Road Initiative. After the competition, the Association invited teachers specializing in translation to make comments, and students generally reflected that they had benefited a lot.

2.3. Model United Nations Association

With the aim of "promoting the spirit of citizenship, cultivating the sense of cooperation and exercising critical thinking", Model United Nations Association has elaborated the activities of the Model United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Knowledge Contest, and has actively organized and carried out various Model United Nations activities both on and off campus. The activities of the association promote the understanding and support of contemporary students for the cause of the United Nations, aim to cultivate composite talents with national sentiment, global vision and professional skills, and are committed to popularizing the knowledge of the Model United Nations, cultivating the youth of the Model United Nations, and building the brand of the Model United Nations.

Taking a Model United Nations General Assembly as an example, with "Global Warming" as the topic in English assembly and "Global Food Security" as the topic in Chinese assembly, the participating students, representing different countries, discussed and expressed their views on countermeasures. This kind of simulation of real international affairs greatly broadened their international perspective, and the students not only improved their English expression skills, but also practiced critical thinking and teamwork.

3. Educational Functions of English Association

In the education system of colleges and universities, English associations, as highly distinctive student organizations, play a multidimensional and important role in the cultivation of talents, and have a far-reaching impact on the growth and development of students.

3.1. Strengthen Language Input and Exercise Language Output

Language proficiency enhancement is one of the core functions of English associations in educating students. In their daily English learning, students often lack a real and sufficient language practice environment, but English associations provide a platform for them to make up for this shortcoming. The English Association builds a diversified language input channel for students, and through the combination of online and offline, it exposes students to authentic and vivid English expressions, broadens the breadth of language input and enhances their sense of language. English speech competitions are organized to give students the opportunity to demonstrate their spoken language, prompting them to transform their accumulated language knowledge into fluent and accurate oral expressions, overcome their fear of expression, and enhance their oral

confidence. Translation competitions focus on written output, improving the logic and accuracy of written expression. This organic combination of input and output effectively enhances students' comprehensive English utilization ability.

Krashen's language input hypothesis and Swain's output hypothesis create favorable conditions for the development of English community [3]. In the process of English learning, it is necessary to feel the language behavior and input the language in the process of listening, speaking, reading, writing and viewing. With the application of the input of the language, the language proficiency of the learners will be improved. According to Swain, in the process of language learning, it is necessary to pay attention to the effective utilization of the language, and this utilization is the "output" of the language. The establishment of university English associations provides a good environment for "language output" and effectively promotes the development of language learning activities.

3.2. Foster Cultural Enrichment and Shape Intercultural Awareness

Cultivation of cultural literacy is an important dimension of English associations. Language and culture are closely linked, and English associations have become a window for students to learn about diverse cultures. The association organizes a variety of culture-themed activities to let students learn more about the history, customs, values and other cultural elements of English-speaking countries. In the process of participating in these activities, students can personally experience the charm of different cultures and feel the cultural differences. This not only broadens students' cultural horizons, but also cultivates their sense of cross-cultural communication and spirit of tolerance, enabling them to view the world with a more open attitude and enhance their cultural self-confidence.

Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions provides theoretical support for the cultural educational function of English associations. The theory holds that there are significant differences between different cultures [4]. English associations help students understand these differences and develop cross-cultural communication skills by organizing culture-themed activities. For example, through Model United Nations activities, students can learn about the cultural backgrounds of different countries and enhance their understanding of multiculturalism.

3.3. Implement Moral Education and Foster a Sense of Social Responsibility

English associations play an important role in moral education, helping students develop a sense of social responsibility and moral character. First of all, association activities usually require teamwork, and students learn to communicate and respect others in the division of labor, forming a team spirit and a sense of cooperation. Secondly, associations enhance students' sense of social responsibility and cultivate the spirit of dedication by organizing public welfare activities such as volunteer translation and community teaching. In addition, association activities require students to have self-discipline, such as in speech contests or translation tasks, students need to consciously prepare and comply with professional ethics, so as to enhance moral integrity. Finally, students take on leadership roles in the associations to exercise their organizational skills, and learn to make decisions under willpower.

From a theoretical perspective, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes that learning is a socialization process in which students construct knowledge and values through interaction [5]. English associations provide students with a platform for socialized learning through teamwork and social responsibility activities. Bandura's social learning theory also states that individuals learn social norms by observing and imitating the behavior of others. In associations, students internalize moral norms and form sound personalities through collective activities and interactions. Therefore, English associations are not only a platform for language learning, but also an important place for moral education, which helps students cultivate correct values and a sense of responsibility in the process of socialization, and promotes their comprehensive quality development.

4. Suggestions for English Association

Although English associations play an important role in educating people, they still face some problems and challenges in the actual development process, which need to be solved by targeted countermeasures in order to better fulfill their educational function.

4.1. Adapt to the Needs of the Times and Innovate the Form of Activities

Optimizing the content and form of activities is the key to enhancing the attractiveness and educational effect of English associations. On the one hand, the content of activities should be closely related to the needs of the times and students' interests. With the acceleration of globalization and the development of information technology, English is more and more widely used in various fields. The association can carry out English activities related to cutting-edge science and technology, international business and cultural exchange, such as "Artificial Intelligence English Forum", "Cross-border E-commerce English Combat", etc., so that students can learn English, understand the industry dynamics and broaden their knowledge at the same time.

On the other hand, the form of activities should be more diversified and innovative. In addition to traditional lectures and competitions, scenario simulation, project-based learning, online and offline integration can also be used. For example, students can be organized to conduct "English workplace simulation", so that they can communicate and collaborate in English in the simulated workplace scenarios; carry out online English learning activities, and make use of social media platforms to interact and supervise, so as to improve students' participation.

4.2. Equip Specialized Teachers and Stimulate Students' Initiative

Teacher team building is crucial to the development of English associations. Schools should select English teachers with rich teaching experience and professional knowledge as association instructors and encourage foreign teachers to participate in association activities. Instructors should not only give guidance to students in English learning, but also pay attention to students' personal development and psychological health, and guide students to establish correct learning attitudes and values. At the same time, the school should provide training and development opportunities for instructors and organize regular teaching seminars so that they can understand the latest English teaching concepts and

methods and improve their instructing level.

In addition, organizers should consult students' learning aspirations in advance when planning each association activity to ensure that the content selected fits students' interests and enhances their enthusiasm for participation [6]. Students can be advocated to take on the role of teachers themselves, teaching courses personally, developing students' communication skills, and prompting them to think deeply about what they have learned and internalize it, so as to realize the "transmission" of knowledge.

4.3. Seek Mutual Assistance Within the School and Expand Cooperation Outside the School

Expanding the resources for association development can provide English associations with a broader space for development. Within the school, English associations should strengthen cooperation and communication with other associations. Through cross-association and cross-discipline cooperation activities, it can realize resource sharing, complement each other's advantages, promote the integration of disciplines, and cultivate students' comprehensive ability. For example, to cooperate with the computer association to carry out the "English Programming Creative Competition", combining English learning and computer skills, enriching the form and content of the activities, and expanding the activities to the whole school.

Outside the school, the association should actively establish cooperative relations with enterprises and social organizations. Enterprises can provide internship and training opportunities for associations and sponsor activities; social organizations can provide professional guidance and communication platforms for associations. By expanding the resources outside the school, students can be exposed to the real social environment and improve their practical ability and social adaptability.

5. Conclusion

As learning groups independently organized by students, English associations in colleges and universities have unique advantages and irreplaceable roles in nurturing students. By enhancing students' language ability, cultivating their cultural literacy, improving their moral quality and shaping their comprehensive skills, English associations have laid a solid foundation for students' growth and development. However, in order to give full play to the educational function of English associations, it is necessary to make continuous efforts and improvements in the content and form of activities, the construction of teacher's team, the improvement of the management mechanism and the expansion of resources.

With the continuous development of society and the deepening of education reform, English associations in colleges and universities are facing new opportunities and challenges. English associations should follow the pace of the times and constantly innovate the development mode to meet the social demand for high-quality talents. Schools and education departments should also attach great importance to the development of English associations, give more support and guidance, and create a favorable development environment for English associations. It is believed that with the joint efforts of all parties, English associations in colleges and universities will play a greater role in cultivating new-age talents with international outlook, cross-cultural

communication skills and comprehensive literacy, and make greater contributions to the development of college and university education.

In the future research, the quantitative assessment method of the educational function of English associations can be further explored in depth so as to more accurately measure the impact of association activities on students' development. At the same time, the characteristics and development modes of English associations in different types of colleges and universities can be studied, so as to provide more targeted suggestions for the construction of English associations in various types of colleges and universities, and to promote the overall development of college and university English associations.

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