Problems and Solutions of Sakai Platform in Mixed Mode Teaching Activities

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ABSTRACT

The Sakai platform emphasizes sharing, cooperation and interaction, which is suitable for today’s intelligent learning. However, in the teaching practice, there are some problems in teachers’ teaching and students’ learning in Sakai platform. Only by speeding up the development of Sakai localization, actively training and guiding teachers and students, adopting certain incentives and creating a good style of study, can the revolutionary transformation of “teaching and learning” be realized by information technology.¹

KEYWORDS

Limitations of Sakai platform; unfamiliar information technology; style of study

INTRODUCTION

According to the 41st Statistical Report on China’s Internet Development of China Internet Network Information Center, as of December 2017, China had 772 million Internet netizens and 753 million mobile phone users[1]. The Internet has revolutionized the core event “how to teach and learn”, and the mixed teaching mode based on SAKAI platform is the product of this revolution. In the teaching practice, this brand-new educational mode greatly improves the teaching efficiency, and at the same time, there are also some problems. This paper makes a diagnosis and explores the way to solve the problem.

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LIMITATIONS OF SAKAI PLATFORM

The Sakai platform was originally an open source curriculum management system initiated by the Michigan University and Indiana University. The Sakai platform, which revolutionizes “teaching and learning” with powerful tools, is highly respected around the world, with more than 4 million registered members worldwide and 1.25 million in the United States alone[2]. However, the Sakai tool has its limitations. The main problems for Chinese users are as follows:

Sinicization of Sakai Platform

The Sakai platform has Western traditions, such as in “personal information”, where the user’s name follows the Western custom, which does not conform to Chinese custom, and the exterior design of the Sakai platform is in line with Western styles and aesthetics. In the “Homework” column, the text needs to be input into the text box, however, the toolbar doesn’t fit the user’s habits, and the font, size and background patterns available are too few to use, which is inconvenient.

Limitations of Sakai Platform Tools

The Sakai platform provides many tools, but some of them have similar functions and some of them are inconvenient to use, for example, the first one is that when you log in, you need to use browsers above IE9, or Firefox and Google Chrome, and if you use Baidu, 360, etc., it is not easy to submit, the second one is that the “station message” is suitable for mass mailing, and when sending a private message, you need to select the recipient in 26 alphabetical order, and if you are not carefully, it’s easy to become the mass texting, the third one is that the statistics tool in “discussion area” can only count the number of posting and reading the post, and the content of posts can only be viewed according to layout, but not the subject, and the last one is that it is impossible to upload large files above 200M, and lots of wonderful videos and courseware can’t be shared by students, and it is also impossible to realize online viewing, and you have to download it to use.

PROBLEMS OF TEACHERS IN TERCHING ACTIVITIES

With the popularization of higher education and the change of talent cultivation mode, the “communication technology prepares for a wider range of technical and economic elite roles”[3]. This requires the education team to keep pace with the times, and enhance the ability of information technology and information thinking, in order to achieve revolutionary changes in the teaching process. However, the current situation is not optimistic. There are mainly problems in the following aspects.
The Proportion of Teachers Who Insist on Using Sakai Platform to Strengthen Teaching is not High

The mixed teaching mode based on Sakai platform has been widely used in education circles. It has been five years since the introduction of Sakai platform in our school. However, among the 1400 teachers in our school, only 120 teachers insist on using Sakai platform for the mixed teaching mode. A large number of teachers mainly use the Sakai platform for testing, and the test questions are objective questions, which do not need to be corrected, just for the convenience of technology, not for teaching change.

The Teacher’s Lack of Information Technology Makes the Teacher’s Teaching Effectiveness Greatly Discounted

The mixed teaching mode based on Sakai platform emphasizes the organic combination of teaching content and information technology, but any technology has its limitations. Teachers’ roles are irreplaceable. Teachers can randomly deal with various complex problems in an appropriate way, but technology can only solve problems within the existing model framework[4]. Under the new teaching mode, it is necessary to design the classroom scientifically, rationally allocates time investment both online and offline, and make all kinds of teaching elements merge deeply, so as to play the role of technology in promoting teaching and learning. However, many teachers’ teaching is often ineffective in the teaching process because of the unfamiliar operation of technology, due to the lack of information technology, some teachers only share other people’s resources in the course construction and do not make contributions themselves, and some just transfer the class schedule, textbooks and test questions from traditional classroom activities to Sakai platform, which makes it difficult for them to take advantage of the advantages of past lectures and the online advantages of Sakai platform, so the teaching effect is greatly discounted.

Teaching Management Lags behind, Affecting Teachers’ Use of Sakai to Enhance Teaching Enthusiasm

The front-line teachers use information technology to carry out teaching reform, and the teaching management departments do not have the corresponding scientific management methods and evaluation methods. There is no corresponding measure to evaluate the different contributions of teachers in curriculum construction. It is the same no matter whether teachers do or not. The student’s achievement has already realized the Sakai online scientific statistics. The educational administration achievement management system can’t dock with the Sakai platform’s achievement. Achievements also need to be recorded on the paper grade book, and then recorded on the Educational Administration Zheng-Fang System. It’s hard to avoid making
mistakes in the manual results record. If there is a mistake, it is a teaching accident. For hundreds or even thousands of public course teachers, it is a pain in the neck.

PROBLEMS STUDENTS HAVE IN USING SAKAI PLATFORM FOR LEARNING

Students Who First Use Sakai Platform for Learning Lack a Sense of Belonging

In traditional teaching, students are used to having classes and a sense of belonging in the learning environment. However, online autonomous learning enables teachers and students to be separated from each other and lacks the humanized communication and learning environment of synchronous learning. For first-year students using Sakai, the lack of feeling is especially obvious. In addition, they have less self-control when it comes to autonomous learning, and have no interest or even resistance to the new teaching model. Some students are lazy enough to learn, and without the supervision of their teachers, they will soon transfer to games and TV shows when opening Sakai.

Students’ Learning Efficiency is Polarized in the Mixed Mode and the Style of Study is Affected

The online learning is not monitored, so the platform can’t identify plagiarism, and substitute examination[5], which will encourage students to be lazy, to plagiarize and to speculate. For example, in the “chat room” and “discussion area”, students refresh screen to get the number of page views. Some students use technology to slack off. When they look at homework questions, they find “Du Niang” and paste it up. The most serious ones are “substitution”, especially the mid-term and final examinations, which account for a significant course performance. It is possible that a student with excellent grades in a class will complete the test for the entire class. The dirtiest thing is the emergence of an industrial “alternative group” around the campus, which greatly corrupts the style of study.

SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS OF MIXED TEACHING MODE BASED ON SAKAI PLATFORM

Strengthening Hardware Environment Construction and Accelerating Sakai Localization Development

One cannot make bricks without straw. Sakai platform teaching needs the support of the server. If the school doesn’t invest enough in hardware, doesn’t have enough servers, students don’t have a computer, or even a smart phone, then the
difficulty of online learning will increase, especially in the final exam. The capacity of existing servers should be fully considered to avoid system breakdown. Therefore, the school must increase investment and strengthen hardware construction. The limitation of Sakai platform requires accelerating the localization development, which is also inseparable from human and material input. To address the practical problem of students lacking computers or smart phones, schools can open up a number of computer rooms for free use by students.

In the case of inadequate input and no breakthrough in technology, the limitations of “resources” can be overcome by external linking tools of Sakai platform, such as linking the Sakai site to the excellent course site, putting large files on the excellent course site, or linking the personal Sakai work site with a specific Internet address to achieve online viewing.

**Guiding actively and Establishing a Teaching Team of “Passing, Helping and Leading ”and “1+1” Pair**

Schools should stand at the strategic height of education information to use Sakai platform for the overall planning of network teaching, to enhance the enthusiasm and initiative of teachers to use network teaching. It is effective that we adopt the teaching team of “passing, helping, and leading” and “1+1” pair. “Passing” is that teachers in the same discipline construct the curriculum together. Teachers who are proficient in Sakai tools explain to teachers in the same discipline so that teachers can organically combine the teaching content with the Sakai platform to form a teaching team. Small teams formed within the discipline help each other, and colleagues form a model of “big fish leading small fish”, and they exchange ideas with each other in a small atmosphere. Experienced veteran teachers lead young teachers to focus on research and development of teaching content, and young teachers lead veteran teachers in technology, thus driving the whole school to use the Sakai platform for online teaching. “1+1” pair, that is, old teachers with rich teaching experience pair with young teachers. Old teachers help young teachers in teaching content and strategies, and promote the growth of young teachers. Young teachers help old teachers upload resources and beautify pages in the use of Sakai technology.

**Strengthening Training and Improving Information Literacy and Technology Level of Teachers and Students**

Relevant departments of the school strengthen the promotion of Sakai platform. By making videos, carrying out training courses and holding lectures, they vividly introduce the use method of Sakai platform to teachers and students. They can also hold relevant learning competitions, and expand the impact of the system on teachers and students to create a good educational technology atmosphere. At the same time, teachers should also encourage and guide students to adapt to the new teaching mode. The attitude of teachers has a great impact on students, so teachers
should actively help students to use the learning system, make full use of the advantages of the system, carefully carry out curriculum construction, give full consideration to the interests of students, and stimulate the enthusiasm of students to use Sakai[6].

**Setting up Teaching Incentive Mechanism and Strengthening the Study Style of School Spirit**

The teaching work of the school is an organic entity that operates as a whole. The school advocates that teachers use modern technology to promote the quality of teaching. Each department of educational administration should take the lead in setting a good example. It is impossible to use traditional manual operation to manage academic performance to add extra teachers’ burden under the condition that every teaching link has been paperless. Schools should be inclined from traditional teaching to mix mode teaching in administrative management and teaching service. The teacher’s teaching activities using educational information technology should be assessed quantitatively, and teachers who contribute greatly should be encouraged.

**CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusions, the cooperative and interactive functions provided by Sakai conform to the trend of the times and meet the requirements of contemporary intelligent learning. However, any technology has its limitations. By combing and cracking the problems of the mixed teaching mode based on Sakai platform, the educational informatization progress can be written better, the information literacy of teachers can be improved, and the teachers can play a unique leading role in the human spiritual highland which can’t be reached by technology with the help of technical means.

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**REFERENCES**


