PROCEEDINGS ARTICLE

Practice and Reflection on College English Online Teaching During the Epidemic Period: Taking the Comprehensive English Course in Beijing International Studies University as an Example

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ABSTRACT

A sudden COVID-19 epidemic brings great challenges to college English teaching. This article takes the Comprehensive English course as an example to present the entire process of its online teaching, summarize and reflect on the teaching effects, aiming to provide some reference for college English online teaching during the post-epidemic period.

1. INTRODUCTION

In late 2019, the coronavirus disease broke out, and the epidemic gradually became worse. To prevent the spread of the epidemic to campuses and ensure the health and safety of teachers and students, the Ministry of Education of China required all types of schools to carry out online teaching by using the network platform, in order to realize the goal of "postponement of school without suspension of learning". On 5 February 2020, the Ministry of Education specially issued the *Guidance on the Organization and Management of Online Teaching in Colleges and Universities During the Epidemic Prevention and Control Period* (hereinafter referred to as the *Guidance*). The *Guidance* requires that "colleges and universities should make full use of online MOOCs and high-quality online course teaching resources at the provincial and university levels, and actively carry out online teaching activities such as online teaching and online learning by relying on various online course platforms at all levels and online learning

space on campus, driven by the service support of MOOC platform and experimental resource platform, in order to ensure the teaching progress and teaching quality during the epidemic prevention and control period." At the same time, the *Guidance* clearly states that quality of online learning and offline classroom teaching should be substantially equivalent [1].

Beijing International Studies University actively responded to the Ministry of Education's deployment of "postponement of school without suspension of learning" and urgently issued the "Notice on the Arrangements for Undergraduate Education and Teaching during the Epidemic Prevention and Control Period" on 5 February 2020 [2]. At the same time, teachers were organized to adjust teaching methods, redesign teaching plans, and carry out distance teaching with multiple measures. Comprehensive English course is a compulsory course for non-English Majors in Beijing International Studies University. This course has a wider range of coverage, a longer course period (up to two years), and more class hours

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per week (up to 4 hours). It is a very important course for non-English majors to learn English knowledge and skills. This article will take the Comprehensive English course as an example to present the entire process of its online teaching, summarize and reflect on the teaching effects, aiming to provide some reference for college English online teaching during the post-epidemic period.

2. PREPARATION

2.1. Revision of Teaching Plan

According to the school's "one course, one scheme" principle, the comprehensive English teaching team, through collective discussion, determined the specific implementation plan of Comprehensive English course during the epidemic prevention and control period. The teaching plan was redesigned. Besides, the teaching methods, teaching approaches, evaluation methods, after-school counseling and homework were also adjusted.

During the epidemic prevention and control period, the school recommended three types of remote teaching methods, namely, established online courses, live broadcast courses, and remote guidance. Taking into account high interactivity of the Comprehensive English course, the teaching team finally decided to adopt a hybrid distance teaching mode based on live network and assisted by instant messaging software. At the same time, online lectures, discussions, student presentations and Q&A were also carried out.

2.2. Teaching and Training

The sudden change of teaching mode has brought unprecedented challenges to teachers both in psychology and in practice. To ensure the smooth development of online teaching, the school organized a series of online teaching training, aiming to improve teachers' online teaching skills, helping them to be familiar with the operation and use of platform and software, guiding them to use platform teaching resources and learn excellent online teaching cases, and urging them to redesign teaching plans. After a series of training, the psychological barriers of online teaching were gradually eliminated and teachers' basic online teaching skills were greatly improved.

2.3. Software Testing

According to the established teaching plan, the Comprehensive English teaching team tested the various pieces of live broadcast software repeatedly,

and finally determined to use the "Rain Classroom" teaching software. This teaching software has powerful functions, which can send instant voice message, PPT and teaching video to students. Moreover, the software has interactive teaching functions such as random roll call and classroom questioning. Students' answers in class and homework completion can also be recorded, which is convenient for teachers to carry out formative evaluation. At the same time, Zoom and Tencent are selected as backup live broadcast software.

The Comprehensive English teaching team has also selected instant messaging software such as WeChat and QQ as auxiliary or emergency teaching software to deal with the sudden breakdown of network in live broadcast. WeChat and QQ can also be used to guide those students who have difficulty participating in the network live broadcast. Students in Beijing International Studies University are from different parts of China. Some of them come from remote areas with poor internet access, and some are overseas students. Due to the lack of good network conditions or time difference, these students may not be able to attend class. Therefore, it is very necessary to use instant messaging software such as WeChat group, QQ group for remote guidance.

It is worth mentioning that the school has not strictly required teachers to use fixed live broadcast software and instant messaging software. Instead, the decision-making right is given to teachers, allowing each teacher to choose the suitable software based on his or her own experience and the students' needs, which brings great convenience to the smooth development of online teaching.

3. TRIAL BROADCAST

Different from offline teaching, online teaching involves various factors, including software, hardware, network status, teachers' online teaching ability and so on. In order to better improve online teaching, the school sets the two weeks before the beginning of school as the trial broadcasting period, leaving teachers and students with sufficient time to experience and adapt.

Due to the sufficient preparatory work and the perfect emergency plan, the trial broadcast in the first two weeks went smoothly. During this period, the school has continuously strengthened teaching guidance and management, sending teaching supervisors into online classrooms, and guiding teachers to actively carry out online teaching observations and learning from each other. After the two-week trial broadcast, the school conducted a questionnaire survey on

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students from 58 classes and 13 majors. The results show that most students can adapt to the online teaching mode and are satisfied with it.

Although the trial broadcast in the first two weeks went smoothly, the teaching supervision group, teachers and students gave a lot of feedback. Teachers also found some problems in the teaching process, mainly focusing on the following aspects.

3.1. Software and Hardware Problems

The trial broadcast in the first two weeks showed that the three selected webcast software had different degrees of network blocking. This is because all universities, middle schools and primary schools across the country have launched online teaching in response to the Ministry of Education's deployment of "postponement of school without suspension of learning". When the school started, many online live courses inevitably led to network congestion, which is more obvious in "Rain Classroom". "Rain Classroom" is a smart teaching tool jointly developed by Xuetang Online and Tsinghua University Online Education Office. It has very powerful functions and is the preferred live platform for Comprehensive English teaching team. However, during the epidemic period, the powerful "Rain Classroom" provided free platform services and technical guidance to university teachers nationwide. Therefore, a large number of university teachers conducted online teaching in the "Rain Classroom", which finally resulted in congestion during times of heavy usage. Although most students expressed their understanding, the interruption of teaching caused by network congestion will inevitably reduce the effectiveness of teaching. In the long run, students' enthusiasm for class will also wear off. In addition, some students are unable to participate in online teaching due to their remote location or outdated computers and mobile phones.

3.2. Discomfort and Interference of Online Learning

The sudden change of teaching mode often causes students' tension and discomfort. Colleges and universities have heavy teaching tasks and tight class hours. In addition to studying multiple specialized courses and many general courses, non-English majors of Beijing International Studies University must also minor in English as a second major. Take the freshmen as an example, they need to learn three English courses every semester, with up to 8 English class hours per week. The students have very heavy

schoolwork, and the daily course arrangement is very tight. Long time online learning can easily cause fatigue of eyesight. The students' initial sense of freshness is difficult to maintain, and it is easy for them to enter the fatigue period. In addition, the sudden change of teaching mode is also a challenge for those students with introverted personality or poor learning foundation. Because of their shyness or nervousness, they often refuse to turn on the camera and seldom participate in classroom interaction. The network also brings great negative interference to the students with poor self-control. Online chat software, online video viewing, games and entertainment websites all distract their attention and have a negative impact on online teaching.

3.3. Low Utilization of Curriculum Resources

After years of accumulation, the Comprehensive English course has rich course learning materials and exercise resources which have already been uploaded to the school cloud platform. In addition to uploading unified course group resources, class teachers can also upload their own teaching resources. All of the resources on the platform are free for the students to use. However, when students browse the course resource database, they often need to screen and reorganize the resources, which is quite time-consuming. In addition, the previous learning materials are mostly designed for offline courses, and many resources are not suitable for online learning.

3.4. Academic Evaluation

In the first two weeks of trial broadcast, students showed great confusion and worry about the performance evaluation mechanism of online learning. The final score of Comprehensive English is mainly composed of three parts: usual performance (30%), mid-term examination (30%) and final examination (40%). Among them, the usual performance records the students' daily learning, such as class attendance, classroom performance, homework completion and so on. After a whole semester of offline learning, the freshmen have been very familiar with and adapted to this comprehensive evaluation system. However, some students worry that due to the limitations of online learning, teachers can't fully record and evaluate their studies. There are also students who worry that online teaching will limit the time and frequency of interaction between teachers and students, which will finally affect the evaluation of their usual performance.

4. ADJUSTMENT OF ONLINE TEACHING

Based on the trial broadcast of the first two weeks and feedback from multiple channels, the Comprehensive English teaching team timely summarized and discussed the problems and opinions, trying to adjust the basic factors of online teaching.

4.1. Lesson Preparation

Lesson preparation is the first step in teaching. In the stage of lesson preparation, teachers need to design a reasonable teaching plan according to the teaching content and students' basic situation. Based on the previous trial broadcast and group discussion, the Comprehensive English teaching team readjusted the teaching plan, supplemented or deleted the teaching content timely according to the syllabus and the features of online teaching, and redesigned classroom interaction. For example, the commonly used audio and video materials are re-screened and edited to make them more suitable for the teaching content; interesting classroom interactive activities such as online answering race, voting, mutual questioning among students, discussion and presentation are added; the knowledge points of each lesson are recorded into short videos of about 30 minutes, which is convenient for students to consolidate knowledge and review after class, and provides effective remote guidance materials for students who are unable to participate in the live broadcast.

4.2. Classroom Teaching

Due to the rapid increase in the number of "Rain Classroom" users, network congestion often occurred. The Comprehensive English teaching team decided to use Zoom or Tencent to conduct online teaching. With more powerful interaction and evaluation functions, "Rain Classroom" still serves as an important platform for pre-class learning resources, post-class homework submission and testing.

As mentioned above, the sudden change of teaching mode often causes students' discomfort and tension. Long time online learning can also cause students' physical and mental fatigue, and students with poor self-control ability will also be negatively affected by the network environment. Therefore, it is of great importance to organize online teaching effectively, motivating the students and inspiring them to participate in the online activities.

In view of the problems mentioned above, the online teaching activities were redesigned, aiming to arouse students' interest and increase the interactivity. Meanwhile, guidance was also strengthened, trying to

guide students to gradually improve the ability of self-control and autonomous learning. Take Unit 2 *The Virtues of Growing Older* in *An Integrated English Course* (Book 1) as an example [3].

The topic discussed in Unit 2 involves the understanding of different stages of life. The author especially analyzes the benefits of being old. The students are in their prime years, and they usually don't pay too much attention to the life of the elderly. Therefore, it is not easy to arouse their interest in the topic of this unit. In order to stimulate students' interest, the classic clip from the Hollywood film *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* was selected and shown at the very beginning of the class, which successfully aroused students' curiosity and interest. The questions discussed were as follows:

1. Can you list some words to describe the features of the youth and the old?
2. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of being young? Are there any advantages of being old?
3. Do you dread aging? Why? Can you imagine what you will become when you are old? What distinct characteristics will you have?

Through the discussion, students expressed their own opinions. The heated discussion not only helped them to practice their oral English, but also stimulated their willingness to further study the text and understand the author's point of view. In the process of studying the text, the teacher guided the students to further understand the text by asking questions, group discussions and debates. In addition, based on the unit topic and the text content, the teacher designed a variety of consolidation exercises and expansion activities to give students enough time and space to carry out independent exploration and learning. For example, students were required to share their grandparents' life stories and attitudes towards life; students were asked to explore the generation gap between the younger generation and the older generation by way of role playing; students were guided to watch and discuss the video entitled "What advice would you give to your younger self?", then they were required to record a short video with the title "Talk to My Future". After the video sharing and discussion, students could also be guided to write a letter to their future selves; students were also recommended to watch some relevant movies and TV series such as *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* and *Growing Pains*. Through a variety of consolidation and expansion exercises, students' basic skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing can be well trained. They gradually adapted themselves to online teaching. The discomfort and tension of online

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learning disappeared, and the self-control ability and autonomous learning ability were enhanced.

Comprehensive English also involves a lot of difficult vocabulary and grammar learning. To help students master relevant vocabulary and grammar easily, teachers need to change the way to explain key words and grammar in offline classroom. Instead, teachers should make full use of the powerful interactive functions of online software, allowing students to gradually understand and master the correct use of vocabulary and grammar in a relaxed atmosphere.

4.3. Extracurricular Expansion & Instruction

After reorganization and screening, the Comprehensive English extracurricular exercises and assignments were mainly published on the "Rain Classroom" platform. Students could open the relevant modules for online practice and teachers could review, evaluate and give feedback at any time. In addition, the Comprehensive English teaching team re-integrated and developed the curriculum resources of the Cloud platform to facilitate students' quick access. According to the needs of students, teachers could also recommend 1291 national high-quality online open courses to students as supplementary learning resources.

As online teaching is limited by the physical conditions such as network and equipment, teachers need to provide personalized guidance based on students' situation. First of all, for students in remote areas, international students and students with poor personal electronic equipment, teachers recorded the video of learning points and sent it to each student through WeChat or email. Besides, WeChat, QQ or e-mail were also used to carry out remote guidance. Secondly, a Q&A WeChat group was established to encourage students to actively ask questions. Finally, a special Q&A time was added every week, and students could use WeChat or Video software such as Zoom and Tencent Video to ask questions in the form of text, voice chat or video chat. It has been proved that diversified Q&A and counseling provide students with multiple ways to ask questions, which can not only help them solve problems in time, but also reduce their tension or worry.

4.4. Learning Evaluation

Comprehensive English course is to cultivate students' knowledge and skills in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation. In order to fully understand the students' learning progress, the Comprehensive English teaching team has formulated a detailed evaluation plan. At the same time, in order to strengthen the students' motivation to participate in online learning, the Comprehensive English teaching team decided to cancel the mid-term examination (submitted to the school and approved) and increase the proportion of usual performance to 60%. Thus, the final score of the semester is composed of two parts: usual performance (60%) and final exam (40%). The team also refined the proportion of the usual performance in a detailed way, mainly from 3 aspects: class attendance, homework, and classroom performance (Table 1). Teachers can adjust the specific proportions of class attendance, homework and classroom performance based on the actual situation. It is undoubted that the assessment of classroom performance is the most complicated part. Teachers need to record every speech, discussion and report made by students, and grade them according to their performance. Although the workload is heavy, students' classroom participation is greatly improved. In order to provide each student with the opportunity to show themselves and reduce tension in front of the camera, the author asked students to deliver class reports and allowed each student to participate in the comments and scoring, with the average score as the final score. The average score of class report was also included in the classroom performance. Through this activity, the students' interest was aroused and the classroom atmosphere was greatly activated. In addition to the fair and objective recording of students' usual performance, the final online examination also adheres to the principle of fairness and justice. Most of the items are subjective, which not only flexibly tests the students' practical language application ability, but also avoids cheating.

In summary, a fair, objective, and impartial evaluation system eliminates students' worries and tension. Real-time online evaluation and multi-dimensional evaluation methods encourage students to participate in online learning, helping them build online learning confidence and improving online learning efficiency.

5. SUMMARY AND REFLECTION

After experiencing the difficulties, tensions and discomforts of online teaching in the early stage, through continuous adjustment, teachers and students gradually adapted to the new teaching mode. Due to the limitations of online teaching, if we want to ensure that the quality of online and offline teaching is essentially equivalent, teachers, students and schools need to work hard together. Teachers' online teaching ability should be improved, students' autonomous learning ability should be enhanced and school management should also be strengthened.

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School: School of English Language, Literature and Culture			Class: XX				
Course: Comprehensive English							
Serial Number	Student Number	Name	Class Attendance (30%)	Homework and Quiz (50%)	Class Performance (20%)	Total Score	Note
1							
2							
3							
4							
Teacher's signature:							
Note:	The ratio of class attendance, homework, and class performance can be adjusted by the teacher. Class attendance: lateness, absenteeism (points will be deducted for each time). Homework: homework (X times), quiz (X times) (points given based on quality of homework). Classroom performance: speaking in class, discussion and report (points given based on quality).						

Table 1. Usual performance of the second semester of academic year 2019–2020.

5.1. Teachers Should Improve Their Online Teaching Ability

Online teaching is a new experience for most teachers, and also a new challenge for them. Facing the camera, teachers inevitably feel nervous and uncomfortable. It can be said that the online teaching ability of teachers directly affects the quality and effect of online teaching. The online teaching ability of teachers is not only related to their own professional literacy, but also affected by their own information literacy. Most teachers have excellent professional literacy, but often neglect the cultivation of information literacy. Under the background of online teaching, information literacy is particularly important. Therefore, teachers should strive to improve the level of computer operation, learn how to install and use common software, get familiar with the operation of live broadcast software and platform, learn to use the platform or software to organize online learning interaction and monitor learning progress. Besides, teachers should improve the ability of multimedia and network application, and have the ability to produce high-level courseware by proficient usage of multimedia and network resources. Finally, teachers should also have the ability to integrate and optimize the curriculum resources, and learn to effectively integrate and utilize the existing learning resources.

5.2. Students Should Improve Their Autonomous Learning Ability

In the face of the brand-new online learning model, students will inevitably be nervous and uncomfortable, especially in the part that lacks teachers' attention and supervision. A large number of students often have no idea what to do and cannot focus on learning. Some students even show negative feelings of studying. To a large extent, students' discomfort stems from the lack of autonomous learning ability. Students have already got accustomed to face-to-face teaching. The lack of teachers' actual supervision in online class often causes a strong sense of anxiety. Besides, students with poor self-control usually cannot resist the negative interference of the Internet. Therefore, it is urgent to guide students to enhance their autonomous learning ability. In daily teaching, teachers should timely guide students to correct their learning motivation, introduce effective learning strategies, and guide students to conduct self-management.

5.3. Schools Should Strengthen Their Teaching Management

The effective development of online teaching is inseparable from the school's management. In the

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current epidemic situation, schools should speed up the establishment or improvement of online teaching platforms, organize personnel to integrate and optimize curriculum resources, and regulate teachers' online teaching. At the same time, schools should also improve the diversified evaluation system to promote the common development of teachers and students, ensuring the smooth progress of online teaching.

6. CONCLUSION

At present, the epidemic situation in China has been effectively controlled. However, as countries reopen their borders and resume economic exchanges, there will inevitably be small-scale recurrences of the epidemic in China. Before it is fully controlled, we still need to carry out online teaching or online and offline hybrid teaching according to the development of the epidemic. It is undeniable that online teaching will be normalized and become an important teaching mode of college English education in China. What should we do with college English education after the epidemic? How should we effectively carry out online teaching? How should we ensure that quality of online learning and offline classroom teaching is substantially equivalent? Every college English teacher should think deeply about the questions mentioned above. The author believes that the most urgent task is to strive to improve the online teaching ability of college teachers and at the same time guide students to enhance their autonomous learning ability. In addition, universities should further strengthen teaching management to provide guarantee and supervision for efficient online teaching. It is hoped that on the day of complete victory of the epidemic prevention and control, college English education in China will also have a new development opportunity through continuous reform and innovation!

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

This article was independently completed by Ying Wu.

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