An Exploration of the Actual Situation of the Fully Online Teaching of College English--A Case Study of an Independent College in Henan Province

Lu Haiyan

Xinlian College of Henan Normal University, Xinxiang , Henan, China, 453007

35181874@qq.com

Abstract

During the period of epidemic prevention and control, in response to the call of the Ministry of education, College English teaching in colleges and universities across the country was organized and implemented in a fully online way. In order to know the actual situation of College English teaching, such as the use of terminal，App and resources, teaching methods, students' attendance, teachers and students' views on online teaching, as well as the teaching effect, this paper takes an independent college in Henan Province as an example, and carries out a series of investigation and research by way of daily teaching statistics, questionnaire survey and online interview. The results show that there are advantages and disadvantages of fully online College English Teaching under the background of epidemic situation. Its disadvantages are more than its advantages. So online teaching cannot totally take the place of classroom teaching for College English.

Keywords: Epidemic prevention and control; College English; Fully online teaching; Actual situation

1. Introduction

Due to the outbreak of Covid-19 epidemic and our prevention and control, nationwide colleges and universities delay their opening date of semesters. In response to the call of the document ([2020] No.2 MOE) issued by the Ministry of Education on "maintaining undisrupted learning", the fully online teaching supported by means of information technology has become the only way for colleges and universities to carry out various teaching activities during epidemic prevention and control period. As soon as the document was promulgated, all kinds of educational organizations and institutions at all the levels quickly took action. After various and scientific research, they formulated the work plan of online teaching, and then began to implement it with careful arrangement. As one of the compulsory courses in colleges and universities, College English is a comprehensive course integrating knowledge teaching and skill training. It includes not only the teaching of language and cultural knowledge such as pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar, but also the training and improvement of language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. Its curriculum covers a wide range, and the skill training is practical. After the implementation of online teaching, the actual teaching situation of the course and whether it can achieve "substantial equivalence"([2020] No.2 MOE) with offline classroom teaching have become important issues that we should comprehensively know, analyze and discuss.

2. Research Subjects

This paper takes the teaching situation of more than 4000 students and 36 teachers of College English in 67 classes of 2018 and 2019 in an independent college in Henan Province as the research subjects. Among the 36

teachers, 32 also undertake the teaching tasks of College English in the parent public university of the independent college, accounting for more than half of the total number of College English teachers in the parent public university. Therefore, the online teaching situation of College English in this independent college is basically the same as that of its parent public university, which is highly representative.

3. Data Sources

There are three sources of data in this study: First, it is the daily report of the members of learning and assisting staff of each class. The author is an educational administrator of this independent college, responsible for collecting the daily data of online teaching this semester and monitoring the teaching quality, which facilitates me to obtain the statistical data of all the aspects of College English teaching. Second, two questionnaires were conducted before and during the semester. Before the implementation of online teaching, the author added some questions on the basis of the online teaching questionnaire issued by the superior administrative department. By the means of Question Star, a platform providing functions equivalent to Amazon Mechanical Turk, the author conducted a survey concerning online teaching preparation and acceptance among all the students and teachers. During the semester, the author also used Question Star to conduct a questionnaire survey on the adaptability and teaching effect of online teaching. Third, it is an online interview. In the process of online teaching, the author conducted online interviews with all the teachers and nearly 100 students through telephone, WeChat, QQ and other means so as to further understand the experience, opinions of and suggestion for teachers and students on the fully online teaching of College English.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Use of teaching terminals

According to the survey before the class, there are four types of teaching terminals used in College English teaching: desktop computer, portable notebook computer (including tablet computer), smart phone and iPad. 28.8% of the teachers used desktop computers and 71.2% laptops. One teacher did not take a computer with him because he was away from home, so he used his smart phone to teach online in the first two weeks, and then used laptop to teach after returning. No one used iPad to teach. However, 99.8% of the teachers use smart phones to assist teaching and carry out interactive activities such as check-in, Q&A and discussion. 8.2% of the students used desktop computers as terminals, 17.5% laptops, 74.6% smart phones and 0.7% iPads. All the students use smart phones for interactive activities such as check-in, Q&A and discussion. Therefore, during the fully online teaching of College English, both teaching and learning rely on the smart phones. In terms of input convenience and functional completeness, the smart phones are inferior to portable laptops and thus have not become the first choice for teachers to teach, but the convenience and practicality make it the preferred terminal fort he   most students. With the development of technology and the further expansion of the functions of smart phones, teachers and students may rely entirely on smart phones to carry out fully online teaching and learning activities of College English.

4.2 Use of platforms

Before the fully online teaching, our college conducted technical training on the use of Super Star Learning and Rain Classroom for all the teachers. Therefore, at the beginning, all teachers used Super Star Learning or Rain Class, and the proportion was 68% and 32% respectively. Since Rain Classroom needs identification before use, more teachers choose to use Super Star Learning. However, in the first two days of teaching, due to the sharp increase in the number of students, the phenomenon of live broadcast stuck, video unable to be uploaded and system crash occurred frequently in these two platforms. Thus the teachers had to try other free platforms with relatively smooth and stable live broadcasting, such as Tencent Conference and QQ live broadcast. After that, the teachers began to use Tencent classroom, DingTalk and other platforms with good live

broadcast effect and relatively complete functions. As time went by, the daily report showed that Tencent conference / classroom, DingTalk, QQ live and broadcast were used with increasing frequency, and gradually became the main teaching platforms for the most teachers, while Super Star Learning and Rain Classroom became assistant for uploading learning materials, signing in or distributing homework. Some teachers even gave up using these two platforms. At the same time, WeChat group and QQ group were also used as auxiliary platforms by the most teachers to conduct Q&A, discuss or share learning materials.

The use and development of online teaching platforms showed that for the fully online teaching of College English, a single teaching platform or software could not meet the teaching needs. The most teachers used 2-3 platforms or software. In addition, this phenomenon showed that the stability and function of online teaching platforms commonly used in colleges and universities in China needed to be strengthened and improved. This conclusion is basically consistent with that of Liu et al. (2020).

4.3 Use of teaching materials

The teaching materials of College English can be divided into official resources, social resources, college resources and self-made resources. Official resources refer to the national top quality courses. Social resources range from the teaching materials produced by the master publishing company and the supporting textbooks to the online learning courses of key universities or the learning resources promoted by the professional official accounts, such as Master of Vocabulary and BaiCiZhan. School resources refer to online courses developed by the colleges based on SPOC; self-made resources refer to teaching materials designed and produced by teachers according to textbooks. When online teaching was first implemented, 12.3% of the teachers used official resources, 58.4% used social resources, 19.7% used school resources, and 9.6% used self-made resources. Due to the close combination of social resources and textbooks, it is necessary to use more of them. At the beginning of the fully online teaching, most teachers were indifferent or perfunctory, thinking that after less than two weeks, more than four weeks they could return to offline classroom teaching, so the self-made teaching resources were seldom used. However, with the continuous epidemic prevention and control, only relying on official resources or social resources cannot meet the personalized learning needs of our students; and given the average level of English among our students, it was difficult for them to learn and use official resources. The daily report showed, as a result, that the use of self-made teaching materials had gradually increased, while official resources, social resources and school resources had declined. The data near the end of the period showed that the utilization of official resources decreased to 8.1%, social resources to 48.7%, school resources to 15.6%, and self-made resources increased to 79.8%. On the basis of using the original resources, most teachers have designed and produced teaching materials according to the students' English level. The change of the teaching materials from different sources reflects the change of teachers' attitude towards the fully online teaching of College English: from the initial indifference and perfunctoriness, teachers gradually accept the fact and actively made their own teaching resources, which were more suitable for the use of our students.

4.4 Use of teaching methods

Basically, there are three kinds of online teaching methods: live broadcast, recorded broadcast, assignment and Q & A. According to the daily report at the beginning of the semester, except for one teacher who used a single assignment and Q & A in the first two weeks, most of the other teachers used mixed teaching: either "live broadcast + Q & A", or "recorded broadcast+ Q &A", and even two teachers adopted three ways of "live broadcast + recorded broadcast + Q & A". There are 15 teachers teaching live, accounting for 41.67%, and 24 teachers recording, accounting for 66.67%. The data in the middle and late semester showed that no teacher used a single way to assign tasks and answer questions, and all teachers use mixed teaching. The results of the questionnaire among students showed that the number and frequency of students asking questions online were very few, and less than 3% of students would ask questions on their own initiative. As a result, teachers had to change their teaching methods. Besides, the questionnaire of students and the research findings of Yang Sen

(2020:20-22), Wang Jixin (2020:15-21) show that students prefer teachers' live teaching. The results of student interviews show that students hope to listen to or see the teacher and interact online in time, which can reduce the sense of distance and increase the sense of intimacy and belonging. In the middle and later period, the number of teachers teaching live increased to 32, while the number of teachers recording decreased to 14. The number of teachers using the three methods at the same time increased to 11. Some teachers also recorded and upload the video to the database. Others used the screen recording function of the platform, so that students can review at any time after class.

4.5 Situation of class transference and combination

Although the educational administration department of the college has repeatedly asked teachers to carry out online teaching according to the timetable and class division, due to the quarantine at home and the network stuck in rush hours, it is difficult to strictly conform to the timetable and class division. Therefore, the educational administration department allows teachers to adjust the time or combine the classes within a certain range after approval. According to the statistics of educational administrators, in this semester, 36 teachers of College English had adjusted their courses for 86 times, more than five times as many as those in the offline class; nine teachers had combine classes to teach language and culture, while the skills training and Q & A were carried out in separate classes. As for the question that "whether frequent class transference and illegal class combination affect teaching influence", 85.7% of the students said "no influence", 14.3% of the students said "I don't care", and no student said "influence". In response to the "opinions and suggestions for online teaching", no student mentioned the problem of frequent class transference and class combination. In the interview, some students said that they "understood and accepted" the phenomenon of class transference and class combination, and believed that "the class transference and class combination" would not affect their learning results. From this point of view, as long as the supervision is in place and the procedures are complete, the fully online teaching can reduce the time cost of teachers to a certain extent and increase the freedom of time arrangement, which is beneficial to teachers.

4.6 Attendance of the students

Although the attendance rate of each class is different, the daily report shows that the trend of the attendance rate of 67 classes is very similar: the attendance rate is high at the beginning of school, about 96%, dropped to about 87% in the middle period, and rose to about 95% in the end. This is basically consistent with the change of the attendance rate of offline teaching, but the change range is larger. At the beginning of the school, because of the students' strong sense of freshness, the attendance rate is relatively high; in the middle stage, the students are tired, and the attendance rate has declined; when the end of the semester is approaching the examination, the pressure of students has increased, and the attendance rate has risen. The attendance rate of offline class is basically maintained at 94-100%, which is not lower than 90%.

On the whole, although the average attendance rate of fully online teaching has been higher than 80%, there is still a large room for improvement, which needs more restriction and management. At the same time, the author learned from the teacher interviews that students tended to be late for class during online teaching. Even if teachers strictly required them to sign in on time, there were still some students being late. Most of the students answered this in the interview with "overslept" or "something interrupted". There is a huge difference between study at home during quarantine and study at school. Students would be disturbed by various things and couldn't devote themselves to study. It is inevitable that the phenomenon of being late occurred frequently. Students also responded that a considerable number of parents did not realize the seriousness and importance of online teaching, leaving students with many other matters. After all, college students are already adults, and should help to do some housework and farm work according to their parents and families. Some students even worked part-time. Therefore, the results of the fully online learning at home will be affected.

4.7 Views of the students on online teaching

The questionnaire shows that 17.36% of the students are "very satisfied" with the fully online teaching of College English, 50.52% are "satisfied", 28.25% are "indifferent", and 3.87% are "not satisfied". Less than 70% of the students are "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with online teaching, which is far less than 90% of the students' satisfaction with offline classroom teaching. The results of students' questionnaires and interviews show two advantages of online teaching. One is that recording can meet the personalized needs of watching repeatedly by students; the other is that students are relatively free in learning time, which is not necessarily limited in class time. However, students think that the shortcomings of online teaching are also obvious. Firstly, the blocking of the network causes frequent accidents during class, which is not as smooth and orderly as offline classroom teaching. Secondly, eye discomfort caused by staring at the mobile phone or computer screen for a long time leads to fatigue. Thirdly, there is a sense of distance between teachers and students, students and students in online teaching, which is not as good as that of offline classroom atmosphere, and in this case students are also easy to be distracted and tired. Fourthly, classroom interaction is not intuitive and timely, the number of interaction is significantly lower than offline classroom, and some live platforms or software can not even support the interaction in class.

4.8 Views of the teachers on online teaching

For the implementation of fully online teaching, 9 out of 36 teachers said "very willing", 22 said "willing", 5 said "don't care". No one chose "unwilling" or "very unwilling". Under the background of epidemic prevention and control, online teaching is the general trend, and thus no teacher is "unwilling" to online teaching. Moreover, according to the results, it can be seen that the vast majority of teachers (accounting for about 80.6%) can accept and are willing to implement the fully online teaching. The author has summarized the reasons why teachers are "willing and very willing" to carry out online teaching from the interview with teachers are mainly that the restrictions on teaching time, place and the number of students attending the class have been greatly reduced, and the use of various media, technology and other teaching methods in the teaching process is relatively flexible (Jiao Jianli, 2020). In addition, the fully online teaching is relatively new for most teachers, so they are willing to try. However, teachers think that the shortcomings of fully online teaching are also very obvious. First of all, through the screen, teachers can't grasp the students' reaction directly and timely, so they have great blindness and powerlessness. Secondly, it is very difficult for teachers to maintain the order of the classroom. Every class has students who are late, leave early and enter and leave many times. Thirdly, the delay of network makes it difficult to carry out online language training and other interaction. Fourthly, recording or producing learning materials greatly increases the workload of teachers.

5. Conclusion

Based on the statistics and analysis of eight aspects of College English teaching in this semester, this paper holds that the fully online teaching of College English has both advantages and disadvantages, and the disadvantages outweigh the advantages. To sum up, the fully online teaching is advantageous in three aspects. First, it can meet the students' personalized learning needs, and students can watch the teacher's teaching content anytime, anywhere and for many times. Second, it moderately improves the freedom of teachers' teaching and students' learning in time and place, and can also break the restrictions of class and number of students. Third, the teaching forms and means are relatively diverse and flexible. Its disadvantages are mainly reflected in the following aspects. 1. The network congestion, the limitation of terminals and platform functions make the online teaching less stable and orderly than the offline classroom. 2. Teachers and students face their own computers or mobile phones, not as direct and friendly as teachers and students face to face in offline classroom. Teachers can't master the students' learning state in time, so they can't control the class well, which has led to blindness and powerlessness. The students who face the screen is also tired or distracted due to eye discomfort and external interference, and the teaching effect has been affected. 3. Due to the network delay, traffic or bandwidth

constraints, the language skills training can not be carried out well online, which has also affected the overall learning effect of College English. 4. Although the fully online teaching reduces the limitation of teachers in teaching time and place, it does not mean that the workload of teachers is reduced. On the contrary, teachers should construct learning platform by self-made, screening and uploading teaching materials. A large amount of teachers' extra-curricular time has been spent in curriculum design, teaching PPT and video production, the selection and upload of learning materials and other activities, that is to say, the invisible workload of teachers is greatly increased. 5. Students' satisfaction with online teaching is much lower than that of offline classroom teaching, and the attendance rate is relatively low. For the students who are used to learning under the supervision of teachers, the ability of autonomous learning is not strong (Hua Liqun, 2009: 125-129). So the learning effect is not as good as that of offline classroom teaching.

In summary, there are advantages and disadvantages in the fully online teaching of College English. The disadvantages outweigh the advantages, and the teaching effect is unsatisfactory. Therefore, online teaching cannot completely replace offline classroom (Liu Yi et al., 2020). Future researches should further explore its advantages, overcome its disadvantages, and explore a "mixed" teaching mode combining online teaching and offline classroom so as to realize the revolution of "teaching" and "learning" in College English course (Wang Qing et al., 2017) .

Acknowledgements

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Biography

Lu Haiyan, Associate Professor, Ph.D., School of Foreign languages of Henan Normal University, Research interests: Foreign Language Teaching; Curriculum Design and Textbook Analysis.