A Study on the Teaching Design of Blended College English Listening and Speaking Course Based on Unipus

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Abstract: *In recent years, blended teaching, a teaching model that combines traditional classroom face-to-face teaching with students' autonomous online learning, has been widely applied and promoted in College English teaching. This study takes College English listening and speaking course for non-English major undergraduates as an example to explore the teaching design of the College English listening and speaking course based on the Unipus learning platform, which aims to improve teaching quality of College English course and provides practical reference for teaching reform of College English listening and speaking course.*

Keywords: *College English listening and speaking, blended teaching design, Unipus*

1. Introduction

The concept of blended teaching, which combines online teaching based on modern educational technology with traditional face-to-face learning, has attracted widespread attention since its birth, and has been practiced and promoted in the education fields in Europe and the United States [1].   In China, Professor He Kekang proposed Blended learning at the 7th Global Chinese Computer Education Application Conference in 2003, and actively advocated the introduction of blended teaching into course teaching [2]. The "College English Teaching Guide" (2020) issued by the Ministry of Education clearly states that "…encourage colleges and universities to actively seek changes, reform teaching concepts and models, advocate that colleges and universities make full use of information technology, actively create a diverse teaching environment, and implement blended teaching models, and guide students towards active learning, autonomous learning and personalized learning" [3]. In addition, it encourages that "all universities should incorporate online courses into their curriculum and pay attention to the construction of high-quality courses, such as online open courses, offline courses, online and offline blended courses, and virtual simulation courses" [4].

Listening and speaking teaching is an important part of the entire College English teaching process. And it is also the primary goal of College English teaching. However, the phenomenon of teaching- "only listening but not speaking" is very common in listening and speaking classes. In College English Test (CET)-4 and CET-6, which are held for non-English major students in colleges and universities across the country, oral test scores have been used as an important indicator to evaluate students' overall English quality, and the proportion of listening part is also increasing year by year. However, in actual test-taking process, the majority of candidates lack English speaking skills and have limited listening skills. Speaking and listening parts have become the most difficult parts in CET-4 and CET-6.

This study, based on the teaching practice of College English listening and speaking course in a science and engineering university, takes two classes of freshmen in non-English in 2023 as the teaching practice objects, and applies the blended teaching design of College English listening and speaking course as an example to explore how to optimize the teaching effects with the help of the U campus teaching platform in the teaching process and promote the development of College English listening and speaking teaching towards technology and data, which aim to effectively improve the teaching effect of listening and speaking, fully mobilize students' autonomy in English learning after class and cultivate students' autonomous learning ability, thereby to achieve the teaching goal of improving students' English listening and speaking abilities.

2. Theoretical basis of blended teaching design of College English listening and speaking based on Unipus

2.1 Blended Teaching

Blended learning is a teaching model based on the Internet environment. It is a teaching concept that combines traditional classroom teaching with online teaching, which is called online + offline teaching activities [2]. In today's era where information technology and education are highly integrated, traditional classroom teaching should take full advantages of online resources and online learning. The two should complement each other in order to allow students to achieve the best English learning results [5]. In the process of blended teaching, the traditional relationship between teaching and learning will also undergo a series of changes. Students have a certain degree of autonomy in making choices and are no longer in a completely passive position. Through the supervision of online platforms, learners become more actively participate in teaching activities [6]. Teachers should not only play an active role in inspiring, guiding and monitoring the entire teaching process in teaching activities, but also should stimulate students' initiative and creativity in participating in teaching activities. That is to say, with the blended teaching model, teachers need to play a leading role in guiding, inspiring, and monitoring the teaching process. Students, as the main body of the learning process, need to fully exert their initiative, enthusiasm, and creativity. Therefore, the blended teaching model emphasizes "student-centered", reconstructs the relationship between "teaching" and "learning", creates an autonomous learning path that combines traditional classroom teaching and network technology. It also guides students to learn actively and promotes students' autonomous learning ability. Blended teaching is not a simple superposition of traditional teaching and online teaching modes. The two cannot replace each other. Instead, the entire teaching design is re-optimized and adjusted to achieve the best teaching effect of blended teaching by the ways of pre-class guidance, online autonomous learning, classroom face-to-face teaching, online and offline interaction, etc. In addition, teachers can also track and guide the students' autonomous online learning situation at any time in the teaching platform and give accurate feedback and evaluation on the performance of each student.

2.2 U Campus teaching platform (Unipus)

U Campus, the full English name is "Unipus (Universal Campus)," is an online learning platform software developed by the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press for foreign language teaching in higher education institutions. This platform provides one-stop online teaching services for teaching, learning, evaluation, testing, and research for foreign language courses in higher education institutions, and also provides relatively mature network support for the implementation of blended teaching. In terms of learning content, the digital courses closely follow the theme content of the textbooks, design listening and speaking activities according to the unit content and provide micro-course explanation of test-taking skills for CET- 4 and CET-6. Through vivid and high-quality learning content, efficient and convenient teaching tools, students' online learning are combined with teachers' face-to-face teaching to form a complete closed learning loop, which comprehensively enhances the learning experience and teaching effect. Moreover, with big data and intelligent learning technology in Unipus, teaching activities and learning data can be cyclically analyzed, which can provide teachers with data-based academic prediction and analysis, provide students with personalized learning guidance paths to achieve smart teaching and learning goals.

The textbook " New Horizon College English Listening and Speaking" has been applied in the author's college for many years. The various services in Unipus platform, including class check-in, pre-class preview, text audio explanation, etc., can be proficiently applied among teachers and students. For example, the listening tasks in Unipus will be included in students' daily performance. The daily performance is composed of study time, academic results, tests, homework and check-ins. At the end of the semester, teachers will export them according to certain proportion. The result of this part and the test score of the final examination will constitute the student's total score in proportion, which not only stimulates students' enthusiasm for learning but also optimizes teachers' supervision and evaluation. In addition, if students encounter any problems during the learning process, they can promptly ask teachers for advice or receive in-time help from classmates by the discussion function of Unipus.

3. Analysis on the current situation of College English listening and speaking course

For a long time, there is the phenomenon of focusing on reading and writing and neglecting listening

and speaking in College English teaching. Enen though in listening and speaking teaching, teachers often focus on listening training and neglect oral output, which makes it difficult to achieve ideal teaching results. The traditional College English listening and speaking teaching has the following disadvantages:

3.1 Less time for listening and speaking classes, difficult to complete teaching tasks

Due to the limited arrangement for College English courses, there is less time for listening and speaking classes, and students do not have enough time to practice and strengthen listening and speaking training. At many universities, only one English listening and speaking class is arranged for per week, and in the listening and speaking class teachers spend most of the time explaining listening skills to students, leaving less time for students to actually practice listening and speaking. Students not only do not have enough time for listening training but also cannot practice English speaking in real English teaching situations. The lack of class time is one of the main reasons for the unsatisfactory learning effect of students' listening and speaking courses. Due to the lack of sufficient time guarantee and students' autonomous learning awareness, they hardly take the initiative to practice listening and speaking after class. Even in the short time in class, repeated listening and speaking training cannot be carried out, which ultimately leads to poor listening and speaking ability of students.

3.2 Single traditional teaching model, difficult to have enough classroom interactions

In traditional listening and speaking classes, teachers spend a lot of time explaining difficult listening materials, which invisibly reduces students' time for language output, and students have no chance to participate in oral communication. The teaching model is also relatively single: explaining new words - playing audio and video-doing exercises-checking answers. When encountering more difficult materials, the teacher generally repeatedly plays the audio and video and explains again until most students can choose the correct answer. The inappropriate arrangement of training time has turned the listening and speaking class into a pure listening class, and the listening and speaking class has become into a "silent classroom". There are few interactions between teachers and students, students are passive, not active in class, some of the students may even become resistant to listening and speaking course. Such kind of classroom model has seriously affected students' learning efficiency and the improvement of teaching quality.

In order to make up for the disadvantages of traditional listening and speaking teaching, the blended teaching model with the advantages of "rich online resources", "personalized task learning design", and "diversified teaching activities" has become an important way to optimize College English listening and speaking.

3.3 Different levels of students' English, difficult to unify teaching activities

First of all, the students in the institution where the author works mostly major in science, who may not pay enough attention to English study. Some of the students have received listening and speaking training in middle school and have higher level of English, but some of them have never had listening and speaking class before going to college, because in English College Entrance Examination there are some differences in different provinces, that is, listening and speaking abilities are not examined in some provinces, which leads to a poor foundation in English listening and speaking for these students. They have a certain fear of English listening and speaking and dare not speak or are even unwilling to speak English. So, teachers face great difficulties in designing teaching content, for the students with high levels of listening and speaking skills, the content may be too easy, but for the others with poor levels, it may be too difficult to follow.

In addition, College English is a compulsory general course, there are nearly 50 students in each class, which makes it difficult for teachers to take care of every student within the limited listening and speaking course time. These have become obstacles to the cultivation and improvement of students' listening and speaking abilities in College English teaching.

3.4 Outdated traditional listening and speaking assessment methods, difficult to stimulate students' enthusiasm

The traditional assessment method of College English listening and speaking course is outdated, which relies only on the evaluation from English teachers and the mid-term and final exam scores to determine students' listening level, so this kind of assessment method cannot stimulate students'

enthusiasm and initiative in listening learning. With this assessment method and students' low learning initiative, it is impossible to mobilize students to autonomously learn English after class, and the limited classroom time is difficult to meet the requirement of listening learning.

In summary, although the school has taken the reform of College English teaching for many years and implemented teaching at different levels according to the English scores in College Entrance Examination and also achieved good teaching results. However, it is still common for traditional teaching methods to be used in class, many new modern teaching methods cannot be fully applied. In class, teachers still spend most of the time lecturing and students just passively listen, and students' participation is seriously insufficient. Besides, the interaction between teachers and students in listening and speaking course is not enough, which cannot achieve the best teaching effect. Based on the current situation of College English listening and speaking, this study explores the blended teaching design of College English listening and speaking course, reconstructs the course design and teaching organization, and combines the advantages of the online teaching platform with traditional classroom teaching to provide an example for the reform of College English listening and speaking course.

4. Blended teaching design for College English listening and speaking course based on Unipus

4.1 The scheme of teaching design for College English listening and speaking course

Based on Constructivist learning theory and Bloom's Cognitive theory, the teaching design of blended College English listening and speaking emphasizes the student-centered teaching concept, stimulates students' active learning and encourages students to achieve the improvement of knowledge and ability in the process of active construction. The purpose of the teaching design is to integrate the generation, internalization and expansion of knowledge into the entire teaching activities.

4.1.1 Set up teaching objectives

College English listening and speaking course makes full use of information technology with students as the main body and teachers as the guide and builds listening and speaking teaching simulation situations so as to promotes cooperation and interaction between teachers and students, and between students themselves. The main purpose for this is to cultivate and improve students' autonomous learning ability, language application ability and knowledge comprehensive construction ability.

4.1.2 The design of teaching process

In the teaching process of blended College English listening and speaking, the traditional teaching process is reconstructed, and the presentation of knowledge is completed according to three stages: pre-class preparation, in-class internalization, and post-class expansion. The online and offline teachings are closely linked and connected.

First, in the pre-class preparation stage, knowledge is generated. Teachers formulate learning task lists based on teaching objectives, design pre-class learning tasks according to the content of the related teaching unit, and then upload them in advance in Unipus. Students study these learning tasks in the platform autonomously. Teachers not only can follow the dynamic trace of students' study but also can have tests in the platform before class to evaluate students' self-study effects, which can serve as a reference for classroom teaching design.

Secondly, in in-class process, knowledge is internalized. Teachers determine the offline classroom teaching content based on the feedback of the pre-class self-study in the Unipus, explain the key and difficult points, answer questions and doubts, thus to promote the interaction between teacher-student and student-student by the teaching activities, such as daily conversation imitation show, simulated interview, speech debate, role play, etc., which aims to create an atmosphere for students to learn spoken language, restore the real English communication context and internalize knowledge.

Finally, in the after-class stage, knowledge is expanded. The purpose of after-class study is to consolidate and expand the related knowledge. Based on the online diagnosis and offline classroom teaching, teachers will explain the knowledge that students have difficult in learning; for students who have achieved the unit knowledge goals, teachers will provide more and deeper learning resources to guide their expansion and improvement. Especially for part of the oral output, differentiated guidance is adopted. Students with weak expression ability start from pronunciation and intonation and are guided by audio or video interaction to improve their confidence and achieve the advanced training from "difficult to speak" to "dare to speak" to "able to speak". For students with slightly higher oral expression

ability, they are provided with expanded learning resources to increase learning difficulty and guided to participate in challenging theme speeches or group debate activities.

Teachers help students of different levels to consolidate knowledge and deepen learning by personalized tutoring. In this stage of teaching, the role of the extra-curricular second classroom is fully played, students make the output and application of knowledge by attending extra-curricular activities, such as personal dubbing show, imitation show, group debate competition, situational drama performance, recitation competition, speech competition, English drama competition.

4.1.3 Evaluation of blended College English listening and speaking teaching

Blended teaching evaluation includes both online teaching evaluation and traditional classroom teaching evaluation. With the dynamic monitoring of data in the platform of Unipus, teachers can follow the track of students' online autonomous learning, homework completion, peer evaluations and test scores. Then based on the information, teachers can comprehensively grasp students' learning progress and learning effects and adjust teaching strategies timely. In teaching practice, a combination of summative and formative evaluation is adopted to comprehensively evaluate the whole process of students' learning.

4.2 Examples of blended teaching design of College English listening and speaking based on Unipus ---- taking unit 5 "relax and explore" from the textbook "New Horizon College English Listening and Speaking" as an example

4.2.1 Pre-class preparation stage (Unipus)

Before the start of this unit, the teacher will search for relevant situational teaching materials online based on the unit theme, create a teaching context for students to help students learn more knowledge related to the teaching theme of this unit. Students autonomously complete the pre-class preview of this unit in Unipus and watch the video "listening to the world," and practice the corresponding exercises. In the process of pre-class preparation, students learn the listening strategy of this unit—listening for people's preferences by identifying comparative to prepare for the listening activities in class. Based on Unipus, the teacher can monitor students' pre-class preparation situation, obtain multi-dimensional learning data and in-depth academic analysis so as to adjust the learning content in class appropriately and arrange the focus of classroom teaching reasonably.

4.2.2 In-class teaching stage (classroom)

During the classroom teaching process, the teacher first analyzes the students' pre-class learning data and academic results to find out the reasons for the errors and provides in-depth and detailed explanations for the parts that the students have poor performance. In the selected unit, the feedback shows that the result of the listening summary question about "What the woman's and the man's preferences" is not ideal, the score is low. Based on this feedback, the teacher conducts a detailed analysis and explanation of this question in class and integrates the skills of the listening summary question into actual practice. In addition, teachers can also organize classroom teaching and activate the classroom atmosphere by classroom voting, questioning and other functions provided by Unipus, especially in the classroom with a large number of students, so as to achieve full and effective interaction, it is much more effective. For example: the oral activity of this unit is "Choose a town/city in China you think foreign tourists would most like to visit." The teacher randomly divides students into groups of four and first asks them to introduce a city or town in the group. Many students choose to introduce their hometown and talk about the changes brought about by the tourism industry in their hometown with China's economic development, which deepens their understanding of China's economic development and enhances the students' patriotism.

Besides, teachers can also conduct in-class quizzes for students, assign homework after class and follow the track of student' learning based on Unipus. After that teachers can make effective classroom evaluation and adjust teaching methods and teaching progress in time to achieve targeted results.

4.2.3 Post-class consolidation stage

At this stage, teachers can reflect the effectiveness of classroom teaching by analyzing the data in Unipus. According to the students' task completion, teachers can also analyze whether the students have truly completed high-quality listening and speaking training and whether they can deepen their understanding of the textbook content in the process of listening and speaking practice, then teachers assign corresponding consolidation exercises to further deepen their learning of the content. Speaking and listening expanded training and testing can also be carried out based on Unipus. In the learning

process of this unit, teachers assign the expanded exercises around the topic of this unit- "relax and explore" in the moral education section of Unipus. At the same time, for the oral activity of this unit "Choose a town/city in China you think foreign tourists would most like to visit", students are required to record their own introduction into a video after class and upload it to Unipus, then the teacher will make comments and guidance in this platform and choose some excellent videos to display in the platform in order to allow students to learn from each other.

5. Conclusion

The blended teaching design of College English listening and speaking based on Unipus combines the advantages of traditional classroom learning and online learning, the two models are deeply connected and complement, which helps to achieve teaching objectives better. The blended teaching model reconstructs the teaching process and enables teaching activities to transform from "teaching" to "learning". The changes of the roles of teachers and students stimulate students' learning initiative. By applying blended teaching model, the teaching and learning content is rich, which provides enough resources for students' personalized learning. Meanwhile, thanks to the convenience of mobile terminal devices, it is easy to create flexible learning time and space to achieve "teaching students in accordance with their aptitude "and ensure that students of different levels gain learning satisfaction. With the development the informatization and intelligence, the online and offline blended teaching model will gradually become common. As teachers, we should actively adapt to the development needs of the times, continuously improve teaching design and promote this teaching model so as to provide new ideas for the future reform of College English information-based teaching.

Acknowledgement

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