

Research on Blended Teaching Mode of English Public Speaking Course based on the Superstar Teaching Platform

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ABSTRACT. *Under the background of constructing the talent training system for English majors with Chinese characteristics, changing the traditional teaching mode is the key to the curriculum reform. Based on the current teaching situation and the necessity of reform of English Public Speaking course, this paper puts forward a blended teaching mode by using the Superstar Teaching Platform. This paper analyzes how to construct the blended teaching mode of English Public Speaking course before, during and after class, how to develop the online learning database, and how to improve the course evaluation system. The practice shows that this mode not only improves the teaching quality of English Public Speaking course, but also reflects the deep integration of talents training and modern information technology in colleges and universities in the new era.*

KEYWORDS: *blended learning, English public speaking, Superstar Learning APP, course design*

1. Introduction

Digital technology is changing the way people learn at all stages. In higher education, different from traditional face-to-face teaching, blended learning integrates classroom learning with online virtual learning so as to broaden students' horizons and give them a more complete learning experience. [1] The use of interactive online learning tools not only ensures the learning effect, but also further achieves educational equity. Similar to SPOC, MOOC and other online education platforms, Superstar Teaching Platform also plays an important role in higher education in contemporary China. In many colleges and universities, teachers attempt to facilitate course instruction and evaluation with Superstar Teaching Platform, while students are adapting to the new era of learning technology and adopting a new way of learning.

2. Current Situation of English Public Speaking Course Instruction

2.1 The Requirements of English Public Speaking Course

In the “National Guide to the Teaching of Foreign Language and Literature for Undergraduates in Higher Education” (“National Guide” for short) [2], English Public Speaking course is designed for sophomore English majors in China as one of the core curricula with explicit teaching objectives. Within 64 class hours, over a period of two semesters, students should be able to 1) lay a solid foundation of English language and acquire a broad range of knowledge; 2) develop logical reasoning ability, critical thinking ability and flexibility; 3) collect extensive materials on a topic, write speech manuscripts, then deliver speeches without notes; and 4) gain the ability to speak impromptu on a given topic after a short period of preparation.

2.2 The Need for the Reform of English Public Speaking Course

Firstly, course instructions are not basically “student-centered” in the teaching practice. Traditionally, English Public Speaking course mainly relies on classroom instruction provided by the teacher, who systematically teaches the basic knowledge of speech composition and coaches the speech delivery. The teacher is also responsible for the organization of classroom activities to carry out individual learning, pair work or group learning. Classroom presentations, speeches and necessary discussions, which helps to cultivate students’ linguistic ability and critical thinking ability always give way to the teacher’s instruction.

Secondly, teaching materials are obviously inadequate in the traditional teaching practice. In most colleges and universities, teaching materials of the English Public Speaking course is greatly limited to introduced or domestically developed textbooks, in which theoretical explanation overweigh speech examples and speech analyses. Even with limited speech examples, students hardly gain adequate comprehension of the speech composition and delivery. In the meantime, as a language course, the limitation of language input is also revealed in a lack of adequate multimedia resources.

Thirdly, the traditional evaluation method of the course is a formative one, which based on the teacher’s assessments on students’ class performance and the composition of speeches. However, it is difficult to carry out the comprehensive formative evaluation, especially with regard to peer and self-assessment of students’ English public speeches, which improves the students’ critical thinking ability and analytical ability [3].

From the above aspects, the current teaching mode of English Public Speaking course has been unable to meet the cultivation objectives at the present stage. As information technology has triggered a revolution in education, it is necessary to reform the curriculum so as to better serve the needs of cultivating English talents.

3. Blended Learning Mode and Superstar Teaching Platform

The “National Guide” (2020) points out that it is necessary to implement the “student-centered” educational concept, by creating an intelligent teaching environment that combines in-class and extracurricular activities, integrating online and offline activities, innovating teaching content so as to reform English teaching with modern information technology. According to Huang et al. [4], blended learning is to break the time and space restrictions of traditional classroom with the help of modern information technology. Thus teachers should encourage students to choose their own learning content and change the sequence and form of learning new knowledge, thus providing a reliable paradigm for the realization of “student-centered” learning in higher education.

3.1 Blended Learning Teaching Design

3.1.1 Connotation of Blended Learning

Blended learning derives its name from the hybrid application strategy of learning theory, applied techniques and implementation methods. From a macro point of view, blended learning strongly promotes the personalization of education and provides endless possibilities for teaching reform through the combination of technological tools and human wisdom [5]. In terms of form, blended learning incorporates the characteristics of classroom learning and online learning, combines the advantages of the two learning methods, and reinforce the complementary advantages to upgrade the course instruction.

With the development of teaching technology, more and more teachers seek the opportunity to adopt new technology in teaching. Therefore, it is important to correct the misconceptions of blended learning: it does not refer broadly to all learning methods using educational information technology, nor does it simply refer to teachers using modern teaching technology in the classroom to achieve teaching goals. Blended learning include the following three characteristics:

First, blended learning include students’ independent online learning. During the instruction of a course, students can choose when, where and at what pace to study online individually. From the perspective of learning autonomy, students can use technical means to browse or control the progress of the learning materials. For example, when watching an online learning video, students can pause or replay the video to ensure the understanding of the key points.

Second, blended learning is inseparable from classroom learning under teacher supervision. Although blended learning incorporates online learning materials, teacher supervision is also important for better results. Teachers can teach course content in a planned and purposeful way at a fixed time and place. Meanwhile, they also design worksheets, give learning feedback, track learning effect and provide personalized teaching guidance. The role of classroom learning in blended learning is also shown in that it provides a platform for students to communicate and learn

face to face from each other.

Third, blended learning involves a comprehensive learning experience. Blended learning provides students with relatively rich learning experience. For example, in flipped classroom, students have different paces and effects in learning, while teachers can track each student's learning process through online learning platform. In group activities or network interactions, students are able to access to various types of communication, such as "student-student" interaction as in online pair work, "student-students" interaction as in class speech, "students-students" interaction as in group debate, "student-teacher" interaction as in personal speech coach, and "students-teacher" interaction as in online or offline plenary teaching.

In a word, in blended learning, students lead the learning process, actively participate in learning design, explore learning resources, and use existing knowledge to motivate learning. On the other hand, teachers can fully guide students, better communicate with students, and are able to pay attention to students who need more attention.

3.1.2 The Significance of Blended Learning Design in English Public Speaking Course

In the era of education reform and classroom revolution, in order to better meet the training objectives of English professionals, the reform of English Public Speaking course is in urgent need [6]. Blended teaching mode has changed the traditional teaching, because online learning enriches the sources of materials for speech content preparation and broadens students' thinking and vision. More time is allotted to offline activities, which is conducive to strengthening the skills of students' speech presentation, cultivating students' logical reasoning ability and critical thinking ability, and developing students' adaptability to changing situations through impromptu speeches, questions and debates[7]. The expanded course format can provide students with more opportunities for language correction and training in class.

3.2 Superstar Teaching Platform

Blended teaching is inseparable from the technological tools of online learning. Therefore, an appropriate online learning platform should be selected to achieve various forms of education, such as knowledge consolidation, student interaction, homework correction, explanation and guidance, which can organically match the contents of students' classroom learning.

3.2.1 Introduction to the Superstar Teaching Platform

Superstar Learning Platform (super.fy.chaoxing.com) is a teaching platform which provides a mobile terminal App as well as a website access. It is widely used

by institutions of higher learning in China. As a network teaching platform, it can be easily downloaded and installed in mobile phones, tablets and computer terminals. Users can scan a QR code to install the smart phone App or visit its website to register and log in.

3.2.2 Major Functions of the Platform

For teachers, the platform provides an interface to design courses, get access to the whole platform learning model, retrieve students' learning records and issue tests, collect students' assignments, provide individual feedback, and track students' learning progress. In addition to the teaching files compiled and uploaded by teachers themselves, Superstar Teaching platform also provides abundant shared learning resources, including "electronic books" and free "online course videos". Teachers can plan and supervise the learning content for students according to the course content. Superstar Teaching platform also provides a complete teaching mode of online "exercises", "tests" and "discussions". Teachers can issue "sign-in", "test", "question" and "select students" through multiple terminals, and grasp the teaching effect timely through "data analysis".

For students, the platform offers great opportunities for autonomous learning. In the students' personal space page, students can check the "knowledge points" listed in the "chapter lists". In the "navigation for learning", students can receive the learning tasks, tests and assignments issued by teachers immediately. Students can check their learning progress at any time, expand learning through searching materials, and participate in virtual class discussions. In "statistics", students may check the course assessment standards, track their own learning progress and scores, and also view the progress of other students in the class. In "resources", students can view or download extracurricular materials uploaded by teachers during the course. The "notice" function helps students to receive and view all kinds of class notices, including homework notices, peer assessment notices, or test notices sent by the course teachers. Students can also post on "forums" and invite teachers or other students to reply.

4. Blended Teaching for English Public Speaking Course based on the Superstar Teaching Platform

4.1 Blended Teaching Activity Design

According to the course content and teaching arrangement, teaching activities of English Public Speaking course are designed into three stages: pre-class, in-class, after-class. At the beginning of the semester, teachers may issue course syllabus to students, introducing a learning schedule based on the whole course. For each teaching unit, students may receive the pre-class, in-class and after-class learning tasks that should be completed on the Superstar Teaching platform and in classrooms.

4.1.1 Pre-Class Learning Design

The pre-class part of blended learning is completed by students independently outside the classroom. Based on the syllabus and the preview materials uploaded by teachers in advance on the learning platform, students complete pre-class knowledge preview, relevant video learning, discussion and other learning contents. Students have the opportunity to fast-forward or review the content according to their understanding, which increases their learning autonomy.

As the first step of blended learning, students' pre-class learning effect will directly affect the discussion and knowledge construction in classroom teaching. Therefore, in addition to pre-class learning, a preview test is an indispensable part of pre-class design. Generally, the pre-class preview test of English Public Speaking course is conducted in the form of pre-class quiz. The quiz mainly includes the basic concept understanding and judgment involved in the unit, and the question type various from multiple-choice question, true/false judgment to short answer questions.

Since the platform automatically grade the students' tests and generates data analysis charts of the test results, teachers can easily find the weaknesses of students' learning according to data. Teachers then propose related questions on "forums" before class instruction to evoke discussion, encouraging students to actively discuss online so as to prepare for class discussion.

4.1.2 In-Class Learning Design

In in-class learning, the teacher's role is not to control the class, but to guide it. The course is organized around learning topics, but not limited to textbook content. At the same time, the teacher may grade the students according to the students' participation and their contributions to the class discussion. In general, the in-class learning design focuses on the concepts of "student-centeredness" and "learning-centeredness".

First of all, it is convenient to check the classroom attendance on the Superstar Teaching Platform. In addition to ordinary online "sign-in", the platform also provides sign-in methods such as gesture, QR code and location, so that teachers can know students' attendance in real time, providing accurate and reliable statistical data for teaching evaluation.

Secondly, the "screen projection" mode of the platform provides technical support for classroom teaching. Through the pre-class learning and online discussion in the previous stage, students have a certain degree of understanding of the content of the relevant chapters. However, it is still necessary for teachers to scaffold the students by explaining the knowledge framework and provide theoretical guidance for students' discussion in class. The platform can share powerpoint slides, coursewares, materials, videos and other contents on the large screen of the classroom.

Thirdly, the interactive function of the platform greatly arouses student's learning enthusiasm. In class activities, teachers may use the platform to "select students" randomly to answer questions, and students can also use "responder" to answer the question and get the prize. The interactive functions have a very good effect in classroom activities and group discussion.

4.1.3 After-Class Learning Design

The concept of blended learning is to extend the study of space and time threshold. In English public speaking course with blending teaching mode, the chances to express students' ideas greatly expand. The Superstar Teaching Platform offers a "discussion" column to help students further discuss on some controversial topics, which are unfinished in class discussion. Besides, after-class learning activities range from round-table discussions, topical debates, to seminar speeches on a key topic. Students can book time to have a seminar, or give written feedback through the platform. Meanwhile, teachers can give comments and feedbacks to all kinds of assignments, including students' speech scripts, audio and video assignments, and students can self assess or peer assess their own work on the platform conveniently.

From the pre-class, in-class and after-class learning design, students learn to prepare for all types of speeches, acquire presentation skills and put the theory into practice. Teachers know more about the students' cognitive ability, and give better corresponding feedback and follow-up guidance.

4.2 Evaluation of the Courses

The assessment of English Public Speaking course adopts a formative assessment system. The overall assessment of the course includes: Completion of the platform tasks (10%), Offline class attendance (10%), Contribution to class discussion(10%), Online tests (15%) , An informative speech(10%), A persuasive speech (25%) , A commemorative speech (10%) , Students' self-assessment(5%) and Peer assessment(5%) . Through the assessment of each item, students can have a better understanding on their achievements in the course.

4.3 Construction of Teaching Resource Database

In blended teaching design, teaching resources are indispensable. In addition to the massive online resources, teachers should provide students with abundant teaching resources in the course and build scaffolding for students' course learning [8]. In Superstar Teaching platform, course resources can be saved as downloadable materials, courseware, and exercise database.

First of all, teachers should supplement a large number of speech sample videos, including TED speeches, video recording of classic speeches, speaking contests, and

excellent classroom speeches, which can be used to expand students' learning resources. Secondly, other related open online courses can also be included in a collection list to expose students with potential learning opportunities. Links of the open online courses in Superstar Teaching website, MOOC made by other universities can be embedded into the platform. Students can choose to browse the relevant courses on English public speaking conveniently in multiple terminals after learning relevant chapters. Thirdly, in the blended teaching mode, in order to better track the effect of students' online learning, teachers should design and pre-upload course exercises in advance. Then with the progress of the course, teachers release course exercises and organize unit tests at any time, then students can answer online test questions on mobile devices and computers according to requirements.

5. Findings and Discussion

Since the blended teaching of English Public Speaking course was implemented, the Superstar Teaching platform has been jointly built by the teaching team, benefiting all classes and students participating in the course and widely praised by teachers and students. In the practice of blended learning of English Public Speaking course, teachers preset the learning contents and related materials to the Superstar Teaching platform before, during and after class according to the course objectives and the progress of study. Before class, teachers release tasks and monitor students' pre-class self-learning. In offline classroom teaching, the platform provides a more convenient and friendly way of teacher-students interaction. After-class blended learning is more targeted, and the reliability and validity of course evaluation enhanced.

Compared with traditional classroom teaching, students' subjectivity is enhanced in course learning. Learning objectives and processes are clearer, which is helpful to cultivate students' self-learning ability and sense of self-efficacy. Instead of passively relying on the classroom to absorb new content, students are more inclined to use classroom time for learning actively through practice, discussion and research on the course content. At the same time, students' enthusiasm for online learning is significantly increased, the online learning time related to course learning is significantly increased, and the learning interaction is enhanced. For teachers, blended learning avoids the repetition of teaching basic definitions and skills, and provides teachers with more time to focus on curriculum development and the design of learning activities to expand knowledge concepts and improve students' critical thinking ability. The communication between teachers and students is more effective, and the content of teachers' feedback, tutoring students' practice and project learning is richer.

The purpose of this study is to innovate the teaching methods, implement the "student-centered" educational concept, guide students to conduct independent learning through multiple methods in order to realize students' interactive learning and inquiry learning. In the subsequent reform, teachers can further explore the interactive functions of the learning platform, such as further increasing students' contribution to curriculum construction, adding student teaching assistants, allowing

students to participate in more effective and meaningful learning activities including resource sharing, student evaluation, and innovative research topic discussion. It is hoped that this research will provide reference for the course development and the construction of online and offline teaching environment in the new era.

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