Blended Teaching Practice of “Basic English” Course Based on Digital Teaching Resource Database

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ABSTRACT: As a core and basic course for students majoring in English in colleges and universities, it is in urgent need to improve the teaching quality and construction level of “Basic English” so as to meet the requirement from teachers and students in current era of mobile internet. In this paper, in order to innovate teaching, it was discussed how to develop the high-quality digital teaching resource and apply these resource into teaching in such an education information environment. After analyzing the teaching objectives, course content and learning conditions in this course, the author have explored the knowledge system and developed a digital teaching resource database featured in vocabulary and grammar. The database was used to construct the online class which meets the teaching requirement, leading to an effective mode of blended teaching combining the advantages of network class and of traditional class. Practice has proved that this mode is fit for “Basic English” course for students majoring in English, effectively solving the problems in network class and traditional class, deepening the reform of “integrating knowledge into practice” and achieving digital teaching resource sharing.

INTRODUCTION

Basic English” course, also called “Intensive Reading” or “Integrated English”, is a core course for freshmen and sophomores majoring in English. It focuses on basic language skills including listening, speaking, and reading, writing and translating to lay a solid foundation for major courses in the following two years. Due to the limited teaching period and profound influence of traditional teaching, activities in class are composed by “teaching” and “learning”, which is in the mode of “students listening to teachers’ teaching and answering questions”. And the teaching is mainly carried out through “grammar-translation method” which allows teachers to impart lots of language knowledge while students’ learning effect cannot be timely evaluated. Therefore, the expected teaching objectives cannot be achieved. The shortcomings of spoon-feeding teaching are becoming increasingly obvious, so it is extremely urgent to reform the curriculum.

Since 1990s, the rapid development of information technology has pushed forward the innovation in teaching principles and methods. From the proposal of “E-learning” by Jay Cross, an American scholar in 1998 on, on-line learning has become a brand-new teaching way by using modern information technology and internet. However, this new learning mode cannot replace traditional teaching though it can help realize some teaching objectives and has showed some disadvantages, such as single way of knowledge transmission, lack of effective teacher-students interaction, poor knowledge internalization and low learning efficiency. Thereupon, in rethinking E-learning, the international education community put forwarded a new idea — blended teaching, a teaching mode combining advantages of face-to-face teaching and network teaching. An ideal teaching environment can be created with educational information technology, which can put teachers’ leading role into full play and allow students to play their parts.

In recent years, with the popularity of information technology in traditional teaching, MOOC and Micro-Course Online Video have won great mass fervor in higher education. So it is a hotspot for the whole international education community to effectively improve teaching efficiency and accomplish reform in teaching methods and ways featuring in “students-centered while teachers-led”.

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In China, Prof. HE Ke-kang from Beijing Normal University formally proposed the concept of blended teaching in the 7th Global Chinese Conference of Computer in Education (GCCCE). Chinese scholars have been dedicating to the construction of curriculum digital resource and the studies on the feasibility and application of blended teaching in all subjects. However, the pervious studies focus much more on courses in natural science and technology than in language courses. Besides, the construction of digital teaching resource and studies on blended English teaching are not so systematic: paying more attention to the College English teaching rather than the major courses such as listening, oral English and translating. Considering this, how to build a teaching resource database of Basic English with modern educational IT was discussed; a blended teaching mode was designed and the curriculum was reconstructed with the digital resource to achieve the teaching objectives in “Basic English”.

2. Problems in digital teaching resource of English courses

As a new type of teaching method, blended teaching has gained more and more attention from scholars at home and abroad. And a precondition ensuring an effective work of blended teaching, the construction of digital teaching resource database is beneficial to the application of modern IT in teaching to achieve optimal teaching efficiency. Since early 21st century, English teachers have been devoting themselves to developing a network platform which mainly contains PPT, videos, class videos and extracurricular materials. In recent years, with the continuous development and evolution of teaching IT, MOOC and Micro-Course Online Videos have become the main content of digital teaching resource. However, there are still some problems in the digital teaching resource after exploring some websites—“iCourse”, “XuetangX” and “Unipus”.

First of all, the resources for English courses are quite few in a smaller range, most of which are for College English, Oral English, English Writing and Translation. Only few are applicable for core courses like “Basic English”.

Secondly, both the content and form of PPT, audios and open courses are so single. The teaching contents are basically the same with those in traditional teaching, so it is not so attractive to stimulate students’ interest and activate them. That is why the application is not so desirable.

Thirdly, MOOC and Micro-Course online Videos attract more students than the open courses. According to the statistics, only 8.97% courses attract over 1,000 learners with the highest click of 19,000 while almost every MOOC and MCOV attracts more than 1,000 learners with the highest click of 376,000.

Every open course lasts more than 30 minutes, making it difficult for students to be attentive and to learn in pockets of time anywhere. In contrast, MOOC and MCOV only last 2-10 minutes, this makes the learning easier. But our survey has revealed that good MOOC and MCOV of English courses are quite few, especially of the “Basic English”, so a really effective blended teaching is so rare. Therefore, it is an urgency to develop and integrate high-quality digital teaching resource that is applicable for a true innovation in Basic English teaching.

3. Construction of digital resource database for “Basic English” teaching

After language learning (vocabulary and grammar) and passage analysis in “Basic English”, students can have a good command of Basic English knowledge, promote their comprehension and better at basic skills such as listening, speaking, writing and translating. The obvious distinction among students in language level causes the problem that class teaching cannot meet the demand of all students. As a result, to construct digital teaching resource suitable for independent learning is helpful to improve students’ learning efficiency, activate their enthusiasm and achieve expected results. Based on the existing problems in teaching resource, two chunks—vocabulary and grammar are used to disintegrate the traditional language points and to reconstruct a knowledge tree. In this way, digital teaching resource were developed according to specific need, which ensures that every student can study anywhere at anytime through the mobile terminal. More specifically, students can study on their own through Cloud Class on their phone by virtue of rich digital teaching resource including MCOV, PPT, texts, audios and exercises.

This course consists of 4 textbooks with 1,500 words or so. In the developing, one word is a complete knowledge point. So every micro-video lasts 5-10m, covering the basic usage, special usage, collocation, derivation and derivatives. All these videos are stored in the database in the alphabetical order of words to form a digital resource database like a dictionary.

Grammar is quite hard for English learners. The long and burdensome lecture means poor absorption of students in a short period of time. As shown on Table 1, in this database, the grammar was divided into 12 modules which were also divided into many
points. All of these points were grouped and stored, forming a structured resource database.

### Table 1: Construction of Grammar Points in Digital Teaching Resource Database for “Basic English”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Modules</th>
<th>Knowledge points</th>
<th>Micro-class videos</th>
<th>PPT</th>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Exercises</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tense</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Noun</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Linking Verb</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Non-finite Verb</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Attributive Clause</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ellipsis</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Inverted Sentence</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Subject-Predicate Consistency</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Adverbial Clause of Cause</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Non-Predicate Verbs in There be Sentence</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Special usage in Comparative Degree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On one hand, this developing makes mobile learning easier where students can study chunk by chunk on their phone efficiently; on the other hand, this is a solid foundation for curriculum reconstruction based on modern IT. As is known to all, grammar, vocabulary and phonological system are the major constituents of a language. Vocabulary is the basic and bridge while grammar is another important element in a language system, both of which are of equal importance and indispensable. In any course of English learning, grammar and vocabulary are essential. So there is no doubt that the development in this paper cannot only meet the demand of “Basic English” teaching, but can be used in the whole learning process according to different courses and students’ levels. Thus, the learning is reconstructed as a “personalized” one.

### 4. Design and reconstruction of blended teaching in “Basic English”

#### 4.1 Construction of blended teaching

Blended teaching, an organic integration of online teaching and offline teaching, falls in 3 stages: pre-class, while-class and post-class. Before the class, students are requested to study on line on their own about relevant knowledge points, do online tests, ask and think about questions. While-class is the major part of blended teaching, where students can discuss and solve problems with teachers and put their knowledge learnt into practice for a better internalization; after the class, students are supposed to finish their assignments online and teachers will give their feedback and instructions.

Take one lesson—The Tapestry of Friendship for example. There are 35 words in this unit. The author organizes two classes with the traditional teaching and the blended teaching as shown on Table 2:

#### Table 2: Designs of Traditional Teaching and Blended Teaching in Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching mode</th>
<th>periods</th>
<th>Pre-class tasks</th>
<th>While-class tasks</th>
<th>After-class tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional teaching</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Independent preview</td>
<td>To practice the pronunciation of words after the tape, listening to the lecture about words and answer questions</td>
<td>To review what have learnt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blended teaching</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>To finish online assignment: “Read after Me”, 35 micro-videos, self-quiz</td>
<td>To do exercises on words usage</td>
<td>To finish online homework and do more exercises according to teachers’ feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In traditional class, teachers usually ask student to preview new words before the class but only 46.8% of the students do this task. During the class, students listen to teachers’ lecture on the usage of words presented in PPT in 2 periods but few can give their right answer to teachers’ questions; meanwhile, they spend a lot of time taking notes so that they cannot concentrate on teachers’ lecture. After the class, students are supposed to review what they have learnt without teachers’ further involvement or review in next period.

In blended teaching, teachers always assign students tasks before the class: to read words after the tape, study the material in the database, finish
pre-class tests and participate in online questioning or discussion, based on which teachers will design their teaching process. During the class, teachers focus on key and difficult points before two-group class activities. One is to cement the pronunciation and spelling of words, in which students are asked to spell and pronounce the 35 words in a word relay that can greatly involve students in class teaching and learning. The other one aims to strengthen the master of words. In the activity, students are asked to make sentences with 10 words or expressions selected by teachers. It is required that every word or expression can be used only once in one sentence and that the 10 sentences can compose a passage about a story. Upon finishing their task, the group should post their work online for discussion and correction. Lastly, students have effectively achieved knowledge internalization. After the class, students are asked to do online homework and teachers should give timely feedback.

Thus it can be seen that the design of blended teaching embraces 3 major factors: knowledge, fun and practice. Results of practice show that this new type of teaching can effectively improve teaching efficiency and effect, accelerating students’ integrated language proficiency and foster students’ ability to study and think independently. This is really “students-centered” and can help teachers realize the teaching objective of “putting knowledge into practice” and help students get rid of the image of “exam-oriented English learners”.

4.2 Advantages of blended teaching based on digital teaching resource database

Advantages of digital teaching resource and blended teaching in “Basic English” for students majoring in English are as follows:

First, the digital teaching resource changed “online courses” into “online class”, which combines the advantages of traditional class teaching and online network teaching and paves the way for an effective implementation of blended teaching. It is difficult to combine online courses with traditional class since students are not so enthusiastic in self-study and teachers cannot trace students’ learning effect because of the long duration of online courses, single teaching way, limited content, and poor teacher-students interaction. Therefore, all these open courses can only be used as extracurricular learning materials for students while teachers still stick to the traditional “cramping” teaching. With the rapid development of educational IT, the developing of digital teaching resource made up for the shortcomings of online courses, and online class containing MCOV, PPT, texts, audios and exercises has been set up for teachers to build their “personalized” class. This plus their interaction with students, homework correction and guidance has greatly improved the utility rate of good teaching resource.

Second, the basic knowledge is imparted through from while-class to post-class, prolonging the time of teaching and learning out of the 4 periods every week, which improves teaching efficiency. Teachers are allowed to open online class with the teaching resource database and students can set their study schedule accordingly and finish pre-class tests to find their disadvantages for timely discussion and solution. Students at higher level can go further their study for a better understanding of words usage after finishing online tasks while students at lower level can learn at anytime in their pockets of time for better digestion so that they will be able to participate in class activities. This kind of teaching pushed forward the teaching innovation, greatly improved the quality of teaching, helped students form the ability of self-learning, created more face-to-face communication between teachers and students and achieved the “students-centered while teachers-led” principle.

Third, the teaching resource developed in this paper makes it convenient for teachers to set up corresponding courses according to their different teaching needs and share these resources through APP and Cloud Teachers’ Studio. In the above example, there are 1,500 words in the alphabetical order in the vocabulary database, forming a database similar to number dictionary. Words is a necessary part in the major courses including reading, listening, translating and writing, so teachers can create their own online class out of the words resource. Besides, for a better resource sharing and rich resource, all English teachers can cooperate to complete the database so as to make contributions to subjects’ construction.

5. Conclusion

The swift development of educational IT has changed people’s way of learning, pushing forward the innovation of teaching concept and methods. Blended teaching, rising as the times required, combines advantages of digital teaching with those of traditional teaching. To achieve the reform in “Basic English” teaching, a high-quality digital teaching resource has been developed according to teaching objectives, subject characteristics and students’ features, in which two resource databases have been built—vocabulary and grammar. In the process of blended teaching, with full use of the database,
teachers can create their “personalized” class; design their teaching process in a rational way, including pre-class tasks, while-class activities and post-class feedback, which will change the situation of “spoon-feeding teaching”. Practice has demonstrated that the blended teaching based on digital resource database is applicable for “Basic English” courses for students majoring in English and has effectively improves online courses and traditional classes, carried forward the reform in this course for “integrating knowledge into practice”, and realized sharing of teaching resources.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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7. REFERENCES

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