

# On College Spoken English Teaching under the Blended Teaching Model

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**Abstract.** Spoken English teaching in many Chinese colleges and universities have seen major problems in four aspects, namely, unfavorable language environment, insufficient listening and authentic corpus input, inadequate language processing and internalization and increasing psychological barriers to students' language expression. The online and offline blended teaching mode in the context of "Internet plus" can expand the teaching methods and learning space of college spoken English, enrich the teaching resources, optimize language processing and internalization and reduce the psychological barriers to students' oral expression, helping to improve the English learners' speaking skills. Exploring and analyzing the problems existing in traditional spoken English teaching, this paper applies blended teaching to the three stages of spoken English teaching: pre-class preparation, in-class teaching, and after-class consolidation in order to improve students' oral communication skills.

**Keywords:** Blended teaching model; Spoken English teaching; Oral communication skills

## 1. Introduction

Spoken language is the most commonly used and directly promoting part of social interaction in language, and it is the primary aspect of language. As Chinese linguist Z.L. Hu (1996) puts it well, a basic principle of language analysis is that speech is superior to writing [9]. To put it further, the international economic and cultural exchanges and telling Chinese stories well require a high level of foreign language speaking ability, so oral English should be given priority in foreign language learning. According to POA (Production-oriented Approach) by Q.F. Wen (2018), in practical teaching, students' internal drive to learn a foreign language comes more from output than input [5]. In other words, language output as the main driving force can not only improve students' language application ability, but also make them curious and eager to learn new language knowledge that they have not been exposed to. However, in many universities in China, oral English teaching can not meet the needs of students to improve language output due to factors such as classroom language environment, teaching mode, and the poor listening and speaking abilities of the students.

With the development of information technology, human beings have entered the information age, and information technology has been widely applied in various fields of human life, including education. Against the background, blending teaching, combining the advantages of traditional face-to-face teaching with that of digital and networked learning, comes into being [6]. In this teaching mode, teachers inspire and guide students in the teaching process, giving full play to their leading role in the classroom [4]. Meanwhile, being "student-centered", the mode allows students to enjoy sufficient autonomy, highlighting their dominant position in the learning process and fully reflecting their initiative and creativity, which provides learners with a more participatory learning experience.

## 2. Problems in College Spoken English Teaching under the Traditional Teaching Mode

**2.1 Unfavorable Language Environment.** In many universities in China, due to limitations such as teaching time and location, the number of English speaking classes arranged is relatively small. Moreover, many universities adopt a large class model for English speaking classes, with a large number of students attending classes and short oral training time for students. Although some universities have realized the problem of oral English teaching and have organized a series of extra

activities in an attempt to provide opportunities for students to practice their English speaking, there are still very few students who actively participate in them.

**2.2 Insufficient Listening and Authentic Corpus Input.** In English learning, listening and speaking practice is the precursor to reading and writing, and listening input precedes oral output. However, in college spoken English teaching, reading input is more common, while listening input is less, which does not conform to the foreign language learning pattern which advocates listening and speaking first, reading and writing later. Compared to vocabulary acquired through reading, words captured by students through listening can be memorized for a longer time, as the brain stimulation caused by listening input is stronger than reading input [1]. The assistance of listening input in oral learning is also reflected in the learners' ability to subtly transfer the pronunciation features in listening to their own oral communication.

Textbooks are the main source of language input in many traditional classrooms, and many expressions presented in textbooks are not what the native English speakers are practically using. For example, as we can learn from the book, the way to respond to 'Thank you' is 'You're welcome', but in real communication, formal responses such as 'My pleasure' can also be used, as well as informal responses such as 'No problem' and 'No words'. Only through a large amount of authentic language input can students use appropriate oral expressions in different situations.

**2.3 Inadequate Language Processing and Internalization.** Practice has proven that the more authentic the context created in spoken English teaching, the better the learning effect [7]. However, in traditional college English teaching, students are largely required to repeatedly recite and memorize the language points and make sentence with the new words. If language processing and internalization are not applied in real communication scenarios, learners are prone to forgetting the knowledge they have learned. Therefore, teachers should create real scenarios and guide students to apply the knowledge and communication skills to specific scenarios so that the knowledge obtained in specific and real communication activities can be truly transformed into language skills, thereby improving learners' language communication abilities.

**2.4 Increasing Psychological Barriers to Students.** Most Chinese students do not accept spoken English training before college, so their speaking skills are relatively backward as opposed to reading, listening, and writing abilities. Therefore, in speaking classes, students are more likely to suffer various psychological barriers such as timidity, nervousness, and anxiety. Research has found that anxiety has the strongest impact on learners' oral communication [2]. Under the influence of the high level of anxiety, learners may lack confidence, worry about making mistakes and exposing their "defects", inviting ridicule from their peers, thus building a psychological barrier and even developing a rejection mentality towards English speaking [3]. For example, if learners are encouraged by teachers to engage in oral communication and feel that their performance is poor, they may be shy, fearful, or even angry. In traditional classrooms, when students are facing the teacher before the blackboard and podium, this spatial layout can easily lead to psychological distance between teachers and students, indirectly leading to a poor learning motivation. If negative emotions are not properly directed, it will reduce students' enthusiasm for English speaking, leading to low self-efficacy [3]. However, the blended online and offline teaching model includes students' autonomous learning before and after class. These two online sections do not only allow students to learn in more relaxing and comfortable way, but also enable teachers and students to communicate more equally and fully, thereby alleviating students' psychological pressure, narrowing the psychological distance between teachers and students and stimulating students' learning motivation.

### **3. Exploring Approaches to Spoken English Teaching under the Blended Teaching Model**

When conducting listening and speaking teaching in traditional English classrooms in Chinese universities, teachers spend most of their time giving lectures, while students spend most of their time listening to teachers. In this situation, students do not have much opportunity to output language when receiving input. By applying the blended teaching model to college spoken English teaching, teachers can continuously adjust teaching design and various aspects of the classroom according to practical needs, enabling students to participate more actively in classroom interaction,

thereby enhancing students' language output. According to the theory of constructivism, the learning environment is usually composed of four elements, namely, context, collaboration, conversation and meaning. In blended learning, teachers will readjust these four different elements. In practical teaching, teachers can analyze and research various elements involved in teaching by observing and analyzing some excellent blended learning lesson examples, and then apply their own teaching design to college spoken English teaching practice, thereby establishing a classroom that can improve students' English language output. In specific practice, the following steps can be implemented: firstly, teachers should reasonably formulate a curriculum plan for blended teaching, which should be clear and specific, highlighting the key and difficult points of teaching; Secondly, in practical classroom teaching, teachers need to classify their teaching activities and procedures in order to accurately determine the focus of each activity. The full application of blended teaching in spoken college English teaching can be implemented in three steps: pre-class preparation, in-class teaching, and after-class consolidation.

**3.1 Pre-class Preparation.** Before the class, teachers can encourage students to form independent teams to conduct learning activities based on the learning content. Each group can independently control the learning speed and choose the main content for group learning. When it comes to the online part, teachers can make full use of the rich language materials on the network resources, select and upload videos related to oral topics according to students' interests. Considering the students' language proficiency, teachers can organize and share the language points related to the topic online, urging students to preview individually or in groups. Meanwhile, students can make a list of their learning tasks based on their personal situation. In the preparation section before the class, teachers can also provide appropriate teaching guidance to students and supervise their pre-class learning activities appropriately, thereby comprehensively improving students' abilities in all aspects. In this process, the main role of teachers is to guide students' learning.

**3.2 In-class Teaching.** When it comes to in-class section, teachers often play a dominant role in traditional English classrooms while students have almost less opportunity to practice English. In the classrooms with blended teaching, teachers need to change their teaching approach and methods, increasing interaction with students and encouraging them to speak English by asking questions and employing other methods. In teaching, teachers can also adopt task-based and cooperative learning approach to conduct their teaching, allowing students to express their opinions in English within their respective groups and communicate with other students in English. What's more, teachers can also simulate the real language environment in videos to create a scenario for students' spoken English practice, enabling them to do the role-play and improve their language proficiency. As students' pre-class preparation prepares them for language output activities in the classroom, the major role of teachers is to promote students' learning, while the major role of students is to construct meaningful knowledge.

**3.3 After-class Consolidation.** After class, the traditional spoken English teaching takes oral testing as the major way of evaluation, which mainly includes reading aloud and question answering. The blended teaching mode requires teachers to take a more diverse approach to evaluating students' speaking proficiency, valuing students' performance in their learning process. Therefore, after class, teachers can take some measures (such as assigning relevant tasks online, encouraging enlightening discussions concerning the course, etc.) to encourage students to engage in language output and improve their English speaking skills. The online platform under the blended teaching mode provides broad space for the extension of classroom teaching. Teachers can assign some in-depth and thought-provoking online tasks concerning the theme involved in the classroom after class, encouraging students to discuss and exchange their opinions online. Students can also be required to make videos of some speaking tasks in the form of role-playing or pair work and upload them to the online platform for peer evaluations, followed by the teacher's summary and remarks. In the process mentioned above, teachers can record students' participation, which counts a part in the diverse evaluation system. In addition, teachers can supplement richer audio-visual

teaching resources based on students' mastery of the content in the offline classroom, thereby improving the quantity and quality of language input in the classroom.

The following is a detailed application of the blended teaching mode based on FiF app in spoken English class for students majoring in Translation Studies in our university (As is shown in Figure 1)

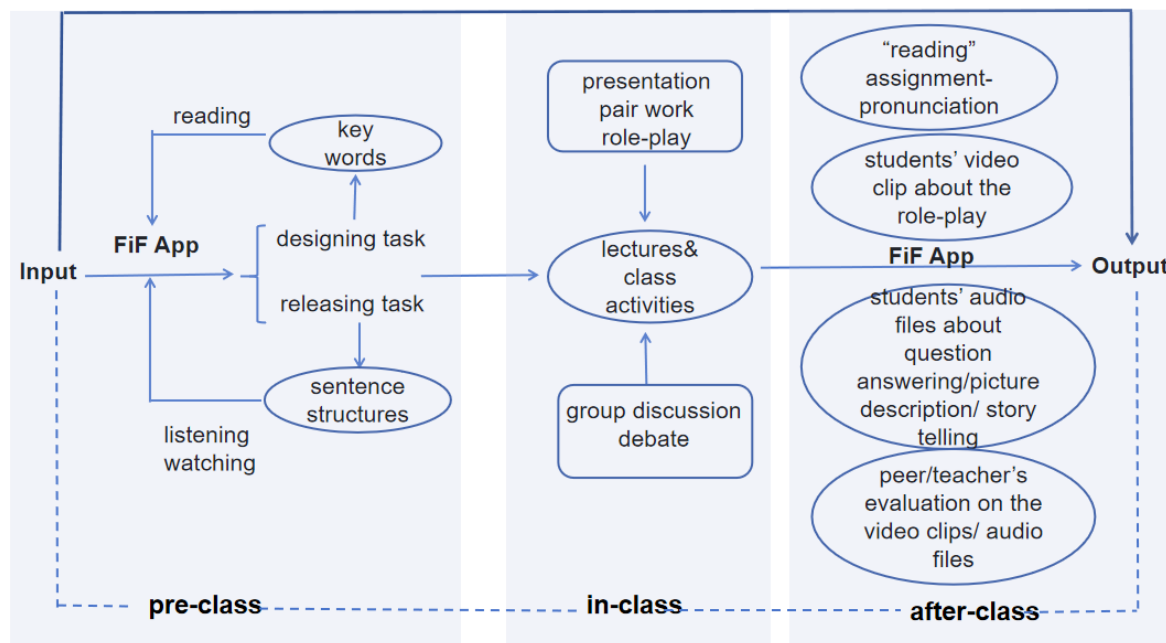


Figure 1. Blended Teaching Mode Applied in Spoken English Teaching

With the application of the blended teaching mode for two semesters, the average score of the whole class in the final oral test has risen from 80.65 to 83.5. The specific scenarios designed for students help them get more motivated to engage in the English speaking activities to improve their speaking skills. During the two semesters, among all the students (31 in total) in the class, 14 students have taken part in concerning English speaking activities, such as speech contest, English drama show, etc. as opposed to 7 students in the previous year.

#### 4. Conclusions

The blended online and offline teaching mode has realized the combination of tangible and intangible classrooms in college spoken English teaching, fully leveraging the advantages of traditional classrooms and online platforms, and providing a better platform for diversified teaching methods [8]. In the era of information technology, college English teachers can try various teaching methods in their spoken English teaching, such as task-based approach, cooperative approach and exploratory approach. On the one hand, these approaches can help improve students' English speaking skills, on the other hand, they can stimulate students' interest and initiative in learning English, leading to a positive interaction and development between teachers and students. In addition, in the context of "Internet Plus", teachers and students can share a large number of practical online teaching resources. At the same time, resources such as micro lesson videos produced by teachers and dialogue exercises and oral imitation videos uploaded by students have further enriched online resources, helping to construct diverse forms of teaching resources. The diversified teaching evaluation system established on the factors mentioned above can also help teachers to have a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the individual learner and facilitate teachers to teach according to their aptitude, thus stimulating students' enthusiasm and initiative in English speaking.

In summary, the application of the blended teaching model can help build a good ecological model for college spoken English teaching, optimize the teaching mode, enrich teaching methods and perfect the evaluation system of the spoken English teaching, and thereby improving students' English speaking skills.

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