

Reflections on Online EFL Teaching during COVID-19: A Case Study of Yunnan University in China

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Abstract

The paper is a case study on a whole-term online English teaching practice of non-English major postgraduates from March to July 2020 at Yunnan University in China. By attempting to probe into the strategies employed in the three phases of pre-teaching, while-teaching, and post-teaching respectively, reflections upon the mega-scale online English teaching for 30 classes of approximately 1200 students are analyzed by qualitative research in the forms of online interviews and class video observation. The research aims to summarize useful strategies and key factors teachers need to attach importance to in technology-assisted English language teaching with mixed applications and approaches to meet an urgent need in practical situations. The practice can be an example of the effective “localization” of college English teaching in China. It also shows that effectiveness-oriented online teaching can be feasible and useful in shaping and enriching the new normal of foreign language teaching in post COVID-19 era.

Keywords: *Online EFL Teaching, COVID-19, New Normal, Pedagogical Reflections, China*

Introduction

On February 5, 2020, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (MOE) issued a document entitled “Guiding Opinions on the Organization and Management of Online Teaching at Colleges and Universities during the Period of Pandemic Prevention and Control ” (MOE, 2020a). As a speedy and timely official response to cope with the negative impact of COVID-19 on the spring term of 2020, the national document clearly stated the requirement of adopting the three synchronic dimensional approach (MOE, 2020a), which is characterized as being government-led, school-based, and society-participating, to jointly implement and ensure online teaching at all levels from kindergartens to universities in Chinese mainland.

The emergency of containing the pandemic has been exerting serious impact and unseen changes on traditional and normal modes of teaching and learning for teachers and students nationally and internationally (Murgatrottd, 2020; Guo, 2020). The impact is related to the contagiousness of respiratory viruses because the classroom can be a relatively small venue in which students and teachers are prone to infection. As for the changes, information technology is no longer an auxiliary, but a dominant substitute to ensure the normal implementation of teaching. According

to the official data in 2019 from MOE, there were 530,100 schools at all levels nationwide with a total number of 282 million students. The total number of students in various colleges and universities of higher education in China is 40.02 million, and the average per school is 11,260. Besides, 397,635 foreign students from 202 countries and regions were studying in China in 2019 (MOE, 2020b). These data have undoubtedly brought unprecedented challenges to the normal conduct of teaching in a country with such a large number of students and diversified needs in education. The negative impact of COVID-19 has posed challenges to university students who need to finish all the courses within the stipulated 3 or 4 years in their twenties, which is of great importance for their career. In light of this, it is essential and basic to keep their academic life going without long pauses or delays. It is also the collective responsibility of the government, the society, the school and the teaching staff to take actions.

Context

Since the 1990s, language teachers, researchers and educationalists have been practising, researching, and exploring the relevant pedagogic theories and practice of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). According to the data collected by Chinese scholars from 1171 papers relating to CALL from five influential academic journals *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *Language Learning & Technology*, *ReCALL*, *CALICO Journal*, and *International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching*, there are three significant periods the initial period, the rapid development period and the in-depth application period (Deng & Chen, 2018). This initial stage (1995-2003) originally explored the role of computer network media in promoting teaching and learning English as a foreign language learning, as well as the impact of new technology applications on traditional language teaching (Chapelle, 2003). In the second period of rapid development (2003-2010), there was research on blogs, voice chat, computer literacy, teacher education, and computer-mediated communication, which put forward higher requirements for teachers' and students' computer literacy and the acquisition and application of information technology. The third period of in-depth application (2010-2019) mainly focused on research such as data-driven learning, second language acquisition, and collaborative learning. During this period, the deep integration of technologies such as social networks, big data, learning management systems, and learning analysis made MOOCs (massive open online courses) one of the important application modes of CALL, which can better support learners' online self-learning and collaborative learning (Deng & Chen, 2018).

As for the specific needs of college English teaching in China, CALL can alleviate the shortage of teaching staff, meet different needs of individual learners, and stimulate students' interest in learning. With the deepened scope and the diversified attributes, information technology, to some extent, has never gone beyond its position of being assistant, supplementary, or facilitating. Face-to-face teaching in class has been attached irreplaceable importance. However, the sudden outbreak and quick spread of COVID-19 has completely challenged and changed the traditional classroom teaching practice with information technology as assistance overnight. The emergency of coping with the pandemic has been exerting serious impacts on normal modes of CALL in English teaching and learning at both national and international levels. Hence, the research focuses on EFL teachers' first-hand online teaching experiences and discusses and exemplifies

what we did and how we prepared ourselves for the challenges in the so-called “There’s no best Method” age (Prabhu, 1990, p. 161).

Methodology

First, this study focuses on the implementation of online public English teaching for postgraduates in Yunnan University during the initial phase of Covid-19 and employs a combination of two workable methods: online interviews (10 teacher correspondents and 20 student correspondents) and classroom observation (20 recorded online class videos) to explore useful online large-scale teaching strategies under emergency at the micro level and discuss the development trend of information technology to optimize blended English teaching at a macro level.

Second, the study explores the online English teaching experiences of the first term from March to July 2020 at Yunnan University of China by following the route of response, planning, practice, and reflection. It attempts to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of online pedagogical approaches step by step from the three phases of pre-teaching, while-teaching, and post-teaching. Under the pressure of emergency, the Graduate English Teaching Department (GETD) members at Yunnan University effectively finished the EFL teaching tasks for more than 1200 students in 30 classes as scheduled.

Third, the study reports how English language teaching faculty members at GETD responded to and adjusted to the challenges by bending efforts for the author’s self-reflection. In the research field of foreign language teaching and learning, there have been numerous theories in terms of methods, approaches, and ways. The linear and dynamic development of EFL, to some extent, has reflected the constant external challenges and internal demands. There is no fixed English teaching theory that can meet all the needs of changing reality, not to mention the unseen pandemic since the 20th century.

In the following illustration of the case study, the macro strategy of pre-class, while-class, and after-class is adopted as the overall guidance (see Figure 1). At each stage, microscopic and specific teaching theories or methods are used, which resemble the cocktail (combination) methods to optimize teaching in a state of emergency.

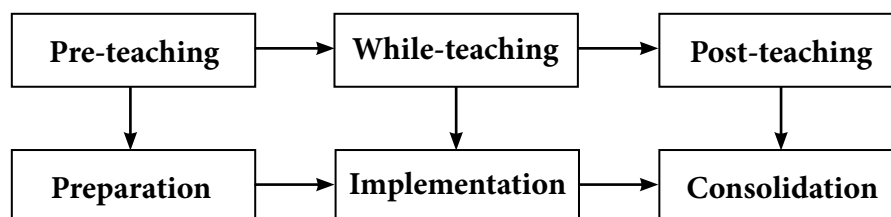


Figure 1: Overall Guidance of Teaching Procedure

In the first place, Production-Oriented Approach (POA) (Wen, 2015) is adopted in the part of teaching planning and teaching design to promote effective output through links between “motivating-enabling-assessing” via “learning through doing” (p. 548). Secondly, the course draws on the theories of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Littlewood, 1981& Richards, 2006) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) (Prabhu, 1987 & Ellis, 2003), and emphasizes the feasibility and effectiveness of online learning by integrating all of the available resources.

Discussion

Pre-teaching

According to the online interviews of 10 teachers who fulfilled the whole-term online teaching tasks in my department, all the teachers (100 %) reached a consensus that smooth and successful online teaching places more emphasis on pre-class preparation than traditional English classes. The pre-teaching phase highlights planning and preparation. Teaching planning is essential for EFL teachers. As for the unpredictable emergence, teachers need to redesign the course framework, be sufficiently familiar with the applications of information technology, and select suitable materials for online teaching tasks.

Redesign course framework

Before the detailed discussions, it is necessary to give a brief introduction to the course framework at Yunnan University. Yunnan University, founded in 1922, is one of the earliest comprehensive universities in Southwest China. It offers undergraduate and postgraduate programs for Bachelor’s, Master’s, and PhD degrees in a variety of majors with national research strengths in ethnology, anthropology, ecology, and historical studies. As for master candidates, the students are categorized into two parts: academic master candidates and professional master candidates. The Graduate ETD is responsible for the English teaching tasks of academic master candidates. To reduce the burden and increase efficiency, students can apply for English course exceptions if they meet the minimal requirements set by the Graduate School at Yunnan University. The students, who need to take the English classes as shown in Figure 2, have two compulsory courses and one optional course. The framework serves two functions: English for General Purposes (EGP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). As for EGP, the courses focus on general English language abilities: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. We combined reading and writing as one course (Du-xie); while listening and speaking as another course (Ting-shuo). Both are categorized as compulsory courses. For ESP, academic priority for master’s candidate of master’s degrees lies in the improvement of scientific research. They need to focus on the specific field, do research, collect data, analyze the data, and have papers published. Therefore, ESP for them is oriented toward Academic English Writing. The course is set as an optional course for extra credits. So basically, there are three English courses for master’s candidates. For the emergency, our department decided to cancel the optimal course of academic writing temporarily and guaranteed the teaching of two compulsory courses “Reading& Writing” and “Listening and Speaking”.

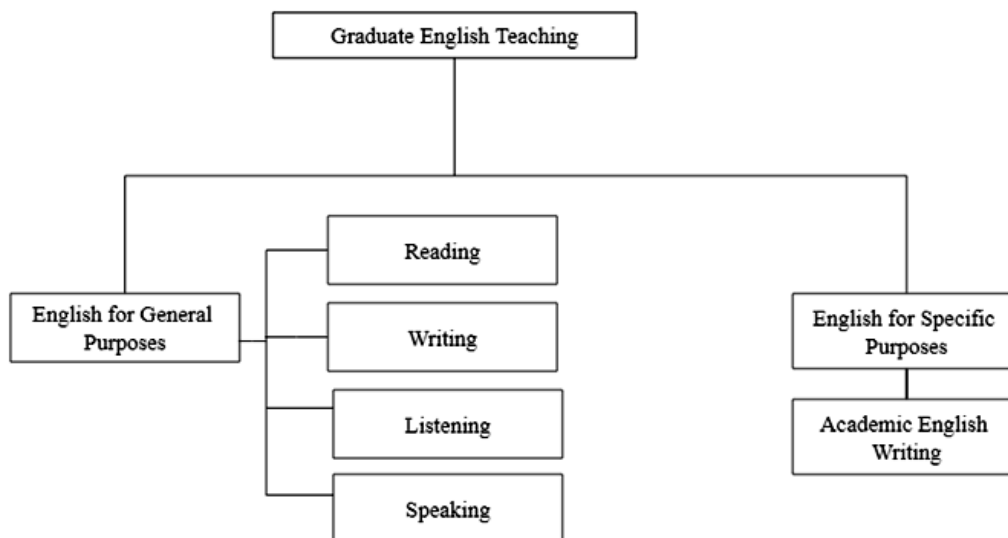


Figure 2: Course Framework for Graduate English at Yunnan University

Since the paradigm must be shifted from the traditional classroom to virtual classes, English teachers, from the experienced to the novice, from professors to the lecturers, need to adapt to new modes of teaching positively, actively, and effectively online. All the available information technologies are not as assistant as they used to be. In the context of the pandemic, they became the ways that the teachers must rely on. With wide coverage and complicated learning conditions, English teachers in our teaching department made appropriate adjustments in response to the crisis and give full play to our subjective initiatives.

Ensure familiarity and proficiency in employing information technology

Teachers need to know how to make typical classroom activities electronically. As an important phase of online teaching, the organization and planning of teaching need to be by the actual situation of the school and match the network environment conditions of both teachers and students. The basic conditions are computers (laptops or smartphones), and the coverage of the network. According to the online survey conducted by the information centre of Yunnan University, all of the teachers in the Postgraduate English Teaching Department possess internet-connected computers. For students who need to take the courses, the coverage rate of smartphones is 100%, and the coverage rate of Internet-connected computers is 76%. In addition, 1% of the students in the school were unable to attend classes because they were not connected to the Internet for financial reasons. For the 1% of the students, free SIM cards were delivered to them by the university with support from internet service providers such as China Mobile and China Unicom.

The next step is that with the guidance of the Graduate School and technical support of the Information Center at Yunnan University, all the teachers received formal training in using different applications of smartphones and computers like Tencent Meeting, ZOOM, Rain Classroom, Ding Talk, Chaoxing and so on. Systematic online training sessions were carried out with Q&A. Frankly speaking, different applications have their strengths and weaknesses and there is no one-for-all solution. After 5 times of collective training (some communication or consultation for individual questions or queries are not included), teachers in Graduate English Teaching Department had trial classes by rotating the roles of teachers and students to simulate teaching to test the effective and smooth uses of different applications. Three main factors which made us reach a consensus were free accessibility, user-friendliness, and EFLT efficiency.

First of all, 96% of the teacher and student interviewees believe that free accessibility of available online applications is the primary factor when choosing an application. Luckily, with the unpredictability of the exact duration of online teaching, the MOE of China ensured that all the high-quality online courses and virtual simulation experiment teaching resources are open to college teachers and students nationwide for free. Meanwhile, numerous social online course platforms provided free high-quality online course resources. In the past, the cost of a computer and network connectivity was the chief limiting factor of online teaching in China. Now with the high owning rate of smartphones, some basic functions of computers can be done on mobile phones with the technology of 4G or 5G. Therefore, except for the computer/laptop or mobile and network environment, there was no extra need for teachers and students to purchase any electronic equipment.

The second factor is user-friendliness. Although there is no perfect solution, 58% of respondents in the interviews mentioned directly and indirectly that “convenient to use” is somewhat more important than “free to use”. The users consist of teachers and students. Most English teachers are skilful in using Microsoft word, PowerPoint, and some basic word processing software. However, online classes posed great challenges to computer technology. Teachers had more concerns than before, for example, picture quality, sound quality, demonstration operations, the efficiency of individual work and group work, teacher-student interactions, student-student reactions, assignments, evaluations, and so on. After the 5-day trial and testing, our team decided to take the following operations collectively: first of all, set up a Tencent QQ group (communication group) for each class. Since QQ is one of the most popular chatting apps in Chinese mainland, it is easy and convenient for teachers to send and share information and materials with students. Also, the Tencent QQ group provides the function of the virtual class. The app can list the names of the teacher and students clearly and legibly; secondly, use Tencent Meeting as the teaching platform. When students get the pin code of each class in the QQ group (a periodical and recurring meeting pin can be set), they log on to the platform and the online classes start soon. Comparatively speaking, Tencent Meeting is simple and easy to use for Chinese users. The most important reason was that teachers and students can flexibly access multiple platforms, such as iOS, Android, Windows, Mac, OS, web pages, and small programs by just one-click login; finally, use Rain Classroom (Yucatan) to do automatic attendance taking, assign and check online homework. Based on the teaching practice of our team, the three applications or platforms are convenient, stable, and safe to achieve synchronous online English teaching and learning.

Select or design suitable textbooks and relevant teaching materials

Teacher respondents in the interviews agree that it is necessary to select a suitable textbook for each course (100%) and design teaching materials (60%) to make online teaching easy to be followed. There have been controversies on whether language learners need unified textbooks under different backgrounds of TESOL (Cunningsworth, 1995). The reality of college English teaching for non-English majors at universities in China has been proving the need for students to have a textbook and supplementary materials in English classes. The reason is that with many language learners at different levels in a single class from different provinces of the country with a vast territory, textbooks can help to achieve consistency and continuation of English teaching and learning. Furthermore, it can give learners a sense of organization, systematization, and cohesion. It also helps teachers save time and overcome deficiencies in preparing teaching materials.

As soon as our team got the document issued by the Graduate School at Yunnan University, we selected two textbooks for the two compulsory courses. A list of textbooks was shared on the official website of the university. Students had four weeks to prepare the materials. Even in the relatively remote places of the country, the delivery can be achieved within two weeks. In case of some unpredictable situations, teachers photocopied the contents of each lesson and shared them online with the authorized permit from the presses. It was for emergency use, not for commercial use. To some extent, it is also the social responsibility of the press.

As for teachers, we made and revised slides of PPT for each session on the aspects of adaptations in forms, contents, tasks, durations, and even language points. It means that in the past, teachers can make the slides in a general way, even in a casual way, because face-to-face communication can compensate for the information gap to some extent. In the context of online teaching, teachers can switch the webcam to let students have a sense of full participation and active interaction. However, from the classroom observation of videos, the author noticed that two factors can restrict the actual effect. First, the screen of the teacher's video image was relevantly smaller when sharing the screen of PPT or other materials. Even with attractive gestures, students could not be attracted all the time. Second, teachers' personalities differed a lot. From the randomly selected 20 videos of recorded teaching (45 minutes each), 6 switched on the webcam from the beginning to the end of each online teaching session, 11 turned on or off the webcams according to the teaching contents and tasks, 4 kept the videos off all the time because of the considerations of privacy and preference. Nevertheless, it is interesting that teacher respondents believed that the PPT slides should be of high quality in terms of contents, layout, and effects to attract students while student respondents hold the view that the focus and commitment of teachers in teaching online are more important than any form of material.

Another concern is the supplementary materials. We prepare a well-selected reading list. Take the reading and writing class in our department, for example, there are eight units for the 18-week spring term. For each unit, there are three tasks Reading Passage A, Reading Passage B, and Writing. Passage A is taken as intensive reading and passage B as extensive reading. They share the same or similar topic but vary in authors, styles, tasks so on. To order to meet the learning needs of candidates for master's degrees, more reading materials related to the topic can

be provided. On the one hand, the novelty and authenticity of new materials can be guaranteed. On the other hand, the academic needs of young adults can be met to the maximum. Since they are more likely to be attracted by materials with new and interesting topics.

For the final point of material preparation, 8 teacher respondents (80 %) asked students to integrate the materials and do a preview according to their needs and wants. Previewing the textbooks and supplementary materials is an important part of learning which can arouse students' awareness of autonomous learning. This is the first step for students to learn independently. While teaching English, teachers can provide students with some learning websites and application software, demonstrate how to use them, and also encourage students to exchange their experiences in using resources.

While-teaching

While-teaching plays a vital role in the whole process of teaching implementation. From the discourse analysis of interviews, all the teacher and student respondents mentioned "interaction" in different contexts. Besides interaction, teacher respondents also paid attention to tasks. From the beginning to the end of each class (session), the teachers in our team focused on the principle of making each class interaction-focused and task-based. At the first glance, these popular terms in English language teaching may look nothing new. However, something that has stood the test of time and practice is useful.

Being interaction-focused

Interaction is a prerequisite for successful communication. From the perspective of classroom management, interaction is one of the key issues in teaching and learning activities. Since the interactions of online teaching take place in the virtual environment. The techniques and skills of the teacher in initiating interaction play an essential role in ensuring smooth and effective teaching. Online teaching during the pandemic focuses more on interaction. Teachers in our team were required to organize online interactive activities, and encourage students to participate in online interactive activities such as quick answer questions, topic discussions, news broadcasts, cultural sharing, and group project presentations. Students shared their thoughts, acquisitions, and views as a form of output in the interactive session. The principle of "learning by doing" could not only enrich students' online learning experience but also ensured the effectiveness of online teaching and learning for both teachers and students.

There is no need to list the usage of information technology in detail. Technology can be deployed to its best advantage. However, teachers' roles lie in something that technology cannot replace. In this sense, teacher-student and student-student interactions can bridge the gaps, which make the teaching sessions live, real and communicative. Below is a summary of classroom observation of an online meeting (class) of our real teaching practice during the whole term of online teaching. When students got the Meeting ID, they keyed in the numbers and joined the meeting. If the teacher set the recurring "meeting", students just needed to click the icon of "join again". When joining

the meeting, students (attendees) had the options of “Turn on Mic”, “Turn on Speaker”, “Turn on Video”, and even “Beauty Filters”. For the teacher, except for the audio and video functions, the most useful application was “Share Screen”. The teacher selected the contents to share by the pre-planned teaching procedure, the detailed task requirements, and the learning output drives. There were three categories of “share screen”: basic, advanced, and Tencent documents. The basic “share screen” functions consist of “Desktop”, “Whiteboard” and “Only PC audio”. When using desktop sharing, teachers shared Microsoft PowerPoint. The operation was the same as what we normally do in the classroom. Students just needed to focus on the screen of their PCs or smartphones and follow each step of the teacher’s instruction. Another useful application was “whiteboard”. The teacher could “write” anything necessary on the whiteboard simultaneously. They keyed in or wrote down the words with the available changes of fonts, sizes, colours, and other related word functions. Also, then there was no need to share videos or presentations, the teacher selected “only PC audio”. According to the experience of our team, this function was rarely used, while “Desktop” and “Whiteboard” were the most useful ones in presenting. As for the advanced “share screen”, there are “partial screen” and “External Video Source”. The third one was about the “Tencent documentary”. The teacher shared all related documents available on the application.

During the part of the interaction, the teacher and students needed to make sure their microphones and webcams work. Both audio and video functions are essential in a virtual classroom. 90% of the teacher interviewees argued that the biggest challenge is that teachers need to be maximally effective in keeping the students maintaining their full participation and being on task. In the interview, the top four frequently mentioned ways were “Asking Questions”, “Group Work”, “Pair Work” and “Video Making”.

The most direct and easiest one is “Asking Questions”. It is a way of teacher-to-student interaction. When the teacher clicks the icon of a student who is supposed to answer the impromptu question, the online interaction is connected. There are at least three reasons for the practice. First, from the perspective of the teacher, asking questions is a basic teaching strategy. It is an easy way for the teacher to get a quick response from students. Second, students can keep focused and alert because their performances or their answers to the questions will be assessed by the teacher. The impetus to deliver high-quality answers can help students get involved in teaching and learning. By cooperating with their peers, they can repeat, paraphrase and explain in English. Third, it is a part of live communication. Most of the students won’t feel left out or isolated. Objective and subjective needs to follow the instruction make them follow the teaching procedure from the beginning to the end of each session.

Another useful way of interaction is group work. Each teacher shared the topics taken from the textbook. Then the name list of groups with specified topics was arranged and posted online. The principle of topic selection is its relevance to Chinese history, culture, politics, economy, etc. culture. The topics we selected were:

Socialism with Chinese Characteristics; The Four Great Inventions of Ancient China; One Belt and One Road; Chinese Zodiac; The Chinese Dream; The Great Wall of China; The Chinese Spirit; Chinese Diet Culture; Community of Shared Interest; Chinese Crosstalk; China's Favorite Colors; Chinese Dragons; An All-Round In-Depth Reform; Chinese Calligraphy; Community with a Shared Future; Lucky Numbers in Chinese Culture; Made in China 2025; The Twenty-four Solar Term in China; Matters of Confidence; Chinese Wuxia Novels; The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence; Traditional Chinese Medicine; The System of People's Congress; The Forbidden City; Multiparty Cooperation and Political Consultation; Chinese Silk; The Two Centennial Goals; Hutong; China's Mobile Payment; The Sharing Economy; The Craftsman's Spirit; Peking Opera. Meanwhile, tasks with an analytical and discussion nature are suitable for small groups, such as writing reviews, article reviews, translation of difficult sentences, test explanations, etc.

Pair work is effective for introverted students in the sense of peer interaction. Since home-based online learning often lacks a classroom learning atmosphere, it is necessary to organize and mobilize students. However, some individual needs could be neglected. "Pair work" in the forms of dialogues and role-plays in our online teaching practice was not just confined to activities and tasks. It was extended to information sharing, communication, mutual help, and even psychological support in so-called "crisis". According to student interviews, they did feel the pressure of taking online classes at the beginning of the term. But pair work facilitated the process, relieved the anxiety, and maintained the motivation by having a friend who was "in the same boat" and provided help.

Video making also appealed to the students because most of them were interested in information technology and could have a sense of achievement in providing high-quality videos. As mentioned in the above part of group work, each group was required to select one topic and submit a video within the stipulated time. They adopted different forms of recording the videos, such as role-plays, interviews, and performances. Again, different students have different personalities and preferences. Some introverted students were influenced by the members of their group. Peer cooperation and collaboration can be more useful in motivating the participation of students than the instruction of the teacher. The essence of teaching and learning is the process of teacher-student communication, active interaction, common improvement, and development.

Being task-based

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) originated from communicative language teaching, which emphasizes the principle of task (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004). As Ur (1996, p. 123) points out that "a task is essentially goal-oriented; it requires the group, or pair, to achieve an objective that is usually expressed by an observable result".

When asked what makes effective online teaching in terms of task designing, the majority of teacher respondents pointed out that tasks are an effective means of implementing the process of learning and teaching online. Through task designing, teachers could know how to "diagnose" the students' engagement, learning patterns, and behaviours. Our team members adopted the framework: Pre-task (introduction to topic and task); Task Cycle (Task-Planning-Report); Language Focus (Analysis and practice: review and repeat task) (Willis, 1996, p. 135). Students

were instructed to use the strategies of listing, ordering, sorting, making comparisons, sharing personal experiences, and solving real-life problems.

The following demonstration is taken from the recorded video of an online class. It was an interview with a doctor about pleasure. First, students watched a three-minute video about stress. Then the teacher led them into the listening task. Five questions were asked at the beginning of the task and students needed to answer the questions as soon as they finished the listening task. Students were required to write down the answers and then had discussions with their classmates.

The questions are:

- (1) What things give people the most pleasure?
- (2) What is the purpose of pleasure?
- (3) Why does pleasure exist?
- (4) What is pleasure?
- (5) Is pleasure good for you?

Interviewer: “Pleasure is the beginning and the end of living happily.” Those are the words of the Greek philosopher Epicurus, who lived 2,300 years ago. People have always tried to find pleasure and today we have many more pleasures than the Ancient Greeks had. And yet we still don’t know a lot about this important part of life. Here in the studio is Dr Jonathan Shamberg. Good evening, Dr Shamberg.

Shamberg: Good evening. It’s a pleasure to be here.

I: Yes, indeed. Well, what things give people the most pleasure?

D: We don’t all enjoy the same things. Pleasure means different things to different people. Some people get pleasure from jumping out of aeroplanes or driving at 200 kph. For others, pleasure comes from relaxing in a hot bath or playing with children. Doing a crossword or repairing the car give other people pleasure.

I: What’s the purpose of pleasure? Why does it exist?

D: Well, if pleasure didn’t exist, we wouldn’t exist. Pleasure is important for human survival. If we want to survive, we have to do three things-eat, have children, and get on with each other. If these things give pleasure, we want to do them. So we survive. That’s why we get so much pleasure from food, being in love, and socializing.

I: But what is pleasure?

D: Pleasure is a chemical reaction in the brain. When we do something that we enjoy, endorphin and noradrenaline are produced. These stimulated pleasure centres in the brain.

I: And is pleasure good for you?

D: *Oh, yes. The happier you are the longer you will live. But it isn't the great moments of pleasure that are important. Happy people enjoy the ordinary everyday things of life, like cooking a meal, going for a walk, or chatting with a friend.*

I: *I see. Well, let's talk some more about your research into pleasure...*

(Excerpted from Graduate English Listening and Speaking (2019, pp. 213-214))

Another significant feature of our tasks was integrating Chinese value education into English teaching. The new era has given higher education a fundamental task for moral cultivation. It is an important measure to promote the ideological and political construction and reform of the curriculum. While cultivating students' English language proficiency and cross-cultural communication awareness, it is necessary to implement ideology and value education by boosting cultural confidence. The following task is a speaking task about introducing Chinese culture. The Twenty-four Solar Terms in China divide the year into 24 solar terms (Jie-qi). The Twenty-four Solar Terms indicate the changes of seasons and climate, closely associated with Chinese agricultural production. The Twenty-four Solar Terms are as follows:

a) Spring: Start of Spring (立春), Rain Water (雨水), Awakening of Insects (惊蛰), Spring Equinox (春分), Clear and Bright (清明), Grain Rain (谷雨);
b) Summer: Start of Summer (立夏), Grain Buds (小满), Grain in Beard (芒种), Summer Solstice (夏至), Minor Heat (小暑), Major Heat (大暑);
c) Autumn: Start of Autumn (立秋), End of Heat (处暑), White Dew (白露), Autumn Equinox (秋分), Cold Dew (寒露), Frost Descent (霜降);
d) Winter: Start of Winter (立冬), Minor Snow (小雪), Major Snow (大雪), Winter Solstice (冬至), Minor Cold (小寒), Major Cold (大寒).

Table 1: The Twenty-four Solar Terms of Chinese Culture

Students chose one term and introduced it specifically or make an overall introduction of the Twenty-four Solar Terms. While learning a foreign language, students strengthen their study of the cultural elements of their own country and increase their ability and confidence in cross-cultural communication. Language is the carrier of culture. The inheritance and development of culture need to be realized through language, and language teaching must not be separated from the cultural elements of the nation.

Post-teaching

The focuses and strategies in the part of post-teaching for online English teaching are more important than normal ones in terms of assignments, feedback, and assessment (or evaluation). From the interviews, two key points were taken into consideration.

First, the assignments can be done via internal and external systems. The internal system means the online exercise and test bank of our teaching department. So far, we have set up the testing system for four courses: English Reading and Writing, Listening and Speaking, English Academic Writing, and International Academic communication. There are more than 10,000 items in total in the testing system and we renew the banks with 20% of the new materials each term. The external system means the online resources from the different presses of textbooks. The contents are closely based on the textbook and the teacher can select the suitable materials for the assignments according to the needs of teaching practice.

Second, assessment has to be valid, reliable, and practical by teacher assessment, peer assessment, and self-assessment. Through our platform (see the Pic. Below), teachers and students can easily upload or download various materials required for the course. Students can also use the message board function for self-evaluation and give feedback about the course. In addition, teachers have also built blogs, WeChat, QQ, and other online mobile platforms for students to help students get supportive feedback from the assessment.

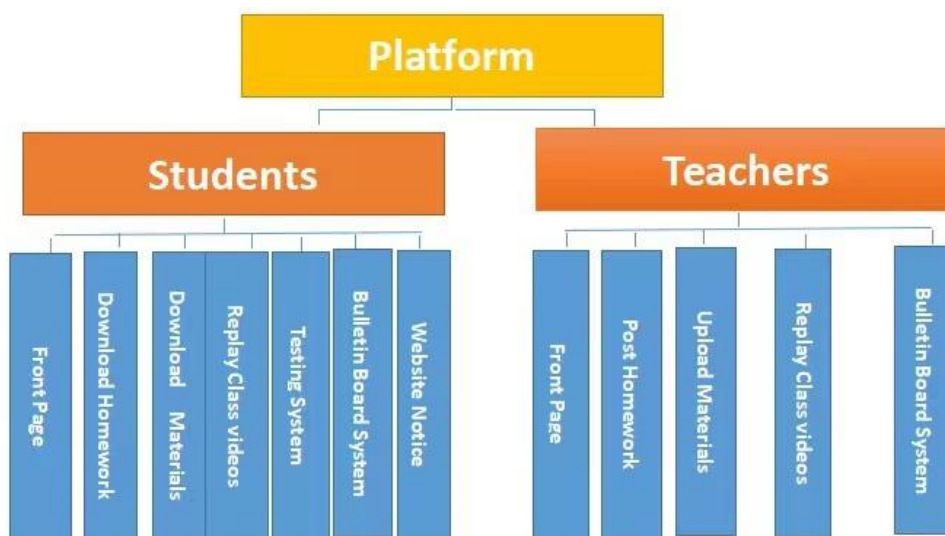


Figure 3: Platform of Online Teaching of Yunnan University

At the beginning of September 2020, with the successful containing of the virus and effective measures to prevent and control the pandemic, the holistic situation of the whole country was back to normal without a widespread national outbreak of epidemic. The students who took the online English course for the whole term were back to school. In the first week, a formal test

automatically generated from the test banks with 100 points was arranged on the two campuses of our university for 1123 test-takers. The scores ranges are listed as follows. From the distribution of the data, we noticed that the number of students in Band C (79.5-70) occupied the largest section, while in the former term in July 2019, the number of students in Band B (89.5-80) had the highest ranking. There are many reasons for the change. But from the data, the difference is not significant. At least, the whole term of online teaching was formally assessed, which put an end to the emergency practice.

Table 2: Final Exam Score Range

Grades	Number of students	Percentage
100-90 (A)	139	12.38%
89.5-80 (B)	256	22.80%
79.5-70 (C)	325	28.94%
69.5-60 (D)	272	24.22%
< 60 (F)	131	11.66%

Conclusion

No one likes the sudden change in teaching and learning during the pandemic. In a sense, fully-scaled online teaching is a compromise and a solution to a crisis that is completely out of the control of the teacher. However, we cannot wait and see. Han Yu (768-824 A.D.), a famous scholar in the Tang Dynasty of China once said “a teacher is the one who can propagate the doctrine, impart professional knowledge, and resolve doubts”. Teaching is the original aspiration of teachers. My research is small-scaled without abundant data and sophisticated statistical software. But I do believe that practice is the sole criterion for testing “truth” and the first-hand online teaching practice is beneficial for the individual growth of an EFL teacher.

Compared with traditional face-to-face classes, online teaching has its advantages, such as abundant high-quality teaching resources, and flexible time and place. However, depending on the nature of the course, the application effect of online resources will also vary. In this process, students’ responses and feedback directly affect their interest and willingness to learn online. As emphasized in the first part of the paper, information technology cannot completely replace human beings no matter in the case of an emergency or a normal period. Based on the needs of both teachers and students to improve teaching and learning efficiency, we need to reflect on the valuable teaching practice.

Realize the effective integration of technology and teacher education

In the era of “Internet +”, online education requires high-quality technological reforms to achieve the deep integration of technology and education. At present, there are mainly two education modes in online English education: video-on-demand mode and online live broadcast mode. Video-on-demand mode is the most primitive online education mode and still occupies an important position. Its disadvantage is that learners lack a sense of participation and can only watch passively. From the need to deal with the emergency, English teachers need to know how to

realize the effectiveness of teaching. Online English language teaching is not simply a combination of online technology and education, but to achieve internal deep integration. We need to have the awareness to be efficient in CALL and keep up with the needs of EFL teaching and research development.

Innovate Learner-centered Curriculum with Information Technology

Changes always result from stress. In the post COVID-19 period, the blended mode of online and offline teaching has brought the great potential for innovating learner-centred curricula with information technology. For the design of online courses, teachers not only need to keep pace with the teaching planning but also be skilful in designing and implementing the teaching for the needs of students and the needs of education. So different teaching activities need to be based on personalized and diverse teaching modes. Since curriculum resources are not static, which cannot fit all. Therefore, online language teaching should continuously and positively change to the actual needs of localization and regionalization. Teachers do not only need to ensure the unity and continuity of the overall design of online courses but also pay attention to the diversification and multi-level real needs of course subjects by continuously improving and optimizing the effect.

Give full play to students' participation and cooperation

For online learning, due to the invisibility of the learning process and the inability to monitor the real-time learning status of students, students are prone to fall into a state of disengagement and passive learning, especially students with a low sense of self-discipline, they can easily lag behind the learning and even form a negative attitude towards it. Therefore, teachers need to give full play to students' participation and cooperation by innovating teaching methods, improving teaching design, and guiding students in using information technology to improve learning efficiency. Teachers and students need to work together, know the strengths and weaknesses of online teaching, explore more reasonable and efficient teaching models, and realize a symbiotic education ecosystem of "teachers, students, teaching approaches and learning resources".

In a word, in the post pandemic era, we must attach great importance to online education as it is related to the overall development of international Chinese education, and lay a solid foundation for the formation of a new English teaching ecosystem in which online and offline education complement each other and are deeply integrated. When facing the pandemic, we need to stay positive and keep positive. In retrospect, it is information technology that helps us overcome the hindrance and keep going. It is necessary to let students have a sense of responsibility and cultivate all-around development.

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