

Research on Strategy of WeChat-based College English Teaching in China

Ying Cheng¹, Yue Shuyu^{2,*}, Li Jing³

¹English Experimental Base, Xi'an International Studies University 7100128 Xi'an, China

²School of Foreign Languages, Yulin University, 719000 Yulin, China

³Chinese-Swiss Hotel Management School, Shaanxi Radio and TV University 710015 Xi'an, China

*Corresponding author

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Abstract: At college and university in China, WeChat has become an indispensable vehicle of communication for students. Now it is used by many teachers as a platform to carry out college English teaching. Investigations show that the WeChat-based college English teaching is supported by students, teachers and administrators. The evidence from the empirical studies indicates that three strategies should be employed to improve WeChat-based college English teaching in China which include constructing a theory, forming a platform and exploring a new type of teaching mode.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, WeChat, a network platform created by the rapid evolution of internet technology, is essential to college students study and life. In particular, English learning by it is in vogue. Under the background, WeChat can be an innovative platform for college English teaching. Based on the empirical studies, this paper discusses the strategies of WeChat-based college English teaching.

2. Overview of Research

2.1 Research at Home and Abroad

2.1.1 Research Abroad

In foreign countries, there are many social network platforms sharing and disseminating real-time information, among which Facebook and Twitter are the most popular ones. Some researches are about the foreign language teaching methods based on internet technology. Reynol Junco [1] of Lock Haven University in the United States concludes that initiating cooperative extra-curricular activities by Facebook will bring about positive influence on university teaching. Carmen Holotescu and Gabriela Grosseck [2] proposes that the teachers can use microblogging to deliver online courses. Gabriela Grosseck and Carmen Holotescu [3], taking the application of micro-blog platform to education in Romania as an example, discusses the function of teaching methods with the micro-blog, and analyzes in detail on the merits and demerits of Twitter in foreign language teaching. Rhode, J. [4] points out that using Twitter can make teaching and learning smoothly and improve the professional development for students. Kelly Walsh [5] describes more than 100 ways to enable micro-blog to play the roles in education in different stages, such as those in preschool, primary school, secondary school and higher education, involving different fields such as teaching in the classroom, academic research and library management. Further, Kelly Walsh analyzes in detail the five reasons why the micro-blog technology should be accepted by educators, which are as follows: 1) it meets the demands for the academic development; 2) it can attract students' attention to study; 3) it is easy for students to use it; 4) more and more people enjoy using it; and 5) the staffs in the companies and schools are skilled at using the internet technology. In a word, in the foreign countries, there are various modes of foreign language teaching based on the micro-blog and other internet technologies. In addition, the studies related to the micro-blog mainly

focus on the summary of practical experience and exploring the potential commercial value of the teaching method of micro-blog technology.

2.1.2 Research in China

In China, there are many kinds of network platforms for education. Especially, network platforms for foreign language teaching and learning are widely-used and popular. Some researches about the foreign language teaching based on the internet technology are hotly-discussed in China. Li Kaifu [6] has proposed an idea that WeChat can change everything, so the foreign language teaching method based on WeChat should be paid attention to. Lin Shubing and Xu Xiaodong [7] point out that micro-blog, as an interactive network platform will expand and enrich the content of foreign language teaching in the classroom teaching. They also point out that the micro-blog has shifted the college English teaching to a mode of interactive communication from the traditional “duck-stuffing” type of teaching. Hao Zhaojie and Sun Zhongna [8] uphold the idea that micro-blog shapes an excellent platform for foreign language teaching and communicating between teachers and students, because it endows with large information capacity, and high speed of information dissemination and feedback. Zhang Tingting [9] explores the specific methods for teachers to build an English learning micro-blog platform in a class. Tian Xiaolei [10] summarizes the experience of college English teaching based on the micro-blog, and puts forward some major principles and concrete measures for the construction of the English teaching micro-blog platform. The above researches can serve as a footstone for the application of micro-blog to college English teaching.

WeChat possesses merits such as low use cost, multiple functions which can show voice message, video, picture, emoji and text, and live communication which can realize voice intercom, group chat and group video chat. Therefore, it is important to study the strategies of WeChat-based college English teaching in China.

2.2 Research Significance

At present, WeChat is one of the most popular network communication platforms in China. However, few researchers study the application of WeChat technology to the college English teaching. So it deserves more empirical studies on this topic. With regards to the problems stated above, this study is designed to discuss the mechanism, approaches and contents of the application of WeChat technology to the college English teaching.

2.3 Research Methods

The questionnaire is employed in this research. The college students, graduates, college English teachers, technicians and administrators are the interviewers, and their opinions on the practice and theory concerning the college English teaching based on WeChat are obtained and discussed.

Case study is also adopted in this research. Students majoring in French and Japanese at Xi'an International Studies University are assigned into one group and students majoring in computer technology at Xidian University into another group. By qualitative and quantitative analysis, the two groups of students are investigated on college English teaching based on WeChat.

3. Investigation Results and Analysis

3.1 Investigation Results

In this research, 286 questionnaires were distributed to college students, graduates, college English teachers, technicians and administrators from Xi'an International Studies University and Xidian University and 260 questionnaires were collected. At the same time, a brief interview was conducted to 33 college students, college English teachers, network management technicians, and student management personnel. The result showed that 98% of respondents and 97% of interviewees are in favor of college English teaching based on WeChat.

3.2 Analysis about the Strategies of College English Teaching Based on WeChat

3.2.1 Actively Constructing the Theory of College English Teaching Based on WeChat

Currently, English teaching is one of the most pressing concerns among Chinese people. Meanwhile, theory and practice exploring on English teaching are underway. It is generally believed that English teaching practice based on certain theories can go far and acquire outstanding effects. The mode of WeChat-based college English teaching has been widely adopted, so it is necessary to construct corresponding teaching theory to make the teaching practice valuable.

Habermas [11] proposes the public sphere theory which provides powerful support for the practice of WeChat-based college English teaching and is helpful to improve the practical mechanism. According to the theory, “public sphere” means a national or social public space where people have rights to freely express their views without limitation and interference. Currently, college students can try to obtain English texts through various channels with their desire to learn English effectively. WeChat will be one of the most important tools for students to learn English because it is instant, convenient and inactive to provide various types of text. As a new media, WeChat offers a space for the public (teachers and students and other people) to express themselves. In the “public sphere” created by WeChat, people can communicate in English freely, whereas any participant related to college English teaching and learning should be subject to some factors, such as internet security, polices, laws, regulations, technologies, and facilities as well.

Additionally, educational institutions should attach more importance to new educational concepts and educational modes, inputting more professional skills to guide all types of learners and educators to cooperate with each other and improve learning efficiency. Based on WeChat, people should determine the positive factors and reduce or eliminate the negative factors through their exploration, and summarize novel concepts, modes, methods and technologies so as to optimize English teaching mode and enhance teaching efficiency.

3.2.2 Actively Improving WeChat-based Platform for College English Teaching

WeChat is a cross-platform communication tool launched by Tencent on February 20, 2014, supporting instant communication by individual or multi-user in ways of sending voice messages, pictures, videos and texts. It ensures the successful implementation of the WeChat-based college English teaching.

First of all, WeChat is a platform of interactive. Teachers can share pre-study outlines, teaching points, homework answers, test information, teaching courseware, etc. with students in a WeChat group. While students are allowed to read, forward these information and offer comments. A web-like communication mode of one-to-many or many-to-many can be formulated by questioning-answering, discussing or even being mutual fans between teachers and students.

Second, WeChat platform can provide personalized services. In a WeChat group, people's personalities, hobbies, and interests are quite different, but everyone, particularly those who are self-abased or reserved can express their own opinions. In other words, the WeChat platform will prompt relationships of teacher-student and student-student in a unique way, and improve the learning effect.

Third, the WeChat platform can extend learning space. The WeChat group can be organized by dozens of people or hundreds of people. Some groups can be composed of the students with different levels of English, different majors. Some groups can be the English learning groups across schools and industries. WeChat groups enable information to be acquired by different people without geographic limitation, so it is possible for English learners in different regions to obtain learning materials, and for English teachers to meet their teaching objectives.

3.2.3 Setting up New Modes of WeChat-based College English Teaching

WeChat has become absolutely necessary for college English teaching. Therefore, people need to constantly try to set up new modes of college English teaching based on WeChat. Most of the college students are outgoing so they would like to express their views and opinions. What is more, they are familiar with online platforms. Consequently, they enjoy using the new modes of college

English teaching based on WeChat. Furthermore, they are able to fully participate in the new teaching process.

However, WeChat works just as a platform in which the college English teaching contents displayed on it should be created by people in a new mode. With this goal, teachers should provide different types of texts, in which the contents should attract the students, and be convenient for students to read. In other words, the modes of presentation of the texts should be easily accepted by the students, and the students are willing to participate into setting up the platform. For example, students majoring in computer technology are encouraged to be the participants in the development of WeChat platform, while the students of French and Japanese majors are encouraged to provide various texts in English-French and English-Japanese, which can help the students majoring in French read the texts written in Japanese while the students majoring in Japanese read the texts in French. The students actively participate into setting up a platform of college English teaching based on WeChat so the students can learn English happily and effectively.

4. Conclusion

This paper mainly analyzes the status of the WeChat-based college English teaching at home and abroad, and proposes some strategies. WeChat is one of the most popular new network platforms for people. Correspondingly, the WeChat-based college English teaching is also a kind of newly sprouted thing. More people will pay attention to it and conduct research on it to promote the development of college English teaching in China.

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