Online College English Teaching Practice during the Outbreak: Taking Rain Class as an Example

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Abstract: The Outbreak has exerted profound influence in education sector worldwide. Hence, online teaching has emerged. The purpose of this article is to discuss the role of Rain Class in online college English teaching during this special period. In the study, the key method was a questionnaire survey, which was conducted among the college students from different provinces with an average age of 21. Questionnaires were attributed to 100 college students. The study's results highlighted the benefits and challenges confronted by college students having online lessons via Rain Class. Data collected reveal half students think Rain Class greatly promote their listening ability. Lacking of interaction, 62% students do not feel that they have improved their language skills by studying purely online. The results also demonstrate students' preference for "online plus offline" mode because they can concentrate on class well and listen class repetitively. In addition, the findings confirm that most students can't focus on study and weak Internet connection may influence learning efficiency. In short, the findings indicate that in order to improve English learning skills and increase learning efficiency, teachers should focus more on transforming teaching mode to let as much as possible students participate in class.

1. Introduction

Since December 2019, Wuhan, Hubei Province has continued to carry out influenza and related disease surveillance, and found a number of cases of viral pneumonia, all of which were diagnosed as viral pneumonia infection.

In order to reduce crowd contact and stop the spread of the new coronavirus, the Ministry of Education has proposed "suspended classes, ongoing learning", and all schools require teachers to teach online. During the epidemic, all teaching activities can only be carried out in the "cloud", and the teaching mode has crossed from online and offline hybrid teaching to "online learning platform + live teaching" all-online teaching. With the emergence of various online platforms for teaching communication, the traditional teaching mode has changed from the traditional offline teaching and private teaching to online teaching and online interaction[5] (Yu, 2021).

Language learning is different from theoretical lessons, because it requires a learning platform where learners can effectively interact with each other and practice the target language, it seems critical to listen to learners' voices, experiences and feelings about this process to enhance online learning platforms in terms of language education.

Rain Class is a new smart teaching solution jointly launched by Tsinghua University and Xuetang

Online. It aims at integrating cutting-edge information technology (such as cloud computing, mobile Internet, data mining, etc.) into teaching scenarios[3] (Lin&Zhang, 2020). It embodies a relatively new teaching concept in the aspects of systematic, interesting, exploratory and interactive teaching design.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the role of Rain Class in online college English teaching practice during the Outbreak.

2. Literature Review

With the widespread of outbreak, it is hardly surprising that the relationship between online-teaching practice and pandemic has attracted considerable attention in recent years. A large and growing body of literature has investigated teaching experiences during the outbreak pandemic. Arfae (2020) pointed that online learning platform can promote learner autonomy and enhance students' performance[2]. While some research has focused only on people's attitudes towards online teaching methods and other platforms, for example, research by Megat Abdul Rahim et al. (2021) showed that most of the students preferred face-to-face communication with their instructor English education in a classroom setting rather than online education[4]. Similarly, Agung et al., (2020) carried out a study to found students' thoughts about online education during the coronavirus pandemic[1]. Other work has sought to show how to improve teaching effectiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2022, Zou suggested that teachers might adapt methods found from this study to achieve higher teaching effectiveness in online EFL teaching environments in the specific time or normal teaching period[6].

According to previous research into online English teaching practice, there are two general limitations. The first one is that many scholars only consider online platforms like Tencent Meeting and Ding Ding. Nevertheless, only a few studies mentioned Rain Class. Another limitation is that previous studies focusing on the effectiveness of online teaching, its disadvantages are also obvious. Therefore, it seems essential to address following questions:

(1) What are the perceptions of students towards Rain Class in online teaching practices during the COVID-19 pandemic?

(2) What are the common challenges that college students meet when studying English with Rain Class during the COVID-19 pandemic?

(3) When looking specifically the advantages and disadvantages of Rain Class, give solutions on how to solve existing problems.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The aim of the survey was to find out the attitude, awareness, satisfaction and use of technology towards Rain Class in online English teaching, 100 college students were invited to participate in this study. A questionnaire survey was conducted among these students, 90% of them were female students, 10% were male students. Students´ responses were collected in the course of summer semester of the academic year 2021/2022. A total of 100 questionnaires were returned as shown in the table 1.

Table 1 The demographic information of the participants

Grade	F	%	M	%
Freshman	3	50%	2	50%
Sophomore	16	80%	4	20%
Junior	36	90%	4	10%
Senior	36	100%	0	0%

3.2 Research design and instrument

Quantitative strategies were used in this study. The questionnaire contained a total of 10 questions, nine close-ended questions with a choice of possible answers and one open-ended questions, out of which two questions were demographic and focused on respondent's age and sex. The rest of questions were divided into five variables, i.e. language skills, learning obstacles, learning mode, effectiveness and limitations of foreign online teaching. Specific information of these questions can be found in Appendix.

All in all, 100 questionnaires each with 10 questions were administered to college students who study online in their English classes.

3.3 Data collection procedures and analysis

Students' responses were collected through Sojump, an online questionnaire platform. Then the data will be put into Microsoft to further analysis including using tables, bar charts, pie charts.

4. Discussion and analysis

4.1 Results of the survey

The findings show that 100 (100%) students eventually submitted the questionnaire. Out of these students 90% were females and 10% were males. Their age range was from 18 years up to 22 years with an average of 21years. More than 80% said that they used Rain Class in English teaching during the pandemic.

Figure 1 below then illustrates whether students' language skills were improved or not. The findings indicate that nearly 80% of students thought Rain Class enhanced their English language skills.
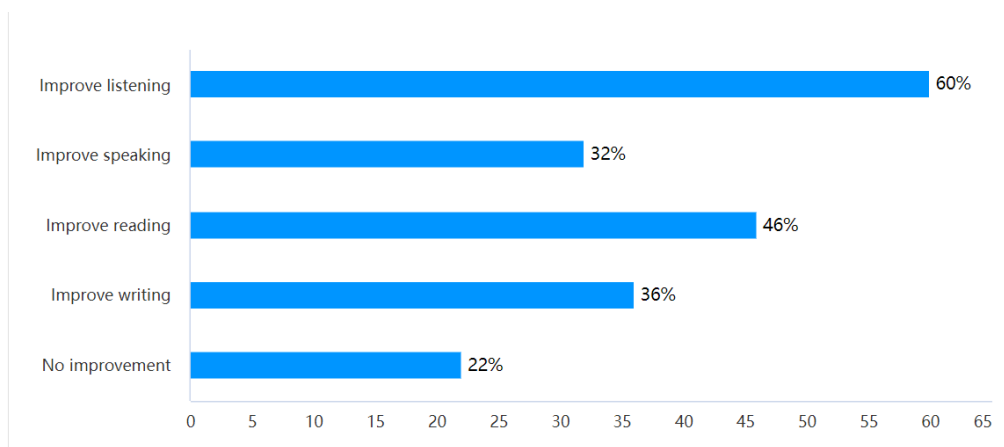

Figure 1 Language skills and which are thought to be good to practise online

As for the improvement of the skills described above, first, a majority of students (60%) felt that they improved their listening ability, there is a strong possibility that when studying online, they need to pay attention to what the teacher said or answered. Second, the speaking ability was improved least when studying online, because they reported that they could be lazy and say that their microphone was not working and simply did not respond.

Figure 2 below indicates what learning modes students prefer. The results reveal that 68% of students welcomed the "online plus offline" mode. Figure 3 presents some problems students meet when having online class. It appears that the biggest problems are poor attention and weak Internet

link. Besides, starring the computer screen may hurt his/her eyesight.
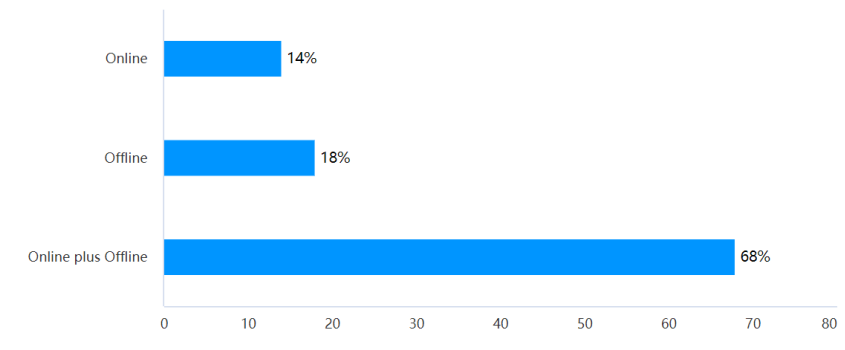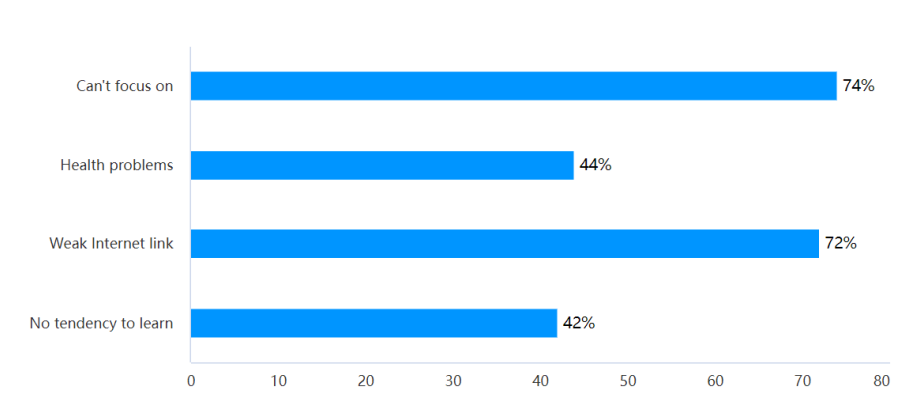

Figure 2 Learning mode students prefer

Figure 3 Problems encountered in online study

Some advantages of Rain Class are presented in Figure 4. 74 students preferred the function that teachers could upload PPTs before class so that they could preview contents before class. Meanwhile, communicating in bullet comments and highlighting confusing contents were also attracting for most students.
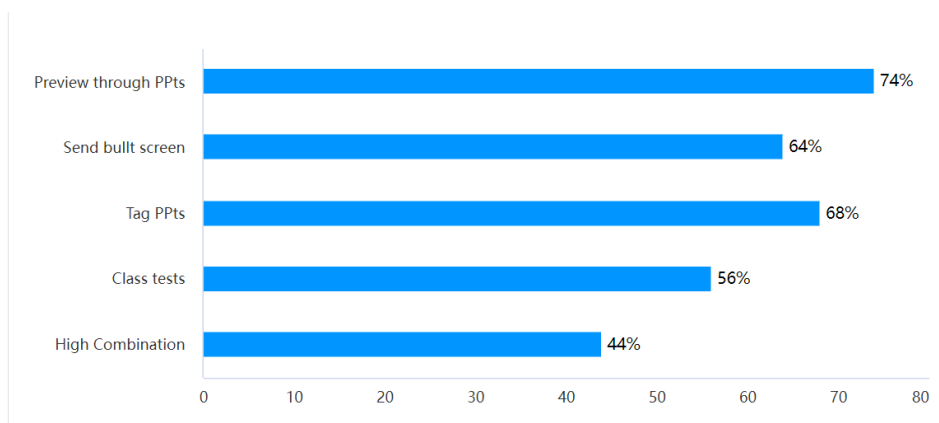

Figure 4 Functions of Rain Class

4.2 Limitations of Rain Class

It can be concluded from the data in Figure 5 that there are some limitations of Rain Class in English teaching. Most students considered that the teacher-student interaction was undermined. While using online teaching platform, teachers don't know whether students has mastered knowledge

points or not, because they can't observe students' demeanour, language, body movements, etc., and can't adjust teaching rhythm in time. In English teaching, pronunciation, intonation and punctuation should be paid attention to. The best way to realize these is face-to-face interaction, but Rain Class can't achieve this goal.

What's worse, when having a test, teachers can't monitor students, so they can find answers online. Students may have high scores, but it's not reliable, and their knowledge cannot be utilized wisely. Health problems also require our attention, students have to stare the screen all the time and they will probably have eye-sight problems.
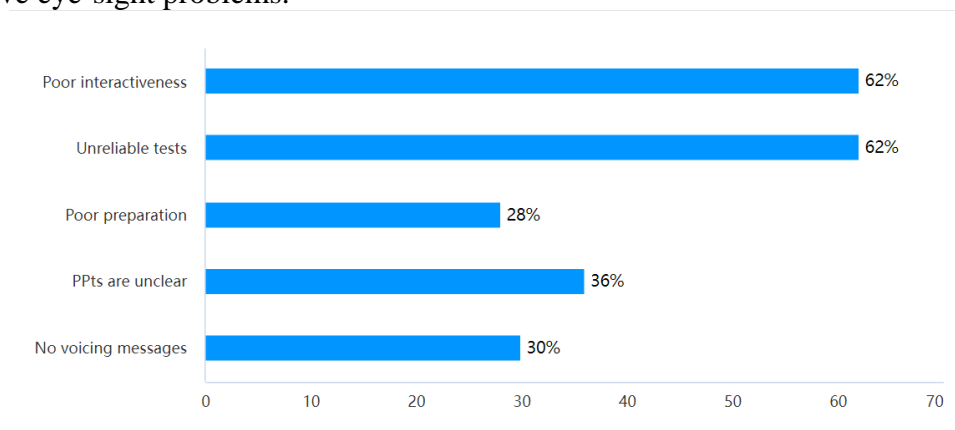

Figure 5 Limitations of Rain Class

4.3 Effective methods of enhancing English teaching

4.3.1 Strategy one: Improve the platform

According to the user feedback, developers should optimize the platform and software in terms of carrying capacity, stability and humanized design. Most students suggested adding a question bank so as to prepare exams better.

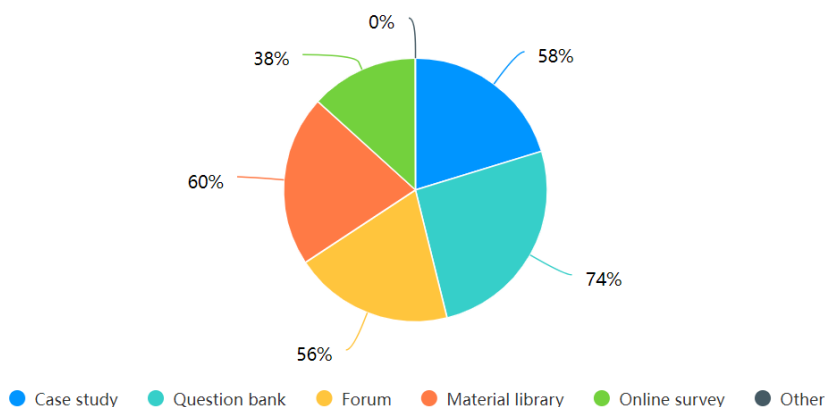### 4.3.2 Strategy two: Optimize the teaching mode

Figure 6 Suggestions from students

Figure 6 demonstrates some suggestions from students. During the online teaching, teachers should choose teaching modes according to the characteristics of different courses, explore new online teaching techniques in a timely manner based on students' feedback, increase the positive

interaction between teachers and students, like inviting students open their microphones to speak and taking videos to check their speaking fluency.

5. Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected each and every aspect of daily life, including our education system. In conclusion, the aim of this study is to investigate the application of Rain class—an online education platform during this unusual period. The results revealed that it increased students' listening ability most. While at the same time, it's difficult to focus on class when having online class. What's worse, the study environment is easily influenced by Internet link. One contribution that this study makes to the existing literature is broadening the exploration of Rain Class. Currently the pandemic is still surging, online teaching has a long way to go. Teachers should change their teaching modes, for example, ask students to open cameras to activate class atmosphere.

Despite the positive findings of the study, some limitations need to be acknowledged. The key limitation of this study consists in a relatively small sample of the respondents. Although the findings might seem limited, they indicate that there are many similarities with the findings of already published research studies. Future research needs to be undertaken to see how teachers and students in different countries regard Rain Class in online English teaching.

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