Analysis on the Characteristics of Online English Contests and Its Backwash Effect

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ABSTRACT

During the COVID-19 (novel coronavirus pneumonia) epidemic, an educational technology company in Guangzhou, Guangzhou Foreign Language Association and Guangdong higher vocational colleges jointly organized three online English skill contests of "English Reading Aloud", "English Writing" and "English Morning Reading" for students of higher vocational colleges in Guangdong Province one after another. This article briefly describes the three online competitions, summarizes their common characteristics in terms of outstanding timeliness, high student autonomy, intelligent evaluation, intelligent statistics, etc., and focuses on the analysis of the backwash effects of online English contests on teachers' optimization of contest plans and tutoring plans, improvement of tutoring models, enhancement of contest tutoring ability, students' motivation to participate in contests, development of independent competition preparation strategies, and improvement of competition preparation efficiency, so as to provide new ideas and enlightenment for vocational English teacher contest tutoring and student contest training against the background of information technology.

Keywords: online English contest, contest characteristics, backwash effect

I. INTRODUCTION

The sudden outbreak of novel coronavirus pneumonia has brought an unprecedented impact to the study and life of young students, and it has also objectively promoted the development of online teaching at all levels of education in universities, middle schools and primary schools. With the help of the Internet, mobile terminals, online teaching platforms and other information technology means, large-scale online English teaching across the country was carried out in an orderly manner during the epidemic. In this context, from mid-February to the end of May 2020, an educational technology company in Guangzhou, Guangzhou Foreign Language Association, and Guangdong vocational colleges have successively jointly successfully held "English Reading Aloud" "English Writing" and "English Morning Reading" three online English skills contests for students of higher vocational colleges in Guangdong Province,. All three competitions have been actively participated by students from many vocational colleges, the response has been enthusiastic, and good competition results have been achieved, which has enhanced students' enthusiasm for English learning based on the Internet and mobile terminals, and improved students' English application ability.

English skill contests have always been an important part of English teaching in higher vocational colleges, and are the core content of teaching practice. It has "significantly promoted English learning"[1]; oral English contest is one of the important items of annual professional skills competition for vocational college students, FLTRP Cup (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press Cup) English writing competition is also a national competition with greater influence. In addition, there are various English contests held by various provinces, cities, districts, associations, and schools. For the purpose of "teaching", they all create a good English learning atmosphere. However, all kinds of traditional English contests are basically conducted offline from organization, testing, evaluation to summary. As a new thing, online English contests have achieved successful practice and rapid development under the influence of the epidemic. However, there is still a lack of relevant research on online contests, and its characteristics and backwash effects are worthy of in-depth analysis and discussion.

II. INTRODUCTION TO THE THREE ONLINE ENGLISH CONTESTS

The English reading contest was held on the MyET professional oral training platform with the theme of "GO CHINA! GO WUHAN". Students read aloud according to the designated reading materials to get a certain score. The material to be read aloud is selected from oral essays or monologues, which belong to the category of oral communication, such as opening

remarks, telephone relaying, oral notices, etc. Contestants have about 1 minute of preparation time. After hearing the system prompt tone, the contestant begins to read the short essay aloud for 1-2 minutes. Each contestant can repeat the contest regardless of the number of times to continuously improve his score. The system records the player's best score as the contest result. The reading competition mainly tests the candidates' pronunciation, intonation, sentence segmentation skills and fluency.

The writing contest is held on Juku Pigai.org with the title "The Special Holiday". The competition urged students to face the epidemic, suspend classes but never stop writing, pick up the pens in their hands, and write their aspirations during this special holiday, so as to achieve the purpose of popularizing specialized knowledge of novel coronavirus, learning to protect themselves, and cheering for Wuhan. Students only need to register online, log in to Juku Pigai.org, and enter the composition number of the competition to start writing, and they can modify and submit multiple times. The purpose of the competition is to better organize students' English learning activities during the epidemic, to stimulate the motivation of writing and learning, and to record the learning and life experiences of special periods to improve the awareness of epidemic prevention.

The first MoTalk English Morning Reading Contest of Guangdong higher vocational colleges was held in the "MoTalk Morning Reading" applet. Students participate in registration, competition, and morning reading through the MoTalk Morning Reading applet to get points. The scoring rules for the competition are that the scores are obtained from the three modules of "reading task", "evaluation task", and "get-up-early task", and students are required to complete the corresponding tasks within the specified time. The MoTalk Morning Reading applet, with the help of smart phones and cloud data, provides a massive morning reading article library to automatically assign suitable morning reading articles to students as morning reading tasks. The reading contest aims to urge students to develop a good habit of reading early in the morning during the epidemic and staying at home, and insist on reading and practicing English.

III. ANALYSIS OF COMMON POINTS IN THE CONTESTS

A. Outstanding timeliness

In terms of time, the three online English contests were held during the special period when the epidemic was spreading and the people were fighting the epidemic. In terms of participation, because online contests have greatly improved the convenience of teachers to organize contests and students to participate

in the contests during the epidemic, the coverage of the competition is very wide: about 3,567 students participated in the writing contest, about 2,771 students participated in the reading contest, and there were even 21,127 students participated in the morning reading contest. In terms of content, some words, sentences, chapters, and paragraphs of the three contests are carefully selected to be closely integrated with the epidemic in order to educate students on epidemic prevention and control. In terms of purpose, the contests aim to provide good English learning and communication opportunities for students in China during the epidemic. Therefore, it is warmly welcomed by students. Therefore, the contest and epidemic prevention and control have been widely publicized among young students. In terms of methods, the main reason why online English contests can highlight the timeliness is that they make full use of modern information technology. Students only need to complete them on mobile terminals, mainly mobile phones. They can participate in the contest anytime and anywhere, and repeatedly modify and submit multiple times to obtain the best results, which fully reflects the advantages of online contests. In terms of function, relying on the Internet, mobile terminals, and big data platforms, the online English contests provide students from vocational colleges in Guangdong Province with online stages to compete on the same stage, promote exchanges between students on epidemic prevention and control and English learning and sharing, and popularize knowledge about novel coronavirus protection. They can also cultivate the English learning habits of listening, speaking and writing, stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning, refresh students' oral and writing level, improve students' English application ability, and also play a good role on the ideological and political education. Since the contest organization and participation process are completed online, this convenience is a powerful guarantee for the outstanding timeliness of the contests. It is foreseeable that future online English contests will still be characterized by timeliness.

B. High student autonomy

The successful holding of the three online English contests highlights the high degree of autonomy of students in participating.

All competitions are student-centered, with students registering, participating independently, and completing independently, reflecting a high degree of independence and initiative. Before the contest, according to the requirements and rules of the contest, students should learn about the rules of the contest online, register for the contest, join the contest consultation QQ group, and if they encounter technical problems, they should consult and solve the problems by themselves; the students need to download, install, and register MyET,

pigai.org and Motalk morning reading applets, being prepared for the contest. During the contest, according to the contest time and requirements, students should make arrangements for the competition and online classes to avoid time conflicts, and set the alarm clock to complete the morning reading or reading tasks on time. They also should search for information, peer assistance, and guidance from instructors by themselves in order to solve the problems of English pronunciation, vocabulary, sentence structure, writing, and reading comprehension encountered during the contest. As well, it is necessary for them to conduct strict self-time management and persist until the end of the contest. Especially the morning reading contest, it lasted for a month, which was a great test on students' independent learning and their spirit of persistence. After the contest, they need to summarize and reflect on the lack of the contest; many students are even unwilling to part from the contest, thanking the contest helps them for overcoming laziness at home, improving the awareness of independent learning, and forming a good habit of persisting in morning reading, reading, and writing. It can be seen that in the entire online contest process, there is very little teacher intervention, and the students basically complete it independently, and autonomy is high in participating in the contest.

C. Smart evaluation

The reading contest is an online English reading contest based on the Internet environment. It is not restricted by time or place. Students register online and compete online, using MyET automatic voice analysis technology to score accurately, quickly and instantly. The contest system also points out the problems in pronunciation, so that students can practice and improve while participating in the contest. The contest system is equipped with automatic speech recognition function, automatically keeps the record of the contestant's highest score, and uploads it to the server for archive and detection.

The writing contest is based on Pigai.org, which takes into account the repetition rate, and the score is fair and scientific. The title of the writing contest is set to "students can modify multiple times", and the system will analyze and score and correct errors according to the version of the composition submitted by the student each time. In the process of multiple interactions with machine corrections, students can continuously modify their own articles to improve their writing performance, which forms autonomous learning behaviors in the process of "output — feedback — learning — re-output" to achieve good autonomous learning effects.

The morning reading contest also uses an intelligent voice evaluation system for intelligent evaluation. It is divided into reading task and evaluation task. Reading task: The system automatically allocates 2 morning reading articles to students every day, and students read the articles aloud. The system automatically detects the matching degree of the article reading, and the matching degree higher than 60% is effective reading. Evaluation task: The system automatically assigns 2 evaluation articles to students every day. Each time a student evaluates, the system will perform voice analysis on the content read aloud and score it instantly. In order to encourage students to use the morning time to study in the morning, the system will reward students who get up early in the morning. The evaluation is a comprehensive evaluation based on factors such as fluency, pronunciation standards, and completeness. The places where the reading is not perfect will be marked with red prompts, reflecting the advanced nature of intelligent evaluation.

D. Smart statistics

The contest statistics link also reflects the intelligent advantage of online contests. From the perspective of reading aloud contest, the organizers rely on the software's intelligent statistical function to provide detailed student data reports, including the number of participants, the time period of improving scores, the total average score, the ranking, the proportion of the score segment, the improvement of the score ratio, the total online time, the student sampling data and other details. This provides data for the evaluation of online self-learning; and the contest adopts dynamic ranking, and the players can be arranged in real time according to the score.

Smart statistics for writing contest include the number of essays submitted by schools, data on students' autonomous learning behavior, and error statistics. In this writing contest, students submitted more than 3,600 essays and conducted more than 40,000 times of human-computer interactions. For example, students' self-study behavior data includes modified behavior data; the data shows that 57.49% of students have modified their essays and then resubmitted them, with an average of 11.41 revisions per essay per person; the students showed a strong enthusiasm for autonomous learning. Through man-machine interaction modification, the students increased the average score of the composition from 76.63 in the first version to 79.21 in the final version in an independent state, and the effect of independent learning was good. The changes in the initial and final version of the comprehensive dimensions show that students' vocabulary richness, vocabulary difficulty, average sentence length, clause density, article length, average number of paragraphs, spelling accuracy, and grammatical accuracy have improved in varying degrees. The number of errors per 100 words of students' composition dropped from 3.57 in the first version to 2.18 in the final version, and the grammatical quality of the composition has been improved. Students

can already correct a certain number of grammatical errors through self-study. The self-study effect of grammar is remarkable.

The MoTalk Morning Reading applet has a powerful statistical function. It quickly counted that a total of 83 higher vocational colleges have signed up to participate in the organization, and 21,127 students participated in the contest online through the "MoTalk Morning Reading" applet. Students complete the three tasks of reading aloud, evaluating, and getting up early every day. The intelligent voice evaluation system detects and obtains points and uses this to rank the scores of participating students. In addition, there are contest details, real-time rankings of the contest, "contestant ranking", "individual ranking within schools", "organization unit ranking" and other information. The statistics category also includes contest statistics, number of participants, viewing recordings, etc.; recordings are divided into evaluation recordings and reading recordings, both of which can be viewed, and multiple recordings per day can be kept. Students complete morning reading tasks and earn morning reading points, which can be rewarded according to the points statistics. The intelligent statistics function promotes the integration of information technology and English contest management, making college students' English morning reading study interesting, effective and manageable.

IV. THE BACKWASH EFFECT OF ONLINE CONTESTS ON HIGHER VOCATIONAL ENGLISH CONTESTS

As a new type of competition mode, online English contest has a backwash effect on both teacher contest guidance and student preparation, but there is still a lack of research on the backwash effect of contest guidance. At present, most researches on backwash effect are about the influencing factors and models of backwash effect. For example, Shih discussed various factors that contribute to the backwash effect, and proposed a specific backwash effect model on student learning [2]; Or the researchers focus on the impact of a certain teaching activity or test on English teaching and learning, such as studying the backwash effect of the CET (College English Test) on listening teaching [3] and English translation teaching [4], and analyzing the impact of TEM-4 (Test for English Majors Band Four) on writing [5] and the backwash effect of BEC (Business English Certificate) on spoken language [6] and so on. Student skill contest is an important starting point for promoting teaching and learning through competition, and informatization is the current research hotspot of higher vocational English teaching. Therefore, taking the three online English contests under the anti-epidemic background as an opportunity, it is of great significance to explore the positive

backwash effect of online competitions on English competition tutoring and participating training. The research results can provide new enlightenment and ideas for the reform of higher vocational English contest guidance.

A. The backwash effect on teachers' tutoring on the contests

1) Providing inspiration for teachers to optimize contest plans and tutoring plans: Instructors' tutoring on the English contests has always been an important guarantee for students to achieve excellent results in competitions, and for the teacher guidance, the plan comes to the first. An outline contest plan is the guideline for contest organization and implementation, and a concise tutoring plan is the guideline for contest tutoring. Online English contests, as a new form of English contests against the background of information technology, provide great inspiration for the compilation of contest plans and tutoring plans. For teachers, the epidemic has injected catalysts for online tutoring, accelerated the transformation from offline tutoring to online tutoring, and prompted teachers to change their roles, adjust tutoring methods, and think about how the setting of contest programs can meet the requirements of online tutoring and how to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of tutoring. In online contests, students' autonomy is high, and teacher intervention is greatly reduced, which enlightens teachers to truly implement the student-centered concept in daily tutoring. The role of teachers has changed from master, instructor, to guide, illuminator, and facilitator. The contest plans should consider the psychological adaptation of students' online contests, the mode of tutoring acceptance and the supervision mode of teachers; the tutoring plans should consider the best time arrangement for teachers and students, the arrangement of specific tutoring content, and the test of tutoring effect. The contest plans and tutoring plans should fully consider the use of information technology in online contests to bring the convenience of intelligent evaluation and intelligent statistics, so that the plans can effectively guide the smooth completion of the contest.

2) Encouraging teachers to improve the tutoring model: Traditional English contest tutoring is mostly face-to-face. The advantages are real-time communication and solving problems in time; the disadvantages are that the time and place of the tutoring are not flexible, and face-to-face tutoring may result in insufficient tutoring time, frequency and efficiency. The smooth development of online English contests will have a transformative impact on the contest tutoring model. The combined online and offline tutoring model

will replace the traditional face-to-face tutoring model and greatly improve the efficiency of English contest tutoring. The assignments assigned by the tutoring have changed from paper to pictures, voice, and video. The tutoring model has changed, but the effect is better. With abundant online digital resources, warm-hearted care from teachers and face-to-face communication, advanced technical equipment and peer-to-side combat, the mixed English contest tutoring model is bound to become a more common and effective tutoring paradigm.

3) Improving the contest tutoring ability of English teachers: Online English contests also have a positive backwash effect that promotes English teachers to improve their tutoring ability. English teachers who are accustomed to traditional face-to-face tutoring face the advent of the new online English contest model, facing the challenge of completing tutoring tasks well and getting the opportunity to improve tutoring ability and effectiveness. According to the characteristics and requirements of online competitions, teachers should be familiar with the use of online contest platforms such as MyET, Pigai.org, MoTalk morning reading applet, and be proficient in the operation of online course platforms such as Xuexitong, Zhijiao Cloud, I-smart, Lanmo Cloud, Rain Classroom, etc., to carry out tutoring work, and use WeChat, QQ, Tencent Classroom, Tencent Meeting, DingTalk and other network communication platforms to answer students' questions in real time. At the same time, teachers should improve their control ability on contest tutoring, that is, according to the online tutoring schemes and plans, the mixed tutoring model combining online and offline can be practically used in tutoring practice, real-time tracking and grasping of students' participation and psychological dynamics. According to the actual situation, teachers can adjust and optimize the tutoring plans in time to obtain the best tutoring effect.

B. The backwash effect on student preparations

1) Enhancing students' enthusiasm for participating and enhancing students' awareness of online contests: Traditional English contests often have limited participation due to the inconvenience of venues, scoring, and evaluation. Most students have not fully participated in the contest and have an indifferent attitude towards the contest. The online English contests are convenient and fast, and the participation coverage has been greatly improved, which greatly stimulated students' enthusiasm for participating. In these three online contests, students showed a rare competitive spirit of initiative, enthusiasm, positivity, self-confidence, and persistence, which fully

demonstrated the ideological and political education influence of the online contest "educating people by contest". Although many students failed to win the contest after the contest, they also expressed their favor and gratitude to the contest. They all agreed that the contest aroused their enthusiasm for learning, exercised their oral and written English skills, and improved their English proficiency. The change of students' attitude towards participating in the contest will have a positive driving effect on other students and various vocational colleges, and play a publicity role for the development of similar contests in the future, which benefits the vast number of young students who improve their English in the contest in the end.

2) Developing students' independent preparation strategies: The backwash effect of online English contests on students' independent preparation and independent learning strategies is particularly worthy of attention. There were also many students who gave up on the contest halfway through the three contests because of the lack of independent preparation strategy. And students with excellent results can take measures such as self-control, feedback, and adjustment of learning methods during the contest. Therefore, participating students need to formulate a sound contest plan under the guidance of the self-learning strategy and be able to urge themselves to proceed according to the plan. Targeted development of the plans is the standard for self-examination of participating students and teachers' inspection. It can help students judge the progress of the contest, and make timely inspection and feedback. Online contests reflect the importance of students' autonomous learning ability and the importance of mastering self-learning strategies. Appropriate use of autonomous learning strategies, especially metacognitive strategies, can enable participating students to consciously use metacognitive knowledge to plan, monitor and evaluate contest tasks reasonably [7]. Before the contest, under the guidance of teachers, students should appropriately use the planning strategy, monitoring strategy, and evaluation strategy in the self-learning strategy to make detailed and comprehensive plans for their participation. During the contest, teachers monitor the contest process and the degree of participation in real time, and conduct real-time evaluation, adjustment, and correction of good contest behavior and bad behavior. After the contest, students should reflect on the characteristics of online contests and their own contest methods, results and existing problems. Only in this way can they truly improve their independent contest strategies and ability to compete.

3) Improving students' English preparation efficiency and contest level: The traditional single-channel offline preparation model is time-consuming and inefficient, and students are not motivated. Online preparation is inherently convenient. It can integrate multiple training methods and multi-channel learning to improve students' English preparation efficiency and contest level. Especially in online competitions, students can repeatedly complete the entry tasks, submit multiple times, and take the best record as the final score. This formative evaluation model that focuses on continuous participation and continuous progress of students is more advanced and reasonable compared with the traditional competition, which can effectively encourage students to improve training methods, insist on independent learning, and find ways to effectively improve the level of preparation for the contests and increase the efficiency of preparation. According to the students' feedback after the contest, after the exercise of the contest, students can generally operate the contest platform flexibly, and flexibly use various information technology learning tools and methods such as electronic dictionaries anytime and anywhere to improve the sentence patterns of writing, improve spoken pronunciation and intonation, and greatly improve contest preparation efficiency and level of participation.

V. CONCLUSION

The ultimate goal of English language teaching is to improve students' autonomous learning ability and practical English application ability. Online English contests have accelerated the achievement of this goal, and the effect of promoting learning is obvious. Online English contests provide platforms for students to communicate in higher vocational colleges, enhance the ability of higher vocational English students to compete online, improve the application ability of the online learning platform for higher vocational English students, and boost the confidence of vocational English students to learn English well; The contests also speed up the teacher's comprehensive grasp of students' English reading and writing ability, and improve the mode and method of English contest tutoring of higher vocational English teachers. Online English contests promote the organic integration of information technology and English competition, and the positive backwash effect needs to be guided and applied to promote the development and progress of students' level of competition and professional skills; promoting teaching by competition and promoting learning by contests need to be further strengthened in the context of informatization teaching reform. There are reasons to believe that the future English contests will be a multi-ecosystem of "teacher + student + online + offline +

third-party services". Many subdivisions in the system may derive points worthy of continued attention and research.

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