



The Influence of Online Education on the Quality of Chinese Middle School Students' English Learning

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Abstract. The period between the start of 2020 and the end of 2022 was a special time that COVID-19 pandemic attacked the whole world and made people struggled a lot. In those three years, Chinese people are asked by government to stay inside once the virus breaking out so that it may decrease the risk of infection. Under such a condition, students had no alternative but to take part in online live classes to continue studying. The article aims at analyzing how the online education helps Chinese middle school students with their English learning. By using the questionnaire researching method, 47 Chinese students answer the questions and 38 of them are valid. They are asked to estimate the outcomes of their English learning influenced by online class. It is discovered that most middle school students regard online education as a useful tool in English learning while only a few ones think differently. Also, they come up with some practical suggestions on future development of this new kind of learning platform.

Keywords: Online education, Questionnaire, English learning, Students.

1 Introduction

1.1 Researching Background

At the very beginning of 2020, a new type of virus called COVID-19 pandemic broke out in a sudden and almost nobody could be able to adjust to it in time. With high-rate infection and serious toxicity, the virus crushed the world at an unimaginable speed. Governments from many areas over the world took emergency measures even though some were not confirmed by legislatures^[1]. At first, people knew nothing about it thus the only thing they could do is getting away and controlling the distance from each other. In most western countries it was taken by self-willing, while in China was carried out compulsorily by central and local government. To cope with that situation, schools are advised to deny or cancel the after-school assemblies, gathering at a restaurant, a shopping mall or a house is also discouraged^[2]. These steps are taken to ensure the lower risk of infection, but the progress of education must keep moving on. As isolated from each other, students need a virtual classroom through the Internet and participate in online live classes or find available resources by themselves. In order to meet the requirements of society and education sustainability, online education is thought as a

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more efficient and cost-effective mode compared with traditional system [3]. That's why online education became a popular way of English learning at that time. According to a former secretary from an American school, the lesson they learn from that crisis is to prepare a backup system, which allows the school to transfer to online education seamlessly. Besides, a permanent system is also required to be developed to make most use of the crisis and make up the gap between affluent students and disadvantaged ones [4].

1.2 Researching Topic and Method

The article focuses on the influences of online education on the online quality of Chinese middle school students' English learning. Defined as a language subject, English differs from other subjects that focus on book knowledge. It requires more proper communication and getting to know each other through that way. Sometimes even though students practice communicative skills during the class, they still don't reach the desired results since they are not provided with more opportunities to use the language to orally interact [5]. Changing from conventional face-to-face classes to online teaching and learning, it requires a process for both teachers and students to adjust to it. In a classroom, teachers are able to conveniently communicate with students in English or explain some problems to them. However, looking at a screen is a definitely distinct feeling. That causes some new ways as well as new problems in learning.

A questionnaire program called 'Wenjuanxing' will be used to analyze this study. It can be published on a particular platform and automatically collect the data provided by people who fill in it. Therefore, it is more accessible to compare the different answers in both horizontal and lengthwise ways.

1.3 Researching Purpose

As mentioned, online education plays a two-sided role in English learning, which brings some new opportunities and leads to new issues under solving at the same time. As introduced, experimental learning is divided into sight, smell, touch, hearing and taste, which cover the long-term memory portion in the brain. Nevertheless, online learning may only consist of two types of them, increasing the difficulty of deep learning [6]. What this article plans to do is concluding an outcome that whether the advantages of online education overweight disadvantages. In other words, it's more like an estimation questionnaire to assess whether middle school students in China are satisfied with online learning. Besides, a few suggestions are also put forward for the long-term development. That emphasis on the innovation of online techniques and functions of education platforms, being beneficial to rebuild the new type of education into a mature system, allowing students to reach a better experience.

2 Method

2.1 Researching Target

This article is planning to analyze the Chinese students in secondary school and senior school through a questionnaire. In China, students in those two kinds of schools occupy the most proportion of online English learning. Usually, the number of primary school students is not as many as secondary and senior ones and they may not be fully aware of the effects of online education due to less mature knowledge, while college students who don't embark on English courses seldom care about English study as well. Thus, middle school students are regarded as the most representative group of online English learning.

2.2 Questionnaire Designing

Generally, the whole questionnaire is composed of 3 single choice questions, 2 multiple-choice questions and a blank-filling question. As the target group is Chinese middle school students, the first question is to confirm whether the interviewee is a student in target one. Next, they will be asked whether they have used an online platform for English learning. If the answer is 'No', the answer will not be valid as well. Then, students would think about what advantages and disadvantages online education possess compared with traditional face-to-face mode, and to what extent they think online live classes may help with their English learning. Lastly, some practical suggestions are welcomed to come up with.

2.3 Data Collecting

The questionnaire is provided through an online platform called 'Wenjuanxing', which can keep the data altogether automatically after being answered. Lasting for about 24 hours, it has collected 47 portions totally. With 7 interviewees studying at university and other 2 people having never experienced online learning, the number of valid data will be 38 at last.

3 Result

3.1 Positive Feedback

According to the collected data, in the third question that asks about the advantages of online education, the proportions of interviewees who choose 'Not limited by time or space' 'Watch for several times whenever you want' and 'Various of educational sources are available' count for 65.96%, 91.94% and 53.19% respectively. All of them are larger than 50%, which critically proves their dominance in the advantages of online education. The data are showed in Figure 1, which represents compared with traditional education mode, what advantages online teaching and learning possess. It could be

discovered more directly in this way. Over half of interviewees regard these three factors are the basic advantages especially the second one, over 90%. Also, nobody has an additional remark about it.

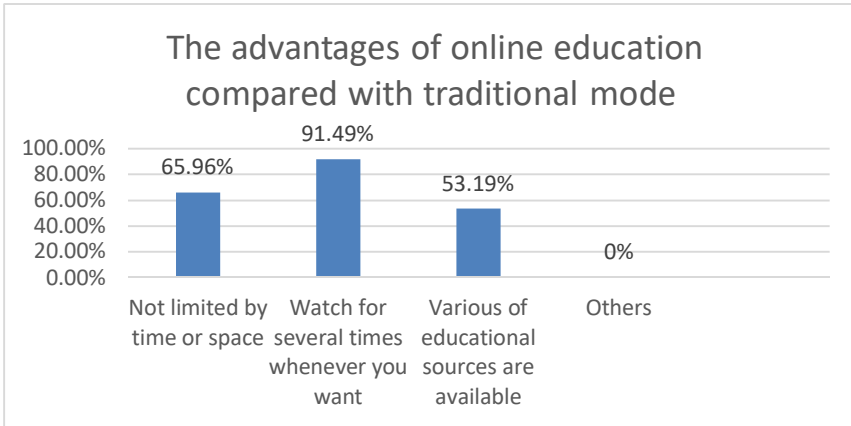


Fig. 1. The advantages of online education compared with traditional mode

3.2 Negative Feedback

Besides positive factors, online learning and teaching also associate some bad aspects. As the next question shows, when being asked what disadvantages exist in online education compared with traditional mode, interviewees who choose ‘Hard to concentrate on classes’ ‘Worse effects on class interaction’ and ‘Affected by website fluctuation or relevant issues’ dominate 61.7%, 68.09% and 55.32% (see Fig. 2). By comparison, all of these three data are over 50% as well, but it seems more equal in the distribution since none of them exceeds 70%. They are definitely important factors no one is extremely outstanding. Also, like positive feedback, nobody adds an extra answer in the blank.

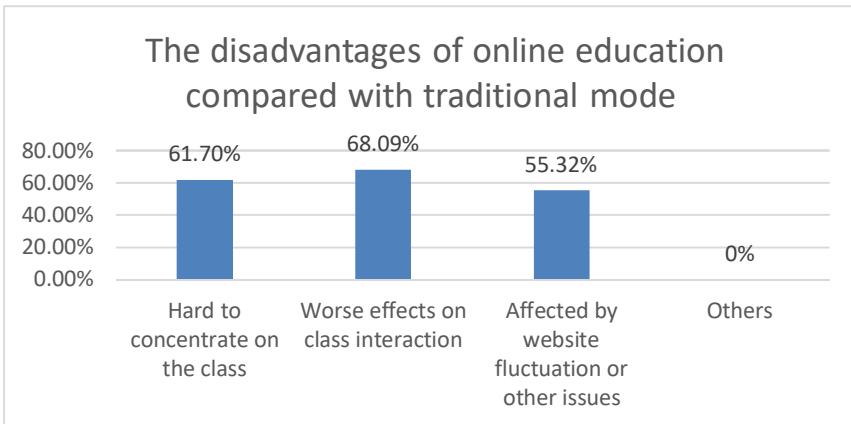


Fig. 2. The disadvantages of online education compared with traditional mode

3.3 Collective Feedback

Generally, both the positive and negative issues are highly admitted by interviewees according to the collected data. Their influences may happen at the same time when participating the online classes and contribute to the final consequence of students' learning. In the fifth question, interviewees are requested to estimate to what extent they think online live classes may help with their English learning. Except for 9 answers which are not valid, 6 people choose 'Pretty helpful among the 38 interviewees, 25 of them choose 'Limited help', while the other 7 regarded it as 'Absolutely useless, even does harm'. Obviously, most students who complete the questionnaire think online classes may help, but just a little. Linked to the previous data, most middle school students benefit from the repetitive watching function, which could be a sign that they are more likely to reach progress by learning the specific class for several times. Not only the memory of knowledge can be built stably, but also students could always find something that has not to be mastered in such a period.

4 Discussion

4.1 Basic Reasons

During the process of learning English, the most important thing for middle school students to acknowledge is memorizing. In order to adjust to the final graduation examination, a large number of new words have to be learnt and mastered. Thus, if students find something tough to understand during the class and hesitate to ask teachers for help, they may prefer to watch it again later, and that could be vital to their learning outcomes. Another reason for accounting for that is motivation. According to Chunmei Long, Zhu Ming and Liping Chen, English learning motivation can be divided into intrinsic and extrinsic one, as intrinsic motivation comes from the bottom of learners' minds, the extrinsic one is determined by what they could get during this process^[7]. By finding different types of educational sources, students are likely to give intrinsic motivation since some sources on the Internet are not as boring as conventional classes, instead, they could be presented in various of new forms so that attract students' interest in learning English. Also, the advantage of 'Not limited by time or space' could be regarded as the combination of these two factors, which represents that students are able to take care of their schedule more freely.

As for the reasons of disadvantages, it can be easily imagined that, unlike a brick-and-mortar class, nobody can supervise each student on an online platform. Even though in Chinese middle schools, most teachers may ask their students to turn on the camera and ask them questions at any time to examine whether they are focusing on the class, it is still pretty difficult to ensure the quality is as high as conventional classes. For students themselves, middle school age is the key period that stimulates the ability to self-control and self-learning. An influential experiment shows students who are in well self-disciplined behave better in test scores and competitive academic programs. Even IQ is not as important as self-control^[8]. If they feel completely free to do whatever they want, it may cause unsatisfactory consequences at last. Plus, as a language subject,

the key factor of English learning is supposed to be frequent communication. But apparently, an online class is a virtual platform short in communication functions compared with a face-to-face one. Therefore, students are likely to earn theoretical knowledge but fail to impart it to others in an efficient way^[9]. What's more, for students who live in a village or other places with weak website signal, taking part in an online class gives them an uncomfortable experience. With serious fluctuation, nobody is willing to battle with the website connection.

4.2 Future Development

At the last question from the questionnaire, students are welcome to provide their suggestions about the future development of the online education system. After screening the contents, there are 8 valid answers left. Among those answers, 4 of them concentrate on the significance of interaction during the class, emphasizing the variety of interaction as well. A comment also says that online teaching is supposed to vary from the conventional one and combine interest with effective communication at the same time. There is no suspicion that communication plays a key role in education. As described, communication could be defined as a dynamic process that requires the mind and courage to transfer others' information^[10]. Thus, in a virtual classroom, the efficiency of communication is even more valuable than in a real class. Another three suggestions support the long-term progress of online education as well. In contrast, it advocates not communication but the function of supplementary towards main subjects. In other words, it is able to add up something not mentioned by teachers during the class.

The rest one suggestion looks interesting, which recommends less use of online platforms for a class as possible. This statement, objecting to the future development of this new kind of mode, is really a unique point compared with the others. It is likely to be predicted that the person who fills the answer has a sense of trouble in using the online technique for English study.

Generally, most of the valid answers show a positive attitude to future development and put forward some practical advice, sorted out communication progress and supplementary assistance. Most online platforms used for teaching and learning, like Ding Talk or Tencent Meeting, have already got enough communication tools. Students can turn the camera on and raise their hands to answer the questions. Moreover, the whole class could be recorded and sent to the database, where the video will be available to all students. On the Ding Talk platform, homework is fixed up by teachers and completed by students online. It is admitted that the functions of online education have reached a high standard during the three-year process of the pandemic. In the future, what should be promoted deeply is the combination of teaching and entertainment, taking full advantage of online technology. During the pandemic time, meeting with each other face-to-face is almost impossible, and it is likely to feel boring when getting isolated. For the designers of the education platforms, they are supposed to support the structure of platforms. One way to build it better is to repair some errors that may bother the website connection in order to offer students a stable environment to study online. Another issue is, some resources on the Internet are useful but cost an expensive price on account of the copyright of their producers. That is not wrong, but if more low-price

or free materials can be used by students without excellent living conditions, they may feel reasonable.

In addition, artificial intelligence is a brilliant choice to make use of. AI implications like simulation and communication programs support practice skills and stimulate real-life skills^[11]. For instance, a popular app called IELTS Bro is widely used by Chinese students since it covers the database of IELTS exams and has a unique function that provides a mock speaking test between the learner and artificial intelligence, with the same rhythm as real tests. That may also work in the English study of middle school students. Usually, a class is composed of about 40 students and some of them who are shy to communicate with teachers are likely to be ignored by teachers sometimes. However, talking with an advanced AI assistant is truly helpful to solve it.

5 Conclusion

From what have been discovered, the online education system acquires the satisfaction of most Chinese middle school students. They are offered more sources compared with the traditional mode and are able to save time, which seems more flexible. Through that, students will not feel so exhausted to meet time schedule every day, instead, it can be regulated by themselves due to their own habits and arrangement. Some students are energetic at the daytime so they can take part in classes as usual, while others prefer to stay up until midnight or even later so they don't need to complete their tasks at the original time. In the end, most of them find a suitable learning method as well as reach a positive progress.

However, current problems also require attention. It is not strange that without any compulsory management, students seldom take control of themselves. If they don't want to focus on a live class, teachers have not so much effort to supervise each of them. If they copy the homework from the Internet or their classmates, no one can prevent them from doing so. If they try to cheat in online tests, their grades can't be trusted at all. Students who are good at self-control keep a balance between learning and entertainment, but unconscious ones are very likely to waste time at home. The middle school in China is a place filled with pressure and competition, once getting rid of that particular environment, students are likely to seek freedom and fall behind finally.

Fortunately, more and more Chinese students are building an awareness of studying hard. Even though they can be managed by teachers or parents to study sometimes, eventually it is an affair that must be dealt with by themselves. As more students are willing to be strict with themselves from the bottom of heart, being online will not be a reason to be lazy any more. With the overwhelming progress of technology, the online education system will become multi-functional one day. A number of issues that can't be solved today are hopeful to be coped with in the future. Everything in the world is a coin with two opposite sides and both of them are worth concentrating on. At a basic period of learning, it is important for middle school students to critically think about what may help them, and what will become a sense of crisis for their studying. Take

the essence and discard the dross, and they are able to make use of the online platform as a tool rather than a barrier.

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