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A Survey Research on Agricultural College Undergraduates' Attitudes towards In-class and Out-of-class Activities Based on the Mixed Teaching Model

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Abstract In order to study the effects of in-class and out-of-class activities of college English based on the mixed teaching model on the fostering of students' English learning and application ability, the attitudes of 215 freshmen of Agricultural College, Yanbian University towards in-class and out-of-class activities and their participation and completion of tasks were investigated by a questionnaire. The results show that a series of in-class and out-of-class activities could help improve the students' language competence as well as non-language competence such as learning strategies, emotional attitudes, and cultural awareness. The implementation and effect of school online courses were inferior to classroom teaching, but they provide reference and experience for future mixed teaching.

Key words Mixed teaching model, In-class and out-of-class activities of college English, Language competence , Non-language competence

1 Introduction

With the integration of the world economy and scientific and technological progress, English application ability as the necessary quality of internationally competitive talents has attracted much attention. In order to foster students' English application skills during the practical use of English[1], the requirement of students' English learning in agricultural colleges should be improved. That is, they should not only develop their common language competence, but also further enhance their professional academic English communication skills and intercultural communicative competence for effective communication in English in different areas or contexts.

In the Internet age, the cultivation of English application ability of undergraduates is inseparable from network technology. A new mixed college English teaching model that integrates information technology and classroom teaching must be constructed, such as using high-quality educational resources such as online micro-lessons, massive open online course, *etc.* to expand teaching content, improve teaching effect, achieve teaching goals, and enhance students' learning efficiency. In-class and out-of-class activities of college English based on the mixed teaching model are task-oriented, and their effective implementation and completion must be suitable for learners as subjects. Outcomes will also be affected by learners' perceptions about what they should contribute to task completion, their views about the nature and demand of the task, and their definitions of the situation in which the task takes place[2]. In this study, the attitudes of students of Agricultural College, Yanbian University towards in-class and out-of-class activities were investigated, and the effects of in-class and out-of-class activities on students' language level, learning strategies, emotions, cultural awareness, *etc.* were analyzed. Moreover, some suggestions were proposed according to existing problems.

2 Research methods

2.1 Research questions In this study, the attitudes of students of Agricultural College, Yanbian University towards the mixed in-class and out-of-class activities combining online courses and classroom teaching were investigated, and the effectiveness of teaching activities was explored. The questions are as follows: first, whether the participation and completion of students' in-class and out-of-class activities reach the goal; secondly, whether students' language competence, namely language knowledge and language skills, are improved by the in-class and out-of-class activities; thirdly, whether in-class and out-of-class activities can help improve students' non-language competence in terms of learning strategies, emotional attitudes, and cultural awareness.

2.2 The object of the study The object of the study was 215 freshmen (who entered the university in 2017) of the Agricultural College, Yanbian University, whose specialities were agricultural and forestry economics and management, food science and processing, plant production, animal science, animal medicine, gardening, environmental science, and biotechnology. Their average score of English in the college entrance examination was 105.6. Among these freshmen, there were 83 boys (accounting for 38.6%) and 132 girls (accounting for 61.4%). Among them, 173 students were the Han Chinese, accounting for 80.5%; 42 students were Koreans, Manchus, Mongolians or Huis, accounting for 19.5%.

2.3 Research tools and data collection In this study, a ques-

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tionnaire was designed. The questionnaire contains 30 items, of which 23 items used the Likert scale (1 is very wrong; 2 is wrong; 3 is uncertain; 4 is correct; 5 is very correct), and 7 items were selected using ticks. The questionnaire was mainly composed of three parts, namely the students' participation and completion of tasks in in-class and out-of-class activities, the students' attitudes to language competence, and the students' attitudes to non-language competence. The students answered the questions according to their actual situation. Descriptive statistics, and comparative analysis of the survey data were performed by SPSS19.0 software.

3 Results and analysis

3.1 Participation and completion of the students in in-class and out-of-class activities The main in-class and out-of-class activities included giving a speech before class (namely presentation), reading texts, role playing, reading puzzles, visual-audio-oral classes, school online courses, online courses on autonomous platforms, and the foreign language listening and speaking competition of millions of undergraduates for global language communication. The students thought that presentation was the most rewarding (60%), and the efficiency was the highest (44.7%). Among the most unsatisfactory items for the students in the activity of presentation, "the atmosphere is boring and the interaction is not strong" accounted for 54.9%; " it is simple and boring in content and monotonous in form" accounted for 20.9%; "speakers' voice and tone are not good" accounted for 15.3%; "speakers do not use PowerPoint" accounted for 5.6%; "not unsatisfied" accounted for 3.3%. It was praised and paid attention to by the students, and the students were highly motivated and required a higher level of classroom atmosphere, content and form of speeches. As for the final output of reading puzzles, the most reasonable items are as follows: "summary dictation" accounted for 36.3%; "summary writing" accounted for 33.0%; "answering questions orally" accounted for 19.1%; "answering questions in the form of writing" accounted for 11.6%. The students tended to use summary as the main output method and combine dictation with writing, but they did not favor the shallower way of answering questions.

For school online courses, 39.5% of the students completed one or two units; 30.3% of the students finished 3 or 4 units; 11.6% of the students completed 5 or 6 units; 6.5% of the students finished 7 or 8 units; 11.6% of the students did not complete any units; students who did not know their tasks accounted for 0.5%. The completion of the online courses was not ideal. Only about 30% of the students completed half of the tasks, and 12% of the students did not perform or did not know their tasks. Among the online courses on autonomous platforms, 49.7% of the students participated in the course "College Times English Spoken Language", and the participation rate was the highest; 14.0% of the students took part in the course "Basic Writing"; 11.1% of the students participated in the course "Art of Speech"; students who did not take part in any courses accounted for 24.7%; 0.5% of the students did not know their tasks. Nearly 50% of the students chose "College English Times Spoken Language", which is a basic oral course instead of an applied course. 25.2% of the students did not participate in or know their tasks. The students' participation in the courses was also not ideal. Among the reasons for participating in the English competition, the proportion of "taking this opportunity to exercise myself" was the highest, up to 75.8%; "my English is good and I can give it a try" accounted for 9.7%; "pleasing my English teacher", "I join the competition due to others' participation", and "English teacher emphasizes the importance of participating in the competition" accounted for 1.4%, 2.3% and 5.1% respectively; "not participating in the competition" accounted for 5.6%. Most students thought that participating in various competitions was a good opportunity to train themselves and try to test their own level. A small number of the students had a negative attitude towards the competition.

3.2 Effects of in-class and out-of-class activities on students' language knowledge and language skills According to item 30 in Table 1, students' attitudes towards language competence, namely language knowledge and language skills, were positive in in-class and out-of-class activities, and 80% of the students acknowledged that in-class and out-of-class activities were conducive to English learning. Item 8 shows that 92.5% of students believed that reading texts could help to improve their spoken language, and the average was the highest (4.38). The students who approved of visual-audio-oral classes (item 16), presentation (item 4), reading puzzles (item 14), and role playing (item 9) accounted for 86%, 84.3%, 80.9% and 79.5% respectively. The results show that these activities enabled students to improve their listening, speaking, and reading abilities and expand their knowledge and horizons, which was related to the fact that improving the listening and speaking ability of freshmen was put in the first place in the reform of English courses. Only 67.9% of the students believed that they learned some knowledge from the presentation of their classmates (item 5), indicating that the knowledge of presentation was not deep enough or did not draw students' attention. Students' attitudes towards the online courses and the foreign language competition were not optimistic, and 68.8%, 63.7% and 65.6% of the students thought that school online courses, online courses on autonomous platforms, and the foreign language listening and speaking competition were conducive to their learning respectively. Moreover, 31.6% of the students were uncertain about online courses on autonomous platforms, and the proportion was the largest. School online courses and the foreign language competition had a slightly lesser effect on the improvement of students' English language competence.

3.3 Influences of in-class and out-of-class activities on students' learning strategies, emotional attitudes, and cultural awareness According to Table 2, as for the impact of in-class and out-of-class activities on students' learning strategies, 90.7% of the students believed that in-class and mid-term listening tests were helpful in understanding their listening level, and the aver-

age was the highest (4.39) (item 17). Peer assessment in an English class made the students find their advantages and disadvantages and improved the connections among the students, which was accepted by 86.5% and 85.1% of the students respectively, indicating that the students showed a positive attitude to peer assessment (items 26 and 27). 72.1% of the students thought that reading puzzles could help to make classroom atmosphere active (item 11), while only 50.7% of the students felt comfortable with in-class and out-of-class activities (item 29). Students' attitudes to emotional education by in-class and out-of-class activities were slightly inferior. The students acknowledged that presentation and role playing enhanced their English learning motivation and interest, which was accepted by 79.5% and 73.5% of the students respectively (items 3 and 10). 68.4% of the students thought that presentation could help them to have confidence in spoken English (item 6). 77.2% of the students admitted that reading puzzles enhanced the spirit of cooperation among the students (item 13). However, only 50.7% of the students were interested in various English competitions (item 24). 81.4% of the students believed that in-class and out-of-class activities contributed to the enhancement of cultural awareness, and the average was very high, up to 4.17 (item 28). In a word, the students recognized that in-class and out-of-class activities could foster and improve their learning strategies, emotional attitudes, and cultural awareness, and believed their effect, but it is necessary to guide and supervise them to completely adapt to and integrate into various activities.

Table 1 Students' attitudes towards their language competence (language knowledge and language skills)

Items and description		Percentage//%					Average	Standard deviation
		Very wrong	Wrong	Uncertain	Correct	Very correct		
4	Presentation can improve my spoken English	0.9	4.7	9.8	47.9	36.7	4.15	0.85
5	I can learn a lot of knowledge from my classmates' presentation.	2.8	4.2	25.1	39.1	28.8	3.87	0.97
8	Reading texts can help to improve my speaking skills.	0.9	1.4	5.1	43.7	48.8	4.38	0.73
9	Role playing can help to improve my speaking skills.	1.9	3.3	15.3	46.5	33.0	4.06	0.88
12	Reading puzzles can help to improve my reading skills.	0.9	3.3	17.2	50.2	28.4	4.02	0.82
14	Reading puzzles enables me to increase my knowledge and expand my horizons.	1.4	4.2	13.5	47.9	33.0	4.07	0.87
16	Visual-audio-oral classes can help to improve my listening skills.	0.9	2.8	10.2	50.2	35.8	4.17	0.79
18	School online courses are conducive to my English learning.	1.9	6	23.3	46.5	22.3	3.81	0.91
20	Online courses on autonomous platforms are conducive to my English learning.	1.4	3.3	31.6	44.2	19.5	4.04	1.02
22	The foreign language listening and speaking competition of millions of undergraduates for global language communication can improve my English listening and speaking ability.	3.3	3.7	27.4	40.0	25.6	3.81	0.97
23	The foreign language listening and speaking competition of millions of undergraduates for global language communication are conducive to my English learning.	2.8	3.7	27.9	40.9	24.7	3.81	0.95
30	In short, extracurricular activities of English classroom can help me learn English.	1.9	3.7	14.9	50.2	29.3	4.01	0.87

Table 2 Students' attitudes towards their non-language competence (learning strategies, emotional attitudes, and cultural awareness)

Items and description		Percentage//%					Average	Standard deviation
		Very wrong	Wrong	Uncertain	Correct	Very correct		
3	Presentation can improve my English learning motivation and interest.	1.9	4.7	14	44.2	35.3	4.07	0.92
6	Presentation can make me confident in spoken English.	2.8	6.5	22.3	41.4	27.0	3.83	0.99
10	Role playing can improve my English learning motivation and interest.	1.4	4.7	20.5	41.9	31.6	3.98	0.91
11	Reading puzzles can help to make classroom atmosphere active.	2.3	4.2	21.4	42.8	29.3	3.93	0.94
13	Reading puzzles can enhance the spirit of cooperation among the students.	1.9	0.9	20.0	45.1	32.1	4.05	0.85
17	In-class and mid-term listening tests can make me know my listening level.	1.4	1.9	6.0	37.7	53.0	4.39	0.80
24	I am very interested in English competitions (national college English contests, reading and writing competitions).	5.6	12.6	31.2	29.3	21.4	3.48	1.13
26	Peer assessment in an English class can make me find my advantages and disadvantages.	0.5	3.3	9.8	52.1	34.4	4.17	0.77
27	Peer assessment in an English class can improve the connections among the students.	0.5	1.9	12.6	50.2	34.9	4.17	0.75
28	In-class and out-of-class activities can help to enhance my cultural awareness.	0.9	0.9	16.7	43.3	38.1	4.17	0.80
29	In short, I have adapted to in-class and out-of-class activities of English.	11.2	15.3	22.8	34.4	16.3	2.71	1.23

4 Conclusions and discussions

In this study, it was found that in-class and out-of-class activities based on the mixed college English teaching model had a positive impact on the fostering of students' comprehensive English application ability, and the overall effect was very good. First of all, they could effectively improve students' listening, speaking, reading and other language levels. They not only made the students master more language knowledge but also improve their language skills. 80% of the students admitted that in-class and out-of-class activities were conducive to their English learning. Reading texts that was ignored in high school was favored by the students. In-class activities, such as visual-audio-oral classes, presentation, reading puzzles, and role playing were relatively effective. However, extracurricular activities which were carried out in school online courses, online courses on autonomous platforms, the foreign language listening and speaking competition, *etc.* had little influence on the improvement of students' language competence. Teachers have the responsibility to enable students to accept the new concept of a mixed teaching model, strengthen supervision, and mobilize the enthusiasm of students in conjunction with performance assessment, so that students can consciously develop self-learning skills. Second, in-class and out-of-class activities could effectively improve the students' non-language competence such as learning strategies, emotional attitudes, and cultural awareness. The students had a better understanding of their own English level, and found their own advantages and disadvantages. They could also increase the connections among them, strengthen their cooperation, and enhance their motivation and interest in learning English. The students also gained confidence in learning, and their cultural awareness was increased. However, there were too many activities which were quite hard for the students to accomplish, and the students' adaptability was poor. Teachers should make reasonable arrangements in teaching organization and distribution of tasks, and patiently guide students to gradually integrate into various activities. Finally, students' participation and completion of tasks by students in in-class and out-of-class activities provide a more reliable basis for the mixed English teaching model, which is conducive to the improvement of teaching effect and learning efficiency. The influence of traditional teaching models is still ingrained. In-class and out-of-class activities based on the mixed teaching model made the students at a loss, but actively mobilized the students' learning needs, and helped improve their learning efficiency. In in-class and out-of-class activities, teachers should pay more attention to students' needs and personality traits and foster students' autonomy and independence[3]. The participation and completion of school online courses were less optimistic. There were also many students who did not participate in or did not know about their tasks. Although the development of online autonomous learning was not satisfactory, it provided lessons and reference for the mixed teaching model, and also cautioned the teachers that they should pay attention to the lack of emotional communication and isolation learning in major online courses, and strengthen free communication and interaction between teachers and students to truly benefit from each other and thus get the satisfactory effects of learning and teaching[4]. Distribution of in-class and out-of-class activities, improvement of teachers' ideas and techniques, and improvement of evaluation mechanisms are all to be groped and explored, so that students are guided from shallow to deep learning.

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