



A research on College Students' Burnout in Mixed Online and Offline English Teaching Model

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Abstract

Burnout is one of the most common emotions in foreign language learning. In the new era, mixed online and offline model of learning foreign languages has become a trend, but learning burnout still exists. Many scholars have investigated the burnout of foreign language teachers or students in traditional classroom teaching, but there is little research on online and offline blended teaching. Through questionnaire and interview, the present study uses the burnout rating scale to investigate mixed online and offline college English learning burnout of 60 college students of different genders, majors and grades. The results show that burnout is common in mixed foreign language teaching. The general burnout situation in online and offline teaching is not noticeable while certain specific syndromes are different. Foreign language learning burnout is related to gender, major and college English learning length. This study hopes to provide more thinking space for reducing foreign language learning burnout and improving students' well-being.

Keywords: *Burnout, English teaching, Mixed online, Offline model*

A. Introduction

The emergence and spreading of COVID-19 pandemic have brought great alterations to teaching models globally. Since the outbreak, Chinese college students have experienced mixed online and offline teaching model in their English learning. The national phenomenon has inspired numerous educationists, teachers, linguists even journalists to do researches. Most of them have found that mixed online and offline teaching is a mixed blessing. Some scholars did empirical researches to investigate its effectiveness, others studied teachers' roles and students' adaptability in online teaching (Xu & Tao, 2020; Zhang & He, 2020). Since students are major participants in mixed teaching model, more attention should be paid to them.

Recently, college students' affective factors such as satisfaction and anxiety in learning English have been studied in depth (Yu et al, 2015; Li, 2020). However, the energy-and-time-consuming nature of language learning determines that learning burnout is continual and common, while the relationship between burnout and mixed online and offline model is in want of more concentration.

Under the circumstances, the present study employs online questionnaire and interview to explore college students' burnout in mixed online and offline teaching model, figuring out the overall situation as well as individual distinctions of different genders, majors (mainly English major and non-English majors) and various English learning lengths. Moreover, the present

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study investigates whether online or offline English teaching can cause more burnout in college students.

The importance of the present research lies in that it provides an opportunity to have a glimpse of Chinese college students' burnout in the context of the post-pandemic era, so as to make better choices in some techniques to enhance the interest and attraction of mixed online and offline teaching model.

B. Literature Review

Mixed Online and Offline Teaching Model

Mixed or blended teaching or learning is a new model combining offline teaching and online teaching (Wang & Liu, 2019; Chen et al, 2021). Offline teaching that refers to classroom teaching in the present study is a traditional English teaching around the world, especially in developing countries like China. In the context of classroom teaching, most teaching methods such as Total Physical Response, The Silent Way, Community Language Learning and Cooperative Learning can be effectively applied into practice. Instructors and students can meet face to face, so the instructors can observe and supervise exactly what the students are doing during the class. In this case, many studies focused on the application of detailed pedagogy of offline teaching and some of them related pedagogy to participants' (teachers and students) affective factors. Yu et al (2015) investigated the relationship between EQ, English learning anxiety and English test scores as well as self-evaluation scores of 510 non-English major college students. From the perspective of Positive Psychology, Li (2020) investigated 1307 Chinese Year-2 senior high school students' emotional intelligence (EI), emotions in English learning, and their relationship with English achievement. Li and Wang (2020) explored the effects of task difficulty and interestingness on incidental vocabulary learning from audio-visual English input. These researches were all based on offline English teaching.

The outbreak of the pandemic, however, has challenged the traditional and somewhat rigid classroom teaching. Selvaraj et al. (2021) also pointed that " In developing countries like India, traditional learning methods were widely accepted before the emergence and spreading of COVID-19." According to UNESCO, by the end of April 2020, 186 countries have implemented nationwide closures, affecting about 73.3 % of the total enrolled learners (Selvaraj et al., 2021). The compelled lockdown led educational institutions all over the globe to resort to online teaching to ensure continuity of learning. Compared with classroom teaching, the online alternative has its own advantages, such as more abundant quality teaching resources, free of the limitation of time and place (Tan & Fu, 2020).

The booming of online teaching has attracted many scholars to this field. Han and Gao (2020) described the basic situation of online foreign teaching researches home and abroad in recent years and they appealed to promote the development of online foreign language teaching research in China, so as to give guidance and suggestions for coping with the rapid iteration of Internet technology and the transformation of teaching modes under the impact of the pandemic. Li et al (2020) sought to investigate boredom and its predictors in an online learning environment. It contributed to a better understanding of boredom and how it is shaped by students' personalities and self-perceptions of their achievement in an online learning environment. Xu and Tao (2020) concentrated on teacher's roles in online teaching, and explored how to construct the professional identity of college foreign language teachers in online teaching. In the same context, Li and Zhou (2020) discussed the application process of the self-regulating

ability of college students. In the wake of mixed online and offline teaching models practice, more researches come out. Zhang and He (2020) used questionnaires and interviewing to research on college students' adaptability to blended college English learning. They mentioned that with the wide use of information technology in education, blended learning, with the integration of online learning and traditional face-to-face classroom learning, using various teaching resources and platforms, and various teaching methods and learning strategies etc. has aroused widespread attention and become increasingly important at home and abroad. What's more important, they believed that blended learning is not only increasingly popular but also the tendency of development in future education and will be the new norm of college English teaching. Besides, some more detailed researches on mixed teaching models like the requirements of China's reform and development of higher education in the New Era (Yu, 2020) and blended academic English writing classroom (Chen et al, 2021). In a word, studies on this new and promising mixed teaching model are still rare compared with those on single offline or online teaching. In addition, their study focuses are scattered.

Burnout in English Learning

The aforementioned teaching activity, no matter online or offline, consists of teachers and students. As humans instead of objects like teaching materials and realia, they have intelligence and sensation. Palos et al. (2019) believed that academic performance and student well-being are two desirable outcomes of any learning and instruction process. In recent years, there has been an upsurge of positive psychology research in the field of second language acquisition. The number of scholars who adopt the "whole person" perspective to treat second language learners is large and growing. Learning performances and outcomes are not the mere criteria for measuring the success of teaching activities any longer, but individual well-being is paid more attention (Li, 2020). In this context, some typical emotions that frequently occur in second language acquisition, such as anxiety, enjoyment and burnout, have been taken into consideration.

Among them, anxiety as a primary negative emotion is investigated the most. Scholars prefer to employ field research to explore the relationship between anxiety and academic performance. However, as another significant negative emotional factor in language learning, burnout especially students' burnout has not been so thoroughly studied.

Considered as an erosion of student engagement (Fiorilli et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2007), student burnout refers to feeling exhausted because of study demands (emotional exhaustion), having a cynical and detached attitude toward one's study (depersonalization, or cynicism), and feeling incompetent as a student, having the tendency to evaluate the educational context negatively (low personal accomplishment). Because the exhaustion and the depersonalization components are strongly correlated, researchers suggested that a general factor – core burnout, should be used in research studies (Green, Walkey & Taylor, 1991; Schaufeli, 2003).

Most studies concentrated on foreign language teachers' burnout in teaching activities. Fan and Yang (2015) defined teachers' job burnout, and expounded the measurement and theoretic models concerning this phenomenon. Moreover, they explored further the coping strategies for job burnout among university English teachers. Jiang (2019) provided a comprehensive analysis of the college English teachers' job burnout research from the aspects of research methods, research focuses and research findings, and discussed the existing problems and future directions of the research.

Others introduced innovative and different models to explore teachers’ burnout, such as Liu’s (2014) “Three Dimensional Model” of behavior expression of job burnout and Tang’s (2020) study of university English teachers’ job burnout in the context of the professional learning community. In addition, there are researches on the causes of job burnout of foreign languages teachers (Zhang, 2011), gender differences of teachers’ job burnout (Liu, 2013) and the relationship of college English teachers’ self-efficacy and job burnout (Liu, 2014). The year of 2021 has witnessed a new research trend of this field—online teachings factors have been incorporated in (Varjas et al., 2021). Though all these studies are closely concerned with teachers’ side, they can provide many conducive and practical inspirations and suggestions for students’ burnout study which little research has investigated. In general, the advance of science and technology is unstoppable, so a mixed online and offline teaching model is inevitable. In this case, investigating students’ emotional factors especially the less studied burnout in this mixed teaching model will be meaningful.

C. Methods

Research Questions

This study aims to investigate college students’ burnout in a mixed online and offline English teaching model. Specifically, the research questions are as follows: First, what is the overall situation of students’ burnout in college English learning? Second, is burnout related to gender, major, and English learning length? And third, whether offline or online English teaching can cause more burnout among college students?

Participants

A total of 60 Chinese college students who have experienced mixed online and offline English teaching were recruited from a web survey tool, Wen Juan Xing ([https://www.wjx. cn/](https://www.wjx.cn/)). 10% of these students were interviewed to reassure the questionnaire results. The basic information of the participants is listed below in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Participants’ information

	Gender		Major		
	Male	Female	English major	Humanities (English excluded)	Science and Engineering
Students participated in questionnaires	18	42	25	20	15
Ratio	30%	70%	41.67%	33.33%	25%
Students interviewed	2	4	2	2	2
Ratio	33.33%	66.67%	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%

Table 2. Participants' information

	How long have you learned English?		How many years have you learned English in college?			
	>= 10 years	<10 years	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years
Students participated in questionnaires	51	9	14	15	28	3
Ratio	85%	15%	23.33%	25%	46.67%	5%
Students interviewed	6	0	0	3	2	1
Ratio	100%	0	0	50%	33.33%	16.67%

Instruments-Questionnaire

Based on the platform Wen Juan Xing (<https://www.wjx.cn/>), questionnaires were distributed to college students. There are two parts in each questionnaire: first, respondents' basic information including gender, major, English learning length; second, the formal survey which applied Yang (2015)'s Foreign Language Learning Burnout Survey. The items of this survey are derived from the burnout scale widely used in psychology (Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student) and the researchers' interview with 30 foreign language learners in dialogue. 18 questions listed in the survey are classified into 3 dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced professional efficacy. The 6-point Likert scale was used to score the questionnaire. To be specific, every question has 6 answers from “never” to “very frequent” according to the frequency. The survey has good structural validity as well as a reliability coefficient up to 0.839 (Tao, 2017). In order to research on mixed online and offline teaching model, the present study innovates the Foreign Language Learning Burnout Survey. Each question was been attached to reminding of “offline” and “online”, so as to make a comparison between online burnout and offline burnout.

Instruments-Interview

In this part, 6 respondents who had done the questionnaire were interviewed. The interview questions were the same with those in the questionnaire. The only distinction was that there was no emphasis on “offline” and “online” in the interview, which means students recalled only their daily English learning state rather than details. The main purpose of the interview is to confirm the validity of the questionnaire and to grasp the overall situation of students' burnout in mixed model of English learning.

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was distributed to college students after it was well prepared. A total of 60 questionnaires were collected and 60 were found valid. Among these questionnaire respondents, 30% are male and 70% are female. 41.67% are English major students, 33.33% are students of humanity majors and 25% are science and engineering majors, which covers different majors that can be used to analyze the relationship between English learning burnout and major. Also, the survey includes two English learning lengths: the one from the first year to learn English and the one from the freshman year in college. In this case, the relation between English learning burnout and learning length can be explored. After collecting the statistics, a crosstab analysis was conducted.

D. Findings and Discussion

The Overall Situation of Students' Burnout in College English Study

Burnout in Learning-Teaching Model

In the applied Foreign Language Burnout Survey, question 6-9, 12-16, 20-22, 26-29 are about students' emotions in learning-teaching models. All these questions are concerned with "classroom teaching" or "online teaching". Table 3 shows students' emotional states and behaviors in learning-teaching modes. Negative emotions including wandering mind, feeling sleepy, slack and exhausted. Students who never show these negative dispositions account for a very slim portion. The number of students who wander their minds during English class is conspicuously large, followed by feeling slack, sleepy and exhausted.

Table 3. Students' states and behaviors in different learning-teaching modes

state frequency	Teaching-Learning Models					
	never		1 time / month and less		Several times/ month and more	
Online / offline →	offline	online	offline	online	offline	online
Wandering mind	3.33%	3.33%	35%	15%	61.67%	81.67%
Sleepy	18.33%	20%	50%	41.67%	31.67%	38.33%
Slack	18.33%	18.33%	40%	36.67%	41.67%	45%
Exhausted	16.67%	11.67%	51.66%	53.33%	31.67%	35%
Find something useful	1.67%	3.33%	38.33%	50%	60%	48.33%
Cannot bear English class anymore	23.33%	28.33%	48.33%	50%	28.34%	21.67%
Do not want to have English class anymore	40%	36.67%	36.67%	41.67%	23.33%	21.66%

The negative emotions gap between offline and online teaching is tiny however except for "wandering mind". Online teaching is reported to be easier for students to be distracted by their surroundings. But it should be paid attention that online teaching poses more burnout emotions than offline teaching, while this difference is not significant. In the report of worse feelings like "cannot bear English class anymore" and "do not want to have English anymore", most students do not have these hysterical emotions frequently. Nearly half of participants find that they can learn something useful in English class.

Besides, in the interview after the survey, all the interviewees agreed that they suffer from syndromes above from time to time and can clearly feel their "physical and emotional burnout" in English learning. They also said that relying on self-discipline and encouragement from teachers and classmates, their burnout has not deteriorated to that "hysterical point". They have adapted themselves to the unconventional online teaching but find it difficult to concentrate all the attention on the class. Basically, the results of the interview is similar to those of the questionnaire.

Sense of Professional Self-Efficacy

Table 4 shows the results of the rest questions in the questionnaire which are about student's sense of professional self-efficacy.

Table 4. Students' sense of professional self-efficacy

Sense of Professional Self-Efficacy						
state frequency →	never		1 time / month and less		Several times/ month and more	
	offline	online	offline	online	offline	online
Suffer from sore eyes or headache on seeing dense English	23.33%	21.67%	48.34%	46.67%	28.33%	31.66%
Behave well in English class	1.67%		56.66%		41.67%	
I feel my English is excellent	15%		55%		30%	
I am proud of my English	23.33%		50%		26.67%	
I feel English dull	23.33%		50%		26.67%	
Memorizing new words is tedious	8.33%		43.34%		48.33%	
I doubt whether I can learn English well	23.33%		40%		36.67%	
I feel disappointed in my English dictation	21.67%		46.67%		31.67%	
I doubt the correctness of my pronunciation	6.67%		43.33%		50%	
I am sad that my English listening can not improve	10%		45%		45%	

Sense of professional self-efficacy is a significant dimension to measure foreign language learning burnout. It can be concluded from the table that nearly half of the participants belong to the "Medium-level Majority". They have confidence in their English level but they rarely feel this confidence. They sometimes find it dull to learn English but this thought seldom occurs. In terms of detailed English abilities such as dictation, vocabulary acquisition and learning, they have similar performances. Among these questions, students' negative emotions on vocabulary and listening ability are particularly obvious. This result may be inspiring to later research on students' burnout in vocabulary acquisition and listening. In general, students' sense of professional self-efficacy in overall English learning is moderate, while that in detailed vocabulary and listening is low.

Relations Between Burnout and Gender, Major and Learning Length

In both offline and online teaching, it is more easily for males to have burnout syndrome than females. In both offline and online teaching models, English majors feel the most burnout in English learning, followed by students of other humanities then students of science and engineering. There is no conspicuous difference in burnout caused by college English learning length in the context of offline and online English teaching. But in terms of the sense of professional self-efficacy, freshmen tend to be more confident in their English competence. Besides, the longer students learn English, the stronger their negative feelings on English. For example, senior students in college find English is tedious more often than freshmen and other-grade students.

E. Conclusion

Learning a foreign language, in and of itself, is an arduous journey. As the most popularized foreign language in China, English also poses students' burnout in both traditional classroom teaching and the innovative online teaching. The present study investigates college students' burnout in mixed online and offline teaching through questionnaire and interviewing. The results show that burnout is common in mixed foreign language teaching. The general burnout situation in online and offline teaching is not noticeable while certain specific syndromes are different. Foreign language learning burnout is related to gender, major and college English learning length. This study hopes to provide more thinking space for reducing foreign language learning burnout and improving students' well-being. In the future research, more participants will be included and underlying reasons of students' language learning burnout will be explored in details.

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