

# College English Listening and Speaking Teaching in the Digital Era: Current Practices and Reflection: A Case Study of Transfer Students from Vocational Colleges to Undergraduate Programs

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## ABSTRACT

With the full implementation of the "Internet + Education" strategy, educational informatization has become a central driving force in higher education reform. As a crucial component in developing students' comprehensive language proficiency, college English listening and speaking courses are experiencing significant transformations and challenges in the wave of informatization. This study focuses on a distinct and growing student population—those who transfer from vocational colleges to undergraduate programs (referred to as "transfer students"). These students exhibit significant differences from regular undergraduate students in terms of English foundation, learning motivation, and cognitive styles. This paper aims to deeply analyze the current state of college English listening and speaking courses for transfer students. While technology-mediated teaching has yielded positive outcomes in many respects, several challenges have also emerged. Accordingly, this study proposes targeted optimization strategies and pathways aimed at enhancing teaching effectiveness and promoting educational equity for this student group.

## KEYWORDS

Informatization teaching; College English listening and speaking; Transfer students; Blending teaching model

## 1 Introduction

In the era of globalization and digitalization, educational informatization has become an inevitable trend in educational reform and development. The "Education Informatization 2.0 Action Plan"<sup>[1]</sup> launched by the Ministry of Education proposes the core concept of "deep integration of information technology and teaching and education." The "College English Teaching Guidelines (2020 Edition)"<sup>[2]</sup> clearly states the need to "actively utilize modern information technology to build a blended teaching model that combines online and offline learning, and improve students' English application abilities." As a core component in cultivating students' cross-cultural communication abilities, the teaching model of college English listening and speaking courses is constantly being innovated in the wave of informatization. Meanwhile, information technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, and mobile internet are reshaping the education ecosystem with unprecedented depth and breadth, bringing unprecedented opportunities for English listening and speaking teaching. College classroom media are becoming increasingly diversified, with approaches such as the flipped classroom, micro-lectures and virtual language environments expanding the boundaries of teaching and learning, thereby facilitating personalized, interactive, and autonomous language acquisition.

Within this context, "transfer students" — a special group in China's higher education system — are expanding in scale year by year, and their educational quality is closely tied to the overall equity and efficiency of higher education. Transfer students typically refer to those who enter undergraduate institutions for further study through a selective examination after graduating from higher vocational colleges. Compared with traditional undergraduates, they exhibit several distinctive characteristics: first, they generally possess a weaker foundation in English, particularly in systematic listening and speaking training; second, their motivation for learning is often instrumental and may be accompanied by anxiety and avoidance due to limited proficiency. However, many universities' informatization reforms in college English teaching are designed and promoted based on the assumed needs of traditional undergraduate students, without sufficient consideration of the unique attributes of transfer students. As a result, the potential benefits of informatization teaching are not fully realized for this group, and may even exacerbate existing learning difficulties due to their inadequate preparation and low motivation, potentially widening the digital divide. It is therefore urgent to investigate the current state of English listening and speaking teaching for transfer students under the background of informatization, identify specific challenges, and propose effective strategies. This study aims to provide evidence and insights for achieving the "targeted empowerment" of informatization teaching.

## 2 Modalities and advantages of college English listening and speaking teaching under the background of informatization

Informatization teaching has been deeply integrated into college English listening and speaking courses, with diverse forms and significant advantages, mainly reflected in the following aspects:

## 2.1 Digitalization and diversification of teaching resources

The traditional single-resource model relying on textbooks and teacher recordings has been completely overturned. Today, teaching resources are characterized by their massive quantity, multimedia nature, and high interactivity. Teachers can use authentic materials such as TED talks, BBC documentaries, English news podcasts, and clips from English TV shows and movies to create a nearly real language environment. Various online corpora (e.g., COCA, BNC) and intelligent dictionaries provide strong support for vocabulary and grammar learning. These resources not only enrich the input content but also greatly stimulate students' interest in learning.

## 2.2 Intelligence and interactivity of teaching platforms

Various online learning platforms (e.g., Chaoxing Learning, WE Learn) and mobile applications (e.g., English Fluency, Shanbei Listening) have become important extensions of classroom teaching. These platforms integrate functions such as video on-demand, online quizzes, voice imitation and evaluation, topic discussion, and group collaboration, achieving the full online process of "teaching, learning, managing, evaluating, and testing."

## 2.3 Flipped and blended teaching models

The informatization environment has given rise to the widespread application of blended teaching models such as the flipped classroom. The flipped classroom, also known as the inverted classroom, reverses the two stages of traditional learning—knowledge transmission and knowledge internalization<sup>[3]</sup>. Before class, teachers require students to watch micro-lesson videos and complete the transmission of basic knowledge through the platform. In class, students internalize knowledge through various teaching forms, such as group discussions, project presentations, role-playing, and debates. This model partially transfers the learning initiative to students, which is more conducive to cultivating their autonomous learning ability and collaborative spirit, and maximizes the efficiency of classroom time usage.

## 3 Current situation of college English listening and speaking teaching for transfer students

Despite the prominent advantages of informatization teaching, its application in the actual teaching of college English listening and speaking courses for transfer students reveals a considerable gap between ideal and reality, with several prominent problems exposed:

### 3.1 Student-level challenges: misalignment between information literacy and language proficiency

Data indicate considerable variation in transfer students' English proficiency. Additionally, upon entering undergraduate programs, the primary purpose for most transfer students to learn English is for exam-oriented career examination, and the drawbacks of exam-oriented education are precisely reflected in the neglect of oral and listening skills, which leads to a lack of motivation for these students to engage in listening and speaking courses. Therefore, faced with authentic, fast-paced audio-visual materials, they often experience cognitive and interest loss, resulting in frustration. They require comprehensible input<sup>[4]</sup>—adapted materials with moderated speed, subtitles, and linguistic annotations—which is often lacking.

### 3.2 Teacher-level challenges: disconnection between teaching design and student needs, insufficient targeting

Many teachers lack deep understanding of transfer students' learning profiles. They often use the same resources, task difficulties, and pacing as for traditional undergraduates, without tailored tiered design. For instance, TED Talks — with their fast speech speeds and advanced vocabulary — pose excessive challenges for transfer students with weak foundations. This mismatch between learning tasks and student abilities leads to frustration and a gradual loss of learning confidence. Meanwhile, some teachers hold a superficial understanding of informatized English teaching. There is insufficient exploration of how to implement tiered instruction, design differentiated learning paths, or utilize learning analytics for personalized support.

Additionally, transfer students may already lack confidence, need teachers' encouragement and individualized attention. Some teachers' overreliance on digital communication without face-to-face interaction and emotional support can lead to these students' feelings of neglect and reduced their engagement.

### 3.3 Resource and platform limitations: lack of customization and homogeneity

Most existing English learning platforms and digital resources target general learners rather than specific populations. Their content difficulty, topics, and tasks do not adequately address the knowledge gaps and transitional needs of transfer students, failing to support their foundational development and smooth articulation.

## 4 Pathways for optimizing informatized english listening and speaking teaching for transfer students

To address the above problems, systematic reforms should be implemented across multiple dimensions — including

"teaching, learning and management" — to construct a new informatized teaching ecology that supports effective learning for transfer students.

#### 4.1 Constructing a deeply integrated "online-offline" tiered blended teaching model

As practitioners and promoters of blended classrooms, teachers play a key role in informatization teaching <sup>[5]</sup>. They should move beyond simple online self-study plus offline lecture models to create scaffolded tiered structures. Blended learning should balance teachers' guiding and supervisory roles with students' active and creative participation. Pre-class, instructors can provide tiered resources: basic materials, extension materials and online tasks. In class, teachers should act as designers, facilitators, and motivators. Using mixed-ability grouping, teachers can encourage peer support through role-plays, presentations, and discussions, while providing individualized guidance to less-proficient students.

#### 4.2 Develop and integrate differentiated digital resources for "targeted empowerment"

In the context of informatization, college English listening and speaking teaching needs to continuously expand more personalized and precise teaching resources. Institutions should support teaching teams in developing or adapting school-based digital repositories for transfer students. A preparatory course resource package could systematically address phonetics, basic grammar, and high-frequency vocabulary to strengthen foundations. Implementing topic-tiering and optional tasks allows students to choose materials and activities matching their proficiency level, enabling personalized progression.

#### 4.3 Enhancing information literacy of teachers and students and strengthening humanistic emotional support

Effective informatization teaching requires technological competence and emotional intelligence from both teachers and students. Institutions should offer orientation training on platform usage and self-directed learning strategies to reduce technological barriers. Additionally, teachers should consciously offer positive reinforcement in online and offline settings, and conduct regular consultations to understand learning challenges and psychological needs, thereby strengthening transfer students' sense of belonging and motivation.

### 5 Conclusion and outlook

In conclusion, informatization teaching has injected strong momentum into the reform of college English listening and speaking courses, but the maximization of its effectiveness must be based on an accurate analysis of transfer students' learning situations. For transfer students, informatization is not a panacea. The key lies in aligning teaching design with their unique learning characteristics and needs. Current practices exhibit significant shortcomings in resource alignment, pedagogical methods and support systems. If these issues are not taken seriously and resolved, not only will it fail to empower learning, but it may also exacerbate their learning difficulties. Therefore, future teaching reforms must shift from "technology-centered" to "student-centered," deeply understanding the uniqueness of transfer students and acknowledging the reality of their weak foundation and insufficient adaptability. By implementing tiered blended models, developing differentiated resources and combining these with empathetic support, information technology can truly enable precision support, helping transfer students overcome barriers in English listening and speaking, enhance their language proficiency, and ultimately promote substantive equity and quality in education. This requires collaborative efforts among institutions, teachers, and platform developers, and deserves sustained exploration and practice.

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