Innovations

Unveiling Affective Influences:
Enhancing English Pronunciation Performance in Hybrid Teaching

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Abstract: This empirical study uses a hybrid teaching mode to explore the affective effects exerted on learners in English pronunciation classes. The study aims to analyze how affective factors influence English pronunciation learning outcomes in hybrid teaching and offer some practical strategies to solve pronunciation problems in hybrid teaching. This study employs a mixed-methods approach to accomplish its goals by using a Questionnaire of Affective Factors' Influences on Pronunciation developed from Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scales(FLCAS) (Horwitz et al., 1987) and conducting semi-structured interviews with the participants who majored in English in two public universities in Henan Province, China. After examination of both quantitative and qualitative data, the findings of this study shed light on the benefits and drawbacks of adopting a hybrid teaching mode to alleviate the negative affective influence. The results will benefit efforts to improve English pronunciation in blended learning.
Keywords: affective factor, influence, English pronunciation, blended learning, hybrid teaching

1. Introduction

English pronunciation is a significant component of linguistic proficiency and is essential for various purposes(Kiline & Yildirim, 2020). It assists individuals who speak English effectively convey their messages, thus enhancing their communication skills and self-assurance(Derwing & Munro, 2015). Pronunciation is a fundamental element of effective communication(Kilag et al., 2023). Research has indicated that pronunciation challenges are notable among individuals learning English as a Second Language (ESL), especially those from non-English speaking contexts (Yasmin, 2022).

Affective factor is a complex combination of psychological factors with uncertainty and variability (Sadiq, 2017). Individual affective factors readily influence learners throughout the process of language acquisition, and the effect of affective factors on language acquisition is at least as substantial as that of cognitive factors, and it is sometimes more notable (Stern, 1983). Affective factors play an excellent role in activating learning ability, arousing learning enthusiasm, releasing learning potential, and solving psychological and ideological problems in the process of learning(Wang, 2001). Affective factors can hinder or promote English learning and play a key role in English and language teaching (Dewaele & Li, 2020). The outstanding physiological characteristics caused by the affective factor in phonological research are essential to phonological studies (Qi &Li, 2004).

Blended learning combines classroom learning with online knowledge, in which learners can follow their own pace, self-regulated and controlled learning(Ma et al., 2016). It needs to combine the advantages of both online education and traditional classroom learning, not only to play a leading role in guiding, inspiring learners, and monitoring the entire teaching process, but it also needs to be learner-centered(He, 2005).

In the hybrid teaching model,the changes in students' physiology and psychology come from the external environmentin online self-regulated learning. It will affect the acquisition of knowledge, the improvement of skills, and the learners' learning attitude, and the learners' affective factor is to promote the advancement of learners' learning ability in English pronunciationhybridteaching (Zhao, 2021).

English pronunciation problems are increasingly prominent in English pronunciation teaching among local college students in China. Students often have difficulties in learning English pronunciation, full of anxiety, tension, and other emotions. These negative emotions seriously hinder the students' English pronunciation ability. In the hybrid teaching mode, students' affective factors will play a positive role in learning English pronunciation. Online learning can relieve students' anxiety and increase their motivation and confidence (Pei, 2012).

Research Questions

The principal objective of this study was to examine the impact of affective factors on the outcome of English pronunciation learning in hybrid teaching environments, as well as to identify and evaluate effective and practical ways for addressing pronunciation difficulties. This study aims to specifically address the following issues:

RQ1: What is the influence level of the affective factors in English pronunciation learning outcomes in hybrid teaching?

RQ 2: What are the practical strategies to enhance pronunciation performance in hybrid teaching?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Affective Filter Hypothesis

Krashen (1982) defined Affective Filter Hypothesis as motivation and attitude causing a mental barrier. These issues prevent second language learners from understanding the language's rich input. Lack of passion, self-confidence, and other characteristics might elevate an individual's filter and create a mental barrier, preventing comprehensive input from reaching the law of attraction (Krashen, 1982: 31). The hypothesis states that language learners can receive more input in an environment with a low emotional filteror filter down. However, a high emotional filter hinders language acquisition (Figure 1).

Figure 1 (Krashen, 1982:31)
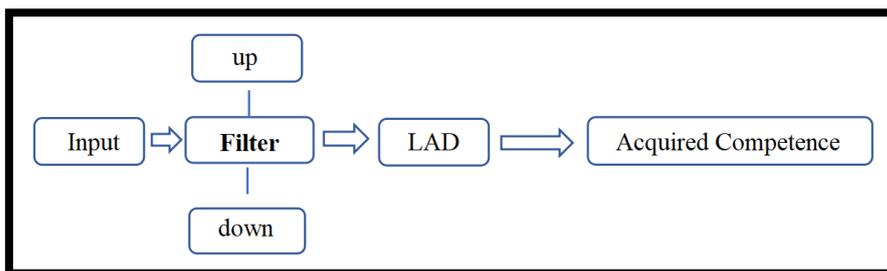
(Note: **LAD**: Language Acquisition Device)

Three types of affective or attitudinal variables about second language acquisition (SLA) have been identified by the hypothesis:

2.1.1 Motivation

Fu (1998) delineated three categories of motivation: task, situation, and global. Global motivation is students' entire attitude. Situation motivation is students' passion and determination outside of class. Task motivation is a reason to execute a mission. Gardner and Lambert (1972) advanced motivation research by arguing that language acquisition depends on motivation. Two types of motivation exist: integrated and instrumental. People who want to learn a new language and communicate with native speakers have the most integrated motivation. Learners acquire a

second language through instrumental motivation when they want academic or professional achievement.

2.1.2 Confidence

Confidence is crucial to learning success. Thus, confidence in learning a second language, especially pronunciation, is crucial. Strong confidence reduces inhibitions and encourages social contact. Their strong ego helps them learn languages without fear of failure(Fu, 1998). Self-confidence is essential to the emotional filter since it can drive students to study more (Krashen,1981).

2.1.3 Anxiety

Anxiety may hinder language acquisition, especially oral communication. Anxious learners fear public speaking because they don't want to disclose their weaknesses and damage their reputations(Kilag et al., 2023). Thus, educators must help students overcome their fear of speaking English (Qi &Li, 2004). Language anxiety occurs when a person must use a second language in an unfamiliar setting. Self-criticism, somatic anguish, and physiological responses like an increased heart rate define this attitude. Performance and anxiety are linked (Arnold, 2000).

2.2 Affective Factors in Language Learning

The influence of affective factors on English learning can not be ignored. Learners' affective factors directly affect their learning behaviors and outcomes (Qi & Li, 2004). Haidara (2016) conducted a study identifying four psychological characteristics influencing students' English speaking proficiency. These elements include anxiety, shyness, reluctance, and lack of confidence.

Khrasen states that motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety impact speaking performance (Tuan & Mai, 2015). Lack of motivation can stifle language learning (Li & Pan, 2009). Learners need confidence to study English because it inspires enthusiasm, courage, and drive (Roysmanto, 2018). The speaker fears making mistakes when learning a language due to anxiety (Isnaini, 2019). Motivation, self-confidence, anxiety, and linguistic comprehension are linked. Learners with strong drive, self-confidence, and low anxiety absorbed linguistic information better (Neil, 2008).

2.3 Blended Learning

Blended learning refers to an educational approach employed by certain institutions to enhance learning effectiveness by providing a flexible and timely form of knowledge (Rasheed et al., 2020), and online learning combined with traditional classroom teaching is very beneficial (Delialioglu & Yildirim, 2007; Gülbahar & Madran, 2009). In blended learning, using online resources maximizes limited on-site class time (Bidarra & Rusman, 2017; Rovai & Jordan, 2004). 21st-century learners use different online resources because they have more significant opportunities to participate in blended learning (Bautista, 2013). Educational researchers are interested in blended learning outcomes (Jensen et al., 2017). Instructors should employ online resources and innovative instructional methods to engage students in various activities and improve learning efficacy (Rasheed et al., 2020). Online tools offer students more opportunities to build autonomous learning abilities than traditional classrooms(Azizan, 2010). Totally different from traditional teaching methods, blended learning helps learners focus on independent learning (Abdelaziz, 2014). Flexible and engaging, blended learning allows time for individual study and improves their performance in the classroom (Cheney & Terry, 2018).

2.4 English Pronunciation in Hybrid Teaching

Hybrid teaching settings emphasize the combination of online classes and on-siteclasses (Ulla& Perales, 2022). Internet, podcasts, video conferencing, movies, and voice recognition software are some of the best pronunciation instructional resources. Such gadgets can also help learners improve their language skills (Bahadorfar & Omidvar, 2014). Combining online and on-site classes offers a potential basis for applying diverse pedagogical methodologies to second language learning (Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2019). Online resources can simulate real-life speaking situations

and offer learners immersive experiences that improve pronunciation skills (Sosas, 2021). The online resources give language learners lexical richness in speaking and help them improve their oral performances (Drewelow, 2013). Students are generally comfortable using technology for communicating instruction (Huang & Hung, 2010).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the influence level of the affective factors in English pronunciation learning outcomes in hybrid teaching. Firstly, it is to investigate the influence level of various affective factors by a questionnaire. Secondly, it offers some strategies for educators. A mixed-methods approach is adopted. The quantitative method is used in the analysis of the questionnaire. The qualitative method is used to analyze the interview part. This investigation will be conducted in a hybrid teaching mode, integrating online and on-site instructional methods.

3.2 Participants

The participants in this study are 126 freshmen who majored in English and enrolled in September 2023 in two public universities in Henan Province, China. There are 22 males and 104 females, ranging from 17 to 19 years old. They attend an English Pronunciation Course incorporating a hybrid teaching mode in the first semester of 2023-2024. Participants in this study have not only obtained fundamental knowledge regarding pronunciation but have also spent sufficient time engaging in the study and getting feedback, which enhances the reliability of the findings in the present study.

3.3 Instruments of the Study

Researchers used different tools to study hybrid teaching's affective effects on English pronunciation. A questionnaire on *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scales (FLCAS)* (Horwitz et al., 1987) will be created to determine if affective factors significantly affect English Majors' pronunciation learning in hybrid teaching. The 20-item quiz covers English pronunciation self-concept, motivation and attitude, learning anxiety, and communication anxiety. Every inquiry is evaluated using a four-point scale on the influence level with four options: very high (4 in the questionnaire), high (3 in the questionnaire), moderate (2 in the questionnaire), and low (1 in the questionnaire).

After analyzing the questionnaire, participants will be interviewed in semi-structured interview, in which participants are invited to discuss how affective factors affect their English pronunciation learning in hybrid teaching.

4. Results

The process of data analysis can be divided into two parts: the data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed on the online questionnaire platform, and the descriptive values of the data were obtained, and the semi-structured interview conducted after the questionnaire analysis is focused on the participants' idea on affective influence on English pronunciation in hybrid teaching.

4.1 Questionnaire Analysis

Table 1 below shows the mean scores of the participants' four aspects of affective factors and the mean scores of each item in pronunciation learning. Four aspects affect the participants' pronunciation learning, varying from different levels: very high level of influence (mean score from 3.26 to 4.00), high level of influence (mean score from 2.51 to 3.25), moderate level of influence (mean score from 1.76 to 2.50), and low level of influence (mean score from 1.00 to 1.75). Table 1 also indicates the influence level of the affective factors in English pronunciation learning outcomes in hybrid teaching.

Table 1 The Influence Level of Affective Factors on English Pronunciation Learning

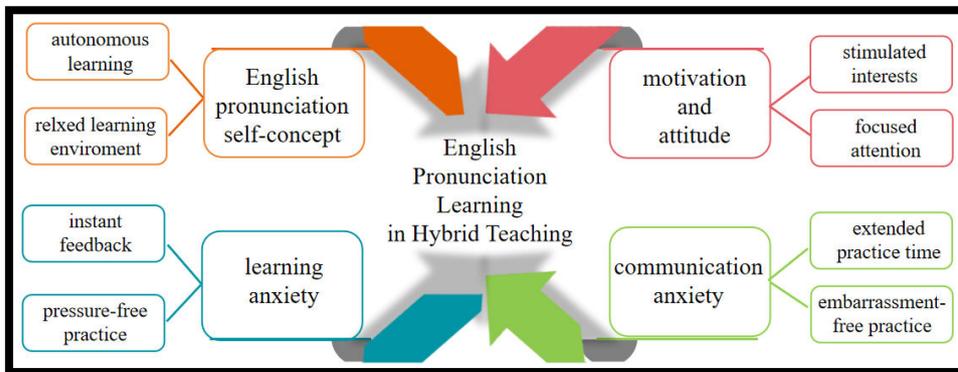| English Pronunciation Self-concept	Mean	Interpretation
I feel ashamed because my English score in the National Entrance Exam was low.	2.61	High level of influence
My pronunciation is not good, so I am reluctant to speak English.	2.37	Moderate level of influence
I feel distressed about my strong accent both in Chinese and English.	3.05	High level of influence
I think that other students are better at pronunciation than me.	2.22	Moderate level of influence
Despite some difficulties, I still believe I can learn pronunciation well.	2.07	Moderate level of influence
Mean	**2.46**	Moderate level of influence
Motivation and Attitude		
I am interested in pronunciation learning.	2.17	Moderate level of influence
I do not think I can have good pronunciation.	3.62	Very high level of influence
I have a clear plan for pronunciation learning.	2.86	High level of influence
I am very active in every pronunciation course.	2.87	High level of influence
I will spend extra time working on my English pronunciation.	2.64	High level of influence
Mean	**2.83**	High level of influence
Learning Anxiety		
I worry about making mistakes in phonetic courses because I fear the teacher's criticism.	3.08	High level of influence
I am afraid to be interrupted occasionally and corrected by my teacher.	3.46	Very high level of influence
I do not worry about making mistakes in phonetic courses.	3.04	High level of influence
I often feel distressed about learning pronunciation because it is hard for me.	3.38	Very high level of influence
I often feel overwhelmed by the rules we must learn in phonetic courses.	3.51	Very high level of influence
Mean	**3.29**	Very high level of influence
Communication Anxiety		
I feel nervous when I speak English in public.	2.49	Moderate level of influence
I worry when I do not understand what others say.	2.28	Moderate level of influence
I fear my classmates will laugh at my poor pronunciation when I speak English.	2.98	High level of influence
When I speak English with others. I am afraid they can not understand me.	2.52	High level of influence
I would not be nervous when I speak with native speakers.	3.38	Very high level of influence
Mean	**2.73**	High level of influence

Table 1 lists the mean score of four aspects of affective factors and the mean score of each item in a particular affective factor. The mean score of English pronunciation self-concept is 2.46, lower than the other three aspects, which only moderately influences English pronunciation learning. It means participants' pronunciation self-concept has the slightest influence on all the affective factors involved. The mean score of learning anxiety is 3.29, higher than the other three aspects, which has a very high level of influence on English pronunciation learning. It means participants' learning anxiety has the most significant influence of all the affective factors. The mean scores of motivation and attitude and communication anxiety are respectively 2.83 and 2.73, which have high level of influence. A conclusion can be safely drawn from the participant's responses to the questionnaire: the affective factors significantly influence the students' English pronunciation learning at different levels, varying from very high to moderate influence.

Five items are very highly influenced: "I do not think I can have good pronunciation." "I am afraid to be interrupted occasionally and corrected by my teacher." "I often feel distressed about learning pronunciation because it is hard for me." " I often feel overwhelmed by the rules we must learn in phonetic courses." "I would not be nervous when I speak with native speakers." From the five items, the researcher discover that the participants are not confident enough and consider English pronunciation learning as a challenging task. Affective factors influence the effects of English language learning.

4.2 Semi-structured Interview Analysis

Ten participants attended the semi-structured interview to talk about the influences of affective factors on English language learning in hybrid teaching. The representatives of their horizons are listed in the Appendix. From the participants' horizon, they benefit a lot from the blended learning. Figure 2 shows how four affective factors have influenced English pronunciation learning in hybrid teaching.

Figure 2 The Strategies to Enhance Pronunciation Performance in Hybrid Teaching

According to the participants in the Appendix, they benefit a lot from blended learning. In their horizon of English pronunciation self-concept, the participants find their self-concept in the relaxed learning environment and enjoy the autonomous learning process. In their horizon of motivation and attitude, they enjoy the blended teaching mode because they get stimulated interests and focused attention. In their horizon of learning anxiety, they acquire more in blended learning and enjoy the pressure-free practice online and get instant feedback, which alleviates the learning anxiety. In their horizon of communication anxiety, the extended practice time offers the participant more chances to do embarrassment-free practice to relieve their communication anxiety. The themes from the participants' horizons on the left and right sides of Figure 2 include the benefits participants got. They are also considered strategies for educators to enhance pronunciation performance in hybrid teachings.

5. Discussion

The results of this study answer the first research question. The four affective factors influencing English pronunciation learning outcomes vary highly to moderately. The mean score of English

pronunciation learning anxiety is the highest of all the aspects, proving that learning anxiety plays an essential role in the learner's pronunciation learning process. Many participants in regular classes have learning anxiety about pronunciation despite achieving good results in various English exams. Chinese learners exhibit greater modesty, shyness, and reluctance to publicly showcase their abilities. The mean score of communicative anxiety in the high level of influence confirms the idea. During the on-site class, the students will encounter feelings of communicative anxiety. Research on pronunciation courses has revealed that English majors focus more on developing their speaking skills and oral English fluency. Motivation, attitude, and self-concept have a distinct role in the acquisition of pronouncing skills, as indicated by the questionnaire answers (Shamas, 2006). However, the increased emphasis may also lead to elevated levels of anxiety among them.

The results of this study answer the second research question. The semi-structured interview reveals the benefits of reducing learner anxiety in the hybrid teaching style. The flexibility in manipulating English pronunciation allows individuals to alleviate their levels of learning anxiety. The online materials are accessible for multiple viewings at any time and location. Learners can independently organize their study schedules and choose their preferred study techniques. Individuals have the freedom to study following their personal preferences. Alleviating anxiety associated with looking facilitates the learners' acquisition of English pronunciation abilities more effectively. Learners who have apprehension while engaging in public communication might avail themselves of increased opportunities to practice through AI in blended learning. The learners' performance in on-site classes will be improved as they engage more with AI technology or view instructional vedios on communication. Hybrid teaching involves providing additional online resources by educators, and the feedback from online assessments aids students in alleviating their learning anxieties. The diverse range of tools, including the online course, videos, and interactive activities, will enhance the learning experience by adding interest and engagement. Learners will derive pleasure from the procedure and alleviate their anxiousness.

Using a hybrid teaching approach, educators provide students with increased opportunities and autonomy to engage in self-directed learning, effectively mitigating the impact of affective factors on the acquisition of English pronunciation.

6. Conclusion

This study finds out that affective factors significantly influence English pronunciation learning outcomes for English majors. Most students are motivated and have a strong interest in pronunciation learning. Since students' learning anxiety exists in the traditional teaching circumstance, the adoption of a hybrid teaching mode helps the students overcome the learning anxiety. The study tries to offer some suggestions to educators of English pronunciation.

6.1 Fostering Learner's Motivation and Interests

Educators must be brave in adopting hybrid teaching. They should also quickly and strategically adapt their teaching methods to interest students. Sound recognition, imitation, conversations, role-playing, and reading jazz chants and tongue twisters help teachers engage students. Educators might use online English rhymes, songs, jokes, advertising, and lines from popular English films and engage language learners via multimedia. To explore English intonation, students could look for materials from "English Imitation APP" and "Everyday English Listening APP" , varying audio, visual, animation, and video stimuli. They can also join "Foreign Language Association", "English Imitation Contest," "English Songs," and "English Reading Club." Students establish positive attitudes and acquire a long-term interest in using these activities. (Peng, 2011). The pressure-free and embarrassment-free practice in the online part stimulates the interest and involves students in autonomous learning.

6.2 Alleviating Learners' Language Learning Anxiety

Educators have a decisive influence on students' moods in the on-site class. When students experience anxiety, frustration, or irritability, educators in charge of organizing language acquisition activities should be able to adjust their emotions. Positive educators reinforcement may ease students' anxieties and provide a joyful learning atmosphere. In the hybrid teaching environment,

students can only reach their full potential and learn more effectively when they are at ease. Instant feedback from online applications could increase students' focused attention and offer extended practice time and a relaxed learning environment, in which the students will alleviate their language learning anxiety.

6.3 Cultivating Learners' Confidence

The cultivation of self-confidence relies on the students themselves, but they still need the assistance of educators. Building self-confidence is frequently interconnected with personal development. Educators should consider each student's unique characteristics and effectively utilize their talents during the teaching process. Educators' positive feedback can significantly build students' self-confidence. Hence, educators must improve their linguistic proficiency following the unique aptitudes of their students, demonstrate reverence for their emotional and personal attributes, and use the benefits of blended learning to foster students' self-confidence.

6.4 Offering Learners' Communicative Chances

In the blended teaching mode, educators should offer learners an increased number of video materials, which will enable learners to comprehend the practical application of English phonological abilities in real-life communication scenarios, enhance their proficiency in pronunciation, and reduce any feelings of nervousness during communication. Offer learners virtual scenario training in online courses to bolster their self-confidence. Facilitate learners with occasions to exhibit their proficiency in face-to-face instructional sessions. Students may enhance their communication abilities by consistently receiving communicative skills from online courses and participating in on-site classes communicative activities.

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Appendix
Semi-structured Interview Analysis: Strategies to Enhance Pronunciation Performance in Hybrid Teaching

Affective Factors	Horizons	Textual Languages	Theme/Strategy
English Pronunciation Self-concept	"In hybrid teaching, I have more **freedom** to plan my studying."	freedom	autonomous learning
	"The various activities are arranged by myself, and I improved my **autonomous learning ability**."	autonomous learning ability	
	"I could be **brave** to meet the challenges during the online learning. "	brave	
	"The online study offers me many chances to learn by myself and improve my **self-control** ability. "	self-control	
	" Adopting blended learning has given me **confidence** and my study routine."	confidence	
	"I can study **anytime and anywhere** in hybrid teaching mode."	anytime anywhere	relaxed learning environment
	"I could arrange my time spent on study freely, and I felt very **comfortable** with the blended learning mode. "	comfortable	
	"After-class study makes me **relaxed** to practice my pronunciation."	relaxed	
	"The combination of on-site classes and online classes makes learning more interesting. I feel **satisfied** with blended learning."	satisfied	
	"Online study allows me to have more **recognition** of my pronunciation problems."	recognition	
Motivation and Attitude	"My autonomy is increased in hybrid teaching mode, and I get a greater **motivation to practice** thanks to blended learning."	motivation to practice	stimulated interests
	"Online learning in hybrid teaching mode makes me feel more **relaxed and motivated**."	relaxed and motivated	
	"The flexible blended learning and various learning materials attract me more, and I have **more interest** in learning. "	more interests	
	"In blended learning, the time is very flexible, and I just have a more **positive attitude** to learn English pronunciation."	positive attitude	
	"The instant feedback of the online APP encourages me to practice more and improve my learning ability."	encouragement	
	"I am fond of blended learning and **eager to learn** it well."	eager to learn	
	"Blended learning allows me to **focus better** and learn better in pronunciation	better focus	focused attention

	practice."		
	"I have a better **concentration** when I study online by myself."	concentration	
	"**The learning efficiency is improved** in blended learning."	improved efficiency	
	"During the online learning process, there is **less distraction** when studying alone."	less distraction	
Learning Anxiety	"My **anxiety levels are much lower** thanks to blended learning since it gives me more opportunities for self-directed learning."	lowered anxiety	pressure-free practice
	"In a traditional classroom, I always feel anxious when doing pronunciation exercises and worry about pronunciation inaccuracy. Blended learning **decreased my worries**."	decreased worries	
	"I can follow the standard pronunciation in the video and get marks. I feel **relaxed about the assessment** made by the APP."	relaxed about assessment	
	"The flexible learning environment **relieved my learning pressure**."	pressure relief	
	"I always feel nervous when speaking English, but the blended learning **reduced my psychological burden**."	reduced psychological burden	
	"Online learning is **without the anxiety of a teacher's criticism**."	no worry about the teacher's criticism	
	"I am braver than before and **do not worry about making mistakes** in blended learning."	no worry about making mistakes	
	"I can correct the mistakes immediately thanks to the **repeated corrections** from AI or pronunciation applications."	repeated correction	instant feedback
	"The freedom and ease of blended online and on-site learning **improves learning efficiency** and eliminates anxiety."	improves the efficiency	
	"The learning outcomes could **be graded at a fast speed,** which reduces anxiety."	quickly grading	
Communication Anxiety	"The teacher asked us to chat with ChatGPT or AI, and I felt relaxed by **repeated practice** with AI.	repeated practice	extended practice time
	"My ability to express myself has improved in blended learning because I have **more time to practice** and imitate the video's pronunciation."	more time to practice	
	"I enjoyed the online resources because they can be **repeatedly played**."	repeatedly play the video	
	"Blended learning provides **simulation training**, and daily oral communication	simulation training	

	is more comfortable.”		
	“I can learn the **correct communication skills** from the AI. I am satisfied with the blended learning. ”	improve communication skills	embarrassment-free practice
	“I **collected a lot of different ways to communicate** in the online videos. I benefit a lot from the hybrid teaching.”	collect better communicative way	
	“I accumulate authentic expressions in the process of self-directed learning and **become brave in communicating** with others.”	brave to communicate	
	“In blended learning, I practice speaking with AI, which can effectively **avoid the embarrassment** of communicating with others who is not allowed to speak.”	avoid the embarrassment	
	“In blended learning, I am **relaxed** to accumulate more expression, which is beneficial to my communication in English.”	relaxed	
	“I am **not afraid to speak in English in public** because the blended learning makes me self-confident.”	not afraid to speak in public	