Web-based foreign language teaching in China: Status Quo, methodology and prospect

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ABSTRACT

In the 1990s China started to explore web-based foreign language teaching. So far, some remarkable achievements have been made and the study of web-based foreign language teaching has shown signs of diversification. This paper studies the current development of research on web-based foreign language teaching in China, summarizes several problems in web-based foreign language teaching, and proposes effective methods to make web-based foreign language teaching more scientific and effective.

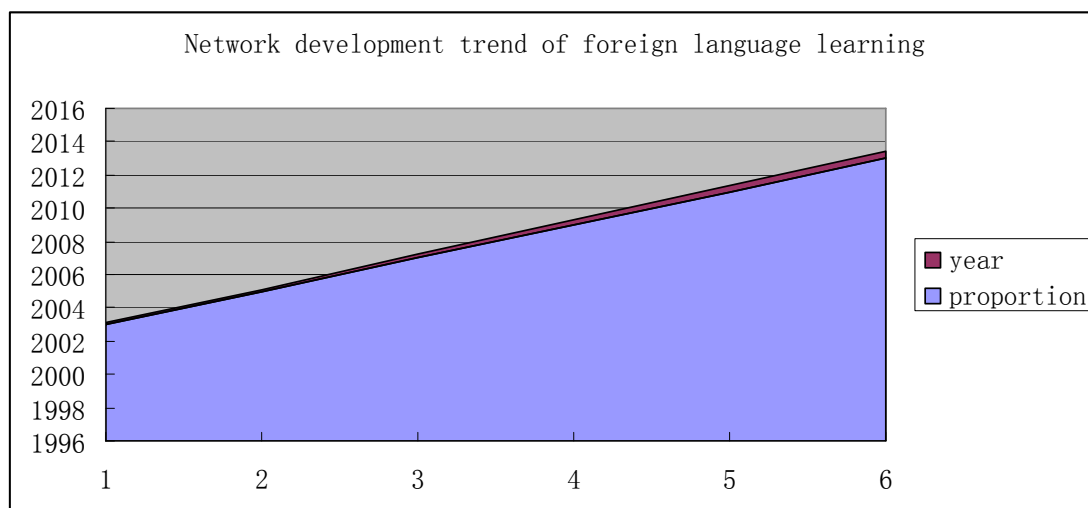**Key words:** research on web-based foreign language teaching; status quo; problems; methodology; prospect
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INTRODUCTION

Web-based foreign language teaching refers to foreign language teaching via the Internet. The study of web-based foreign language teaching focuses on foreign language teaching activities. Despite many differences between conventional foreign language teaching and web-based foreign language teaching, web-based foreign language teaching has incorporated the advantages of conventional foreign language teaching and has become an important part of foreign language teaching. Web-based foreign language teaching has its own unique strengths: it breaks away with the restraints of conventional foreign language teaching and introduces new teaching and researching methods. Web-based foreign language teaching refines the conventional teaching method, but the targets and objects of teaching remain unchanged. The studies of conventional foreign language teaching mode can also help us better understand web-based foreign language teaching and the analysis of the features and principles of web-based foreign language teaching will help improve the effectiveness of foreign language teaching. Thus it is a very important part in the study of web-based foreign language teaching.

STATUS QUO OF WEB-BASED FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN CHINA
Web-based foreign language teaching has emerged in the 1960s along with the invention of computer. And since then how to enhance the teaching quality of web-based foreign language teaching has long been the hotspot of research in China. Relevant literature about computer-assisted foreign language teaching has been improved greatly with the rapid development of computer technology.

Ever since people entered the information era, many educators and experts around the world have paid their attentions to computer. The earliest paper in China about internet and foreign language teaching was published in 1987. In the period of 1997-1998, GU Peiya Et Al. published a series of internet and foreign language teaching in the magazine of COMPUTER-ASSISTED FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION. In the 21st century, studies of web-based foreign language teaching have embraced a period of great prosperity. Figure 1 demonstrates the development trend of web-based foreign language teaching in China in the past few years.

From the figure above it can be seen that the trend is moving upwards as time goes on. Analysis shows that the research range of web-based foreign language teaching in China is relatively wide and many aspects are regarded. They are:

1. Comparison between web-based foreign language teaching and conventional foreign language teaching

Features of web-based foreign language teaching and differences between web-based foreign language teaching and conventional foreign language teaching are mainly studied in this category of research. Li Xuejie and Ma Qian (2006), Wan Jing (2001) found out the strengths and weaknesses of web-based foreign language teaching by comparing the features of these two types of educational methods. Moreover, promotion of web-based foreign language teaching based on the existing advantages is also a popular issue. Some probe into the combination of the two. However, most of the researches only conducted an overall discussion, not producing any deep insights. That made them less useful for the development of web-based foreign language teaching.

2.   Web-based foreign language teaching mode and approach

This type of research mainly focuses on the link of listening, communication, writing, reading, and translating in the teaching process with some teaching of grammar and vocabulary included. They primarily focus on teaching mode and method. The main stream of researches aims to meet learners' requirements in the learning process taking use of internet and computer and help them succeed. Therefore it is necessary to find out what foreign language students really need during learning. Figure 2 is about an investigation of advantages of foreign language in middle school in China.

writing	listening	communication	reading	none
3.55%	3.81%	5.58%	34.81%	52.25%

Fig.2 Proportions of advantages in English learning in a Chinese middle school

To sum up, research regarding this aspect focuses on planning of teaching which stays at an ideal stage without any practical proof.

3. Participants of web-based foreign language teaching

This research targets participants who use internet to conduct foreign language teaching as objects. It studies on their mental state, language learning method and mode, etc. An integral analysis is conducted to better motivate and improve their studies, hopefully helping them succeed. Besides, the research also tries to find out a way of stimulating participants to study positively and consciously. Except students, teachers are also studied. Responsibilities and teaching abilities are the main content of the research. However, parts of students and teachers are not integrated well. To enhance the effect of web-based foreign language teaching, they two need to be combined together and studied. Figure 3 shows the time proportion of student using internet to study.

The term students learn English time by network
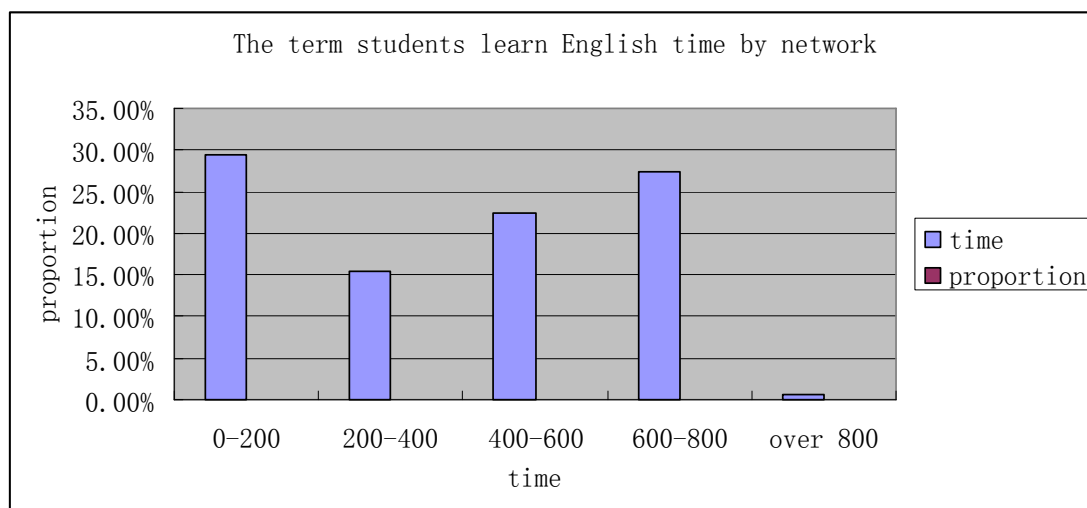
PROBLEMS OF WEB-BASED FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN CHINA
Since its emergence in China, web-based foreign language teaching has been a more and more popular issue in educational research area. Researches have already covered basically every layer. But problems still exist which might possibly have bad effect on the development of web-based foreign language teaching in China if they are not solved in time.

1. web-based foreign language teaching is constrained by theories of conventional foreign language teaching
Research of web-based foreign language teaching is constrained by conventional foreign language teaching mode. Many studies ignored the features of web-based foreign language teaching, just simply adopting theories of conventional foreign language teaching. That was supposed to be an improvement of research but it somehow turned into a bad outcome with research process being too simplified. These researches not only abused the theories of conventional foreign language teaching but also failed to demonstrate the features of web-based foreign language teaching. Therefore they meant nothing for the study and development of web-based foreign language teaching.

2. Undue obsession with details of web-based foreign language teaching
Some researchers have wasted too much effort to study on the detailed content of web-based foreign language teaching. Such an obsession is not good for research ignoring the essence of the details. The reason why such problems exist is that the whole of web-based foreign language teaching is not mastered well. Details are not studied entirely but only from the surface. Some details are overemphasized.

3. Theory is more valued than practice
Many researches attempt to build up a grand new theoretical frame of web-based foreign language teaching by only studying and analyzing the previous theories. However, no breakthroughs will be made until practical exploration is done. Under such circumstances, the number of theories of web-based foreign language teaching is big but very little of them are innovative and inspirational.

RESEARCH METHOD OF WEB-BASED FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN CHINA
Research of web-based foreign language teaching is very complicated. Thus an effective research method is needed, which is action research method. First, many problems exist in the study on web-based foreign language teaching. They can be turned into the direction of research and they can be solved through action research method. This method offers strong protection to the emerged problems. Secondly, the research target of study on web-based foreign language teaching is to find out problems and solve them in the researches covering every aspect and factor. In this process, the effectiveness of web-based education can be improved, which is also the objective of action research method. Lastly, this method suggests that action and research should be conducted simultaneously; requiring researchers to keep adjusting the research scheme and turn the teaching process a research process. This method is also given attention in web-based foreign language teaching. Since web-based foreign language teaching is a new teaching mode, its stability is low and in its development many X factors exist to generate influence. That means there will be many unknown problems. So researchers are required to make adjustment in line with the new situation and keep optimizing web-based foreign language teaching.

PROSPECT OF WEB-BASED FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN CHINA
With the progress and development of the era, China's computer networking technology has been being improved. Hence research of web-based foreign language teaching also needs to catch up the pace. As to the future development of web-based foreign language teaching, experts and teachers must have their thoughts. An outlook of its developmental trend is very necessary.

Status quo of web-based foreign language teaching will be a key point in future researches. So are some current researches. Main aspects of study on web-based foreign language teaching in the future are mentioned in Modern foreign language teaching in China: theory, practice and method. They are research on theory, research on learning system and mode, planning of web-based foreign language teaching scheme, teaching mode and plan, research on participant, research on teachers and assessment mechanism of web-based foreign language teaching.

Some problems occurred in current researches are also the main content of the future study of web-based foreign language teaching. The future research direction will be consistent with the current one. With researches regarding these problems being deepened, positive effect they have on assessment mechanism of web-based foreign language teaching will be more and more obvious. Then the connection between studies of web-based foreign language teaching and web-based foreign language teaching will be strengthened.

In the past few years, CET-4 and CET-6 have been constantly reformed in China. Related issues will also be a direction of the future studies of web-based foreign language teaching. There will be many problems in the researches on finding ways to serve effectively the foreign language examination through internet. So far, feasibility of online language tests is still doubted. Nevertheless, we should hold our faith and bear in mind that with thorough exploration, the development of online language tests will be a positive driver for the development of studies of web-based foreign language teaching.

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