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## Challenges of Using Short Videos in English Language Teaching

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Original article

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### Abstract

The rapid development of digital technology in the 21st century has given rise to the emergence of short videos. As a polycode text, short videos have been widely applied in the field of education due to their unique characteristics. However, the difficulties that educators encounter in applying short video teaching in actual instruction are rarely discussed, and these challenges may vary significantly in different contexts between urban and rural areas. To deeply explore this phenomenon, this study first conducted a questionnaire survey among 106 middle school English teachers across the country to quantify the universality of the challenge. Subsequently, based on the questionnaire results, six teachers from different schools in urban and rural areas with different teaching experiences were selected for in-depth interviews and multi-case studies, which used qualitative data to explain the quantitative results. The research results show that there are significant differences in the perception of equipment technical defects among urban and rural teachers, and the insufficiency of professional skills is a common challenge faced by urban and rural teachers. This study is of great importance in practise, providing empirical evidence for understanding regional inequality in the application of educational technology and offering different inspirations to practitioners at different levels.

**Keywords:** Short Videos, English Language Teaching, Urban-Rural Disparity, Mixed-Methods Research

**Conflict of interests:** The author declares no conflict of interests.

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**Школьное образование по информатике  
и информационным технологиям**

## **Проблемы использования коротких видеороликов в преподавании английского языка**

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Оригинальная статья

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### **Аннотация**

Быстрое развитие цифровых технологий в XXI веке привело к появлению коротких видеороликов. Как поликодовый текст, короткие видеоролики широко применяются в сфере образования благодаря своим уникальным характеристикам. Однако трудности, с которыми сталкиваются педагоги при применении коротких видеороликов в реальном обучении, редко обсуждаются, и эти проблемы могут значительно различаться в разных контекстах между городскими и сельскими районами. Чтобы глубоко изучить это явление, в рамках данного исследования сначала был проведен опрос 106 учителей английского языка средних школ по всей стране с целью количественной оценки универсальности этой проблемы. Затем, на основе результатов опроса, было отобрано шесть учителей из разных школ в городских и сельских районах с разным опытом преподавания для проведения углубленных интервью и многослучайных исследований с использованием качественных данных для объяснения количественных результатов. Результаты исследования показывают, что между городскими и сельскими учителями существуют значительные различия в восприятии технических неисправностей оборудования, а недостаток профессиональных навыков является общей проблемой, с которой сталкиваются городские и сельские учителя. Данное исследование имеет большое практическое значение, поскольку предоставляет эмпирические данные для понимания регионального неравенства в применении образовательных технологий и предлагает различные идеи для практиков на разных уровнях.

**Ключевые слова:** короткие видеоролики, преподавание английского языка, разрыв между городом и селом, смешанные методы исследования

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## Introduction

Technological advances and proliferation of smart devices have made it easy to access and create short videos, and the roll out of 4G and 5G networks has provided the basis for the transmission of high-quality short videos [1]. Under the guidance of policies in various parts of China, a number of short video online platforms have created education sections to promote the dissemination of high-quality educational videos [2]. In the context of the digital era, the traditional education model has evolved with the times and ushered in new opportunities. Combining short videos with traditional teaching to create a new teaching model has become a research topic for many scholars. Researchers at home and abroad have addressed the application of short videos in teaching and learning from several directions, including educational research, psychology, health care science services, behavioral science, computer science and communication. Based on educational research, some academic study focuses on using short videos to teach English. According to the research results of the keyword "The Application of Short Videos in English Teaching", most scholars explored the impact of short videos on the effectiveness of English teaching, and mainly focused on the practical application effects of short videos in English teaching [3-9]. However, there are relatively few studies on the difficulties that educators encounter when using short video teaching in actual instruction and the possible differences in different urban and rural contexts. This study focuses on the unique context of China's urban-rural dual structure, aiming to reveal the urban-rural differences behind the challenges of short video teaching and their deep-seated roots, providing a more explanatory theoretical framework and more targeted practical paths for promoting educational equity.

## Literature Review

The concept of polycode text was first introduced by Sonin in 2005. Polycode text as a text that was made up of vocal text components with different semiotics and signals with different semiotic qualities that were arranged in one visual space<sup>1</sup>. According to the polycode text theory, learners received information simultaneously through different senses, which could enhance their understanding and memory of the learning content. The application of polycode design principles in actual teaching reduced the cognitive load of learners and had a positive impact on learning outcomes [10-14].

As a complex polycode text, video integrated visual modalities (picture, color, subtitles, special effects), auditory modalities (voice, music, sound effects), language modalities (oral and written language), and spatio-temporal modalities (rhythm, editing, transitions) [15, 16]. The content of short videos was concise, so learners could focus on the most important information in a short time easily, which would improve the effectiveness of teaching to a certain extent [17-19].

In recent years, there have been more studies related to the application of short videos to English language teaching.

Short video teaching could improve learners' listening and speaking skills, and ultimately promoted English language learning [3-5]. In addition, when short videos were used to teach English vocabulary, students enjoyed this mode of teaching and responded to the classroom activities more positively, which improved the effectiveness of teaching [6]. Meanwhile, students' attention, interest, and understanding of English vocabulary content in the classroom were improved through TikTok's interesting video instruction [7]. Although short videos are widely used in teaching. However, educators still encounter multiple challenges when using short videos in teaching. There have been significant differences between urban and rural areas in China in terms of high-performance intelligent devices and stable high-speed networks [20-22]. Low bandwidth and insufficient device performance cause problems such as video stream lag, blurry pictures, audio and video desynchronization, and inability to display subtitles normally. This impairs the visual and auditory modal quality of learners, preventing students from obtaining a coherent learning experience. Visual and audio features such as image and audio quality have been important to learners and had a positive impact on learning outcomes [23, 24]. In addition, teachers lacked the professional skills needed to create and interpret teaching short videos [25-27].

In conclusion, previous research focused on exploring the teaching effectiveness of short videos. And most of the research on the challenges faced when applying short videos focused on the objective reasons. However, this paper measures differences in the perceived challenges of urban and rural teachers in different dimensions through quantitative data. It also deeply explores the underlying subjective and objective reasons behind these differences through qualitative case studies, and ultimately analyzes the predicaments that urban and rural teachers in China encounter when using English short videos in teaching.

## Purpose

Drawing upon the polycode theoretical framework, this paper will explore the disparity in capabilities between urban and rural teachers when "using" and "producing" educational short videos. The study aims to provide targeted, differentiated practical recommendations and policy insights for education authorities, schools, and teacher training institutions to bridge the digital education divide and promote educational equity.

## Methodology

In the first phase of the study, researchers conducted a broad survey via questionnaires to explore frequency of using short videos in teaching, their purposes, perceived effectiveness, and challenges. The questionnaires were distributed to junior high school English teachers across multiple provinces and cities nationwide through the online platform Wenjuanxing. A total of 106 voluntarily completed anonymous questionnaires were collected, with 94 valid responses. The questionnaire primarily employed a five-point Likert scale, covering the following dimensions: basic information, challenges, attitudes and suggestions, as illustrated in Table 1.

<sup>1</sup> Sonin A.G. Understanding polycode texts: Cognitive aspects. Moscow: Institute of Linguistics, RAS, 2005. 219 p. (In Russ.) EDN: QXNTCB



Table 1. Questionnaire on "Challenges of Short Video Applications in Secondary School English Teaching"

<b>Part One: Basic Information</b>					
1. Your school is located in: <input type="radio"/> Urban area <input type="radio"/> Rural area					
2. Your years of teaching experience: <input type="radio"/> 4 years or less <input type="radio"/> 5 years or more					
3. How frequently do you use short videos in English teaching? <input type="radio"/> Almost each class <input type="radio"/> 1-3 times per week <input type="radio"/> 1-3 times per month <input type="radio"/> Rarely					
4. In which teaching segments do you typically use short videos? (Multiple selections allowed) <input type="checkbox"/> Lead-in <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary or grammar explanations <input type="checkbox"/> Listening practice <input type="checkbox"/> Speaking demonstration and practice <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural background introduction <input type="checkbox"/> Class Summary					
5. Which platforms do you most frequently use to access English teaching video resources? (Multiple selections allowed) <input type="checkbox"/> Bilibili <input type="checkbox"/> Douyin / TikTok <input type="checkbox"/> YouTube <input type="checkbox"/> Self-shot or self-produced <input type="checkbox"/> WeChat Official Accounts/Video Account <input type="checkbox"/> Professional teaching resource websites/platforms					
<b>Part Two: Challenges and Difficulties</b> (1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree).					
6. The classroom network (Wi-Fi or wired) at my school is very stable and smooth.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The school's teaching computers, projectors/all-in-one devices, and other equipment perform well enough to play high-definition videos without lag.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Students can easily access the video resources I share in class using their own devices (such as tablets).	1	2	3	4	5
9. I'm concerned that technical issues (such as no sound, black screen, or lag) may occur during video playback, disrupting the teaching progress.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Students encounter internet or device difficulties when watching the video assignments I assign at home.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I can very proficiently and quickly filter out high-quality, teaching-appropriate English short videos from vast online resources.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I possess basic video editing skills (such as cropping, splicing, adding subtitles, etc.) to optimize the resources I find.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I know how to design effective classroom activities or worksheets that guide students to watch videos with purpose, rather than just skimming through them.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I can deeply integrate short videos with textbook unit themes, grammar points, and other content rather than using them in isolation.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I am confident in assessing students' gains in language or cultural knowledge after learning through short videos.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I have received systematic training on how to integrate digital resources such as short videos into teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I worry that students focus only on the entertainment value of videos and overlook the language knowledge they need to master.	1	2	3	4	5
18. It's difficult to find short videos whose content and language difficulty are perfectly suited to the level of the students I teach.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I am concerned that certain short video content may contain linguistic errors or unnatural expressions that could mislead students.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Part Three: Attitudes and Recommendations</b>					
20. Overall, how effective do you think short videos are for English teaching? <input type="radio"/> More cons than pros <input type="radio"/> More pros than cons <input type="radio"/> Pros and cons are roughly equal					
21. Would you be willing to use short videos more frequently for teaching in the future? <input type="radio"/> Very willing <input type="radio"/> Somewhat willing <input type="radio"/> Not very willing <input type="radio"/> Not at all					
22. If you wish to receive relevant training, what topics would you most like to learn? (Multiple selections allowed) <input type="checkbox"/> Techniques to find high-quality educational short video resources <input type="checkbox"/> Basic video editing and production software usage <input type="checkbox"/> How to design teaching activities centered around short videos <input type="checkbox"/> How to deeply integrate short videos with textbook unit content <input type="checkbox"/> How to evaluate the teaching effectiveness of short videos <input type="checkbox"/> No training needs at this time					

Source: Hereinafter in this article all tables were drawn up by the author.



In the second phase of the study, this research adopted a participatory, qualitative, multi-case study approach. Multi-case study was a qualitative research method designed to analyze and understand specific phenomena by examining multiple cases. Unlike single-case studies, multi-case studies provided a broader perspective through comparing several independent cases, thereby deepening understanding of the phenomenon and enhancing the generalizability of research findings<sup>2</sup>. Researchers employed the Maximum Variation Sampling strategy within purposive sampling to recruit participants. This strategy ensures the sample adequately reflects the complexity and diversity of China's educational environment across geographical regions, resource allocation, and teachers' professional backgrounds, thereby providing rich and multifaceted insights into the challenges when short videos are used in English instruction. Specific

selection criteria encompassed two core dimensions: geographic location and years of teaching experience. To ensure the sample represented the typical dual structure of Chinese education, participants were required to come from six distinct junior high schools located in urban, and rural areas within a province in eastern China. To explore the potential impact of professional development stages, participants' years of teaching experience needed to span both novice teachers (1-4 years) and experienced teachers (5+ years). All participants were currently employed as English teachers and volunteered for the study. After preliminary candidate identification through sampling, the researcher selected six teachers based on the aforementioned criteria. Detailed background information is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Background information about participants**

Name	School Background	Teaching Year	Project Focus
Cindy	English teacher of a rural middle school of Huaian city	4 years	Training of Listening and speaking skills of talking about hobbies in Unit 2 Grade 7
John	English teacher of a middle school in center of Huaian city	1 years	Training of Listening and speaking skills of talking about hobbies in Unit 2 Grade 7
Maya	English teacher of a rural middle school of Suzhou city	3 years	Learning vocabulary of festivals in Unit 8 Grade 7
Anna	English teacher of a middle school in center of Suzhou city	6 years	Learning vocabulary of festivals in Unit 8 Grade 7
Daniel	English teacher of a rural middle school of Nanjing city	5 years	Training of Listening and speaking skills introducing friends in Unit 1 Grade8
Henry	English teacher of a middle school in center of Nanjing city	2 years	Training of Listening and speaking skills introducing friends in Unit 1 Grade8

In addition, after identifying the research topic of this project, the researcher maintained close contact with the six English teachers. The specific implementation process of this project is shown in Table 3. The researcher and the six teachers recorded and shared the specific teaching experiment process through online meetings before and

after the experiment, and discussed the difficulties and countermeasures encountered in the process of practice through interviews. The six teachers themselves also conducted questionnaire surveys on students' attitudes, classroom attention and other aspects before and after the experiment.

**Table 3. Schedule of project sessions**

Meeting Purpose: Research and Action Project Design for Teaching English Language When Using Short Videos
1. Welcome and introduction of the session
2. Discussion of research on the use of short videos in English language teaching and learning.
3. Classroom use of short videos and pedagogy discussion
4. Discussion of possible use of short videos in participants' projects
5. Initial exploration of action research methodology and design
6. Action Research Project Design Workshop
Participants undertook their action research projects
7. Mid-term feedback and problem solving for action research projects
8. Sharing of research results and reflection on experience

<sup>2</sup> Stake R.E. Multiple case study analysis. 2nd ed. New York: Guilford Press; 2020. 342 p.; Yin R.K. Case study research and applications: Design and methods. 6th ed. London: Sage Publications; 2018. 352 p.



## Findings

Results of questionnaires indicated that 86 % of teachers selected “More pros than cons,” demonstrating teachers' strong recognition of the educational value of short videos. However, in the second section of questionnaires regarding actual usage frequency, 68 % of teachers chose “1-3 times per week” or “1-3 times per month.” This showed that certain objective or subjective factors prevented teachers from applying these tools with greater frequency or depth while teachers expressed a strong desire to incorporate short videos into English instruction.

Besides, options such as “high-quality resource retrieval techniques” and “teaching activity design” were selected by 78 teachers in the training preference section. Among 94 valid questionnaires, 53 participants currently served as English teachers in urban middle schools, while 41 participants worked in rural areas. Fifty-three participants from urban areas agreed with the statement in Question 6, while 34 participants from rural areas selected “agree.” Regarding Question 7, 48 participants from urban areas selected “agree,” and 21 participants from rural areas selected “agree.” These results are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 below.

	school area	consent rates
Q6	urban school	100%
	rural school	83%
Q7	urban school	90%
	rural school	51%

Fig. 1. School area and consent rate

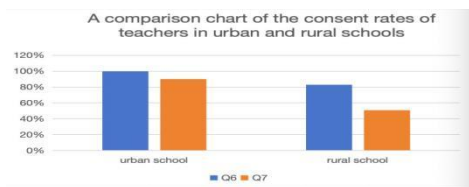


Fig. 2. A comparison chart of consent rates in urban and rural schools

Additionally, 61 % of teachers were highly proficient at quickly filtering high-quality, teaching-appropriate English short videos from vast online resources. 52 % of them possessed basic video editing skills to optimize the resources they found. 35 % of them had received systematic training on integrating digital resources such as short videos into their teaching practices.

When it comes to results of case study, six teachers agreed that the use of short videos in English language learning could achieve good teaching results through the particular course. Whether in English listening and speaking or vocabulary teaching classes, short videos made students more attentive and active in the classroom. One educator made a vocal remark about this.

*The use of short videos in the English classroom is so interesting for the students to enjoy. Short videos with novel topics can attract students' interest. In recent years, the short video software represented by Tiktok is very popular in China, and students are also fans of short videos. when using short videos in the classroom, students' learning enthusiasm is high and the learning atmosphere*

*becomes relaxing.*

It was also found that the first difficulty encountered in using short video teaching in actual English language teaching was the imperfect infrastructure, especially the obstacles from the technical and equipment level. The differentiated economic development of different regions directly contributed to the differences in educational infrastructure between regions. In this study, the basic teaching equipment and technology in the two urban secondary schools were well-developed. In contrast, teachers from the rural secondary schools faced challenges due to outdated teaching infrastructure that had not kept pace with contemporary standards. The following paragraph was what one teacher shared about the problems encountered in teaching practice.

*To a certain extent, the inadequate infrastructure affects the teaching methodology, which is unable to integrate short-video teaching with the traditional teaching mode effectively. Sometimes, although I have prepared in advance with the course content in line with the short video, but the computer can not work successfully. Occasionally, slow Internet speed will cause the short video to play video lag. This will definitely reduce the expected teaching effect. This is the technical equipment level problem encountered in teaching at present.*

In addition, educators faced a deficiency in the requisite technical expertise necessary for effectively utilizing short videos in teaching and learning. They encountered challenges at three distinct levels: video production, the application of technological tools, and content innovation. Four teachers were unfamiliar with video filming, editing, and the use of related professional tools. Moreover, the content of the video screens should be innovative in order to attract students' attention. However, teachers found it difficult to choose short videos that were both interesting and educational in practice. Compared to teachers with more years of teaching experience, teachers with less years of teaching experience were more likely to choose to use creative short videos when teaching English.

*The short videos that I use in my classroom are originated from the internet. It is hard for me to make short educational videos on my own because I don't understand how to make and edit short videos. There are times when I have some ideas to shoot some short videos, but there is no way to start. And it's easy to pick educational videos from the web.*

## Conclusion

The use of short videos for teaching English had good results, which was reflected in the English listening and vocabulary teaching classroom [28-30]. Short videos combined words, images and sounds to present a multi-sensory text, which attracted learners' interest more<sup>3</sup>. In addition, students could be exposed to real-life language use scenarios through short videos [31], which could train learners' English listening and speaking skills, thus

<sup>3</sup> Blonde A.N. The effects of using short videos on language motivation and acquisition in English as a foreign language. Maltepe University; 2023. Master's thesis.



improving their English language application skills. However, the application of short videos in English teaching is confronted with a structural predicament of dual challenges. This study affirms that the challenges are multifaceted, encompassing both external deficiencies related to equipment and technology access, as well as internal shortcomings concerning teachers' professional skills. These two major challenges together form the key barrier that restricts the full play of the potential of short videos in teaching. Furthermore, there are significant and systematic differences in the perception of challenges between urban and rural teachers, which reveals the multi-dimensionality of the digital divide in education. Both quantitative and qualitative data consistently indicate that the predicament faced by rural teachers is significantly more severe than that of urban teachers. This is due to the differences in infrastructure and resource allocation caused by the unbalanced regional economic development. Besides, there is a still strong demand for professional

development among the teaching staff. The vast majority of urban and rural teachers have expressed an urgent desire for high-quality training, which from the side confirms the general lack of professional skills support and also provides a clear direction for future intervention.

This research holds significant practical significance and offers different inspirations to practitioners at various levels. Education policymakers must adopt a differentiated empowerment strategy. For rural areas, the policy focus should be prioritized on improving network infrastructure and upgrading teaching hardware equipment. Schools leaders need to undergo a paradigm shift, upgrading traditional teacher training to a cultivation model centered on digital ability.

This study still has limitations in terms of sample size. Although the sample coverage of the questionnaire survey and the number of case studies can meet the research requirements, the sample size can be further expanded to draw more universal conclusions, in the future.

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