

An Exploration of “Smart Classroom” for College English Teaching with SPOC Platforms

Jia Lin

Shandong University, Jinan, Shandong, 250100, China

Keywords: SPOC, Multi-platforms, College English teaching, Smart Classroom

Abstract: Chinese higher education is greatly impacted by the development of ICT (Information Communications Technology) and new modes of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teaching have emerged and been implemented under contexts of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) and SPOCs (Small Private Online Courses). This requires education practitioners to further clarify their purposes of teaching, make detailed plans for the innovation accordingly, and furthermore, build the new model of EFL teaching with the support of feasible platforms. The study introduced the application of the “Smart Classroom” in College English teaching and the five steps to put it into practice. Through the exploratory research, it is found that the “Smart Classroom” combined with the support of SPOC multi-platforms is realistic and feasible in college English classrooms, which indicates the advantages of the new mode in promoting the motivation of the students and enhancing learning effects. Thus, the new mode of teaching with “Smart Classroom” has potentials to be furthermore applied and explored in the college English teaching process.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the methods of teaching in higher education are experiencing a revolutionary reform. The predictions from IEEE have been proved by the recent developments in higher education that MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) will exert great impact on the present education system as well as its future. Courses of different fields (Formanek, Buxner, Impey, & Wenger, 2019) had been launched onto various platforms in the form of MOOCs and degrees and certificates have been granted for accomplishing those courses on line.

Ever since Plato had founded his Academy 24 hundred years ago, people have been meeting in physical spaces, conducting teaching and learning activities face to face. As the development of science and technology during the following centuries and decades, historical revolution has happened in distance learning which can be classified into three major periods in terms of the media involved: printed materials, television, and the Internet. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2016). MOOCs is one of the latest revolutions in educational technology in the development of the Internet.[1]

MOOCs have been impacting the education in the recent decade and will have further impact on the future landscape of education in China. MOOCs has provided more opportunities for students to get access to courses from world-renown universities and promoted cooperation among universities, professors and learners (Formanek et al., 2019). Until now, MOOCs has been a powerful complement to traditional education methods.

Under this circumstance, SPOCs (Small Private Online Courses) became another online form of teaching derivation from MOOCs and has helped to achieve a more accurate and efficient way of online education. During the period of COVID 19 epidemics, MOOCs and SPOCs have developed at an incredible speed as a substitution to the traditional off-line teaching in most universities (Impey & Formanek, 2021), making distance education develop rapidly in a very short time.

Although MOOC platform had been implemented in the field of education for years, MOOC courses had also encountered practical problems, which cannot meet the needs of contemporary Chinese college students' personalized curriculum and curriculum needs of different levels of students. Under the support of multiple platforms, SPOC has the potential to enhance the pertinence of school professional teaching effectively, improve the quality the overall learning effect of students. To this end, college English classrooms need to further explore and implement the "smart classroom" hybrid teaching mode with the support of ICT.[2] By combining the online courses and offline classrooms appropriately, students had more autonomy in adjusting their own ways of learning and investigating deeper into the relevant topics. With tasks assigned in the off-line classrooms and necessary instructions given, students do more independent learning afterwards with MOOC, and discussions could be conducted in various forms through different forms on SPOC. Therefore, the learning efficiency could be greatly promoted.

The reform was conducted in a university in China with 120 participants who are freshmen majoring in minor foreign languages. The new teaching mode with "Smart Classroom" was applied to the College comprehensive English classes, each of which had 4 hours of teaching each week. For each two and a half weeks, a cycle of sessions was accomplished and there were 6 cycles for a whole semester. For the 5 sessions, which lasts 100 minutes for each, in a cycle, the students had off-line instruction, off-line independent learning, on-line exchange, and off-line exploration and in-depth learning, on-line/off-line report and assessment in sequence. The rest two sessions of each semester were the review and conclusion time conducted offline in the classroom. After two semesters' learning, a survey was conducted to learn the feedback of the students. Moreover, interviews were conducted with students randomly selected from the participants[3].

2. Significance of "Smart Classroom" for college English teaching

College English courses occupy a major position in the systems of teaching in the higher educational institutes, and English courses are the subjects that required be mastered by all professional undergraduates. However, due to the fact that the English course materials in Chinese colleges and universities are generally outdated in classroom teaching methods, teachers often transmit English information one-way in the classroom, which makes students' learning become passive and seriously hinders the teaching of college English in colleges and universities. Therefore, in recent years, Chinese colleges and universities have highlighted problems such as the large gap in English teaching methods, learning resource allocation, examination methods and students' basic knowledge. Traditional teaching methods have caused great pressure on English teachers and students in Chinese colleges and universities, making some students unable to cooperate with teachers effectively. The traditional ways of teaching has proved to ineffective in promoting in-depth learning and critical thinking in college English teaching in the new era. According to new concepts of curriculum reforms in recent years, English teachers must actively reform their modes of teaching, and apply the mixed teaching methods supported by MOOC or SPOC to bring online fragmented and efficient teaching to learners. It is based on this concept that we advocate the reform of MOOC and SPOC teaching mode in English teaching in universities with ICT technologies. The implementation of the college-English mixed teaching mode under the conditions of SPOC multi-platforms has opened up a new way for college English classrooms, effectively changed the traditional teaching

methods, improved the quality and academic proficiency of students, as well as enhancing their learning motivation and effects.

3. Advantages of “Smart Classroom” supported by SPOC

The goal of college English teaching is to cultivate senior professionals with comprehensive English language skills and language application ability. The use of English teaching supported by SPOC multi-platform can enable students to get access to various types of learning resources and the vast choices of materials. By doing research and applying the knowledge in the SPOC learning environment in forms of small-group discussions, self-learning, independent reading and critical thinking, it will be easier for them to effectively put the use of English in their future work and life. In the new Smart Classroom on line, students had the opportunity to communicate and exchanges ideas more effectively and smoothly. Meanwhile, students could improve their cultural literacy, improve the competence of intercultural communication, which enabled them to conduct effective social dialogues with people from different cultures and backgrounds.

3.1. Promoting learning effects and foreign language learning motivation

Most of the students of minor foreign language majors have good foundation of English learning because they have to pass the very strict test and interviews in English before being recruited. However, after entering college and beginning the learning of their own major foreign languages, such as French, Japanese, Spanish, German etc., their motivation of learning English become much weaker. As there are less English classed in the first year of college learning, their English proficiency decreased really fast. This situation has continued for years and gradually, students lose their interest in learning English and the English learned before coming to college was wasted completely. In addition, a considerable number of students have poor learning habits and lack subjective initiative.

The mode of “smart classroom” has provided more on-line tasks which could compensate the disadvantage of a lack of English learning hours. The learning materials include various forms including independent reading, listening comprehension, video watching, writing, and self -tests. They could consult the teachers and students in time on different platforms and posts their learning results and share them with classmates on line. On the platforms, students get feedbacks from teachers and classmates. Meanwhile they also had opportunities to comment on others’ works. The time of learning English become flexible for the students as well as the amount of time they devote to English learning. They could choose to learn more hours and report online with the teachers for more in-depth learning through the self-learning platforms of the “Smart Classroom”.

3.2. Enabling a flexible and effective teaching style

College English teachers have heavy load of teaching and strict scientific research and social service requirements, as well as their own professional development. The “Smart Classroom” could free the teachers from the large amount of work from off-line time-consuming conversations with students, and the communication could be done on line intensively in the on-line communication time both in written form or video conversational forms. By posting the syllabus, teaching plans, reference materials, extra-reading materials and homework on line, the students have a better picture of what they are going to learning. Moreover, homework checking was easier and students could get feedbacks from teachers more promptly. Some students who were shy to talk and ask questions may become more motivated and participated enthusiastically in the “Smart Classroom” Though the new mode combining off-line and on-line teaching with SPOCs, teachers achieve their goals of teaching more effectively.

4. Concepts and approaches for the reform

4.1. Focusing on students' needs in learning

College English teachers need to change their concepts in teaching, transforming from teacher-centered lectures to students' independent learning mode, giving full play to students' subjective initiative in learning. In that way, they can participate in the learning activities promoting construction of knowledge, and conduct learning in a joint effort composed of students and teachers. In a partner-type organization, teachers and students are not only providers and beneficiaries of learning resources, but creators of new knowledge. In this process, teachers no longer only focus on their own "teaching", but more on students' "learning", do their best to lead, inspire and track students' learning, and work with students to complete teaching goals. In order to meet the above requirements, college English teachers should master the necessary theoretical foundations and basic steps of managing the mode combining off-line and on-line teaching through various training sessions. At the same time, teachers should keep pace with the times and expand students' knowledge of information technology fields such as ICT knowledge and skills. Only in this way, college English teachers can better carry out the teaching reform.

4.2. Optimizing teaching design and promoting active learning

Under the basic conditions of SPOC, the center of the college English teaching and learning is the students, and teachers play the role of the organizer. In various conversational contexts, the smart classroom fully mobilizes the learners' autonomous learning ability, transforms students from passive knowledge receivers to active knowledge discoverers, and realizes the construction of knowledge frameworks in a vivid and efficient interactive way. The blended teaching method has completely changed the one-way cognitive method of traditional classroom teaching, thus optimizing the classroom. In the "Smart Classroom", learning is divided into five main parts: off-line instructions, off-line independent learning, on-line exchange, and off-line exploration and in-depth learning, on-line/off-line report and assessment.

4.2.1. Off-line instructions

During the off-line instruction period, the instructions are given in the classes by the teachers and the basic settings of the topics and learning tasks are analyzed by the teachers, with reading assignments and tasks declared to the students. Meanwhile, learning materials will be provided in electrical forms for the reference of the students.

4.2.2. Off-line independent learning

Then the students spend time off-line for the independent learning by referring to the materials and resources provided by the teachers under their instructions. Tasks are expected to be accomplished before the next on-line meeting during which the problems would be collected.

4.2.3. On-line exchange

During the on-line exchanging period, teachers answer questions raised by the students and feedbacks will be given at the same time on their works. Furthermore, higher requirement will be given to the students for modification of their works and reaching higher goals of learning.

4.2.4. Off-line exploration and in-depth learning

After the exchange session online, the students will do off-line exploration and independent learning again, which is a process of in-depth learning process and the knowledge and scope of them will be largely expanded. More application of the language skills would be encouraged through this off-line exploration period.

4.2.5. On-line /off-line report and assessment

Last but not the least, the on-line or off-line report session will be conducted to rap up all the learning results with presentations from the students. Furthermore, more reviews and instructions will be given by the teachers for further learning. Assessment will also be conducted during the report period online or offline to check the effect of learning.

5. Conclusion

The present study is an exploration of the “Smart Classroom” building in College English teaching with the support of SPOC platforms. First, the background of the present situation of teaching combined with MOOCs and SPOC was introduced and the new trend and development in college English teaching in China was explained. Second, the significance of the reform was introduced. Third, advantages of “Smart Classroom” were analyzed from two perspectives: promoting learning effects and foreign language learning motivation and enabling a flexible and effective teaching style. Fourth, the concept approaches of the reform were interpreted with five steps of teaching: off-line instructions, off-line independent learning, on-line exchange, off-line exploration and in-depth learning and on-line/off-line report and assessment. The implementation of the mixed teaching mode for college English under the conditions of SPOC multi-platforms has opened up a new era for college English teaching, effectively changed the traditional teaching methods, improved the quality and academic proficiency of students, as well as enhancing their learning motivation and effects.

Acknowledgement

Fund Project: The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The Educational and Teaching Reform Project of Shandong University (2021Y275).

References

- [1] Feng H. *Research on construction of College English based on SPOC — Take Unit3 of New Vision College English 1 (third 3) as an example [J]. Teaching (Higher Education Forum), 2022 (5): 85-88.*
- [2] Yuan Y. *Research on the mixed teaching mode of university English based on SPOC [J]. English Square, 2022 (5): 66-69.*
- [3] Yang Q. *Empirical analysis of the role of learning support services in the blended SPOC — Take "European and American Literary Classics in movies" as an example [J]. Journal of Shenzhen Vocational and Technical College, 2022,21 (2): 73-78.*