

A Study of Blended Teaching & Learning Model in College English Cultural Courses

A Case Study of "Introducing Chinese Culture in English"

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore and analyze the effect of the blended teaching and learning model used in college English cultural courses by taking the course "Introducing Chinese Culture in English" as an example. The blended teaching and learning model brings the optimal integration of on-line and off-line teaching and learning into reality by employing the on-line state level MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) "Introducing Chinese Culture in English", constructing SPOC (Small Private Online Course) on U-Campus platform, and adopting a variety of cultural activities in off-line classroom. The teaching practice proves that the blended teaching and learning model advocates the "learner-centered" teaching idea, and fits in the characteristics of college English cultural courses. The learners acquire abundant and effective cultural information through the on-line MOOC and SPOC resource input, and in the off-line classroom, through different types of teacher-learner and learner-learner interaction and varied cultural teaching strategies, including cultural lecture, cultural performance, cultural discussion, the teachers and learners cooperatively and successfully construct an interactive, harmonious and humanistic cultural classroom.

Keywords: College English, Cultural course, Blended teaching and learning model, Cultural classroom.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are an integral part with language as the carrier of culture and culture as the base of language. Therefore, College English cultural courses occupy a very important position in the curriculum of almost all colleges in China. Generally speaking, English cultural courses in most colleges of China include *A Glimpse of British and American Culture*, *Insights into Chinese Culture*, *The Contrast of Chinese and Western Cultures*, *The Greek and Roman Mythology*, *Intercultural Communication*, *The Bible Culture*, *The Selective Reading of English Newspaper and Magazine*, *English Movie Viewing and Appreciation*, *Aspects of American TV Series*, etc. These cultural courses contain a large amount of

cultural knowledge and information, interesting cultural stories and authentic cultural contexts. The teaching and learning of these cultural courses can greatly enlarge the learners' cultural knowledge repertoire, cultivate the learner's cultural literacy and cross-cultural communicative competence. However, it is still a disappointing fact that most cultural teachers are still using traditional teaching method to teach these cultural courses, i.e. the teachers deliver lectures in class and the learners listen to the lectures during most of the time in classroom. These so called "spoon-feeding" traditional teaching methodologies are time-consuming and energy-consuming but ineffective. Therefore, college English cultural courses urgently need innovative teaching methodology to reform the conventional teaching method. Coincidentally, China is already in the information age, and new information technology greatly influences college education. With MOOC, SPOC and Micro-Lecture gradually booming in the field of education,

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teachers begin to realize the necessity of the integration of the information technology and course teaching, of the combination of on-line learning and off-line discussion and the teacher-learner as well as learner-learner interactions. Thus, a brand new teaching pedagogy came into being, i.e. the blended teaching and learning model. The blended teaching and learning model "breaks the discontinuity of traditional teaching... provides students with rich teaching resource, makes English teaching rich and colorful, and improves students' enthusiasm and initiative" (Jingjing, 2018).

This paper is reforming the conventional teaching method used in college English cultural courses, and with the support of information technology, employing the blended teaching and learning model by taking the course "Introducing Chinese Culture in English" as a case study. Hopefully, this paper can provide some insights into college English cultural courses teaching and learning for other teachers and researchers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review will cover two perspectives: the first part is about the teaching pedagogy concerning college English cultural courses; the second part is about the employment of blended teaching and learning model in college English courses in China.

2.1 Teaching Pedagogy Concerning College English Cultural Courses

Joan Kelly Hall lists some researching and teaching methods of English cultural courses in his book *Teaching and Researching Language and Culture*, such as cooperative learning in groups and a variety of cultural activities (Hall, 2005). A.J. Liddicoat in his book *Intercultural Language Teaching: Principles for Practice* generalizes four types of cultural activities in language classroom, i.e. cultural study, cultural contrast, cultural exploration and the orientation of cross-cultural mediator (Liddicoat, 2004). Chunping Ge and Shouren Wang put forward the idea that the forms of the intercultural teaching involve classroom teaching and extracurricular theme activities (Chunping, Shouren, 2016). Cong Wang states that the conventional cultural teaching and learning methods do not fit in the characteristics of the cultural courses, so he advocates the diversity of cultural teaching methods, such as cultural cooperation, cultural appreciation, cultural

performance, cultural experience and cultural study, etc. (Cong, 2014).

2.2 Blended Teaching and Learning Model in College English Courses

Some college teachers of English have employed the blended teaching and learning model in college English courses and achieved satisfactory effect. Jiehui Hu and Zhongjie Wu use the blended teaching and learning model in college English course based on self-developed college English MOOC videos and conclude that a coordination of MOOC and flipped classroom teaching and learning can lead to fully blended learning in college English education supported by information technology (Jiehui, Zhongjie, 2014). Fang Yang and the other two scholars explore the practical use of blended teaching and learning approach in EFL learning by taking their university-based course entitled "English Communication in Daily Life" and conclude that the connection of on-line and off-line teaching and learning models ensures the quality of English blended teaching, and the basic principle of the blended teaching was to highlight the autonomous role of students in learning (Fang, Xing, Wenxia, 2017) Yongyan Zheng Conducts a study of the learning effects of a SPOC Blended English Academic writing course and concludes that the SPOC blended learning environment fostered the deep learning through the intensive engagement with a series of on-line and off-line activities (Yongyan, 2019). Yan Jiang and Jiasheng Hu explores the administration, instruction and guaranteed operation mechanism of massive college English flipped instruction based on the teaching practice of a certain university in Chongqing of China (Yan, Jiasheng, 2018)

3. BLENDED TEACHING AND LEARNING MODEL IN "INTRODUCING CHINESE CULTURE IN ENGLISH": DESIGN AND PRACTICE

After reading the above mentioned academic papers about blended teaching and learning model used in college English courses, and in the meantime, considering the unique features of college English cultural courses, the authors of this paper tries to take the course "Introducing Chinese Culture in English" as a case study and design the blended teaching and learning model for the course. The course design advocates the "fusion of

language learning and cultural practice" teaching idea, facilitates the interaction of the teacher and the learners, the interaction among the learners, and the connection between on-line and off-line tasks, in-class and after-class activities.

3.1 The Description of the Course

"Introducing Chinese Culture in English" is a university-based core cultural course in Harbin Institute of Technology at Weihai. The course bases itself on certain important themes of Chinese culture, through blended teaching and learning model, guides the learners to learn English language, enlarge vocabulary concerning Chinese culture and relate Chinese stories in English. The course aims to be delivered in an interesting and lively way with different kinds of teacher-learner

and learner-learner interactions and with optimal integration between on-line and off-line teaching and learning activities, hoping to enlarge the learners' knowledge about Chinese culture and cultivate the learners' cultural competence to read, speak and write Chinese-culture- based topics.

3.2 Course Design and Teaching Practice

Through the thorough analysis of the academic papers concerning blended teaching and learning model in college English course, the teaching group puts forward the course design of "Introducing Chinese Culture in English" using blended teaching and learning model according to time sequence of the on-line and off-line teaching and learning of the course. The course design can be illustrated in "Figure 1".

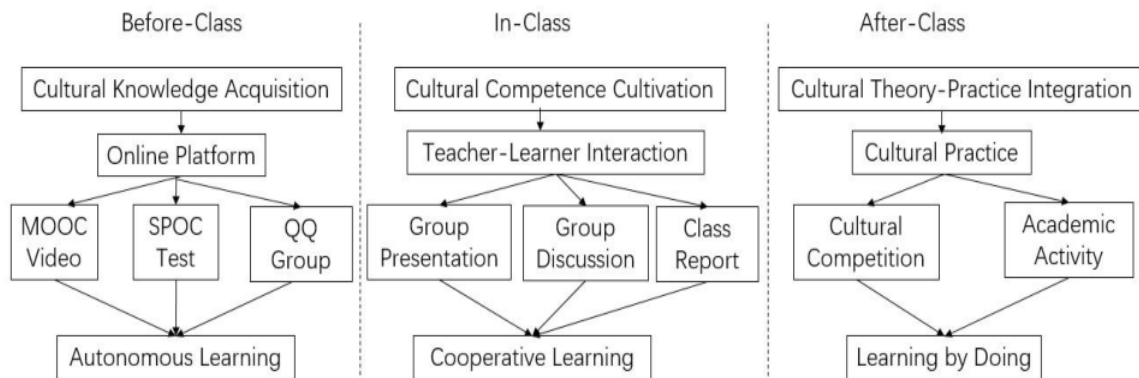


Figure 1 Blended teaching & learning model of college English cultural courses.

In before-class stage, also called the stage of "cultural knowledge acquisition", the learners are suggested to watch MOOC videos and answer the questions in the discussion section and finish the test based on the MOOC videos, complete U-campus test and read the text of each unit before class. The state-level MOOC "Introducing Chinese Culture in English" produced by Hubei University is on the platform "Xuetangx" developed by Tsinghua University. The tests are designed by the teachers and are put onto the U-campus platform operated by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in Beijing. The textbook is compiled based on the contents of the MOOC videos with the two passages of part two of each unit as the scripts of the MOOC videos and the passage of part one as the general introduction of the topic of each unit. Beside these two online platforms, the teachers also provide some reading or listening task for the learners through the QQ group of each class, and the QQ group is served as

the major channel for the teachers and learners to communicate online. In before-class stage the learners acquire a large amount of cultural knowledge concerning Chinese culture through a variety of on-line channels, which guarantees the learners with enough cultural knowledge input, and in the meantime, enhances the learners' autonomous learning competence.

In in-class stage, also called the stage of "cultural competence cultivation", the learners are going to internalize what they have acquired from different on-line platforms through teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions. In this stage the teachers employ different types of forms to promote the interactions and learners' cooperative learning, such as learners' group presentation, group discussion and class report. And at the same time, the teachers organize different types of activities to carry on the cooperative learning process. It should be noted that the In-class stage is closely related to

the before-class stage to ensure the off-line classroom is the extension and elaboration of the content of the previous on-line classroom. The teachers design different types of class activities step by step to help the learners to internalize what they have learned in Before-class stage. These activities mainly include mini-lectures, word guess game, cultural words translation and dictation, group presentation about certain cultural topics, critical cultural discussion within groups about certain cultural issues, cultural performance and cultural experience, etc.

In off-line classroom the teachers conduct certain mini-lectures concerning the topic of each unit to deepen the learners' understanding of particular cultural topics. The word guess game or cultural words dictation is to check how big the learners' cultural vocabulary is and to stimulate the learners to enlarge their cultural vocabulary. The group is organized according to the learners' will and with three or four people in one group and with one group leader to be in charge of the group affair. Each group is responsible for the presentation of one unit topic and their presentation is graded based on the performance of the whole group. Therefore, the group members undertake different parts of the group task and complete the task through cooperation and mutual support. And in face-to-face class, each group is needed to raise one or two question concerning different cultural topics and participate in group discussion and the group members are required to take turns to do class report on behalf of their group. Sometimes certain group is encouraged to do cultural performance or cultural experience in class. For instances, a group with two boys and two girls makes a short play about Chinese cheongsam in class and another groups with four boys experience skin scraping therapy in class. The activities like cultural performance and cultural experience can make a lively cultural atmosphere in class and can also provide the learners with opportunities to experience culture in person.

In after-class stage, also called the stage of "cultural theory-practice integration", the learners are suggested to participate certain Chinese cultural activities conducted in English, such as cultural competition and cultural experience activities. The cultural competitions include Chinese cultural knowledge competition, English creative writing concerning Chinese culture, English micro-video competition concerning Chinese culture, etc. The Chinese cultural experience activities are mainly offered by school academies, such as paper cut,

Peking opera, tea ceremony, calligraphy and painting. These after-class activities are designed to carry out the teaching principle "learning by doing".

3.3 Teaching Reflection

The teaching group has employed the blended teaching model in the course "Introducing Chinese Culture in English" for three semesters. In the end of each term, the teachers make investigation among learners about the teaching and learning effect of the blended model through questionnaire, class observation and interview. The finding shows that 89% of learners are accustomed to the blended teaching and learning model and think they obtain a great deal of cultural knowledge through on-line self-learning. And 78% of learners say they like to actively take part in the off-line group discussion and class report because these activities can improve their cultural competence and all-round abilities. Admittedly, there are still a small group of learners who cannot adapt themselves to the new teaching method and prefer to the traditional teacher's lecture because they do not want to devote too much time to self-learning a lot of cultural materials and they lack the ability to express the cultural ideas in English. As for the teachers who involve in the blended teaching method feel satisfied with the teacher-learner interaction, and feel optimistic about implementing this technology-based teaching method in the college English cultural course. In the meantime, they also feel anxious about how to design more feasible and effective class activities to attract more learners to take part in the group discussion and class report and further enhance the learner-learner interaction which can be regarded as the weak part of the whole teaching and learning process.

4. CONCLUSION

In the information age, the blended teaching model has become the most popular and trendy way to conduct foreign language course, especially English cultural courses. Before face-to-face classroom, the large amount of cultural knowledge input is essential for the learners who will use what they have acquired in on-line classroom to participate in the discussion and debate in the off-line classroom. And the after-class cultural activities will also enable the learners to further comprehend what they have obtained in on-line autonomous learning and off-line cooperative learning. The blended teaching and learning model can increase the learners' cultural knowledge,

improve the learners' critical thinking competence, stimulate their learning potential and creativity, and further cultivate their cultural literacy.

In the future research, the teaching group will focus its attention on the design and organization of the attractive and effective off-line classroom activities to further enhance the learner-learner interaction through which the teachers can encourage more learners to open their mouths to express their ideas in front of the audiences. And the teachers will also make efforts to conduct the humanistic and moral education in face-to-face classroom because the blended teaching and learning model fit perfectly in the character education in the context of college English cultural courses.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Yuping Jia wrote the manuscript, Yonggang Miao did the research design, and Xiangyu Jiang was responsible for revising and editing.

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