

MOOCS—Challenges and Opportunities in College English Teaching Reform

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Abstract. According to the requirements for college teaching reform in universities and colleges offered by the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education and the Steering Committee of the Foreign Language Teaching Committee of the Ministry of Education. Since 2014, our university has taken the lead in implementing college English teaching reform in Jilin province and even in the national agricultural universities, breaking the structure of a required course in college English and constructing a multi-dimensional curriculum system including compulsory courses, module optional courses and practical courses. This poses a serious problem for the practice of foreign language teaching reform. Since 2012, the rapid development of MOOCS has brought challenges and opportunities to the reform of college English teaching, especially in providing the platform for module optional courses. This paper introduces what MOOC is and its characteristics, and then discusses the challenges and opportunities that MOOC brings to college English teaching and summarize how to make use of MOOC to promote the reform of college foreign language teaching.

Introduction

College English is a part of humanistic education in colleges and universities. It has both instrumental and humanistic qualities. The instrumentality of college English is not only the improvement of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating skills in the basic stage but also the acquisition of relevant skills in academic or professional fields by learning academic or vocational English related to a major or future work [1]. According to the requirements for college teaching reform in universities and colleges offered by the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education and the Steering Committee of the Foreign Language Teaching Committee of the Ministry of Education, our university has taken the lead in implementing college English teaching reform in Jilin province and even in the national agricultural universities, breaking the structure of a required course in College English and constructing a multi-dimensional curriculum system including compulsory courses, module optional courses and practical courses. The basic English class periods will be compressed from 264 to 192, and the listening and speaking training courses will be added, which will be opened during the semesters 1-4; the optional courses cover 4 modules, including practical English skills training module (English visual-audile-oral course, college English translation and writing course), advanced English module (advanced English reading, advanced English skills training), general education module (English national cultural studies, literature review) and general academic English module (agricultural science and agricultural science and technology English reading, translation and writing), which will be opened during terms from the 3rd to 7th. Because of the limited class periods, the 4 modules will be opened smoothly and effectively with the help of MOOCS. MOOCS bring challenges and opportunities to the reform of college English teaching.

MOOC and Its Characteristics

What is MOOC? Since 2012, the Year of MOOC[2], the name of MOOC, which has attracted much attention both at home and abroad, was jointly proposed by Canadian scholars Dave Cormier

and Bryan Alexander in 2008. It means the large-scale development of network courses, and it is a new teaching mode in the open education field in recent years [3]. “M” in MOOC stands for massive and differs from the traditional course only by dozens or hundreds of students. MOOC is available for tens of thousands of people, up to 160 thousand people; “O” stands for open, interest oriented, anyone who wants to learn can register to learn, regardless of nationality; the third letter “O” stands for online, learning online without travel, without restriction of time and space; “C” stands for course [4]. With the development of MOOC, several MOOC education institutions were born. They are coursera, edX, udacity, Khanacadem, codeacademy etc. In 2013, the famous universities of China, Qinghua University, Beijing University and so on established the online curriculum project in edX and Fudan University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University signed the contract with coursera [5].

Characteristics of MOOC. MOOC has three characteristics. The first one is large-scale. The most important characteristic of MOOC is large-scale, mainly manifests in the large number of schools to participate in the development of curriculum resources, larger number of curriculum types and large numbers of students. The second one is the Internet. Course development, learners’ participation and achievement tests of MOOC are completed on the Internet, without the limitation of space and time. The third one is openness, which mainly manifests in the educational idea, the learning subjects and the way of learning [6]. Three key characteristics are revealed: varied definitions of openness, barriers to persistence, and a distinct structure that takes the form as one of two pedagogical approaches. The concept of openness shifts among different MOOCs, models, researchers, and facilitators [7].

MOOC—Challenges in College English Teaching Reform

There are 4 optional modules in college English multi-dimensional curriculum system. They are practical English skills training (English audio-visual-oral course, college English translation and writing course), advanced English module (advanced English reading, advanced English skills training), general education module (English national cultural studies, literature review) and general academic English module (agricultural science and agricultural science and technology English reading, translation and writing). The setting of these courses is reasonable, and they add content and vitality to college English teaching but there is difficulty in opening these courses, for example, the course content should be taken into account for the different majors and needs of the students. The setting of the courses will be limited by the teachers’ professional background and academic ability, and there is difficulty in the choice of teaching materials [8]. Therefore, each college English teacher needs to solve the above problems, to maximize teachers’ professional expertise and language background, and to maximize the foreign language proficiency of students. Today, with the rapid development of network information, MOOC plays a very important role in college education [9] because MOOC is different from the traditional classroom, not only can go out of the classroom and schools but also can reach every corner of the world through the Internet [9].

Teaching Mode and Teaching Content. In the traditional teaching mode of college English, the traditional teaching theory advocates the “three central theory”. That is teacher center, book center, classroom center [10]. Teachers are still dominant in the classroom, and students are the recipients of knowledge; teaching revolves around text books and pays attention to the teaching of knowledge points and the training of students’ skills in class, which has restrained the students’ thinking, affecting train students’ divergent thinking and creative thinking [11]. For traditional teaching content, college English teaching revolves around text books and the main task of teaching is to explain the text. The basic part of teaching is text introduction, text structure analysis, vocabulary explanation, difficult sentence explanation, writing method appreciation and so on. Teachers explain the text with a small amount of oral practice which is mainly based on the word and sentence level, students rarely have opportunities to communicate in English [12].

Role of Teachers. In the traditional teaching theory, the relationship between teachers and students is that teachers are the main body of teaching and students are the object of teaching,

emphasizing on teachers' authority, teachers play a leading role in teaching. As Comenius Johann Amos put it: The teacher's mouth is the source of knowledge, the stream of knowledge flows out of the teacher's mouth and the students have to accept the pour of knowledge like a trough. Students have to obey the teacher's teaching, their main task is to learn knowledge. Its essence is teacher determinism, ignoring the creativity of students [13].

MOOC— Opportunities in College English Teaching Reform

Application of Blended Teaching. Blended learning is to combine the advantages of traditional learning methods with the advantages of Networked learning, that is during the teaching process, teachers play the leading role in guiding, inspiring and monitoring students and students develop initiative, activity and creativity [14]. Blended teaching can combine the advantages of MOOC with the advantages of traditional teaching. Considering the large investment in MOOC, therefore, MOOC can be applied in the theory teaching and students can use it for a long time with high performance price ratio. MOOC can also be used in class demonstrations, a large number of video, animation, and better visual effects can increase the vitality of theoretical teaching. For the first place, MOOC can bring good teaching effects in a large number of relevant cultural background knowledge about English text comprehension. Therefore, MOOC is suitable for the setting of advanced English module (advanced English reading, advanced English skills training), general education module (English national cultural studies, literature review). Understanding and application of the knowledge is closely related to culture. Failure to understand the customs and cultural traditions of the country in which the author lives is likely to lead to misunderstandings or distortions. For the second place, in classroom teaching, students must take part in group discussion, which forces students to improve their classroom participation to promote students' thinking. Therefore, students learn how to use their English knowledge to communicate flexibly, and effectively [15]. On MOOC platform, students select online aggregation of a large number of curriculum resources according to their interests and the actual situation. Compared with the traditional college English class, the teaching content of MOOC is very rich, and the amount of information is also very large [11].

Improving the Professional Quality of Foreign Language Teachers. With the arrival of MOOC, the teacher's level of information technology is very important. The reality is that many teachers have very low level of information technology. After the busy education and teaching work, teachers devote less time to information technology learning. Teachers should set up a scientific and modern teaching concept of keeping pace with the times. Teachers should apply the new technology brought by MOOC, so that students can learn knowledge without the limitation of time and space. Students can enjoy the best educational resources in the world free of charge according to their own conditions and interests. This puts higher demands for the teachers. Teachers should improve the teaching cognitive ability, teaching operation ability and teaching monitoring ability. Meanwhile, teachers should flexibly use all kinds of modern teaching methods to adapt to the rapid development of MOOC [15].

Conclusion

Although the introduction of MOOC is not for a long time, it has brought great impact and challenge to the traditional classroom teaching, which means the teaching method of MOOC is a subversion of the traditional teaching idea [11]. MOOC has injected new ideas, new thoughts and new methods into college English teaching. The teaching idea of MOOC is introduced into college English teaching practice, which will lead to the innovation of English teaching mode, so as to enhance the interest and effectiveness of college English learning [15]. As college English teachers, we should seize the opportunity and realize the reform of college English teaching with the teaching resources and ideas of MOOC to set advanced English module (advanced English reading, advanced English skills training), general education module (English national cultural studies,

literature review) to promote the development of college English teaching and the improvement of teaching quality in China.

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