

SPOC-Based College English Course Mode Aimed for Art Majors: Research and Application

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Abstract

SPOC realizes the effective combination of classroom learning and online learning. The research thus carries out a six-month teaching experiment on SPOC-based college English teaching mode on art majors and investigates the teaching effect. Analysis shows that, combining the advantages of MOOC and traditional classroom teaching, SPOC offers the learners a more open language environment where they play a relatively active role in the whole learning process. For teachers, SPOC allows them to share teaching resources with different focuses and difficulty according to students' actual levels. After the class, with the help of data, they are able to offer timely and specific guidance and tutorship to students based on actual learning situation.

Keywords

SPOC-Based Course Mode; College English; Art Majors; MOOC.

1. Introduction

Armando Fox, Professor in Berkeley's Electrical Engineering & Computer Science Department coined the term SPOC (Small Private Online Course) (Fox, 2013). According to Fox, SPOC being used in classroom teaching can enhance the teachers' instructing effect, foster learning and boost student engagement. SPOC, as a private online course formed by restricting the class scale, primarily by limiting the students to on-campus students, is a learning model where MOOC is localized to suit actual conditions and some existing problems of MOOC are solved, such as matching the MOOC resources with specific teaching object, course objective, course difficulty and the acquired knowledge of students (He Bin, Cao Yang, 2015).

Research on SPOC used in foreign language learning in China started in 2014 and went through several stages, including theory introduction application and improving. Currently, the research of "SPOC+flipped classroom" is in the development period from theoretical research to applied research (Zhao Jingmiao, 2022). The theme covers SPOC-based flipped class, teaching design and teaching effect. Wang Na analyzes the deconstruction of traditional classroom teaching mode by SPOC-based flipped class and the reconstruction of classroom teaching based on this. Jiang Yan describes the educational administration condition, teaching condition and guarantee factors for flipped class to be carried out on a large scale. Xu Lin examines the mechanism of how five negative factors affect college English learners in learning motivation. Generally speaking, current research in China shows that domestic scholars are actively participating in the research and practice of SPOC-based college English teaching mode, and the research subject is focused on teaching mode design, practice, teaching effect analysis and teaching mode improvement. However, the research on SPOC-based course aimed for art majors is insufficient. Thus the research is conducted as an attempt to supplement study in the field as is discussed. The paper describes the whole research and analyzes the teaching effect.

2. Overall Analysis

Overall analysis is conducted before the research. In specific, the teaching object, teaching content, current teaching situation and learners are analyzed.

2.1. Teaching Object and Teaching Content

College English III is a common required course aimed at second-year college students in their third semester of College English learning. The courses serve the objectives of the university, the talents training objectives of the country and the individual development needs of students. The course undertakes the task of cultivating and improving students' English application ability, intercultural communication awareness, autonomous learning ability and comprehensive cultural accomplishment. The teaching objective is to enhance students' English ability for use, cross-cultural communication, independent learning and cultural foundation. The teaching contents consists of two parts: English for general purposes and English for specific purposes. The course is made up of sixty teaching periods; half of it is used for English for general purposes and the rest is for English for specific purposes. The participating students are all art majors, including art design, fine arts and fine arts studies.

2.2. Current Teaching Situation

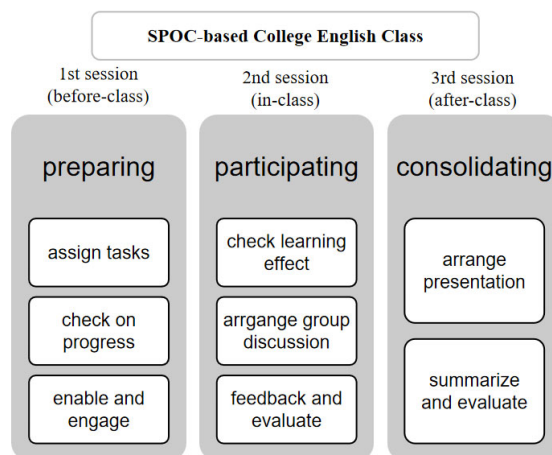
The students attend College English III twice every week and each session comprises two teaching periods which lasts for 45 minutes. Each class is made up of 52 to 65 students. Due to the large scale of class, the teacher cannot pay full attention to students' individual needs in language learning, and the teaching resources shared by the teacher are based on average level of learners instead of different levels of language competence. Before entering each unit, the teacher would assign tasks to the students to get prepared, such as looking for materials related to the theme, get familiar with the vocabulary, etc., but the effect is insignificant partly due to students' lack of specific guidance as for exactly what to look for and how to find what they need, and partly due to the fact that students can get overwhelmed with the vast ocean of information.

After the class, the teach keeps up with students learning condition in the form of discussion on online forum , Longman Interactive English, and instant messaging app, such as WeChat and QQ, but the lack of big-data analyzing techniques makes such effort time-consuming and energy-consuming, thus effective feedback is wanted.

2.3. Learners

In the research, the learners are art majors under the undergraduate programme of Fashion Design, Visual Communications, Ceramic Art and Oil Painting. These students spent at least one third of their middle school years on enhancing art foundation, learning sketch and watercolor, etc. Accordingly, the time for English is less than their peers. In college, their second language foundation is weak. As there is a co-relation between learning motivation and self-efficacy (Zhou Yong, Dong Qi, 1994), they generally show declining interest in the College English class as their self-efficacy goes down in College English learning where the requirement on the students' part goes up as compared with that in high school time. Besides, learners in the same class show distinct difference in their language foundation, motivation and learning strategy. Besides, some of the students haven't transformed their attitude towards English from seeing English learning as a way merely to pass exams to regarding it as a useful tool that can help them enhance study in other field and broaden horizon. Thus, these students generally show low motivation after passing College Entrance Examination where English still accounts for a significant proportion.

3. Constructing and Improving Blended Teaching Mode Based on SPOC



The research is aimed to examine the feasibility and teaching effect of SPOC being applied to College English course for art majors in an art institution in mainland China. The course lasts for six months and the teaching objects are 2nd-year art majors in their third semester of College English learning.

Based on situations, initiative and integrity (Lv Tingting, Wang Na, 2016), virtual community for learning and on-campus class is combined. The teacher sets two English learning situations: the online one and the offline one, where collaborative learning is encouraged and highlighted. The resources in the community are created with the joint effort of the teacher and the student, including College English III Course and An Introduction to Fine Arts on Mooc Platform for China Universities, as well as a series of micro videos on different themes made or adapted by the teacher, are open for adapting and modifying according to teaching needs. The experimental teaching mode lasts for six month and at the end of the semester, the teaching effect is evaluated with questionnaire and interview based on the four factors of a course framework, including the teaching objective, teaching content, teaching process and teaching evaluation (Tyler R W., 1949).

Based on the results of empirical research and feedback from teachers and students, the author improved the syllabus, curriculum standards and handouts. According to the actual teaching effect of the last stage, the author has adjusted the teaching plan, and developed a more perfect teaching system, so as to provide a complete and systematic teaching implementation plan and materials for the future teaching of our school and other art colleges. In addition, reflection and summary are made in theory to provide first-hand data and materials for future research in this field.

3.1. Before-class Autonomous Learning

Autonomous learning is arranged in the first session. At the beginning, the teacher informs the students of the teaching content and what they need to grasp with autonomous learning. The class log on to the the Platform of MOOC for China universities and access resources which are given in the form of videos, written documents, etc., to further their understanding. If questions occur, they seek the answers by themselves first. If the questions are solved, they deepen their understanding and move on the next stage of learning. If not, they may seek help from the teacher and various resources that are available. In the meanwhile, the teacher log on to the platform and check real-time study data, offer guidance based on the data and students' question that cannot be solved by themselves.

3.2. Classroom Learning

One week after assigning the tasks comes the classroom session. The teacher carries out this part through specific content-based tasks. Students internalize their learning by finishing the tasks. The tasks cover reading, listening, speaking, writing and translating. This part may consist of two periods to four period based on the difficulty of the unit.

3.3. After-class Consolidation

Before the last session, student form different groups and prepare for the final presentation. The content is based on different units. In the second session of classroom teaching, they give the presentation to the class and then teacher-student evaluation, as well as peer evaluation are conducted. The teacher summarizes the whole process, evaluates student performance, clarifies the confusion and corrects mistakes if there are. All students evaluate peer performance and share experience accumulated.

4. Teaching Effect Assessment

The final assessment comprises two parts: online study performance and offline performance, respectively taking up half of the full score. The first part is based on learning behaviors, such as viewing videos, doing exercises, taking exams, participating in discussions and test results for each chapter. The second part is based on students' classroom performance and the score is based on teacher-student evaluation and peer evaluation.

The teaching effect is evaluated in the form of quantitative research and qualitative research. The former is based on analysis of questionnaire on learners and teachers and the later is based on interviews on learners and teachers as regards the learning environment and process.

4.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire for students is adapted from the Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) developed by Gardner and Lambert (Gardner R. C., 1985). To conform to this study, only items about students' learning motivations and their attitudes toward learning English were maintained. The research group issued thirty-five questionnaires to the learners, and thirty-four valid questionnaires were recovered. The questionnaire comprised 40 questions regarding learners' cloud class learning experience and classroom learning experience.

4.2. Interview

Classroom observation and on-the-spot notes were used as the basis for the formation of interview questions, and then a semi-structured interview was designed. The recordings are transcribed and coded with memo, and data is analyzed after being sorted. The questions cover teachers' evaluation of the class, learning effect, students' performance as well as students' own comment on the class, their own performance and their mindset in a certain situation.

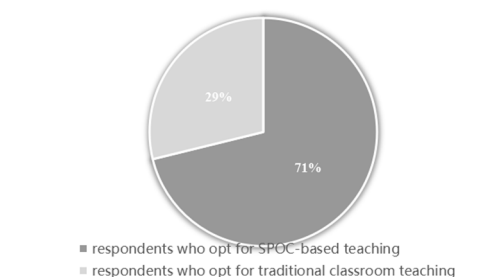
4.3. Analysis

After sorting and analyzing, classroom observation notes show that after autonomous learning, students have grasped what is expected of them for the first session of learning and thus demonstrate confidence at a certain level when finishing tasks. Thus, the scaffolding effect of the teacher and classroom learning become more evident on the students' part. Though some students are still facing difficulty in the presentation due to spoken language limitations, they still show fluency and confidence when compared with previous classroom performance.

Semi-structured interviews also prove this. The first session where students have taken enough input enable them to use the language with less limitations, thus delivering performances of relatively high quality and the the language skills are internalized more efficiently. According to the students, the language and information input in the cloud class is more systematic and

goal-driven than general preparation in the form of reading and memorizing which is what they used to do before traditional classroom learning. In the process, “I know exactly what to do and when puzzling questions occur, I have enough time to engage myself in the answer-seeking effort with the help of various sources.” As for the question “what if you cannot successfully locate the answer after the endeavor?” Another student responds that in the new course mode, he could make full use of the second session and third session instead of directly asking for “answer” from the teacher. “In most cases, the whole learning process seems more integrated and goal-oriented. When I invest full time and sufficient effort on the quest, the knowledge on a certain subject stand out like a map in my mind and I will get to know how to locate the answer.”

As the respondents are all 2nd-year students whose second language acquisition experience is limited to traditional classroom teaching and SPOC-based teaching till they finish the questionnaire, the first question regarding course mode preference offers two options instead of three or more. The results of the questionnaire show that 71.18% prefer the mixed teaching mode of SPOC-based College English class. As for the reason, 36% choose “it is more interesting”, 28% choose “they can master difficult points more efficiently and improve English oral expression ability.”, 16.25% choose “The new course mode gives them more freedom for exploring by themselves” while the rest choose “other reasons”. When being asked to describe their feelings with three key words, 82.04% of the learners mention words related to initiative, such as active, positive willing, enthusiasm, etc.



In the answer to the multiple-choice question “What is your favorite SPOC-based class activity?”, 65.29% opt for MOOCs learning while 28.02% choose group work. Among the people who opt for MOOCs learning, 76.15% choose video watching as their favorite MOOC learning activity while 18.93% think both video watching and finishing quiz and tasks are attractive.

As for the second session, when being asked about “what’s your most impressive classroom activity?” 56.06% opt for “presentation”, 27.87% choose “group discussion”, 18.90% choose “summary report” and the rest 16.07% of students choose “other activities”. As for what is the biggest benefit you get from classroom activity, over one third choose real-time feedback from the teacher and peers.

In terms of challenges, over 82.31% of the students mention that challenges do exist, such as “lack of self-control”, “confusion about what is expected during autonomous learning”, “poor time-managing skills” and “lack of confidence to make public presentation”.

When being asked about coping strategies, 42.98% of the respondents mention that they would use put off difficult tasks until getting close to the deadline while 38.20% of them would use schedules to remind themselves of the unfinished tasks at every stage, and the rest 18.82% opt for seeking help from the outside, such as the teacher, the peers and making use of online resources.

5. Conclusion

This study researches into SPOC-based college English Teaching model applied in art colleges, and based on the experiment conducted among second language learners in an art institution of higher learning in their third semester of College English learning, it has been proved that compared with traditional classroom teaching and MOOC, SPOC has unique advantages as regards satisfying individual-based needs, learning environment for students, and class management. In this study, the advantages of traditional classroom and MOOC teaching are integrated, while the temporal and spatial limitations of the former and the learning management shortcomings of the latter are specifically avoided. Based on the actual needs of art students, a new teaching mode based on SPOC concept is constructed.

Compared with traditional college English class, learners in SPOC-based learning environment can take the initiative to sort language points and skills instead of passively being asked to finish tasks, thus creative and positive application is achieved. Before-class independent learning enables the students to play a more active part in learning. Before-class learning, collaborative learning and learning by inquiring make the learners establish a connection between existing knowledge, locate difficult points beforehand, grasp what they lack with the help of various resources and clarify similar concepts.

Compared with traditional college English classroom, SPOC model has a more open language teaching environment, which is an ideal model for college English teaching in art colleges. Supported by advanced educational information technology, it expands the learning time and space of traditional teaching, and can realize instant information exchange and division of labor and cooperation between teachers and students.

Comparing the traditional classroom and the new MOOCs, the research finds that the blended teaching mode not only avoids the spoon-feeding teaching method and boring teaching content, but also avoids the mistake of teaching into entertainment. It combines the seriousness and preciseness of teaching knowledge with the liveliness and vividness of teaching form, maximizing the advantages of flipped classroom teaching mode. It effectively completes the internalization and solidification of knowledge, is conducive to greatly improve the comprehensive score and learning effect of college students, helps to reduce learning pressure, enhance learning confidence, improve learning interest, promote the communication and understanding between teachers and students, and inject new vitality into teaching.

On the students' part, SPOC-based learning requires self-discipline, time-managing skills and collaboration among peers at a higher level than traditional classroom learning does, so they need to enhance their self-discipline by keeping away from irrelevant information interruption and tap into resources on making scientific use of limited time. Besides, it is suggested that students adapt to the collaborative learning mode which is highly required if satisfactory learning effected is expected.

It should be noted that, as the English learning for art majors has its unique features as regards students cognitive characteristics, learning motivation, language foundation, etc., the teacher is suggested to pay special attention to exploring various forms of online and offline interaction and process-oriented learning evaluation, so that students enthusiasm can be fully triggered. In order to implement SPOC-based college English teaching in a highly efficient way, rich and convenient online teaching resources are the foundation, extending the width and depth of resources and the form of online and offline interaction is the key. Last but not least, process-oriented learning evaluation method is the guarantee.

Acknowledgments

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