

Teaching Design of Interactive Online Chinese Writing Classes for Foreigners Based on Google Classroom

Bingxin Li

ALCO Insurance Brokers Pte Ltd 079903, Singapore

Abstract

Due to the impact of the New Coronary Pneumonia epidemic, teaching activities around the world have to be converted from offline to online in a short period of time, and the ecological environment of international Chinese language teaching has also changed accordingly. Based on Google Classroom and the theory of interactive Chinese language teaching, this article intends to take the teaching design of a character description writing class as an example, summarize its experience and reflect on its shortcomings on the basis of the design and research of previous foreign Chinese teaching, design a case study of an online Chinese writing class, and discuss the considerations regarding the development of an online Chinese writing class accordingly, hoping to provide teachers with some new ideas.

Keywords

Online teaching; Google Classroom; Chinese as a foreign language; Writing class; Interactive Chinese teaching.

1. About Google Classroom

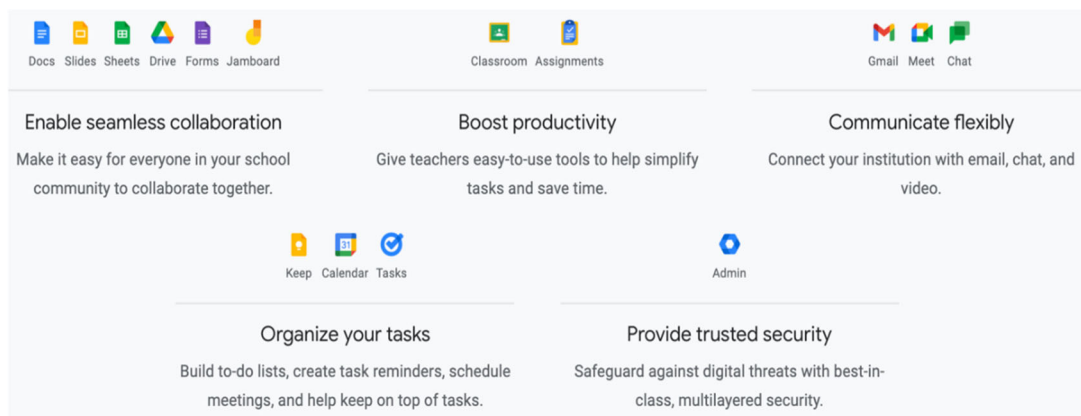


Figure 1. Google Classroom components

Figure 1 is a comprehensive statement of the Google Classroom components on the Google website. As the diagram shows, each of the components of Google Classroom can be found in products with similar functionality. However, the components of Google Classroom are well connected, collaborative and shared, helping teachers to achieve a one-plus-one effect in their preparation, delivery and management of lessons.

When teachers use Google Classroom to teach Chinese as a foreign language online, the components that are commonly used include Classroom, Meet, Docs, Sheets, Slides, Drive, Gmail, Calendar and so on. When teachers sign up to Google, they will be given a Gmail account which they can use to log in to other Google software. Teachers can also use Gmail to communicate with students in their classes.

Docs, Sheets and Slides are all free online office software provided by Google to create and edit documents for collaborative work between teachers and students, and they are compatible with Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint respectively. Processed documents can also be saved on Drive, Google's online storage service, which provides both online synchronised storage and categorised storage for course materials and other relevant documents. Teachers can share the learning materials stored in Drive with their students by linking them as needed, so that both teachers and students can access, view and work with the documents at any time, regardless of time, place or device. Classroom is an interactive educational management platform that records basic information about teachers and students and enables activities such as course creation, interactive question and answer sessions, assignment distribution and marking, and real-time interactive evaluation. Classroom also automatically generates a folder for each course in Drive to store materials in a separate category for easy access by teachers and students.

2. Interactive Teaching Methods

Interactive Teaching was first introduced by American educational psychologists A.L. Brown & A.S. Palincsar in 1989. It is a self-directed approach to learning based on interpersonal interaction that aims to improve students' reading comprehension and self-monitoring skills. According to H. Douglass Brown, 'interaction' refers to the mutual exchange of ideas, feelings and influences between two or more people. The teaching method advocates that students interchange roles from time to time, sharing resources, teaching and learning between teachers and students, and showing friendship and mutual help in order to accomplish the teaching task together. (Pang Weiguo 2003; Kim Fanwoo 2018). Wu Qinglin (2012) proposes that interactive pedagogy is a pedagogy in which teachers and students, or students and students together, engage in two-way or multi-way equal communication and autonomous interaction around a content or topic in a macro teaching situation.

The interactive approach emphasises the teacher's role as an organiser of classroom activities, a guide to learning activities and a facilitator of learning strategies in the teaching and learning process. It is reflected in the teaching process that students are the subject of classroom teaching and the centre of teaching activities, while the teacher acts as the organiser of classroom teaching activities, the controller of classroom rhythm and the facilitator of students' learning strategies and methods.

The design of the case study follows the concept and principles of interactive teaching and learning, making full use of Google Classroom as an online teaching platform for teaching Chinese as a foreign language. It is expected to promote a high level of interaction and improve learners' writing skills.

3. Research on the Use of Interactive Teaching in Online Teaching of Chinese as A Foreign Language

The rapid development of the Internet has made real-time online videoconferencing technology more and more mature, laying a solid technological foundation for interactive online teaching of Chinese as a foreign language. In addition, with the global spread of the New Coronary Pneumonia (COVID-19) epidemic, traditional offline teaching has become difficult to carry out in many countries and regions, and the demand for online teaching has exploded, and research on the design of remote interactive Chinese teaching has accelerated.

Zheng Lufei (2010) systematically introduced the practice of interactive videoconferencing distance learning in primary and secondary schools in the US, and proposed solutions to the problems that arose in practice based on specific cases. Li Ruoxuan (2015) examines how to

make full use of educational technology to achieve interaction in online instructional design from the perspective of teaching activity design. Gao Xing (2019) conducted a detailed design of an integrated lesson reform based on the Kahoot platform for Chinese learners in Poland, demonstrating the successful practice of educational technology in teaching Chinese as a foreign language through several teaching cases. Lin Mianhuan (2019) and Zhou Bing (2020) each provide a more comprehensive design and implementation of the Zoom platform in teaching Chinese as a foreign language from different perspectives.

The above studies have made optimized solutions for teaching design based on different teaching platforms in the context of distance Chinese teaching, combining their respective teaching objects and the practical problems arising from teaching. However, there is still not enough research on how to apply the interactive teaching model to online writing classes. In view of this, this paper proposes to use Google Classroom as a platform to explore how to design an interactive Chinese writing class for foreigners.

4. Design and Analysis of Distance Chinese Classroom Teaching Based on Google Classroom

4.1. Course Design

To facilitate the exploration, this study proposes to design an interactive online Chinese writing course for foreigners as follows.

- 1) Target group: S4 students of Singapore Chinese Advanced Class with a vocabulary of about 2500.
- 2) Course content: detail description - character detail description
- 3) Teaching Objective: Students will learn to use detail descriptions to portray characters, and will be guided to pay more attention to life and discover the beauty of details in life, thus stimulating their interest in writing.
- 4) Teaching time: 60 minutes
- 5) Course requirements: Both teachers and students need to have a Google account and students should be able to use the components of Google Classroom.

To use Google Classroom online, teachers should first set up an online classroom, create a class and add students to it so that they can post information, manage students and communicate with them. Teachers can also upload relevant teaching resources to Drive in advance so that students can access them. During the preparation phase, the features and functions of the Google Classroom tools can be used to enable interaction between the platform, the teacher and the students.

4.2. Teaching Steps

- 1) Before the class starts, the teacher and students can enter Meet in advance and the teacher should share the screen with the students and turn on the video function. During the introduction phase of the class, the teacher can first show some simple and interesting pictures using Slides, and let the students talk about the content in the pictures, and guide them to add and evaluate each other, so as to attract more students to participate together and enhance the interaction. This is a great way to liven up the atmosphere and draw students' attention to the class, and to check the network to ensure that all students and teachers are joining in properly.
- 2) When moving to the formal teaching stage, the teacher can show two different sets of clips depicting the same story as shown in Figure 2: one with details and one without. Have students read the story clips in groups, discuss them and answer questions. The teacher can use the grouping function of Meet to group students for the discussion. Questions can be designed around identifying and evaluating the descriptions of the characters and their actions,

mannerisms, words, etc. in the two clips. Teachers can also arrange for students to read aloud in character.

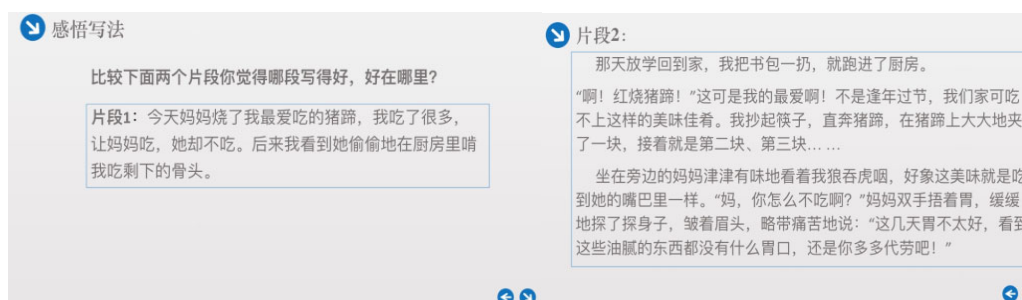


Figure 2. Example of comparing different portrayals of the same subject

The audio-visual function of Meet can provide a good interactive platform for discussion between teachers and students and between students. It facilitates teachers' comments and summaries, and allows students to have a good overall perception of the content of the passages. Providing example texts with comparisons for students to read aloud and analyse can help students quickly understand and grasp the essence of writing, and let them know the importance of observing the details of life in their writing practice and pay attention to the details in their writing.

3) Afterwards, the teacher can show some photos or drawings and ask students to observe the scenes reflected in them, and to develop reasonable associations and imaginations to translate the images into a story representation. Students can start by observing and discussing, for example, who or what is in the picture, what the characters in the picture might be doing, what their emotions are, and so on. On the basis of thorough observation and discussion, students can choose one of the pictures, choose their own perspective and develop their description. Before formally putting pen to paper, the teacher should agree with the students on some considerations, such as the title, word count, etc. Considering the level of students and the actual situation of the classroom, it is recommended that teachers can provide several photos or drawings of different themes for students to choose from, and the photos or drawings chosen should be focused and clear, with a strong storytelling aspect that allows students to find the entry point quickly and have some room for association and play. Ideally, students should be able to interpret different but all sensible, rich and vivid stories from a limited number of images. This allows students to choose their own angle, write about their own style and characteristics. The word count can be limited to about 60 words. During the writing process, the teacher should pay attention to the students' status one by one and, as needed, give timely guidance and assistance to students who encounter difficulties. After completing the writing, students can deposit their assignments in the web tray, i.e. complete the submission of the assignment.

4) As for the assessment of the essays, teachers can flexibly arrange for them to be selected for reading in class, or select more typical cases after marking them in class and present them to the class for discussion in the next lesson. Whatever the method chosen, students should be guided to actively participate in the appreciation and discussion of their essays, so as to further develop their writing skills through increased interaction and motivation and participation.

5. Reflections on the Teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language in Online Classrooms and Strategies for Response

Compared to offline teaching, the biggest advantage of online teaching activities is that they are not restricted by time and space. Teachers and students can join in the learning anytime and

anywhere as long as they have access to the internet and devices. The rapid development of computers and information technology has made the internet more accessible and devices more widespread, with mobile phones, tablets and computers serving as both lifestyle and teaching tools. Offline teaching is usually only available in real time, and the only way for students to review, or catch up on missed points, is through notes and other forms. Teaching online, on the other hand, allows for easy recording, storage and access to lesson videos, which not only facilitates review by teachers and revision by students, but also allows for observation by those who are not involved in the teaching activities at the time and want to understand what is being taught. Teaching activities with the help of the teaching platform can also be made more efficient by providing great convenience in many details, such as setting course reminders and sending and receiving assignments. Writing on a computer, with the help of a keyboard and input method, reduces the stress and barriers to learning Chinese characters and enables students to better focus on their writing practice, and is a basic requirement for language and writing applications in the digital and internet age.

It is worth noting that even though it is very convenient, online platforms such as Google Classroom cannot provide quality teaching and learning by themselves, but still need to be planned and used wisely by teachers. Excellent platforms with excellent teaching methods work together to increase classroom interaction, strengthen language input and promote Chinese learning. At the same time, the motivation and autonomy of students, as the main subjects of learning, should also be cultivated and stimulated in order to ensure the maximum effect of online learning. Therefore, the online teaching platform and the teaching design need to be prepared in accordance with the target audience and the type of lesson being taught. Finally, online teaching places new demands on teachers, including their proficiency in the use of computers and the Internet, and their ability to manage an online course.

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