

The SPOC-based Blended Teaching Model for College English Grammar Course

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Abstract: SPOC is the teaching solution adaptable to the small-scale particular groups in the development of MOOCs and its application to college English grammar teaching is an inevitable trend for the integration of modern information technology into foreign language teaching. The study aims at constructing a blended teaching model for this course based on the online learning and offline teaching supported by SPOC. The online learning includes three stages as WIP (Watching-Interacting-Problem-raising); the offline learning includes four stages as RSEA (Reviewing-Solving-Enhancing-Assessing). This learning process is a reflection of constructivism and the students' cognitive level will be developed from the lower level of knowledge comprehension and application to the higher level of analysis, synthesis and evaluation, and finally their grammatical competence will be further improved.

1. Introduction

In the Key Points of the Ministry of Education's Work in 2018 (Educational and Political Law[2018]1), the Ministry of Education pointed out: "Advocating the inter-school network collaboration, exploring the pilot project of a new teaching mode based on information technology, implementing the project of deep integration of information technology and education, and promoting the classroom reform in colleges and universities". Therefore, with the renewal of educational concepts, the development of modern educational technology and the requirements of national policies, there is an urgent need to carry out the teaching reform to have a deep integration of information technology into classroom teaching in higher education.

College English grammar course is a compulsory course for English majors at universities. However, there still exist many problems in teaching, such as the teacher-centered teaching mode; the teacher's lack of cultivation of students' pragmatic competence and high-order thinking such as analysis, synthesis and creation; the limited supports of teaching resources, which could not meet students' individualized learning needs. SPOC (Small Private Online Course) may provide a possible solution to the problems. SPOC-based blended teaching model will combine students' online learning and teachers' offline teaching. This model is problem-oriented and task-driven and therefore, it will better combine the classroom teaching with students' personal learning, and to improve the students' comprehensive ability in English grammar.

2. The theoretical basis

2.1 The constructivist theory of learning

The constructivist theory of learning holds that learning is a process in which an active learner acquires meaning from personal experience or environment and constructs personal cognition in the process of solving problems. On the basis of their previous knowledge, learners construct their cognition in contexts. Therefore, the amount of knowledge a learner acquires depends more on the learner's ability in constructing the meaning of knowledge than only memorizing the contents taught by the teacher.

The four components of constructivism are situation, cooperation, conversation and meaning construction and the basic characteristics are autonomous, situational and social. First, autonomous.

When students construct personal knowledge, the teacher serves as resource provider, facilitator and collaborator to help them form new cognition. Second, situational. In a real situation, students learn through task-oriented activities, and they accumulate more experience, grasp the complexity and relevance of knowledge, and construct meaning in real contexts (Yuan Liping 2008). Third, social. Learners interpret things based on their own experience. They negotiate and collaborate with others so as to fully understand knowledge, and finally achieve a higher level of cognition. The whole process reflects the social feature of learning.

2.2 Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive goals

Bloom's cognitive goals are from the lower level to the higher level, including the remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, synthesis, and evaluating (Zhu Xun, Ma Wenjing 2014).

Remembering refers to recognizing and memorizing specific or Abstract knowledge, such as terminology, principles, structures or specific expressions. Understanding includes transformation, interpretation, inference, etc. Applying refers to the preliminary and direct application of the concepts, principles and structures. That is, students correctly apply Abstract concepts to concrete examples with personal learning. Analyzing is the use of the principles and structures to clearly decompose the overall language phenomenon into descriptive concrete contents, and students make clearer the language structures through comparison and contrast. Synthesis is based on analysis and integrates the specific language elements into a whole according to the new requirements, so as to solve new problems creatively. It belongs to the higher-order thinking. Evaluating is the highest cognitive goal. It requires not to judge through subjective feeling, but to reasonably make judgments, synthesize internal and external information, and to make inferences with objective facts.

3. The design of SPOC-based blended teaching model

In the SPOC-based blended teaching model, the construction of online course resources is the basis for effective implementation of blended teaching. The "online learning" fulfills the knowledge imparting in traditional teaching, and the "offline teaching" guides students to internalize, consolidate and extend their grammatical knowledge, which are not easy to fulfill in traditional class due to the limit of time. In this blended model, the "individualized learning", "feedback of problems and difficulties" and "diagnostic instruction" will be realized, and thus the students will gradually develop from the simple memorization, understanding and application of grammar knowledge to more advanced abilities such as analysis, synthesis and evaluating.

3.1 The construction of online course resources

Teachers need to integrate the core contents of grammar, reorganize the units and make videos, supplemented by the task lists, courseware, unit tests, supplementary reading and other resources. One week before the course starts, teachers need to upload the learning resources to the SPOC platform for students to conduct online learning independently. Here, the online course is the combination of paper textbooks, supplementary materials and experiences of teachers for years of accumulation. Based on these resources, the teachers redesign the course scientifically, and recorded the videos for the grammatical points involved in the curriculum. The online English grammar course can be obtained from SPOC of Liaocheng University and the resources of the online course are listed in Table 1.

Table 1 The resources of online English grammar course

Resources	Resource contents	Specific contents
Task lists	Study guidelines	Learning objectives, essential points, learning methods
	Learning tasks	Online study of videos, PPTs, quizzes, discussion, etc.
	Potential difficulties	Difficulties in each unit
SPOC video	Key points of English grammar	Lecturing, initial application, online test, discussion topics
Supplementary resources	literary texts, translation tests of CET4, 6 and TEM8, compositions	

3.2 The SPOC-based online learning

SPOC emphasizes the importance of teaching according to learners' characteristics and it is an online course offering individualized management and supervision of learners. (Ding Cuihong 2017). SPOC-based online learning will meet learners' individualized needs irrespective of time and space. The learners' online learning takes the WIP (Watching--Interacting--Problem-raising), facilitating learners to self-construct a new understanding based on their personal experiences and video learning. Moreover, the cognitive level of learners has evolved from the simple memorization and understanding of grammatical theory or framework to preliminary application to analysis and questioning. The online learning will be further elaborated in the following part.

(1) Video-watching and self-understanding

According to the requirements, students register, log in to the SPOC platform and join in the course. They determine the time and rate of learning independently, and complete the list of tasks before class: video learning, inter-video test and discussion. After class, students are required to finish the unit test and homework. In the learning process, all data related to students' performance are recorded by the online platform and are available to teachers and students. Therefore, students will independently conduct staged learning assessment to improve the effectiveness of learning.

In this stage, students are able to construct their personal cognition independently based on experience and teachers' explanations in the video. The differences among students can be compensated by individualized and independent learning activities, such as repeated video learning and consulting related materials, which are not limited by time and space. From the perspective of cognitive goals, students complete the simple memorization and understanding of grammar knowledge by online learning. That is, in this learning process, students identify and memorize specific or Abstract knowledge, form a preliminary perception and understanding of specific grammar items, which lays a solid foundation for the following learning activities.

(2) Forum interaction and sharing of ideas

After the video learning, students need to participate in the forum discussion for exchanging ideas. Besides, they may also raise questions on the platform to be answered by peers or teachers. According to the focus of grammar item, teachers will decide on one or two topics to be discussed, such as errors in language expression, certain language phenomenon, or translation task.

In this stage, the students try to apply the grammar concepts, principles or structures they've learned, and put the Abstract concepts into concrete examples to solve the problems in specific situations. Meanwhile, learners exchange views in the forum so as to have a deeper and comprehensive understanding of grammar language. This reflects the sociality of learning.

(3) Problem-raising

In the process of online learning, students can post queries in the question area at any time, and their peers may answer them through follow-up posts. Then teachers have chances to sort out students' difficulties by browsing these messages in question area, and offer appropriate feedback in online and offline teaching.

In this stage, students develop from the direct application of grammar theory or framework to further reflection into the language phenomena. They try to make a preliminary analysis of difficult points, and raise the awareness of problems in this learning process.

3.3 The SPOC-based offline teaching

The SPOC-based offline teaching takes the RSEA (Reviewing-Solving-Enhancing-Assessing) to solve the difficult problems in students' online learning and uses the real, comprehensive task to improve students' ability of grammar use as a whole. In this stage, the cognitive level of students will evolve from the preliminary analysis and questioning of grammar knowledge and linguistic phenomena to the comprehensive use, creation and evaluation of grammar knowledge, thus ultimately improving their abilities in using grammar appropriately in contexts. The offline teaching is composed of the following four steps.

(1) Reviewing the key points

In class, the teacher first offers feedbacks on students' online learning based on the big data

supported by SPOC platform, and then review the main points of grammar knowledge in this unit. This stage builds the connection between online learning and offline teaching for students, provides feedbacks and urges students to learn online independently, and be well prepared for the ongoing teaching activities.

(2) Solving problems

Teachers need to analyze the common problems and difficulties in students' online learning before class and conduct the targeted offline instructional design. Then in offline teaching, teachers lecture on and discuss these difficulties and extend the grammatical usage, thus helping students to solve difficulties and internalize the grammar knowledge.

(3) Enhancing capacity

Teachers assign comprehensive tasks related to grammar use, and the corpus involved in the tasks come from real life situations, such as conversation, text analysis, writing, translation and reading. Students conduct cooperative and exploratory study in groups, and complete the tasks through collaboration. Then the group reports to the class. Afterwards, teachers and students will question, analyze and answer the problems in the group report, and students may put forward higher-order questions. Thus, the students' grammatical competence will be further enhanced.

In this stage, students learn in real situations and around specific target tasks. These comprehensive tasks require students to make full use of the decomposed and specific grammar knowledge to reorganize them into a whole according to the new requirements. In this process, students will solve new problems creatively, which reflects the development of higher-order cognitive ability. Meanwhile, in the process of collaborative learning within groups, students grasp the complexity and relevance of knowledge, and form a multi-construction of meaning in the context, thus forming the new experience.

(4) Assessing performance

The teacher and group members give a comprehensive assessment of the group reporter and group performance. In this stage, students need to integrate the internal and external information of grammar knowledge and usage to make rational judgments in accordance with facts, which is also the highest order of cognitive thinking.

4. Assessment of SPOC-based blended teaching of English grammar

Assessment or evaluation of curriculum is an important stage in the teaching process. It plays an important role in ensuring the completion of teaching contents and the realization of learning objectives. However, the evaluation system constructed under the blended teaching model is different from that of the traditional classroom. It lays more emphasis on the complete learning process of students, assesses or evaluates the students' learning effects at different stages. The analysis based on the big data provided by SPOC platform can facilitate teachers to assess students' learning outcomes more objectively and scientifically.

The assessment system constructed in this study is composed of five aspects: assessment types, dimensions, index, contents and assessors. It offers an comprehensive evaluations of students' online learning and offline learning and adopts a combination of formative assessment (40%) and summative assessment (60%). Among them, formative assessment includes online learning assessment (20%) and offline learning assessment (20%). Each dimension has sub-dimensions and is assigned a certain value. The assessment system is listed in Table 2.

Table 2 The assessment of SPOC-based blended teaching of English grammar

Assessment types	Assessment dimensions	Assessment index (%)	Assessment contents	Assessors
Formative assessment(40%)	Online learning (20%)	Video learning(20%)	Total length(3hours/week)	teacher
		Forum interaction (20%)	Number and quality of post	
		Online test(30%)	Memorization and understanding	
		Online homework(30%)	Extension and application	
	Offline learning (20%)	Attendance(10%)	Attendance on time	teacher
		In-class test(30%)	Unit tests	teacher
		Individual performance(20%)	Amount and quality of questions	teacher
		Group presentation(40%)	Analysis and evaluation of grammar phenomena	peers, teacher
Summative assessment(60%)	Final test (60%)	Online test paper	Multiple choices, blank-filling, proof-reading, translation, writing	teacher

In this system, online learning assessment includes online learning records and learning effects. The online learning records include the total length of video learning, the amount of interactive questions and answers in the forum. The evaluation of learning effects includes the students' online tests of 12 units, online homework and two group tasks. The offline evaluation includes students' attendance in class, personal participation and group presentation. The forms of evaluation include teacher evaluation, student evaluation and group evaluation. The evaluation criteria include the participation of group members, fluency of language expressions and correctness of grammatical contents. The summative assessment is a final test, which includes a comprehensive survey of students' grammatical competence. The test types include multiple choices, blank-filling, proof-reading, translation and writing, in which the latter two involve the evaluation of students' overall language abilities.

Under the multi-dimensional assessment system of blended teaching, the function of evaluation is no longer the only way to judge the students' mastery of grammatical knowledge and language proficiency (Li Fengqing, Han Xiaoling 2017). More importantly, when classroom assessment goes together with the teaching process, the boundary between assessment and teaching begins to blur or even disappear. Assessment will become a powerful tool to promote students' interest in grammar learning and to enhance their active learning in improving the language abilities (Gardner 2008).

5. Conclusion

Nowadays, with the rapid development of information technology, the emergence of online courses, mobile learning and blended learning provides new concepts, new technology platforms, tools and resources for university classroom teaching (Mawulin, Hu Jiasheng 2014). The blended teaching of College English grammar course reflects the integration of foreign language teaching and modern information technology. It has great vitality and prospects in the deconstruction of traditional English grammar teaching and reconstruction of the classroom teaching on the basis of modern information technology. However, there's still room for practical explorations into the blended teaching of College English grammar course.

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