Research on MOOCs Based Intercultural Teaching in College English

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Abstract: With the deepening of educational informatization, the combination of E-Learning (digital or online learning) and traditional classroom teaching in the form of blended learning has been widely applied. The cultivation of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is one of the important goals of college English education. This paper focuses on the cultivation of ICC through MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) in teaching. It begins by reviewing the research and definition of ICC by scholars both domestically and internationally. Subsequently, it provides an overview of the current status and trends of domestic intercultural teaching based on MOOCs, summarizing achievements, identifying shortcomings, and aiming to provide insights for college English intercultural teaching and research.

1. Introduction

Traditional face-to-face classroom teaching, dominated by teacher-led instruction, has exposed some drawbacks over time. Students are accustomed to learning in a passive "receptive" manner, limiting their autonomy, initiative, and interest in the learning process. With the deepening of educational informatization, E-Learning (digital or online learning) has gradually entered people's field of vision and rapidly developed and applied in the education sector. This teaching model advocates student-centered, self-paced learning and has gained popularity among an increasing number of learners. Since the birth of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), issues such as high dropout rates and low completion rates have gradually become apparent. For example, on the edX platform, the electronic circuits course offered by MIT attracted over 155,000 registrations from more than 160 countries, but the course completion rate was very low. Duke University's "Bioelectricity: A Quantitative Approach" had over 10,000 student registrations, but less than 300 students persisted until the end of the course, with a completion rate of less than 3%. People are gradually realizing that both traditional classroom teaching and pure online learning have their own advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, the idea of blended teaching, combining the strengths of both, has emerged.

Blended teaching combines the advantages of traditional teaching methods with those of E-Learning. It emphasizes the active, proactive, and creative role of students as the main participants in the learning process while recognizing the guiding, inspiring, and monitoring role of teachers. Only by combining the strengths of both can the best learning outcomes be achieved. Introducing MOOCs into traditional classroom teaching, using them as learning resources in the online learning phase of

blended learning, and utilizing MOOC platforms as a medium for learners' socialized learning interactions can enhance the consolidation of knowledge learned in traditional classroom teaching. It also contributes to improving the completion rates of MOOCs.

2. Research background

The 19th chapter, Article 60 of the "National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Outline (2010-2020)", issued in 2010, emphasizes the need to "innovate the online teaching model, promote the popularization of quality education, improve teachers' proficiency in information technology, update teaching concepts, improve teaching methods, and enhance teaching effectiveness". The emergence of MOOCs poses both challenges and opportunities for higher education. For researchers, it is essential to actively explore the integration of MOOCs and higher education, thereby promoting the internationalization and popularization of higher education in China. In 2017, the "Guidelines for College English Teaching" identified intercultural education as one of the important tasks of college English courses. It explicitly stated that the goal of college English teaching is to cultivate students' English proficiency, enhance intercultural communication awareness and abilities, develop autonomous learning capabilities, improve overall cultural literacy, and enable them to effectively use English in study, life, social interactions, and future work, meeting the needs of national, social, institutional, and individual development.

Internationally, intercultural teaching, based on "digital education" has emerged. However, there is currently no specialized research in China on how to integrate MOOCs into intercultural English teaching at the university level to enhance the promotion of ICC among non-English major students ([30] Suo & Chi, 2018). This paper focuses on summarizing research on MOOCs based intercultural teaching in college English in China, aiming to find the room for improvement in college English teaching and provide insights for future college English teaching reform, thus eventually liberate students from the traditional "lecture-style" learning mode and shift their learning from "passive" to "active", thereby enhancing ICC of non-English major students.

3. Intercultural teaching, MOOCs and blended teaching

To understand the current status of blended college English intercultural teaching based on MOOCs, it is essential to comprehensively understand the current state of intercultural teaching research both domestically and internationally. Additionally, clear definitions of MOOCs and blended teaching must be clarified.

Research on intercultural teaching abroad primarily focuses on constructing conceptual frameworks ([11] Kramsch, 2011; [15] Uryu et al., 2014), developing characteristics ([7] Deardorff, 2009; [13] Risager, 2014), and cultivating approaches ([3] Bennett, 2009; [9] Huth, 2010) within authentic intercultural communication scenarios. [5] Byram (1997) has played a leading role in research on cultivating ICC. [4] Borghetti (2013) combined intercultural and language teaching models, proposing an integrated approach. [12] Moeller and Osborn (2014), building on the theoretical models of Byram, Deardorff, and Borghetti, outlined principles and classroom activities for intercultural teaching.

In China, since 2000, national foreign language teaching guidelines have included goals for cultivating ICC. Consequently, research on ICC and intercultural teaching have rapidly increased in domestic academic circles ([23] Hu, 2013). Research on these subjects in the field of English education in China can be categorized into three types: first, theoretical and speculative studies on intercultural teaching ([23] Hu, 2013; [25] Kong & Luan, 2012; [27] Pan, 2007; [29] Sun, 2016); second, descriptive studies on the current situation and needs of intercultural abilities among Chinese teachers and students ([17] Fan et al., 2013; [20] Han, 2014; [28] Shi, 2014; [31] Wu et al., 2013;

[32]Yang, 2013); and third, practical explorations of intercultural teaching based on theoretical foundations ([24] Huang, 2015; [18] Fu & Zhang, 2017; [33] Yang & Li, 2017).

MOOCs are defined as online courses that allow for massive student interaction and provide open resources over the internet. Various scholars have different interpretations of the concept. Wikipedia defines MOOCs as online courses that allow for massive learner interaction and provide open resources over the internet. [1] Mcauley et al. (2010) consider MOOCs as courses with massive student participation and interactive online learning using open resources. Professor Jiao Jianli was the first to translate "MOOC" into "Mu ke" (MOOC in Chinese) and received widespread recognition in the Chinese education community.

Blended teaching refers to a teaching method that combines traditional classroom teaching with online teaching ([2] Auster, 2016). Blended teaching can take various forms, with the most common being the replacement modality and supplement modality ([14] Twigg, 2003). The former reduces classroom teaching time and uses corresponding time for online teaching, while the latter retains the original classroom teaching time and uses online teaching during non-classroom hours. [21] He (2004), the earliest advocate of blended teaching in China, believes that blended teaching combines the advantages of traditional classroom teaching and online teaching, giving full play to the guiding, inspiring, and monitoring role of teachers, while also fully reflecting the initiative, enthusiasm, and creativity of students ([35] Zhang & Wang, 2014).

4. Status quo of blended intercultural teaching based on MOOCs

Since the development of MOOCs in 2012, the concept and methods of blended teaching based on MOOCs have sparked discussions among scholars. In practical applications, there are mainly two types of blended teaching designs based on MOOCs both domestically and abroad.

The first type is the flipped classroom model ([8] Ghadiri et al., 2013; [10] JPDL Croix et al., 2014; [16] Chen, 2015; [22] Hu & Wu, 2014; [34] Zhang & Ma, 2015). The basic pattern of this model involves students watching instructional videos at home and then engaging in targeted exercises. In class, students quickly complete a small assessment, internalize knowledge by solving problems, and finally summarize and provide feedback. For example, [22] Hu & Wu (2014) conducted a practice of flipping the classroom for college English based on a self-developed MOOC. Students autonomously learned with the MOOC before class, and the design of classroom teaching and evaluation activities followed a project-based approach based on autonomous learning through MOOCs. Each unit was completed in two forms: a group oral report and an individual written project. The research results showed that the flipped classroom teaching model based on MOOCs is applicable to college English teaching, and students highly appreciated the new model.

The second type is to use selected MOOCs as a supplement to traditional classroom teaching. In this mode, teachers still focus on traditional face-to-face courses, but MOOCs are utilized as high-quality resources to assist and complement traditional courses ([6] Holotescu et al., 2014). [26] Ma et al. (2016) conducted a collaborative blended teaching practice based on MOOCs. The study was a Sino-foreign cooperative teaching, with offline teaching primarily consisting of traditional classroom teaching and online activities, including MOOC learning, video communication with international teachers, and online discussions on local platforms. The courses selected were mainly science and engineering courses. Meanwhile, the study used questionnaires and interviews to evaluate teaching effects, with a relatively simple evaluation method. Therefore, the generalizability of this model requires further exploration. [30] Suo & Chi (2018) attempted to integrate the "Intercultural Communication" course on the international MOOC platform FutureLearn into their second-year comprehensive English course at the university. The research results showed that the instructional design successfully achieved the dual goals of improving both college students' ICC and English

proficiency. However, this study only conducted blended teaching experiments in the experimental group without using a control group. The data analysis was primarily qualitative, representing an exploratory practice of MOOC-based blended intercultural teaching. Therefore, the generalizability of its conclusions still needs systematic verification.

5. Conclusion

The theoretical construction and practical exploration mentioned above have expanded the field of intercultural teaching in China, significantly promoting the development of ICC for both English majors and non-English majors. However, the cultivation of ICC is a complex and long-term process. Achieving this goal cannot rely solely on classroom teaching; it also requires coordination with extracurricular activities ([23] Hu, 2013; [19] Ge & Wang, 2016). To overcome the limitations of communication between teachers and students in university English classrooms and to expand the external space for language and culture learning ([25] Kong & Luan, 2012), it is necessary to explore how to organically integrate intercultural communication practices into traditional language teaching classrooms and construct a new model of university English intercultural teaching that complements extracurricular activities.

In summary, research on intercultural teaching, both domestically and internationally, still revolves around traditional classrooms, with few designs for blended intercultural teaching based on MOOCs. Furthermore, the predominant form of teaching is often the flipped classroom model, characterized by pre-class knowledge dissemination through student-initiated learning, with in-class activities organized by teachers to internalize knowledge. That is, how to integrate MOOCs into intercultural teaching in college English to enhance non-English majors' ICC is still in the early stages of research in China, which calls for future research and practice in the field.

Acknowledgement

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