

Construction and Application of a Blended Online and Offline University English Course

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Abstract: This paper explores the design, implementation, and evaluation of the Integrated English 3 blended course, which integrates online learning through massive open online courses (MOOCs) and face-to-face classroom instruction. Guided by the production-oriented approach, the course aims to improve students' language proficiency and intercultural communication skills. It employs a variety of teaching methods, including online self-study, task-based learning, and collaborative group work, to foster student engagement and promote language output. The study highlights key elements of course construction, such as the use of MOOCs, the design of smart classrooms, and the development of a comprehensive assessment system that combines formative and summative evaluations. The results suggest that the blended teaching model enhances students' language skills while promoting critical thinking and cultural awareness. The course also emphasizes the importance of developing digital literacy among both students and teachers to effectively utilize online resources.

Keywords: Blended learning; Massive open online courses; Production-oriented approach; Intercultural communication; Course design

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1. Background of course construction

The "Implementation Opinions on the Construction of First-Class Undergraduate Courses" issued by the Ministry of Education on October 30, 2019, clearly outlined the overall requirements, content, and organizational management for constructing "first-class courses." A "first-class course," also known as a "golden course," is a concrete measure to promote the modernization of education and a strong educational nation. It is part of the "Double Ten Thousand Plan" and specifies detailed requirements for course construction^[1,2].

This study analyzes the connotation and construction principles of blended online and offline "first-class courses" in college English, using the "production-oriented approach" as the theoretical framework. It explores specific paths for building "first-class" blended courses from teaching objectives, content, methods, evaluation, and teacher development, aiming to provide references and insights for the construction and

teaching reform of the Integrated English 3 course.

Furthermore, the study involves conducting surveys and analyses of the target student group's needs. Data are collected through questionnaires, student interviews, and teacher feedback to understand students' learning needs, learning styles, and digital learning capabilities.

2. Key issues to address in the course and teaching reform

To meet the diverse learning needs of students, an essential challenge is designing flexible and varied teaching methods and integrating online and offline teaching resources effectively. Ensuring steady improvement in the quality of blended teaching is another critical focus. Additionally, it is necessary to cultivate teachers' blended teaching capabilities and digital literacy while redefining their roles to better suit the demands of this new teaching model. The development and utilization of high-quality teaching resources require particular attention. The design of scientifically sound evaluation methods and tools, along with the effective use of evaluation results to inform teaching practices and course improvements, is also vital. Finally, ensuring that reformed courses and teaching models are sustainable and adaptable to the constantly changing educational environment and requirements is a key consideration ^[3].

3. Development process of course construction

3.1. Overall course design

Following the Ministry of Education's requirements, a comprehensive blended course teaching system and educational framework are built, adhering to the principles of "changing perspectives, goal orientation, diverse content, method reform, scientific evaluation, and capacity building." The overall course design is based on several essential elements.

The teaching philosophy serves as the guiding thought and theoretical foundation of the course, embedding the concept of cultivating morality and comprehensive education into online learning content, classroom instruction, and course evaluation. This approach guides students in developing a correct worldview, outlook on life, and values through multiple channels and perspectives.

Using the production-oriented approach as a theoretical framework, blended teaching activities—such as online self-study, online evaluations, and interactive classroom sessions—are designed to be learning-centered, integrating study and application. The teaching goal emphasizes output, shifting from the traditional focus on language knowledge acquisition to a broader aim of improving language ability and literacy. This approach transforms the conventional "input-focused" teaching model into one that is "output-driven," linking the learning and application phases ^[4]. Online learning supports lower-level knowledge acquisition, while face-to-face classes foster higher-level knowledge output and advanced skills development.

3.2. Construction of the course environment

The construction of an appropriate course environment starts with selecting and building an online learning platform that suits the course's characteristics and student needs ^[5]. This platform includes both the institution's online teaching system and third-party educational tools, backed by technical support and training. Such a platform provides comprehensive functionalities, such as course management, resource uploads, assignment submissions, discussion boards, and live or recorded lectures.

The preparation and integration of teaching resources are also crucial. This involves developing,

selecting, and integrating various online learning materials, including electronic textbooks, multimedia presentations, teaching videos, online resources, and digital library materials, to diversify the course content.

In addition, the organization of teaching activities must be thoughtfully designed, incorporating online activities such as live-streamed lectures and group discussions, along with offline practices like project-based learning and micro-lesson exercises. This approach ensures that relevant teaching resources and venues are effectively utilized.

A robust learning support and tutoring system is necessary to assist students. This includes online Q&A services, study guidance, and academic consultations, providing continuous support to students throughout their learning journey^[6].

Ensuring access to appropriate technical equipment and a stable network environment is essential for seamless participation in online learning activities. Schools need to provide necessary devices, network infrastructure, and broadband access to maintain connectivity and security.

Designing conducive learning spaces and tools enhances the online learning experience. This involves creating virtual classrooms and learning communities and offering learning tools such as online whiteboards, document editing software, and online quiz systems to support effective learning.

3.3. Development of specific course elements

The development of teaching content includes not only the use of traditional in-class textbooks but also the integration of updated materials reflecting current affairs, Chinese traditional culture, and the latest technological advancements^[7]. This enriched content aligns with the holistic education concept, supporting interdisciplinary learning and enhancing course challenges to improve students' overall competencies.

Teaching methods in blended courses demand the use of advanced teaching technologies and the adoption of suitable methods to effectively link online and offline teaching elements. The “production-oriented approach” emphasizes the shift in teachers' roles, advocating for scaffolding and encouraging active student participation. Teachers facilitate a lively, interactive classroom environment and guide students step by step, incorporating problem-oriented strategies and flipped classroom models to address specific learning challenges^[8].

Assessment in blended teaching should be comprehensive and multifaceted, involving a range of methods and participant perspectives to ensure fair and objective evaluation of student learning. This approach motivates students and enhances their engagement. Evaluations should align with the “production-oriented approach,” incorporating innovative methods that emphasize online input and offline output. Non-standardized assessments, such as exploratory projects, reports, and papers, are recommended to add rigor and challenge to language production assessments^[9].

Finally, the digital literacy of teachers is fundamental to the success of a blended “first-class course.” Teachers must be adept at using online teaching platforms, assigning tasks, organizing discussions, tracking grades, conducting tests, and facilitating real-time interactions with students. They should also be capable of integrating smart devices effectively into face-to-face teaching to leverage modern teaching technologies as supportive tools.

4. Construction and application of course content and resources

The content and resource construction of the Integrated English 3 course follows the “Two Characteristics and One Degree” standard set by the Ministry of Education, which includes “advanced level,” “innovative

nature,” and “challenging degree.” This is primarily reflected in the course content and teaching model. In terms of course content, it aligns with the training objectives for foreign language talents and course positioning by organically combining knowledge, skills, and literacy to provide students with cutting-edge academic achievements and enhance the challenge of course content ^[10]. Regarding the teaching model, it is student-centered, achieving a deep integration of online and offline teaching. High-quality national and provincial online resources for foreign language courses are fully utilized, with carefully designed online and offline teaching activities that encourage students to produce more foreign language outputs, thereby improving the quality of English courses.

This course adopts a blended teaching model based on multiple massive open online courses (MOOCs). The first course is the Modern College English (Third Edition) Intensive Reading digital series, which aids students in previewing foundational knowledge of the textbook online. The second course is Integrated English 3, which serves as a supplementary study of important knowledge points and is completed through self-study. The third course is the MOOC Winds from the East: Introduction to Contemporary China, which introduces China in English. The fourth is the national premium online course Impressions of Britain and America: A Journey Through Time. The instructional design based on multiple MOOCs aims to be rooted in the Chinese context, fostering students’ cultural confidence while helping them develop the ability to compare and draw lessons from Chinese and Western cultures, thus cultivating their critical thinking and cross-cultural communication skills. The overall course design, guided by the principles of maintaining integrity and innovation and promoting moral and educational development, integrates MOOC resources into offline teaching and implements a student-centered blended foreign language teaching model. The production-oriented approach is employed to actively develop students’ comprehensive English skills.

For the online teaching component, we use the Collaborative Cyber Community (3C) model as the online teaching approach in the blended foreign language course. The 3C model has two workspaces: the Teacher’s Office and the Classroom. The Teacher’s Office is a virtual space accessible only to teachers, where tasks include uploading learning resources, managing students’ online learning, designing teaching activities, and providing relevant links. In this course, the teacher’s virtual office mainly refers to the backend management areas of local MOOC platforms such as UCampus and the Chaoxing teaching platform. Teachers create classes, multi-MOOC resources, online test banks, and discussion boards in these virtual offices, while also publishing online unit discussion questions, group collaborative activities, peer reviews, and other types of online teaching activities.

The Classroom, accessible to both students and teachers, includes both synchronous and asynchronous modes. The asynchronous space primarily involves local MOOC learning platforms, where learners can log in anytime and freely use various learning videos, audio, text materials, and discussion board functions. For language learning, synchronous learning spaces are especially valuable. These include face-to-face classroom instruction and platforms such as the Chaoxing live-streaming platform, Tencent Meeting, and enterprise WeChat group chats, known collectively as the “synchronous cyber classroom.” This type of synchronous cyber classroom has five key features: audio and video playback, a control panel, a text chat box, a whiteboard, and a sub-video window. The synchronous online spaces used in this course leverage these five teaching functions to fully integrate real-time interaction, audio and video sharing, discussion, and text-based interaction in blended teaching. All online teaching activities can be recorded in real time within the synchronous cyber learning space.

5. Course teaching content and implementation

The Integrated English 3 course is rooted in the requirements of foreign language disciplines and the characteristics of intercultural communication courses. It focuses particularly on language interaction and expression of viewpoints in the foreign language classroom, ultimately promoting language output and enhancing students' comprehensive foreign language proficiency and intercultural communication skills.

The blended teaching method of this course integrates two types of learning spaces: the virtual learning space for online independent MOOC learning and the smart classroom space for offline classroom teaching. The offline teaching phase incorporates new intelligent technology into the classroom learning environment.

The smart classroom serves as the physical teaching space. Various smart teaching tools integrate the virtual online community into the physical classroom, creating a new, combined smart teaching space. For instance, teachers utilize intelligent interactive tools such as Tencent Classroom and Chaoxing Learning Pass for class management functions like attendance, answer submission, open voting, and on-site assessment, enabling real-time interaction, discussion, and mobile evaluation in face-to-face teaching.

The teaching is conducted through class-based study groups, with each group consisting of five to six students forming a learning community. Classroom instruction follows a structured approach of summary review, group discussion, teacher-student interaction, and presentation of outcomes. This structure systematically reviews and synthesizes MOOC content, promotes cooperative learning among students, and fosters deeper understanding and reflection on topics related to outstanding Chinese culture and Anglo-American culture. This approach encourages the development of divergent and critical thinking that combines “foreign language + culture.”

During the online independent learning phase, the course uses the WRT (Watch-Read-Think) self-study model to engage students in pre-class video learning, online testing, and preparatory reflection on MOOC chapters. Students are required to think about questions posed by the teacher based on their MOOC learning.

In the offline classroom phase, teachers present innovative teaching designs based on MOOC content. The process begins with reviewing content through pre-class tests and brief responses. Subsequently, the class moves on to detailed explanations of key points, reinforcement, enhancement, and divergent expansion based on the MOOC content. Various teaching strategies such as task-based, cooperative, and reflective teaching are employed to facilitate open discussions. These discussions enable students to comprehensively review and creatively reconstruct the content of the chapter, encouraging them to use comprehensive and open-ended approaches to generate new ideas.

The teaching design follows the “input-driven, output-oriented” principle of foreign language courses, embodying the core concepts and objectives of first-rate blended language courses. The instructional design originates from the MOOC, extends beyond it, and includes diverse teacher-student interactions. Personalized guidance and classroom summaries provided by teachers help learners consolidate and improve their understanding of the teaching material.

6. Course assessment methods

The blended approach of online and offline learning incorporates two types of learning pathways, with the assessment system emphasizing the learning process. The course employs a multifaceted assessment system that combines formative and summative evaluations, integrating online and offline assessments.

The evaluation method rationally balances the importance of the learning process with the outcome. Online self-study, assignments, and tests are evaluated alongside offline teaching activities, ensuring

consistency and coherence. Formative evaluations provide timely feedback, and summative assessments comprehensively evaluate students' learning abilities.

The assessment method includes both online and offline evaluations, predominantly teacher-led but supplemented by machine grading and peer assessment. Online evaluations use intelligent recording and grading tools on the teaching platform for process evaluation. Before the course begins, the teacher sets different weightings for parts like study duration, content, and completed exercises, placing greater emphasis on non-standardized output tasks. The platform's automatic grading function records and scores standardized tests. Offline output tasks are evaluated through cooperative assessments involving both students and teachers, not simply an aggregation of scores but a deep learning process guided by the teacher.

The assessment involves multiple participants, including teachers, students, and intelligent grading systems, addressing the limitations of a single-teacher evaluation approach. Formative evaluation methods are used for subjective offline outputs, incorporating teacher assessments, self-evaluations, and peer evaluations. The assessment of group discussions, presentations, and debates follows standardized criteria set by the teacher, with students grading both their own and their peers' performance. The final score for each student is the average of their self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and teacher evaluation.

The evaluation content is multi-dimensional, focusing on the quality of output tasks and the achievement of teaching goals. Evaluations use teaching objectives as reference points, assessing not only the quality of communicative goals but also the application of language forms and discourse structures learned during the course. In addition to covering objective assessments of language knowledge, the evaluation system emphasizes the assessment of inquiry-based, paper-based, and report-based tasks. This approach extends beyond language ability assessment to include students' thinking skills, creativity, and emotional factors.

7. Conclusion

The construction and application of the blended online and offline Integrated English 3 course demonstrates the effectiveness of combining MOOCs with traditional classroom teaching to enhance foreign language proficiency and intercultural communication skills. By incorporating the production-oriented approach, the course design shifts the focus from passive language acquisition to active language output, emphasizing the development of students' practical language skills. The integration of online self-study through MOOCs and interactive offline classroom activities promotes a deeper understanding of content and encourages students to engage critically with both the language and cultural aspects of the curriculum.

The course also highlights the importance of developing digital literacy in both students and teachers, enabling effective use of educational technology. Teacher-student collaboration, peer evaluations, and comprehensive assessment methods foster a rich learning environment, aligning with the goal of creating courses that respond to the diverse needs of learners.

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