Optimization of Teaching Design for American Literature Course Based on SPOC

XIANYU Jing, HU Yanru

Beijing Union University, Beijing, China

SPOC (Small Private Online Course) in the post-MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) era, with its characteristics of flexibility, teaching students in accordance with their aptitude, optimization of teaching resources, and full care of students, shows its strong advantages. The use of SPOC platform has brought about a series of changes to the teaching of American literature, which is reflected in students' participation, teaching methods, teaching contents, etc. The optimization of teaching design needs to strengthen deep learning and realize the deep integration of online and offline teaching.

Keywords: SPOC, depth, optimization

Introduction

In the digital era, the combination of online and offline teaching and relative discussions have become a hot topic in academic circles. SPOC platform in the post-MOOC era presents more advantages than MOOC because of its features of small scale, privacy, personalized education (Qi & Zhang, 2018) flexibility, and rich learning resources. More and more schools are using SPOC platform to improve teaching quality, but it also poses challenges for teachers. This paper deals with how to integrate the use of SPOC platform into the teaching of the course of American Literature in order to meet the learning needs of students in the new era and enhance teaching effectiveness.

Changes Brought About by Using SPOC Teaching Platform

Promotion of Students' Participation

SPOC platform can provide various learning resources, including teaching videos and PPT (Power Point), recommended books or articles for students to read, etc. And students can repeatedly learn the learning materials or video content provided on the platform. According to the questionnaire survey, as many as 94% of the students watch the SPOC teaching videos repeatedly, while only less than 6% of the students do not. Another advantage of SPOC platform is the way of test. The teacher can put the questions into the system in advance, such as filling in the blanks, multiple choice, short answer questions, etc., so students can carry out the test after studying relevant parts, and the system will automatically give an evaluation. If students are not satisfied with the score, they can take the test again and again until they finally master the content and get a good score. Such a way of learning can enhance students' confidence, eliminate the anxiety caused by worrying

XIANYU Jing, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of English, Institute of Tourism, Beijing Union University, Beijing, China.
HU Yanru (corresponding author), M. A., Associate Professor, Department of English, Institute of Tourism, Beijing Union University, Beijing, China.

about poor grades, and relieve psychological pressure. The survey shows that 71% of students like the test on SPOC platform.

Online learning breaks through the limitations of time and space, and students can participate in discussion or learning at any time. In classroom teaching, even in small classes, there are usually 20-30 students, so not all the students have the opportunity to speak. However, through SPOC platform, every student can participate in the discussion and express their views freely, which not only helps them to internalize knowledge, but also improve students' language ability. Most students are willing to actively participate in online discussion. The survey shows that about 62% of students like to communicate through SPOC platform, because it allows students "additional time to think, and the opportunity to research prior to posting and replying", and online discussions "have an even greater benefit for introverted students who find it difficult to think and react spontaneously" (Thomas, Wieser, & Fittipaldi, 2019, p. 2). Teachers should pay attention to the design of questions and encourage students to interpret literary works in multiple perspectives. Moreover, SPOC platform is also conducive to further study after class. Teachers can put relevant books or articles on the platform in advance, and guide students to read and summarize the main idea or find out the main points. Students' participation would bring opportunities for effective learning.

Students' Experience of Real-World Scenes and Enhancement of Learning Enthusiasm

Many classic works of American literature have been made into films, such as *Moby Dick*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, etc. The scenes, clothes, and articles in the film often try to reproduce the real-world and customs in a specific period. The experience of the real-world scenes in online learning can break the monotony of traditional way of study. Memorizing mechanically or just reading text is often boring, especially for students with poor imagination. American literary works present American culture of specific period(s) in American history. For example, Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is about New England in the 17th century, *Moby Dick* centers around American whaling industry in the 19th century. For contemporary Chinese students, it would be difficult to understand these works. The appropriate use of videos and audios can give students a deep impression, deepen their understanding of the cultural background and the characteristics of works, and give them opportunities to listen to native speakers' English. By watching the videos, even playing a specific role, students could go into a certain scene or experience the feeling of the characters in literary works. This experiential teaching method can mobilize students' emotions, help students find their own interests, and provide conditions and possibilities for the construction of students' knowledge structure. According to the survey, nearly 40% of the students hope to learn more American writers and works from SPOC platform, which shows students' enthusiasm in learning.

Keeping Track of Students' Learning Status

Compared with traditional classroom and MOOC platform, SPOC platform has the advantage of providing data about each student's learning state automatically in the background. The data include the number of times and length of time for students to listen to the lectures or watch the videos, the frequency to participate in the discussion, etc. These data can make teachers better track, record, supervise and evaluate learning behavior and process, whether it is classroom teaching, or after-class learning. It is helpful for students' involvement in real-world context, knowledge acquisition, language application, development of learning strategy, etc. (Wang, Chen, & Zhang, 2016, p. 54). Based on these data, teachers can find the problems in time, pay special attention to the students who are not active in study, guide them, and help them get out of the trouble.

Theoretical Framework for the Optimization of Teaching Design

The optimization of teaching design for this course is on the basis of various teaching theories including behaviorism, cognitivism and constructivism, connectivism, and teaching optimization theory.

Behaviorism theory holds that learning is the connection between stimulation and response. Behaviorism learning theory requires teachers to create an environment for students to strengthen students' appropriate behavior and eliminate inappropriate behavior as much as possible. Cognitivism holds that the focus of learning is on the process of information processing. Gagne proposed an information processing model to explain the information processing mechanism of human brain, and memory plays an important role in cognitivism. Constructivism holds that learning is a process in which individuals construct and explain external things and phenomena according to their own previous experience and knowledge.

Connectivism theory provides a new perspective for learning in the digital age. George Siemens is known for eight principles of this theory, including that "Learning is a process of connecting specialized nodes or information sources", "Ability to see connections between fields, ideas, and concepts is a core skill", etc. (Utecht & Keller, 2019, p. 108).

Additionally, Babanski's theory of the optimization of teaching process is one of the educational theories with a worldwide influence in the second half of the 20th century.

Optimization of Design in Teaching American Literature Based on SPOC

Optimization of Learning Resources and Selection of Teaching Content

In the digital era, information is overflowing, and a large number of resources keep pouring in. Siemens, a theorist of connectivism, gave an explanation of this phenomenon, and introduced the concept of "knowledge flow" (Lu, 2014, p. 46). In the face of such a complicated information resources, the management of information is particularly important, so teachers need to select resources carefully before they can be used by students. This can meet students' learning requirements, helping them facilitate their learning efficiency, and making students not lose their way in the sea of knowledge. Babanski proposed that the procedures for teachers to optimize teaching content include: (1) deeply analyzing teaching content to judge whether they can complete the specific tasks; (2) finding out the most important and essential parts from the teaching content; (3) considering the coordination among different subjects; (4) arranging the teaching content according to the allocated hours; and (5) treating the poor students and the excellent students differently. Therefore, when choosing teaching materials, teachers should pay attention to their suitability for students in difficulty, quantity, content, and quality. One advantage of SPOC platform is to teach students according to their aptitude, and the optimization of teaching content should be based on learners' abilities, characteristics, and syllabus requirements. Teachers can not only record videos themselves, but also select the corresponding parts from the courses, such as "Appreciation of British and American Literature", "Appreciation of British and American novels", and other courses on MOOC platform of Chinese universities, and put them on the SPOC platform for students to use.

Promotion of Deep Learning

At present, there are many MOOC resources and video classes about American literature, but most of the lectures just focus on the general introduction of historical background, American writers and their literary works, and there is a lack of detailed explanation of the original text. According to the syllabus, to cultivate

students' ability of analyzing literary works is the core goal of this course. Therefore, it is not enough to just show concern for literary knowledge and background information, and students should learn to interpret the meanings or ideas implied in the original text. If teachers use videos and audio too frequently, the study of this course will be superficial. They can only be used as a means to deepen students' understanding, and teachers should avoid the superficial tendency by relying on it too much. Deep learning pays attention to "the application of higher-order thinking and cultivation of critical thinking" (Zhang & Lv, 2018, p. 97). Teachers can record micro-lecture videos, focusing on a certain knowledge point. And it is recommended for teachers to increase the comparative analysis of controversial issues or works to cultivate students' critical thinking. For example, in the comparison between *Moby Dick* by Melville and *Walden* by Thoreau, an interesting point is about the differences in the relationship between man and nature reflected in the two works. Another case is the comparative analysis between Poe's and Hawthorne's works in revealing the dark side of human nature. Teachers can ask students to point out the differences and similarities in their works. The wicked and sinful characters in Poe's works can escape punishment successfully, while the sinful characters in Hawthorne's works may get redemption. Through the comparison, students can deeply understand and interpret the works. It is important to cultivate students' ability to find problems from contradictions or text details, and then expand further researches to promote deep learning. "Divergent questions may be asked continuously to provoke higher-order thinking skills among the students" (Bibi, Butt, & Reba, 2020, p. 117).

Deep Integration of Online and Offline Teaching

It is necessary to make clear the differences between online and offline teaching in content and difficulty, rather than simple blending them. Online learning mainly includes the introduction of historical background, writers and their literary works, and literary terms, etc. Offline learning includes the detailed interpretation of original text, discussion on controversial issues, etc. According to Bloom's classification of educational objectives in cognitive field, the different stages of teaching should follow in order and advance step by step. The teaching of this course should follow the process from low level to high level, including the levels of "knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation" (Bibi et al., 2020, p. 112), so as to facilitate students to connect each knowledge node and construct learning network. The first step is the memory of basic knowledge of literature, including the life of important American writers, writing characteristics, historical background, literary terms, and so on. This part of the learning is mainly completed through online study before the class. In the class, the focus should be on the interpretation of literary works, including the detailed analysis of key parts or points, ideological connotation reflected in works, etc. It is recommended for students to use interdisciplinary approach to comment on literary works. At this stage, teachers should organize students to carry out discussion activities and inquiry activities. Finally, it is the higher level of comprehensive application and creative thinking, and students are encouraged to use the knowledge they have learned to interpret literary works creatively, rather than be limited by traditional and ready-made interpretation. Deep integration of online and offline learning is realized through various activities at different levels.

Change of Teaching Evaluation Methods

The assessment of students' learning status on SPOC platform should be included in the overall evaluation. Students' performance on the platform includes video learning (frequency of watching teaching videos), non-video leaning (including reading articles or books and taking notes), online discussion, and online test. The learning status of SPOC should be included in the final evaluation, which can produce certain constraints on

students, and stimulate their learning motivation, so as to ensure the improvement of learning quality. Evaluation not only involves single aspects, such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation, but also comprehensive procedures, such as preview, exercise, review and reflection, etc. (Lv & Wang, 2016, p. 87). By emphasizing learning process, this kind of evaluation can enhance students' learning initiative and the interactions of student-teacher, student-student, and student-content (Wu & Jin, 2020, p. 150).

Conclusion

SPOC should be used reasonably to promote the quality of teaching American literature. SPOC platform injects vitality into teaching and brings many benefits: the promotion of students' participation, the experience of real-world scenes and enhancement of learning enthusiasm, the dynamic observation of students' learning state, etc., but it also poses challenges to teaching. Teachers are required to optimize teaching resources, try to combine MOOC courses and micro-lectures, promote deep learning, to proceed step by step by blending online and offline teaching, and change the evaluation methods accordingly. The optimization of teaching design based on SPOC is helpful for students to construct knowledge network scientifically and improve teaching vitality and validity.

References

Bibi, W., Butt, M. N., & Reba, A. (2020). Relating teachers' questioning techniques with students' learning within the context of Bloom's taxonomy. *FWU Journal of Social Sciences, 14*(1), 111-119.

Lu, X. (2014). A review of connectivism learning theory. *The Guide of Science and Education, 3,* 46, 83.

Lv, T. T., & Wang, N. (2016). A study on the establishment and effect of the flipped classroom mode for SPOC + teaching resource platform as applied in college English teaching. *China Educational Technology, 5,* 85-90.

Qi, C., & Zhang, H. (2018). On group cooperative learning mode of blended teaching based on SPOC. *China Adult Education, 1,* 110-113.

Thomas, M., Wieser, M., & Fittipaldi, D. (2019). Utilizing Bloom's taxonomy for facilitating effective and meaningful online classroom discussions. *Marketing Management Association Annual Conference Proceedings, 1,* 1-9.

Utecht, J., & Keller, D. (2019). Becoming relevant again: Applying connectivism learning theory to today's classrooms. *Critical Questions in Education, 10*(2), 107-119.

Wang, N., Chen, J., & Zhang, D. (2016). SPOC-based flipped classroom of college English: Construction of an efficient learning model. *Computer-assisted Foreign Language Education, 3,* 52-57.

Wu, L., & Jin, A. (2020). Perspectives on student interaction of online teaching. *Business Education Innovation Journal, 12*(1), 149-159.

Zhang, X., & Lv, L. (2018). Constructing the deep teaching model for deep learning under the SPOC platform. *China Educational Technology, 4,* 96-101.