A Study on the Online VS Traditional Classroom Teaching Styles in Sino-Foreign Cooperative Institutions at Times of COVID 19

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Abstract: The outbreak of Corona Virus Disease 2019 (henceforth COVID-19) has put restrictions on travel and educational exchange. In terms of Sino-Foreign Cooperative Institutions, this pandemic has imposed a strain on normal operation of education process, as foreign teachers hardly have the access to the mainland of China for prevention and control. Thus, these institutions have to rely on online teaching as the only way to maintain teaching work. However, some courses taught online are not effective and cannot fully replace traditional classroom teaching. Therefore, this study target at the largest Sino-Australian cooperative school in Zhejiang Province of China as the research object, and conduct a survey on English teaching delivered by foreign teachers via online and face-to-face methods. Specifically, listening and reading modules are taught online while speaking and writing ones are taught face-to-face. It is found that the combination of these ways performs better from feedback students provide and can almost reach the standard of traditional classroom teaching.

Keywords: Online teaching, Traditional classroom teaching, Combined teaching, Sino-Foreign Cooperative Institutions

1. Introduction

Online teaching has been a trend of the modern education industry, and increasingly attracted the attention of various countries[1]. It can not only shorten the distance between urban and rural areas, but also provide cross-border and cross-regional knowledge popularization[2]. COVID-19 has been a disaster for many countries around the world, resulting in shutdown of schools[3,4], restriction on travel and limits to the development of economy and education[5]. The volatility of pandemic imposed challenges particularly on Sino-Foreign Cooperative Institutions, which mostly rely on bringing teachers from overseas to teach in host countries. Many countries' borders

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continue to be closed while those with open borders still have many restrictive and control measures[6]. Therefore, online teaching is of a crucial importance to Sino-Foreign Cooperative Institutions, which depend on it to maintain quality education[7]. Online teaching cannot replace traditional classroom teaching with its face-to-face communication and expression of feelings[8]. Many students still feel that classroom learning is better than e-learning. Combination of online and face-to-face teaching styles facilitated students' learning and they benefited from it much more than if they did with e-learning only[9]. Therefore, the aim of this research is to find out whether the combination of online and face-to-face teaching styles can complement e-learning and whether it can be as effective as traditional classroom learning students had in the past. On the basis of the above background and motivation, the goals of this study are as follows. The first is to recognize the difference between face-to-face and online teaching effectiveness. The second is to understand the effectiveness of combined teaching method. The last is to provide appropriate guidance for Sino-Foreign Cooperative Institutions.

2. Literature review

This study collects and presents the views of scholars on online teaching and traditional classroom teaching modes, and their advantages and disadvantages. It is hoped that these two modes will complement each other and bring better complementary results than solely using traditional classroom teaching mode. Traditional classroom it is always easier for students to consult with their teachers, if they have any questions or problems with their homework. However, in online learning environment, even though students may send emails to their teachers requiring some information, it is still quiet problematic to get in contact with the teachers, let alone sit down and discuss their problems and opinions face-to-face[10]. Compared to traditional classroom learners, online learners get distracted easily without reminders from the teachers or a nudge from their fellow classmates8. They often hand in homework late and unable to consult teachers or their classmates for help[11]. On the other hand, Online teaching has many advantages, especially when it comes to transnational (cross-border) teaching[12]. When teachers are unable to attend classes due to emergencies, they can switch to online teaching mode and deliver their classes online, students can do their studies online, take exams and obtain degrees the same way. From an economic perspective, distance courses are cheaper than traditional classroom courses and students can afford the tuition fees. In addition, if students are busy with work or have transportation problems, they can study online anytime in regions with available network conditions[13]. Rahman suggested that the combination of online teaching and traditional classroom teaching modes could have both the advantages of online teaching and the effect of face-to-face teaching[14]. It would be an appropriate way to teach English (cross-border) during the COVID-19 period with its strict border control measures[6]. To summarize, some courses taught online are not effective and cannot fully replace traditional classroom teaching. This research aims to explore feasible ways to combine online with face-to-face teaching styles to earn better feedback from the students.

3. Materials and methods

This study took place at the Sino-Australian International Hotel Management School as the research object. It is the largest Sino-Australian cooperative institution in Zhejiang Province, which partners with Tourism College of Zhejiang, China. This study focuses on English language courses taught by foreign teachers. The English language courses with listening, speaking, reading and writing classes are divided into theoretical and practical modules. Listening and reading classes are included into theoretical module, this entails improvement of students' receptive skills through the input provided by the teacher while speaking and writing constitute practical module[15], which means that students will improve their productive skills through the output they produce. The study was conducted on the same group of foreign teachers and students. The monitoring of students' evaluation of teaching was carried out in three stages. The first stage or so called non-pandemic stage took place in 2019, when foreign teachers had classes face-to-face in a traditional classroom environment. The second stage took place in 2020, when all foreign teachers had to adopt to online teaching style due to the rapid outbreak of pandemic. The third stage or "pandemic slow-down" stage took place in 2021. The pandemic prevention measures were gradually put in place, schools reopened and students were back to attend their classes. But, since Australian borders are still closed and no foreign teachers can come back, English language courses are being delivered by two different teachers. Foreign teachers from Australia teach theoretical module online while practical module is delivered by local teachers face-to-face with the students in the classroom. On weekly basis, Chinese and Australian teachers hold online meetings to discuss the following week's teaching materials, agenda, pedagogical design, instructional techniques, teaching difficulties and students' progress. At the beginning of the semester, the teaching management council would discuss with teachers teaching online and traditional classroom teaching respectively on the course content and schedule, as well as the expected teaching methods and activities. Content taught by online teachers were also distinguished from those taught by traditional classroom teachers. During the course, the teaching management staff would have online meetings with online teachers and traditional classroom teachers every week to discuss the course progress and difficulties in teaching, and contents that need to be supplemented by online or traditional classroom teachers. At the end of the course, the teaching management staff and the head-teacher would meet with students to assess their learning status, observe the efficiency and quality of their homework delivery, and discuss the adjustment of teaching methods with online and traditional classroom teachers through the following weekly online meeting. This study used the census data collected by surveying 600 students from 2019 intake during the last week of each consecutive semester (2019 intake students completed three years). Students of 2019 intake are the only ones who experienced all three stages of different teaching modes. A total of 582 students responded to the survey which equates to 97%. Students were asked to rate their English language courses on a scale from 0 to 100 points. With a confidence level of 95%, tolerable error of 5%, and a minimum of 386 samples required, this study has exceeded the criteria[16]. The questionnaire is based on ten key question items related to students' evaluation of teaching, which were and suggested by the Academic Affairs Office of the school. The contents are shown in Table 1. The questionnaire covers the issues on Instructional design, teaching content, teacher and student interaction, and

teaching discipline etc [17]. Students should evaluate each question item from 0 to 10 points, with 0 points if they strongly disagree and 10 points if they strongly agree with the statement.

Table 1 Questionnaire items and content

Question item	Questionnaire content
Item 1	The course stimulates students' thinking and interests.
Item 2	The course integrates educational elements and implements moral cultivation.
Item 3	The course introduces the forefront of the industry and stresses the importance of content update.
Item 4	The teaching is close to the key point, it is effective and brings remarkable outcome.
Item 5	Use of advanced teaching methods and flexible teaching means.
Item 6	Integration of multimedia and learning environment, active teaching atmosphere.
Item 7	The textbook selection is reasonable and matches the course content.
Item 8	Teaching discipline compliance and implementation of the teaching plan.
Item 9	Reasonable content and rational courseware design.
Item 10	The teacher attached importance to the student-teacher interaction, the teacher's appearance is always decent and appropriate.

In conclusion, this study target at the largest Sino-Australian cooperative school in Zhejiang Province of China as the research object, and conduct a survey on English teaching delivered by foreign teachers via online and face-to-face methods. Specifically, listening and reading modules are taught online while speaking and writing ones are taught face-to-face. It is found that the combination of these ways performs better from feedback students provide and can almost reach the standard of traditional classroom teaching. By collecting, comparing and analyzing students' points for teaching evaluation with the sample of 582 participants on a scale of 0-100 over three different stages, namely students of 2019 (Stage 1); of 2020 (Stage 2) and of 2021 (Stage 3). The questionnaire is based on ten key questions related to students' evaluation of teaching, covering the issues on Instructional design, teaching content, interaction between teacher and student, teaching discipline and so on.

4. Results

The results of the study are shown in Table 2. Based on students' evaluation of teaching, Table 2 presents and compares the average number of points given by 582 students on a scale of 0-100 over three different stages of the monitoring study, namely in 2019 (Stage 1); 2020 (Stage 2) and 2021 (Stage 3). Traditional classroom teaching (TCT) style scored 94.5124 points, Online teaching (OT) style scored 82.6750 points and Combined teaching (TCT+OT) style scored 93.2857 points. The score of the online teaching style is lower than that of the traditional classroom teaching style, with a score gap of -11.8374 points, which indicates that traditional classroom teaching style is better than the online teaching style. The score of combined teaching style is higher than that of online teaching alone by 10.6107 points, indicating that the combined teaching is more effective than the online teaching alone. The score of combined teaching is slightly lower than that of traditional classroom teaching with deduction of 1.2267 points. This indicates that combined teaching style almost reached the standard of traditional classroom teaching, with a difference gap of 1.2% (refer to Table 2).

Therefore, the combined teaching style involving both foreign teachers (teaching from their home countries) and local teachers (teaching in the host country) is worth paying attention to at times of restricted travel.

Table 2 Comparison of Online and Traditional classroom Teaching Styles

Study stages	Teaching styles	Average score	Difference with TCT	Difference with OT
Stage 1 (2019)	Traditional classroom teaching (TCT)	94.5124		11.8374
Stage 2 (2020)	Online teaching (OT)	82.6750	-11.8374	
Stage 3 (2021)	Combined teaching (TCT+OT)	93.2857	-1.2267	10.6107

5. Discussion

Due to COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on travel[5], Sino-Foreign Cooperative Institutions relied on online teaching to maintain normal teaching operation[4]. However, online teaching is not as effective as traditional classroom teaching and cannot replace it[8]. Therefore, the author focused on the English language courses taught by foreign teachers to carry out this research. English course includes listening, speaking, reading and writing as its constituent parts. Thus, English language courses were divided into two modules, namely theoretical module with listening and reading classes delivered online by foreign teachers and practical module with speaking and writing classes delivered face-to-face by local teachers[15]. Online teaching was combined with face-to-face teaching, weekly online meetings were held between teachers to coordinate the teaching content and monitor students' progress, to discuss instructional techniques, teaching difficulties and mutual cooperation. This study found that students' evaluation of online teaching in 2020 was 11% lower than that of face-to-face teaching in 2019, which correlates with the fact that traditional classroom teaching with its face-to face communication and interaction cannot be replaced by online one[8]. However, the research also showed that students' evaluation of combined teaching style implemented in 2021 was much higher than that of online teaching style alone carried out in 2020. The quality of combined teaching was close enough to the standard of traditional classroom teaching in 2019 with the difference of only 1 %. This proves the fact that combined teaching style fosters and contributes to students' progress[9]. Combined teaching style can be taken into account by Sino-Foreign Cooperative Institutions not only to maintain normal teaching operations, but also to facilitate students' progress at times of restricted travel caused by pandemic, disasters, war or other force-majeure factors.

6. Conclusions and Limitation

This study is still being carried out and currently in its optimization stage. The data is still being collected and analyzed to perfect the whole article. The preliminary research results showed that online teaching style alone was not effective enough, because the practical part of the course content could not be delivered via online teaching. Thus, before numerous Sino-Foreign Cooperative Institutions plunge in online teaching to maintain their educational process, they may first divide the course

content into theoretical and practical modules with precondition for its efficiency. By combining online theoretical teaching with offline practical teaching mode, they may reach very close proximity with the standard of traditional classroom teaching. Online teaching is the teaching method many Sino-Foreign Cooperative Institutions resort to in this volatile pandemic situation, when the ban on crossing the borders cannot be completely and instantly removed. However, with the help of local professional teachers and foreign-language assistants the quality of English language courses as well as students' feedback on that can be significantly improved by implementing combined teaching style. The teaching management council would discuss with teachers teaching online and traditional classroom teaching. Listening and reading classes were delivered through online teaching and speaking and writing classes were delivered through traditional classroom teaching. Through the discussion of the past meetings, When training students listening and reading, some online teachers still let students jot down listening and reading materials in class while some offline teachers tended to let students write online exercises in class, or practice oral speaking through online videos. The researchers found online teachers should avoid suspension of teaching and let student do assignment all the time during online courses, which is easy to distract students. If assignment is needed, oral expression is a better way to achieve better interactive effects. Similarly, traditional classroom courses should avoid allowing students to use online tools for too long time in the course, which is easy for students to engage in non-course activities online, as if there is no need to communicate through the Internet or telephone when they can communicate face to face. Sudden outbreak of COVID-19 emphasized the need for a change in the way we teach. This study conducted research on one individual case, taking only one institution as its research subject, and hence has its limitation of "sample dependence". However, this research was carried out on a large scale with a sufficient number of questionnaires, which makes it reliable. In addition, the unified evaluation scale for all courses in the school was used in this study, and it is suggested that more diversified and professional scales would be used for measurement in subsequent studies. It is expected that suggested combined teaching style attracts attention of other Sino-Foreign Cooperative Institutions and will be studied further. Our institution intends to launch a new type of curriculum with a combined teaching style in the next semester, especially for such practical courses as Housekeeping, Catering, Cookery and First-Aid. Hopefully, the current research results offer helpful suggestions aimed to improve the teaching quality of Sino-Foreign Cooperative Institutions at times, when cross-county borders have not yet been fully opened.

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