Exploring a New Teaching Model for Business English Correspondence

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Abstract: The present teaching model for Business English Correspondence has shortcomings like teaching periods are not enough, teaching contents are boring and learning evaluation is not systematic. This paper explored how to construct a new teaching model for Business English Correspondence based on a platform-MOOC in China and a teaching App-Mosoteach involving Flipped Class, Case Study Teaching and Task-base teaching with the assistance of Information Technology. The new model is students-centered. It has advantages of enriching theoretical learning after and before class, stimulating class involving, cultivating critical thinking and creativity, developing students' autonomous learning ability and enhancing student's writing ability of Business English Correspondence.

Keywords: Business English Correspondence, teaching model, evaluation

1. Introduction

Business English Correspondence is a course for English major or Business English major or International Trade major in colleges or universities. It aims to give basic knowledge about international trade to students and enhance students' practical English writing ability-writing Business English letters in real transaction correctly and properly [1]. This course is important while currently teaching and learning is not as good as it is expected. The author studies papers published in recent few years and found a lot of teachers have realized that there are shortcomings in current teaching and tried to reform traditional teaching model.

2. Literature Review

Nowadays, there are some Chinese scholars who made studies on teaching reform of Business English Correspondence. There are 520 journal papers and 3 master theses indexed in CNKI with topic words of "Business English Correspondence" and "teaching". There are only 141 journal papers indexed in CNKI with topic words of "Business English Correspondence", "teaching" and "information". From those papers, it is easy to find that all scholars think there are some shortcomings in current teaching and it is necessary to improve it with assistance of information technology.

2.1. Shortcomings in Current Teaching

According to author's teaching experiences and literature review, it is found that there are at least 3 shortcomings in current business English Correspondence teaching.

(1) Limited teaching periods

Business English Correspondence is a complicated course covering business knowledge, economy knowledge, international trading knowledge and English writing knowledge. This course is designed for Junior of English major, who have limited knowledge about international payment, international transportation and insurance although they learnt something about international trade. However, there is just 36 periods for students to learn all the above-mentioned knowledge. Therefore, the problems appear: students don't have enough time to study them and teachers don't have enough time to teach them comprehensively. English letter writing skills or business knowhow, that is a dilemma [2]. The

result this course is that students can write an English letter but not a business English letter.

(2) Teacher is teaching from beginning to the end

Because time is very limited and teachers have to finish the content listed in course schedule, there is nearly no time for student's activities in class [3]. Teachers are just teaching and students are just listening and note-taking. The only interaction in class is "teacher asks a question and student answers it". Therefore, students may feel bored and be lack of motivation. Although some teachers going to use Teaching APP, but they are not sure how can use it effectively.

(3) Summative learning assessment with a few items

Students' Learning in most private-run universities are evaluated by final term examination which accounts for 60%-70% and performance in class which accounts for 30%-40%. Performance score in class usually consists of attendance, assignments and others. From those percentages and evaluation items, it is easy to found that this assessment system is not so effective in evaluating students' performance in class. It is not the idea assessment system to evaluate students' leaning ability like learning autonomy, critical thinking, cooperative ability and practical writing ability. During the whole process of assessment, teacher evaluate every activity of student in and after class, which is not always objective.

Because traditional teaching methods has those problems, it is necessary to reform traditional teaching models with the help of information technology.

2.2. Information Technology

Information technology has changed our life and higher education. According to Outline of the *National Program for Medium and Long Term Education Reform and Development* (2010-2020), to expedite educational informationization is major task of educational development in the following 10 years [4]. Nowadays, Educational Informationization is a buzz word. It means that information technology will be applied in teaching to optimize education process, maximize effects, efficiency and result of education [5]. He (2009) pointed out that integration of information technology into teaching can be used to reform structure of teaching including teaching model, teaching method etc [6]. With the aid of information, the combination of two or more teaching methods can be realized.

As information is being integrated more deeply into education, research and development of platforms, apps and equipment facilitating education are developing fast. As for teaching, there are a lot of teaching assistant applications like Rain Class, Mosoteach, Teachermate, Chaoxin, and Icourse. Among those applications, Mosoteach, a teaching assistant APP, enjoys great popularity in higher education [7]. It can be used to record students' attendance, students' interactions like answering questions, brainstorming, running for answers, group work and it can also be used to share learning materials, do a quiz or a test, assign homework and so on. Every activity involving the students can be recorded and shown, which is statistic of students' learning during the whole semester. It has some interesting functions like choosing students randomly, voting etc.. Using this APP can stimulate students' learning interest and involve students more in class activities.

Besides emergence of Teaching assistant APPs, Mooc is another important product in information age. College MOOC in China is the most famous and the highest level Mooc which can provide excellent video classes of different subjects from different top-level universities. One of them is "Business English Correspondence" –National Excellent Course--given by teachers from Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University. This Mooc covers all theoretical parts of Business English Correspondence in offline teaching, therefore it is can be used as pre-class learning material and students can learn theoretical knowledge of this course before class by themselves, which is a good way to extend time spent on learning.

Applying information to assist teaching of Business English Correspondence can address the problems in current teaching and can construct a new model with three periods of pre-class, in-class and after-class [8]. This new model is student-centered, product-oriented involving formative assessment based on statistics.

3. A new Teaching Model Integrated with Information Technology

3.1. Description of RESET Model

This teaching reform lasted for two years covering two semesters of teaching of Business English Correspondence. The first step is selecting proper Apps and Mooc to construct initial model, after that, it is modified theoretically by research group; the second step is application of this model to collect practical information to perfect it; the third step is teaching experiment which intends to test whether this model effective or not.

After this teaching reform, a new model called RESET (figure 1) has been formulated. In this model R refers to Ready, which means students should be ready for the class; E refers to Enlightenment, which means students got enlightened after quiz, or learning sharing and teacher's guidance; S refers to Simulation, which means students are required to write a business letter in class according to simulated situation; E refers to Enhancement, which means students can enhance their writing skills and basic knowledge after evaluation and polishing their work by teacher, their classmates and themselves; T refers to Transition, which means students should move to learning of new chapter after consolidating what learnt in class through self-learning video class from MOOC.
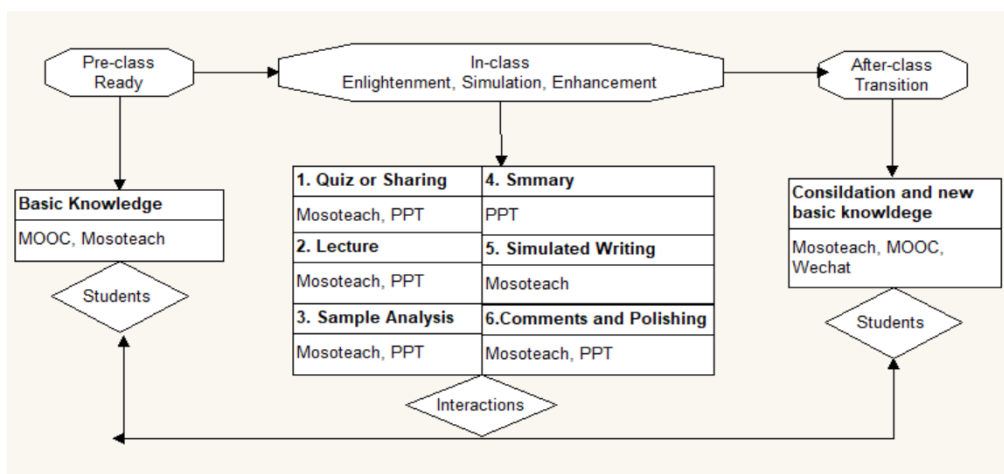

Figure 1: A new business English correspondence teaching model—RESET

3.2. Implementation of RESET model in Classroom Teaching

RESET model divide the whole teaching and learning into three parts: pre-class, in-class, after-class.

During **Pre-class** part, teacher selects videos from MOOC covering the theoretical part of a new chapter, and shares the link in Mosoteach. When sharing the link, teacher can set when it should be studied, how should it be studied and rewards(score) to those who will study it. Meanwhile, teacher should ask students to study it by themselves and take down notes while learning. Teacher should tell students the purpose of self-learning and tell them it is going to be a quiz and the like in class about self-learning contents. Besides, teacher should state clearly any questions about video learning should be put in Wechat group at least two days before next lecture.

The **In-class** part is divided into 6 steps. **Step1** is a quiz in Mosoteach. The quiz is designed according to contents in video learnt by students before class and questions posed by students in Wechat. The best way is to design quiz with multiple choices task rather than answering question or writing because multiple choices task can give you feedback immediately after it ends. In order make quiz an exciting task, students are required to finish a quiz within given time like 6 minutes or 10 minutes and when the quiz ends, there is a ranking(*figure 2*). If teacher wants to check how well students do this quiz, there is a bar chart(*figure 3*) about description of students' scores. If it is very good, teacher moves to the second step. If it is not, teachers should give more explanation to the questions according to specific statistic for each item (*figure 4*).

Mosoteach can give immediate feedback of students' performance in quiz, which make it an interesting task and make it clear to what extend students mastered knowledge given in the video.

Ranking	Name	Student number	score	Time spent
1	邓先成	416081634	6	0'30"
2	卜佳玲	416081614	6	1'1"
3	陈美贤	416081612	6	5'45"
4	刘展博	416081633	5	0'20"
5	连阁儇	416081613	5	4'37"
6	卓夏儿	416081607	4	2'57"

Figure 2: Ranking of scores

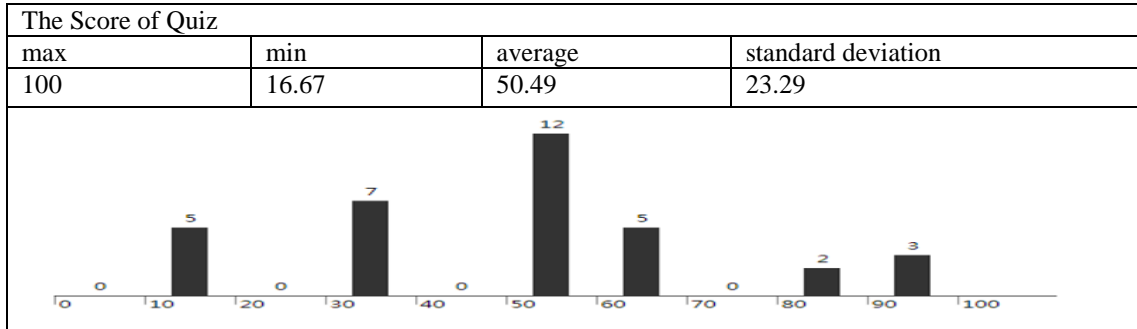| The Score of Quiz			
max	min	average	standard deviation
100	16.67	50.49	23.29

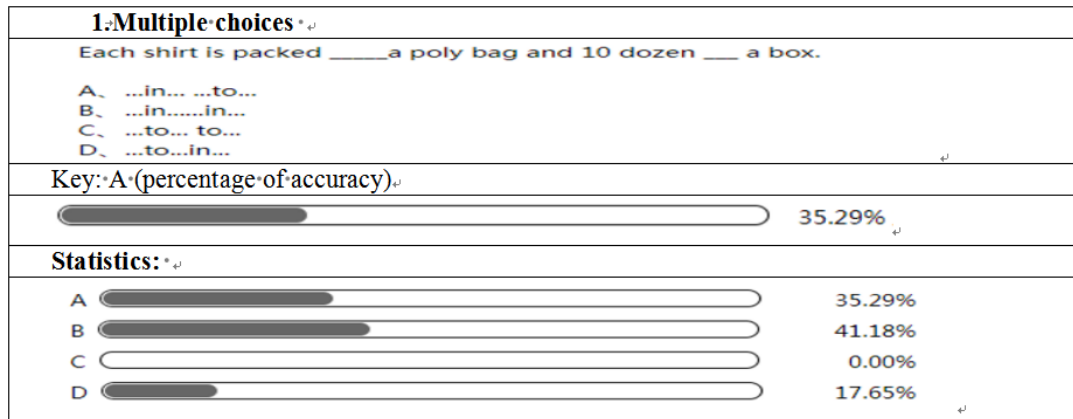*Figure 3: Descriptive analysis of scores*

Figure 4 Specific statistic of an item

Step 2 is teacher's lecture. Teacher gives lecture according to difficulties of students and focus of the chapter. When giving lecture, teacher addresses those key points and difficult points in sample letters. Usually, the structure of business English letter should be focused, and wording which makes the letter concise, courtesy and consideration should be focused. During the lecture, teacher can use Mosoteach to do classroom activities and teacher can ask some heuristic questions to enlighten students. When giving lecture, teacher should observe students' reaction and tailor different questions for different students in order to involve nearly all students in. The last part of this step is sample letter analysis given by teacher.

Step 3 is sample analysis. Teacher assigns the task of sample analysis to students. Usually, students are divided into different groups with 5-7 students in a group and one group analyzes one sample letter with the points of structure, useful expressions, difficult sentence and how to achieve 7C principle. While students are analyzing the sample, they take down notes. When time is up, one student from each group will give a presentation about their analysis.

Step 4 is summary. When a student is giving presentation in front of the classroom, he/she can have interactions with the rest students. When he/she finishes presentation, the rest students may ask questions if any. If asked, the student who gives presentation or the group should answer those questions. If they cannot answer the questions, teacher should give explanation or clues of answers. When presentations given by different groups finished, teacher makes a summary about the key points and typical expression used in typical business English letter, for example, in a "letter for Offer" there should be expressions like " *We are making you an offer…"or "We are offering you…"*

Step 5 is simulated writing. After presentation and teacher's summary, a writing task was designed. This task is designed according to a real business situation or a simulated situation. For example: Suppose you received a letter of Offer, but you cannot accept price, shipping, and terms of payment, and you are going to write a counter-offer letter. Teacher should give directions "*Please write a counter-offer accordingly with 15 minutes. When time is up, please submit it to Mosoteach.*"

Mosoteach can evaluate students' writing within 10 seconds. It gives an overall score, an evaluation report consisting of four dimensions: structure, vocabulary, grammar, spelling. For each dimension, it gives an overall evaluation like *excellent* or *good* and analysis with improvement suggestions in details. Students can read this report by themselves to make some polishing.

Step 6 is comments and polishing. After Mosoteach gives evaluation of students' writing, teacher can judge students' writing easily. If most students get less than 80 points of 100, teacher should ask all students to read evaluation report carefully and improve their writings with suggestions given in that evaluation report. At the same time, teacher should pick out several writings which get about just 60 and ask students to improve their classmates' writing. If most students get more than 80 points of 100, teacher should choose one or two writing which get more than 90 for appreciation—tell why it is a good business English letter. This is a process to cultivate students' critical thinking and to consolidate what students learnt. Peering evaluation is mutual benefit.

3.3. Learning Assessment under RESET Business English Correspondence Teaching Model

One of innovative points of this model is its learning assessment system(figure 5), which evaluates students' learning activities in pre-class part, in-class part and after-class part.

This assessment system consists three evaluators: teacher, students, Mosoteach and 11 items: homework, class activity, presentation, simulated writing, notes, attendance, online material, online activity, video learning, quiz, and questions.
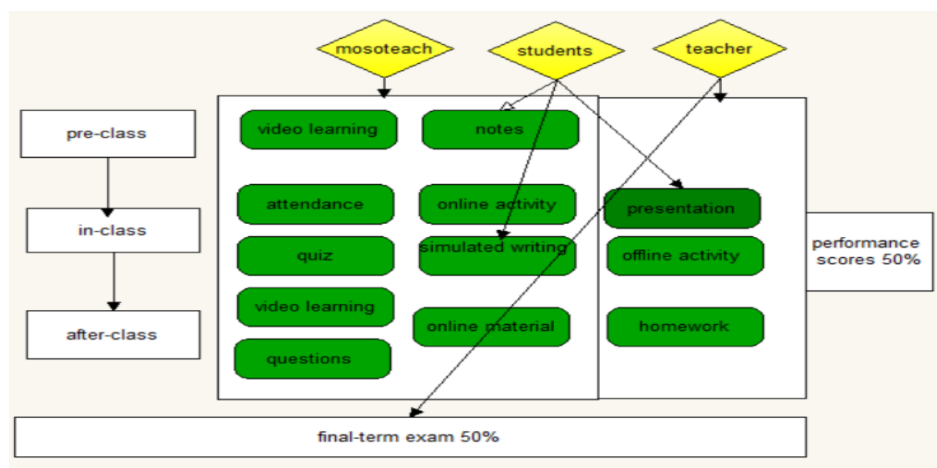

Figure 5 Learning assessment system

Teacher evaluates students' homework and presentation with exact scores, and evaluate students' performance in class with words, scores or gifts. Mosoteach records students' attendance, times of attending activities held online, scores of quizzes, whether students check online materials, time spent on video learning, times they render answers to their classmates' questions, scores of their writing. Students evaluate their classmates' presentation, writing and notes of video learning. In a word, evaluation happens in every second of students' learning and the student have a visual picture of his/her learning presented in Mosoteach, which on the one hand gives student a sense of achievement, and on the other hand, gives him/her a sente of learning motivation especially when his/her scores presented there is not so high. In this assessment system, three evaluators shoudn't work independently mechanically. For example, when one student gives presentation in class, both teacher and students can evaluate his/her presentation. That is to say, three evaluators can interact with each other while they make judgement.

3.4. The Results of Teaching Experiment of RESET Model

This teaching model was applied in business English correspondence course and this teaching

experiment lasted for one semester to test RESET model. In this experiment, one class is experiment class (EC), the other is control class (CC). These two classes were selected randomly and taught by one teacher. In experiment class, the teacher used RESET teaching model and in control class teacher used traditional teaching methods. After one semester of teaching experiment, there is significant difference between the achievements of these two classes (the average score of EC is 81.3 and that of CC is just 74.4). To be specified, the percentage of students in EC who got more than 80 points out of 100 is 53%, while that of CC is 35.3%. Besides, there are 2 students got more than 90 in EC, while no one got more than 90 in CC. As for the number of students who got 70-80, the percentage of CC is slightly more double as that of EC. The percentage of students who got about 60-70 is almost the same in two classes.

In a summary, this new teaching model can help students to achieve more in this course, especially helpful for students to move from Medium (70-80) to Good (80-90) or Excellent(90-100), because in traditional teaching model, students can pass the exam and most of them can get more than 70, but, it is quite difficult for them to get more than 80. In this new model, teacher gives extra-curriculum learning materials to students before class and stimulates students to do peer evaluation and polishing, which are useful for development of students' learning autonomy. When students learnt autonomous learning, they can achieve much more than ever. This is another important innovative point of this new teaching model, as show in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Scores of EC and CC

Scale	100-90	90-80	80-70	70-60	<60
EC(N)	2	16	7	9	0
Percentage	5.9%	47.1%	20.5%	26.5%	0
CC(N)	0	12	14	8	0
Percentage	0	35.3%	41.2%	23.5%	0
Average score	EC	81.3			
	CC	74.4			

4. Conclusion and Suggestion

This teaching reforming was carried in 2019 to find a new teaching model to address problems in current teaching of business English correspondence, at the same time, at teaching experiment was carried out to test the effectiveness of that new model. That model (RESET) is a blended teaching model which combines different teaching methods such as flipped class, task-based teaching with help of Mosoteach and MOOC. This model can stimulate students' learning motivation and interests, extend time spent on learning, enhance peer learning and develop students' autonomous learning ability. From the result of final scores, we can find this model can help students to achieve more in this course. Besides, students gave comments on this model like *"very interesting", "thrilling", "I like it very much", "learnt much more", "helpful"*. And even till now, students always ask me that whether I can give lectures to them or not.

However, teaching reform applying information technology is a complicated process. Is the technology literacy of teachers good enough? The assessment system is reliable or not? Does every student like using cellphone in class? How to teach students of different levels in a class? Those are the questions should be addressed when exploring a new teaching model. For this study, there are some limitations. Firstly, there are 11 items to evaluate students' learning but there isn't percentage for each item in detail. Secondly, this experiment was done in only two classes. Therefore, in the future study, the percentage for each item should be quantified and a large scale of teaching experiment is necessary.

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