Teaching Design and Practice of Intercultural Communication Course Based on BOPPPS

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Abstract

BOPPPS (bridge-in, objectives, pre-assessment, participatory learning, post-assessment, summary) mode, centering around students, enables students to actively participate in classroom activities and stimulates their learning interest. It fully implements the philosophy of effective teaching. During the implementation of Intercultural Communication course in China, more and more teachers find that the content of the course is diverse and complex and teaching periods are always limited to achieve targeted teaching objectives. This pressure also leads to students’ inactive participation in class and further affects students’ classroom learning outcomes. To address this issue, taking the course Intercultural Communication as an example, this paper reassembles learning materials to formulate teaching design and approach according to BOPPPS mode, finding that problems of insufficient lesson periods and inactive participation in traditional Intercultural Communication courses are solved in this teaching practice. Therefore, the application of BOPPPS mode in Intercultural Communication course is feasible and potential to other similar courses.

Keywords

BOPPPS, Intercultural Communication, Teaching design

1. Introduction

With the continuous development of information and technology, online teaching is becoming more and more prevalent in high education globally. Recent years have witnessed an increasing number of learning technologies and teaching models to enhance teaching quality and learning outcomes. Under this trend, traditional classroom roles of teachers and students, teaching mode, teaching content are undergoing a revolutionary change. Meanwhile, frontline teachers find it more and more challenging to organize and manage classroom teaching while utilizing various online teaching resources. On one hand, the post-2000s generation of college students grew up in the Internet era, and their studies and lifestyles have been changed by the Internet to a large extent. They are more personalized and diversified and more dependent on mobile phones. On the other hand, the traditional teaching mode characterized with teacher as “duck-stuffing” and students as passive recipients can no longer attract the post-00s generation, thus the teaching quality and learning outcome are greatly reduced.

The quality of classroom teaching design directly affects teaching activities' efficiency, effect and benefit. Faced with opportunities and challenges, teachers are bound to explore and practice feasible teaching modes. BOPPPS prioritizes the effectiveness of classroom teaching in disassembling and analyzing teaching units to improve the teaching process in high education. The basic framework provided by the BOPPPS model can help teachers re-examine the distribution of teaching content and determine which content to migrate from the classroom to pre-class activities (Ke & Gao, 2020). This paper is to explore the teaching design and practice of the Intercultural Communication Course, enrich on-site
teaching practice examples in high education, and provide more teaching activities cases for cultural topics.

2. Literature Review

Based on experimental learning, BOPPPS Model originated from Canadian ISW (Instructional Skill Workshop) in the 1970s, emphasizing a student-centered teaching process to improve students’ participation in class (Day & Pattison, 2006). Featured by inquiry-based, personalized and participatory classroom teaching, BOPPPS has been introduced and adopted by more than 33 countries and implemented in more than 100 universities and training institutions around the world (Wang, 2020). Some scholars have pointed out that the BOPPPS teaching model can help teachers disassemble and analyze the teaching process and find blind spots in their teaching to improve their teaching quality and students’ learning outcome (Foxe et al., 2017; Lou et al., 2014). The BOPPPS mode develops teacher skills training based on teaching practice through clear six elements, which enhance teachers’ teaching skills and teaching design skills through intensive training of concentrated time (Chen, 2019). In short, the six elements are as follows (Shin & Tsai, 2020):

- Bridge-in: The link between the objective of the course and its value to the learner.
- Objective: A clear description of the learner’s learning outcomes at the end of the course.
- Pre-assessment: Evaluate the concepts that learners have already known about the course.
- Participatory: Learning: Learners should actively participate in learning activities.
- Post-assessment: Let teachers (and learners) understand the extent to which they have met learning objectives.
- Summary: Provide learners with an opportunity to reflect on what they have learned.

Centering around the student, BOPPPS teaching mode takes students’ participation as the core. Each learning unit should be divided into the above stages with each stage lasting between 10 and 15 minutes in order to make students more concentrated on the stage objectives. This time allocation is based on the theory that a learner’s attention span is around 15 minutes (Li, 2016). Meanwhile, teachers can moderately adjust the sequence and duration of the six stages to better suit their teaching objectives, which requires teachers to do a good job of teaching preparation, purposeful assignment of pre-class tasks, and lay a good foundation for the efficient application of BOPPPS model in class (Liang, 2020). With the increasing implementation of BOPPPS model in China’s high education, great optimization has been made along the way through the integration with advanced teaching philosophy, teaching mode, and teaching facilities.

3. The Necessity of Applying BOPPPS in Intercultural Communication Course

Intercultural Communication Course has long time served as a required professional course for senior students of English Major with 2 credits and altogether 32 credit hours. This paper will take the case of students at Nanjing University of Science and Technology, Zijin College to illustrate the necessity of applying the BOPPPS model in the Intercultural Communication course.

Compared with comprehensive colleges and universities, English major students in Zijin College do not prevail in the source of students. Some students (for example, from Yunnan Province) did not carry out English listening training in senior high school. The goal of students’ learning English is only to pass the final exam or TEM-4. Herein, students’ enthusiasm for active learning and classroom participation is not high in class. In contrast, some students who have a good foundation and enthusiasm for English are more willing to improve their English practical application ability in many aspects and expect more fruitful achievements in English learning. This unbalanced learning need make it difficult to design and implement the course with the same teaching goals within a fixed teaching duration.

What’s more, according to China National Quality Standards for Teaching Foreign Languages and Literature, students of English major are required to develop correct worldviews and values, good moral character, Chinese sentiment, an international perspective, a sense of social responsibility, and a spirit of cooperation, a spirit of innovation, and basic disciplinary literacy. Besides, the intercultural communication ability is exclusively explained in the Standards that students should respect the diversity of the world's cultures and have cross-cultural empathy and critical awareness; master basic theoretical knowledge and analytical methods of cross-cultural studies; understand the basic characteristics and similarities of Chinese and foreign cultures, and help people from different cultural backgrounds to communicate effectively across cultures. From basic literacy requirements to knowledge and ability aims, all-round and up-to-date teaching objectives have been expounded.

Conforming with the Standards and the actual situation of Zijin College, the syllabus of Intercultural Communication aims to integrate ideological education into the curriculum and help students establish a right world outlook on life and values. The specific objectives are as follows.

- Professional knowledge objectives: (1) Understand the external language expressions (e.g., language, dress code, food, music, sculpture, ceremonies, modes of interaction, etc.), characteristics, and similarities and differences of different cultures. (2) Understand the different features and elements of nonverbal communication. (3) Understand the
components of intercultural communication competence.

Values Objectives. (1) Understand different cultures and be able to analyze them dialectically; (2) Establish an attitude of tolerance, openness and respect for both Chinese and foreign cultures, and break through the limitation of extreme thinking; (3) Identify cultural prejudices, stereotypes, racism and ethnocentrism correctly and develop an awareness of cultural equality in intercultural communication.

Cultural Analysis Methodology Objectives: (1) Learn to adopt a historical, dialectical approach to the analysis of culture, which requires that a cultural phenomenon be read in its specific political, economic, religious and social context and that the internal logical relationship between the cultural phenomenon and the context in which it arises not be severed. (2) Cultivate the method of root metaphor to grasp the underlying motives that shape and nurture different cultures, including belief systems, values, philosophical systems, etc., on the basis of understanding the external manifestations of these cultures, so as to grasp the inner essential characteristics of different cultures rather than the superficiality of the cultures.

All the objectives aim to shape students with good intercultural communication skills and application ability while upholding critical thinking of different cultural phenomena. However, in the face of the ever-changing global development, a significant change has been made in the field of intercultural communication that culminated in uncovering covert factors and internal logic behind different cultural conflicts and blending, exploring efficient cultural communication strategies in establishing mutual understandings and common destiny of different cultures. Present intercultural communication courses have thus been challenged greatly for their mismatch between limited class periods and complicated language points, as well as incompatibility between higher requirements and students’ inadequacy of application in a real context. For a long time, to complete heavy teaching tasks within limited class periods, the “duck-stuffing” teaching mode has dominated the teaching process of Intercultural Communication, potentially leading to the exhaustion of teachers’ passion for teaching and students’ enthusiasm for learning. Furthermore, relying solely on the class and the textbook, students’ understanding and analyzing cultural context lag behind real situations. Overall, curriculum reform of the Intercultural Communication course at Zijin College is urgently required.

Hugely influenced by the dramatic change brought in teaching methods by the epidemic, as well as the pervasive use of online courses, an aggressive market of online teaching APPs have provided a number of technical and theoretical solutions to the problems in traditional “duck-stuffing” class. The BOPPPS model has been greatly applied during this period and quickly attracted the attention of both teachers and students for the following benefits. Firstly, teaching aims are more clearly and measurably defined in each teaching episode in this mode. Secondly, teacher-student interactions are more active and realistic for the participative learning process. Thirdly, computational thinking can be cultivated to better help students explore learning difficulties and blind spots. Last of all, students learning process can be extended from in-class activities to out-class activities, which is one of the most effective ways to solve the problem of insufficient teaching periods.

4. Design of the BOPPPS Teaching Model

Using BOPPPS teaching model to design and teach Intercultural Communication can improve students’ participation within effective time in the classroom and shape Intercultural Communication into a "golden course" for students while developing students’ computational thinking ability to more quickly identify blind spots in the learning process. To design an effective course based on BOPPPS, we need first to understand the internal relationship among the six stages. Generally speaking, they can be further divided into three parts, from learning to know, learning to do, to learning to be, which coincides nicely with Bloom’s classification of learning objectives: memory, comprehension, application, analysis, evaluation and creation. In the learning-to-know stage, Bridge-in, Pre-assessment and Objective parts should be well implemented to help students be aware of their own knowledge level and be well-prepared for participating in classroom activities. In the learning-to-do stage, the teacher acts as a facilitator to emphasize key points of each part, also to instruct students to share their own understandings in class while explaining learning difficult points in class. In the learning-to-be stage, students need to build a bridge between knowledge in class with the real cultural problem-solving process after internalizing the process.

Guided under the above teaching philosophy, the author has designed each unit of the Intercultural Communication course for a whole semester. The concrete implementation of unit 1, entitled “Communication Across Culture”, will be specifically introduced in this paper as an example. This unit, serving as an initial chapter to equip students with a cultural perspective, consists of a basic introduction to globalization as well as its challenges. What’s more, the learning materials provided in this chapter comprehensively introduce the importance of intercultural communication and blocks in it. To better apply BOPPPS model, the author also takes the advantage of an online platform—Rain classroom, in which a bunch of videos, pictures, and reading materials can be promoted to students immediately and a series of exer-
Exercises can be implemented online to better help students master their own knowledge level. Based on this teaching model, teachers can teach students in accordance with their aptitude and students can receive instruction that matches their English level (Zhou, 2021).

Six modules in BOPPPS mode can be equivalently implemented in this unit as follows:

Bridge-in: Students get information from prepared videos The Prince and Me, in which cultural conflicts happen everywhere, and from reading materials about an interesting story of explaining color to a blind person in Rain classroom. With the assistance of several keywords and questions, students are generally acquainted with the topic of intercultural communication and the difficulties people may possibly encounter in the interaction process.

Objectives: students get to know definitions of several key terms in this unit, such as globalization, intercultural communication, cross-cultural communication, and six blocks in intercultural communication. Some of them can be grasped after reading passages in our textbook and new words and phrases will be clearly explained in Rain classroom. Students can learn new vocabularies and complex sentences repeatedly before class, in contrast to a traditional classroom where students are exhausted in understanding lots of new words within a limited time while keeping up with teacher’s task schedule.

Pre-assessment: after previewing online learning materials, students need to complete online assessments in order to find blind spots in understanding unfamiliar terms and be well prepared for debate activities in class.

Participatory learning: firstly, through story-sharing activities, students share with classmates whatever experiences they have had in communication that can be considered as intercultural. Then work together to decide whether each of the sharing cases of communication is possibly intercultural or not. Secondly, through debate activity, students are divided into two groups and debate on the two different views mentioned in the given intercultural communication cases through Rain classroom. Students are required to state points of view clearly and support arguments with convincing and substantial evidence. The notes they get from Rain classroom platform before class will be of great help for them to give logical statements. Thirdly, through case study activity, students need to listen to a given case and discuss several listed questions centering around the reasons for misunderstandings in different cultural backgrounds.

Post-assessment: students are required to do a quick answer race in the way of cloze and match through Rain classroom. Through these activities, students’ understanding of key and difficult points in this lecture can be enhanced. They could also find it effective to check their own learning outcomes in this period.

Summary: students sum up the knowledge they have learned and teacher summarizes real learning outcomes according to post-assessment, as well as the blind spots and the way to overcome them.

5. Conclusion

BOPPPS mode, effective teaching philosophy to reassemble different learning material, is appropriate to be applied in reforming the Intercultural Communication course. It involves students at different levels together to build an interactive and harmonious learning atmosphere. Combined with online teaching platform Rain classroom, BOPPPS mode in the Intercultural Communication course breaks the boundaries between in-class teaching and after-class learning, effectively solving the problems of insufficient lesson periods and inactive participation in class. Still, it is noted that during the implementation process, teachers should provide a large range of teaching resources applicable to the course and a reasonable evaluation mechanism adjustable to different students. Meanwhile, as a facilitator and a guide, teachers should properly organize classroom activities to enhance students’ participation in learning outcomes by establishing a suitable classroom teaching quality supervision system (Wu, 2014). Therefore, future research should focus more on the analysis of students learning outcomes.

References


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