Research and Design of Flipped Classroom for International Trade Practice in Sino-Foreign Cooperated Higher Vocational Colleges

Yue Li¹,a,*

¹Department of Integrated Business, Suzhou Centennial College,
Suzhou, P.R. China

*aEmail: jlin2010@sinano.ac.cn

*Corresponding author

Keywords: Sino-Foreign Cooperated Higher Vocational College, Flipped Classroom, International Trade Practice.

Abstract. As a student-centered mode which turns the traditional education upside down, the flipped classroom draws growing interest recently. This paper analyses the characteristics of post-1995 students and the course of International Trade Practice in Sino-Foreign cooperated higher vocational colleges. Then the advantages and challenges of flipped classroom are studied for designing a new model of blended course to meet the demand of teaching. The possible problems, solutions, and implementation scheme are also discussed.

Introduction

There has been a growing interest in senior technical staff due to the economic structure transformation and upgrading in China. More and more students and their parents have changed their negative attitude to vocational school. In this process, the Sino-Foreign cooperated higher vocational colleges has also played a unique role and had significant development because of its international features. However, the students enrolled by Sino-Foreign cooperated higher vocational colleges have much more complex characteristics than before. First, they have distinct characteristics of the times as the Chinese post-1995 generation. Second, they are different from research-oriented undergraduates as the students of higher vocational colleges. Last, the students choosing Sino-Foreign colleges have significant differences compared with the peers in domestic ordinary colleges. As a result, the traditional teaching mode has been unable to meet the challenges. The only way to increase students’ performance in Sino-Foreign cooperated higher vocational colleges is to study the students and courses in-depth and create a new teaching model.

Flipped (or inverted) classroom is a widely reported method to increase student performance [1-5]. The model was described simply as, “Lectures took place outside of class and class time was devoted to group and individual problem solving, discussion, critical thinking and experiments”[1]. It allows the teacher spending more time for one-on-one engagement with individual students after removing the instructional content from in-class time. As a result, the flipped classroom is considered as a student-centered model which turns the traditional education upside down. Compared with the developed studies and practices of flipped classroom in western countries, the researches in China are just on the initial stage. There are several domestic universities
to explore and carry out the flipped classroom preliminary [6-9]. For example, Tsinghua University tried this model using its own MOOC platform[10].

In this paper, feasibility and advantage of flipped classroom in Sino-Foreign cooperated higher vocational colleges is studied after the analysis of the target student groups and specific course of International Trade Practice. The possible problems, solutions, and implementation scheme are also discussed.

Analysis on the Students and Course

The Students

In fact, the students in Sino-Foreign cooperated higher vocational colleges have some unique advantages compared to most of the undergraduates or ordinary college students. A significant superiority for these students is that their families are usually very well off because of the higher tuition charge. So they have higher emotional quotient, better adaptability and broader vision due to the impact of the family environment and more travel experiences. There are much more opportunities for them to take part in a variety of interest classes to learn talents. Most of these students have advantages in practical ability and active thinking with easier acceptance to new things.

However, the above advantages are often can’t fully reflected in the professional courses learning with traditional teaching mode. There are some serious problems instead for the Sino-Foreign cooperated higher vocational colleges students as follow,

1. Poor professional basis without good learning habits. There are still significant gaps in the book knowledge base and learning habits between the enrolled students and undergraduates because of the lower admission scores. The direct result is that the students have problems in learning the complicated contents of professional courses. So the students are not interested in these courses in traditional classroom, with little spare time spent for preview or review. Their performance is getting worse and worse and weariness is widespread.

2. Lack of curiosity and ambition. The students usually lack learning motivation and goal for better job because of their rich parents. A significant number of students only pay attention in meeting attendance and passing the exam. Therefore, the students usually ignore what the teachers have taught in the class. They would like to sleeping, listening to the song, or playing around with a smart phone in the traditional classroom.

3. Lack of self restriction. A lot of students in Sino-Foreign cooperated higher vocational colleges are spoiled during their growing process. Their parents are usually too busy for business to educate or accompany them, with the compensation of money or gifts. It makes the students unwilling to bear hardships, lack of responsibility, and weak will in overcoming difficulties. It is easier for them to give up when encountering difficulties in learning the courses. While the continual efforts are necessary for many core knowledge points to be understood and mastered.

In a word, traditional teaching methods exposed more and more limitations in Sino-Foreign cooperated higher vocational colleges due to the unique characteristics of the post-1995 students. It is difficult for the theoretical course to draw students’ learning interest during restricted class-time, and meet students’ individuation by unified teaching in a large class.

The Course

International Trade Practice is a special professional course with a combination of theory and practice. More attention should be paid on practice for higher vocational
students to meet the future job requirements. However, the part of the theory is the basis of practical operation. The theoretical knowledge teaching takes up more than 2/3 of the class hours in traditional teaching of this professional course. The operation training can be given only at the end of the whole course, which makes theory and practice disconnected with each other. Even so, it is still difficult for the teacher to explain the knowledge points deeply in the limited classroom time to ensure every student understanding. For example, the understanding and application of the terms of trade are difficult for a lot of students while it takes a plenty of time to explain in class.

The Advantages and Challenges of Flipped Classroom

Advantages Compared to the Traditional Mode

Flipped classroom has advantages in teaching ideas, methods, content and effectiveness, etc. Compared to the traditional classroom teaching mode.

Before Class. The students only need to read the textbook sketch in the traditional preview. However, they are required to master the knowledge points and complete the corresponding exercises before the flipped class. It leads learners to searching for related information and self-studying conscientiously. There are a lot of easy knowledge points in International Trade Practice can be self-studied by students.

In The Class. Considering the attention span of the post-1995 students, flipped classroom can get their attention much better compared with traditional way. In addition, flipped classroom mode can save the class time for discussion by transferring the explanation of the fundamental knowledge points out of the class, which is really helpful for putting the theory into practice.

After Class. The homework after class in traditional teaching mode is mainly for consolidate the knowledge points, which still remain in the stage of theory. However, the part of theory has already been solved during class time in the flipped classroom model. The students can focus their attention on the consolidation of practice and innovation, what is also the most widely appreciated feature of flipped classroom.

As a student-centered mode, flipped classroom finds a new breakthrough to improve the relations between teachers and students in the traditional classroom. It is a effective way for teaching the post-1995 students to meet the training goal of the international trade practice course.

The Problems

According the reported literature and the analysis of our students, there may be some problems as follow,

The Lack of A Mechanism For Timely Exchange. Many students may have questions in self-studying before class. These questions may interrupt the self-study progress if not be answered on time. So a platform for exchange timely and effectively among the teacher and students is necessary for flipped classroom model.

Challenge To The Teacher’s Comprehensive Ability. A successful flipped-classroom course is undoubtedly the presentation of teacher's comprehensive ability including professional level and proficiency, interdisciplinary, practical knowledge, and organizational learning capability. The effect of flipped classroom should be more observed even the teacher is knowledgeable and experienced. Teachers are required to be not only the knowledge disseminators, but also the course developer and designer in the flipped classroom mode. Therefore, the implementation of the flipped classroom is a huge test to teacher’s ability, energy, and time.
Ensure Each Student Completing The Homework. The preparation before class plays a key role in implementation of the flipped classroom smoothly. Watching the micro-courses seriously and finishing the pre-class test are necessary for the students to know whether they have mastered the knowledge of this lesson. The flipped classroom should be returned to the traditional teaching mode if the homework before class is absent. As a result, how to make each learner completing the preparation before class is a challenge for the implementation of flipped classroom.

Solutions and Specific Course Design
In view of the above problems, the corresponding solutions are also designed as follow to minimize the resistance.

A New Evaluation System
The traditional evaluation systems for students mainly focus on the behavior performance during the class time, completion of homework, and exam grades. However, the flipped classroom model places more emphasis on the students' autonomous learning ability and innovation consciousness out of class-time. So the traditional assessment methods are not comprehensive in evaluating the students’ performance. New assessment methods and standards match flipped classroom model should be established. For example, the students’ preparation before class must be evaluated and scored as part of academic achievement. And the time for students to watch the videos can be monitored by website platform.

The number of courses, teaching hours, students’ scores, and research achievements are the main contents of traditional teachers’ assessment. These quantitative standards also need to be changed after the implementation of flipped classroom. The new evaluation system to encourage the enthusiasm of flipped classroom should mainly focus on details including related micro-course video design, the effect and timeliness of the interaction with students, the student organization of group cooperative in class-time, and so on. The enterprise evaluation is also necessary to meet the needs of market in higher vocational colleges.

Improve The Function of The Network Platform
Besides to provide a platform for interaction among teachers and students timely and effectively, the internet system also should records the learning process, provides the note pad, and help the learners to recover the last study fast. Another function for the network system is to track students' self-study process before class, and ensure the videos and homework being finished by everyone before class.

Flipped Classroom is Used Flexibly
Some knowledge points still need to be explained during class-time if the micro-course videos are not enough in the chapters mainly on theory. The course progress should be adjusted carefully according the content and the actual learning situation of students, and differentiated counseling is necessary.

Blended Courses Design
As an attractive combination of traditional face-to-face and virtual elements, the blended classroom possesses both the advantages of the two modes. It not only emphasizes teachers’ inspired, guidance and oversight role during the process, but also
attaches the importance of students’ subjectivity, creative, and active in the process of mastering the knowledge.

Design of the Flipped Classroom for International Trade Practice

Design of The Learning Situations

First, the course content of International Trade Practice is integrated according to the analysis results of business position, business tasks, students' professional quality, and necessary knowledge and skills in the international trade. Then a business transaction is divided into four different learning situations: trade preparation, business negotiation, the performance of the contract, and business rehabilitation. There are several learning tasks arranged for the organization of teaching as follow,

Learning situation 1: Trade preparation including the international trade situation analysis, the international trade hot spot questions, and the transaction prepares. There are three sub situations.

Learning situation 2: Trade negotiation including commodity clause, terms of trade, transport clause, and insurance clause. There are four sub situations.

Learning situation 3: The performance of the contract including the contract signed, and the contract to fulfill. There are two sub situations.

Learning situation 4: Business rehabilitation including prevention and treatment of international payment, and payment dispute. There are two sub situations.

Design of the Specific Course

Test cycle: one semester.
Object: Freshman (international trade majors) in second term.
Class: A total of 14 weeks, in addition to the first week (introduction, the first test) and last week (final exam). 3 hours / week
Group: Each group including 3-4 students
Teacher's work: the production of micro lesson video, the use of Suzhou hundred years of Career Academy College MOOC platform upload course materials, before the class test questions, after-school practice, etc.
Analysis: The freshman students have not been exposed to any International Trade professional courses. As a professional basic and introductory course, International Trade Practice is particularly important for the students in this major for the basic concepts, practical training and related acknowledge.

The International Trade Practice flipped classroom will be demonstrated by the methods including investigation of the questionnaire, discussion and so on after the end of the test cycle.

Several key indexes including pass rates of professional certification, students’ final grades, and students' satisfaction will be compared with the previous performance in traditional classroom model.

Summary

The feasibility and advantage of flipped classroom in Sino-Foreign cooperated higher vocational colleges is demonstrated after the analysis of the target student groups and specific course of International Trade Practice. The possible problems, solutions, and implementation scheme are also discussed.
Acknowledgement

This research was sponsored by Qing Lan Project, Jiangsu Province.

References


