# A  Comparative and Optimized Study of MOOCs and Conventional EFL Teaching in College

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**ABSTRACT :** *The article firstly reviews the development tendency, the main characteristics, and the influences of international MOOCs. Then the author makes comparative study between MOOCs and conventional EFL teaching in college in terms of the number of being lectured, lecture time, leaning motive, learning time and space, learning subject, interactive mode, course design, course presentation, and course assessment. The focus of this article lies in providing two suggestions on optimizing these two teaching models: From Push to Pull; From Independent and Authoritative to Gathering and Interactive. To establish a hybrid EFL teaching model integrating the advantages of MOOCs into conventional EFL teaching is the common ideal shared by EFL teachers.*

*Keywords –MOOCs, EFL teaching, comparative study, optimized study, integration*

## I.       INTRODUCTION

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs for short), as the new development of distance learning, is a kind of online courses aimed at open visit and massive participation. In recent years, MOOCs rose to prominence by leaps and bounds being characteristic of massiveness, openness, high-quality, and free of charge globally. Many top-class universities in different countries acceded to the ranks of MOOCs one after another, and their rapid development rendered the conventional universities full of passions for the future education, inclusive of EFL teaching.

The first course of MOOCs, Connectivism and Connective Knowledge, was established by George Siemens and Stephen Downes for Manitoba University, which combined David Wiley's open contents of Intro to Open Education with Alec Couros' open learning concept in his network course of Social Media and Open Education.  MOOCs learners can participate into online learning and open discussion through social software, such as YouTube, Blog, Moodle, and Twitter. [1] The year of 2012 is the year of MOOC. Three distinguished universities including Stanford, Harvard, and MIT came to be involved in the operation of MOOCs, permitting any learners around the world to register their online courses freely; it transmitted this concept: anybody can learn any knowledge anywhere and anytime. By the end of 2013, Coursera, one of the three mega MOOCs, has assembled 558 courses offered by 107 distinguished universities, and more than 6 million learners have registered online.

## II.       THE ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL MOOCS' INFLUENCES ON EFL TEACHING AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

**2.1 The influences of international MOOCs on EFL teaching in college**

According to the website information from Coursera, there are 70 cooperative partners including American celebrated universities, Yale and Stanford University. Another major platform of MOOCs, edX, advocates spreading outstanding courses offered by world first-rate universities. All these facts indicate that more and more populace has accesses to the higher education being far away from them before. Meantime, the free learners own more freedom to decide when to learn and how to learn. The comprehensive development of MOOCs is bound to exert radical influence on the society. Once the openness of high-quality higher learning resources goes beyond the campus and covers every corner of the country and the world, the individuals, families, entrepreneurs, and government agencies can enjoy the perfect training in knowledge, information and skills, and so a real learning society and knowledge society is approaching. [2]

Undoubtedly, MOOCs will have great influences on college English teaching. Data of 2013 reveal that Coursera platform provides 12 languages courses, and 91 percent of them are lectured in English. College students can improve their English proficiency through focusing on some language points. The famous educationist Lu Youquan has said that in the era of modernized educational technology, if the college students cannot be nurtured by the university in scientific spirits, democratic spirits, critical spirits and ideal personality, they may not go to college, finishing their schooling at home through doing research, consulting  references and writing papers. [3] As portable mobile terminal devices are more and more intelligent, many learners begin to transfer their learning classes to smart phones, downloading excellent college course videos, installing English

learning software to learn English anytime and anywhere. This learning model better employs scattered time, improving their learning efficiency. Compared with face-to-face course and the network course based on computer, this smart phone learning course is more micro, more instant, stressing context learning, which makes English learning easier and more convenient. At present, there are around 40 percent of network users learn foreign language knowledge with their phones. Therefore, college English teachers are confronted with a huge challenge and danger that more and more students will transfer from English class to phone courses, focusing their interests and attentions on MOOCs.

**2.2 The analysis of MOOCs' characteristics from two perspectives**

In general, MOOCs are free courses open to global learners provided by those top-class universities. The teaching forms are similar to class teaching, but the class is extended to the cyber space, and the whole world is a huge class. Its teaching characteristics are as follows, its time limitation (the courses generally last 2 to 12 weeks. Once many MOOCs finish, the unregistered cannot visit the courses), its regular assignment (there are weekly assignments, requiring learners to finish them on time with peer review), its intensive interaction (the interaction between teacher and learners, video and learners, learners and learners), its learning files system (every learner's learning process is recorded by MOOCs assessment system to record their learning performance), and its learning certificate (the learners who finish the whole course and obtain the required performance can be awarded Statement of Accomplishment). [4]

In addition, there are other three main features to be mentioned. The micro-video is a major teaching mode lasting 15 minutes with questions and interpretations in order to avoid learners' diversion from the class and help them to digest the new knowledge earlier. The automatic assessment system can reduce the professors' workload of assessment for learners' assignments to the minimum. The interactive forum for learners to interact is a very positive platform to explore learners' potential and exercise their collective intelligence.

## III. THE COMPARATIVE AND OPTIMIZED STUDY OF MOOCS AND CONVENTIONAL EFL TEACHING IN COLLEGE

**3.1 The comparison between MOOCs course model and conventional EFL teaching in college**

At present, MOOCs involve two course types: cMOOC and xMOOC. According to different theoretical basis, these two course types present different characteristics. cMOOC belongs to knowledge construction, emphasizing creative, autonomous and social network learning. This course is distributed in various areas with students and teachers contributing to the online community. Learners enjoy higher decision-making power to connect and construct the new knowledge through resources sharing and multi-dimension interaction in the community. xMOOC, however, is quite similar to the conventional EFL teaching process focusing on learning contents, knowledge transmission and duplication. Video, homework and test are the main teaching and learning approaches.

Although, many MOOCs follow the conventional college teaching process including registration, attending the class, class test, homework, discussion, exam, graduation and certificate. But, in fact, compared with the traditional one, in terms of the number of being lectured, lecture time, leaning motive, learning time and space, learning subject, interactive mode, course design, course presentation, and course assessment, MOOCs have their particular characters, which deconstruct the links of teaching and learning in traditional face-to-face communicative system, reconstructing the new interaction system on the basis of Internet by means of process reconstruction. Table 1 gives the readers a clear and complete illustration as to the differences in various perspectives.

Table 1: The Comparative Study of MOOCs Model and Conventional EFL Teaching Model [5]

|  | MOOCs Model | Conventional EFL Teaching Model |
|---|---|---|
| Number of being lectured | Without fixed number, generally thousands of learners | About 40 students or no more than 80 students |
| Lecture time | Flexible, about 10 to 15 minutes, micro-video is the main teaching form | Fixed, 45 minutes or 50 minutes |
| Learning motive | Out of learners' learning demands and interests | To fulfill required EFL courses |
| Learning time & space | To learn anywhere and anytime | Restricted by the time, place, and region of EFL class teaching |
| Learning subject | Student-centered, with students' active initiative | Teacher-centered, with students' passive participation |
| Interactive mode | Multi-dimension, and multi-level interaction | Face-to-face communication with strong sense of field |
| Course design | Delicate and creative | Lace of creation |

| Course presentation | Repeated presentation of short video | Teacher's lecture only one time |
|---|---|---|
| Course assessment | Systematic, peer and teacher's multi-dimension assessment | Teacher's assessment |

**3.2 The optimized study of MOOCs and conventional EFL teaching in college**

*From Push to Pull:* MOOCs are characteristic of higher decision-making power, repetition, the emphasis of learning experience and interaction, stressing the concept of To Learn and revealing the brand-new teaching orientation based on Pull. In the conventional EFL teaching model, teachers possess the absolute rights to speak, pushing students to learn inactively. The Pull teaching model can encourage students to arrange their learning activities in their own ways in accordance with their interests and learning requirements. They can watch teaching videos repeatedly, read those recommended materials, do exercises systematically and participate in community interaction. These active and positive learning processes effectively prevent the whole class push model, mobilizing learners' enthusiasm and initiative to construct and create the knowledge. Experience represents the static learning with the focus on students' independent sense and internalization of the knowledge; interaction represents the dynamic learning with the focus on students' interpretation and production of the knowledge. The optimized means of MOOCs and conventional EFL teaching is to substitute Pull for Push, in other words, to substitute active exploration and constructive interaction online for passive absorption and separate thinking off-line. Many famous universities attempt to apply the Flipped Classroom model in which the students watch the video of MOOC through campus network, and join in class discussion to solve the problems. The discussion video is uploaded to the server, sharing with those MOOCs learners with lower learning pace. This modernized hybrid learning model reconstructs students' learning process on campus, flipping the regular learning order with information passing on in class and information absorbing and internalizing after class. This teaching reform contributes to the knowledge internalization and the enhancement of learning efficiency.

*From Independent and Authoritative to Gathering and Interactive:* Students' watching MOOCs video revolutionizes the conventional EFL monologue teaching model.  The online physical separation establishes an equal-dialogue learning environment in which students can assess the teachers very sharply without considering teachers' authority. Teachers or other online learners can respond to the follow-up post or questions through massive references and multiple thinking. Cooperative creation is the first choice for the higher learning to cooperate with MOOCs. The education field has commenced to explore the hybrid teaching model to integrate MOOC into EFL teaching class, establishing MOOCs-Inside teaching model (network course plus university face-to-face deep participation teaching model). This integrated model turns our teaching class to reasoning field and the emotion-experienced field to radiate the vigor of the life. [6] The learning community members supported by MOOCs and EFL teaching class develop active interaction carrying their own cultural capital including life experiences, field knowledge, and emotional attitudes. Each branch of learning and learning community own their particular knowledge structure and way of thinking. The active interaction can promote deepening and internalizing the knowledge. The equal dialogue and communication between community members can help learners to find, understand and solve the problems with pluralistic and comprehensive views.

The integration of MOOCs and EFL teaching isn't aimed at offering complete content, but advancing interactive questions relevant to the theme, requiring students to obtain the real cognition of the knowledge through practice (consult the references, and communicate with peers). The integration also advocates the teaching method of Learning by Doing, promoting the development of the students' critical thinking. Doing makes the students act as the subject of the practice to establish their cognition of the objective world. Teachers in EFL class and MOOCs propel the students to find the problems in practice on guiding their doing, providing the perspective and ways to solve the problems. In this process, students learn to think in critical and analytical way.

## IV.     CONCLUSION

MOOCs is the new development of open educational resources, which blurs the dividing line of online learning and traditional learning through providing brand-new way of transmitting knowledge and learning. Although it hasn't established mature system, it does bring forth the deep reform in learning concept, learning system, teaching model, and talents development. College English teachers must reconsider their teaching roles and teaching models, establishing the hybrid and integrated teaching model to bring the advantages of MOOCs and conventional EFL teaching into full play.

## V.     ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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