

## Exploring the Blended Teaching Reform Mode of “Introduction to Chinese Culture” Course for English Majors Based on SPOC

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### Abstract

In the context of digital education’s booming development, this thesis explores the blended teaching reform mode of the English major’s Introduction to Chinese Culture course based on SPOC (Small Private Online Course). By analyzing the characteristics and advantages of the SPOC platform, combining the learning needs of English majors and the teaching objectives of the Introduction to Chinese Culture course, this study designs and implements a set of blended teaching programs, aiming to enhance students’ cross-cultural communication skills while improving their in-depth understanding of Chinese Culture. This study conducted an in-depth discussion on students’ experiences and feelings about blended teaching before and after the teaching reform, teachers’ roles and challenges in the teaching reform, and the impact of blended teaching on students’ learning outcomes, and found that the blended teaching model based on SPOC significantly enhanced the teaching effect and provided new perspectives and strategies for modernizing and reforming the English majors’ courses.

**Key words:** SPOC; English major; blended teaching; Introduction to Chinese Culture

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### INTRODUCTION

*Introduction to Chinese Culture* is a comprehensive course covering many aspects, such as philosophy, politics, and academics. The goal is to equip students with knowledge of Chinese Culture, develop critical thinking and cross-cultural understanding, and inspire their love of Chinese Culture. The establishment of the elective course *Introduction to Chinese Culture* for undergraduate English majors can enhance students’ cultural literacy and international vision, help them establish correct values and artistic confidence, and cultivate cross-cultural talents for the country and society (Li, 2024). Though this course, students can learn better to tell Chinese stories and spread Chinese voices.

The teaching mode of *Introduction to Chinese Culture* is mostly based on the traditional teaching mode, in which teachers teach knowledge in class and students take notes and listen to explanations. The traditional teaching model focuses too much on historical and classical content, and ignores the evolution and influence of Chinese culture in contemporary society (Ma & Yao, 2024). Some teachers have the problem of emphasizing the cultivation of students’ English proficiency and neglecting the cultivation of students’ cross-cultural communication skills, understanding cross-cultural communication in a one-sided way, and ignoring the important pedagogical content of using English to express Chinese culture (Cao, 2021). Under this teaching mode, students can only passively accept the knowledge transfer and rely on rote memorization to cope with the examination. The teaching effect is unsatisfactory and fails to cultivate students’ interest in learning Chinese Culture; this learning effect does not help to enhance students’ humanistic literacy and inheritance of excellent traditional Culture and fails to achieve the purpose of letting students understand and spread the traditional

Chinese Culture (Tan & Liang, 2024). In the context of digital education, the SPOC teaching model provides new ideas and methods for reforming teaching in higher education institutions.

This paper aims to discuss the blended teaching reform mode of the English majors’ “Introduction to Chinese Culture” course based on the SPOC teaching mode. By analyzing the current teaching situation of the course “Introduction to Chinese Culture” for English majors and combining the features and advantages of the SPOC teaching mode, the paper proposes a specific model of blended teaching reform, which combines online independent learning and offline classroom teaching, gives full play to the role of the students’ main body and the teacher’s guiding role, and improves the teaching effect and the student’s motivation to learn.

## 1. THE COMBINATION OF SPOCS AND OFFLINE CLASSROOM TEACHING

“SPOC is a blended learning model that combines classroom teaching with online learning. In the classroom, students can be divided into several project groups to complete the classroom subject content (Zhou, 2023).” SPOC (Small Private Online Courses: Small Private Online Courses) is a term first coined by Prof. Armando Fox (2013) of Berkeley University in 2013, which implies that MOOCs are adapted to fit the specific needs of educational institutions that follow the diversity of academic standards and tend to personalize learning (Ruiz Palmeiro et. al., 2020). Since the concept was first introduced in 2013, SPOCs have been progressively implemented in higher education. SPOCs emerged to compensate for the shortcomings of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), namely the high dropout rate.

The SPOC (Small Private Online Course) teaching model is a blend of traditional classroom learning and online education. Unlike MOOCs, which are open to a large audience, SPOCs limit enrollment to a smaller, more focused group, often within a specific institution or course. SPOCs usually have a student population of tens to hundreds and are fully open only to small-scale applicants who meet the entry requirements (Tang, 2021). This model integrates online content (such as video lectures, quizzes, and discussions) with in-person classroom activities, promoting a blended learning environment. SPOCs allow for personalized learning experiences, more interaction between students and instructors, and flexible teaching methods, while still leveraging the benefits of online education tools. The goal is to enhance engagement and improve learning outcomes. In the SPOC model, students usually learn independently before class, mastering basic knowledge by watching videos, reading materials, and completing online exercises. Class time is then devoted to in-

depth discussions, hands-on activities and individual tutoring by the teacher. This model aims to increase student learning efficiency and engagement while giving teachers more opportunities for differentiated instruction and timely feedback.

## 2. THE CONSTRUCTION OF TEACHING MODEL AND APPLICATION OF SPOC IN INTRODUCTION TO CHINESE CULTURE

In the course *Introduction to Chinese Culture* for English majors, a blended teaching mode combining Small Private Online Course (SPOC) and offline classroom teaching can be implemented to enhance learning outcomes. This method aims to provide a student-centered approach, using digital resources, interactive discussions, and personalized feedback to improve both English language proficiency and cultural understanding. Below are key strategies for effective integration of this blended teaching model.

### 2.1 Digital Resources and Online Engagement

The digitization of course content is a key strategy in the blended teaching model, where theoretical knowledge, historical background, and cultural case studies are transformed into video lectures, interactive courseware, and online assessments available on the SPOC platform. The primary focus is on ensuring linguistic accuracy and cultural depth in these materials to meet the needs of English majors. Additionally, the use of interactive online discussion forums is emphasized to foster student engagement, enabling them to practice their English language skills by discussing cultural topics in an academic context. Regular participation by instructors helps maintain the academic rigor and depth of these discussions.

### 2.2 Optimized Offline Classroom Instruction

The offline component of the course utilizes a flipped classroom model, where classroom time is dedicated to deeper exploration of complex and controversial topics initially introduced on the SPOC platform. This model encourages students to actively participate in activities such as English debates and speeches on Chinese culture, promoting both linguistic competence and cultural understanding. The offline classroom is mainly used for in-depth discussion of complex and controversial points covered in the online SPOC platform, as well as for cultural practice. For example, students are organized to make English speeches or debates on Chinese Culture to promote the double improvement of language skills and cultural understanding. A core aspect of the SPOC-based flipped classroom is its student-centered approach, which shifts the role of the teacher from a traditional “leader” to a “guide,” fostering a more equal and interactive teaching

environment (Gao & Chen, 2021). And the students and teachers are to be on an equal footing in the teaching and learning process.

### 2.3 Personalization, Cooperation, and Assessment

The integration of online and offline learning ensures continuity and depth in the educational experience. Pre-class preparation using SPOC resources allows for more meaningful classroom discussions, while post-class reviews reinforce students' understanding through additional online materials and assessments. Personalized learning is facilitated by the data analytics capabilities of the SPOC platform, allowing instructors to provide tailored feedback and address common challenges in class. Blended learning requires that online learning and face-to-face learning together constitute an integrated course, and the incongruity of students going back to the traditional classroom for review after online learning should be avoided, and the computerized data system can be used to track the students' learning process, so as to match the difficulty level and course content with the online, one-to-one, or group learning modules (Bian & Wang, 2017).

Through the group cooperation, students can conduct in-depth research on specific Chinese cultural items, such as Chinese festivals, traditional arts, etc., and then present them in the classroom, which enhances teamwork and cross-cultural communication skills (Qin, 2024). Teachers may set up online discussion forums to encourage students to discuss specific cultural topics in English to improve their language application skills. Teachers can participate regularly to guide the direction of the discussion and ensure academic depth. Then, a diversified assessment framework, combining online tasks, group projects, classroom performance, and final papers, is employed to comprehensively evaluate students' learning effectiveness and academic outcomes. And regular reflection from instructors is also necessary. Regular feedback meetings between teachers and students are held to discuss the implementation effect of the blended teaching mode, collect students' feedback on SPOC resources and classroom activities, and continuously optimize the teaching design. Regular feedback sessions between teachers and students further support the continuous optimization of the blended teaching approach.

By blending online SPOC resources with offline classroom teaching, the course *Introduction to Chinese Culture* can offer a dynamic and effective learning experience for English majors. This approach not only improves students' English language proficiency but also deepens their understanding of Chinese culture, fostering stronger intercultural communication skills. The combination of digital resources, personalized learning, and diversified assessments creates a more

student-centered, interactive, and enriching learning environment.

## 3. STRATEGIES FOR UTILIZING SPOCS TO INCREASE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING EFFECTIVENESS

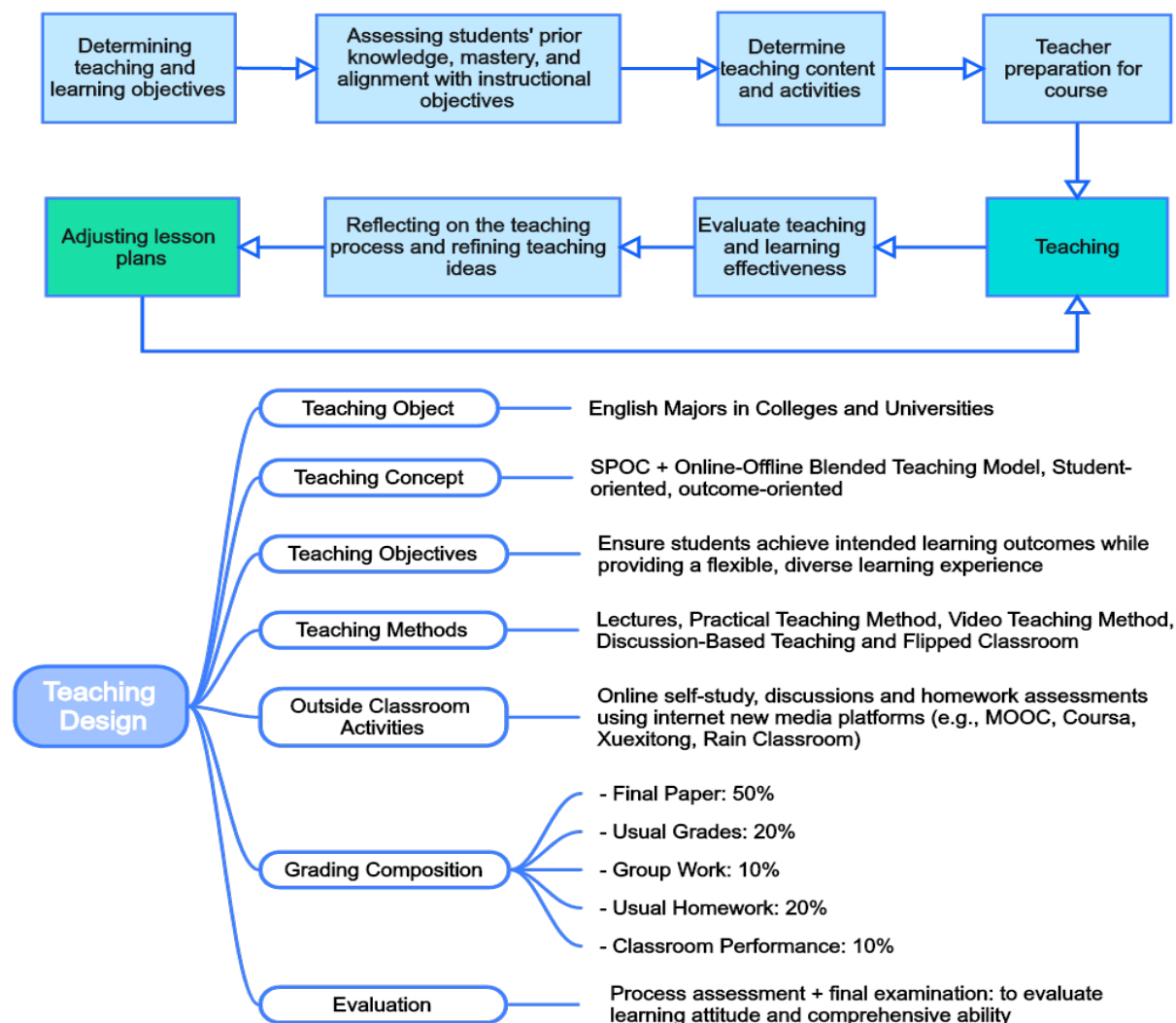
In traditional teaching, the SPOC platform can be utilized in the following ways to improve students' participation and learning effect:

### 3.1 Course Design

On the SPOC platform, students can enjoy personalized learning path development tailored to their English proficiency and understanding of Chinese Culture, providing beginners with solid basics and simple exercises. In contrast, high-level students can explore cultural analysis and extensive reading in depth. This model enhances students' learning autonomy and stimulates their enthusiasm for learning by allowing them to choose what to study according to their own pace and interests (see Figure 1).

Meanwhile, the platform integrates diversified teaching resources, including video lessons, audio explanations, rich texts, vivid pictures, and animations to meet different students' learning styles and needs. It enhances the fun and attraction of learning through exciting teaching tools such as videos of cultural short stories and online lectures by experts. For example, some scholars have proposed (Li, 2024). Improve the teaching mode-specific practices based on the rich teaching content, according to the characteristics of students to design, constantly improve, and perfect teaching mode. Teachers create situations and raise specific questions, and then teachers and students search for information, study, research, explore, and discuss together to solve differences and problems that arise in the teaching process so that students can master knowledge and deepen the acquisition of skills. For example, teachers and students share Chinese myths, fables, legends, etc., and discuss Chinese myths in and out of the classroom. The patriotic spirit, perseverance, diligence, courtesy, and respect for the wise and the virtuous are conveyed by traditional Chinese stories so that students can deepen their sense of patriotism and traditional Chinese ideology. This way, students can deepen their patriotism and traditional Chinese ideology and values.

In addition, interactive learning activities such as discussion forums, online quizzes, and group projects encourage students to actively participate in in-depth discussions and research on topical issues and themes of Chinese Culture, and ultimately to present their learning outcomes on the platform, thus creating an active and productive learning environment.



**Figure 1**  
The procedure of instructional design for the course - *Introduction to Chinese Culture*

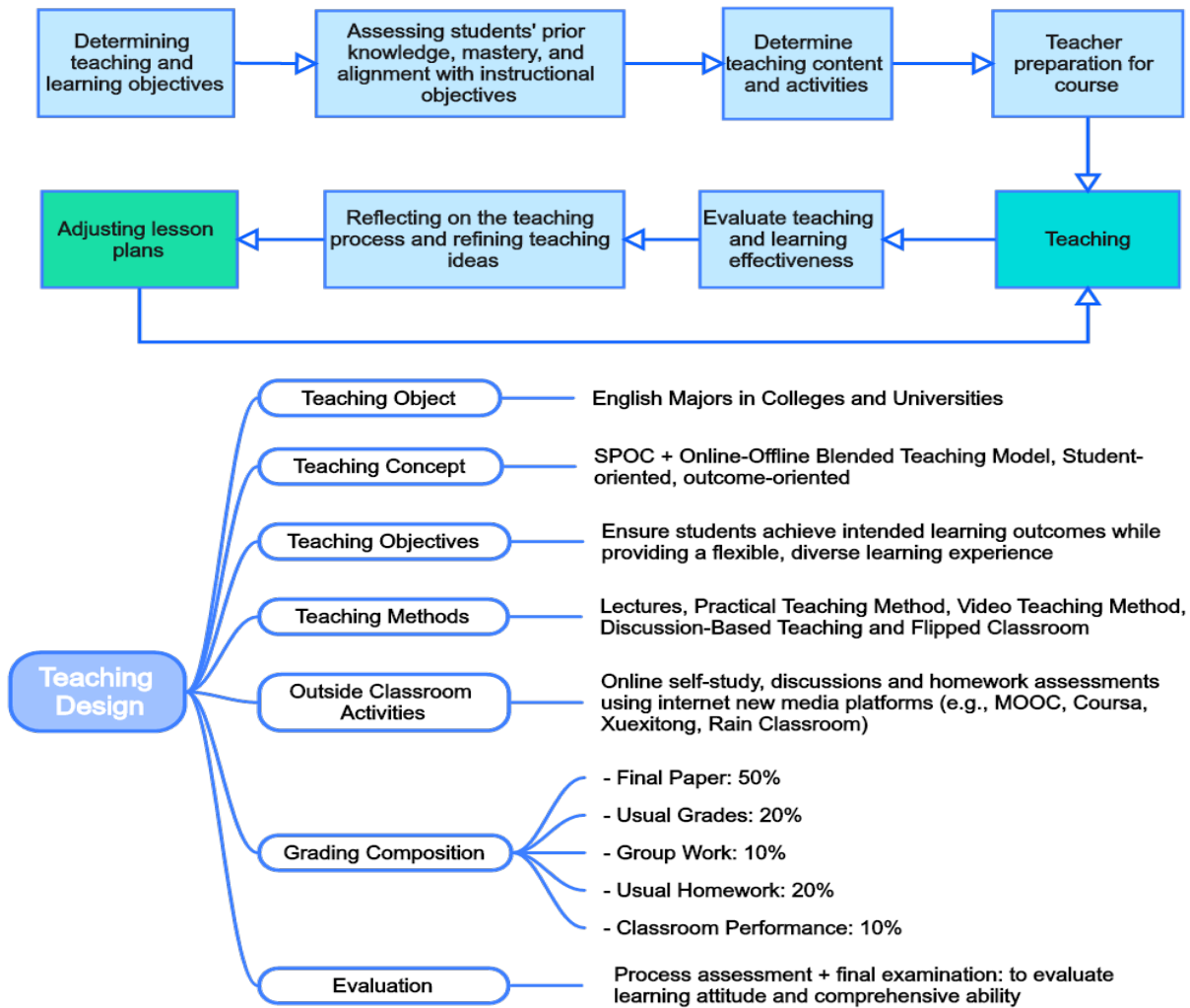
### 3.2 Feedback and Evaluation of Teaching and Learning

Through the SPOC platform, the teacher realizes instant submission and feedback of assignments, clearly points out the strengths and weaknesses of students' assignments and provides suggestions for improvement, and at the same time, sets up online tests for students to self-assess their learning effectiveness, and flexibly adjusts the teaching content and progress accordingly.

Regarding the composition of grades, the final paper accounts for 50%. The regular grade consists of regular homework (20%), group work (20%), and class performance (10%). The final examination of the examination course is in the form of submitting a thesis.

The assessment method is a combination of process and final assessments, mainly used to assess students' learning attitude and comprehensive ability (see Figure 2).

In addition to the above evaluation mechanism, the teacher also introduces a point reward mechanism to motivate students to participate actively in learning activities and stimulate students' competitive potential and learning motivation by exchanging points for rewards and regularly announcing their learning progress and ranking. Teachers are involved in the whole process, actively guiding students' thinking and discussion, holding regular online Q&A sessions, and precisely adjusting teaching strategies according to students' feedback to enhance the personalization and effectiveness of teaching.



**Figure 2**  
 The main steps of teaching design for the course - *Introduction to Chinese Culture*

### 3.3 Learning Support

We are committed to ensuring the stable operation and convenient use of the SPOC platform, providing comprehensive technical support for students by responding quickly to technical problems, and providing detailed operation guides and video tutorials. At the same time, we actively advocate the construction of learning communities, encouraging students to share their learning experiences and resources on this platform to form a good atmosphere of mutual assistance and progress, and teachers also organize learning group activities to promote collaborative learning and growth among students. In addition, we use the SPOC platform to provide students with a wealth of extracurricular resources, such as recommending Chinese culture-related movies, books and information on cultural activities, with the aim of broadening students' horizons, stimulating their interest in independent learning and exploration, and thus enhancing their overall learning experience and independent learning ability.

### 4. CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION

In the process of teaching, there are some problems; for example, students have some inherent prejudices and cognitive misunderstandings about cultural courses, such as the belief that everyone understands Culture and doesn't need to learn it; they think cultural history is too spacey and challenging. In response to these problems, the instructor recognized that improving students' knowledge of and ability to express Chinese Culture was crucial. In order to make students more active and expansive in the learning process, and to further enhance their analytical and problem-solving abilities, instructors must provide an integrated online and offline course learning program.

On the one hand, combining online and offline in the wide world of blended teaching mode, instructors integrate a series of fascinating teaching resources, including carefully edited culture-themed videos, in-depth analytical articles, and case studies close to reality, etc., to tailor students' learning to suit them according

to their actual situation. The rich and varied teaching resources paint a vivid picture of Chinese Culture, igniting students’ enthusiasm for learning about China’s outstanding traditional Culture and completely subverting any preconceived notions they may have about Chinese culture courses. At the same time, we make full use of online learning platforms at home and abroad to build bridges of cooperation for students, encouraging them to collaborate, communicate actively, discuss enthusiastically, and display and share their unique insights and profound perceptions of Chinese Culture in different forms. This kind of exchange and collision of ideas across time and space broadens students’ horizons, deepens their understanding and recognition of Chinese Culture, enhances their cultural confidence, and promotes artistic development. This kind of exchange and collision of ideas across time and space broadens students’ horizons, deepens their understanding and recognition of Chinese Culture, enhances their self-confidence, and promotes the excellent traditional Chinese Culture.

On the other hand, in the classroom, teachers created a warm and pleasant teaching environment through lively classroom lectures, energetic group presentations, and immersive field trips, leading students to experience the long history of Chinese Culture and appreciate the cultural treasures that have been sculpted over the years. From the silent exhibits in museums to the mottled marks on cultural heritage sites, each place carries heavy historical and cultural information, allowing students to deeply feel Chinese Culture’s profoundness and unique charm in different offline activities. In addition, the instructor skillfully designed a group cooperation project with Chinese Culture as the theme so that students could explore the unknown and complete the group task together. This process exercises their teamwork ability and lets them learn how to find consensus and innovate for change in a cross-cultural context.

In conclusion, *Introduction to Chinese Culture* is a course with profound ideology and emotional resonance, and the cultural value it carries is the spiritual connotation of a nation’s view of all things in nature, which has a far-reaching impact on the inheritance and development of Culture. Therefore, teachers must explore and improve the teaching methods through the combination of curriculum and practice to improve the students’ cultural literacy and cognitive level gradually, stimulate their learning potential, make them more interested in and respect Chinese Culture, and ultimately cultivate a group of outstanding talents with an international perspective and cross-cultural communication ability.

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