A Study on the Teaching Beliefs of College English Teachers in the Post-MOOC Era

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Abstract: In the post-MOOC era, the updated teaching beliefs is the key to promote and deepen the reform of college English blended teaching. This study, with the qualitative case study method, aims at investigating the differences between novice teachers and expert teachers regarding their beliefs in college English teaching, from three dimensions of views of language, views of language learning and views of language teaching. Also, this study gives an insight on the factors contributing to the differences of teaching beliefs, and the relationship between the college English teachers' teaching beliefs and their teaching practices. The results show that the novice teachers and expert teachers have different teaching beliefs, which are affected by the environment, teachers' learning experiences and their personalities. Despite the fact that the novice teachers' teaching beliefs have been updated and improved after a certain of training, there remain some gaps between the novice teachers and expert teachers. As the core of teachers' beliefs, teachers' teaching beliefs are basically consistent with their practices, which will have a direct impact on their classroom teaching activities. Therefore, the novice teachers should reflect on their own teaching practices and renew their teaching beliefs constantly. Meanwhile, college English teachers' training system should be established and strengthened, which will be beneficial to increase the teachers' awareness in information technology and explore the innovative teaching modes and methods, so as to promote teachers' professional development.

Keywords: Post-MOOC Era; College English Teachers; Teaching Beliefs; Teachers' Practices

1. Introduction

MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), first emerged in the United States in 2008 and became an important element to promote the reform of higher education. With the development of information technology, the new teaching modes and the technology-relevant demands are constantly emerging while entering the post-MOOC era. In the post-MOOC era, modern information technology, such as multimedia technology, big data, virtual reality technology and artificial intelligence technology has been widely applied in foreign language learning and teaching, and has played an important role in the reform of college English blended teaching. According to the College English Teaching Guide (2020 edition), "College English teachers should implement the blended teaching mode to develop the students' autonomy learning and individualized learning with the online teaching platform, and online teaching resources such as MOOCs and micro-courses." The core of college English blended teaching reform lies in the reform of teaching mode, which is not only relevant to the transformation of teaching method and teaching means, but also to the change of teaching beliefs. The study of the college English teachers' teaching beliefs plays a key role in the development of foreign language teachers, especially for the professional development of novice teachers, which enables them to develop scientific and practical teaching beliefs. In such circumstances, in order to have a deep exploration of teaching beliefs, a couple of representative English teachers from Guangxi colleges are selected for this study. It is expected that this study will give an implication on the update of the college English teachers' teaching beliefs, the improvement of the college English teaching quality and the promotion of the teachers' professional development and the reform of college English blended teaching.

2. Research Design

Four college English teachers, who are from 4 different colleges of Guangxi, are selected to participate in the study. The

general information about those teachers can be referred to Table 2-1. (Notes: 4 teachers are anonymous and are respectively referred to as Mr. A, Miss B, Miss C, Mr. D.) Among them, Mr. A, Miss B are novice teachers, and Miss C, Mr. D are expert teachers.

Table 2-1 Background of four college English teachers

Name	Gender	Age	Teaching Years	Highest Education	Grade	Professional Title
Mr. A	Male	28	2	master's degree	freshman	assistant
Miss B	Female	30	2	master's degree	sophomore	lecturer
Miss C	Female	46	15	doctor's degree	freshman	associate professor
Mr. D	Male	50	24	master's degree	sophomore	professor

The research is conducted mainly based on questionnaire, coupled with classroom observation and interview for comprehensive analysis. The questionnaire survey is based on the BALLI, which is abbreviated for "Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory" proposed by Horwitz (1987), in order to explore teachers' teaching beliefs from views of language, views of language learning and views of language teaching. The table of classroom observation is created under Li Hua's table framework of observation (2009). The teaching behaviors and classroom activities are observed in a natural context in order to find out whether their teaching beliefs are consistent with their teaching practices. The interview questions are posed based on Xie Fang's interview outline (2006), with an aim to have a further exploration of the relationship between teaching beliefs and teaching practices, as well as the factors affecting the formation of teaching beliefs. The data are collected from the audio recording of three-hour classroom practices and 200-minute interview. All data are analyzed in a qualitative way in this research.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 The Analysis of Teachers' Practices

Teachers' teaching beliefs are usually reflected in their classroom practices. How teachers behave in the classroom activities is dependent on their understanding of the roles of teachers and students. In this study, teaching practices, which can be observed in the classroom, will be explained from the perspectives of teaching procedure, teaching content, classroom activities, teaching approach, teaching resources and the role of teacher. Teachers' practices can be referred to Table 3-1.

Table 3-1 Four college English teachers' practices

Item	Mr. A	Miss B	Miss C	Mr. D
Teaching procedure	pre-class: preview	pre-class: self-study	pre-class: questions	pre-class: review
	while-class: teach	while-class: discuss	while-class: report	while-class: discuss
	post-class: test	post-class: Q&A	post-class: discuss	post-class: summarize
Teaching content	grammar learning	online learning	ways of speech	lifelong learning
	creating situations,	problem lead-in,	warming-up,	micro-course lead-in,
Classroom activities	grammar teaching,	oral report,	setting up tasks,	students self-learning,
	group learning	text analysis	group discussion	group learning
Teacher's role	explainer	explainer	enabler	enabler
Teaching approach	cognitive approach	cognitive approach	task-based approach	communicative approach
Teaching resources	blackboard,	multimedia, ppt	SPOC, multimedia,	MOOC, micro-course
	textbook	textbook	ppt, textbook	multimedia, textbook

As is shown in the table above, Mr. A and Miss B tend to play the roles of lecturers, who emphasize the explanation of the language rules and the drills of language skills. Miss C and Mr. D are more likely to play the roles of facilitators, who focus on the interaction and functional communication between teachers and students. In general, the novice teachers can set the reasonable teaching goals and identify the students' learning difficulties. They can create an enjoyable teaching atmosphere which facilitates classroom activities. However, due to the ineffective use of information technology, the classroom activities are discouraged in their classroom practices, where the teachers are in full control of the class, and hence make it less "student-centered". In contrast, the expert teachers know how to make good use of the teaching resources, such as SPOC, MOOC, and micro-lectures, to keep their teaching running smoothly and consistently. Moreover, there is a clear hierarchy in their teaching activities, from the simplest to the most complex at level. With a sound understanding of the teaching goal and teaching material, they usually have good command of teaching and feel confident in their own teaching ability. Also, this study shows that the expert teachers are more likely to have critical reflection on their own teaching, compared to the novice teachers. There is a certain gap between the novice teachers and expert teachers in terms of their teaching practices. The novice teachers need to learn more teaching theories and make full use of information technology in order to improve their teaching quality and effectiveness.

3.2 The Analysis of Teachers' Teaching Beliefs

Based on the observation and the interview, the teaching beliefs of the novice teachers and expert teachers will be explored from the perspectives of views of language, views of language learning and views of language teaching, in order to find out their similarities and differences.

3.2.1 Views of Language

Views of language are the way by which people think of the essence of a language, and understand the importance of learning a language. Teachers' options for teaching beliefs, teaching mode and teaching method vary with their views of language. The novice teachers (Mr. A and Miss B) believe that language is a skill. Learning a language is no more than language drills with an aim to improve the learner's basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). The expert teachers (Miss C and Mr. D) believe that language, as a tool of communication, manifests itself in interaction and humanity. The aim of learning language is to enable the leaners to become competent communicators.

3.2.2 Views of Language Learning

Views of language learning are concerned about how people learn a language, which involve the language learning process, and language learning approach. As this study shows, the novice teachers (Mr. A and Miss B) tend to believe that learning language is a matter of skill, which involves a lot of language drills. They usually use memorizing and drilling to help the students solidify newly learned skills. The expert teachers (Miss C and Mr. D) believe that language is a tool for communication. They usually encourage students to have the discussion and help them develop critical thinking while teaching in class. Also, they believe that the students should be encouraged to participate actively and collaborate effectively in the leaning activities, and to develop the autonomy to construct language knowledge. Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic period, online learning and offline learning should be bended to make language learning more effective.

3.2.3 Views of Language Teaching

Views of language teaching which are relevant to the teachers' attitudes toward language teaching focus on the question of "what to teach" and "how to teach" and affect their teaching techniques and teaching strategies. As can be seen in this study, the novice teachers give the priority to the language knowledge. They usually place the teaching of language knowledge ahead of language drills, since they believe that students need to know about language knowledge before they acquire the language skills. Their approaches to teach language are examination-oriented. They are concerned about the grade which the students get in the examination rather than the students' language competence. As opposed to the novice teachers, the expert teachers believe that language teaching involves not only the language knowledge and language skills, but also non-language elements, such as students' attitude, learning strategies and cultural awareness, etc. In order to stimulate the students' motivation and interest, the interaction between teachers and students, the discussion, and the blended learning, such as MOOC, micro-lecture, are encouraged in their class.

Due to the differences in their views of language, the teachers have different views on language learning and language teaching. In this study, four teachers' teaching beliefs can be classified into two categories, as is shown in Table 3-2.

Table 3-2 Four college English teachers' teaching beliefs

Item	Description	Teacher
views of language	Language is a skill which requires lots of listening, speaking, reading and writing.	Mr. A, Miss B
	Language is communicative and humanistic.	Miss C, Mr. D
views of language learning	Teacher explains language points, students drill them as much as possible.	Mr. A, Miss B
	Let students participate, explore, practice, cooperate, discover, and construct the language knowledge.	Miss C, Mr. D
views of language teaching	Teach language knowledge firstly, and then teach language skill.	Mr.A, Miss B
	Not only teach language knowledge and skills, but also teach non-linguistic knowledge, such as emotion, attitude, learning strategies and cultural awareness, etc.	Miss C, Mr. D

Moreover, the data collected from the observation and interview shows that not only the environment but also the teachers' experience and personalities have influence on teacher's teaching beliefs. The environment consists of educational system, examination system, as well as the region, school, and cultural atmosphere in English class. Teachers' learning experiences and personalities have effects on the views of language. Different teachers have different study backgrounds and teaching experiences with different cognitive levels, which will lead to different teaching beliefs.

3.3 The Relationship between Teachers' Teaching Beliefs and Practices

The analysis of teachers' teaching beliefs and practices shows that teachers' teaching beliefs influence the students' language acquisition. Teachers' teaching beliefs, as the core of educational beliefs, have direct effect on teachers' practices.

Firstly, teachers' teaching beliefs are consistent with their teaching practices. Teachers' views of language teaching affect their choices of teaching methods. Mr. A pays more attention to the explanation of grammar and sentence pattern drills. He tries to correct the students' errors during the drills and use demonstration as teaching strategies. Miss B places emphasis on the lexical and semantic training, as well as listening skill drilling. She tends to teach pronunciation through phonetic alphabet. Miss C thinks that teachers should make efforts to keep the students active and motivated throughout the class and increase their interests in learning. Based on the SPOC teaching mode, she enables the students to have an active participation in the learning activities and group discussion with a task-based approach. Mr. D sticks to a principle that teachers should create a situational context for students and guide them to learn. He believes that the aim of language teaching is to prepare the students to be good communicators. Teachers should take part in the language learning activities and interact with students. They should help the students communicate in English through MOOC and micro-lectures.

Secondly, views on the role of teacher are closely related to the teaching method adopted. In this study, as can be seen from the observation and interview, Mr. A and Miss B tend to believe that teaching is just about lecturing and conveying knowledge to the students. They focus on the language rules and language skills while teaching, and use interpretation and demonstration as the primary teaching strategies. Miss C and Mr. D believe that a teacher should play the role of facilitator whose task is to create the situational context and the interactive task, and to prepare the student for the autonomous learning.

Thirdly, it is difficult for the teachers to align their teaching beliefs with their practices. In the interview, Mr. A and Miss B implied that they knew that language is a tool of communication, and the blended learning would benefit the leaners. However, the examination-oriented educational system and their inadequate information literacy have become barriers for

them to stick to their teaching beliefs. They had to give up altering the teaching method because they were worried that the students cannot get used to the new teaching method.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Major Findings

This case study research makes an investigation on four college English teachers' teaching beliefs. Here are three main findings. Firstly, the novice teachers and expert teachers have different teaching beliefs, which are attributed to the educational environment, teachers' learning experiences and personal personalities. Secondly, the novice teachers' teaching beliefs have been updated after training, but there is still a certain gap between the novice teachers and expert teachers. The novice teachers should learn more from expert teachers and improve their information awareness and literacy. Thirdly, teachers' teaching beliefs are basically consistent with their practices. Teachers' teaching beliefs, as the core of teachers' beliefs, have a direct influence on their classroom teaching activities, which determines the structure of classroom teaching, the teaching method, the teaching design and the role of teachers and students.

4.2 Implications

The study has far-reaching implications for the college English teaching reform, and the English teachers' professional development. On one hand, the novice teachers should reflect on their practices and update their teaching beliefs from the perspectives of teaching aims, teaching content, and teaching methods. Meanwhile, the learning community, based on the mentoring relationship between the expert teachers and the novice teachers, should be built to ensure that the expert teachers can be role models for the novice teachers. The novice teachers should learn from the expert teachers in order to improve their understanding of educational theory and information literacy. On the other hand, the complete teacher training system should be established to increase the teacher's awareness of information technology, and to promote the reform of the College English blended teaching mode. In the post-MOOC era, in order to transfer teachers' traditional teaching beliefs, the research should be conducted to explore how to reform the foreign language teachers' training system. Based on the digital platform and the blended learning mode, information technology training program should be conducted by delivering expert lectures and micro-lectures, opening forum and workshops for discussion to increase teachers' awareness of information technology and their information literacy, which will be also beneficial to update their understanding of foreign language teaching essence through reflection and practice.

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