

Research on the Current Situation and Countermeasures of Japanese Language Online Course Construction

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Abstract: As the scale of quantitative change in the construction of Japanese online open courses in domestic universities has been initially formed, the course construction work urgently needs to move to the next stage of a quantum leap. This paper, taking the construction status of domestic Japanese online courses as the entry point, analyzes the necessity and basic path of constructing a reconstruction mechanism for course construction, and puts forward relevant opinions and suggestions for creating more first-class online Japanese courses.

Keywords: Japanese online open courses; construction status; reconstruction

1. Introduction

The 70-year informatization of foreign language education in China marks the change of information technology from assisting to integrating with foreign language education. Jiehui Hu points out that the development history of foreign language education informatization in China can be divided into three stages: First, foreign language e-teaching (1949-1997), which can be further divided into a difficult exploration period and a vigorous development period by the National Symposium on Foreign Language Education at the beginning of reform and opening up in 1978. Second, computer network-assisted teaching (1998-2011), can be further divided into the period of single-computer-assisted teaching and the period of network-assisted learning by the 2004 edition of the Teaching Requirements for College English Courses. Third, in-depth integration of information technology and foreign language education (2012-2019), which can be further divided into the period of "Internet + foreign language education" and the period of "artificial intelligence + foreign language education" by the 2018 Action Plan for Education Informatization 2.0^[1]¹⁷.

With the increasingly significant trend of economic globalization, the openness, and equity of education are gradually developed. Since the first year of MOOC in 2012, large-scale open courses, spoc, and other information technology-based reform methods in the education industry have emerged, showing a strong trend of replacing traditional education. In November 2018, Yan Wu, the director of the Department of Higher Education, explained at the 11th China University Teaching Forum that "golden courses" are characterized by high order, innovation, and challenge^[2]⁷⁰. Taking Japanese online courses as an example, this paper analyzes the current situation of Japanese MOOC construction and research in Chinese

universities, conducts a survey and analysis of Japanese online open courses on course platforms such as icourse, Xuetaangx, Zhihuishu, and Chaoxing erva, and develops a trend analysis of the development of Japanese online courses in the context of the era of integration of foreign language information technology and course construction.

2. The current situation of online Japanese open courses construction in Chinese universities

There are about 20 influential online open course platforms in China including icourse (China University MOOC), Xuetaangx, Zhihuishu, Xueyinonline, etc ^{[2]68}.

2.1 Abundant course platforms and wide distribution

According to the survey and research of major domestic course platforms, as of September 2020, there were 121 Japanese related online courses distributed on the main identified platforms as follows: icourse (33), Xuetaangx (10), Zhihuishu (17), edX (4), Chaoxing erva (6), ahmooc (2), zjooc (15), cqooc (2), Xueyinonline (15), Ulearning (4), UMOOCs (6), and imooc (4).

Among them, the top three national open course platforms listed are icourse, Zhihuishu, and Xueyinonline (zjooc is mainly a regional platform). With the above data as a reference, combined with the analysis of the author's survey data, the Japanese language online courses on icourse, Zhihuishu, and Xuetaangx only accounted for 3.6%, 12%, and 8.1% of the total respectively. The data shown above illustrates that the construction of Japanese online courses is still in the initial stage in the process of building foreign language online courses, lagging behind English online courses in terms of number. There are only three national high-level online open courses for the Japanese language, namely, "Japanese Language and Culture" at Tsinghua University, "University Japanese" at Xi'an Jiaotong University, and "Practical Japanese" at Nanchang University. Among the 121 online Japanese language courses, only 2.5% of them meet the requirements of "high-order, innovative and challenge" to be national first-class online courses.

2.2 Scarcity of high-quality courses offered by Chinese institutions

At present, there are 121 online courses in the Japanese language offered by major platforms in China. Among them, the courses offered by the "double first-class" universities are as follows: Dalian University of Technology (5), Tsinghua University (4), Xi'an Jiaotong University (4), Peking University (3), Jilin University (3), Shandong University (2), East China Normal University (2), Electronic Science and Technology University (1), South China University of Technology (1), Nankai University (1) and Fudan University (1), accounting for about 10% and 20% of the total Chinese institutions and the "double first-class" universities setting Japanese language major respectively.

2.3 Huge and polarized demands of course application

Online open courses are characterized by diverse educational needs, the openness of courses, and sharing of course resources. Taking the application number of Japanese online open courses as an example, there are 33 Japanese courses on icourse, among which 25 courses

have a cumulative number of 10,000 or more students, accounting for 75.8% of the total. Among the 121 Japanese online courses, 43 of them have more than 10,000 students, accounting for 28% of the total. Among them, 51 courses with less than 2,000 people took the course, accounting for 42% of the total. This data shows that most Japanese online courses have a low number of applications, and the development of the influence and application of Japanese online courses is uneven. Online Japanese courses produced by “Double first-class” universities account for a larger proportion, in contrast to that made by general universities and vocational colleges, showing an obvious polarization.

2.4 Course types emphasizing theory rather than practice

According to the statistics of online Japanese course construction mentioned above, those courses can basically be divided into five types: basic public foreign language courses, basic professional language courses, courses for single enhancement, literature and culture courses, and courses for special purposes.

1) Basic public language courses

32 out of the 121 online Japanese language courses that are currently available on major platforms are classified as basic public language courses, accounting for 27%. The target audience can be students whose major is not the Japanese language but have interests in it, showing abundant applications, wide distribution, openness, and sustainability. The wide acceptance and strong general knowledge have promoted the application and construction of online Japanese courses to a certain extent. In particular, the top 3 national first-class quality online courses announced so far, “Japanese Language and Japanese Culture” of Tsinghua University, “University Japanese” of Xi’an Jiaotong University, and “Practical Japanese (1)” of Nanchang University, are basic public foreign language courses. This shows that there is a growing demand for Japanese language courses among online foreign language learners, in addition to English courses.

2) Basic professional language courses

There are 14 basic language courses for Japanese majors, accounting for about 12%, mainly basic Japanese courses, i.e., intensive reading courses. These courses basically focus on cultivating students’ comprehensive skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In the online course construction of the intensive reading class, teachers basically help students understand basic vocabulary and sentences by giving intensive lectures on situational dialogues, texts, and grammar. In addition to the different textbooks used, online intensive reading courses are basically homogenized as they all set parts of vocabulary, grammar, and conversation, lacking characteristics.

3) Courses for single enhancement

There are 21 courses for single enhancement, accounting for about 17% of the total, intending to improve students’ foreign language skills. By nature, those courses can be further divided into five categories: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation, which are special training courses for language learners to improve their single ability in the five aspects.

4) Literature and culture courses

There are 44 literature and culture courses, accounting for 36% of the total and ranking the

first among the construction of Japanese online courses. This type mainly focuses on four modules: Japanese culture, Japanese literature, Japanese history, and Sino-Japanese intercultural communication to construct knowledge-centric courses. Among them, there are 25 courses on Japanese culture, accounting for 56.8%, but its degree of repetition and homogeneity is also in the first place. Literature and culture courses basically impart declarative knowledge, relatively lacking in the features of higher order, innovation, and challenge.

5) Courses for special purposes

There are 10 courses for special purposes, accounting for about 8% and currently ranking the last. This type is mainly offered by vocational colleges, and mainly involves application-oriented courses such as business Japanese and tourism Japanese, and the composite talent training mode of combining foreign language and skills.

In summary, the statistics shown above that course types are more significant in the construction and application of online Japanese language courses, which emphasize theory rather than practice.

2.5. Wide geographical distribution and little cooperation

Beijing, Zhejiang, Liaoning, Shanghai, Jiangxi, and Jilin (Shanghai and Jiangxi are tied) rank in the top 5 positions of Japanese online open course construction. The course construction is widely distributed, gradually establishing the leading position of the eastern region, including the eastern coast and the northeastern region. In the central and western regions, the construction of Japanese online courses is relatively weak. Second, in addition to the uneven distribution of online Japanese course construction in the eastern region and the central and western regions, there is also a lack of geographical characteristics of the course construction. Course content is set up singly, and the construction of the teaching team is basically concentrated at the school level, while the inter-campus communication and cross-regional cooperation are relatively lagging. This is also one of the important reasons for curriculum homogenization.

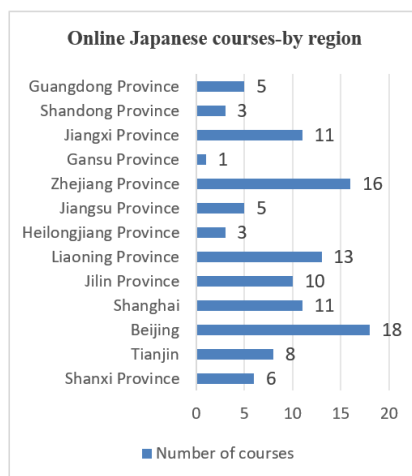


Figure 1. Online Japanese courses-by region

3. Implementation path of the reconstruction mechanism of online Japanese course construction

Compared with the construction of online courses in other non-general languages, online Japanese courses feature a large total number, various types, and wide applications. Although the overall situation shows a good trend of linear increase, there are still many problems. Therefore, as shown in the figure below, the author elaborates the implementation path of the reconstruction mechanism in the construction of Japanese online courses from three stages: pre-course construction stage including integrated course resources across platforms, mechanism of course construction cooperation, courses with characteristics; course application stage including innovative teaching method and diversified course evaluation methods; course maintenance stage including timely course feedback and systematized course theory research.

3.1. Pre-course construction stage

1) Integrated course resources across platforms

At present, among the 121 Japanese online courses, the course which is available on a maximum of four platforms is “Advanced Japanese Audio-visual Course” of Nanchang University, and nine courses are available on three online platforms including “Intermediate Japanese Hearing Course” of the Dalian University of Technology. The rest of the Japanese online courses are only available on a single platform for learners to use.

The above results show that the resources are not fully open and shared between platforms with a relatively large number of online Japanese language courses of various types. To a certain extent, this can lead to online learners not being able to choose courses that meet their needs due to the limitations of the course platform resources. On the other hand, the fact that learners are limited in their choice of courses due to a large number of online course platforms will further discourage the course construction, which will inevitably lead to the suspicion of slackness in promoting the construction of online courses in the long run.

Therefore, course platforms should monitor each other and cooperate effectively to establish an effective long-term development mechanism. For example, they can work together to promote quality courses that meet national standards for first-class curriculum construction, so that learners can more fairly and openly choose online “gold courses” according to their personal needs. At the same time, it also further eliminates unqualified courses, helping online course construction continue to reform better. In response to always changing, innovating, and optimizing offline teaching reform and curriculum construction reform, online teaching reform, though started late, must not be stagnant.

2) Mechanism of course construction cooperation

In addition to the need to establish a sound cooperation mechanism between course construction platforms, teachers should also build a team according to the characteristics of the course type at the pre-course construction stage.^{[4][56]} At present, online Japanese course construction is basically based on the team within schools, and the cooperation across schools and regions, between schools and enterprises is basically rare. With the deepening and regularization of Japanese online course construction, the teaching team should also go to the

open stage. School-level exchanges, school-enterprise exchanges, and regional exchanges can make online course construction more personalized, and further refine and specialize course types.

3) Courses with characteristics

In 2019, the State Council issued documents including Opinions on Deepening the Reform and Innovation of Ideological and Political Theory Courses at School in the New Era, requiring synergizing the promotion of various courses and the construction of ideological and political courses to achieve the organic unity of “knowledge transfer” and “value leadership”^{[5][23]}. At the beginning of 2020, education around the world is facing great challenges due to COVID-19, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out, in his important speech at the meeting on the deployment of work to promote the prevention and control of the epidemic and economic and social development, that the strength and efficiency that Chinese people present in the prevention and control of the epidemic and their image as a responsible power have been highly praised by the international community. The valuable experience of the epidemic prevention and control, which has achieved remarkable results, should be the best teaching material to lead students to become moral adults and ambitious talents.

The construction of Japanese online courses focuses on knowledge transfer, with the recording of basic knowledge as the primary task, but belittles the guidance of students’ ideology. Courses with characteristics can be based on the focus of course ideologization and regional culture promotion, appropriately combine the foreign language institute with the guidance of values and ideology, and strive for an organic reconstruction that combines course construction with the development of the times.

3.2. Course application stage

Japanese online courses take different shapes and results depending on the function of the course platform. The course application should focus on the implementation from two perspectives: innovated teaching methods and diversified course evaluation methods.

1) Innovative teaching method

Online education does provide effective tools for teaching and learning, but it must also be governed by the same rules of development and implementation as traditional education and training; in other words, it requires good pedagogical practices and good instructional design^[3]. 205 Course recording should follow the principle of being short and concise, highlighting the important points of the course without being boring. How the learning of foreign languages can achieve the purpose of engaging students in a limited time also requires teachers to be innovative in the use of teaching methods.

2) Diversified course evaluation methods

Course evaluation is the value judgment of the teaching process and teaching results based on teaching objectives and serves for teaching decision making, playing a crucial role in teaching activities^{[6][36]}. At present, the online education evaluation method of most course platforms consists of four parts: course video viewing, discussion times, assignments, and tests. The evaluation criterion of the video viewing module is basically based on the length of students’ viewing time, which is authentic for independent learners, while the viewing data of passive

learners may lack authenticity. The evaluation data of the online discussion part is also basically analyzed by the number of posts, which is less correlated with the quality of posts. As online teaching activities are relatively static, the determination of learners' performance will be biased without a dynamic formative evaluation method being introduced. Therefore, in addition to the existing evaluation methods, if the course platform can provide certain technical support, interactive behaviors such as grouping tasks can be introduced appropriately, supplemented by teacher evaluation, student-student mutual evaluation, self-evaluation, and other evaluation subjects.

3.3. Course maintenance stage

After the first two stages of pre-course construction and application, the online course has reached a mature stage. However, course construction is a process that requires long-term experiments and repeated experiments. The existing course resources need to be updated and innovated immediately after stages of testing, launching, and using. Specifically, it can be implemented step by step from the timely feedback of the course and systematic research of the course theory.

1) Timely course feedback

The timeliness of feedback in online courses plays a crucial role in facilitating learner learning. Proactive learners leave comments and discussions on the online platform and delayed feedback from teachers or teaching assistants give will affect the learners' motivation. Course feedback requires teachers or teaching assistants to overcome certain difficulties, and can be supplemented by appropriate live Q&A and online sharing in line with the course type.

2) Systematized course theory research

For the 121 online Japanese language courses, the number of teachers engaged in theoretical research on online courses is low. The author searched for the keywords of "Japanese language" and "MOOC" on CNKI, and only found 68 papers in total. Among them, the number of papers published in core journals is only 7. By contrast, 3488 papers with the keywords of "English" and "MOOC" were searched, with 128 papers published in core journals. In the field of foreign language online open course construction research, English is still in the leading position, followed by Japanese whose MOOC construction research starts later and has a weaker foundation. In addition, the number of published papers involving data analysis of specific online courses is relatively small, which proves that the mutual conversion between practice and theory in the construction of Japanese online courses is basically at the initial stage. Systematized theory research will promote teaching practice more comprehensively, so it is also important to improve the level of theory research in the process of practice.

4. Conclusion

The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 has prompted an unprecedented rapid development of large-scale online courses. Major course platforms have launched teaching resources for various subjects one after another, greatly solving teaching dilemmas^{[7]148}. The dramatic increase in the variety and number of online courses in Japanese has to some extent, alleviated

the conflict between teaching and learning for teachers and learners during the epidemic. On the other hand, the large-scale teaching practice of online courses during the epidemic further deepened the pedagogical reflection among teachers and organizers of teaching activities. Ministry of Education will further strengthen research on online teaching during the epidemic, compile a medium- and long-term development plan for education informatization and the 14th Five-Year Plan for teaching informatization, issue guidelines for promoting the development of “Internet + education”, and continuously improve the higher education teaching system^[8]²⁰⁶. The system of higher education has been improved. Therefore, based on Japanese online education, it is also the future trend to further study the current situation and reform the path of foreign language online education. Based on the research of non-universal language online education represented by Japanese, this paper summarizes the current situation of foreign language online education, explore the “Gold course” characteristics of the first-class online course construction path, for foreign language online teaching sustainable development strategies.

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