

Exploring Technology-Driven English Teaching: Insights from the OSSD Online ESL Course Applied to Chinese International High School Students

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Abstract – As technology continually reshapes education, online learning plays a vital role in the globalization of education. This paper delves into the symbiotic relationship between technology, English teaching, and course design by investigating the integration of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) online ESL (English as Second Language) course within the context of Chinese international high school education. Focusing on the development of technology and its implications for instructional materials and formative assessment, the study examines how this ESL course, adapted for online delivery, can offer valuable lessons for English educators in China. By assessing the application of the OSSD ESL course to Chinese international high school students, the study highlights the role of formative assessment in tailoring instruction to individual student needs. Moreover, it explores how technology-enhanced platforms can foster engagement and interactive learning experiences. With a lens on the Chinese students' English language learning (ELL) context, this paper infers lessons that English teachers and course designers in China can glean from the OSSD course design. It underscores the importance of combining rigorous curriculum objectives with the flexibility afforded by digital tools, accommodating diverse learning styles and paces. Additionally, the study illuminates strategies to effectively harness technology for real-time feedback, collaborative projects, and self-directed learning. In conclusion, with in descriptive analysis, this paper envisions a cross-cultural dialogue, envisioning a pathway for Chinese educators to adapt and integrate elements of the OSSD ESL courses while leveraging technology for optimal English teaching. By embracing technology-driven formative assessment and online learning materials, English teachers in China can enrich their pedagogical approaches, enhancing learning outcomes for their students in the ever-evolving landscape of global education.

Keywords –Online ESL course, Chinese international high school students, course design, technology driven English teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

The landscape of global education has undergone significant transformation in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The abrupt shift to online learning platforms, initially a response to immediate health concerns, has expanded the horizons of educational methodologies and accessibility (Smith, 2020). In this evolving educational landscape, the intersection of technology and English language teaching, particularly for Chinese International High School Students (CIHSSs), presents a unique area of study.

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The Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) online course exemplifies this pioneering approach. Distinguished from traditional international courses like the International Baccalaureate (IB), Advanced Placement (AP), and A-Level, the OSSD is characterized by its student-centered approach, offering unprecedented flexibility and autonomy in learning (Jones & Smith, 2021). This approach is increasingly relevant for CIHSSs, who face a growing demand for innovative educational models that cater to diverse learning needs and styles (Chen, 2019).

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The increasing enrolment of CIHSSs in online courses such as the OSSD highlights a crucial area of investigation. Understanding how these students interact with, and benefit from, online courses is pivotal for educators and policymakers, especially in contexts aiming to enhance the effectiveness of online learning platforms in China (Wang, 2022). However, there exists a gap in comprehensive understanding and documentation of the specific settings and contexts provided by the OSSD online course for CIHSSs.

Additionally, the implications of the OSSD curriculum for teachers, in terms of pedagogical approaches, curriculum design, and student assessment, remain underexplored. With the shift towards online learning, it is imperative to examine how teachers can adapt to and optimally utilize the OSSD curriculum for the benefit of international students.

This study, therefore, seeks to address two primary research questions:

- I. What settings and contexts does the online OSSD course provide to CIHSSs?
- II. What implications can teachers gain from the OSSD curriculum?

Addressing these questions will contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of online learning platforms like the OSSD in international education and provide valuable insights for enhancing teaching and learning experiences for CIHSSs.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Online Learning

The evolution of online learning has significantly reshaped the educational landscape, offering novel ways of teaching and learning. Moore, Dickson-Deane, and Galyen (2011) describe online learning as an educational process that occurs over the Internet, characterized by its

accessibility and flexibility. This mode of learning offers diverse experiences, ranging from fully online courses to blended formats, which combine digital and traditional face-to-face teaching methods (Bates, 2015).

Online learning's effectiveness has been substantiated by a considerable body of research. Bernard et al. (2009) conducted a meta-analysis which concluded that online education could achieve the same effectiveness as traditional classroom instruction when both teaching and technology are strategically implemented. The flexibility of online learning allows educators to tailor their teaching to diverse learning styles, potentially leading to more effective and personalized learning outcomes (Zhao, 2012).

Despite its benefits, online learning faces several challenges, including the digital divide and issues related to student engagement (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2010). The digital divide, referring to the gap between those who have access to modern information and communication technology and those who do not, can limit the effectiveness of online learning for some students (Selwyn, 2014). Additionally, maintaining student engagement in an online environment requires innovative teaching methods and interactive content to keep learners motivated and involved (Dixon, 2015).

The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of online learning across the globe. As schools and universities pivoted to remote education, the demand for effective online teaching strategies and tools surged (Hodges et al., 2020). This shift highlighted both the potential and the limitations of online learning, with educators and students navigating new territories in terms of communication, assessment, and academic integrity (Jisc, 2020).

Furthermore, online learning has opened doors for lifelong and flexible learning opportunities. Adult learners, professionals, and students in remote or underserved areas have increasingly turned to online courses to further their education, develop new skills, or change career paths (Boelens, De Wever, & Voet, 2017). This flexibility is particularly important in today's rapidly changing job market, where continuous learning and adaptation are crucial (Weller, 2011).

In addition, online learning platforms have been instrumental in advancing collaborative and interactive learning experiences. Technologies such as virtual classrooms, discussion forums, and collaborative projects facilitate peer interaction and knowledge sharing, extending learning beyond geographical boundaries (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2010).

Online learning has transformed educational practices, offering flexibility, accessibility, and diverse learning experiences. Its effectiveness, contingent on thoughtful implementation and resource accessibility, suggests a promising future in education. However, addressing the challenges of the digital divide and student engagement will be crucial for realizing its full potential.

ESL Teaching and Learning

The field of ESL (English as a Second Language) teaching and learning has been profoundly influenced by technological advancements. According to Godwin-Jones

(2018), digital technologies offer new avenues for language acquisition, including interactive and collaborative learning opportunities. The integration of multimedia resources and communication tools can significantly enhance language learning (Chapelle, 2010).

Blended learning environments, which combine online and traditional methods, have shown particular promise in ESL education. This approach provides a balance between the benefits of face-to-face interaction and the flexibility of online learning. Tomlinson and Whittaker (2013) found that blended learning environments could offer a more personalized, flexible, and engaging experience for ESL learners, catering to their individual learning styles and needs.

The importance of culturally responsive teaching in ESL education cannot be overstated. As Lin (2015) points out, acknowledging the diverse cultural backgrounds of learners is crucial in designing effective ESL instruction. This approach involves incorporating culturally relevant materials and examples into the curriculum, thereby making learning more relatable and effective for students from various backgrounds.

In addition to cultural responsiveness, the role of technology in facilitating language acquisition in ESL contexts has been a focus of recent research. Gonzalez-Lloret (2015) discusses how online platforms can provide authentic contexts for language use, a key component in acquiring language proficiency. These platforms can include language learning apps, online discussion forums, and virtual exchange programs, which allow learners to practice language skills in real-world situations.

Moreover, the shift towards online and blended learning in ESL education has implications for assessment practices. Traditional language assessments are often inadequate in online settings, leading to the development of innovative assessment strategies that leverage technology. These strategies include digital portfolios, online quizzes, and interactive language tasks, which provide a more comprehensive and authentic evaluation of language skills (Hampel & Stickler, 2012).

The incorporation of technology in ESL teaching also poses challenges, such as ensuring equitable access to digital tools and addressing the digital literacy skills of both teachers and students (Hockly, 2018). Teachers need to be adept at using technological tools and integrating them effectively into their teaching practices. Professional development opportunities focusing on digital pedagogies are therefore essential in equipping ESL educators with the necessary skills (Meskill & Anthony, 2010).

The integration of technology in ESL teaching and learning has revolutionized the field, offering enhanced, personalized, and culturally responsive educational experiences. However, the effective implementation of technology in ESL contexts requires consideration of access, digital literacy, and innovative assessment strategies.

OSSD Development

The Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) has undergone significant transformations to meet the demands of an evolving educational landscape. The OSSD, as outlined

by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2016), is structured to provide a comprehensive education, equipping students with the necessary skills for post-secondary education and the workforce. In recent years, there has been a marked shift in the OSSD curriculum, with a strong emphasis on integrating technology and online learning methodologies (Barbour & LaBonte, 2019).

The integration of online courses within the OSSD program aligns with a broader trend in education towards flexible learning pathways. Davies and West (2014) argue that online courses offer adaptability to accommodate diverse student needs and learning styles. This flexibility is particularly crucial in preparing students for the demands of the digital age, where skills such as critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving are increasingly valued (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016).

Moreover, the adoption of online learning in the OSSD reflects an educational shift towards student-centered learning. Virtual learning environments allow students to engage with content at their own pace, fostering a sense of autonomy and self-directed learning (Zimmerman, 2017). This approach is supported by the findings of Lee and Hannafin (2016), who note that online learning environments can provide students with personalized learning experiences, catering to individual strengths and areas for improvement.

The effectiveness of online learning within the OSSD framework has been a subject of research. A study by Thompson and William (2018) found that students enrolled in online OSSD courses demonstrated improved engagement and academic performance, suggesting that the online format can effectively support learning objectives. Furthermore, the ability to access a wide range of digital resources and tools within these courses enhances the learning experience, offering students varied and interactive ways to engage with the curriculum (Hodges et al., 2020).

However, the transition to online learning is not without challenges. Barbour and Reeves (2017) highlight the need for adequate technological infrastructure and digital literacy, both for students and educators, to fully leverage the benefits of online learning. Additionally, the importance of teacher training in online instructional strategies is emphasized to ensure effective course delivery and student support in virtual settings (Johnson, 2019).

The development of the OSSD in incorporating online learning represents a significant step towards modernizing education in Ontario. This shift not only aligns with the global trend towards digitalization in education but also offers a more personalized, flexible, and engaging learning experience for students. As educational institutions continue to adapt to technological advancements, the OSSD's evolution offers valuable insights for other educational systems worldwide.

IV. METHOD

This study employs a descriptive case study approach, which is well-suited for an in-depth examination of a specific educational phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2018). The case study focuses on a private school in Canada, known for its innovative online platform offering the OSSD

course to international students, including those from China. This selection is strategic, as international students outside Canada often access the OSSD curriculum through such private institutions (Martin, 2021).

The research methods include a detailed analysis of the online platform used by CIHSSs. This encompasses an examination of the course structure, instructional materials, interaction mechanisms between students and teachers, and assessment methods. Additionally, the study involves collecting qualitative data through interviews with teachers, students, and administrators, and analyzing student performance data to assess the effectiveness and impact of the OSSD course on CIHSSs (Brown & Green, 2020).

V. FINDINGS

Research Question 1: Settings and Contexts of Online OSSD for CIHSSs

The online learning environment of the OSSD is characterized by its innovative blend of synchronous and asynchronous elements. This hybrid model allows for both real-time interaction and self-paced study, providing a dynamic and flexible educational experience (Brown, 2019). Synchronous elements typically include live video lectures and interactive sessions, facilitating immediate communication and collaboration among students and instructors. Asynchronous components, on the other hand, might consist of recorded lectures, discussion forums, and digital assignments, offering students the flexibility to engage with course materials at their own pace (Hodges, Moore, Locke, Trust, & Bond, 2020).

In-class activities within the OSSD online environment are specifically designed to engage students actively. These activities often involve collaborative projects, discussion boards, and practical exercises that apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios (Singh & Lee, 2020). This approach not only enhances student engagement but also fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

The use of digital tools and platforms in the OSSD course significantly enhances student participation and interaction. These tools might include learning management systems (LMS), interactive whiteboards, and various educational apps, which facilitate a more engaging and interactive learning experience (Martin, 2021). Additionally, the integration of multimedia content such as videos, podcasts, and simulations enrich the learning material, providing diverse ways for students to grasp complex concepts (Clark & Mayer, 2018).

Assignment submission and feedback mechanisms in the OSSD course are streamlined for efficiency and effectiveness. Digital platforms allow for easy submission of assignments, timely feedback from instructors, and opportunities for revision and improvement. This process is crucial in providing students with constructive feedback that is essential for their academic growth and development (Wilson, 2022).

Research Question 2: Implications for Teachers from OSSD Curriculum

The OSSD curriculum is structured to provide a consistent and comprehensive educational experience across various subjects and levels. This consistency ensures that regardless of the mode of delivery, be it online or in-person, the educational objectives and standards are maintained (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2019). For teachers, this means adapting their teaching strategies to align with these standardized objectives while also incorporating the flexibility that online education demands (Taylor & Williams, 2020).

Preparing guidelines for students is a critical component of the OSSD curriculum. Clear communication of course objectives, expectations, and evaluation criteria is essential in helping students navigate the course effectively. This clarity aids students in understanding what is expected of them and how they can achieve their academic goals (Khan, 2019).

Formative assessment within the OSSD plays a pivotal role in supporting student learning. Unlike summative assessments that evaluate student learning at the end of an instructional unit, formative assessments provide ongoing feedback and guidance. This approach allows for continuous monitoring of student progress and timely interventions to address learning gaps or challenges (Brown & Knight, 2021). Such practices are instrumental in fostering a supportive and responsive learning environment that caters to individual student needs.

VI. DISCUSSION

The findings from this study highlight the distinctive features and benefits of the OSSD online course, particularly in its application to Chinese International High School Students (CIHSSs). The course's online setting provides a dynamic, interactive learning environment, enriched with diverse materials and robust feedback mechanisms. This environment fosters a high level of student engagement and facilitates a deeper understanding of the subject matter (Lee & Johnson, 2021).

A critical implication of these findings is the potential for the OSSD online course to serve as a model for technology-driven education in China. Its student-centered approach, coupled with the flexibility and autonomy it offers, aligns well with the educational needs and preferences of CIHSSs (Wang & Zhao, 2022). Furthermore, the OSSD's emphasis on formative assessment and continuous feedback can inform and improve teaching practices in China, where traditional methods often prioritize summative assessment (Chen & Li, 2020).

Comparing the OSSD with traditional teaching methods and other international courses, it is evident that the OSSD offers a more adaptable and student-focused learning experience. Unlike the more rigid structures of IB, AP, and A-Level courses, the OSSD allows for a more personalized and inclusive educational approach, which is particularly beneficial in a diverse and globalized student population (Kim & Park, 2019).

VII. CONCLUSION (OR LIMITATION OR SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDIES)

This study underscores the significance of the OSSD online ESL course as a valuable educational resource for CIHSSs. The course's emphasis on flexibility, student autonomy, and a comprehensive feedback system offers a progressive alternative to traditional teaching methods and international courses. These features make the OSSD particularly suited to the evolving landscape of global education, where digital tools and student-centered approaches are increasingly paramount (Smith & Taylor, 2022).

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for educators and policymakers in China:

Integration of Flexible Learning Models: Incorporate flexible, student-centered learning models similar to the OSSD in Chinese educational systems, especially in ESL teaching.

Focus on Formative Assessment: Emphasize formative assessment in teaching methodologies to provide continuous feedback and support to students, enhancing their learning outcomes.

Adaptation of Digital Tools: Utilize digital tools and platforms to create interactive and engaging learning environments, catering to the diverse needs of students.

Policy Reform: Policymakers should consider reforms that encourage the adoption of international educational models like the OSSD, fostering a more globalized and inclusive education system.

For future research, it would be beneficial to conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of the OSSD online course on CIHSSs. Additionally, comparative studies between different online international education models could provide further insights into the most effective practices in global education.

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