

# The Practice of Interactive Teaching Methods in the Introduction to Sociology Course at Regional Second-Tier Universities in China

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**Abstract:** *Traditional teaching methods for the Introduction to Sociology Course at regional second-tier universities often emphasize theory over practice, lacking a focus on fostering students' critical thinking and practical skills. Interactive teaching methods address these shortcomings by emphasizing the dynamic interaction between teachers and students as well as among students themselves. This paper explores a teaching reform practice centered on the theme of "sociological imagination," detailing the implementation process in the classroom. The findings demonstrate that interactive teaching methods significantly enhance students' enthusiasm for learning, deepen their understanding of sociological concepts and theories, and improve their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. It is recommended to integrate technological tools to optimize classroom experiences, introduce role-playing activities, and further refine the teaching evaluation mechanisms.*

**Keywords:** Regional Second-Tier Universities, The Introduction to Sociology Course, Interactive Teaching Methods.

## 1. Introduction

The Introduction to Sociology Course at regional second-tier universities has traditionally relied on a conventional teaching model centered on textbooks and theoretical lectures. This approach is teacher-centered, delivering systematic knowledge in alignment with the chapter structure of the textbook. While this model excels in standardizing teaching content and maintaining the integrity of theoretical frameworks, it also reveals significant limitations. In particular, it falls short in stimulating students' interest in learning and developing their practical skills [1].

Therefore, the integration of interactive and practice-oriented teaching reforms has become an urgent priority. Rooted in constructivist learning theory, interactive teaching methods advocate fostering students' initiative and creativity through various forms of interaction [2]. This approach emphasizes a gradual transition from teacher-student dialogue to peer-to-peer dialogue under the guidance of the instructor [3]. By leveraging the reciprocal influence of teacher-student and student-student interactions, the method aims to facilitate the balanced development of students' knowledge, skills, and overall competencies [4]. This teaching approach emphasizes the equality of teacher-student roles, highlights the practicality of instructional contexts, and advocates for collaboration among teaching participants [5]. It has become a key direction for the reform of introductory sociology courses at regional second-tier universities. Taking the teaching of the core concept "sociological imagination" as an example, this paper explores the application pathways and outcomes of interactive teaching methods in sociology courses. The aim is to provide practical insights and empirical support for the ongoing reform of sociology teaching practices.

## 2. Classroom Practices of Interactive Teaching Methods

### 2.1 Teaching Design and Objectives

This classroom practice adopted the interactive case-based teaching method, which positions the teacher as both a designer and facilitator. The teacher presents challenging cases to guide students in engaging in in-depth discussions and exploring potential solutions. The objectives of this session were to ignite students' enthusiasm for participation, break their reliance on standard answers, and cultivate critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Through case analysis, students were encouraged to examine issues from multiple perspectives and propose innovative solutions, aligning with constructivist learning theory and the active learning principles emphasized in contemporary higher education.

This teaching design aimed to help students bridge the gap between theory and practice through the analysis of real-world cases, enabling them to gain a deeper understanding and mastery of sociological concepts. Ultimately, it seeks to provide a solid foundation for their future theoretical studies and social practice.

### 2.2 Implementation Steps

#### 2.2.1 Phenomenon Discussion: Long Queues for Women's Public Restrooms

To enhance students' motivation and engagement, this practice selected the widely observed and relatable social phenomenon of long queues for women's public restrooms as the discussion topic. This phenomenon is closely tied to the daily lives of university students and holds significant sociological value for analysis, making it an ideal practical case for achieving the stated teaching objectives. During the classroom session, the instructor organized the teaching process according to the following steps:

Step 1: Phenomenon presentation and preliminary exploration. The session began with a visual comparison of photos presented via slides, depicting long queues outside women's public restrooms contrasted with the emptiness outside adjacent men's restrooms. This visual material served to highlight gender disparities in the use of public facilities,

encouraging students to observe and reflect on the underlying reasons for this phenomenon. Subsequently, students were invited to share their personal experiences and initial insights, fostering an interactive and open classroom atmosphere. This step not only heightened students' awareness of social phenomena but also stimulated their sense of engagement, laying a solid foundation for the subsequent in-depth sociological analysis and discussion.

**Step 2: Question design and interaction deepening.** In this phase, a series of progressively structured questions were designed to guide students in exploring the social structures and cultural factors behind the observed phenomenon. The session began with "Why don't men's public restrooms have queues?" to encourage students to reflect on gendered perspectives in public facility design and societal expectations for men and women. This was followed by "What are the key factors contributing to long queues for women's public restrooms?" prompting students to analyze the issue from various dimensions, such as cultural norms, gender roles, and facility design. The third question, "Should this phenomenon be changed?", steered the discussion toward evaluating the fairness and efficiency of the status quo, encouraging critical reflection on gender equality and social efficiency. Finally, students addressed "How can this phenomenon be changed?", proposing practical solutions such as adjusting stall ratios or optimizing restroom management. These questions fostered deeper engagement, critical thinking, and collaborative problem-solving, effectively linking sociological theory to real-world issues.

During the classroom discussion, the instructor integrated impromptu speeches and debate activities to simulate a public restroom design planning meeting. This approach encouraged students to propose specific adjustments and explore implementation strategies. The interactive teaching method facilitated in-depth analysis of the issue from multiple perspectives, enhancing students' understanding of sociological concepts. Under the instructor's guidance, students connected individual experiences with social structures and abstract theories, gradually developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This teaching strategy not only increased student engagement but also effectively nurtured their ability to apply sociological knowledge to real-world problems.

**Step 3: Theoretical integration and empirical support.** Building on the prior discussion, the instructor incorporated insights from Criado-Perez's research in *Invisible Women*, using data and empirical analysis to substantiate students' perspectives. Criado-Perez's study highlights the pervasive lack of a gendered perspective in public facility design and how this deficiency contributes to women's inconveniences in public restroom usage [6]. By integrating Criado-Perez's theoretical framework with the students' discussions, this segment not only deepened their understanding of the discussion outcomes but also reinforced the importance of connecting theory with real-world issues. This theoretical support validated students' observations and analyses while further inspiring their interest in conducting in-depth research on social phenomena.

#### 2.2.2 Practical Analysis of Restroom Reform: Cases and Their

#### Cultural Significance

To broaden students' perspectives, the instructor integrated policy documents and real-world cases to guide further exploration of the cultural and social significance behind the phenomenon of long queues for women's public restrooms.

**First, policy context introduction.** The instructor introduced the framework of the *China Women's Development Program (2011–2020)*, emphasizing the importance of a gender perspective in public facility planning. This program explicitly outlined scientific standards for the ratio of male to female restroom stalls, aiming to address women's physiological needs and promote gender equality [7]. By analyzing the policy context, students gained an understanding of the central role gender issues play in public policy and their profound impact on societal phenomena.

**Secondly, case discussion.** The instructor presented a case from a university in Chengdu, Sichuan, where several men's restrooms were converted into women's restrooms. Students were guided to explore questions such as, "Why was this reform implemented?" and "What were its outcomes?" Through analyzing real-world photos and engaging in discussion, students gained an understanding of how policy recommendations are applied in practice and the critical importance of gender sensitivity in restroom redesign. This segment allowed students to experience the connection between policy and gender equality at a practical level.

**Finally, judicial advocacy path analysis.** The instructor introduced a public interest litigation case from Shenzhen concerning public restroom renovations [8], illustrating the role of judicial mechanisms in improving public facility management. By analyzing this case alongside the earlier university reform example, students gained a deeper understanding of the importance of judicial measures in driving policy implementation and addressing social issues.

#### 2.2.3 From Case Analysis to the Theme: Unpacking the Essence of Sociological Imagination

Through the analysis and discussion of the aforementioned cases, students gradually learned how to "see the essence beyond the surface," gaining an appreciation for both the significance and challenges of this process. Building on this, the instructor introduced the core concept of "sociological imagination" and provided an explanation of its essence.

**First, posing core questions.** The instructor asked students, "What kind of ability did you observe during the previous discussions?" This was followed by a probing question: "Do you think you have developed this ability?" These questions were designed to encourage students to deeply reflect on their takeaways from the discussions and to assess whether they had begun to cultivate the critical skills required.

**Secondly, explaining the concept.** The instructor explained to students that this ability to observe and analyze social phenomena is referred to as "sociological imagination" within the discipline of sociology. Drawing on Mills' theoretical framework [9], the instructor elaborated on the essence of sociological imagination—examining individual experiences

in relation to broader social structures and understanding how personal troubles reflect public issues. Emphasis was placed on the fact that one of the primary learning objectives of an introductory sociology course is to cultivate this critical ability.

Finally, theoretical reflection on the case. The instructor guided students to revisit the earlier discussion on the phenomenon of long queues for women's public restrooms, encouraging a deeper analysis of its underlying connections to social structures and issues of gender equality. By summarizing the discussion, students were able to identify the cognitive process involved in sociological imagination, deepening their understanding of this core concept and extending its application to the analysis of other social issues.

### **3. Effectiveness Evaluation of Interactive Teaching Methods**

#### **3.1 Teacher Evaluation**

To comprehensively assess the effectiveness of the teaching reform in the introductory sociology course and ensure the achievement of instructional objectives, the instructor adopted a combination of formative and summative evaluation methods. These strategies were designed to monitor students' performance throughout the learning process and to analyze the actual impact of teaching strategies on their skill development.

**Formative evaluation.** Formative evaluation was integrated throughout the entire teaching process, focusing on observing students' performance during classroom discussions and case analyses. The instructor recorded students' progress in mastering knowledge and developing analytical skills in real time. During interactive teaching activities, guided questions and teacher-student interactions helped students identify gaps in their learning and encouraged active participation in discussions. For example, in the discussion on "How to address the issue of long queues for women's public restrooms," some students eventually proposed perspectives rooted in gender culture and gender equity, demonstrating a shift from single-dimensional to multi-dimensional analysis. This dynamic feedback mechanism effectively enhanced students' grasp of sociological knowledge and fostered their preliminary ability to apply theoretical concepts to practical scenarios.

**Summative evaluation.** Summative evaluation was conducted at the end of the course, focusing on assessing students' mastery of core sociological concepts and theories, as well as their comprehensive analytical abilities. The instructor designed an open-ended discussion activity, asking students to explore the real-world issue: "Why do university students frequently fall victim to telecommunications fraud despite the prevalence of anti-fraud campaigns?" During the discussion, students demonstrated strong theoretical application skills, analyzing the problem from multiple perspectives, including social structures, cultural norms, and individual behaviors. This indicated that the teaching reform successfully achieved its goal of cultivating students' sociological imagination, further validating the effectiveness of the teaching method.

#### **3.2 Student Evaluation and Feedback**

Data from five consecutive years of online course evaluations show an average score of over 90, reflecting students' high recognition of the interactive teaching method. In their feedback, one student praised the course as being "ingeniously designed, thoroughly explained, with well-structured practical sessions that effectively sparked interest and enhanced skills." Another student noted, "The engaging content improved my ability to transfer knowledge to new contexts." Notably, some students still vividly remember the "Sociological Imagination" module years after completing the course. As one graduate remarked, "This teaching method gave me my first profound understanding of analyzing social phenomena through a sociological lens."

These comments confirm that the interactive teaching method not only increased students' interest and critical thinking but also had a lasting impact on their subsequent studies and career development.

### **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

In the Introduction to Sociology Course at regional second-tier universities, adopting interactive teaching methods to implement the "student-centered" teaching philosophy has not only strengthened teacher-student interaction but also effectively enhanced students' learning enthusiasm and agency. By increasing classroom engagement, this approach further improved students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. However, challenges remain in classroom practice, such as some students' difficulty in shifting from passive learning habits, low participation levels, and the limitations imposed by large class sizes on interaction. To address these issues, the following recommendations are proposed for future implementation:

**Integrating interactive teaching with digital tools.** Leverage online discussion platforms such as Rain Classroom and Superstar Learning to enable real-time feedback and interaction during class, enhancing the immersive and interactive experience. These tools can provide students with a more diverse and engaging learning environment.

**Expanding forms of interaction.** Introduce role-playing activities in class, where teachers and students collaboratively enact specific roles based on textbook scenarios. This simulated experiential learning fosters teacher-student cooperation, strengthens interaction, and improves students' practical skills.

**Optimizing teaching evaluation mechanisms.** Focus on a multidimensional, process-oriented evaluation system that integrates formative and summative assessments. The evaluation should emphasize student agency and interactivity while incorporating digital tools to enhance the effectiveness and practicality of assessments.

By addressing these challenges and continuously refining teaching strategies, interactive teaching methods can play a pivotal role in transforming traditional classrooms, cultivating students' sociological imagination, and equipping them with essential skills for academic and professional success. This

approach not only aligns with the evolving demands of higher education but also provides valuable insights for the broader reform of sociology education.

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