

On Application of Blended Teaching of College English

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Abstract: This article examines the nature and definitions of the term blended teaching, which embodies numerous connotations, including its concept as a strategy, teaching mode, or pedagogical approach. As a new teaching form, blended teaching can integrate the advantages of in-class teaching and online teaching on the premise of changing the orientation of teachers and students, and improve the overall quality and effect of English teaching. In order to give full play to the role of blended teaching in college English education in China, based on the current practices, the article clarifies its limitations and problems in application and put forward corresponding practical strategies and ideas.

Keywords: Blended teaching, College English education, In-class teaching, Online/offline.

1. Introduction

In the last few decades, blended teaching has arisen as a new and significant educational trend. Research on blended teaching is relatively new and is linked with other educational fields such as English teaching methodology, educational technology and computer-assisted language teaching. This study takes into account that the blended learning provides college students with a highly personalized and self-management language learning experience, and combination of traditional and online teaching modes. This integration provides benefits for students including improved time efficiency and locational convenience. According to Riel, Lawless, and Brown [1], blended learning environments provide students with online and face-to-face places to meet, collaborate, and work on meaningful projects. As argued by Owston, York, and Murtha [2], blended teaching should accommodate different types of learners and ensure teaching alternatives to help learners achieve greater academic achievements. Thus, it provides students with a variety of adaptations to fit multiple commitments within their schedules while simultaneously feeling engaged with a course. However, teachers and educational institutions are not always ready to respond to such conditions, due to their lack of knowledge and experience or their lack of awareness concerning the efficient structure of blended teaching. Very often, institutions launch blended teaching projects without considering how blends should be made or how a smooth integration may be best achieved. This article presents important implications for those interested in the development of blended teaching plans to support students' needs effectively.

2. Definitions of Blended Teaching

Blended teaching is a term that lacks a unified definition. Its conceptualization includes the combination of information and communication technology (ICT) and different teaching delivery modes, and the addition of ICT to traditional teaching methods, although in practice it may identify some random mixing and matching of different teaching delivery modes. Nevertheless, current definitions of blended teaching tend to address three commonly related aspects of instruction and teaching [3]: a blend of online and face-to-face instruction, a blend of instructional methods, and a blend of instructional modes. Graham [3] believes that blended

teaching is a system that combines face-to-face teaching with computer-assisted teaching, which not only promotes the use of different information and communication technologies, but also promotes the emergence and development of different types of interactions and encounters between participants.

Blended teaching also represents a fundamental shift in instructional strategy and its flexibility enables the online delivery of content to be combined with the best features of classroom interaction to personalize learning, encourage thoughtful reflection, and individualize instruction across a diverse group of learners.

Blended teaching does not mean using technology as a complementary way to deliver information. It should be viewed as an opportunity to redesign the way courses are developed, and delivered through a combination of physical and virtual instruction. It also transcends barriers of time and place and can have a direct positive impact on students' learning outcomes when compared with traditional teaching [4]. Therefore, student satisfaction is one of the factors that can measure whether blended teaching is effective. Zhang and Zhu [5] conducted a study in which blended teaching mode was compared to traditional face-to-face teaching mode. Specifically, the study investigated the effectiveness of blended teaching compared to the traditional methods used to teach English as a second language in China. The results showed that students in blended teaching settings performed better in ESL courses than students in face-to-face settings. The researcher indicated that the results showed that the use of blended teaching has a positive impact on student teaching outcomes.

3. Current Application of Blended Teaching in China

The implementation process of blended teaching is divided into three stages [3]. The first is the exploration stage in which schools or teachers have awareness of teaching in a blended way, but do not provide support. The second stage is the application stage, which refers to the gradual formation of blended teaching measures, policies and strategies, and lays a solid foundation for the implementation objectives. The last stage is the promotion and maturity stage, which specifically means that the school has a relatively perfect technical environment, governance structure and promotion strategy. In terms of practical mode, blended teaching can integrate

modern advanced teaching mode and teaching method into it to form a teaching pattern that adapts to the actual teaching environment in colleges and universities.

Nowadays, though China is constantly promoting the construction of information education. Under the new education environment, various teaching software, APPs and platforms have emerged, the blended teaching in most universities and colleges is still undergoing in exploration stage. The arrival of the epidemic era has greatly promoted the education informatization construction. In the post epidemic era, this reform in the field of education will not stop. Thanks to the influence of the Internet era, teachers and students can quickly accept and adapt to the technological changes in the teaching model. Colleges and universities have been actively promoting the reform of blended teaching, emphasizing the dominant position of students in the classroom. Currently, the most popular ones in China are as follows: (1) Flipped classroom. Flipped classroom mainly refers to the process of transferring classroom teaching content to after class, and internalizing students' knowledge in class. It can focus teaching on the level of ability improvement and knowledge internalization, and help teachers better promote the comprehensive development of students. As the main body of blended teaching, it can deepen the connotation of network teaching, transform the nature of classroom teaching, and make modern information technology an instrument for self-study. (2) SPOC. SPOC is short for Small Private Online Course. It can meet the needs of classroom teaching and help students make up for their own shortcomings and problems. And in the application process of SPOC platform, teachers can provide rich and excellent online teaching resources for blended teaching, and improve the efficiency of problem solving.

4. Problems of Blended Teaching in College English Education In China

In practical application, blended teaching mode can integrate a variety of modern educational concepts and ideas, help teachers improve the effectiveness of English teaching, and stimulate students' interest in classroom teaching. However, in the process of specific application, there are many problems in the aspects of teacher-student interaction, teaching methods, teaching content, and effect evaluation, which seriously affect the quality and efficiency of the application of blended teaching.

4.1. Limited Teacher-student Interaction

In the process of applying blended teaching, it is difficult for students to actively participate in English teaching activities, and the degree of teacher-student interaction is relatively limited. Although in the process of college English classroom teaching, teachers can highly control the progress of teaching and can actively interact with students. However, the distinctive freedom and virtuality of online teaching restrain the interaction efficiency between teachers and students. Some students are difficult to fully participate in the process of online English teaching, and even have conflicting psychology and misunderstanding of online teaching that online English teaching is not important and cannot have a decisive impact on their own test results. Although some students can participate in different links and processes of online English teaching, they rarely interact with teachers in real time, resulting in low quality and efficiency of online

English teaching. According to the relevant theoretical research, the focus of the application of the blending model is "student orientation". If students are difficult to interact with teachers online, they cannot highlight their own role as the main body, which affects the quality of students in online teaching, resulting in unsatisfactory application effect

4.2. Lagging Teaching Methods

At present, education informationization provides support for the improvement of college English teaching methods. However, due to the constraints of network construction and teachers' quality, online teaching methods and resources are still difficult to be fully, effectively and comprehensively applied in English classes. For example, in line with the New Objective English Course, teaching resources are difficult to be fully applied in college English teaching practice. Many teachers generally regard courseware as an important and only teaching means, and do not integrate it with web-based teaching, micro-lectures and other information-based means. However, during the online teaching of the mode, many English teachers have not yet defined the basic features and characteristics of English online teaching. They still use traditional and backward English teaching methods, extending the theoretical indoctrination from classroom teaching to online teaching, so that students have more the burden of English learning, in turn, withdraw their interest in online learning. As a result, the quality of blended English teaching is not satisfactory. In addition, the lagging teaching methods also easily lead to the lack of close connection between online teaching and classroom teaching, which makes students lack of attention to online English teaching, thus affecting the effectiveness of college English teaching.

4.3. Evaluation System to Be Improved

Evaluation is an important means to test the quality of students' learning. It can help teachers identify the problems and improve the corresponding teaching methods and modes. However, it has been found the teaching evaluation system is not perfect enough under the blended teaching modes [6-7].

The traditional evaluation system and methods are still used, which makes it difficult to assess students' learning effectiveness, diverging from the basic requirements of English education. In other words, under the influence of the traditional evaluation system, it is difficult for teachers and students to attach importance to the blended teaching modes. As what students do in the traditional modes, teaching is still confined to the classroom part. Various teaching activities carried out by teachers in the blended modes will lack effectiveness to a large degree, let alone to evaluate students in terms of "core English literacy", "English expression ability" and "cross-cultural communication awareness".

5. Practical Strategies of Blended Teaching

5.1. Change the Concept and Teaching Methods

Based on the understanding of the basic features and characteristics of blended teaching, teachers need to free themselves from the traditional teaching concept and methods. In traditional teaching activities, teachers should play the role of designer, organizer, implementer, supervisor, evaluator, etc. In the blended teaching mode, teachers still have to play these roles, but the connotation of the roles has been greatly

enriched. Integrating the strong interaction under the online teaching with a high degree of freedom and universality of the offline, teachers are required to redesign the course with the methods of problem driven, group cooperation, project driven and other teaching methods to help students deepen their understanding through self-exploration and self-analysis. In this sense, under the new mode, teachers have more responsibilities. In order to be competent for these roles, teachers need to improve their abilities in all aspects. Their ability of designing teaching need to be elevated to develop an optimal path to achieve teaching goals on the platform. Editing teaching resources, making courseware, recording micro lesson videos, and interacting with students on the Internet all require teachers to improve their information technology ability. In order to take advantages of data collecting on the teaching platform, teachers are required to have strong data analysis ability and be able to carry out teaching in a more scientific and effective way based on the data.

At the same time when teachers convert their concept, students are required to change their notions of traditional passive learning to active learning, and actively complete the construction of knowledge. Students' learning under the blended teaching mode dramatically differs from that under the traditional one concerning the enriched content of independent learning. Students need to improve their autonomous learning ability in many ways, including effective planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, reflection. Meanwhile, offline part provides students with more opportunities to develop their own non-intellectual factors, such as cultivating optimistic attitude and confidence as well as being learning motivated and self-disciplined, so as to effectively deal with anxiety, irritability and other negative emotions in the learning process. Considering the nature of autonomous learning under the new mode, students are supposed to have strong awareness of cooperation and be able to actively and effectively communicate with teachers and students on/offline, to better the Students-students/ teacher-student interaction.

5.2. Renew the Evaluation System

In order to promote the teaching quality of teachers and the learning effect of students, the new teaching model needs a new evaluation system. The main change of teacher evaluation under the new mode is to increase the evaluation of online teaching work, including teaching design, learning resource construction, quality of recorded micro lesson videos, quality of questions, online homework correction, supervision and management of students' online learning, online Q&A and other effects of teacher-student interaction. Undoubtedly, it would lead to a significant increase in teachers' workload. Thus, improvement of salary mechanism is urgently needed to be taken into account to protect teachers.

The evaluation of students under the new model should reflect the principle of combining online and offline, formative evaluation and summative evaluation. The traditional evaluation method of "in-class performance + final paper marks" has been changed to "online learning performance + offline performance + final paper marks". The "online performance" reflect the achievement of online activities including task completion, exercise, homework and test. When the teachers assess the completion, it is suggested to give bonus points to the students who have learned both the compulsory and selective parts. The students should be

allowed to modify and submit online exercises and assignments repeatedly before the deadline. The online test should be set to allow multiple times (such as three times) and then take the best score into assessment. Careful analysis of the evaluation results would play the role of backwash evaluation to achieve the goal of promoting teaching and learning simultaneously.

5.3. Platform Construction

Blended teaching modes owes to well-equipped online teaching platforms with rich resources and powerful function. They with a range of courseware, online quizzes, photo galleries, audio recordings, and an archive of works, etc. Teaching resources that are produced by teachers themselves are recommended to first be assessed in terms of applicability, and necessary processing on the selected materials is in need, such as notes to the hyper syllabic words in the materials. In spite of the abundant online resources, teaching is centered on objectives and highlight the key points and difficulties, hence, materials to be appropriately selected. For the cultural content involved in the teaching units, relevant information of Chinese culture corresponding to it should be provided, so that students can compare Chinese and Western cultures, and carry out ideological and political education for students while cultivating their cross-cultural communication awareness and ability.

In terms of functions, the teaching platforms support not only the PC end, but also the mobile end (mobile phone and tablet) to meet the needs of ubiquitous learning. The platform should have necessary functions like retrieval function, social function to facilitate interaction between teachers and students, function to submit and correct homework online and online testing function, including voice testing function, which can evaluate students' pronunciation according to standard voice, and provide visual acoustic waveform for comparative analysis. The platform shall be able to conduct statistical analysis on the test results and push personalized learning content to students according to the statistical analysis results; Be able to collect and analyze background data and understand students' platform usage habits for future improvement; In order to strengthen management and prevent students from cheating as much as possible, the platform should have face recognition function. In addition, live broadcast function is greatly recommended under special situations, especially during pandemic time. In the construction, although external links can be used due to convenience and copyright permission, in order to avoid uncontrollable situations such as slow network speed and invalid links, more investment should be made to localize resources and functions.

6. Conclusion

Blended teaching is a teaching mode that integrates both traditional in-class instruction and online teaching in one setting. It is a growing trend in the information age. It is a prospect that has linked together such a range of significant fields as teaching methodology, educational technology, online teaching, and learning. The use of the new mode in the ESL/EFL context has attracted much attention as a way to teach and learn English. Research has shown that taking blended approach contributes to many benefits not only on teaching environment but also students' learning compared to that in a way of traditional teaching or online teaching alone. Some of these benefits include enhancing the English learning

process, developing language skills, and improving the English learning environment. Despite these benefits, the use of blended teaching can be associated with some challenges. Therefore, More researches have to be done to explore ESL/EFL teachers' perspectives regarding the challenges that they encounter when using blended learning in English teaching and learning.

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