



A Study on the Application of Blended Teaching Model in Integrated English Courses

Jiang Xue

¹Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences, Hohhot City, China

²Philippine Christian University Center for International Education, Manila City, the Philippines

*Correspondence: 18640435@qq.com

Abstract: Since the beginning of the 21st century, blended learning has attracted the attention of scholars. With the influence of the epidemic in the past three years, it is imperative to explore how to apply blended learning to stimulate the impact of the integration of online and offline education in order to achieve the ultimate goal of promoting students' development. In the foreign language departments of universities in ethnic areas of China, it is significant to conduct teaching practice of the blended teaching model for the course of Integrated English, which occupies a large proportion of the English major curriculum and plays a pivotal role in improving English majors' language proficiency and cultural literacy. This paper explains the exploration of the blended teaching model in Integrated English in one Chinese independent college in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region from two perspectives: the overall design and the analysis of the application of Integrated English I and II. This study collected data from questionnaires, interviews, and teachers' logs in order to investigate the effect of Integrated English based on the blended teaching model. The analysis of the results indicates that the application of the blended teaching model in Integrated English I and II is conducive to cultivating students' learning habits, improving their language skills, learning ability, and cultural awareness.

Keywords: blended teaching model, Integrated English, English majors, independent college

Introduction

In 21st century, online education is a popular trend and blended learning is an approach that provides innovative educational solutions through an effective mix of traditional classroom teaching with mobile learning and online activities for teachers, trainers and students^[1]. After the outbreak of the COVID 19 epidemic, it is still necessary and vital for researchers from higher institutions to analyze how to reorganize and carry out teaching practice with the advantages of both traditional face-to-face classroom teaching and technology-based E-learning teaching^[2]. And the Ministry of Education explicitly requires teachers to build and use MOOC and SPOC to transform and expand teaching content using high-quality online educational resources and to implement the blended teaching model in classes^[3]. In order to better adapt to the relevant requirements of blended teaching in the Internet era, the focus of the reform of Integrated English courses and the teaching in the independent college is to take the initiative to meet the challenges brought by the late epidemic and strengthen the integration of teaching contents and the blended teaching model, which could further highlight the subjectivity of students in the process of English learning status, especially for students in ethnic minority areas.

Literature Review

In recent years, in terms of blended teaching research, Thai found that the teaching model has a positive impact on students' self-efficacy and learning motivation^[4]. Ellis explored blended teaching design and the students' learning output in other countries^[5]. Wu Yingying proposed the framework of teaching and learning process based on blended teaching model^[6]. In addition, regarding blended teaching and learning in college English, the study of Li Wuxiang focused on the design and application of college English on online learning platforms^[7]. Wang introduced the design and practice of the blended teaching model of spoc + small classroom^[8]. As for the relevant research of the course of Integrated English, Jiang Shiqian explored this course based on certain platforms of the application Vocational Higher Education Institution^[9]. Wang Xian proposed the design of comprehensive English based on SPOC in Academic Higher Education Institution^[10].

At present, the relevant research on Integrated English mainly focused on the application of the Integrated English course under the guidance of certain theory as well as the analysis of teaching materials and teacher training in Academic Higher Education Institutions or Vocational Higher Education Institutions. In addition, the studies on blended teaching, in terms of research contents and perspectives, are mostly about the model construction and its effect on students' learning. What's more, most studies on blended teaching model have been carried out in the course of college English for non-English majors. So far there is a relatively small body of literature that is concerned with

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blended teaching model in Integrated English for English majors in Independent Institutions, which is necessary for further research.

Description of the study area:

This study focuses on the design and analysis on the application of Integrated English courses. Integrated English I to IIIV are a series of four courses designed to promote English language proficiency at undergraduate level for English majors. They concentrate on the training of students' reading and writing abilities on the basis of listening and speaking. The textbooks chosen for the courses systematically are *Modern College English Intensive Reading*, published by the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press and edited by Professor Yang Limin, which won the second prize of Chinese National Excellent Textbook (Higher Education) in 2021. The series of textbooks adhere to the educational philosophy of "By Chinese, of Chinese and for Chinese". They cover a large number of original texts showing rhetorical features and cultural varieties with a lot of vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation exercises and more exercises for intensive skills training with the aim of consolidating and extending students' command of English grammar, vocabulary and translation strategies, their ability of developing an essay, preparing them for TEM 4.

Up till now, the design and implementation of Integrated English I and II have been completed based on blended teaching model under the influence of the outbreak of the COVID 19 epidemic so this study pays special attention to the analysis on the application of the blended teaching model for Integrated English I and II.

The Overall Construction of Integrated English Courses Based on Blended Teaching Model

The following is an introduction to the overall construction of the blended teaching model in Integrated English I to IIIV from two dimensions: horizontal and vertical. The horizontal dimension is generously built around the online and offline hybrid courses. The online part focuses on increasing the knowledge of English language and the expansion of Chinese and western culture while the offline courses emphasize language practice, intensifying the learning efficiency of what the students learn online by organizing many activities, such as inter-class, cross-class, inter-department and inter-campus activities. And the outstanding students are encouraged to participate in departmental, inter-college and even regional and national college competitions so as to help them learn through competitions, promote learning by thinking and doing and set good examples for others as well. The online and offline hybrid classrooms promote the integration of resources and the integration of different teaching methods, such as task teaching method, holistic language teaching method, communicative teaching method, product-oriented approach and so on, to promote students' efficient learning.

For the vertical dimension, the blended teaching model of Integrated English I, II, III and IIIV would be carried out primarily in the form of flipped classroom throughout four semesters in an orderly way, with the design of "Chinese and western culture micro-lectures" and other cultural extensions related to the content of the texts, and the content of online language knowledge in accordance with the learning objectives students should achieve. The flipped classroom is a simple strategy for providing learning resources such as articles, prerecorded videos and internet links before the class. The online classroom time is then used to deepen understanding through discussion with faculty and peers^[11]. The aim of the arrangement is to improve students' language proficiency systematically, to develop their cooperative and creative ability and to enhance their cross-cultural awareness which will help students prepare them for their future studies and successful entry into society.

Student assessment is one of the important methods of the evaluation process in the education system^[12]. As for the evaluation process, besides the student evaluation profile mechanism, the multiple assessment indicators applied in the course include: online unit quiz + homework (10%), class report + pre-class test (10%), offline unit test (20%) and final exam (60%), which could make the assessment and evaluation mechanism more objective, reliable and comprehensive. In addition to the final exam, the standards of students' evaluation also take into account of the test on online platform and the performance in the flipped classroom and the mid-term test which involves some questions to test their ability of Chinese cultural expression.

Research Content and Methodology

This part introduces the specific design of teaching activities applied in Integrated English I and II based on the blended teaching model in this independent college as well as the research methods used in this study.

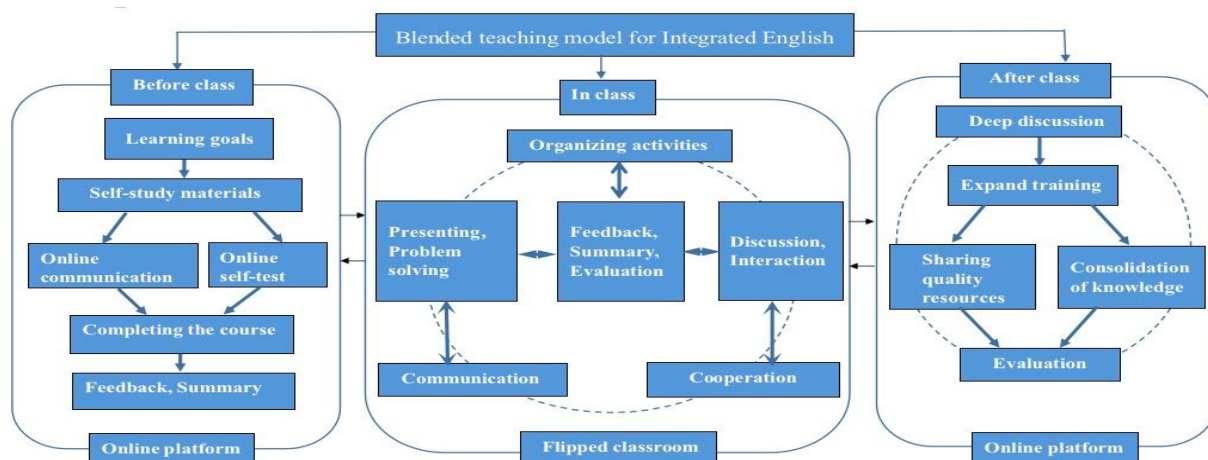


Fig. 1 Design of teaching activities based on blended teaching model

As Fig. 1 shown above, the online resources before class mainly adopt the online courses of Integrated English I and II on the platform of China University Curriculum, and the “Chinese and western culture micro-lectures” and other materials are presented on the platform of Chaoxing learning APP with online communication and online self-tests designed for important parts. Furthermore, the key contents of the online resources are fully communicated between teachers and students in the form of flipped classroom offline. To be specific, the offline classes consist of pre-class tests, student reports, group discussions, teacher explanation and student-teacher interactions. By doing so, students can understand their learning results based on their question completion, review and consolidate the knowledge after class. Then, the teachers organize activities and guide the students to present or solve problems so as to understand the internal relationship between the fragmented knowledge logically. Students report or discuss in small groups and do the presentation in class, analyzing different problems from a variety of perspectives. In order to improve the quality of English majors’ language output, various activities have been organized after class so that the online resources can be used in a scientific way to assist students to produce high-quality language output.

The study mainly used questionnaire and interview to collect quantitative data to do the analysis. Specifically speaking, it was carried out by using questionnaire for students, interview for teachers and students as well as teachers’ logs in order to investigate the effect of the Integrated English I and II under the blended teaching model. Six teachers applied blended teaching model in Integrated English I and II, while 238 students used the online and offline teaching resources designed in the survey. First of all, as for the research methods, the questionnaire contains 16 objective questions and one subjective question. Questions 1 to 5 are about the students’ attitude toward blended learning, teacher-student and student-student communication and interaction. 6-8 questions are related to how students view the changes on their roles, learning strategies and language proficiency, while 9-12 questions are designed to know the degree of their satisfaction with the lesson plans, the evaluation of the activities and materials online. Questions 13 to 16 take a close look at how students rate their own independent learning ability under the blended teaching model, and the last subjective question is intended to find out students’ opinions about the teaching model of the courses. Furthermore, based on the results of the questionnaire, follow-up interviews were conducted among well-selected 8 students who were required to tell what are the possible reasons behind the detected positive effects and problems of blended teaching model for integrated English course in the present research. Each interview lasted about 8 minutes. In addition, teaching reflections and the results of interview for the teachers were also analyzed to collect the data.

Research Results and Discussion

Six teachers and 238 students used the online and offline teaching resources designed and participated in the survey. The results showed that 93% of the students were very positive about the arrangement of the offline flipped classroom. For the online materials concerning language knowledge, such as MOOC and “Chinese and Western culture mini-lectures”, 87% students said that the combination of online courses and offline flipped classroom could develop their independent thinking, analytical judgment and practical skills, which will be conducive to their learning initiative and improving their communicative abilities. For the online vocabulary usage and materials to improve their language comprehension ability, 95% of the students considered the online materials before class and after class could expand their English learning experiences and help them gradually cultivate good learning habits in the form of self-study and mutual learning. These data suggest that such learner-centered teaching model has a relatively high recognition.

In interviews and teaching reflections, teachers also indicated that the use of the online platform facilitated teachers to provide feedback and necessary guidance to each individual. In addition, 91% of the students and most teachers affirmed the advantages of the videos, audios, and materials on the platform, which could not be presented appropriately in traditional class due to the limitations of class time. However, four students said that the online communication and interaction between teachers and students was not effective enough, while three teachers

mentioned in their reflections and interview that the future teaching design, especially for writing instructions, should focus on the better ways to improve student-student and teacher-student interaction through demonstration of good examples or analysis of several cases. Besides, 89% of the students affirmed the merits of the multiple evaluation mechanism, especially for the student-students evaluation online and offline and the function of online feedback for assignments (Pigai writing platform and Rain Classroom, etc.) allowed teachers to give timely feedback on students' writing and after-class discussion.

In interview for the students, student A indicated that the online course provides more learning resources, which echo and complement each other with classroom teaching. It could not only improve their learning efficiency, but offer the freshmen good opportunities to adapt to university for the first time, so that they could gradually develop the ability of independent learning and change from passive students to active learners. Both student B and student A mentioned Chinese and western culture micro-lectures were very interesting, which could broaden their horizon and arouse their curiosities to observe certain culture phenomena critically. And the classroom reports can develop their language skills, analytical skills and collaborative abilities. Student C said this teaching model allowed students to study more flexibly and to choose to learn in a way that suits individual's pace, therefore they could have more productive learning experiences when learning Integrated English I and II. Another student asserted that the online learning was very convenient and they can watch it many times repeatedly without worrying about missing the important points the teacher mentioned in class. Additionally, other students expressed explicitly that the blended teaching model can be instructive to solve their doubts independently before the class and efficiently consolidate what they learned in class. At the same time, the self-test of each chapter online and the output-driven assignments after class can effectively test the learning results and deepen the memory of knowledge they learned.

In addition, the suggestion given by two students in the interview that if the instructor uses digital communication tools skillfully, the students could have more access to the teacher to ask questions or engage in discussion. In interview for teachers, two teachers mentioned that they would learn how to improve their technological pedagogical knowledge. Furthermore, the result of teachers' logs showed that, compared with the course of integrated English I, two teachers, in teaching integrated English II, consciously organized their classroom instruction around the assignments of intermediate students, allowing students to identify problems, revise and explain the common problems, ultimately improving students' language skills, learning ability, thinking quality and cultural awareness.

Conclusion

Blended teaching model is big storm for higher education that many educators are full of their passion and desire^[13]. In general, by collecting and analyzing the data from questionnaire, interviews and teachers' logs, the results of this study indicate that blended teaching mode applied in this study is conducive to cultivating students' learning habits, which in turn can lead students to change from passive learners to active and lifelong learners. In addition, the exploration of construction the blended teaching model in Integrated English courses could be implemented in teaching practice in the future. Furthermore, carrying out the teaching reform in the course of Integrated English I and II could improve students' interest in learning, give full play to their subjective initiative and cultivate the ability to solve problems, which could be beneficial to laying a solid foundation for becoming excellent graduates of English majors. What's more, the insights gained from this study may be of assistance to change teachers' functions in the new era. In this new environment, teachers are expected to change from the traditional "storyteller" to a "participant" role that emphasizes interaction with students and continuous improvement of their own education. With more teachers applying blended teaching model in more courses, independent college could further implement the reforms in learner-centered teaching models, which is in line with educational philosophy and culture features of many colleges and universities.

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