Blended Learning of College English in the Digital Age

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Abstract: The paper discusses the integration of information technology with College English teaching through blended learning, a method combining traditional classroom instruction with digital tools. This approach aims to improve language learning by promoting interaction between teachers, students, and resources. A case study from a Chinese university demonstrates the use of technological tools in an English course, analyzing student engagement, teacher adaptation to technology, and the impact on teaching quality. The findings emphasize the importance of blending skills training with educational technology in curriculum design, highlighting its benefits for student autonomy, collaborative learning, and practical language application.
Keywords: college English, blended learning, CALL, educational technology

Introduction

The implementation of educational informatization in foreign language teaching revitalizes educational concepts, integrating information technology and resources with foreign language curriculum teaching. This approach innovates teaching methods, expands teaching application models, and optimizes the quality of teaching services. *College English Curriculum Requirements of China*[1] suggests that "universities should incorporate online courses into their curriculum, emphasizing the construction of online courses. They should place relevant courses on online teaching platforms, seamlessly integrating classroom teaching with web-based learning." "College English should vigorously promote the integration of the latest information technology with course teaching, continuing to utilize modern educational technology, especially the significant role of information technology in foreign language teaching." *The College English Course Teaching Requirements of China* [2] also states that "higher education institutions should fully utilize modern information technology, adopting computer-assisted and classroom-based English teaching modes to improve the efficiency of traditional teacher-centric teaching . The new teaching models should be supported by modern information technology, especially network technology, allowing English learning to be somewhat free from the constraints of time and place, moving towards personalized and autonomous learning."

This paper explores the blended teaching mode and methods to enhance the efficacy of college English course teaching, promoting multidimensional interaction among teachers, students, and the resource environment, stimulating students' language learning mechanisms, and effectively improving students' language application abilities and the quality of foreign language teaching.

1. Literature review

Since the 1990s, the focus of foreign language teaching has shifted from the cognitive view of communicative teaching to the influence of the social-cognitive environment on learning. Social learning theory [3] believes that learning is the result of the individual's cognitive, behavioral and environmental factors and their interaction. Individual cognitive ability can only constitute the internal conditions for learning, and individuals need to negotiate, adjust and modify with others in order to internalize the relevant knowledge. The influenced view of language learning is that language learning is a social-cognitive phenomenon and language development depends on social interaction. With the popularization and application of intelligent computers and the Internet, based on social cognitive theory and content-based foreign language teaching theory, computer-assisted foreign language teaching has entered into a more powerful, open and comprehensive development stage, and the application of information technology has been integrated into the daily teaching activities as a natural, invisible, and normal behavior [4]. Computer-assisted language teaching is no longer limited to single-computer interaction, and CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) has emerged. Online communication not only stimulates collaborative learning in the language classroom, but also improves communicative efficiency and effectiveness regardless of time and place, provides equal opportunities for participation in communication, and reduces conformity and centralization[5]. In this period the theoretical ground of computer-assisted foreign language teaching technology has shifted from the field of cognition to the social cognitive theory with more focus on the creation of authentic context of language use for learners. Foreign language teaching under the influence tends to integrate a variety of modern educational technology, equipment and task-based teaching, project-based teaching and specialized content teaching, so that language learners are immersed in the physical or social context of knowledge generation, through multi-dimensional interaction and negotiation of meaning to actively acquire problem-solving knowledge and language skills, and to promote effective learning.

2. Blended learning design for College English

The case study method is a research strategy that involves an in-depth, detailed examination of a subject (the case), as well as its related contextual conditions[6].This method is particularly useful in situations where a deep understanding of complex phenomena is sought[7]. In this study, Unit 1 of "College English 1" for non-English majors in a Chinese university is taken as an example to illustrate the blended teaching and learning in an technology enhanced teaching environment.

2.1 Analysis of teaching objectives

The teaching objectives of Unit 1 "College Life" are as follows: Listening and speaking skills: to describe college campus life; Reading skills: to master the reading skills of skimming; Writing skills: to understand how to write paragraphs and to use gerunds to increase the logic and readability of the text; Translation skills: to use nouns that indicate "time", "place" and "event" as subjects; Word formation: prefixes indicating "negative" and "grade"; Social culture: to understand the situation of university education in western countries.

2.2 Implementation of blended teaching

2.2.1 Before class

(1) Pre-class preparation: Students' Training for Technology Enhanced Learning: Students were informed how to use the interactive touch screen for classroom use, use WeChat to join "Rain Classroom"(a programme for mobile teaching), and log in to the online teaching platform to join the

teacher's online class. Teaching Resources: The teacher was responsible for the preparation and uploading of teaching resources, the release of on-line notices and assignments, the setting of class arrangement and grading rules.

(2) Pre-class tasks: Students in groups of four were invited to prepare an oral report in English on university education in western countries and uploaded the related PPT to the online teaching platform; They had previewed the text and vocabulary of the Text *Life at Harvard* and learned the micro-lectures of Unit 1 online.

2.2.2 In class

During the class discussion sessions, students could leave barrage comments or propose questions via the "Rain Classroom", which was Simultaneously broadcast on the main screen. The teacher played a video clip introducing Harvard University to lead in class discussion and listening practice. Then the results of students' autonomous learning in advance were checked via a variety of scaffolding tasks to ensure the students had understood the essence of each part of the text, and the features of writing . A timed skimming task was assigned to the student by the mobile phone to practice their skimming skills, followed by multiple-choice questions which utilized automated grading technology to quickly generate scores. The Teacher could check students' performance reports instantly. The Teacher analyzed of the problems encountered by students in a timely manner, which was beneficial for the targeted explanations and personalized guidance. Lectures were given on language points, reading translation and writing skills with courseware which could be downloaded by scanning the QR. Interactive touch screen for classroom use was applied in match-making games for prefixes and roots. Homework of online writing was assigned to help the students improve the writing through the steps of topic conceptualization, drafting outlines, checking and revising.

2.2.3 After class

The Teacher compiled classroom learning activity data and electronic records, providing   online problem-solving support to students facing difficulties. Meanwhile, with help of the feedback data, the teacher could provide targeted instructions for the next class. After class, the automated self-assessment system for writing helped the students grade the essays and proofread their writing with revision suggestions. The teacher could check the editing process process and provide personalized feedback.

3. Analysis of teaching effectiveness

In this research, case study was conducted in university English classrooms to examine the teacher behaviors. The study covered the following aspects: firstly, Student participation in teaching activities and task completion. Secondly, teaching procedures and technology usage.Lastly, teacher-student interactions and teaching effectiveness. Through observations of teachers' classroom practices, it was evident that students were actively engaged in blended foreign language teaching activities within the multi-faceted teaching environment of classroom teaching, mobile-assisted language learning, and computer-assisted language learning. They conscientiously completed relevant tasks, and the diverse interactions and task-based teaching enhanced their self-efficacy and autonomy in learning. Overall, classroom organization was orderly, and teacher-student interactions were positive. Teachers played a guiding role at appropriate times during student-centered teaching segments, facilitating the learning process.

To obtain more comprehensive data, the author randomly selected 10 students from the observed classes and conducted semi-structured interviews to investigate their opinions and views on technology-enhanced language learning. The interviews revealed that students exhibited strong initiative and proactivity in constructing knowledge through technology. Faced with a significant shift from the high

school learning style, students showed a high level of interest and adaptability. They gained self-efficacy and satisfaction from completing learning tasks. Utilizing modern information technology for multidimensional input and multiple interactions stimulated students' motivation to learn and internal developmental needs, fostering their sense of autonomy and spirit of self-inquiry. Blended teaching methods facilitated the optimization of teacher energy and classroom time allocation, enabling personalized tutoring and comprehensive assessment. The application of information technology in language teaching helped teachers conduct systematic analysis and visual reflection of the teaching process, thus improving their teaching.

4. Conclusion

English teaching in the higher education context, conducted through blended teaching, can promote students' motivation to learn, self-efficacy, and autonomous learning abilities. Blended teaching places high demands on teachers' digital literacy and teaching abilities. Teachers should promptly change their concepts and roles, make full use of high-quality resources and advanced technology within limited class hours, and integrate teaching resources. In terms of teaching methods, teachers should focus on skills training and the integration of modern educational technology. They should use the digital network environment as a teaching aid and incorporate the cultivation of core competencies, such as teamwork, practical skills, and innovative development skills, into curriculum design and implementation. This will help students achieve autonomous learning, research-oriented learning, collaborative learning, learning through practice, learning in the process, and developmental learning, ultimately enhancing their English proficiency.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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