

Research on the Effect of Blended Teaching in College English under the Background of New Liberal Arts

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Abstract

The new liberal arts is an innovative development of liberal arts education, with the mission of enhancing the country's cultural soft power, promoting integrated innovation, and timely applying technological revolution and innovative teaching methods to education and teaching. The core is to shape the soul and educate people. Interdisciplinary integration, online education, blended learning, curriculum ideological and political education, and cloud management are the trends of future education and the fundamental tasks of curriculum construction and quality improvement in the context of new liberal arts. In the context of the construction of new liberal arts, college English teaching should not only strengthen the imparting of knowledge and cultivate students' abilities in cross-cultural communication, self-learning, and critical thinking, but also pay attention to the cultivation of emotions and values, and put moral education into practice. In view of this, this article takes the construction of the new liberal arts as the research perspective, exploring the improvement path of blended teaching in college English from four aspects: the intersection of liberal arts and science information in subject teaching, the deep integration of information technology and curriculum teaching, the organic combination of ideological and political education and curriculum content, and the high degree of integration of online and offline teaching.

Keywords

New liberal arts; College English; Blended learning; Effect improvement.

1. Introduction

The New Liberal Arts was proposed by Hiram College in the United States in 2017, which refers to the reorganization of traditional liberal arts disciplines, the intersection of arts and sciences, and the integration of new technologies into courses such as philosophy, literature, language, etc., providing students with comprehensive interdisciplinary knowledge learning. As an organic part of the new liberal arts, college English education plays an important role in talent cultivation. Through the learning and use of English, students can not only learn and understand the world's outstanding culture and civilization, but also help to strengthen the national language strength, effectively spread Chinese culture, promote extensive exchanges with people around the world, and enhance the national cultural soft power. The development of modern information technology, and especially the COVID-19 that swept the world in 2020, have changed people's learning methods, promoted the development of mixed teaching, and made it widely used in different education fields and teaching in different disciplines.

2. The Connotation and Research Trends of Blended Learning

2.1. The Connotation of Blended Learning

The main viewpoints on the scientific connotation of blended learning are the following. (1) Environmental theory. Graham (2006) described blended learning as the fusion of face-to-face environments, characterized by synchronous human interaction and information and communication technology-based environments. (2) Mixed thoughts. Scholars Hockly and Clandfield (2010) defined blended learning as a combination of face-to-face instruction and online learning. (3) Combination thoughts. Whittaker (2013) summarized its meaning in English language teaching and pointed out that blended learning was any combination of face-to-face teaching and computer technology. Professor He Kekang, based on summarizing the concept of blended learning by foreign scholars, endows it with new connotations and actively advocates the introduction of blended learning into curriculum teaching. The main function of blended learning mode is to integrate traditional teaching methods with new teaching methods, leverage their respective advantages in the teaching process, and use advanced teaching methods to compensate for the shortcomings of traditional teaching methods (Wang Zhu, 2020).

2.2. Research Trends of Blended Learning

2.2.1. Research on the Practice of Blended Learning

Blended learning updates teachers' educational concepts, promotes the transformation of teachers' roles, and encourages students to have more time and space freedom (LI Kaiyu, LIU Weitao, 2018). The key to applying blended learning in English teaching is to better support and improve the learning outcomes of English learners. To achieve this, a harmonious balance needs to be struck between online knowledge acquisition and face-to-face interpersonal interaction, maximizing the advantages of various environments to integrate the two (Osguthorpe and Graham, 2003). However, many researchers question whether the practice of blended learning lacks effective interpersonal interaction in traditional classrooms and fails to leverage the advantages of online systems and technological support (Lee, Lim, & Kim, 2016).

In comparison, in recent years, more and more domestic scholars have applied blended learning to actual classroom teaching and achieved good results. Liu Xiaomei (2016) adopted a blended college English audio-visual teaching model, which improved students' listening and speaking abilities as well as their ability for self-directed learning. Gan Ye (2017) found that blended learning in college English live streaming courses could fully leverage the role of students as the main body of learning and greatly improve their learning efficiency. Sun Youzhong (2017) made the first attempt in China to integrate online reading and discussion into classic reading teaching for English majors. The blended teaching model combining online and offline has played a positive role in cultivating students' interest in learning and promoting learning outcomes. Through comparative experimental research, Li Xiaoli et al. (2014) found that the experimental group had significantly higher grades than the control group, and blended learning was more effective in stimulating students' interest in learning and effectively mobilizing their learning enthusiasm (Wu Liyuan, 2016).

2.2.2. Research on the Effectiveness of Blended Learning

The blended learning model has developed rapidly abroad. Pereira (2007) conducted a comparative study between traditional teaching methods and blended learning methods in the classroom of human anatomy and found that blended learning was more effective. Traditional teaching combined with video teaching can more effectively enhance students' oral skills (Shih, 2010), especially in improving the writing and reading abilities of non-native speakers (Kazakoff et al., 2018). Blended learning has always been a hot topic in foreign language education research. Xie Maosen et al. (2015) evaluated the spatial learning process of students

through the four factors and established a fuzzy comprehensive evaluation model. Tang Wenxiu et al. (2016) advocated evaluating learning outcomes from five perspectives, including participation. Xiong Sujuan (2017) constructed a basic framework suitable for the evaluation system of blended learning mode based on the reference of the Kirkpatrick evaluation model. However, research on the evaluation of teaching effectiveness often reconstructs the evaluation mechanism of teaching quality from the perspectives of teachers, students, peers, etc. (Du Hongqing, 2020).

2.2.3. Research on College English Teaching under the Background of New Liberal Arts

As an organic component of the new liberal arts, where should college foreign language education go? Wu Yan (2019) proposed the overall requirements, ideas, measures, standards, and goals for the reform and development of higher foreign language education in the new era, focusing on recognizing changes, adapting to changes, seeking changes, new missions, broad patterns, new liberal arts, and big foreign languages. To carry out the construction of a new liberal arts in foreign languages, it is necessary to fully leverage the main role of college foreign language departments (Zhang Yonghuai, 2020), clarify the role and mission of college English teaching, constantly update teaching concepts, and adjust teaching content and modes appropriately (Xiang Mingyou, 2020), in order to adapt to the new needs of the development of liberal arts in the new era, build a culture with Chinese characteristics, and form a Chinese school (Li Yansong, 2019).

Overall, blended learning has its unique advantages and has attracted the attention of scholars both domestically and internationally, with theoretical research focusing on its connotations. In recent years, the application of blended learning in specific disciplines has become increasingly widespread. Most scholars have conducted comparative experimental studies between traditional teaching and blended learning, and have achieved good teaching results. However, its evaluation method is relatively single, mostly based on student performance and questionnaire surveys, lacking comprehensive and systematic argumentation. In the context of the construction of the new liberal arts, experts and scholars have pointed out the direction and put forward requirements for the reform and development of college English teaching from a theoretical perspective. However, there is lack of research in teaching practice, especially in improving the effectiveness of blended learning.

3. Exploring the Path to Improving the Effectiveness of Blended Teaching

3.1. Interdisciplinary Integration of Arts and Sciences in Subject Teaching

College English, as an important component of humanities education and the construction of new liberal arts in Chinese higher education institutions, is a compulsory public basic course for non English major students in undergraduate education and plays an important role in talent cultivation. The curriculum combines both instrumental and humanistic aspects. On the one hand, it follows the language learning rules of the general English stage, comprehensively enhancing students' practical English application abilities. On the other hand, through the design of learning materials and activities, it cultivates students' humanistic literacy and comprehensive qualities, enabling them to establish correct values, enhance cultural understanding, and improve cross-cultural communication skills in the process of understanding the world, society, and discovering themselves, thus achieving the organic unity of instrumental and humanistic aspects. This provides a basic guarantee for the comprehensive implementation of the construction of new engineering, new medicine, and new agriculture disciplines, helping students in new disciplines to learn about the world's most advanced science, engineering, agriculture, and medical technologies through English learning, and enhancing their cross-cultural communication, critical thinking, and innovation abilities. To solve the problem of non English major students, especially those in science, engineering,

agriculture, and medicine, excessively pursuing technical training and lacking humanistic literacy, college English should play its role in curriculum nature, adjust and integrate teaching content appropriately, and pay attention to the intersection of liberal arts and science information in subject teaching according to the professional characteristics of the teaching objects. On the one hand, teachers should be good at utilizing textbooks with distinct themes and extensive content, excavating materials from the textbooks, and cultivating students' humanistic literacy through careful teaching design in the process of language knowledge learning; On the other hand, teachers can organically integrate course content with students' professional learning, providing students with learning materials related to their major through micro lesson recording and good article push. Students can learn about the latest developments in their professional field through online learning, and can also share their learning experiences with teachers and classmates on learning platforms. Teachers organize students to discuss and exchange ideas after online classes, and solve key and difficult problems in online learning. In the process of learning and communication, students not only acquire English knowledge, broaden their knowledge, but also improve their critical thinking ability and comprehensive cultural literacy. In addition, to examine the effectiveness of blended learning for students and promote the cross disciplinary teaching of arts and sciences in English subject teaching, teachers can assign tasks once a semester, requiring students to guide them to choose projects related to their major based on the theme of a unit through project-based learning. Relevant materials will be collected through data retrieval, literature reading, questionnaire surveys, personal interviews, and summarization of Chinese and English information, and analyzed, organized, and synthesized. Finally, the results will be presented in written reports, promotional posters, courseware presentations, etc. The completion of project products and group member' work will be evaluated by themselves, others, and teachers, and the average score of the three will be included in the regular course grades.

3.2. Deep Integration of Information Technology and Curriculum Teaching

College English teachers need to constantly improve their own level of educational technology, pay attention to modern information technology, focus on its ubiquitous and shifting advantages, promote the application of new technologies and media such as the Internet, artificial intelligence, big data, learning analysis, etc. In the reform and innovation of college English teaching, they should make full use of the Internet and smart education platform, strengthen resource construction and sharing, select textbooks to supplement resources and materials, design classrooms carefully, and carry out multi modal teaching. In addition, through the analysis of big data on the platform, effective management and supervision of students' self-directed learning can be achieved.

The ability of self-directed learning encourages students to be active, independent, and scientific and learn effectively, which is an important guarantee for the smooth implementation of blended learning and a basic condition for implementing lifelong learning. Cultivating students' autonomous learning ability is a requirement for the development of modern education and an important goal of English teaching in Chinese universities. In blended learning, teachers provide students with guidance plans to help them clearly understand learning objectives. Each online learning task is set with a deadline and immediate learning evaluation is given, which to some extent helps students clarify learning objectives, plan learning time, and evaluate learning effectiveness. However, the participation of teachers is necessary in developing and improving students' self-directed learning abilities. Teachers need to provide training on learning strategies, especially meta-cognitive strategies, to help students understand effective learning strategies, recommend them to choose and practice strategies that are in line with their own learning styles and levels, and check the application of students' strategies. Teachers encourage students to use meta-cognitive strategies, supplemented by big

data on smart education platforms, to effectively monitor their entire learning process. In addition, the provision of a smart education environment and the positioning of the teacher's role have a crucial impact on the cultivation of students' autonomous learning ability. In blended learning, teachers should not only use information technology to collect and organize massive teaching resources, but also comprehensively and objectively understand students' learning situations, determine teaching based on learning, and carry out personalized teaching. Therefore, teachers must put students at the center of their teaching activities, and try to be the collectors and providers of materials, the promoters and evaluators of student learning, the organizers and managers of teaching activities, etc.

3.3. Organic Integration of Ideological and Political Education with Curriculum Content

The clear positioning of the teaching function of college English courses, prominent educational function, and up-to-date textbook content have laid a certain foundation for promoting the construction of new liberal arts. The Guidelines for College English Teaching released in October 2020 clearly stated in the Course Positioning and Nature section that college English teaching should actively integrate into the school's ideological and political education system, so as to play an important role in implementing the fundamental task of cultivating morality and talents in higher education institutions. College English textbooks fully consider the development of the times and the characteristics of the new generation of college students. The selection of materials is rich in the atmosphere of the times, with diverse themes covering different fields such as society, history, economy, philosophy, technology, culture, etc. It emphasizes the combination of ideological and interesting aspects, cultivating students to view individuals, society, and the world from multiple perspectives. Rich themes and vivid texts are very beneficial for teachers to explore materials, cleverly and organically integrate ideological and political education into college English teaching, truly achieve teaching and educating, enlighten students' wisdom, and cultivate them into new talents who have both international perspectives and patriotism, responsibility, benevolence, and solid knowledge.

In blended learning, teachers should first establish the concept of curriculum ideological and political construction. While teaching language knowledge, they should explain the spirit and values behind the knowledge, and effectively convey the correct value pursuit and ideal beliefs to students in a silent form. Secondly, teachers need to optimize the content of ideological and political education in the curriculum. By integrating teaching resources and exploring ideological and political elements, the college English curriculum should be systematically designed. Through micro lesson production, platform sharing, classroom teaching, group discussions, and other methods, ideological and political education should be cleverly and organically integrated into both online and offline teaching of college English, so that teaching activities can go hand in hand with educating and nurturing students. Again, teachers should carefully organize the content of ideological and political education courses, adhere to the teaching philosophy of student-centered and teacher-led, use blended learning as guidance, combine online and offline teaching, and adopt the teaching mode of "learning first, teaching later". In the blended learning mode, on the one hand, teachers set goals for ideological and political education from the cultural and emotional dimensions, extract cultural genes and value paradigms from textbooks, and search for their compatibility with socialist core values. Through micro course input and other related materials, students are required to log in to the University English Smart Education Cloud Platform before class to learn micro courses, preview texts and related extension materials (including selected ideological and political digital course materials), take notes for video lectures, material learning, etc., complete (advanced) assignments, ask questions or share topics of interest. Through online teaching, teachers integrate the guidance of ideals and beliefs into the process of imparting language knowledge

and cultivating abilities, achieving the goal of ideological and political education; On the other hand, teachers design classroom teaching activities based on students' online questions. In offline classrooms, teachers check students' self-directed learning before class through questions or quizzes, sort out learning priorities, and naturally integrate ideological and political education into classroom teaching activities. Teachers and students work together to explore and solve knowledge points that students have not learned and confusion and problems encountered when completing assignments, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the teaching content. Through offline teaching, teachers can not only promote students' personality development and help them establish correct values, but also encourage students to actively participate in teaching activities, thereby achieving better teaching results. Finally, teachers should objectively evaluate the effectiveness of ideological and political education in the curriculum. Integrating ideological and political education into process evaluation, students' learning of ideological and political micro courses and expanded materials, practice and interactive communication of theme essays on the platform, and discussion and sharing of topics related to ideological and political education in classroom teaching can all become important basis for their daily performance through platform data and teacher records.

3.4. Highly Integrated Online and Offline Teaching

The main function of blended learning mode is to integrate traditional teaching methods with advanced teaching methods, play to their respective advantages in the teaching process, use advanced teaching methods to make up for the shortcomings of traditional teaching methods, and use traditional classroom teaching to connect modern teaching methods (Wang Zhu, 2020). Online learning and offline teaching are not separate lines, but products of deep interaction and integration of the technological advantages and classroom reform needs of modern information technology. The basic focus is on education itself (Qiu Yannan, Li Zhengtao, 2020).

The high degree of integration between online learning and offline teaching requires clear goals for college English teaching, strengthening the connection, transformation, and generation between online and offline teaching content and methods, and highlighting the flexibility and symbiosis of dual line blended teaching. Firstly, the teaching team needs to design and produce micro courses based on the requirements of the College English Teaching Guidelines, textbooks, and fully explore and integrate materials according to four dimensions: language knowledge, cultural background, emotional attitude, and learning strategies. Secondly, according to the requirements of the teaching syllabus, the teacher designs a guide plan that requires students to learn several micro courses online, first self digest the relevant knowledge, and use the platform to complete the preview of the text. Each student in the group is required to ask one or two questions or help classmates solve one or two questions. Finally, each group leader will summarize the unresolved issues, and the teacher will design offline teaching activities based on the group leader's problem summary and the sharing and questioning of students on the education cloud platform. This will not only avoid the disconnection between online and offline learning, but also prevent the phenomenon of cooking old rice from occurring. The online learning content will be reintroduced to students unchanged. The integration and symbiosis of online and offline teaching rely on effective management during the teaching process. Based on the big data of online learning, teachers need to timely understand the overall and individual situation of students' online learning, analyze and evaluate their learning styles and learning effects. It is necessary to strengthen the supervision and management of students' self-directed learning, and it is convenient for teachers to design targeted offline teaching activities, especially to provide diversified task choices for students of different levels. Therefore, teachers need to consider the individual differences of students, whether it is online learning, task assignment, or classroom activity setting, they need to provide mandatory items and elective

items to help each student gain a sense of learning achievement, thereby promoting and developing their self-directed learning ability.

The coexistence of online and offline teaching also relies on the construction of a dual line blended learning evaluation model. Based on the advantages of online teaching, teachers need to construct a multi-dimensional evaluation model that focuses on process evaluation, fully utilizing the big data of the education cloud platform to record and manage students' online learning, so that students can not only feel the immediate learning gain, but also clearly recognize the gap between themselves and other classmates in learning, motivate students to actively learn, and form a good learning atmosphere of chasing after each other.

4. Conclusion

The improvement of blended learning effectiveness relies on the excellent teaching design of teachers and the integration and symbiosis of online and offline teaching. More importantly, teachers should pay attention to cultivating students' meta-cognitive strategies and self-learning abilities. By creating a supportive learning environment for students, providing rich learning materials, designing hierarchical problem scenarios, and establishing diverse course evaluation methods, teachers should encourage students to adopt appropriate learning approaches and methods based on their own learning styles and levels, guide students to learn how to learn, actively explore, and achieve optimal learning outcomes through group cooperation and teacher differentiated guidance. At the same time, for non English major college students, especially those majoring in science, engineering, agriculture, and medicine, teachers should fully utilize the nature of university English courses, integrate language knowledge imparting, English application ability cultivation, and value shaping, and help students establish correct worldviews, outlooks on life and values. Students should combine English language learning with professional learning through project-based learning. Teachers stimulate students' interest in learning, encourage them to actively participate in group learning activities, improve their self-awareness, cultivate a spirit of cooperation, and enhance their problem-solving abilities, thereby improve their overall quality.

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