

Talking about the application of blended learning model in TESOL

Xiaochi Zhang

School of Foreign Languages, China West Normal University, No.1 Shi Da Road, Nanchong, Sichuan, P.R. of China.

Abstract

With the rapid development of information technology and telecommunication technology, the teaching environment and conditions at colleges and universities in China have been changed a lot. Blended learning, which combines the traditional classroom teaching with online learning should be greatly applied into TESOL in China. Thus, the author elaborates the origin, basic concept and characteristics of Blended Learning, gives full scope to the advantages of Blended Learning and then puts forward some suggestions about the construction of Blended Learning Model, which includes the functions of teachers involving designing the TESOL contents and modes, organizing the TESOL process, guiding the students' autonomous learning and evaluating the learning outcomes, and also shows that the students' functions should develop an initiative attitude of English learning, changing the emphasized aspects in English learning, taking active part in the whole process. Finally, the author points out that the Blended Learning Model in TESOL will make students not only have the fundamental English language competence, but also cultivate the students communication skills and abilities of solving and asking questions, encouraging their spirit of exploration and research.

Keywords: Talking about, application, blended learning model, TESOL

1. Introduction

With the development of computer network technology and information telecommunication technology, network teaching has been accepted by more and more people, colleges and universities in the world have initiated network teaching in recent years. Generally speaking, network teaching system based on Internet is an information platform which includes transmitting course content, carrying on-line testing and on-line exchanging between teachers and students. At present, there are many network teaching systems in the international market, such as Learning Space (Lotus Corporation). WebCT (Web Course Tools, which is developed by the computer science of Columbia University in UK). Top Class (WBT System corporation) and Virtual (Simon Fraser University in Canada) (Zhou and Qiu, 2005) ^[1]

In China, the Ministry of Education formally started "Higher Education Teaching & learning Quality & Reform Program" in 2003. English education including English major and non-major education reform is the second Key reform in the four projects of the "Quality Program", the main purposes of the reform are to cultivate the students' learning autonomy, improve their comprehensive practical ability, advance the teaching standard and quality, and therefore, to form sound approaches in the TESOL. In view of the marked increase in student enrollments and the relatively limited resources, colleges and universities should remold the existing unitary teacher-centered pattern of language teaching by introducing computer- and classroom-based teaching models. The new model should be built on modern information technology, particularly network technology, so that TESOL will be, to a certain extent, free from the constraints of time or place and gears towards students "individualized and autonomous learning. At the same time, various network teaching system have been developing and applying in colleges and universities in China. The new English teaching requirements

bring a new challenge for both English teachers and students, which demands an appropriate teaching model should be rebuilt in TESOL.

Therefore, Blended Learning Model would become a new model in TESOL in China. This new model should combine the principles of practicality, knowledge and interest, facilitate mobilizing the initiative of both teachers and students, and attach particular importance to the central position of students and the leading role of teachers in the teaching and learning process. This model should incorporate into it the strengths of the current model and give play to the advantages of traditional classroom teaching while fully employing modern information technology."(Zhang, 2010) ^[3]

2. Definition and function of Blended Learning

The terms "blended" "hybrid" "technology-mediated instruction," "web-enhanced instruction," and "mixed-mode instruction" are often used interchangeably in research literature (Martyn, 2003) ^[4]. The concept of blended learning has been around for a long time, but its terminology was not firmly established until about the start of 21st century. One of the earliest references to the term appears in a press release in 1999, when the Interactive Learning Centers, an Atlanta-based education business, announced its change of name to EPIC learning. The article mentions that "The Company currently operates 220 online courses, but will begin offering its Internet courseware using the company's Blended Learning methodology." (The Free Library, 1999) ^[5]. The meaning of blended learning widely diverged to encompass a wide variety of synthesis in learning methods until 2006, when the first Handbook of Blended Learning by Bonk and Graham was published. Graham challenged the breadth and ambiguity of the term's definition, and defined 'blended learning systems' as learning systems that "combine face-to-face instruction with computer mediated instruction."(Bonk and Graham,

2006) [6] Currently, use of the term blended learning mostly involves “combining Internet and digital media with established classroom forms that require the physical co-presence of teacher and students.” (Friesen, 2012) [7].

Needless to say, the concept of “blended learning” is still maturing, but Michael B. Horn and Heather Staker provide a good working definition for it in their book, *Blended: Using Disruptive Innovation to Improve Schools*: “...A formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online learning with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace and at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home. The modalities along each student’s learning path in a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience.” (Michael and Staker, 2007) [8].

Although E-learning was applied into TESOL, it has gradually showed its unexpected drawbacks. For students, the impersonality, suppression of communication mechanisms are lessening with advances in communications technologies. Meantime, e-learning requires vast investment in teaching facilities, however, many colleges and universities have lots of difficulties in raising enough funds to establish qualified-furnished multimedia classroom. At last, the effectiveness of e-learning, to quite a large degree, hinges on the students’ own initiative. If not highly motivated, many students are probably to waste too much time surfing on the internet without finishing learning assignments. At the same time, teachers have no effective measures to monitor and evaluate the results of the students, which will make the e-learning disordered, so it can never entirely replace classroom learning. (Martyn, 2003) [4].

In addition, the present teaching in classroom is criticized as a “spoon-feed” teaching approach. The individual needs, students’ autonomy and the process of learning are not quite taken in to consideration. And at most Chinese colleges and universities. The class time is quite limited with most of the time taken up by reading. The student’s performance is judged by his final test. Every college student has to take part in TEM4 or CET4 which is national test for English major or non-major students. Therefore, students focus their attention on how to pass the test, and spend their time on training to memorize the words used in the test or doing similar exercises. As a result, though they passed CET4, they cannot speak the language fluently, and have difficulty in understanding what the native speakers are saying. This is called “dead and mute English” by outsiders. What worries most universities is that employment articles are complaining more and more and asking that the graduates’ comprehensive quality be improved. Nowadays, it is very important and necessary for us to research on application of new teaching system for English teaching based on Blended learning, so as to change the present TESOL situation in China.

3. Blended Learning Platform and its Functions

Blended learning platform will achieve a specific task of English teaching with collaborative dialogue on network teaching system in different time and space. For traditional teaching modes, teacher and student take face to face exchange, this is a synchronous real-time interaction; for Blended Learning Platform based on network, it provides teacher and students with more flexible exchanges, which includes peer to peer, one to many interactive relationship,

which not only contains the human-PC exchange, but also contains a network of inter-personal communication between students.

The collaborative learning of Blended Learning platform consists of subsystems such as the learning organization, online survey real-time Q & A, seminar, E-mail, BBS Forum, QQ and so on, students can exchange ideas or discuss something about their studying in TESOL.

In result, the traditional English teaching and e-learning both of them have their own limitations. It is necessary for us to explore the new method of college English teaching. And Blended learning is then put forward. The Blended learning comprises both online learning and face-to-face learning and can create more interactive opportunities, which is correspondent with the new challenge for TESOL in China. The general framework of Blended learning in English teaching is as follows.

3.1 Blended learning is flexible effective learning that suits a variety of student needs and psychology.

It means that teachers of College English should design the English teaching contents conforming to the level of students’ cognition, choose suitable or relevant English teaching modes to cater for the students’ psychological state and environment, and stimulate the learning motivation and interest, promote the students’ learning interesting and potential in TESOL. TESOL teachers can use the Internet to create meaningful scenes for learners, stimulate students to take part in English learning, and make them fully display the main roles in learning.

3.2 Blended learning offers flexibility of delivery, including both synchronous and asynchronous modes.

TESOL teachers should actively encourage students to use interactive exercises and test software provided by networks for their study effect, help consolidate and absorb knowledge in class. Meanwhile, TESOL teachers should make appraisals of class activities, learning effects and self-assessments, including language level, learning attitude, class participation, team spirit and other achievements at all levels.

3.3 Blended learning can support multiple learning styles in TESOL.

First, Blended learning will specify the responsibilities of students in TESOL. Only by the teachers’ playing leading role of guidance and monitoring the teaching process and students’ full play as the main body and learning initiative, can they achieve the best effect of teaching and learning in TESOL.

Second, Blended learning will develop an initiative attitude of college English learning in TESOL. In the conventional way of teaching and learning, the students are prone to follow the teachers’ guidance, without too much thoughts of their own, in other words, they just followed the instructions of the teacher.

Third, Blended learning will change the emphasized aspects in TESOL. Various information resources on the internet can help them get to know more about the real situations when using English, not just through the books or tests. By listening to the audio materials and watching the videos, the students can imitate, thus improving their spoken English and communication skills.

Fourth, Blended learning will take active part in the whole process in TESOL. The students should take active part in the whole process of the teaching and learning. At the same time,

they should first make their own concrete goals study plan according to the teaching requirements both for English major or non-major students, get well prepared for study. In the process, they should make self-monitoring and self-adjusting about the progress and learning methods as well: afterwards, they should do come self-examination and summary.

Fifth, Blended learning will develop both teachers' and students' ability of using multimedia technology in TESOL. Falk and Carlson (1995) suggest that administrators should take some actions to encourage and assist teachers improve their professional level and know more about multimedia such as setting multimedia technology training for teachers, and holding competition of multimedia courseware. It is necessary to introduce relevant knowledge on multimedia technology to freshmen in order to make them easily adapt to multi-media teaching in TESOL.

4. Advantages of Blended Learning

From the results of different literatures, the author has already conducted in relation to an application study on the model of blended learning in TESOL. The author also has drawn the conclusion that compared with the traditional teaching models, the model of blended learning in TESOL has some advantages, which can be summarized as follows.

4.1 Blended learning can be used to extend the boundaries of learning so that learning in TESOL can occur at any time, any place, and students can have alternative ways to learn IN TESOL.

4.2 Blended learning can satisfy students' individualized needs and interests. With the aid of computer and network, they can plan their study and choose their learning speed according to their different starting points. What is more, information on the internet is rich, colorful and interesting, which can motivate them to learn actively and happily IN TESOL.

4.3 Blended learning is a combination of the required content learning and self-assessed learning, which demands students to manage their own learning on the internet. After finishing the required work, they can learn whatever they are interested in. So they need to have learning objectives and clear plans, set learning speed to promote their autonomous learning in TESOL.

4.4 Blended learning provides more English language input and output opportunities. Students can have more chances to get comprehensive authentic English language input, and to produce language output. Students are involved in the learning activities both in the classroom environment and online. The enhanced English language input and output opportunities are conducive to students' mastery of English language and the increase of their communicative competence in TESOL.

4.5 Blended learning can create a favorable and harmonious learning environment, it provides rich English learning resources and changes the traditional teaching content and form; collaborative learning and inquiry learning in blended learning encourage students to be initiative and creative. Students can learn whatever they are interested in, and have a lot more interactions than in the traditional English teaching

model and more emotional exchange than in the e-learning setting. Besides, prompt feedback from teachers and peers can also be very helpful to maintain students' motivation in TESOL.

5. Conclusion

Blended Learning theory is becoming increasingly popular in TESOL and learning as a means to motivate students in their learning and to provide them with as many ways as possible to express their ideas. In China, multimedia technology is still a new one and the potential of multimedia in higher education remains largely unfulfilled. Blended learning Theory will be developed into better condition in the future TESOL in China. However, when a new teaching model is introduced, the elements of teachers and students in TESOL should be first taken into consideration. Teachers' updated English teaching concepts, the improved teaching technology as well as students' English language proficiency and learning awareness should be greatly highlighted in process of constructing the model of blended learning in TESOL.

The variety of media, technology, and human interaction (diaital and in real-life) are more engaging than long monotonous eLearning or classroom courses. Blended learning allows for specific matching of instructional technology to learning outcome i.e., the use of best possible learning solution for the need, making it especially effective for larger curriculums in TESOL.

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