The Influence of Blended Learning on English Language Learners' Motivation in Higher Education in China

Airong Li *

Department of Education, University of California, Irvine, United States

* Corresponding author: airongl@uci.com

Abstract. Blended learning has become one of the major pedagogies of innovative approaches in modern education with the development of technology, and it is necessary to consider about the efficiency for this new type of learning. Based on analysis of cases and past researches, this article focuses on the influences in three areas that blended learning can affect the motivation on English language learners in higher education of China, which are motivation in intrinsic interest, peer socialization, and extrinsic management. There is more positive influence on students' intrinsic interest because of the developing autonomy of learning in blended classes, but the drawback is the lack of preparation of students' positive learning attitudes and habits to learn a foreign language actively by oneself. There is also more positive affect on peer socialization in blended learning, because students are able to have more opportunities to interact with peer friends and increase collaboration, but the possible harm is the lack of communication because of translation technology in language learning. Additionally, there is more negative influence in extrinsic management of educators because of the unfamiliarity of technology and insufficient preparation of both class organization and students' diverse goals or motivation for this innovative teaching pedagogy and mixed learning environment. This theory-based article also includes limitation of the subjective recognition of motivation and lack of data collection or experiment. There is recommendation for future studies to discover in this area as well.

Keywords: Motivation, English language, blended learning, higher education, Chinese students.

1. Introduction

In the 21st century and the age of technology, digital devices are gradually implementing into life and education as a powerful tool to support people's better development in different areas. Innovative pedagogies, such as blended learning, are also applying in classroom with the development of internet to better cultivate students with abilities of both innovative technology and critical thinking. Because of the pandemic, blended learning, which is the combination of remote digital learning and face-to-face interaction, has become one of the most popular methods of learning in higher education in China [1]. Compared with traditional pedagogies, blended learning helps students learn with online instructions instead of physical contact, which can cause both advantages and disadvantages for English language learners in China, especially for students' learning motivation. Considering both asynchronous and synchronous environment, this online student-centered pedagogy can provide either flexibility or isolation for teachers and students who would not be able to interact in-person at the same time in a traditional classroom [2]. It is true that there are positive and negative influences that blended learning can affect students and their learning motivation, but there should be a solution to adjust the balance between merits and demerits for the development of new technology as well as innovative pedagogies in education.

In order to discover the influence of blended learning on the learning motivation of English language learners in higher education in China, this article will analyze cases of blended learning in current situations with benefits and drawbacks in the three main components of intrinsic interest, peer socialization, and extrinsic management. After analysis, there will be a suggestion to discover a more efficient outcome to support Chinese students' motivation in their English language learning process under the influence of blended learning in higher education.

2. The Influence of Blended Learning on English Language Learners' Motivation in Intrinsic Interest

2.1. The Current Situation of Chinese Students' Self-Interest of Learning English

Intrinsic interest is the primary component of motivation, and autonomy is the expression of motivation that cultivates intrinsic interest into learning habits. For language learning, intrinsic interest is more important in both input and output process, because Chinese students in higher education already have the fundamental basis of English but diverse levels of further understanding, learning habits, or application in life, and higher education provides a flexible learning environment with much more freedom than primary or secondary education. Students in higher education of China have different goals and requirements of English language learning, as some of them would like to study abroad for further education, some want to have a job that requires a certification for English ability, some have interest of language, and others may not have a standard requirement or interest of their continuous English learning [3]. Therefore, learning becomes a matter with students' own autonomy, responsibility, or motivation in higher education. According to the research, the development of learning autonomy is closely related to blended learning that can more effectively raise students' self-learning ability through online or offline instructions [4]. In findings from the questionnaire of the research, after taking blended learning, a majority of students consider learning as their own responsibility or a teacher-student's mutual obligation, because blended learning blended learning provides more opportunities for students to learn by themselves with their intrinsic interest in a student-centered class. Teachers, at the same time, plays the role of facilitator instead of instructor, which means that teachers should let students decide their own learning process and have the comprehensive knowledge or ability to adjust every improper step in students' diverse attempts. However, the possible problem is that teachers fail to attract students' interest of learning, when students still consider learning as a completely teacher-centered process led in class. Because the core of blended learning is the familiarity of knowledge that students should learn before or after class prior to teachers' instruction and thus conduct the class by themselves, if students fail to get intrinsic interest or learning autonomy, blended learning and its innovative approaches could be less efficient than the traditional class for both teachers and students.

2.2. Advantage of Blended Learning which can Better Attract Students' Interest through Technology

On the one hand, in talking about the advantage of blended learning to raise students' motivation with intrinsic interest, technology has a greater possibility to provide diverse choices of topics or interaction that can better match students' different interest. In the research of students of English as foreign language in China, blended learning offers innovative technologies and platforms for students to individualize their own learning process with teachers' customized assessment, which effectively enhances the interactive progress of learning with higher motivation [5]. For example, through blended learning of English language, the types of homework and its feedback can be more than written paper, and recordings of video and audio are popular than traditional homework for teachers and students, as there can be more areas for creativity in making videos or audios with sounds, movement, and emotions. Solutions to problems also have different explanations from diverse angles or methods of demonstration to help students better understand the mechanism behind questions. In this way, students with the achievement of the comprehensive understanding of problem solving would more likely to like the process of learning and thus gain more motivation to learn in the next time. With a well-organized blended course, students internal learning intention can be encouraged if they accomplish their achievement during the process that cares their choices and interest much more than traditional pedagogies. Together with a growing responsibility of learning in a learning environment with freedom and opportunities, there would be more possibility for students to develop motivation as their learning habit to realize their future goals in life. The positive motivation of

learning raised in higher education is the start of students' life-long learning in their career in the developing society, which is significant for both students' personal life as well as social development.

2.3. Disadvantage of Blended Learning which can Cause Greater Distraction

On the other hand, however, there is also a serious risk for blended learning to become a distraction or obstacle that would negatively interfere learning outcomes and class efficiency. Blended learning provides not only resources for students to discover knowledge by themselves but also materials that may distract students' attention from learning, such as videos, games, music, social media, and so on. If students have weak self-management ability or less motivation in learning, without clear management or instruction, it would be more possible for students to play instead of learning through technology. In the research, blended learning can be effective when there is enough instructions and preparation for students to get used to skills of technology and self-management before learning, even in higher education [6]. It shows that teachers and students should both get prepared prior to the actual implementation of blended learning into a traditional classroom, and the ability of self-learning is as important as the knowledge of technology. If teachers themselves are not professional enough to manage internet technology or class organization in blended learning, this innovative pedagogy would decrease students' satisfaction of learning and thus discourage their learning motivation [5]. Nevertheless, if students cannot gain enough motivation or autonomy before blended learning, the learning outcome would not become as ideal as expected because of their immature self-efficacy in the personalized learning process. The sudden freedom offered to Chinese students in higher education can also become a potential problem for students to lose control of their normal pace of learning, which requires more preparation for learning autonomy before gaining motivation with intrinsic interest. Without enough instruction or preparation, students may also get materials which are not suitable for their correct level of learning through innovative approaches like flipped classroom that is organized by students themselves in blended learning. English Language learning, especially, requires adequate materials for different purposes such as TOEFL, IELTS, or other standardized English language tests. In this way, inadequate preparation of both physical resources and learning skills during blended learning may cause trouble for students to lose confidence and thus motivation for their future learning, when they cannot accomplish the academic achievement in their choice based on intrinsic interest.

3. The Influence of Blended Learning on English Language Learners' Motivation in Peer Socialization

3.1. The Current Situation of Students' Peer Socialization in Class and out of Class

Peer socialization is also an essential component in building students' motivation of learning, especially for adolescents who are born in this digital age with electronic devices and social media platforms. Blended learning, therefore, provides more opportunities for Chinese students to socialize online through social media software like WeChat to ask questions and solve difficult problems together with teachers and peers [5]. It is considered to be an effective as well as active way of learning, as students have their initiative to build relationships with people through conversation, which is required for their future career in the society. Additionally, through online communication and collaboration, students are able to develop more collaborative as well as socialization skills which is helpful for motivating their learning and building their confidence in interpersonal connection. In the study, learning in collaboration through socialization can get better outcomes than learning in isolation by oneself, because collaborative activities can encourage each other to make mutual progress together in a community [7]. For English language education, collaborative interaction in blended learning can offer a chance for oral communication, which is one of the main parts in language learning that includes reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Students are able to practice their communication ability in multiple languages through socialization, and online platforms

provides methods like text, video, or audio for students to communicate more easily, which can also become a potential obstacle for their motivation of learning. It is difficult for individual work divided to be equal for everyone in collective activities, and blended classroom which is not always built in-person may increase the possibility of evading or being lazy of the separated work in groups. Moreover, because introvert students may choose to text more, speak less, or use their native language for communication, and blended learning makes every type of communication possible through internet, it is considered to be harmful for language learning which requires speaking and pronouncing for not only exams but also actual communication.

3.2. Advantage of Blended Learning that can Promote Students' Collaboration through Innovative Activities

There are advantages of blended learning in raising motivation through peer socialization, as this student-centered classroom encourages students to work together and manage their own learning. Innovative approaches, such as flipped classroom, encourage students to teach lessons by themselves to each other. Being teachers means to understand the knowledge comprehensively before class, and the transfer of roles can let students have a better recognition of teachers' work to feel responsibility and motivation of the whole class's learning. As the study examined, strong learning motivation cannot leave positive learning environment, and students can learn in a higher efficiency when there is good course design and in-class interaction between teachers and peers [8]. If students are in a community that everyone is engaging in learning and trying their best to complete group project, it is more likely for students to learn from others and get influenced unintentionally. In a community that make mutual progress during blended learning, students can share not only the knowledge they learnt from different perspectives but also stronger emotions like pleasure, satisfaction, or confidence with each other when goals are accomplished. Sadness or negative feelings from failures can be shared as well through collaborative activities, and students are more likely to get motivated when everyone in the group is encouraging with kindness and understanding. Language learning is also building from the bravery of overcoming failure when students are interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. Students learn from blended learning that includes group activities with people of diverse types of personal characteristics, socioeconomic status, mental and cognitive recognition can have "improved learning" and positive learning conditions with a higher motivation [4]. Thus, through collaboration with students from different backgrounds, adolescents in higher education can both satisfy their need of socialization skills and learn from inclusive perspectives with an encouraging motivation from the community.

3.3. Disadvantage of Blended Learning that can Limit Students' Oral Communication through Technology

Although the advantages of socialization in motivation are powerful, there are disadvantages that can also discourage students' learning motivation through negative collaboration. There are both positive and negative influences that can be caused by a community. If a group all agree to work not as hard as others, it would easily discourage personal motivation in a community. As research mentioned, self-efficacy is the key component of blended learning, and motivation can be encouraged or discouraged based on the learning environments, conditions, and peers that students are interacting [9]. The inculcation of group can influence students more than instructions from teachers, as students are more willing to learn from behaviors from peers than adults. In higher education of China, after having class, most students are living together in dormitory or neighborhood, which means that there is more time for students to get influences from each other. Moreover, individual power is hard to disobey the agreement from the community. The example from the research shows that blended courses of English language learning can promote oral communication through breakout rooms or "sharing table" that can simultaneous hold talking between several students without interruption from others, but there is also possibilities students to refuse to talk or chatting in other languages without a decreasing learning motivation for each other [5]. Therefore, it demonstrates another problem of

instructors' management from extrinsic motivation in blended learning, because students themselves are trapped in the inappropriate learning environment that is difficult to be improve by themselves in the student-centered class.

4. The Influence of Blended Learning on English Language Learners' Motivation in Extrinsic Management

4.1. The Current Situation of Chinese Students' Requirement of Learning English

Extrinsic management is the catalyst of motivation, as intrinsic motivation requires extrinsic stimuli to start and develop. Blended learning provides technology that can help teachers track each student's individual steps of learning and the outcomes they achieve, such as online quizzes and evaluation. In this way, teachers can better personalize pedagogies for diverse students with different learning paces or levels based on their different goals in order to transfer this type of extrinsic management into intrinsic motivation for students' better future. However, because most Chinese students learn English from primary school, the long process of English language learning from face-to-face elementary to blended higher education may cause confusion for students to get used to. Similarly, teachers may also get confused with this innovative mode of teaching and organize worse courses than before, as traditional face-to-face classroom is the mainstream in China's education system for many years [10]. Without high-quality organization of blended learning, there would be classes with lower efficiency for not only students to lose interest or motivation of learning but also teachers to lose confidence of teaching. Meanwhile, the mix of face-to-face interaction and technology in blended learning has more areas for students to cheat, plagiarize, or being dishonest to their academic achievement, which is becoming more and more difficult to manage with the development of technology. When teachers are not familiar with technology or the mechanism of blended learning, students' academic dishonesty could be harder to investigate and thus correct through extrinsic management.

4.2. Advantage of Blended Learning which can Better Keep Track with Students' Grade

In talking about the advantages, blended learning truly offers convenience for educators to use technology for more immediate and precise assessment for students' work. Therefore, individualized strategies can be better implemented to each student, together with fewer knowledge gap between each student [6]. Students can be encouraged to complete tasks that are adequate for their levels with extrinsic control of their self-learning process, which is the process that can change this extrinsic management into intrinsic habits of learning. Blended learning, thus, has software, such as Canvas, to keep track with students' progress when they upload their assignments for class. Teachers can adjust each student process to make sure that everyone is learning on their own pace with complete understanding of knowledge under differentiated teaching strategies. English language learners in higher education of China can therefore cultivate motivation of learning through accomplishment of goals that are set based on their different abilities. Students' higher motivation can be raised due to sense of proud for their accomplishment as well.

4.3. Disadvantage of Blended Learning which can Limit Teachers' or Parents' Management

The disadvantages are also important to consider when students are not well-prepared with self-learning ability but have an intention of academic dishonesty. In balancing the instructing and student-centered activities in blended classroom, teachers are difficult to manage class organization with time and manner control in order to make students actively learn by themselves instead of passively following the instruction [1]. When teachers and students are not prepared to have a student-centered class, teachers and students would both lose confidence of education because of the unexpected problems emerged in class and lower learning efficiency after learning. Students who have lower learning outcomes would also have lower learning motivation, and in order to complete assignment

given by teachers, it is more possible for them to use unjust approaches, such as plagiarism, to finish. Although there are tools like Turnitin to check the similarity of paper from students, there are questions like multiple choices that cannot be checked in an exam. Language exams, for example, can be cheated through mock exams online that has accessible answers through internet in everyday learning. Online learning and testing provide much more space for students to cheat than those in a traditional classroom. Without teachers' management, students would be more likely to raise incorrect learning habits instead of motivation for actual learning.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, blended learning can both cause positive and negative influence on Chinese students' motivation in learning English language, but there are more disadvantages that blended learning should be applied with improvement in class of higher education. Although blended learning achieves effective outcomes in researches, China has not implemented much of innovative pedagogies in class, which may cause trouble in the sudden change of teaching approaches from offline to online. The pandemic of COVID-19 is the example that shows the model of emergent remote teaching can decrease learning outcome and efficiency when there is not enough preparation or training before class for both teachers and students [1]. As the forced requirement of remote learning during the pandemic has been removed, blended learning should develop a more organized way instead of inadequate preparation for the emergent situation. Future study can focus more on teacher-student mutual feedback of learning motivation for language learning under the model of blended learning from a more objective measurement. Because motivation is a subjective way of measuring, which can be unprecise in research, it is difficult to tell the convincing relationship between learning willingness and outcomes. Technology development is continuing in this digital age, and innovative blended learning should also develop to improve current educational process.

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