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An Empirical Study on the Construction of Blended Teaching Mode of the Course *International Trade Practice* and Its Application Effect for English Major

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Abstract: Based on the learning situation of English major students, and combining with the characteristics of the course *International Trade Practice* and the problems existing in traditional classroom teaching, this study fully utilizes modern information technology such as big data and cloud computing, integrating Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) resources, Rain Classroom Platform, virtual simulation training platform, and classroom teaching. It constructs a blended teaching mode of the course *International Trade Practice* for the English major students and applies it in teaching practice. Through questionnaire surveys, comparative analysis and empirical testing, it is found that the blended teaching mode has been fully recognized by students, and it has received high satisfaction. Moreover, its teaching effectiveness is significantly higher than that of the traditional teaching mode. Finally, this study points out the problems that occur in the process of blended teaching practice and provides directions for subsequent related research.

Keywords: Application Effect; Blended Teaching Mode; English Major; *International Trade Practice.*

1. Introduction

Currently, in the context of the comprehensive English talent training mode, the curriculum system of the vast majority of English majors in Chinese universities not only includes traditional language skills courses such as I*ntegrated English, Listening, Writing, and Reading,* as well as language theory courses such as *Introduction to Linguistics, English and American Literature*, and *Intercultural Communication*, but also encompasses specialized courses in related fields. Among them, *International Trade Practice* is one of the most common specialized courses in English majors. It is characterized by its combination of theoretical, practical, and operational aspects, making it a platform for cultivating students' abilities in various aspects of English. However, due to its dense knowledge points, strong application and practical nature of this course, as well as the existence of a large number of international economic and trade terminology and basic theoretical knowledge, it is often dry and difficult to understand for English major students, which makes it challenging to arouse their initiative and enthusiasm for learning.

In recent years, many researchers in China have proposed various solutions to this issue. For example, Zhou(2011) suggests that the combination of in-class practice and extracurricular internships can gradually develop the practical skills of English major students in international trade[1]. Wang(2014) proposes incorporating the KAS vocational training mode from the United States into the teaching of the *International Trade Practice* course and creating a case library suitable for English major students in order to enhance their practical abilities in foreign trade operations[2]. Han(2020) points out that effective case teaching can improve the learning effectiveness of English major students in the *International Trade Practice* course[3]. These research findings undoubtedly provide valuable experience and important insights for improving the teaching methods of the course *International Trade Practice* for English majors. However, in the curriculum system of most universities' English majors, in terms of class hours, credits and the nature of the *International Trade Practice* course, traditional offline teaching, limited by the number of class hours, makes it difficult to balance theoretical teaching and practical training. Students often have a shallow understanding of complex international trade rules and conventions, and their case analysis and business operations are often superficial. The proposed solutions from previous research are not comprehensive enough to address the teaching challenges of the current *International Trade Practice* course for English majors. In the context of rapid development of information technology and the construction of new liberal arts disciplines, a student-centered blended teaching model combining online and offline learning is gradually becoming the future direction of higher education development and will also become the norm in post-pandemic education. At the same time, this new wave of liberal arts, characterized by the application of new technologies, interdisciplinary integration, and innovative development, is bound to bring new opportunities for the teaching reform and professional development of English majors in Chinese universities.

Based on this, this study takes advantage of the opportunity of new liberal arts construction. By introducing online teaching platforms and supplemented with teaching resources and virtual simulation training platforms related to the course *International Trade Practice* that are in line with the knowledge structure of English major students, this study aims to construct and implement a blended teaching mode that combines online teaching with traditional classroom teaching. The study explores the impact of this teaching mode on students' learning outcomes and their attitudes towards this teaching mode. The goal is to change the existing theory-oriented teaching mode of the *International Trade Practice*

course in English major and effectively address the hard points mentioned earlier in the teaching of the course. This not only has strong practical significance for improving the teaching effectiveness and quality of this course in English major, but the research results can also provide reference for the reform, research, and practice of blended teaching in other similar courses under the background of new liberal arts.

2. The Theoretical Foundation of the Blended Learning Mode

Blended teaching is a teaching method that combines traditional face-to-face instruction with online teaching resources. It integrates traditional classroom teaching with electronic learning resources to provide a more flexible, diverse, and interactive learning experience. The widely accepted definition of blended teaching is "the combination of online learning and in-person instruction". Since the late 1990s, the concept of blended teaching has evolved from a technological perspective to a teacher perspective and then to a student perspective, highlighting the shift in focus from the application of technology to teaching strategies and methods[4]. With the development of the internet and mobile technology, blended teaching has become a new form of organization that combines online learning environments, mobile communication devices and classroom discussions[5]. It emphasizes the student's active role in the learning process. The design of the curriculum, selection of teaching resources, and arrangement of teaching methods all reflect student-centered teaching principles. By leveraging the advantages of online educational resources and information technology, blended teaching aims to achieve optimal learning outcomes.

With the development of blended teaching, an increasing number of studies have focused on the evaluation and measurement of its effectiveness, particularly in comparison to purely online learning and face-to-face instruction. The question of whether blended teaching can effectively enhance students' learning outcomes has yielded different conclusions among scholars. Some studies support the hypothesis that blended teaching is more effective than pure online learning and traditional face-to-face instruction, as it can effectively improve and enhance students' learning outcomes[6], as well as improve their exam results[7]. However, some studies have reached the opposite conclusion suggesting that traditional face-to-face instruction is more effective than blended teaching[8]. Additionally, some research suggests that there is no significant difference between blended teaching and pure online learning or face-to-face instruction [9].

It can be seen that due to differences in sample size and sources among different research institutes, no consistent conclusion has been reached on whether blended teaching is more effective than pure online learning or traditional face-to-face teaching. However, it is foreseeable that in a blended teaching environment, learners need to allocate some time for self-directed online learning. But due to the "absence" of instructors in the online learning environment, effective self-control and self-regulation in the learning process are particularly important for online learners[10]. Therefore, when exploring the construction of a blended teaching model, not only should external factors such as platforms, resources, and teachers be considered, but also the cultivation of students' self-directed learning ability should be emphasized from the perspective of learners' intrinsic factors.

3. Construction of a Blended Teaching Mode for the English Major Course *International Trade Practice*

With regards to the main issues faced in the teaching of the course *International Trade Practice* in the current English major, this study takes into account the learning characteristics of English major students. By combining the advantages of online courses and traditional classroom teaching, this study focuses on the construction of a blended teaching mode for the English major course *International Trade Practice*, which includes building an online teaching resource library, optimizing teaching design, emphasizing the improvement of students' practical abilities and enhancing the assessment system. The specific details are as follows:

3.1. Reconstructing Teaching Content and Strengthening the Construction and Application of Teaching Resource Library

Firstly, based on the course content and in combination with the learning situation of English major students, we will establish an online teaching resource library for *International Trade Practice* by leveraging platforms such as Massive Open Online Courses(MOOC) and Rain Classroom. This library will cover various aspects including teaching plans, PowerPoint courseware, online course instructional videos, teaching case libraries, supplementary materials libraries, assignments libraries, question banks, terminology databases, and discussion forums. We will regularly update the teaching resource library, timely supplement it with current news and trade hot topics, continuously improve the discussion forum, and enhance student-centered teaching activities by designing interactive and high student engagement activities.

In addition, the curriculum of *International Trade Practice* will be restructured and divided into three modules: *Basic Knowledge, Applied Training* and C*omprehensive Enhancement*. The Basic Knowledge module will consist of both classroom teaching by the instructor and self-learning online by students with a time allocation ratio of 1:2. This means that one class hour of classroom teaching will be complemented by approximately two class hours of online self-study content. The *Applied Training and Comprehensive Enhancement* modules will adopt a flipped classroom mode, in which students work collaboratively in groups to complete assigned tasks or use virtual simulation training platforms to engage in simulated exercises of foreign trade business. The difficulty level of the teaching content will gradually increase, aiming to enhance students' comprehensive abilities in solving complex issues encountered in International Trade Practices.

Meanwhile, in order to achieve the organic integration of online learning and classroom teaching, and to ensure the quality of classroom instruction, this study has conducted an overall review of the curriculum content of *International Trade Practice*, and has designed 8 teaching tasks. Each task is further sub-divided into several sub-tasks based on the teaching content, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Schedule of Course Content and Task-Based Design

Teaching Tasks	Class Hours	Self-study Time	Teaching Methods
Business Negotiation and Conclusion of the Contract	2	4	Teaching and Self-study
Name of Commodity, Quality, Quantity and Packing	4	8	Teaching, Self-study, Partially Flipped Class and Simulation Training
Price of Commodity	8	16	Teaching, Self-study and Partially Flipped Class
International Cargo Transportation	4	8	Teaching, Self-study, Partially Flipped Class and Simulation Training
Cargo Transportation Insurance	4	8	Teaching, Self-study, Partially Flipped Class and Simulation Training
International Payment and Settlement	6	12	Teaching, Self-study, Partially Flipped Class and Simulation Training
International Commercial Dispute Settlement	2	4	Teaching, Self-study and Case Teaching
Performance of Import and Export Contracts	2	4	Teaching, Self-study and Simulation Training

3.2. Carrying Out Teaching Design of "Before→During→After Class" throughout the Entire Teaching Process

In order to improve students' self-learning ability, cultivate teamwork spirit and organizational coordination skills, and achieve an organic integration of self-learning, collaborative learning, and classroom teaching, this research adopts a blended teaching design path: learning situation analysis→issuing pre-class learning task→students' pre-class autonomous learning→offline classroom teaching, seminar interaction, flipped classrooms→issuing post-class learning tasks→students' completion of homework after class, teacher's clarification and assistance→simulation training, enhancing practical abilities→teaching reflection→ improving teaching design and perfecting teaching resources. Additionally, by setting up online monitoring points, occasional online tests are conducted to dynamically understand students' learning situation information and respond promptly, thus ensuring continuous improvement of teaching quality.

3.3. Cultivating Students' Practical Ability in Foreign Trade by Combining Theoretical Learning and Simulated Practical Training

As an extension and effective supplement to classroom teaching content, this study fully leverages modern information technologies such as big data and cloud computing, and integrates the 'Integrated Training System for International Business Documentation(Virtual Simulation Platform)' into the blended teaching of the English major course *International Trade Practice*. The aim is to change the current situation in English and Translation major teaching where there are more theories and less practices in these courses and through the construction of a business virtual environment which is close to reality, students are enabled to immerse themselves in business roles and complete a full set of practical training operations in an open, autonomous, and interactive virtual environment. In this way, students' theoretical knowledge can be maximally transformed into practical business and foreign trade skills, and their overall English language proficiency and cross-cultural communication abilities can be further enhanced.

3.4. Optimizing the Form of Course Assessment and Strengthening the Formative Assessment

The traditional assessment methods only focus on the final scores, lacking the supervision and evaluation of students' learning process, which is not conducive to the improvement of teaching quality and the cultivation of students' abilities. In this regard, considering the balance between the formative assessment and summative assessment, this study has constructed a diversified evaluation system for the blended teaching effectiveness of the English major course *International Trade Practice* based on the characteristics of the curriculum and the teaching process. The formative assessment is based on the developmental assessment of the student's entire learning process, aiming to encourage students to engage in self-directed learning and collaborative learning, meanwhile assisting teachers in learning students' regular learning progress and making timely adjustments to the teaching schedule and content. It includes pre-learning effectiveness assessment (including watching videos, pre-tests, etc.), in-class performance evaluation (including attendance, group task completion, classroom discussions, etc.), and post-learning consolidation evaluation (including homework, virtual simulation platform training scores, etc.). Summative assessment mainly relies on the final grades, aiming to prompt students to summarize and review the course, and to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the course content and structure [11].

4. Empirical Testing of the Effectiveness of Blended Teaching

The blended teaching mode constructed in this study was respectively applied to the teaching practice of *International*

Trade Practice courses for Grade 2020 Translation Major and Grade 2021 English Major students in the second semester of the 2022-2023 academic year and the first semester of the 2023-2024 academic year.

4.1. Study Subjects

In order to verify the teaching effects of the blended teaching mode, this study adopted the method of pre-test and post-test experiments. The Grade 2020 Translation students (23 students) who took the course *International Trade Practice* in the second semester of the 2022-2023 academic year as the experimental group used the blended teaching mode, while 23 students randomly selected from English major who took the course in the first semester of the 2022-2023 academic year were the control group using the traditional teaching mode. Both groups of students were taught by the same teacher, using the same teaching materials, teaching content, teaching hours, and the range and difficulty of the final exam.

4.2. Study Tools

This study utilized two tools. The first one is a set of test questions based on the core content of the course *International Trade Practice*. These questions were used to conduct pre-experiment tests on both the experimental group and the control group students, ensuring that there were no significant differences in their course learning abilities before the teaching experiment. The second tool consists of a survey questionnaire and an interview outline, which are used to understand students' different views on the use of traditional teaching mode and blended teaching mode in this course.

4.3. Data Collection and Results Analysis

The data collected in this study includes the subjects' pre-test scores and their final exam scores of the course *International Trade Practice* and data about the survey questionnaires and interviews. Furthermore, quantitative analysis was conducted using the statistical software SPSS 19.0.

Before conducting the blended teaching experiment, this study conducted an independent samples T-test on the pre-test scores of the two groups of students in order to ensure no significant differences in the learning abilities of the experimental group and control group in the course *International Trade Practice*. Descriptive statistical results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistical Results of the Pre-Test of the Course *International Trade Practice*

Grouping	Number of Students	Average Grade	Standard Deviation	Standard Error of Mean
Experimental Group	23	88.4348	8.24525	1.71925
Control Group	23	87.5217	5.93809	1.23818

In addition, as shown in Table 3, according to the Levene test results of the variance equation, F=1.445, P=0.236>0.05, thus it can be considered that the variances of the pre-test scores of the two groups of students are equal, satisfying the assumption of homogeneity of variance. Based on the T-test results for homogeneity of variance, t=0.431, P=0.669>0.05, indicating that there is no significant difference in the learning abilities of the two groups of students in the course *International Trade Practice*.

Table 3. Independent Sample T-Test Results of the Pre-test of the Course *International Trade Practice*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	*P*-value	t	df	Two-tailed *P*-value	Mean Difference	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval for the Difference	
								Upper Bound	Lower Bound
Equal Variances Assumed	1.445	0.236	0.431	44	0.669	0.91304	2.11871	-3.35693	5.18302
Equal Variances Not Assumed			0.431	39.983	0.669	0.91304	2.11871	-3.36908	5.19516

After the experimental phase of blended teaching, this study conducted an independent samples T-test on the final exam scores of two groups of students in the course *International Trade Practice*. Descriptive statistical results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistical Results of the Post-Test of the Course *International Trade Practice*

Grouping	Number of Students	Average Grade	Standard Deviation	Standard Error of Mean
Experimental Group	23	73.1739	8.82997	1.84118
Control Group	23	79.5652	10.86205	2.26489

Additionally, according to the Levene test results for the variance equation in Table 5, F=0.035, P=0.566>0.05, indicating that the post-test scores of the two groups of students meet the condition of homogeneity of variance. Based on the T-test results for homogeneity of variance, t=-2.190, P=0.034<0.05, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in the scores of the two groups of students in the course *International Trade Practice*, and the average final scores of the experimental group (79.5652) are significantly higher than the average scores of the control group (73.1739). This indicates that the blended teaching mode can effectively enhance students' mastery of course knowledge and significantly improve the learning outcomes of the course.

Table 5. Independent Samples T-test Results of the Post-test of the Course *International Trade Practice*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	*P*-value	t	df	Two-tailed *P*-value	Mean Difference	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval for the Difference	
								Upper Bound	Lower Bound
Equal Variances Assumed	0.335	0.566	-2.190	44	0.034	-6.39130	2.91885	-12.27386	-0.50875
Equal Variances Not Assumed			-2.190	42.239	0.034	-6.39130	2.91885	-12.28079	-0.50181

Meanwhile, after the completion of the blended teaching experiment, a questionnaire survey and random interviews were conducted with the experimental group of students to understand their attitudes and opinions towards the blended teaching mode in this course.

In the questionnaire survey, 118 questionnaires were distributed to students majoring in Translation in Grade 2020 and English in Grade 2021 respectively. A total of 116 valid questionnaires were actually collected, resulting in an effective survey rate of 98.3%.

According to the statistical results of the questionnaire data, the overall proportion of satisfaction ("very satisfied" and "satisfied") with the course and blended teaching mode among students majoring in Translation in Grade 2020 adds up to 100% (with the percentage of "very satisfied" being 78.26% and 86.96% respectively). 91.3% of the students believe that the blended teaching mode is very helpful for their learning, and 95.65% of the students express their willingness to continue using the blended teaching mode in their future studies. As for the students majoring in English in Grade 2021, the overall satisfaction with the course and blended teaching mode is 100% and 98.82% respectively (with the percentage of "very satisfied" being 89.25% and 90.32% respectively). 98.92% of the students indicate their willingness to continue using the blended teaching mode in their future studies. Therefore, based on the statistical results of the questionnaire data, it can be concluded that the overall response of the students towards the blended teaching mode in the course *International Trade Practice* is quite positive.

When asked about the improvement of students' abilities through the blended teaching mode, the percentages of Grade 2020 translation major students' preferences for each option are as follows: self-learning ability (95.65%), independent thinking ability (78.26%), innovation ability (78.26%), practical skills in foreign trade (73.91%), language expression ability (65.22%), and teamwork ability (65.22%). Additionally, 95.65% of students believe that the blended teaching mode has enhanced their comprehensive abilities in "English + International Business" and so on. The results of the questionnaire survey are consistent with the interview results.

In the interview, when 10 randomly selected students were asked about the advantages of blended teaching mode, most of them believed that under the blended teaching mode, learning time is more flexible and can be fully utilized. They also found that learning resources are more abundant and readily available, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the knowledge. Additionally, they acknowledged that virtual platform-based mode simulations can better equip them with industry-specific knowledge and relevant skills in international trade. Despite these advantages, students also expressed their concerns about some disadvantages of this teaching mode, such as "lack of classroom urgency and self-discipline, leading to easy distractions," "tight deadlines for completing learning tasks," and "high difficulty level of simulated practical training tasks".

The above study results indicate that after more than one semester's teaching experiment, the blended teaching mode of the course *International Trade Practice* has a significant positive impact on the improvement of teaching quality and students' learning motivation compared to traditional classroom teaching mode. Students' comprehensive abilities have noticeably improved leading to good teaching outcomes.

5. Conclusion

The blended teaching mode addresses the issues of extensive content, specialized nature and lack of effective integration between theoretical teaching and practical application in the course *International Trade Practice* in English and translation-related majors. By fully integrating online and offline resources, it effectively extends the development of students' abilities beyond the classroom, expands the width and depth of the course, and to some extent, helps improve students' learning abilities and their ability to grasp knowledge. The practical results have shown that the blended teaching mode has achieved significant results in enhancing English major students' awareness of autonomous learning, improving learning interest and autonomous learning abilities in the course *International Trade Practice*, cultivating students' comprehensive abilities and promoting innovative thinking. Furthermore, it has effectively improved the teaching quality and effectiveness of the course *International Trade Practice* in the English and Translation-related majors. It can be considered an effective approach to incorporate blended teaching into the teaching reform of English majors as well as *International Trade Practice* courses or similar courses in foreign language disciplines.

However, in the specific teaching practice, the blended teaching mode constructed in this study inevitably faces some issues. For example, students may exhibit a tendency to merely cope with learning tasks; The workload of teachers is heavy, and it requires high abilities from teachers; It is also difficult to innovate the organization of classroom teaching. Additionally, the construction of the blended teaching mode itself should be a continuous process of reflection, improvement, and dynamism. Therefore, relevant research needs to adopt corresponding measures to improve these issues in long-term teaching practice exploration, thus continuously enhancing the teaching quality of blended teaching.

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