

English Teaching Behaviors, Learner's Characteristics, and English Learning Effectiveness of Chinese Non-English Majors in EFL Blended Learning Context

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Abstract: In this post-COVID era, blended English learning can effectively address both the high demands society places on English learning and learners' personalized learning requirements. However, blended learning has a relatively short history in China, and there is still room for improvement in terms of learning outcomes. This article aims to survey the relationship among English teaching behaviors, learner characteristics, and English learning effectiveness. It was found that teacher's online learning management, teacher support, face-to-face classroom teaching, diversified assessment, and individualized teaching significantly impacted learners learning outcomes and students' learning motivation, learning strategies, learning attitude, learning behavior, self-efficacy, and meta-cognition greatly influenced the effectiveness of blended College English learning. This article is intended to provide practical solutions to the enhancement of blended College English learning from the perspectives of teachers and students.

Keywords: College English Blended Learning; English Teaching Behavior; Learners' Characteristics; Learning Effectiveness.

1. Introduction

In the era of informatization, traditional teaching models no longer meet the high demands of society and the personalized needs of English learners. Blended learning, which combines online and offline learning modes, can better meet the individualized needs of both society and students and improve the level of college English teaching [1]. Blended learning in College English refers to the teaching mode that combines face-to-face classroom instruction and online platform learning for non-English major undergraduate students. In the era of informatization, effective teaching aims to cultivate students' critical thinking abilities and emphasizes student-centered instruction. Blended learning has the following characteristics: flexibility, personalization, strong interactivity, conducive to cultivating students' autonomous learning abilities, conducive to developing higher-order thinking skills, providing authentic learning environments, breaking traditional classroom boundaries, expanding opportunities for learner engagement, enhancing accessibility of resources, learner-centeredness, and the ability to make rational choices and combinations of all learning elements [2]. These characteristics make blended learning an important approach for effective teaching in the era of informatization.

This study mainly focused on students' feedback on the teaching behaviors of College English teachers in the blended learning mode, the learner characteristics of college students, and the evaluation of the effectiveness of blended learning for College English.

2. The Influence of Teaching Behavior on Blended English Learning

Teaching behaviors refer to the observable and measurable actions taken by teachers to achieve teaching goals and fulfill teaching tasks [3]. The effectiveness of blended learning

depends on whether teachers can implement teaching behaviors that contribute to its efficacy [4]. These teaching behaviors can be broadly categorized as follows: online learning management, teacher support, face-to-face classroom teaching, diversified assessment, and individualized teaching. By incorporating these teaching behaviors, blended learning can effectively meet the needs of learners and enhance the learning experience.

2.1. Online Learning Management

In blended learning, online learning refers to students utilizing online learning resources to engage in self-directed learning and complete the online learning tasks assigned by teachers, thus achieving meaningful personalized, and adaptive learning [5]. Online learning in blended learning is guided and regulated self-directed learning. In this process, teachers play a role in assigning self-directed learning tasks, tracking learning progress, and providing targeted guidance.

One important characteristic of blended learning is the enhanced interaction and communication between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves. Content that may not be fully covered or difficult to discuss in face-to-face classes can be continued through online interactions. The role of teachers is to create an atmosphere of online interaction between teachers and students, as well as among students, by increasing the space and opportunities for interaction. This helps to overcome the limitations of inadequate classroom discussions and allows all students to have the opportunity to acquire more information, understand others' perspectives, and express their viewpoints, leading to the internalization of knowledge and information. Increasing language application by students is also one way to address the lack of an English environment. Huang Ronghuai et al. proposed three conditions for effective online communication among students: gaining students' trust to encourage their willingness to engage in communication, providing timely feedback to students' questions and expressions to give them

answers or a sense of achievement, and fostering emotional connection and affirmation among students [6].

2.2. Teacher Support

The concept of teacher support and its components are not universally agreed upon in the academic field. Teacher support is typically divided into three categories: autonomy support, cognitive support, and emotional support [7]. Autonomy support refers to the support provided by teachers in terms of learning methods, learning resources, problem-solving, etc., to promote students' autonomous learning. Cognitive support refers to teachers using teaching strategies to facilitate students' cognitive development. Emotional support, also known as affective support or emotional scaffolding, refers to teachers providing care, emotional connection, and assistance to students in overcoming negative emotions.

In blended learning, teachers need to provide learning resources to facilitate students' autonomous learning, shifting the focus from learning primarily from teachers to learning primarily from resources. At the same time, teachers need to provide personalized resources to facilitate individualized learning. Huang Ronghuai et al. proposed five criteria for high-quality digital learning resources: content that is of interest to learners or necessary for problem-solving, appropriate difficulty level and cognitive load, well-structured content, a presentation format that is easily accepted by learners, and a clear navigation layout [6].

Lin Lilan suggested that the learning resources provided by teachers in blended learning were mainly used for students' self-directed learning outside of face-to-face classrooms [8]. Therefore, they differ from general learning resources and include not only learning materials but also systems and technologies that support self-directed learning. High-quality self-directed learning resources should have the following characteristics: they enhance students' self-directed learning ability and language proficiency, provide rich content to meet students' diverse needs, facilitate independent learning, offer a support system for learning, and ensure mechanisms for learning effectiveness, motivating students to engage in effective self-directed learning.

2.3. Face-to-Face Classroom Teaching

Organizing face-to-face classes in blended learning refers to the teacher's grasp and arrangement of teaching content and methods, as well as the organization of classroom activities [9]. In blended learning, knowledge learning and skill training are shifted outside the classroom. The classroom is no longer dominated by traditional English teaching modes that focus on delivering knowledge points, language points, and exercises, with speaking practice as a supplement. Instead, it involves student discussions, group activities, and outcome presentations, which promote the development of language proficiency and facilitate resource sharing among students.

One of the prominent challenges in implementing blended learning is the difficulty in seamlessly integrating face-to-face and online modes, resulting in a dualistic approach. The essence of blended learning lies in the integration of these two modes, leveraging their respective strengths, mitigating their limitations, enhancing teaching efficiency, and improving teaching effectiveness. If the two modes are disconnected, the complementary advantages cannot be fully utilized, and it may even lead to an excessive learning burden. Therefore, ensuring the integration and connection between face-to-face

classes and online learning is crucial to harnessing the effectiveness of blended learning.

2.4. Diversified Assessment

Teaching evaluation can be divided into summative assessment and formative assessment. The former usually refers to standardized exams, while the latter involves evaluating the learning process. Black and William also defined formative assessment, clarifying its content, purpose, and participants [10]. The content focuses on evaluating the learning process, the purpose is to adjust teaching and promote learning, and the participants include teachers and students. Formative assessment is necessary for blended learning.

In traditional teaching, summative assessment often leads to cramming before exams, failing to harness students' motivation and engagement in the learning process. Blended learning places high demands on students' self-directed learning abilities, requiring their active participation throughout the entire process. Without this active involvement, it is difficult to achieve good learning outcomes. Therefore, blended learning requires the use of formative assessment, which comprehensively evaluates students' learning motivation, learning behaviors, and learning outcomes, thereby stimulating their learning motivation.

Blended learning provides conditions for formative assessment. With both face-to-face and online learning components, blended learning involves complex teaching processes and diverse teaching activities, making it conducive to implementing formative assessment.

2.5. Individualized Teaching

The "Requirements for College English Course Teaching" stipulates that whether the course is mainly computer-based or classroom-based, its design should fully reflect personalization and consider students with different starting points. It should cater to students with lower proficiency levels while creating room for development for students with a stronger foundation. It should facilitate personalized learning to meet the diverse needs of students in different majors [11]. The core of personalized teaching is learner-centeredness, which requires considering individual differences and characteristics of students and employing personalized and differentiated teaching methods to provide different guidance for different learners. The development of information technology provides various possibilities and support for personalized teaching, primarily by offering learners personalized learning environments that are not limited by time and space. It also provides rich and diverse resources for learners and enables teachers to access students' learning behavior data, facilitating timely understanding of students' learning situations and providing personalized guidance.

3. The Influence of Learners' Characteristics on Blended English Learning

He Kekang, from a psychological perspective, defined learner characteristics as various aspects of the learner's internal psychological processes that affect the effectiveness of the learning process [12]. These include learning style, cognitive ability, learning starting point, learning motivation, interests, emotional attitude, emotions, willpower, and more.

In this study, the researcher analyzed the influence of blended College English learning on learning motivation, learning strategies, learning attitude, learning behavior, self-efficacy, and meta-cognition.

3.1. Learning Motivation

Learning motivation refers to the internal drive that directly propels students to engage in blended learning, both online and offline. It is a need that motivates and guides students in their learning [13]. In the blended learning mode of College English, students' motivation plays a significant role in their learning outcomes. Students' motivation can be categorized into intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation refers to students' interest, curiosity, and desire for self-development in the learning itself. When students have intrinsic motivation, they are more inclined to actively engage in learning activities, explore knowledge, and improve their learning outcomes. They experience the joy and sense of accomplishment in learning and become more focused and invested in the learning process. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, refers to students being driven by external incentives such as rewards, avoiding punishment, or meeting others' expectations. Extrinsic motivation can to some extent encourage student participation in learning activities.

Therefore, students' learning motivation is crucial for the effectiveness of blended learning. When students have intrinsic motivation, they are more likely to actively participate in both online and offline learning activities, make better use of learning resources and tools, and develop their autonomous learning abilities, thereby enhancing their learning outcomes. Teachers in blended learning should strive to stimulate and support students' intrinsic motivation, create a positive learning environment, provide meaningful learning tasks and feedback, and enhance students' learning motivation and achievements.

3.2. Learning Strategies

Learning strategies refer to the learning rules, methods, and techniques that learners should master in blended learning activities, both online and offline, to achieve certain learning goals [14]. These strategies are consciously used by students to improve learning effectiveness and involve the process of thinking and problem-solving in blended learning activities.

In the blended learning mode for College English, students' learning strategies have a significant impact on learning outcomes. In blended learning, students need to flexibly apply learning strategies and choose appropriate ones based on different learning tasks and environments to improve learning effectiveness.

Effective learning strategies can help students better organize learning materials, improve learning efficiency and memory, and cultivate autonomous learning abilities. For example, students can use online resources for self-directed learning and information retrieval, engage in online discussions and collaboration with others, and utilize technology tools for learning management and note-taking. The application of these learning strategies can promote deep learning and critical thinking, enhancing students' understanding and application abilities in English learning.

Therefore, teachers in blended learning should guide students in understanding and developing effective learning strategies, providing guidance and feedback, and encouraging

them to actively apply various strategies in their learning. Teachers can also design and organize tasks and activities suitable for blended learning to promote students' active participation and strategic use, thereby improving their learning outcomes in College English blended learning.

3.3. Learning Attitude

Learning attitude refers to the psychological inclination of learners towards blended learning, both online and offline, and their acceptance of its effectiveness [15].

In blended learning mode for College English, students' attitudes toward learning have a significant impact on learning outcomes. A positive learning attitude encourages students to actively participate in learning activities, and maintain good learning motivation and focus. Conversely, a negative learning attitude may result in a lack of interest and engagement in learning, thereby affecting learning outcomes.

In blended learning mode, students are required to navigate both online and face-to-face learning environments. A positive learning attitude enables students to be more receptive to new learning methods and technological tools, and overcome learning difficulties and challenges. They will actively engage in online discussions, collaborative learning, and classroom activities, and make effective use of various learning resources and platforms to support their learning.

Therefore, teachers should emphasize cultivating a positive learning attitude among students in blended learning for College English. Teachers can create a positive learning environment and atmosphere by providing interesting, challenging, and meaningful learning tasks. This helps to stimulate students' interest and motivation in learning. Teachers can also offer timely encouragement and support, helping students establish correct learning concepts and goals, and promoting good learning outcomes in the blended learning environment. Additionally, students should actively adjust their learning attitudes, maintain an optimistic mindset, and recognize the importance of blended learning for their personal learning development to enhance learning effectiveness.

3.4. Learning Behavior

In blended learning, learners engage in a collective set of activities driven by a certain motivation to achieve specific learning outcomes [16]. These activities encompass behavior participation, behavior persistence, behavior focus, behavior interaction, and adaptability.

In the blended learning mode for College English, students' learning behaviors have a significant impact on learning outcomes. Positive learning behaviors can enhance students' active participation in learning activities and improve learning outcomes. On the other hand, negative learning behaviors can lead to a decline in learning effectiveness.

In the blended learning mode, students need to arrange their study time reasonably and actively engage in both online and face-to-face learning. They should also effectively manage learning resources and tools. For example, students can actively participate in online discussions, engage in collaborative learning, proactively seek and utilize various learning resources, complete assignments and tasks on time, and regularly review and summarize their knowledge. These positive learning behaviors contribute to deepening understanding, improving memory, fostering critical thinking

and application skills, and ultimately enhancing learning effectiveness.

Therefore, in the context of blended learning for College English, teachers must encourage and guide students to develop positive learning behaviors. Teachers can provide clear learning goals and tasks, assist students in developing study plans and time management strategies, and offer timely feedback and guidance. Additionally, teachers can stimulate students' learning interests and motivation by designing engaging and interactive learning activities, encouraging collaborative learning, and promoting communication and discussions among students. These efforts contribute to fostering positive learning behaviors and improving learning outcomes.

At the same time, students themselves should actively cultivate good learning habits. They should establish regular study schedules, maintain a high level of engagement in their learning, develop self-directed learning abilities and a sense of responsibility, and actively utilize learning resources and tools to support their studies.

Students' learning behaviors are crucial for the effectiveness of blended learning in college English. By cultivating positive learning behaviors, students can improve their learning outcomes and make the most of the learning opportunities and resources provided in the blended learning mode.

3.5. Self-efficacy

Learning self-efficacy is the specific manifestation of self-efficacy in the context of blended learning, encompassing the belief of learners in their ability to succeed in online and offline blended learning activities [17]. It is the learners' subjective judgment of their capacity to utilize resources, tools, and other related elements of blended learning to complete learning tasks and acquire the necessary abilities for personal enrichment and improvement.

In blended learning mode for college English, students' self-efficacy in learning has a significant impact on their learning outcomes. Positive learning self-efficacy motivates students to actively engage in learning activities and maintain good learning motivation and focus. Conversely, negative learning self-efficacy may lead to a lack of interest and engagement in learning, thereby affecting learning outcomes.

In blended learning mode, students need to navigate both online and face-to-face learning environments with different demands. Positive learning self-efficacy enables students to embrace new learning methods and technological tools, and overcome learning difficulties and challenges. They become more proactive in participating in online discussions, collaborative learning, and classroom activities, making effective use of various learning resources and platforms to support their learning.

Therefore, in blended College English learning, teachers should emphasize cultivating students' positive learning self-efficacy. Teachers can create a positive learning environment and atmosphere, provide interesting, challenging, and meaningful learning tasks, and stimulate students' interest and motivation in learning. Teachers can also offer timely encouragement and support, help students develop correct learning concepts and goals, and promote effective learning outcomes in blended learning. Additionally, students themselves should proactively adjust their learning attitudes, maintain an optimistic mindset, and recognize the importance

of blended learning for their personal learning development to improve learning outcomes.

3.6. Meta-Cognition

Meta-cognition refers to the awareness and monitoring of one's learning processes and strategies. It includes setting learning goals, developing study plans, selecting and monitoring learning strategies, and evaluating and adjusting learning outcomes [18]. When students possess strong meta-cognitive awareness and abilities, they can better manage and regulate their learning processes, thus enhancing their learning outcomes. In blended learning mode for College English, students' meta-cognition has a significant impact on learning outcomes.

In blended learning, students are required to engage in self-directed learning and manage their learning processes. With good meta-cognitive awareness, students can set clear learning goals, develop effective study plans, and allocate learning time and resources wisely. They can choose appropriate learning strategies, such as self-directed learning, collaborative learning, discussions, and summarization, to improve their learning outcomes. Additionally, students can monitor their learning progress and understanding, engage in timely reflection, and make necessary adjustments to better grasp knowledge and skills.

Therefore, in blended learning for College English, teachers should emphasize the cultivation of students' meta-cognitive awareness and abilities. Teachers can guide students in setting clear learning goals and provide guidance and training on learning strategies and methods. Teachers can also facilitate students' reflection and development of meta-cognitive abilities by offering timely feedback and assessments to help them adjust their learning strategies and methods. At the same time, students themselves should recognize the importance of meta-cognition and actively cultivate and develop their meta-cognitive abilities to enhance their learning outcomes in blended learning.

4. Suggestions to College English Teachers and College Students

To enhance blended College English learning, on one hand, teachers should transfer his/her role, on the other hand, students should fully understand the importance of learners' characteristics and improve their learner's characteristics.

4.1. From the Teacher's Perspective

College English teachers need to have a clear understanding of the concept of blended learning and define their role positioning, which is different from the traditional teaching role.

4.1.1. Teachers as Designers

In blended teaching, teachers need to design a blended learning environment that combines online learning and face-to-face instruction, fully embodying the ubiquitous, flexible, and personalized nature of blended learning. This includes extending learning beyond the classroom through providing personalized learning resources and creating interactive and participatory learning situations.

4.1.2. Teachers as Organizers

Teachers not only need to organize teaching activities in face-to-face classes but also fulfill the role of organizers in online classrooms. Blended teaching allows for the extension

of interaction and communication between teachers and students and among students beyond the physical classroom. However, simply expanding time and space is not enough. It is also essential to effectively guide student participation and make the online space a “language community” for exchanging ideas, deepening understanding, and using language.

4.1.3. Teachers as Motivators and Emotional Supporters

In blended teaching, teachers need to stimulate students’ learning motivation not only in face-to-face classes but also in various ways to encourage online learning. Teachers should empathize with students’ inner needs, engage in equal communication with students, and help them overcome negative emotions in learning through encouragement and recognition.

4.1.4. Teachers as Learning Analysts

In the era of big data, College English teaching has entered a data-driven and personalized learning era. Through data collection and learning analysis during the learning process, exploring the most effective learning methods based on learning patterns is the most effective guarantee for data-driven College English learning. With the reliance on information technology, we can obtain a large amount of data generated by students’ online learning processes. By using this data to understand the learning process and considering improvements in the learning environment and providing personalized guidance, we engage in learning analysis.

4.1.5. Teachers as Guides and Problem Solvers

Based on the analysis of students’ learning behavior, teachers can timely grasp students’ learning foundation and learning difficulties. Subsequently, they should provide timely feedback and targeted guidance to students. Teachers need to step down from the position of “sage on the stage” and fully play the role of “guide by the side”, serving as guides close to students.

4.2. From Students’ Perspective

From the students’ perspective, learners’ learning motivation, learning strategies, learning attitude, self-efficacy, and meta-cognition have a significant influence on learners’ learning effectiveness. Therefore, learners should improve these characteristics during blended learning.

4.2.1. Improve Meta-Cognitive Monitoring Ability

Learners should progressively complete learning tasks according to the teacher’s instructional arrangement. Before engaging in blended learning, learners should establish clear learning goals and develop a specific learning plan, including setting study time and determining the learning content, and strictly following the learning plan to complete learning tasks. Learners should actively regulate their meta-cognitive experiences, particularly those who are conservative about face-to-face learning and have difficulty adapting to blended learning. They should actively participate in discussions, course activities, and other interactions to gain a sense of achievement and belonging. Learners should promptly control, regulate, and evaluate their behaviors and mental state. They can also utilize information technology to enhance their meta-cognitive monitoring ability.

4.2.2. Enhance Learning Strategies

Learners should consciously cultivate their learning strategies, especially cooperative communication strategies and reflective summarization strategies. Actively

participating in collaborative learning and online interactions can improve their sense of belonging and immersion in online learning, as well as enhance their learning effectiveness. Developing a habit of recording reflective notes and actively self-reflecting on their learning process and outcomes after each learning session is essential, especially for complex knowledge that requires repeated learning. By improving resource management strategies and self-regulation strategies, learners can enhance their meta-cognitive monitoring ability.

4.2.3. Cultivate Self-directed Learning Ability

Learners should cultivate their self-directed learning ability in blended learning, aiming to promote both their self-directed learning ability and learning outcomes. The improvement of self-directed learning ability is facilitated by enhancing meta-cognitive ability. Additionally, participating in teams and learning communities is highly beneficial for improving self-learning ability because learners will encounter obstacles and difficulties during their learning journey and need to find solutions themselves. When encountering unfamiliar knowledge, learning individually is motivated by the responsibility within the team to study new things. Moreover, teams or learning communities can help address difficulties or confusion.

4.2.4. Actively Participate in Activities

Learners can review their learning data to promote reflection and summarization, thus improving their meta-cognitive abilities, especially meta-cognitive knowledge and meta-cognitive monitoring, to address their learning deficiencies. Active participation in feedback is crucial. Learners should promptly engage in communication and interaction with teachers or peers when encountering problems or confusion. Additionally, as blended learning is still in the exploratory stage, learners are not just learners but also participants in course design. Therefore, they should provide timely feedback on the shortcomings in teachers’ instructional designs to help teachers refine and improve blended learning, achieving a win-win situation of enhanced learner-learning outcomes and improved course quality. Actively integrating into various learning communities, particularly virtual learning communities, enhances learners’ immersion and sense of participation.

5. Conclusion

In blended College English learning, both the teaching behaviors of teachers and the learner characteristics have a significant impact on learning outcomes. Therefore, in blended College English learning, teachers should focus on providing effective teaching behaviors, including clear learning objectives and tasks, actively guiding student engagement and collaboration, providing rich learning resources and support, and offering timely feedback and assessment. At the same time, learners should cultivate positive learning characteristics, such as positive learning motivation, a strong sense of self-efficacy, and higher meta-cognitive abilities, to improve learning outcomes. Through the collaborative efforts of teachers and learners, positive outcomes can be achieved in blended College English learning.

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