



# Do the Learners like Learning in a Blended Way?

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**Abstract.** In college English teaching, Blended Learning has greater advantages and adaptability than traditional teaching modes, thus it has gradually come into people's view and showed its vitality. Having carried out four turns of the two courses for more than thirteen thousand college students in a blended way, the author is wondering that do the learners really like this way or not? And to what extent do they like or dislike. By means of adopting the online course with a combination of face-to-face learning, the author offered a blended course, delivered the questionnaire and collected the feedback from the learners hoping to find a satisfactory answer to this issue. This research focuses on the above questions and orientates on the author's own teaching in the course of "World Classics" in Inner Mongolia University of Technology (IMUT) in the fall term in 2021. Three aspects are highlighted: first, what are the learners' perceptions of Blended Learning? Second, what are the learners' perceptions of the teachers in Blended Learning? Third, what are the learners' perceptions of the course? Results reveals that a majority of students have positive views and experiences with Blended Learning. Implications have been discussed in terms of how to better practice and design blended approach in general education courses to foster active learning.

**Keywords:** The Blended Learning · online courses · "World Classics"

## 1 Introduction

Blended Learning is the use of internet to access learning materials; to interact with the content, instructors and other learners. In Blended Learning, students benefit from increased flexibility in their schedules, self-paced online materials, and face-to-face interaction with instructors [1], developing more responsibility for their learning [2] and students appear to be more satisfied and achieve higher grades than in either fully face-to-face or fully online classes [3, 4]. However, some results indicate there is no significant effects of blending on student learning [5]. Even some participants report that social interaction is better in traditional method, late feedbacks are annoyed them and poor internet connection disallow participants to use the blended learning system [6].

This paper provides research carried out in an optional course the model of Blended Learning in a technological university and offers some information about the perception of the learners in blended learning classrooms.

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## 2 Methodology

The study includes a total of 93 university students enrolled in the “World Classics” optional course at IMUT in China. The students are from various grades and departments in the university. The course is designed as a blended course and it lasts 16 weeks in which 14 weeks learning online and 2 weeks learning in-class, and during 2-week period, the students meet with the teacher at the first class and the final class for two hours each, but essential parts of the course are undergoing online. The task for the first class/meeting is to elaborate clearly how will this course be learned including time allotment, assessment for the final score, some suggestions of course learning, and the second focuses on the overall feedback of the performance, delivers the questionnaire and undergoes the interviews. Both the questionnaire and interviews are designed by the author with the help from some colleagues. For questionnaire, 85 are delivered and 8 of them are invalid due to being incomplete and repeated answers. 6 students voluntarily joins the interviews in which the author records and jots down some keywords, and it is necessary to clarify here is that the author does not give any remarks or talk with the interviewees during the whole process. Also there is no results and analysis of the interviews in that some quotations will be used as proof or evidence to support the questionnaire and the conclusion in this paper.

Here is the interview outline in this study: 1. How do you define and understand Blended Learning as a teaching approach? 2. For your part, what are the advantages or disadvantages of Blended Learning approach? 3. Do you like that Blended Learning approach is adopted in all courses? Why or why not? 4. Do you think your teacher has been adopting the Blended learning approach in this course? Why or why not? Can you describe the teacher’s teaching approach and teaching process? 5. In this course, do you think your teacher has a keen understanding about the Blended Learning approach? Why or why not? 6. Which part or which parts of this course (course content or teaching approach) is most beneficial for you? Why?

## 3 Analysis and Findings

The results and analysis of the questionnaire are listed here according to the order of the question and some excerpts of the interview are supplementary as explanation.

The first question is a multiple choice question with the title of “Why do you choose the course?” 96.1% of students choose the course for “English learning” and nearly half of students for “culture learning” “absorbed by the title” is about 22%, and it needs to point out that no one chooses the course “for no particular reason”. There are some options given by the interviewees in the interview may be considered in the following research just as “*It enables us to make good use of the fragmented time. The learning process is easy and immersive. Online tests make us feel the joy, pride and satisfaction of learning English.*”

According to the result of question two, it is clear that over half of the students (58.44%) have never attended an open online course before, so that it may be a new trial for them. It is obvious that the ratio must be higher now than before due to the Covid-19 and the widespread of online education, however, this research reveals the

percentage before that and also it is of great importance in that it offers data for the comparative research in this field. Anyhow, for some learners at that time they had some fresh feeling, like *“This course is taught in the form of watching videos online, which has greatly attracted the interest of students in learning English, formed a learning habit, and added fun to daily life. I hope that the platform will increase the update speed and reduce flash in the case of retreat, the discharge speed option is easy to directly touch the speed bar.”*

The third question aims at investigating the difficulty of this course. Most students who take the course argue it is a little difficult for them, and about 40% of students also argue it in moderate difficulty. It is interesting that the same percentage of who think it is very difficult and who think it is simple. Anyway, nearly 90% students feel difficult, for the reasons the author got from the interview: most of them are science majors who have low proficiency in English and little sense on literature awareness, and the other reason is that this course offers no Chinese script becoming a headache for them.

Question four is about the gains from the course. Seventeen students (22.08%) claim that they have got very much through learning. 44.16% of students argue that they have got a lot from the course, here is one of the interviewee's words: *“This course not only let me learn the language knowledge, inspired me to think independently, and cultivated the awareness of autonomous learning. In addition, the course makes me understand different cultures, feel the true meaning of life, also improve my humanistic quality, learn the truth and essence of being a man.”* and about 30% think what they learned from the class is “just so so”. And there is one student argues he or she has learned nothing from the course. For this question, the author just hopes to find a general idea; the detailed outcome can be drawn through the following question.

The fifth question is a sorting question: for the knowledge and skills, you have learned in this course, rank the options that you think are important, from high to low.

Many students take great importance to “the listening skills” with the average comprehensive score of 3.99 that learned in the class. And the “cultural knowledge” occupies the second position in the ranking level with 3.78, the third and fourth lie in the “encyclopedia knowledge” and “aesthetic taste” with the scores of 2.58 and 1.87. It is noted that the “language synthesis” rank at last, which implies that students neglect it. And it is very necessary to clarify that the main purpose of offering this course is aiming at increasing the learners' overall qualities, especially the literature appreciation competence and the aesthetic taste. Although the result here is unsatisfactory, the author is glad to see *“Teachers can organize students to study by themselves reasonably. Also, they always connect with us by asking us questions during the class. They take students' life and interest as the starting point; make me to form a good study habit and learning structure.”*

According to question six, it is not difficult to find that almost all the students are willing to recommend other students to learn the course. And only 2.6% of students do not do like this. There are a large range of optional courses offered in IMUT and the course needs their recognition and recommendation because the course would not be available for the learners if the enrollment number for the students is below 30.

The seventh question is about the frequency of the students spend time in the course materials/resources, including some script translation, extra videos and other related

materials. About 90% of students look for and explore the course resources. Unfortunately, there are also 5.19% of students who have never used these resources, and even 2 students do not know there are some supporting and related resources. It is necessary for the teachers and platform management to announce formally the position and the importance of related materials. Just like question 3: most students have science or technology background and they have low proficiency in English and little sense on literature awareness, and it has to admit that some of them have the purpose of choosing the course for “easy to pass” or “less time compared with other courses”.

From question eight “the more suitable time of in-class/face-to-face teaching”, we can find that 26 students think the more suitable times is twice in a semester, which occupies 33.77%. And 17 students think it had better to be three times. Warmly, about 20% of students agree the more the better for the meeting times, which shows students’ eagerness of meeting teachers. As Edginton says “Face-to-face interactions with each other and with the instructor were more highly rated than online interactions in this course.” and “Over 80% of respondents indicated that the face-to-face interaction with the instructor during tutorials provided “much help” or “great help” [1].

The last question copes with the measure of the students encountering difficult questions in the learning process. The result shows that over half of the students will access the internet to search for the answer, which occupies 74.03%. And about 21% of students choose to watch the replay to get the answer themselves. In contrast, there are only two students who will ask classmates for help, and also two students choose to ignore questions.

## 4 Discussions

### 4.1 The Blended Approach Offers More Alternatives of Language Learning for Learners in IMUT

For blended courses, the university has been set up since 2018. More and more teachers have realized the necessity of blended learning due to the reduction of class hours and other reasons. Compared with traditional learning way, students are delighted to have more options in choosing the style and model of learning. Such as the blended course “World Classics” is a supplementary for them in IMUT. We may find the words to prove: *“Not only did I know the new vocabulary, improve the ability of language expression, and the level of literature appreciation, but also mastered a new method of English learning.”* *“This course relies on English listening, popularizes literature knowledge, stimulates reading interest, and improves humanistic quality. It not only increases my vocabularies, but also improves my listening and speaking skills; it is full of enthusiasm and it has become a kind of enjoyment.”*

### 4.2 The Learners Give a High Degree of Recognition to the Course and the Teachers

The conclusion can be drawn from question 2 and 6 above. Some words from the interviewees are: *“The teacher is very responsible and he answers questions always*

*in time, he is not only patient, easy-going, but also funny and vivid. The teachers have a very high level of literacy and knowledge. They make me understand the true meaning of literature.” “The teachers’ spoken English is so great that I have a lot of good impression of English. The teaching of pure English is very impressive, authentic accent makes video teaching a pleasure.”* Being blended or online course, one big difference from traditional teaching is that teachers need to design teaching more carefully. How to make students become more focused and active in learning still can not be achieved without teachers’ more practice and better design.

### **4.3 The Blended Teaching Approach Helps Improve Learners’ Autonomy to Some Degree and the Learners Hope to Meet Teachers More.**

*“Blended Learning truly realizes resource sharing, so that we have to meet an excellent team of teachers. In addition, Blended Learning is conducive to our collaborative learning, online communication, discussion and participation, and gaining a sense of pleasure and accomplishment, thereby enhancing my subjective learning awareness, further stimulating my enthusiasm for learning, and enhancing my thirst for knowledge and innovation in life.”* Blended courses provide much of the flexibility and convenience of an online course while retaining the benefits of the face-to-face classroom experience [3]. Some excerpts show that the learners are eager to meet the teachers or to have more in-class teaching.

## **5 Implications**

### **5.1 Teachers Are Supposed to Grasp the Essence of Blended Approach**

The meaning of the blended-learning has already illustrated by many experts. Thus it is still a question: did the course really go in a blended way? Is the blended approach so easy just to combine several face-to-face in-class lessons with some online hours? What are the criteria of blended approach? It needs considering clearly what are the percentage, function and significance of the face-to-face in-class and online mode. Also, it is advisable for teachers to notice the cheating behaviors of the learners including do not learn by themselves, copy the answers from others or hang on the computer, and so on for a major drawback of online instruction is an inability to confirm the identity of a student who is completing an assignment [7].

### **5.2 Results and Conclusions Are Likely to Be Different Due to Covid-19 and Other Factors**

As we know, Covid-19 was widespread throughout the world at the end of 2019 and it has not finished completely up to now which has a very great impact on education lies in that MOOC, SPOC, blended learning, on-line courses have sprung out everywhere. Thus, students are more familiar with on-line courses during this period. And the answers to the questionnaire and interview in this research could be very different, however, it still has some significance in that it could offer some contrasts for the learners learning in blended way before and in/after Covid-19, provide some advice even lessons for the similar courses or teaching patterns as well.

### 5.3 Instructors Need to Enhance the Ability of Teaching Design

In a blended-learning way, instructors are supposed to follow the talents cultivation objective and course characteristics, select the latest and most popular detailed knowledge explanation and keep abreast of the discipline [8]. And more importantly, they need the professional development support from the institution in redesigning their courses and adjusting their instructional practices accordingly [9]. Here just keep two things in mind: one is that the course design should be student-centered; and the other is that recognize clearly what are the proper and new roles of the teachers. And motivation of students can be achieved by professionalism and creativity of a teacher, who takes into account individual characteristics of the students and suggests such kinds of learning activities that would be challenging and interesting for students [10].

## 6 Conclusions

This research emphasizes that blended learning has a positive influence among the learners. And whether other learners have the same perception or whether the learners in this research have the same perception towards other courses still need investigating. The further research might focus on more disciplines, courses, learners, as well as the contrast of the blended-learning and pure online learning, the learning efficacy of learning in the blended-learning before and after Covid-19.

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