

Exploring the Effect of the Blended Teaching Mode on EFL Learners' Perception Towards the Course and Writing Achievement

Congying Mao

School of Foreign Languages, Yichun University, Yichun, China
maocongyingaaa@outlook.com

Abstract. With the popularity of technology aiding teaching, the blended teaching mode is one of the easiest ways to implement at first, which can also cultivate students' independent thinking ability and critical thinking ability. In order to know whether blended teaching mode have a positive effect on improving students' writing skill and how it realize the effect, especially for EFL learners, this article attempted to analyze the course experience questionnaire scores using descriptive statistics and independent sample t-tests in order to determine whether students' writing outcomes had improved and received a higher average score than conventional ones under the mode of blended teaching by altering their perception of the course from six scales. According to the final results, compared to traditional teaching mode, it has been proved that blended teaching mode can improve students' writing ability by letting students have clear goals, independent thinking ability, and good teaching, while a heavy workload given by the teacher damages the good impression of the course to some extent in the EFL learning background.

Keywords: Blended learning, writing achievement, learners' perception towards the course.

1. Introduction

According to Garrison, D. R. and Vaughan, N. D.'s book, higher education leaders are being urged to give students the opportunity to engage in critical and creative thinking and discussion for the twenty-first century with their professors and peers [1]. They also mentioned that with the rapid development of artificial intelligence, it becomes more and more possible to use the advantage of technology to improve students' critical thinking ability during the teaching and learning process [1]. Yu, Z. Z. et al. Believe that blended learning, a kind of learning mode, combines both the advantages of face-to-face learning and online learning, which has been proven to be an effective educational approach to improving the critical thinking ability of students [2]. What's more, according to the According to Entwistle, McCune, and Hounsell, teachers' pedagogical course knowledge and conception of teaching, how course material is selected, organized, presented, assessed, and approaches to learning and studying are three of the main factors which highly relates to the quality of learning achieved [3]. Therefore, there is no doubt that students' perception towards the course

will have a significant or slight change based on the change of teaching mode, and then influence the students' writing achievements.

Even though blended learning has been demonstrated to enhance students' learning results for three reasons, additional study in this area is still needed. First of all, most previous study only examines a few features of the blended mode, such as its definition, classifications, and application in various fields and themes. However, previous researches seldom investigate how blended teaching affects students' writing achievements through changing their perception towards the course. Furthermore, previous studies were conducted in English as the mother tongue or first language background, with most study settings rooted in English culture. The growth of the literature on blended learning in language acquisition is constrained by the fact that studies on English as a foreign language make up a very tiny percentage of all studies.

2. Literature review

2.1. Blended learning

Most professionals define blended learning as the combination of traditional face-to-face instruction with computer-assisted instruction. According to Garrison, D. R., Kanuka, H., and Whittaker, C., when the phrase originally appeared in English language teaching (ELT), it applied to any combination of in-person instruction and Internet resources (both online and offline) [4, 5]. Hubackova, S., and Semradova, I. said that online and offline blended learning are learning modalities that mix self-directed preparation with online resources and in-person instruction with teachers in the digital age [6].

As for the effect of blended learning, it mainly focused on three fields. Firstly, BL can develop students' language skills, such as vocabulary, grammar, listening, etc. For example, Tosun, S. found out that blended learning has a positive effect on EFL students' vocabulary enhancement [7]. Ghazizadeh, T., & Fatemipour, H. indicate that blended learning can improve EFL learners' reading proficiency [8]. Secondly, students' motivation and engagement increase under the conduct of BL. The experiment conducted by Banditvilai, C proved that students' language skills can be enhanced through blended Learning by sparking students' motivation and increasing students' engagement rate [9]. Thirdly, blended teaching mode can also improve the learning environment. Akbarov, Gönen & Aydoğan mentioned that the integration of digital tools in the EFL context enhanced the learning environment with the help of interactive resources and opportunities for self-paced study [10].

2.2. Students' perception of the course

Chickering, A. W., and Gamson, Z. F. once proposed that Instructional design and interaction are important factors to change students' perception towards the course, such as the interaction between teachers and students and group discussion [11]. Even though students' perception is a kind of abstract concept, it still can be measured from five aspects: teaching quality, workload appropriateness, assessment fairness, relevance to future goals, and generic skills [12]. Therefore, it is possible to find out how blended teaching mode changes the five elements and then indirectly changes the writing achievements of students according to the course experience questionnaire.

3. Research questions

Q1: Do the experimental group and the control group differ significantly in terms of perceptions towards the course and writing achievement?

Q2: How do blended modes affect the performance of students in English writing?

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants

With 33 students from Class One and 33 from Class Two, the participants are Chinese third-year college students, and the pre-test results of both classes are comparable to guarantee that students from both classes have a comparable foundation in English writing. Class Two was chosen as the control class (CC) and Class One as the experimental class (EC).

The two classes' professors willingly took part in the study. While the other teacher in the CC continued to use a conventional face-to-face mode, the teacher in the EC received instruction on how to conduct blended learning.

4.2. Procedure

The whole experiment lasted two months and the writing course was been taught two hours per week. Both groups were subjected to the same writing curriculum, namely “Understanding Contemporary China: A Reading and Writing Course”. In order to see whether the blended teaching mode has a better effectiveness than the traditional one, students of both groups had a pre-test of their writing ability.

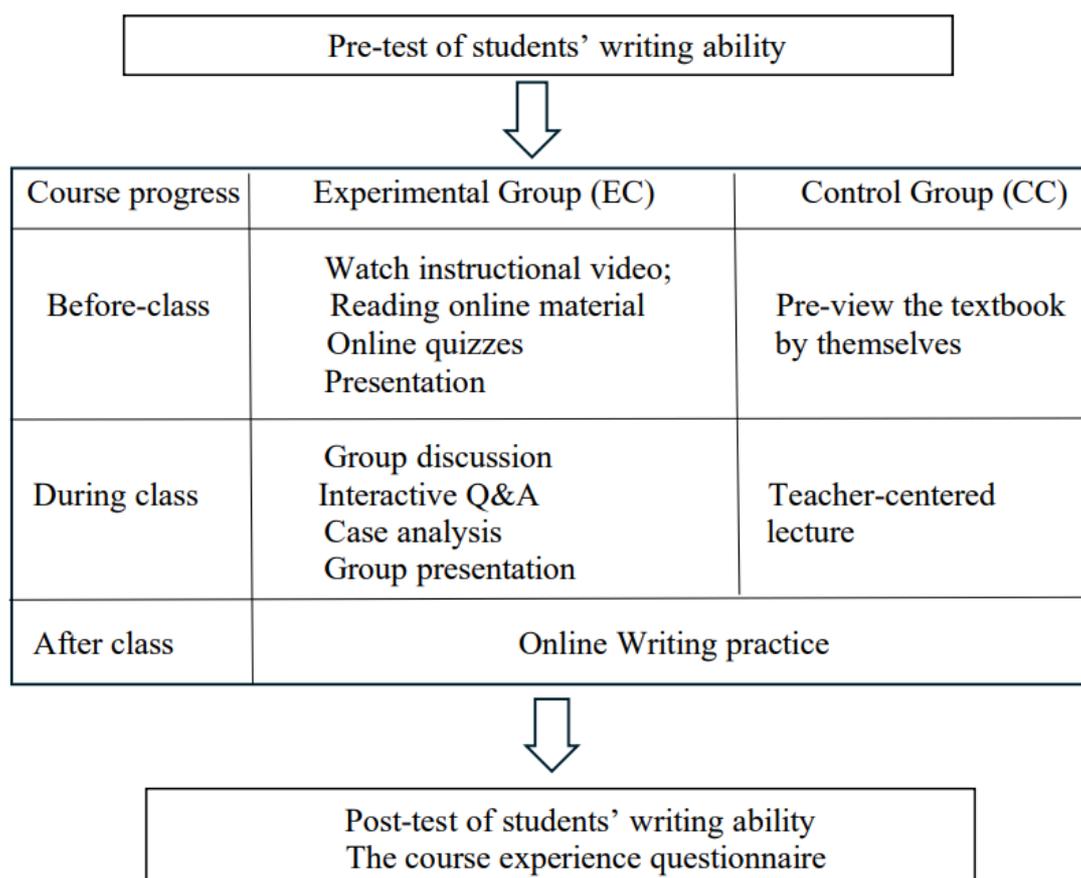


Figure 1: Experiment procedure

Figure 1 depicts the whole process of the experiment procedure. During the whole teaching part, the EC adopted a blended teaching mode to learn how to share Chinese stories with the whole world. Students were assigned to watch instructional videos, to read online materials, to finish online quizzes, to prepare a group presentation, and many other ways to make a full preparation before the teacher gave the class. During class, most of the time was spent on group discussion, interactive questions and answers between the teacher and students, case analysis, or group presentation shows. They exchange ideas on how to improve their writing ability with teachers and peers. In contrast, the CC attended a traditional lecture in class. After class, both groups were required to submit their writing practice on an online platform (Pigai platform), which will give a score for students automatically according to the requirements of teachers.

When the classes ended, students were required to attend an achievement test and a course experience questionnaire measuring their perception of the course.

4.3. Material

4.3.1. Test

Writing speeches on the Pigai online platform on the unit's theme was chosen as the pre-test and post-test in the study, respectively. These were used as instruments to gather quantitative data in order to assess students' writing abilities.

4.3.2. Learning tools

Super Star Learn and Pigai are popular learning software and website platforms. Because of their widespread appeal among youth and the advanced technology that allows teachers to offer homework and assignments, this study selected them as the tool for completing online writing learning activities. The tool system can be used to record students' test scores and study time.

4.3.3. The course experience questionnaire

With all six scales from the Good Teaching, Appropriate Workload, Appropriate Assessment, and Clear Goals and Standards to Emphasis on Independence scales, the questionnaire directly utilizes the entire form (36 items; CEQ36) of the CEQ [12]. Every item received a score ranging from "definitely disagree" to "definitely agree" on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

4.3.4. Data collection and analysis

To explore the participants' perceptions of their course experience in a blended teaching mode or traditional classroom, quantitative data were collected and analyzed. For the data analysis, SPSS 26.0 was used.

To answer Research Question (RQ) 1, which asks what the differences are between the experimental group (EC) and the control group (CC) in terms of students' accomplishments and experiences during the course, the impact of blended learning on improving the performance of EFL learners in English writing and students' perceptions of the course were assessed using independent sample t-tests and paired sample t-tests. Analyzing test findings and comparing the pre- and post-test results of writing performances between the two groups allowed for the comparison of the

differences between the EC and the CC. By contrasting the result of students' perception towards a course, whether the blended teaching mode helps students make progress can be checked.

To address RQ 2 on how blended learning improves the performance of EFL learners in English writing, the data of five scales were collected and independent sample t-tests, descriptive analysis, and MLR Multiple Linear Regression were undertaken using SPSS 26.0.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Writing achievement

Before the experiment, a pre-test of writing ability of both classes was conducted to ensure that the two classes have an equal ability in the subject. The score of the mean and standard deviation of EC were 80.56 and 7.53, respectively. The mean and standard deviation scores for CC were 80.64 and 6.68, respectively. According to Table 1's independent sample t-test results, there was no discernible difference between the participants' scores on the EC and CC ($t=0.04$, $P > 0.05$). Because of this, the students who took part in the EC and CC before the curriculum were nearly the same.

After the intervention, Table 2 demonstrates that the EC and CC had significantly different writing skills ($t=2.176$, $p<0.05$). As demonstrated by the EC's noticeably higher average post-test score (MD = 3.83), students in the EC did noticeably better on the writing test than students in the CC.

Furthermore, comparing the EC's pre-test and post-test results, Table 3 shows that the EC's post-test mean score grew by 4.23 points ($P<0.05$) compared to the CC's, whereas Table 4 shows that the CC's post-test mean increased by only 0.32 points ($P>0.05$). As a result, it is clear that EC produced greater results than CC and that its pace of advancement was far faster.

Thus, it is evident from the results of the two groups' scores that, in comparison to traditional learning, blended learning can greatly enhance students' writing skills in a few areas.

Table 1: Comparison of the EC and CC students' writing proficiency pre-test results

| Pre-test scores | Experimental Class (n=33) | | Controlled Class (n=33) | | MD | t | Sig. |
|-----------------|------------------------------|------|----------------------------|------|------|-------|-------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | |
| | 80.56 | 7.53 | 80.63 | 6.68 | 0.08 | 0.043 | 0.966 |

Table 2: Comparison of the EC and CC students' writing proficiency post-test results

| Post-test scores | Experimental Class (n=33) | | Controlled Class (n=33) | | MD | t | Sig. |
|------------------|------------------------------|------|----------------------------|------|------|-------|-------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | |
| | 84.79 | 7.48 | 80.95 | 6.81 | 3.83 | 2.176 | 0.033 |

Table 3: Comparison of the pre-test scores and post-test scores of students' writing outcomes in the EC

| Test scores | Pre-test scores of EC (n=33) | | Post-test scores of EC (n=33) | | MD | t | Sig. |
|-------------|---------------------------------|------|-------------------------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | |
| | 80.56 | 7.53 | 84.79 | 7.48 | -4.23 | -6.86 | 0.000 |

Table 4: Comparison of the pre-test scores and post-test scores of students' writing outcomes in the CC

| Test scores | Pre-test scores of CC (n=33) | | Post-test scores of CC (n=33) | | MD | t | Sig. |
|-------------|---------------------------------|------|-------------------------------------|------|--------|-------|-------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | |
| | 80.63 | 6.68 | 80.95 | 6.81 | -0.318 | -1.13 | 0.263 |

5.2. Learners' perception of the course

According to Table 5, it is clear that the improvement of the post-test scores in the EC has a direct relationship with students' attitude towards the course ($R \text{ square} > 0.721$). The rest of the factors that may influence the scores of students' writing tests may be class times, teachers' feedback, students' characteristics, etc.

Table 5: The association between the six components of the CEQ and the post-test results in the EC

| EC | R square | Adjusted R square | Durbin-Watson |
|----|----------|-------------------|---------------|
| | 0.721 | 0.657 | 0.686 |

Table 6 illustrates the different points of each scale between the two groups. The EC had a higher score in the good teaching scale, emphasis on Independence scale, Generic Skills scale, and higher than 0.4 at least than the CC. The appropriate workload scale in the EC, which is negative, is also higher than the CC and higher than 0.321. According to the statistics, we can infer that there was a positive relationship between independence, generic skills, and blended learning, which helps students develop their own thoughts and improve their problem-solving ability. At the same time, because of the heavy tasks that should be prepared well before the class, the degree of homework stress was relatively higher than CC.

Additionally, the CC's mean score was greater than the EC's on both the Clear Goals and Standards scale, which includes three positive items and two negative ones, and the appropriate Assessment scale, which has a negative score. For the appropriate Assessment scale, a higher score indicates that the checking method of lessons in the traditional teaching mode was monotonous and didn't allow students to grasp the method of solving problems, instead of just remembering knowledge points.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics for CEQ

| CEQ scale | Experimental Class (n=33) | | Controlled Class (n=33) | | MD | t | Sig. |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|------|----------------------------|-------|--------|--------|-------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | |
| Good teaching | 3.53 | 0.36 | 3.03 | 0.34 | 0.504 | 5.77 | 0.000 |
| Clear goals | 2.75 | 0.34 | 3.20 | 0.36- | 0.448 | 3.58 | 0.001 |
| Workload (negative) | 3.21 | 0.36 | 2.89 | 0.27 | 0.321 | 4.100 | 0.000 |
| Assessment (negative) | 1.99 | 0.68 | 2.95 | 0.39 | -0.959 | -7.024 | 0.006 |
| Independence | 3.14 | 0.56 | 2.65 | 0.37 | 0.489 | 4.177 | 0.000 |
| Generic skills | 3.58 | 0.69 | 2.42 | 0.38 | 1.161 | 8.461 | 0.000 |

In order to understand why EC has a relatively lower score on clear goals, which is supposed to be higher on CC, a descriptive analysis was used to find out the perception of each item. Table 7 showed that questions 3 and 37 have extremely high scores, which are 4.03 and 4.45, while the scores of the other three questions, which are negative, are much lower than the positive questions. So even though the total scores of this scale on EC are lower than CC, it can still find out that students in EC have clear aims of the lesson and promote students to understand the content of the book.

Table 7: Scores of the EC's well-defined objectives and standards scale

| Question number | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean |
|---------------------------|----|---------|---------|------|
| Question 3 (positive) | 33 | 1 | 5 | 4.03 |
| Question 10 (negative) | 33 | 1 | 5 | 2.21 |
| Question 20 (negative) | 33 | 1 | 3 | 1.48 |
| Question 26 (negative) | 33 | 1 | 4 | 1.58 |
| Question 37 □positive□ | 33 | 1 | 5 | 4.45 |

6. Conclusion

According to this study, students' short-term writing skills improve with blended learning, and the benefits of BL instruction are more noticeable than those of traditional face-to-face instruction. Under the blended teaching mode, by completing the unit reading task and online detection task in advance, students have clearer and more accurate learning objectives and a clear context of the whole article before the formal class, compared with the traditional teaching, so as to help students master the text learning more systematically. Instead of only responding to questions, teachers and students often interact and share their opinions in class by choosing themes that are relevant to the article the teacher has provided and by choosing group presentations. Through a large number of

pre-class testing tasks and self-learning materials, as well as multiple group discussions and question answering in class, students' problem-solving ability and coping ability in the face of new topics have been exercised.

Since the teacher is the leading party in course selection, task arrangement, and question raising, students still lack a certain degree of initiative. Blended teaching is inseparable from the fact that before class, students have to spend a lot of time reading course-related materials in advance, preparing for topic group discussions, completing quizzes, and other tasks. Therefore, compared with traditional teaching methods, students' homework pressure increases, and the amount of homework tasks increases, which, to some extent, has a slightly negative effect on students' achievements. By first showing the positive effects of blended learning on improving the writing abilities of English language learners, this study further supports the theoretical conclusions of relevant research. To compensate for the dearth of blended learning trials in Asia, this experiment is conducted in a nation where English is being learned as a second language. In addition, this experiment focuses on exploring how blended teaching can further improve students' learning outcomes and quality by improving students' curriculum experience, which provides new perspectives and influencing factors for exploring how blended teaching affects students' writing ability.

As mentioned in the article, the research duration of this study is short, and the improvement of writing ability takes a long time, so the future research can focus on extending the time, such as one year or even three years.

References

- [1] Garrison, D. R. , & Vaughan, N. D. (2008). Blended learning in higher education: Framework, principles, and guidelines. John Wiley & Sons.
- [2] Yu, Z. Z. , Hu, R. , Ling, S. , Zhuang, J. Y. , Chen, Y. M. , Chen, M. J. , et al. (2021). Effects of blended versus offline case-centred learning on the academic performance and critical thinking ability of undergraduate nursing students: a cluster randomised controlled trial. *Nurse Educ. in Pract.* 53:103080. doi: 10. 1016/j. nepr. 2021. 103080
- [3] Entwistle, N. , McCune, V. , & Hounsell, J. (2002). Approaches to study and perceptions of university teaching learning environments: Concepts, measures and preliminary findings. Edinburgh, UK: Enhancing Teaching Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses Project, University of Edinburgh, Coventry University, and Durham University. Retrieved from <http://www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk/docs/ETLreport1.pdf>
- [4] Garrison, D. R. , and Kanuka, H. (2004). Blended learning: uncovering its transformative potential in higher education. *Internet High. Educ.* 7, 95–105. doi: 10. 1016/j. iheduc. 2004. 02. 001
- [5] Whittaker, C. (2013). "A military blend," in *Blended Learning in English Language Teaching: Course Design and Implementation*, eds B. Tomlinson and C. Whittaker (London: BritishCouncil), 65–73.
- [6] Hubackova, S. , and Semradova, I. (2016). Evaluation of blended learning. *Proc. Soc. Behav. Sci.* 217, 551–557. doi: 10. 1016/j. sbspro. 2016. 02. 044
- [7] Ige, O. A. , and Hlalele, D. J. (2017). Effects of computer-aided and blended teaching strategies on students' achievement in civic education concepts in mountain learning ecology. *Educ. Inform. Technol.* 22, 2693–2709
- [7] Tosun, S. (2015). The effects of blended learning on EFL students' vocabulary enhancement. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 199(1), 641-647. [https://doi.org/10. 1016/j. sbspro. 2015. 07. 592](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.07.592). Ghazizadeh, T. , & Fatemipour, H. (2017). The effect of blended learning on EFL learners' reading proficiency. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 8(3), 606-614. doi:10. 17507/jltr. 0803. 21
- [8] Ghazizadeh, T. , & Fatemipour, H. (2017). The effect of blended learning on EFL learners' reading proficiency. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 8(3), 606-614. doi:10. 17507/jltr. 0803. 21
- [9] Banditvilai, C. (2016). Enhancing Students' Language Skills through Blended Learning. *Electronic Journal of e-Learning*, 14(3), 220-229.
- [10] Akbarov, A. , Gönen, K. , & Aydoğan, H. (2018). Students' attitudes toward blended learning in EFL context. *Acta Didactica Napocensia*, 11(1), 61-68. doi:10. 24193/adn. 11.1.5.
- [11] Chickering, A. W. , & Gamson, Z. F. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE bulletin*, 3, 7.

- [12] Ramsden, P. (1991). A performance indicator of teaching quality in higher education: The Course Experience Questionnaire. *Studies in Higher Education*, 16(2), 129-150.