

Chinese EFL Teachers' Perceptions towards Blended Learning

Mingjiu Wang

Abstract—This study takes Changzhou Institute of Engineering as a sample to conduct a survey, aiming to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions towards blended learning, what the teachers have done to do with this teaching model and what are the challenges for teachers in the process of implementing blended learning. The paper analyzes the results and also makes some suggestions on how to improve blended learning and cope with teachers' challenges in an appropriate way for EFL teachers.

Index Terms—Blended learning, EFL teachers' perceptions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since English has long been the international communication language in the world as well as the most important second language in non-English speaking countries, English is listed as one of the three core subjects in middle schools in China and one essential subject in colleges and universities. Researchers and English teachers have been seeking for a more effective and efficient way to better teach English learners. Learners and educators worldwide have been exposed to new information and communication technologies in order to stimulate and further enhance the learning process. The introduction of blended learning environment using learning management system chosen by universities and colleges can indeed bring positive impact on students' performance in their studies. Reference [1] affirms that "Blended Learning is the combination of different training media (technologies, activities, and types of events) to create an optimum training program for a specific audience." Besides, as stated by Reference [2], "research shows that through BL, students become far more active in their own learning, feeling more technologically empowered and able to learn anywhere and anytime in the manner that best suits their lifestyle." Blended learning is obviously beneficial to learners because it encourages active teaching methods and active learning. By using active learning, students take the lead in their own learning. They regard their teachers as a partner to guide them through the learning process and motivate them for further endeavors [3]. More important, research suggested that active learning can lead to greater retention of knowledge, a stronger motivation to learn, deeper understanding, and more positive attitudes on the subject being taught [4].

Changzhou Institute of Engineering is a state-owned higher vocational college. The school itself has developed an

online teaching platform successfully in which teachers are able to implement blended learning and teaching model, which is called Gongcheng Cloud Platform. Gongcheng Cloud Platform has been put into use for five years and it provides a platform for both teachers and students to interact with each other in class and after class. Teachers are able to make use of it by logging into mobile phones or desktops to design pre-tasks, in-class activities and post-tasks and deliver them to the platform so that students could receive through their mobile phones or desktops. In class teachers can interact with students by a variety of activities. Students can give response to all the tasks in real time on their own mobile phones and teachers can monitor students' performance after class and make a real-time assessment. The platform can statistically produce a report about teachers' teaching design and students' performance in an overall and detailed way in terms of attendance rates, participating rates, tasks completing rates, etc. English teachers in Changzhou Institute are all involved in the participation of Gongcheng Cloud Platform. Therefore, this research mainly focuses on investigation of English teachers' perception towards their practice of blended learning.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research aimed to make a survey of English teachers' attitudes and thoughts about blended learning. The investigation was conducted in Changzhou Institute of Engineering in China. Changzhou Institute of Engineering is one of the top higher vocational colleges in Jiangsu China and aims at fostering comprehensively developed technical graduates for industries. Gongcheng Cloud Platform is a combination that integrates classroom teaching with after-class autonomous learning. All the English teachers have been using this platform since it was set up within the school Internet five years ago. So Teachers' perspective about blended learning is the main target of this research.

A. Participants

The participants for this study were 20 teachers who teach English language as a foreign language in Changzhou Institute of Engineering. They are responsible for teaching a course of Comprehensive English for about 10,000 students. Six of them are male and fourteen of them are female. Most of them are experienced teachers, 60% of them have 11-20 years of teaching English, 15% of them have 21-30 years of teaching English and 25% of them have more than 30 years of teaching English.

B. Research Design

This study is a quantitative design. A questionnaire for

teachers was used in this study. The questionnaire was completed by using WeChat, a kind of social software that can be easily stalled on mobile phones. The questionnaire consisted of 9 questions, which are chosen and adapted from Reference [5], divided into three categories, namely reasons for adopting blended learning, technologies used in blended teaching and teachers' challenges in the process of implementing blended learning.


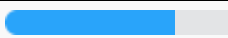

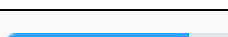



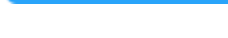
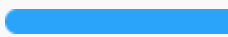

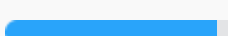
III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed to determine teachers' perception towards blended learning as well as challenges in the implementation of blended learning.

A. Reasons Why Teachers Choose Blended Learning

Teachers' perceptions about why they prefer to make a choice of blended learning was explored in terms of 11 items. As shown in Table I, 95% of the teachers think the reason for them to choose blended learning is to create a student-centered learning environment, the second largest percentage is 80%, the teachers assume that they want to support face-to-face teaching approach, communicate through social networking, create motivating learning environment and have flexible learning time and location. The next percentage if from 75% to 55%, teachers believe in developing independent learning, creating individually tailored solution, creating interesting lessons,, increasing accessibility of learning materials and supporting collaboration. The least proportion is 25%, which focuses on reducing class time. Obviously, the first concern for teachers is to encourage autonomous learning, independent learning and individualized learning. The next emphasis lays on collaborative learning environment and the use of technology and the final attention is more learning materials and class time reduction.

TABLE I: REASONS FOR WHICH TEACHERS CHOOSE BLENDED LEARNING

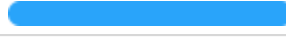
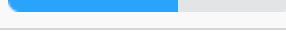

Items	Total	Percentages
support face-to-face teaching approach	16	 80%
support collaboration	12	 60%
communication through social networking	16	 80%
increase accessibility of learning materials	13	 65%
reduce class time	5	 25%
create interesting lesson	11	 55%
create a student-centred learning environment	19	 95%
create motivating learning environment	16	 80%
flexible learning time and location	16	 80%
develop independent learning skills	15	 75%
create individually	12	 60%

tailored solutions		
Valid numbers of participants	20	

B. Technologies Adopted in the Classroom

As we can see from Table II, all the teachers use PowerPoint, and 85% of the teachers adopt audience response systems, finally 65% of the participants make use of interactive whiteboards. Apparently PowerPoint is the most widely used technology in blended learning.

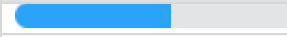
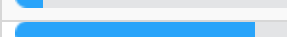
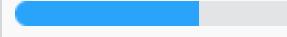


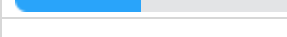


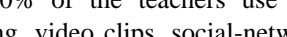
TABLE II: TECHNOLOGIES

Items	Total	Percentages
PowerPoint	20	 100%
interactive whiteboards	12	 60%
audience response systems	17	 85%
Valid numbers of participants	20	

C. Virtual Communication Tools through Internet Audio Files

From Table III, we can see that the relatively high percentage, between 85% and 50%, consist of discussion groups, questionnaires, discussion boards ,chat and email ,while the relatively lower proportions are videoconferencing, web forms, polling, conferencing, and e-lists.


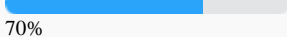
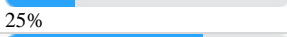
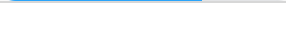
TABLE III: VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION TOOLS THROUGH INTERNET AUDIO FILES

Items	Total	Percentages
discussion boards	11	 55%
e-lists	2	 10%
discussion groups	17	 85%
chat	13	 65%
conferencing	4	 20%
email	10	 50%
polling	5	 25%
questionnaires	14	 70%
web forms	9	 45%
Valid numbers of participants	20	

D. Social-Networking Software

Table IV shows us 90% of the teachers use instant messaging in their teaching, video clips, social-networking sites, phone calls are second largest software's adopted, ranging from 75% to 70%, half of the teachers use weblogs, but podcasts, virtual worlds and wikis only account for 20% to 25%.

TABLE IV: SOCIAL-NETWORKING SOFTWARE

Items	Total	Percentages
instant messaging	18	 90%
phone calls	14	 70%
podcasts	5	 25%
social-networki	14	 75%

ng sites		70%
video clips	15	75%
virtual worlds	6	30%
weblogs	10	50%
wikis	4	20%
Valid numbers of participants	20	

E. E-learning Systems

It can be seen from Table V 90% of the teachers rely on E-learning systems and 85% of group collaboration software, however, the percentage of the those who depend on conferencing systems is merely 45%.

TABLE V: E-LEARNING SYSTEMS

Items	Total	Percentages
E-learning systems	18	90%
conferencing systems	9	45%
group collaboration software	17	85%
Valid numbers of participants	20	

F. Social-Networking Software

Table VI tells us the percentages of those who take advantage of mobile phones, laptops and tablet PCs are 100%, 85% and 45% respectively.

TABLE VI: MOBILE LEARNING GROUP SITES

Items	Total	Percentages
mobile phones	20	100%
laptops	17	85%
tablet PCs	9	45%
Valid numbers of participants	20	

G. Challenges Teachers Are Faced with

Table VII illustrates that more than 75% of the teachers assume that the biggest challenges are to respect diverse talents and ways of learning, encourage Student-Faculty Contact, encourage collaborative learning, encourage active learning, give Prompt Feedback and apply technology. The less competitive challenges are to set and communicate high expectations as well as emphasize time on task.

TABLE VII: CHALLENGES TEACHERS ARE FACED WITH

Items	Total	Percentages
Encourage Student-Faculty Contact	15	75%
Encourage collaborative learning	15	75%
Encourage active learning	15	75%
Give Prompt Feedback	16	80%
Emphasize time on task	9	45%
Set and communicate high expectations	13	65%

Respect diverse talents and ways of learning	18	90%
Technology application	16	80%
Valid numbers of participants	20	

The following are some suggestions for teachers with regard to dealing with pressure. Firstly, helping students to be autonomous learners. Being an autonomous learner does not happen overnight, but demands working systematically in a process. The learning of a foreign language demands practice and developing not only cognitive but metacognitive strategies that enable students to become aware of their weaknesses and strengths and what strategies help them learn. Cognitive strategies are one type of learning strategies that learners use in order to learn more successfully. These include repetition organizing new language, summarising meaning, guessing meaning from context, using imagery for memorization. All of these strategies involve deliberate manipulation of language to improve learning. In the classroom activities which can be described as cognitive strategies include mind maps, visualization, association, mnemonics, using clues in reading comprehension, underlying key words, scanning and self-testing and monitoring. Metacognitive strategies refer to methods used to help students understand the way they learn; in other words, it means processes designed for students to ‘think’ about their ‘thinking’ [6]. Teachers who use metacognitive strategies can positively impact students who have learning disabilities by helping them to make an appropriate plan for learning information, which can be memorized and eventually routine. As students become aware of how they learn, they will use these processes to efficiently acquire new information, and consequently, become more of an independent thinker. Making proper use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies enables students to reconsider appropriateness of the way they choose to learn English language and learn to monitor and adjust their learning methods and strategies. In the meantime, in this recognition of what works or does not for a learner, the EFL teachers’ intervention in order to help students recognize these aspects is crucial since the teachers are their guides through their learning process and that is important for reminding students that “practice makes perfect.”

Next, being creative and resourceful. Students expect you to be creative and not only use appealing resources but to change them and get students to explore English through different learning experiences while drawing on the different learning styles. Teachers must avoid being monotonous in their practice and try new things in terms of EFL learning. This could be accomplished by using a BL model. This might be a big challenge for EFL teachers because providing students interesting learning materials isn’t an easy job. Teachers could take into account theory of multimodality to provide students aural, spatial and visual resources.

Thirdly, looking for training and support. Some teachers and students claim to be technophobic or avoid using technology because it seems to be difficult and time

consuming. However, in this globalized world, where the exchanging of cultures and information prevail, teachers, students and policy makers need to rethink how technology can be integrated into the EFL classroom in such a way that technology becomes a means to an end. In order to reach this goal, teachers require getting enough training in terms of technological literacy and methodological tools to create a BL course [7]. Furthermore, teachers need support to handle problems regarding technology so that they can help their students when these issues emerge.

Finally, designing a needs analysis. After the decision of implementing BL as one of the focal points of the curriculum, a needs analysis is required in order to analyze who our students are and what their preferences and learning styles are. As stated by Reference [8], there are different kinds of unit designs based on needs analysis you can create: body of knowledge, specific competences, social activities and problems, feelings and attitudes, and needs and interests of the learners. Teachers choose the kind of analysis that is required, taking into account their students and curricular policies.

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper explored the reasons why English teachers in CZIE choose blended learning model. The result indicates that EFL teachers assume blended learning is able to facilitate language learners' autonomy, extend communications between teachers and students, respect individuality and cater for diversified learning styles, integrate with modern technological equipment and so on. In order to better implement blended learning, teachers are supposed to face some challenges, most of which are concerned with a variety of learning styles, teacher-student communication, collaborative and active learning and technology application. Therefore, appropriate training is required for teachers in some aspects, such as autonomous learning theory and strategy, social-networking software application. This study is only conducted in Changzhou Institute of Engineering, so the result might be limited to a certain area, so hopefully this study will be likely to be applied to other colleges in China in the future to extend the research and application of this model. And the learners' reactions to this model and comments on it are also expected to be surveyed continually.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

I accomplished the paper from introduction to conclusion myself. This paper is part of the achievement of the project: Empirical Research on English Blended Learning in Higher Vocational College funded by Changzhou Institute of Engineering 2019. Before I conducted this research, I read some articles related to Blended Learning, studied some theories concerning this hybrid teaching and learning approach so as to lay a solid basis for the later implementation of the research. After I finished literature review, I commenced the design of questionnaire for teachers

based on some relevant research questions. And then I typed all the questions and choices into Questionnaire Star (a kind of software) and delivered it to my colleagues in China via Wechat (a sort of social communication software). When all of my colleagues filled in the questionnaire, I collected and analyzed the data, discovered some problems and made some suggestions for teachers in order to make some improvements. Finally I wrote the paper and submitted it to the 7th International Conference on Linguistics Literature and Arts. After I received the result of review by international experts, I immediately revised it according to the review comments. In the end I submitted the final version of the paper to the conference.

From my viewpoint this paper investigated EFL teachers' opinions about blended learning and put forward some ideas for teachers to facilitate this model in the future. It is of some significance to Chinese EFL teachers and beneficial to English language learners and it could presumably help language learners enhance the learning effectiveness.

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Mingjiu Wang was born in Anhui China, December 1966. He received his master degree in English education at Henan Normal University, Xinxiang China in 2004. He was an academic visitor in Mohawk College in Canada, November to December 2007, and in Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages in Taiwan, November 2016. He is an academic visitor in

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