

A Study on Foreign Language Teaching and Intercultural Education in the English Newspaper Course

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Abstract. This paper discusses the blended teaching practice of foreign language teaching and intercultural education in the English newspaper course deploying the reading and writing integrated teaching model. It firstly explores the relationship between intercultural education and reading teaching of English news in Chinese higher education, then expounds the teaching objectives and curriculum design of this course, and also discusses the construction and application of the blended teaching in the context of new media. The study conducts teaching experiments in two classes (control class and experimental class) of English majors in a university in China for one semester (16 weeks), and utilizes questionnaires to gain insights into students' perspectives on this course. The results show that the reading and writing integrated teaching model in the blended teaching class can better raise students' learning interest, develop English comprehensive competence, enhance information literacy, promote critical thinking ability and improve the practical competence of intercultural communication.

1 Introduction

The English newspaper course is a language skill course for English majors in universities in China, aiming at cultivating students' ability to read English publications and improving their English proficiency and overall quality. Based on the survey of this course, there are two main problems currently: one is that the textbooks are outdated, as traditional paper textbooks contain fewer articles and fixed content, which cannot fully reflect the timeliness of this course; the other is the traditional teaching method is mostly teacher-centered, with just a focus on interpreting texts. Thus, students passively receive knowledge and are lack of opportunities to independently obtain information, conduct research, and solve problems [1].

According to the National Standards for the Quality of Teaching in Foreign Languages and Literature [2], intercultural communication competence refers to the appropriate and effective behavior of communicators in an intercultural context, which is an essential skill for English majors. The features of English publications include strong timeliness, large amount of information, and diverse types, reflecting various levels of society in English speaking countries. Some researchers have conducted in-depth research on cultivating students' intercultural competence in the English newspaper course, pointing out that using materials from English newspapers in the teaching process can stimulate students' interest, develop information searching skills, improve thinking skills, and promote intercultural communication practice [3-5]. Therefore, from an intercultural perspective, the English newspaper course has been given new requirements and

urgently need to be reformed to meet the needs of cultivating intercultural competence.

In recent years, the number of research on blended teaching in English classes in China has significantly increased. However, there are few empirical studies on such form for the English newspaper course from an intercultural perspective. Without the constraints of classroom hours, the use of blended teaching brings a new direction for the teaching reform in cultivating intercultural competence. As innovating intercultural education is one of the important tasks in foreign language teaching in China today, applying the reading and writing integrated teaching model, the study constructs and verifies the blended teaching in the English newspaper course, attempting to promote foreign language teaching and intercultural education.

2 Intercultural Education and Curriculum Design

Newspapers are closely related to culture [6]. The essence of the English newspaper course is to use newspapers as a carrier of cultural dissemination, allowing students to understand the world through exposure to the language and culture of the target language, conduct cultural comparative analysis, and ultimately enhance intercultural communication competence. Thus, the teaching objectives of this course are: (1) to understand domestic and foreign current affairs, broaden international perspectives, enhance cultural literacy, and cultivate intercultural competence by reading English newspapers and magazines; (2) to expand English vocabulary in various contexts, and improve

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overall English proficiency; (3) to develop critical thinking skills through analyzing reading materials. This course uses “Reading English Newspapers” [7] as the textbook, and “China Daily” to supplement the teaching. New media is a new type of carrier for information storage, transmission, and expression, such as text, audio, and images, with strong expressive power, large capacity, and excellent interactivity. Therefore, the course can choose appropriate new media materials to assist multi-dimensional teaching of cultural knowledge.

The blended teaching deploying the reading and writing integrated teaching model was designed as shown in Figure 1. The feature is to highlight student-centered learning, with a focus on cultivating English comprehensive competence and intercultural competence. The difficulty lies in effective interaction, and the operating point is the appropriate use of new media in the context of the blended teaching.

(1) Pre-class (online learning): students search materials related to unit topics before the class, discuss and prepare for presentations.

(2) In class (classroom teaching): On the basis of understanding news articles, various viewpoints on social hot topics can be set up for students to have small debates. Through the continuous exchange of ideas and viewpoints, students can gradually improve their language competence and accumulate intercultural competence.

(3) After class (online learning): As an extension of classroom teaching, students are required to write a reading report after class, explaining the causes and consequences of the event, outlining the government and public responses, and providing personal evaluations. In addition, teachers and students can express their opinions on a news event online in English. News events happen anytime and anywhere, and so does the blended teaching.

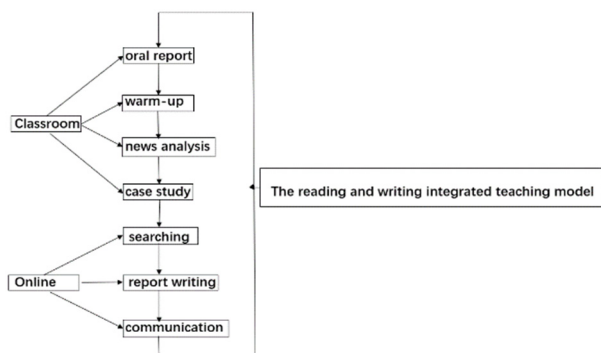


Fig. 1. The reading and writing integrated teaching model

3 Research Methods and Results

The study explores the construction and application of the blended teaching that integrates reading and writing in the English newspaper course, with a focus on cultivating students' intercultural competence. The study selected two classes of sophomores majoring in English in a university in China. One was an experimental class (28 students, 6 male and 22 female), using the blended teaching, and the other was a control class (30 students, 4 male and 26 female), using a traditional teacher-centered classroom

teaching approach. A teaching experiment was conducted for one semester (16 weeks), with the same teacher teaching both classes.

Before the experiment, students from two classes took the College English Test Band 6 (CET 6) in June 2021. An independent sample t-test on the scores of two classes was conducted by SPSS 26. The results are shown in Table 1. Although the experimental class had slightly higher average scores than the control class, there was no significant difference in the scores of each individual item of CET 6 between the two classes, indicating that the initial English competence of the two classes was similar.

After the experiment, students from two classes participated in CET 6 in December 2021, and the average scores of each item in both classes improved (Table 2). Paired sample t-tests were conducted on the scores of each item in the former and latter CET 6 test before and after the experiment (Table 3). After using the blended teaching approach with the reading and writing integrated teaching model, the latter scores of the CET 6 test in the experimental class were significantly improved ($p=0.002$ for listening, $p=0.000$ for reading, and $p=0.000$ for writing and translation). Under the traditional teaching model, Table 4 shows that there was a significant improvement in the reading, writing, and translation scores of CET-6 in the control class ($p=0.006$ for reading, $p=0.048$ for writing and translation). The results indicate that after one semester's learning, the overall English proficiency of students has improved.

Independent sample t-tests were conducted on the scores of each item in the latter CET 6 test for two classes (Table 2). The experimental class had significantly higher scores in reading, writing, and translation than the control class ($p=0.000$ for reading, $p=0.022$ for writing and translation), and there was no significant difference in listening scores between the two classes ($p=0.6$). The results indicate that although both classes have improved their overall English proficiency after one semester's learning, the improvement level of the control class is not as significant as that of the experimental class. Therefore, from the overall empirical results, it can be seen that the teaching effect of the blended teaching that integrates reading and writing from an intercultural perspective is significant.

This study used two times of CET 6 scores as pre- and post-tests. Although it cannot fully indicate that the improvement of individual scores is only related to the English newspaper course, through this semester the course plays an important role in reading training, and CET 6 is a relatively objective test with similar difficulty levels former and latter. From this perspective, the study chose CET 6 scores as the pre- and post-test data.

After the completion of the course, a questionnaire (the Likert's 5 scales) was administrated to students in both classes to investigate their satisfaction of the teaching approaches, from the perspectives of improving English skills, intercultural competence, learning interest, information literacy, critical thinking ability, etc. There were a total of 58 students in two classes, and a total of 58 questionnaire responses were received. Three untrustworthy responses were excluded. SPSS 26 was used and

Cranbach's α was 0.918, indicating that the questionnaire design had high reliability. Table 5 shows the independent sample t-test results of questionnaires from two classes.

There is a significant difference in the evaluation of English listening and speaking ability, intercultural ability, learning interest, information literacy ability, critical thinking ability, and learner autonomy between the two classes, and students in the experimental class more agree with the improvement of these abilities, indicating that the blended teaching classroom has more advantages compared to traditional teaching and is conducive to the development of students' comprehensive literacy.

Table 1. Independent sample t-test of the former CET 6 of the two classes

Item	Mean	SD	F	T	P
Listening	Exp-class 155.54	27.269	1.184	1.133	.262
	Con-class 146.67				
Reading	Exp-class 179.54	24.663	.185	1.727	.090
	Con-class 167.73				
Writing & Translation	Exp-class 145.43	29.191	4.650	1.405	.165
	Con-class 136.43				

Table 2. Independent sample t-test of the latter CET 6 of the two classes

Item	Mean	SD	F	T	P
Listening	Exp-class 168.43	27.189	1.198	.527	.600
	Con-class 162.07				
Reading	Exp-class 201.68	22.303	1.936	3.865	.000
	Con-class 174.10				
Writing & Translation	Exp-class 155.00	26.992	3.200	2.349	0.022
	Con-class 140.63				

Table 3. Paired sample t-tests of the former and latter CET 6 in the Exp-class

Item	Mean	T	P
Listening	-12.893	-3.432	0.002
Reading	-22.143	-7.801	0.000
Writing & Translation	-9.571	-4.603	0.000

Table 4. Paired sample t-tests of the former and latter CET 6 in the Con-class

Item	Mean	T	P
Listening	-15.400	-1.457	.156
Reading	-6.367	-2.992	.006
Writing & Translation	-4.200	-2.064	.048

Table 5. The independent sample t-test of questionnaires from two classes

Items	F	T	P
Improved my listening ability	.446	2.691	.010
Improved my speaking ability	4.951	2.642	.011
Improved my reading ability	.062	.458	.649
Improved my writing ability	2.220	1.476	.146
Improved my intercultural ability	1.418	2.948	.005
Improved my learning interest	.951	2.845	.006
Improved my information literacy	7.739	5.546	.000
Improved my critical thinking	.824	2.341	.023
Improved my learner autonomy	.161	2.752	.008

4 Discussion

Reading is a psychological cognitive activity in which readers decode the language and sentence structure of written materials, in order to understand their ideological content, while writing is the process of coding one's thoughts through word selection and sentence construction. Therefore, the reading and writing integrated teaching model has emerged, which is different from the traditional model of setting reading and writing as two independent subjects in foreign language teaching. In this research, students in the experimental class selected a newspaper article and wrote a reading report after class. This integrated reading and writing task design further exercised students' abilities in reading, summarizing, and elaborating arguments. At the same time, selecting articles can also exercise students' ability to independently seek information and evaluate the value of information.

In addition, the teaching design also required the students in the experimental class to complete an oral report during the semester, either in the form of the class presentation or micro-video sent to the class online platform. This task was designed to developing students' ability to extract, summarize and evaluate information, and to express themselves orally. The results of this teaching experiment show that the students' reading, writing, listening and speaking skills were improved through reading reports and oral tasks, and of which were more obvious in the experimental class. These two tasks were designed to help students understand that reading with purpose can quickly improve the speed and effectiveness of reading, and holistic language teaching based on reading can also exercise listening, speaking, and writing skills [8] and cultivate the ability of self-directed learning of English.

Pre-class searches, class discussions, after-class extensions, and online platform exchanges are all speculative activities carried out on the basis of reading English newspaper articles, so that students can understand the cultural differences between Chinese and foreign ways of thinking,

communication methods, values, historical background, social structure, etc. At the same time, it integrates ideological and political education, strengthening the input of traditional Chinese culture, analyzing cross-cultural misunderstandings and conflict cases, and realizing two-way cultural import. In the end, students will establish a cross-cultural consciousness and a cross-cultural personality, and form an ideology that can master English, tell Chinese stories well, shape China's image, and contribute to China's socialist modernization, as well as the spirit that can not only tolerate the advanced Western culture but also safeguard the fine traditions and national characteristics of the Chinese. Therefore, the English newspaper course is an activity to explore and study culture in the process of teaching and implementation, while the behavior practice of cross-cultural education cultivates students to understand the differences between different cultures and their own cultures from specific case discussions, and to achieve the ultimate goal of effective cross-cultural communication by consciously establishing a multi-dimensional way of thinking and enhancing the acceptance and judgment of different cultures.

This research shows that the blended teaching in the context of Internet plus provides electronic English news materials such as audios, videos and pictures, including many topics of interest to students, which will accumulate students' intercultural knowledge. Peer interaction or teacher-student communication online or in the class is beneficial for helping students establish thinking habits that consider problems from multiple perspectives. During the communication process, students become aware of cultural differences, thereby further regulating their intercultural communication activities.

5 Conclusion

To conclude, the fundamental purpose of intercultural education is to broaden students' global perspectives and enable them to engage in more effective intercultural communication with people from different cultural backgrounds. This study indicates that the teaching practice of the English newspaper course is a process of gradually implementing intercultural education in foreign language teaching. With the development of the modern information technology in the context of new media, especially the wide application of intelligent terminals (mobile phones), a large number of rich, timely and authentic reading materials have been brought to newspaper reading. The blended teaching with the reading and writing integrated teaching model established in this study cannot only be applied to English-major reading courses in universities, but also to non-English majors. It can also provide references for foreign language writing courses, improving students' overall language skills, expanding their knowledge of current events, enhancing their thinking ability, and promoting intercultural competence.

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