Shift of English Teacher’s Role In School-Based Blended Learning College English Course

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Abstract. Teacher is one of the most important elements of teaching. College English Blended Learning Model brings a shift of teacher’s roles compared with traditional “teacher-centered” class. Teacher’s roles influence how the teacher works in teaching practice, thus, to a large extent, affect the teaching practice and outcomes. Based on the observation and records in the process of building online English course and classroom teaching practice, this research analyzes the shift of teacher’s roles in blended learning: designer of teaching content, organizer of teaching activity, integration of teaching materials, and evaluation of teaching activities. Full awareness of teacher’s roles in blended learning ensures student’s effective learning. But the shift of teacher’s role is by no means teacher’s own business; it requires joint efforts of different parts.

1. Introduction

Schools all around the world are increasingly using blended approaches that combine online and face-to-face teaching and learning [1]. Nowadays, students’ learning methods, teacher’s teaching approaches, teaching strategies and teacher’s role shift along with blended learning. This is not only the change in teaching and learning, but also a continuous try of improving effectiveness of both teaching and learning based on deep analysis on students’ needs, teaching material and resources.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Blended learning

After the 1990s, with the development of information technology, E-learning starts to come into the field of education. To some extent, E-learning facilitates students’ learning, but the result is below the expectation without teacher’s deep involvement. Blended learning provides new mindsets and methods for teaching reform.

Blended learning starts from business world together with corporate training and then is adopted in higher education. According to Garrison, and Kanuka, Blended learning, also known as hybrid learning, combines online learning and face-to-face classroom learning[2]. It was brought to China by He Kekang in the 7th Global Chinese Conference on Computers in Education in 2003. He states blended learning combines the advantages of traditional learning and e-learning[3]. Blended learning fully displays teachers’ leading role in guiding, enlightening and monitoring, as well as encouraging learners’ initiative and creativity in learning process. Blending learning makes learning beyond the limitation of class room and time. Online learning becomes an extension of traditional classroom learning and an important part of blended learning. It is a quite flexible approach for both teachers and learners. The result is potentially a more robust educational experience than either traditional or fully online learning can offer [4]. Because of the advantages of blended learning like improving teaching effectiveness, encouraging interaction between teachers and students, instant feedback from learners, etc, many institutions and universities moved form online to blended learning programs and this is growing fast[5].

Blended learning is a mix of online learning and offline learning in form, but a combination of different teaching theories and teaching approaches in nature. From the learners’ perspective, blended learning is an ability of achieving learning goals by acquired equipment, tools, medias and books.
From teachers’ perspective, blended learning is an ability of achieving teaching goals by organizing and distributing acquired equipment, tools, media and books.

2.2 Teacher’s role

Since Classroom becomes the basic forms of education, teacher plays a leading role in classroom teaching by teaching and spreading knowledge. At the end of 19th century, lots of different teaching approaches appear along with social change and needs. Harmer states teacher roles “may change from one activity to another, or from one stage of an activity to another” in the classroom[6]. He raises a framework of teacher roles which are dependent on what students are wished to achieve as illustrated in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Feature</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Controller</td>
<td>The teacher takes charge of the whole class and activities by taking the roll, telling students instructions, organizing drills, reading aloud, and manifesting the teacher-fronted approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessor</td>
<td>Provides students with feedback regarding their performance and grades them in distinct ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrector</td>
<td>Offers students correction of their linguistic errors while assessing their language learning competence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizer</td>
<td>Organizes students to work on classroom activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompter</td>
<td>Prompts students so that they can proceed with learning procedure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource</td>
<td>Acts as students’ reliable resource when they encounter difficulties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Participates in students’ classroom activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor</td>
<td>Works with students individually or in small groups if they undertake challenging learning programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer</td>
<td>Observes students’ performance to offer them individual/group feedback.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The development of teacher’s role is a dynamic process along with the teaching practice. A teacher role is defined by what the teacher does in a given section. The shift of teacher’s role reflects the requirement of teaching reform and new instructional technology. Although there appear many different teaching approaches, English teachers, generally speaking, don’t restrict to one of them. Most of them choose to use different approaches according to different learning material, which is one of the characteristics of foreign language teaching in post-approach era. As Kumaravadivelu states, due to changeability of the needs, requirements and situations of language teaching and learning, there is no method that can take all variables and factors into consideration[7].

3. The Practice of Blended Learning Course

In 2013, Inner Mongolia University for the Nationalities started the reform of class reform project. Many teachers attend training which helps them better prepare for the transition. Until now more than 170 courses have been changed to blended learning courses. The teachers have common sense that besides adding technology, the design of the blended learning courses needs various changes in pedagogies, instructions, administrative processes, and communication. College English was among the first group of blended learning courses. Teachers are still on the way of creating a good course.

Generally speaking, the course design includes the following four parts: pre-course analysis (background, statue quo, expectation and problems); course plan (teaching aims, teaching hours, teaching process and teaching assessment); design (online and offline tasks); course building.
(teaching group, learning unit and supportive parts); implement (practice and feedback). Take unit one of new standard College English as an example, as is shown in the fishbone diagram, blended learning involves online and offline learning. Before class, the teachers’ needs to collect information and design online and offline teaching materials and activities based on the teaching aims. Before class, the students are required to finish online tasks: pre-test about grammar, discussion topic, listening and reading practice. All the materials are closely-related with the main theme of the unit. After checking students’ work, the teachers adjust their teaching plans based on students’ performance of online tasks. During the class, the teacher will focus on classroom teaching. They will further teach where most of the students make errors based on the analysis of their pre-test. Besides, the teacher will give feedback and arouse further discussion on the discussion topics. During this process, the teachers will do formative assessment on student’s performance. After class, the teachers give further questions and feedback on their teaching and students’ learning. Students are also required to do self-evaluation. College English blended learning course aims at creating a more personalized, student-centered course to ensure students’ learning.

![Blended learning fishbone diagram of unit 1 of new standard College English.](image)

### 4. English Teacher’s Roles in Blended Learning Course

Teacher is among the most important elements of teaching. Teacher plays a leading role in teaching. Facing with the various instructional technology, teacher’s role is not weakened but enhanced[8].

#### 4.1 Designer of teaching content

In the process of traditional teaching, teacher’s main task is to convey the knowledge to the students. Traditional classroom is teacher-centered, and they only implement the course. As for blended learning, teacher is not the only source of knowledge. Course is not only the carrier of knowledge, but a process of exploring knowledge by teacher and student together. In order to design the course better, the teaching groups analyze the problems of status quo of teaching, teachers and students’ expectation and problems; they need to be clear about the course plan including teaching aims, teaching hours, teaching process and teaching assessment; the main part is course design: what
are the online and offline tasks? How to better combine online learning and classroom learning? How to arrange the teaching materials? How to evaluate them? The successes of face-to-face classroom learning and online learning have great relationship with teacher’s design. Blended learning gives teachers more freedom to design their course. It also challenges teachers involved. On one hand, teacher needs to have a thorough understanding of teaching aims, teaching focus, teaching difficulties, teaching method, teaching procedures, etc. On the other hand, teacher has to know students’ English level, cognitive ability and learning strategies in order to better design online and offline tasks and activities.

4.2 Organizer of teaching activities

Teaching design reveals in the forms of various teaching activities including classroom and online learning. To organize teaching activities effectively, the teacher needs to have updated knowledge and good preparation of the teaching activities such as the aim, process, expectation and difficulties of each activity. When it comes to the teaching activities, they should facilitate students’ skills and be suitable to students’ language level and arouse their curiosities and interests. The variety of teaching activities is important, but they cannot overweigh the importance of acquiring knowledge or practicing skills in that form. Emphasis should not be put on the forms. In a word, teacher needs to create a positive learning atmosphere and make efforts to improve students’ learning. They need try to stimulate student’s interests and enthusiasm on learning by organizing various task-based, cooperative learning activities as well as individual, autonomous learning activities both online and offline. In addition, the teachers also monitor the platform and promote the interactive relation between online and classroom learning.

4.3 Integration of teaching materials

Teaching materials play an important role in the process of blended learning. Students’ learning motivation and effectiveness depends on resourceful teaching material and various forms. The teachers need to take learners’ individual differences, cognitive ability and learning strategies into consideration while designing the course. Meanwhile, the materials need to be updated easily. The teaching materials include words, pictures and video and audio from Internet and relevant PowerPoints and micro-lectures, which requires a lot of time and energy to make.

In traditional teaching, teachers can teach only if they have qualified major knowledge and know some basic computer techniques. But in blended learning, information techniques are an essential for teachers. Facing the massive, confusing learning materials from the Internet, students are easy to lose. It is the task for the teachers to compare and choose proper and good materials and rearrange them for the sake of student’s learning. The teachers need to have the awareness, knowledge and ability to keep up with the development of technology.

4.4 Evaluation of teaching activities

Teacher’s information technology literacy is closely related with the effectiveness of blended learning. Teachers evaluate students’ performance by ways of checking their online discussion, preview, learning process, learning outcomes, difficulties and problems. Meanwhile, it is important for the teachers to supervise and encourage the students to finish online tasks.

During the practice of classroom teaching, teachers also give formative assessment on students’ performance. Besides, the students are required to do self-evaluation and peer evaluation while learning. Furthermore, the teacher benefits a lot from reflecting on the teaching process. Through reflection on the whole blended learning process including online learning and classroom learning and keeping teaching journals, teacher’s role in different periods of blended learning, organization and implement of teaching activities, and student’s learning and performance, the teachers can find the problems in teaching and try to improve it. What’s more, this information is valuable firsthand for both future adjustment or correct of their teaching and teacher’s research. Teacher becomes the scaffold for students to obtain resource, utilize the resource, apply knowledge and analyze the information [9].
5. Conclusion

Blended learning College English course provides a platform which support students’ autonomous learning, cooperative learning and information sharing and challenge teacher’s ability of designing, supervising, assessing and managing in teaching practice. Thus, compared with traditional "teacher-centered" English class, there is an obvious shift of teacher’s role. The teacher’s role should be reconstructed in the new learning and teaching atmosphere. In blended learning course, teachers are no longer imparting the knowledge to their students, but becoming the designer of teaching content, organizer of teaching activity, integration of teaching materials, evaluation of teaching activities. The flexibility and complexity of foreign language teaching encourage teachers to reshape their roles and adapt to the development of society and technology.

6. References


