The Construction of a Blended English Teaching Model for Vocational Education Based on Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

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Abstract: With the rapid development of mobile internet technology, mobile learning has emerged as a mainstream learning method for the new generation of students. Based on the "Fishpond Theory," this paper proposes a blended learning model for vocational English education, utilizing the WeChat platform on smartphones. The objective is to integrate the benefits of traditional classroom teaching with mobile learning to enhance students' autonomous learning abilities and improve their English learning outcomes. This paper reviews relevant theories and literature, explaining the basic concepts of Fishpond Theory, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning, and blended learning. It further designs a three-stage teaching model construction path, encompassing front-end analysis, activity and resource design, and teaching model evaluation, tailored to the characteristics of vocational English education. Through the WeChat platform's resource distribution, personalized learning support, and online-offline interactive feedback, teachers can effectively guide students toward autonomous and in-depth learning. The findings indicate that this model significantly increases student motivation and engagement. However, in practice, it is crucial to strengthen the cultivation of students' learning habits and the guidance and supervision provided by teachers.

Keywords: Vocational English education; Blended learning; Fishpond Theory; Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL); WeChat platform

1. Introduction

In recent years, the rise of the "millennial" generation of learners has made internet-based learning their predominant learning style. The widespread use of mobile devices, including smartphones and tablets, has enabled students to engage in personalized learning anytime and anywhere [1]. Mobile learning not only aligns with students' learning habits but also supports efficient access to educational resources and facilitates autonomous knowledge construction. In particular, within the context of highly flexible learning schedules and

environments, it demonstrates significant potential for application.

With ongoing educational reforms, blended learning has become a pivotal direction for English teaching innovation. Blended learning combines the strengths of traditional classroom instruction with online learning, allowing for teacher-led guidance while fostering student autonomy and personalized development. Specifically, the integration of mobile platforms such as smartphones and WeChat provides substantial convenience and innovative opportunities for vocational English education. Through these platforms, teachers can expand learning channels and environments by distributing learning resources, assigning interactive tasks, and facilitating communication, thus ensuring learning support is accessible anytime and anywhere. Consequently, constructing a vocational English teaching model that integrates traditional classroom methods with mobile learning is not only an inevitable trend in educational reform but also an effective strategy for improving student learning outcomes, narrowing the interaction gap between teachers and students, and enhancing classroom engagement.

2. Concepts and literature review

This paper proposes a blended teaching model that integrates mobile language learning via the WeChat platform with traditional classroom teaching, grounded in the Fish Pond Theory. The objective is to enhance students' learning autonomy and improve the efficiency of English language learning.

2.1. Fish Pond Theory

The Fish Pond Theory was originally proposed by a renowned marketing scholar to describe strategies for attracting customers through diversification. The theory compares customers to fish in a pond, with the pond representing a gathering space for customers. Each fish in the pond has unique needs, and the pond owner should provide different types of bait to maximize the catch. In an educational context, the traditional classroom is likened to the "pond," with each student as a "fish," while the teacher assumes the role of the "fisherman." Teachers are tasked with offering hierarchical and differentiated learning resources and guidance tailored to students' learning needs, individual differences, and language proficiency, much like providing various baits to attract fish. This approach stimulates students' interest in learning and facilitates optimal learning outcomes. Li and Nie [2] applied the Fish Pond Theory to explore effective strategies for designing learning resources through WeChat public accounts.

2.2. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) refers to the use of mobile devices, such as smartphones, tablets, and electronic dictionaries, to support language acquisition [3]. Burston [4] conducted a review of 345 empirical studies on MALL published between 1994 and 2012, confirming the positive impact of mobile technology on language learning. Chen and Jia [5] summarized the state of MALL research in China by analyzing papers published in CSSCI-indexed journals from 2000 to 2019, noting that most studies focus on informal learning in extracurricular contexts. Relatively few studies have addressed the application of mobile technology in classroom settings.

In recent years, empirical research on MALL in China has grown, encompassing studies such as a blended vocabulary learning model based on the "BaiCiZhan" app [6], research on university students' autonomous English learning in mobile-assisted contexts [7], action research on college English listening and speaking using mobile platforms [8], and a study on the effects of two peer feedback models on English oral output in mobile-

assisted learning environments [9]. These studies provide a robust theoretical foundation for constructing a mobile platform-based blended English teaching model.

2.3. Blended teaching model

In recent years, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and big data technologies has facilitated the evolution of blended learning toward more personalized and intelligent approaches. By integrating AI and big data, blended learning models provide not only flexible learning resources and efficient classroom interactions but also precise analyses of students' learning behaviors, enabling teachers to develop personalized learning paths. Research indicates that emerging technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) will further enhance mobile language learning, making it more immersive and interactive while offering richer learning experiences.

Moreover, the integration of social platforms, online collaboration tools, and learning communities significantly enhance student interaction and collaboration, contributing to improved language learning outcomes. A blended English teaching model based on smartphones and the WeChat platform addresses the limitations of traditional classroom instruction while enhancing learning outcomes and student engagement through the application of these advanced technologies.

3. Pathway construction of a blended English teaching model in vocational colleges

This paper draws on experiences of integrating mobile learning with traditional classroom teaching from both domestic and international contexts. Based on the public English course standards for vocational college students and the Fish Pond Theory, a blended teaching model utilizing the WeChat platform and mobile learning is proposed. The construction pathway is divided into three stages: Front-End Analysis, Activity and Resource Design, and Teaching Evaluation Design [10]. Below is a detailed explanation of each stage.

3.1. Front-end analysis

Front-end analysis forms the foundation of the blended teaching model design, aimed at assessing the feasibility of course implementation [11]. This stage primarily involves analyzing learner characteristics (including language proficiency, learning styles, and learning attitudes), external environmental conditions (such as access to mobile devices and familiarity with social software), and course objectives. By conducting front-end analysis, a scientific basis is established for subsequent instructional design, ensuring the model's adaptability and effectiveness.

In this model design, the project team conducted a basic survey of students using an online questionnaire. Based on the analysis of learner characteristics, students were categorized into four language proficiency groups, with each group assigned to a dedicated WeChat group to form distinct learning communities. Teachers selected and distributed appropriate learning resources tailored to each group's language abilities.

WeChat, as a widely used mobile social platform, served as the core medium for this teaching model. Its ability to share multimodal information, including text, voice, images, and videos, makes it an ideal tool for supporting group teaching. Through the establishment of WeChat groups, teachers were able to implement one-to-many communication and facilitate resource sharing. Additionally, WeChat's instant messaging functions enhanced interaction and feedback between teachers and students, as well as among students, fostering a collaborative and interactive learning environment.

3.2. Activity and resource design

In a blended teaching model, activity and resource design are central elements that directly influence the success of the teaching approach [12]. This model employs mobile language learning as an auxiliary tool, with traditional classroom teaching serving as the primary component. It extends learning beyond the classroom, enhancing pre- and post-class interactions and facilitating information sharing between teachers and students.

3.2.1. Traditional classroom teaching as the primary component

In the classroom, the teacher fulfills multiple roles: as an organizer of activities to facilitate teacher-student interaction; as an authoritative interpreter to clarify key learning points; and as a guide to learning strategies, providing students with methods for efficient study. Students' roles also evolve, transitioning from passive recipients to active participants. During class, students engage collaboratively with the teacher to analyze and interpret course content. Outside the classroom, learning activities continue, reinforcing the knowledge acquired.

3.2.2. Mobile language learning as an auxiliary tool

3.2.2.1. Establishing different WeChat groups

In accordance with the Fish Pond Theory, teachers categorize students based on their learning needs and language proficiency levels (e.g., beginner, intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced). Students are assigned to distinct WeChat groups corresponding to their proficiency levels, creating "ponds" with learners of similar abilities. Teachers distribute hierarchical learning resources tailored to the characteristics of each group, thereby fostering diverse learning environments that address the varying needs of students.

3.2.2.2. Providing microlearning resources

Mobile language learning capitalizes on fragmented time and microlearning opportunities, enabling learners to access resources during brief intervals [13]. Teachers should select mobile-friendly materials aligned with the curriculum and course objectives, dividing them into concise, manageable segments. This design allows students to engage in effective learning during short breaks, enhancing flexibility and accessibility.

3.2.2.3. Creating contextualized and personalized learning

Language learning requires interaction between learners, peers, and the content. Designing an effective learning environment is essential, and the WeChat platform provides flexible contexts to support this process. Learning resources and activities should integrate contextual, social, and individual elements for comprehensive student development:

(1) Contextualization: Teachers can leverage the WeChat platform to create authentic language scenarios, such as sharing current events or anecdotes, to spark interest and motivate students. This approach enhances engagement and encourages active participation in language learning.

(2) Social interaction: Given the limited classroom time for showcasing language skills, teachers can establish learning communities on WeChat to organize discussions on topics of interest. This facilitates peer interaction and the social application of language skills, fostering deeper learning.

(3) Individualization: Recognizing that students have unique needs, teachers should encourage personalized engagement with learning materials. By tailoring learning methods to individual preferences and schedules, students can internalize knowledge more effectively.

Mobile language learning involves an interactive "leader-subject" model, where teachers organize

instructional activities, facilitate meaning-making, and address learning challenges. Students actively participate in constructing knowledge and achieving learning objectives [14]. The WeChat platform plays a pivotal role in resource management, ensuring that students can access knowledge conveniently while promoting autonomous learning. Through WeChat, students share their progress with peers and teachers, integrating in-class and out-of-class learning to enhance both outcomes and language proficiency.

Within the WeChat groups, teachers and students collaboratively engage in retrieving resources, discussing topics, and completing joint tasks. By sharing diverse resources across interconnected platforms, an interactive and collaborative learning community is established. This environment promotes knowledge sharing, internalization, and language skill expansion, optimizing the learning process.

The teacher's role in supervision and guidance is critical in both online and offline settings. Teachers should monitor online discussions regularly, providing timely feedback and addressing students' questions. In addition, the effectiveness of mobile learning can be assessed through quizzes or in-class tests, followed by feedback and problem analysis. Teachers should also establish clear learning guidelines within the WeChat learning environment, including task division and progress monitoring, to ensure the smooth operation of the learning community.

3.3. Teaching model evaluation

The evaluation approach incorporates both summative and formative assessments, with formative evaluation integrated throughout the implementation process of the blended teaching model. Specifically, the evaluation includes self-assessment (focusing on individual autonomous learning performance and outcomes), peer evaluation (gathering students' feedback on learning resources and the teacher's supervision and guidance), and teacher feedback (addressing student behavior, identifying misconceptions, and resolving issues). The initial stages—front-end analysis and activity and resource design—provide critical foundations for this evaluation phase. Data collected through surveys and interviews offers valuable insights and directions for optimizing activity and resource design.

In the blended mobile language learning model based on the WeChat platform, mobile language learning functions as an informal learning mode, with WeChat primarily utilized for resource dissemination and sharing. After preliminary implementation over one semester, surveys and interviews were conducted to evaluate the approach. The findings revealed that, as an informal learning supplement to classroom teaching, students engaged with WeChat learning resources infrequently. Most students accessed the resources sporadically during fragmented time, while the platform was often used more for social interaction than for learning purposes.

Additionally, students expressed difficulty in adapting to using mobile phones for language learning, citing inconvenience in taking notes as a primary concern. These findings underscore the need for enhanced scientific guidance and effective supervision to optimize the mobile language learning model. Teachers are encouraged to employ strategies such as "rational education," "dynamic supervision," and "emotional support" to foster meaningful learning outcomes and ensure the model achieves its intended objectives [15].

4. Conclusion

Regardless of the approach—traditional classroom teaching, massive open online courses, micro-classes, flipped classrooms, or blended learning models—the fundamental objective remains to enhance teaching quality and talent cultivation by innovating teaching methods and stimulating active learning among students.

With the increasing prevalence of smartphones, mobile language learning has become a significant supplement to traditional classroom instruction, and the WeChat social platform has emerged as a valuable mobile tool to support language teaching.

Through the three-phase construction process encompassing front-end analysis, activity and resource design, and teaching model evaluation, this blended teaching model addresses the limitations of traditional classrooms. It empowers teachers to adopt multiple roles, extends classroom teaching into extracurricular domains, and seamlessly integrates formal and informal learning modes. The model enables students to access extensive learning resources across various contexts, experience personalized learning opportunities, utilize convenient learning channels, and develop autonomous learning abilities.

Furthermore, the establishment of a flexible learning community fosters interaction, collaboration, and resource sharing between teachers and students, creating a positive and engaging learning environment. Despite these advantages, further validation of the model's effectiveness in optimizing student learning outcomes remains necessary. This requires continued implementation and evaluation within specific teaching practices to ensure its success and adaptability.

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