

## Development of Cross-Cultural Communication Course Based on Situational Language Teaching Combined with Blended Learning to Enhance English Major Students' Cross-Cultural Communicative Ability in Xi'an University

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### Abstract

**Background and Aims:** Since the founding of New China, especially after entering the 21st century, the growth rate of the number of ordinary colleges and universities and the number of students in the school has accelerated significantly, and higher education has moved from the elite to the common people. The continuous growth of the number of colleges, universities, and high-level specialized personnel training has laid a talent foundation for the socialist modernization drive of all walks of life in China. Cross-cultural communication has become a necessity in people's everyday lives with globalization, the internet, and the general shrinking of time and space. Cross-cultural communication has become much more important than before. So does the cross-cultural communication course. This study was a research and development study. The objectives of this research were 1) to study the background information focusing on course components and existing problems of Cross-cultural communication course, 2) to develop a cross-cultural communication course based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning to enhance cross-cultural communicative ability, and 3) to study the results of implementing cross-cultural communication course based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning to enhance cross-cultural communicative ability.

**Materials and Methods:** The sample was 30 junior students, majoring in English at Xi'an University, the People's Republic of China. They were derived by cluster random sampling. The instruments used in this research were 1) a cross-cultural communication course based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning 2) 8 lesson plans 3) a cross-cultural communicative ability test with a reliability of .73, ( $t = 7.71$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and 4) a student's satisfaction questionnaire with a reliability of .79. The statistics used for data analysis were mean, standard deviation, and t-test for one sample and t-test for dependent samples.

**Results:** The research results were found that 1) Phase 1: the draft course components consist of six aspects. Principles 2. objectives 3. contents 4. instructional strategy 5. media and resources 6. Evaluation and the problems of this course were: 1. The current principles are based on teacher-centered theory. 2. The current objectives focused on the acquisition of basic knowledge, with little attention to developing cross-cultural communicative ability. 3. The content was not up to date. 4. Teaching strategies based on traditional methods. 5. The media was a little out of date. 6. The evaluation method did not cover three domains. 2) Phase 2: the cross-cultural communication course based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning consisted of 6 components: 1) formulate principles, 2) determine objectives, 3) select content, 4) construct instructional strategy, 5) select media and resources, 6) design evaluation methods. Formulate the principles based on student-centered theory, determine objectives to solve practical problems, select content, construct instructional strategy, and select teaching material and evaluation, which are verified by 5 experts (2 experts in curriculum and instruction, 2 experts in evaluation methodology, and 1 expert in the English language). ( $M=4.33$ ,  $SD=0.55$ ). The teaching process has five steps: 1. student grouping and resource allocation (online), 2. presentation of a situation (offline), 3. supervised learning process (offline), 4. achievement evaluation and performance extraction (offline), 5. test and application of new theory and new experience (online). 3) Phase 3: after implementation of the course, pretest scores ( $M=19$ ,  $SD=1.64$ ) of students' cross-cultural communicative ability were lower than post-test scores ( $M=23.67$ ,  $SD=3.34$ ) at a .01 level of statistical significance, and students' satisfaction toward the course ( $M=4.33$ ,  $SD=.39$ ) were higher than the 3.51 criterion at the significance level of .05.

**Conclusion:** The innovation of this research is the developed course components, especially the teaching method, which is based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning that allows students to analyze

extensive cases in cross-cultural communication within carefully designed teaching tasks. In evaluation, due to the high proportion of the total score allocated to the cross-cultural communication ability and the learner-determined topics, situational language teaching combined with a blended learning approach can greatly stimulate English major students' interest and play a positive role in the actual scene, helping to cultivate students' cross-cultural communicative ability. The situational language teaching combined with a blended learning approach can also increase their satisfaction with the developed course. This study has both theoretical and practical significance. Firstly, the research proposes the role of situational language teaching combined with a blended learning approach that is based on students' performance in cross-cultural communication. Secondly, it is confirmed in this study that language use and production are an essential part of cross-cultural communication learning, and that one can learn cross-cultural communication through using the language. Situational language teaching combined with blended learning is suitable for daily teaching because it can enhance the cross-cultural communicative ability of English major students and help increase their satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Cross-cultural Communication Course; Situational Language Teaching; Blended Learning; Cross-cultural Communicative Ability

## Introduction

The Chinese government has been committed to improving the quality and level of English education. To promote English education reform, the Ministry of Education has issued a series of policy documents, encouraging innovative teaching methods, enhancing teacher training, optimizing teaching materials resources, and more. (Estagi & Rahimi, 2018)

Since 1978, China has made remarkable achievements and entered what has been lauded as a New Era. In this New Era, the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative as well as the building of a community of shared future for mankind poses new requirements for higher education and its talent cultivation. At the same time, China has taken the restoration and expansion of sending overseas students as a strategic decision to open up its education to the outside world. It has vigorously developed studies in China and insisted on running schools according to national conditions, which has formed its characteristics and advantages. Chinese colleges and universities have strengthened the introduction of talent. They have formed an international education system with Chinese characteristics while absorbing the advanced ideas of running schools from the West, and have produced special characters in international exchanges and the intersection of China and the West. (Estagi & Rahimi, 2018)

The cross-cultural communication course is a professional core course for English undergraduate majors. This course helps students understand the basic concepts and theories in the field of cultural communication and learn the ways of using these theories to analyze and compare Chinese and Western cultures. Specifically, the goals of this course are: 1) to describe, learn, and see common and important patterned social and cultural differences, 2) to provide a space for students to reflect on their own experience with cultural differences, and 3) to encourage students to engage with different cultures in a hands-on way and to meaningfully experience cross-cultural communication. (Deardorff, 2014)

## Research Questions

The research questions addressed by this research were as follows;

1) What is the background information for developing the cross-cultural communication course? Based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning to enhance English major students' cross-cultural communicative ability?

2) What are the components of cross-cultural communication courses based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning to enhance English major students' cross-cultural communicative ability?

3) How is the effectiveness of implementing a cross-cultural communication course based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning to enhance English major students' cross-cultural communicative ability?

3.1) How does the effectiveness of implementing cross-cultural communication courses based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning compare with Cross-cultural communicative ability before and after implementing cross-cultural communication courses?

3.2) What is the students' satisfaction with the cross-cultural communication course after implementing the course?

### Objectives

The objectives of this research were as follows;

1) To study the background information focusing on course components and existing problems of cross-cultural communication courses.

2) To develop cross-cultural communication courses based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning to enhance cross-cultural communicative ability.

3) To study the results of implementing cross-cultural communication courses based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning to enhance cross-cultural communicative ability.

3.1) To compare cross-cultural communicative ability before and after implementing cross-cultural communication courses.

3.2) To compare students' satisfaction with cross-cultural communication courses after implementing the course with the criterion of 3.51.

### Literature Review

#### Cross-cultural Communications course

A cross-cultural communication course refers to an applied discipline that studies the specific operation and application of cross-cultural communication in teachers' daily teaching. It integrates ideological cultivation, interpersonal application, and operational skills. A cross-cultural communication course is a core course for English majors to improve their professional quality. The purpose of setting up cross-cultural communication courses is to cultivate students' cross-cultural communicative ability. The teaching is aimed at junior students of English majors. In general, the course includes the following course components. Principles, 2. objectives, 3. teaching contents, 4. instructional strategy, 5. media and resources, 6. evaluation methods.

After studying the current course components, the specific problems of the current course were as follows:

1) Principles: The current course is mainly teacher-centered and neglects students' feedback and their active roles in the learning process.

2) Objectives: The objective of the current course is just focus on knowledge, which pays less attention to analysis and practice.

3) Contents: Students have insufficient knowledge of cross-cultural before learning this course.

4) Instructional strategies: The teaching strategies employed in the current course are not sufficiently effective. There is an excessive emphasis on language learning, while insufficient attention is given to fostering students' ability.

5) Media and resources: The current course teaching mainly focuses on classroom learning which is short of multiple resources such as e-resources.

6) Evaluation: The current evaluation system is not comprehensive enough, relying too heavily on single test scores and assessing only theoretical knowledge while neglecting students' practical application abilities. This evaluation method fails to fully reflect the actual outcomes of the course.

Based on the problems above, the researcher is interested in the development of a cross-cultural communication course based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning to improve English major students' cross-cultural communicative abilities.

### Situational language teaching

Situational language teaching (SLT) is an effective instruction paradigm for English teaching in terms of providing vocabulary and sentence patterns with their frequent situations through learning materials. The origins of this approach began in the 1920s and 1930s with the work of the British. The leaders of this movement were Harold Palmer and A.S Hornby. They were the most prominent figures in British twentieth-century language teaching. What they attempted was to develop a more scientific foundation for an oral approach to teaching English. The result was a systematic study of the principles and procedures that could be applied to the selection and organization of the content of a language course.

The theory of language underlying situational language teaching can be characterized as a type of British structuralism, where speech was regarded as the basis of language, and structure was viewed as being at the heart of speaking ability. While the theory of learning is a type of behaviorist habit-learning theory, it addresses primarily the process rather than the condition of learning. As Palmer has pointed out, there are three processes in learning a language: receiving the knowledge or materials, fixing it in the memory by repetition, and using it in actual practice until it becomes a personal skill.

### Blended Learning

Blended learning is not a new concept, which has existed for many years. There are different definitions of what the content of blending is. At present, the general understanding in academic circles is that blended learning is the combination of face-to-face learning and online learning (Sun, 2016). Since the 1990s, along with the improvement of multimedia technology and long-distance technology, e-learning has been applied and developed rapidly in the field of education. So, it is an important way for students, especially students with multicultural backgrounds, to get more learning resources even when they face unpredictable situations such as COVID-19.



**Figure 1** Offline learning, online learning, Blended learning (Zhao, 2020)

Teaching steps of situational language teaching combined with blended learning

Based on the characteristics of situational language teaching combined with blended learning, the researcher combines two teaching methods in teaching steps. The five fundamental steps of teaching methods are typically as follows:

- Step 1: Student grouping and resource allocation (online)
- Step 2: Presentation of a situation (offline)
- Step 3: Supervised learning process (offline)
- Step 4: Achievement evaluation and performance extraction (offline)
- Step 5: Test and application of new theory and new experience (online)

### Cross-cultural communicative ability

Cross-cultural communicative ability is the capacity to effectively and sensitively communicate across cultural boundaries and interact with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. This ability



encompasses both verbal and nonverbal communication skills, as well as an understanding of cultural norms, values, customs, and perspectives that influence communication. (Chen, 2005)

Cross-cultural communication is not only a need but a requirement for success in today's pluralistic society. The cost of being inadequately equipped with such skill is insurmountably high. Being able to communicate cross-culturally increases success in international business, enables productive interpersonal contacts, and decreases mutual misunderstanding. Chen (2005) noted that the interdependence of our global communities calls for more skillful interactions across nations and linguistic boundaries. According to Xu (2011), cultural intelligence is required to bridge cultural differences and cultivate cross-cultural relationships. These authors advised that acquiring knowledge in intercultural interactions, being mindful of cultural differences, as well as learning how to behave and perform in various cultures, added to the repertoire of cross-cultural communication adequacy.

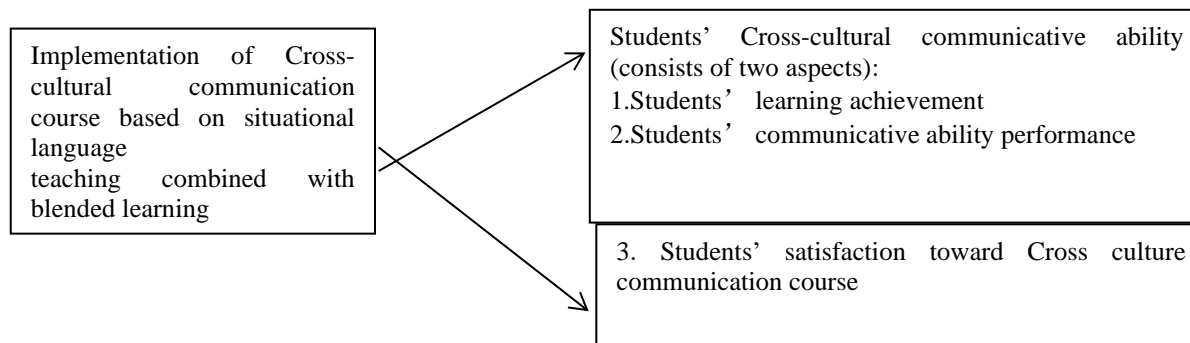
In this research, by implementing a cross-culture communication course based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning, the student's cross-cultural communicative ability will be improved from two aspects: students' learning achievement and students' communicative ability performance which will be evaluated by the test paper and students' communicative performance.

### Research Conceptual Framework

The researcher developed the course by using curriculum and instruction development theories of educators such as Tyler (1950), Taba (1962), and Vygotsky (1997) to obtain and improve the course components. For the instructional strategies, this research used situational language teaching combined with blended learning, which was based on constructivism, to enhance the cross-cultural communicative ability of English junior major students at Xi'an University.

#### Independent Variable

#### Dependent Variable



**Figure 2** The independent variable and dependent variable

### Methodology

**Population and sample:** The population in this study was 167 3rds. The year English major students at the undergraduate level at Xi'an University, China. The sample of this study was 30 students (1 classroom) of junior English majors junior students studying in the 2023 academic year at Xi'an University. They were derived from the cluster random sampling method.

**Research instruments:**

1. A Cross-cultural communication course based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning, which was evaluated by five experts (2 experts in curriculum and instruction, 2 experts in evaluation methodology, and 1 expert in English) using the 15-item evaluation form. The result was that the lowest mean score was 3.8 (SD=0.45), and the highest mean score was 4.8(SD=0.45). It was revealed that the quality of the Cross-cultural communication course, based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning, was at a high level.

2. 8 lesson plans which were evaluated by five experts using an evaluation form. The result was that of the same group of five experts the lowest mean score was 4.33 ( $M=4.33$ ,  $SD=0.59$ ), and the highest mean score was 4.51 ( $M=4.51$ ,  $SD=0.63$ ). It was revealed that the quality of lesson plans was at a high level.

3. A Cross-cultural communicative ability test: The test for students' cross-cultural communicative ability consisted of 2 parts which had an item discrimination range from 0.27-0.73, an item difficulty ranges from 0.36-.41, and a reliability of 0.73, which means the test was qualified and can be used to collect data.

4. A student satisfaction questionnaire: The questionnaire was provided to 5 experts for evaluating the questionnaire's quality. The draft satisfaction questionnaire had item discrimination ranging from 0.22-0.52, and a reliability of .79, which meant that the satisfaction questionnaire was qualified and could be used to collect data.

#### Data collection

The course was implemented in the sample in the 2023 academic year. The procedures of data collection during the course implementation process were as follows) Give orientation to students about the new course. The sample was given a pretest for measuring cross-cultural communicative ability with the constructed instrument. 2) Teach the students using the 8 lesson plans based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning, and the allocation time for instruction was 32 hours. During instruction through the course implementation process, the researcher observed and recorded data, including the teaching process, learning process, classroom atmosphere, students' behavior, and teachers' behavior that occurred in the classroom. 3) After finishing the instruction, the sample received the posttest by using the same instrument as the pretest. 4) The sample was given a student satisfaction questionnaire to express their opinion toward the course.

#### Data analysis

In this study, quantitative data were analyzed by using the statistical program in line with the research objectives. Statistics used to determine the different significance at the .05 level of scores on cross-cultural communicative ability before and after learning through a cross-cultural communication course based on the situational language teaching combined with blended learning was a t-test for dependent samples. Statistics used to assess the students' satisfaction toward cross-cultural communication courses based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning was t- a test for one sample. Moreover, qualitative data were analyzed and interpreted by content analysis and interpretation through the inductive method.

## Results

1. The finding of a comparison of cross-cultural communicative ability before and after learning through cross-cultural communication courses based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning.

**Table 1** Comparing the different scores of cross-cultural communicative ability test before and after learning through a cross-cultural communication course based on the situational language teaching combined with blended learning

Group	Full scores	n	Pretest scores		Post-test scores		t	p
Experimental group	25	30	M	SD	M	SD	7.711*	0.01
			19	1.64	23.67	3.34	*	

\* The significance level:  $p < .01$

The results of the cross-cultural communicative ability of 30 students before and after learning through a cross-cultural communication course based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning revealed that the mean scores of the pretest of students' cross-cultural communicative ability were 19, SD was 1.64, and mean scores of the posttest was 23.67, SD was 3.34. The finding revealed that after learning through cross-cultural communication courses, posttest scores of students' cross-cultural

communicative ability were greater than pretest scores at a .01 level of statistical significance ( $t = 7.71$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

2. The finding of a comparison of students' satisfaction after learning through a cross-cultural communication course based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning, with the criterion set at 3.51, which was analyzed by using- t-test for one sample presented in the table below.

**Table 2** Comparing the different scores of students' satisfaction after learning through a Cross-cultural communication course based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning, with the criterion set at a 3.51 score

Group	n	Full score	Criterion score	M	SD	t	p
Experimental group	30	5.00	3.51	4.33	0.39	6.65**	.001

\* $p < .01$

As presented in Table 2, the mean score of students' satisfaction after learning through a cross-cultural communication course based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning was 4.33, and the standard deviation was 0.39. From possible full marks of 5.0, the satisfaction level was statistically higher than the determined criterion of 3.51 at a .01 level of statistical significance. This indicated that student satisfaction toward Cross cross-cultural communication courses was at a high level.

## Conclusion

Through the comparative analysis of the results of the pre-test and post-test of the English major students using the teaching method of situational language teaching combined with blended learning. The conclusion was as follows:

1. The cross-cultural communicative ability data analysis about pre-test and post-test showed that the mean score of post-test data was higher than that of pre-test data. When the confidence level was .05, the correlation between pre-test data and post-test data was 0.99, and the t-test value Sig. = 0.000 < .05 (The mean of the pre-test was 39.97, and the mean of the post-test was 43.95).

2. The student's satisfaction was very high level. The findings of a comparison of students' satisfaction after learning through cross-cultural communication courses based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning, with the criterion set at 70%, were analyzed by using a t-test for one sample. The lowest Mean score was 3.95 (SD = 0.50), and the highest Mean score was 4.55 (SD = 0.55). The mean score of students' satisfaction after learning through a cross-cultural communication course based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning was 4.35, and the standard deviation was 0.23. From possible full marks of 5.0, the satisfaction level was statistically higher than the determined criterion of 70% at the .05 level of statistical significance.

In this study, SPSS software was used to evaluate the students' satisfaction with the teaching of a cross-cultural communication course based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning. The results show that students have higher satisfaction with the cross-cultural communication course based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning. The classroom practice of cross-cultural communication courses based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning cultivates students' ability and character, such as problem-solving, cooperation, and communication with each other. Students will be involved in learning faster, helping to enhance cross-cultural communicative ability.

## Discussion

Discussion on research findings according to research objectives as follows:

1. Study the background information, focusing on course components and existing problems of cross-cultural communication courses.



The findings of this study were: the draft course components consist of six aspects. Principles 2. objectives 3. contents 4. instructional strategy 5. media and resources 6. Evaluation and the problems of this course were: 1) The principles of the current course are outdated. 2) The objectives of the current course are solely focused on knowledge. 3) The content of the current course lacks practical training for students' behavior. 4) The teaching strategy is centered around teacher-led instruction. 5) The textbook is insufficient to meet requirements and needs improvement. 6) The assessment method primarily emphasizes theoretical knowledge. This is because the current course primarily focuses on knowledge and theory, lacking practical cross-cultural communicative ability. The researcher indicates that the current cross-cultural communication course is not up-to-date, emphasizing theoretical knowledge rather than practical cross-cultural communicative ability. The findings were derived from teachers' and students' interview questions and university documents.

2. Develop a cross-cultural communication course based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning to improve cross-cultural communicative ability for junior English majors junior students.

Based on situational language teaching and blended learning, a cross-cultural communication course is developed. In cross-cultural communication courses based on situational language teaching and blended learning, the course components consist of principles, objectives, content, instructional strategy, material, and evaluation, which are based on curriculum development theories. Considering the background information and existing problems in the current cross-cultural communication course, the development of the course is centered around students, focusing on principles, objectives, content, teaching strategies, media, and resources, as well as evaluation. Through these improvements, students can enhance their cross-cultural communicative ability, better solve real-world cross-cultural communication problems, and effectively cultivate their cross-cultural communicative ability. The development and implementation of the cross-cultural communication course based on situational language teaching and blended learning may enable students to better adapt to post-graduation employment.

3. Implementing the cross-cultural communication course based on situational language teaching combined with a blended learning process

The students' cross-cultural communicative ability test scores showed a statistically significant increase compared to the pre-test level at the .50 significance level. This may be due to the following reasons: 1) this can be attributed to the fact that situational language teaching combined with blended learning methods consisted of 5 steps:

Step 1: Student Grouping and resource allocation (online)

Step 2: Presentation of a situation (offline)

Step 3: Supervised learning process (offline)

Step 4: Achievement evaluation and performance extraction (offline)

Step 5: Test and application of new theory and new experience (online)

which could ignite students' interest, transforming their learning from a passive teacher's role process to an active one, thereby enhancing enthusiasm and initiative in learning. 2) Situational language teaching combined with blended learning indeed seems to contribute to improving students' attitudes and confidence in cross-cultural communication. Situational language teaching combined with blended learning proves to be a feasible and effective method in cross-cultural communication teaching. Situational language teaching combined with blended learning increases students' output practice, fostering awareness of learners towards their practical ability. In this way, comprehension and output are intertwined, leading to a deeper processing of input, turning it into absorption and output. 3) In the classroom, there is an intimate interaction between teachers and students, communication and discussion among students, mutual support and understanding within the team, promoting effective learning, and improving student collaboration. Encouraging students to role-play and analyze the cases extensively helps overcome cross-cultural communication misunderstandings, effectively cultivating their cross-cultural communicative ability. 4) Situational language teaching combined with blended learning can assist students in alleviating anxiety and boosting their confidence, thereby enhancing their motivation, and increasing both the quantity and quality of their







cross-cultural communication ability. Situational language teaching combined with blended learning can be seen as a pioneer in this field.

## Recommendations

### Recommendation for implication

1. Situational language teaching combined with blended learning changes the situation that teachers were the masters of classroom teaching in the past, and teachers themselves become the guides and supervisors of teaching. Teachers should pay attention to the feasibility of learning task design and the effect after completing the task. Try to avoid tasks that are too trivial and have little effect.

2. In the implementation of blended learning, compared to former offline learning, online learning undoubtedly distracts students' attention from regular traditional learning content. Hence, teachers should pay more attention to the progress and quality of online learning. Compact course arrangement and interaction between online and offline implementation allow students to learn autonomously, and try to decrease the possibilities of involuntary learning. Teachers should design reasonable learning tasks, ensuring that students clearly understand the content, methods, and purpose of online learning, including the evaluation criteria, which can often remind students to arrange the learning content online and offline.

3. Teachers need to pay attention to collaboration between teachers and students. From a psychological point of view, teachers and students should be in a state of mutual understanding. However, in the Cyber Age, the speed of knowledge and information updates is too fast, which may lead to information imbalance and misunderstanding between teachers and students. Therefore, teachers should often communicate with students to understand their learning and psychological state. Through a series of training lectures, workshops, or training programs organized by the nation, society, the schools of colleges or universities, teachers' abilities constantly improve to adapt to the requirements and challenges of students.

### Recommendation for further research

1. Due to limitations at the academic level and external resources, this study still has some shortcomings in exploring the teaching methods of situational language teaching combined with blended learning. Further exploration and experimentation are needed in the subsequent stages.

2. One class cannot represent the entire proficiency level of English major students, so the teaching methods of situational language teaching combined with blended learning need to be validated in more schools to make the experimental results more convincing.

3. In future teaching activities, this study will continue to reflect on and improve the shortcomings of situational language teaching combined with blended learning in practice. In the researcher's opinion, with the continuous popularization of information technology and in-depth research, the value of situational language teaching combined with blended learning will be more perfectly reflected in future teaching. Due to the limited practice time and lack of experience in the initial stage of exploration, the research on the teaching mode of situational language teaching combined with blended learning has just started. For the following research, course development can conduct research on the sustainability of this combined model to fulfill the development of cross-cultural communication courses based on situational language teaching combined with blended learning.

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