Development of Introduction to English Literature Course Based on Blended Learning Combined with Critical Thinking Process to Enhance English Reading Ability of English Major Students in Xi'an University

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Abstract

Background and Aim: This study was a research and development study. The objectives of this research were to 1) study the background information focusing on the course components and existing problems of the Introduction to English Literature Course to enhance students' English reading ability, 2) develop an Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning combined with critical thinking process to enhance students' English reading ability, and 3) determine the effectiveness of implementing Introduction to English Literature Course based on blended learning combined with critical thinking process to enhance students' English reading ability. This research was conducted in three phases: 1. Study the background information focusing on the course components and existing problems of the Introduction to English Literature Course. 2. Develop an Introduction to English Literature Course based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process to enhance students' English reading ability. 3. Implement an Introduction to English Literature Course based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process.

Materials and Methods: The sample was 30 second-year students, majoring in English at Xi'an University, the People's Republic of China. They were derived by cluster random sampling from one class in 2023. The experimental design was a group post-test-only design with the criterion of 70%. The research instruments were 1) an Introduction to English Literature Course based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process and its 8 lesson plans, 2) an English reading ability test paper with a reliability of 0.81, and 3) a students' satisfaction questionnaire with a reliability of 0.86. The data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and a t-test for one sample.

Results: The results revealed that 1) Phase 1 found that the draft course components consist of six aspects: 1. principle, 2. objectives, 3. content, 4. instructional strategies, 5. media and resources 6. Assessment &evaluation 2) The problems of this course were: 1. The old principle was based on teacher-centered theory. 2. The old objectives focused on the acquisition of basic knowledge, with little attention to developing English reading ability. 3. The content was not inductive for critical thinking. 4. Instructional strategies were based on traditional methods. 5. Media and resources did not integrate new technologies. 6. The evaluation method was summative and not scientific. 2) Phase 2 found that the Introduction to English Literature Course based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process consisted of the principles, objectives, content, instructional strategies, teaching media and resources, assessment &evaluation, which were verified by 5 experts (M=4.36, SD=0.53). The teaching process has five steps: 1: Learning online with preparation of critical thinking; 2: Learning online with incubation of critical thinking; 3: Learning offline in the classroom with illumination of critical thinking; 4: Online evaluation of critical thinking; 5: Online verification of critical thinking. 3) Phase 3 found that after the implementation of the course, students' English reading ability (M=31.87, SD=4.37) was higher than the criterion of 70% at a significant level of .01, and satisfaction toward the learning process (M =4.30, SD=0.37) was higher than the criterion of 70% at a significant level of .01.

Conclusion: The innovation gained from this research is the course components, which consist of six aspects: principle, objectives, content, instructional strategies, media and resources, and assessment &evaluation. It can enhance the student's English reading ability. Moreover, the developed Introduction to English Literature Course based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process, which includes 5 steps of teaching, can enhance students' English reading ability effectively.

Keywords: Blended Learning; Critical Thinking; English Reading Ability; Students' Satisfaction

Introduction

With China's increasing frequency of exchanges with other countries and the strengthening of the status of English as a lingua franca, there is a growing demand for fostering intercultural communication talents in China. Literature is a carrier of culture, recording important social experiences, national spirit, and national characteristics of the people of various countries with its unique charm. Therefore, English literature is an important course of higher education in China, and *the National Standard for the Teaching Quality of Higher Education Institutions* (*NSTQUEM, the National Standard*, 2018) has stipulated the proportion of literature courses in the course system. Foreign language majors should take language and literature as the main body, and cultivate talents with high humanistic quality, proficient foreign language skills, and solid knowledge of foreign language and literature.

In the context of the implementation of the National Standard, the Introduction to English Literature course has become a compulsory course for English majors in most Chinese universities. An Introduction to English Literature course is required to provide students with an overview of the overall development and fundamental characteristics of literature, covering major literary genres, works by representative authors, underlying ideologies, and cultural backgrounds. It is a professional theoretical course that demands students to possess a high level of language knowledge and ability, as well as a solid foundation in reading and analyzing texts. According to *The Teaching Quality for Undergraduate English Majors*, the teaching objective of the Introduction to English Literature course is to "help students master the basic knowledge of English literature, enhance their ability to understand, appreciate, and evaluate English literary works" (Committee of Foreign Language and Literature Teaching Guidance for English Majors under the Ministry of Education, 2020).

Objectives

The objectives of this research were as follows:

1) To study the background information focusing on course components and existing problems of the Introduction to English Literature Course.

2) To develop an Introduction to English Literature Course based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process.

3) To determine the effectiveness in enhancing students' reading ability through learning the Introduction to English Literature Course based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process.

3.1) To compare students' English reading ability after learning the Introduction to English Literature Course based on blended learning combined with the critical thinking process, with the criterion set at 70%.

3.2) To compare the students' satisfaction toward the Introduction to English Literature Course based on blended learning combined with the critical thinking process, with the criterion set at 3.51 after implementing the course.

Literature review

Introduction to English Literature Course

Introduction to English Literature course is a basic English literature course that is designed to provide a comprehensive presentation of English literature, helping the students get to know the basic knowledge of English literature, including basic English literature concepts, terminology, literature history, representative writers and works, etc. English literature course series are foundation courses for English majors in Chinese universities, among which the Introduction to English Literature Course is the elementary literature course. It aims at developing students' English reading ability and preparing the students for literature study in the future.

Current Introduction to English Literature Course

Introduction to English Literature is currently a compulsory course for English majors in most Chinese universities. It is a professional basic theoretical course required to provide students with an

overview of the overall development and fundamental characteristics of English literature, covering major literary genres, works by representative authors, underlying ideologies, and cultural backgrounds. In the Introduction to English Literature course, students are taught to master basic theoretical knowledge of literature and enhance their English reading ability.

The problems in the current Introduction to English Literature course are as follows:

1) Course principles: The course principles were made before *the National Standard was* published in 2018. It has been using the traditional classroom teaching mode, "teacher-centered," for a long time. The students follow the teacher's full arrangement of teaching. They passively accept the teacher's or the textbook's analysis and opinion rather than learn independently and develop their English reading ability and critical thinking.

2) Course objectives: The current course mainly aims to make students grasp solid theoretical knowledge of English literature and gain the "heritage" of the culture and language. It ignores cultivating students' English reading ability and critical thinking through independent learning to generate their own thinking and analysis.

3) Course content: The current course content is generally satisfactory in the field of theoretical knowledge, but it lacks critical content to lead students to explore, analyze, and judge.

4) Instructional strategies: The current course is mainly carried on in offline classrooms through the traditional teacher's "talk and chalk" teaching method. It is flat, rigid, and weakens students' learning interest, learning efficiency, and learning results.

5) Media and resources: The current course does not leverage enough modern technology and abundant digital resources effectively. In terms of teaching methods, although multi-media teaching equipment has been popularized, most teachers focus on textbook-based jug and mug teaching formats. Current teaching resources lack adequate technology integration, which leads to the inefficiency of teaching and learning. There is a need for learning with the advantages of abundant new media and resources to develop students' English reading ability and critical thinking.

6) Assessment &evaluation: The assessment &evaluation of the current course focuses on students' knowledge accumulation, and it adopts a summative assessment. Judging from the proportion of grades, the current assessment and evaluation largely depend on the final exam, and the exam content is the teaching content of the entire semester, which greatly increases the difficulty of learning English literature. On the other hand, it is only judged by the teacher. As a whole, it is not scientific and reasonable enough, and cannot promptly discover and solve problems encountered by students in the learning process.

Blended Learning

The word "blended learning" first appeared in the field of enterprise training in Europe and America at the dawn of the 21st century after the wave of E-learning in the 1990s. Blended learning is perhaps the most prominent delivery mechanism in higher education (Bonk et al., 2006). Till now, blended learning has undergone over twenty years of development. Researchers, teaching practitioners, governments, and educational institutions now have a basic consensus: Blended learning will become the "new normal" of future education (Charles, Graham, et al., 2018).

Blended learning is defined in different ways by several authors. Graham et al (2005) mentioned three approaches: (a) blended learning as the combination of different instructional methods, (b) blended learning as the combination of different modalities or delivery media, or (c) blended learning as the combination of face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction. Most current definitions of blended learning refer to a blend of online and face-to-face instruction. Cronje (2020) defines blended learning as a combination of face-to-face classroom teaching and online learning.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking involves logical analysis and careful reasoning. It is an essential life skill that helps us identify and evaluate information and data to make decisions through the application of logic. The term critical comes from the Greek word kritikos, meaning "able to judge or discern". Several different definitions of critical thinking exist. American philosopher John Dewey (1910) defined it as active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds

that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends. Ennis, R. H (1962): Critical thinking is reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do. Dwyer (2017): Critical thinking is a metacognitive process that, through purposeful, self-regulatory reflective judgment, consists of several subskills and dispositions that, when used appropriately, increase the chances of producing a logical solution to a problem or a valid conclusion to an argument. Critical thinking is a modern teaching method and also one of the goals of current education, especially higher education. It is a kind of thinking in which students question, analyze, interpret, evaluate, and make a judgment about what they read, hear, say, or write. For students, critical thinking is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking involving the rational, skeptical, unbiased analysis or evaluation of factual evidence.

Teaching steps of blended learning combined with the critical thinking process

The teaching process has five steps:

Step 1: Learning online with the preparation for critical thinking. The teacher makes a micro-video containing the content of the unit and releases it online. The students watch the video, understand the main theoretical knowledge, and prepare the preliminary answers to the questions.

Step 2: Learning online with the incubation of critical thinking. The teacher assigns work for students to create new knowledge by exploring more references and related information based on their interests. Students create new knowledge, and some thoughts will be brewed in the mind.

Step 3: Learning offline in the classroom with the illumination of critical thinking. The teacher creates situations linked with new knowledge and provides situations using critical thinking in classroom learning. Students do representation, have in-depth discussions, and make drama performances.

Step 4: Online evaluation of critical thinking. Students complete assignments of reading and exercises related to course content, using diversified learning tools and evaluating critical thinking.

Step 5: Online verification of critical thinking. Students output their understanding through critical essays in the online exercise and test.

English Reading Ability

English reading ability refers to the ability to understand, analyze, summarize, associate, appreciate, and judge in English reading practice. It is a key ability for effective learning and application of English. English reading ability generally includes the following aspects:

1) Language cognitive ability is the ability to understand the surface of a reading material, which means students can understand the basic meaning expressed by words, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters.

2) The ability to understand internal relationships is the ability to analyze and grasp the deep meaning, clarify the various relationships between its content and structure, and capture the author's "implicit meaning" between the lines.

3) Appreciative comprehension ability, also known as critical ability. When reading, students can make serious evaluations of the content, thoughts, and emotions of works or articles, examine their authenticity, and judge their correctness.

4) Creative understanding ability is the ability to filter what has been read through thinking and integrate it into the students' knowledge system, and generate new ideas as a result. It can associate this kind of knowledge with other knowledge and extend from this genre to various genres, generating new ideas from old knowledge.

Conceptual Framework

Investigate the basic information and problems of the Introduction to English Literature Course. The conceptual framework of development: Blended learning and critical thinking to enhance the English reading ability of English major students in Xi'an University.

Develop the basic information and requirements of the Introduction to English Literature Course based on Blended Learning combined with a Critical Thinking Process to enhance the English reading ability of English major students at Xi'an University.

Determine the effectiveness of implementing blended learning and critical thinking to enhance the English reading ability of English major students at Xi'an University.

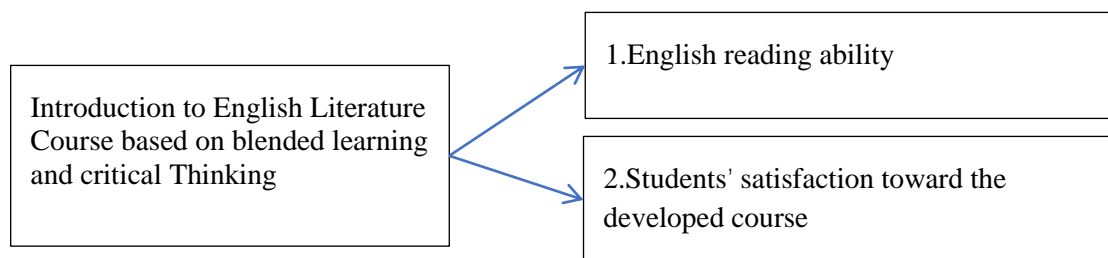**Independent Variable** **Dependent Variable**

Figure 1 The independent variable and dependent variable

Methodology

Population and sample: The population in this study was 120 second-year students of four classes of the English Major at Xi'an University. The sample of this study was 30 second-year students of one class of English majors at Xi'an University, which was selected by using the cluster random sampling method.

Research instruments

1. Draft course Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process. Five experts evaluated the draft course, in the 10 items of the Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning combined with the critical thinking process evaluation form, the lowest mean score was 3.8(SD=0.45), and the highest mean score was 4.6(SD=0.55). It was revealed that the Introduction to English Literature course, based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process, was at a high level.

2. Lesson plans for the Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process

Five experts evaluated the eight lesson plans. According to the expert evaluation form, the lowest mean score was 4.57(SD=0.52), and the highest mean score was 4.72(SD=0.44). It was revealed that the lesson plans were at a very high level.

3. English reading ability test: The test for students' English reading ability consisted of 4 parts and had a quality with a reliability of 0.81, a discrimination index of 0.53-0.78, and a difficulty index of 0.63-0.79, which means the test was qualified and can be used to collect data.

4. Student satisfaction questionnaire: The questionnaire is provided to 5 experts for content validity check and suggestions. Therefore, the reliability of the student satisfaction questionnaire meets the requirements. The draft satisfaction questionnaire had item discrimination ranging from 0.22-0.52, and reliability of .86, which means the satisfaction questionnaire was qualified and can be used to collect data.

Data collection: The curriculum was implemented in the sample in the first semester of the 2023 academic year. The procedures of data collection during the curriculum implementation process were as follows: The course was implemented for the samples in the Autumn Semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. The procedures of data collection during the course implementation process were as follows:

1) The samples that were assigned as experimental groups were taught an Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning and critical thinking. This group was taught through 8 lesson plans, and the allocated time for instruction was 16 class hours (8 lesson plans for 16 class 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.

2) After finishing the instruction, the samples received the post-test for measuring students' English reading ability with constructed instruments. The instruments consisted of a reading comprehension test. There are 4 passages with 10 questions. Students were required to write short answers to the questions based on their understanding of the passages they had read.

3) The students were given the students' satisfaction questionnaire to express their opinions toward the course.

Data analysis: In this study, quantitative data were analyzed by using the statistical program in line with the research objectives.

1) Statistics used to determine the different significance at the .05 level of scores on students' reading ability after learning through the Introduction to English Literature Course, based on blended learning combined with the critical thinking process by using a t-test for dependent samples.

2) Statistics used to compare the students' satisfaction with the Introduction to English Literature Course based on blended learning combined with the critical thinking process by using the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and criteria set at 70%.

Moreover, qualitative data were analyzed and interpreted by content analysis and interpretation through inductive methods.

Results

1. The finding of a comparison of English reading ability after learning through the Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning, combined with the critical thinking process, using 70% as the standard

The scores of the post-test, analyzed by using a t-test for the dependent sample, were presented in the table below. This table aimed to answer the research objective about whether Introduction to English Literature was able to enhance students' English reading ability.

Table 1 The findings comparing the scores of English reading ability after learning through the Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning combined with the critical thinking process, with the criteria set at 70%

Group	n	Full score	Criteria score (70%)	Mean	SD	t	p
Experimental group	30	40	28	31.87	4.37	5.853**	0.001

** p<.01

Presented in Table 1, aimed to examine the scores after learning through the Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning with a critical thinking process. The finding of this table revealed that after learning through the Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning with a critical thinking process, post-test scores of students' English reading ability was p (M=31.87, SD=4.37) higher than the criteria set at 70% at .01 level of statistical significance (t=5.853, p<.01).

2. The finding of comparison of students' satisfaction after learning through the Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning, combined with the critical thinking process, with the criteria set at 3.51 scores

Satisfaction scores were analyzed by using a t-test for one sample, presented in the table below. This table aimed to answer the research objective about whether students are satisfied after learning through the Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process.

Table 2 The findings of the comparison of the different scores of students' satisfaction after learning through the Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning, combined with the critical thinking process, with the criteria set at 3.51 scores

Group	n	Full Score	Criteria Score	M	SD	t	p
Experimental group	30	5	3.51	4.30	.37	11.69**	0.001

**p<.01

In the result of Table 2, the students' satisfaction with the Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning combined with the critical thinking process was higher than the criteria set at 3.51 scores at the .01 level of statistical significance (t= 11.69, p<.01).

Conclusion

The background information data

The results from studying the background data could be divided into two types: 1) The results of studying the relevant literature for this study, and 2) The results of teachers and students about problems.

1) The results of studying the relevant literature for this study

Study the background information focusing on course components of the Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning combined with the critical thinking process to enhance the English reading ability of English major students.

The researcher conducted a thorough examination of literature related to the Introduction to English Literature course, China's educational policies, blended learning, critical thinking, teaching strategies, and evaluation methods. Expert teachers were interviewed to gather insights into the current state of education and data on issues associated with the Introduction to English Literature course. By collecting and analyzing textbooks, literature reviews, journals, online resources, and insights from expert interviews and students, a preliminary course framework was formulated. This framework encompasses key elements such as principles, objectives, content, teaching strategies, teaching materials, and assessment methods, integrating data obtained from the course-related information.

2) The results of the teachers' and students' interviews about problems

The researcher interviewed 5 teachers and 15 third-year students of the Introduction to English Literature course in Xi'an University and found that there were problems in principle, objectives, content, instructional strategy, media and resources, and evaluation of the current mathematical modeling course in Xi'an University.

Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process to enhance the English reading ability of English major students.

The experts agreed to use blended learning combined with a critical thinking process in the new Introduction to English Literature course. Blended learning combined with a critical thinking process aligns with the practical characteristics of English reading ability required in the Introduction to English Literature course, making it more suitable for the learning of the Introduction to English Literature course. The experts support the adoption of this learning approach in the course.

The researchers submitted various documents for the learning process evaluation to each of the five experts, presenting the learning process development strategies, principles, learning process documents, instruments of measurement, and lesson plans. Experts agreed to use the Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process. It is believed that the combination of based on blended learning with a critical thinking process is a new concept and a new way of teaching reform, which can enhance students' English reading ability and improve the comprehensive outcome of learning. Experts, therefore, support the application of. Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning, combined with a critical thinking process in each lesson plan.

The findings of implementing the Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning, combined with a critical thinking process, to enhance the English reading ability of English major students

The course content includes eight topics: English Literature in the Old, Middle Ages, and Renaissance Periods, English Literature in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, English Literature in the Romantic Age and Victorian Age, English Literature in the Early 20th century and since 1945, American Literature of Romanticism, American Literature of Realism, American Literature of Modernism, American Literature of the Early 20th Century and Since 1945.

This study analyzed and compared the post-test results with 70% as the standard for improvement of the English reading ability of English major students at Xi'an University after using blended learning combined with the critical thinking process in class.

1) The English reading ability on the post-test showed that the mean score of the post-test data was higher than the 70% standard. When the confidence level was 0.05, the correlation between post-test data and 70% standard was 0.99, and the t-test value Sig. = 0. 000 <. 01 (The mean of the post-test was 31.87.)

2) The findings of a comparison of students' satisfaction after learning through the Introduction to English Literature course-based blended learning combined with a critical thinking process, 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 the Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process was 4.30, and the standard deviation was 0.37. From a possible full mark of 5.0, the satisfaction level was statistically higher than the determined criterion of 70% at a .01 level of statistical significance.

Discussion

1. Study the background knowledge and concept discussion of English reading ability and blended learning combined with the critical thinking process

Researching the background information of the current Introduction to English Literature course, it is identified as a compulsory course for English majors at Xi'an University. The components of the existing course include principles, objectives, content, teaching strategies, and assessment. The course primarily focuses on knowledge and theory, lacking reading and critical thinking. The researcher indicated that the current Introduction to English Literature course is not up-to-date, emphasizing theoretical knowledge rather than reading and critical thinking.

The problems existing in the current course include the following aspects: 1) Course principles: The course principles were made before the National Standard for Assessing the Quality of Teaching in Undergraduate Programs ("the Standard") was published in 2018. It has been using the traditional classroom teaching mode, "teacher-centered," for a long time. 2) Course objectives: The current course mainly aims to make students grasp solid theoretical knowledge of English literature and get the "heritage" of the culture and language knowledge, rather than cultivate students' English reading ability and critical thinking. 3) Course content: It lacks critical content to lead students to explore, analyze, and judge. 4) Instructional strategies: The current course is mainly carried on in offline classrooms through the traditional teacher's "talk and chalk" teaching method. It is flat, rigid, and weakens students' learning interest, learning efficiency, and learning results. 5) Media and resources: The current course does not leverage enough modern technology and abundant digital resources effectively. 6) Assessment and evaluation: The assessment and evaluation of the current course adopts a summative assessment. It is not scientific and reasonable enough, and cannot promptly discover and solve problems encountered by students in the learning process.

2. Develop an Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process to enhance the English reading ability of English major students.

Based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process, the Introduction to English Literature course is developed. The course components of the Introduction to English Literature course, based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process, consisted of principles, objectives, content, instructional strategy, material, and evaluation based on the curriculum development theories of Tyler (1949) and Taba (1970). Considering the background information and existing problems in the current

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Introduction to English Literature 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 English reading ability. The development and implementation of an Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process may enable students to better adapt to post-graduation employment and meet social needs.

3. The discussion of implementing the Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process

The course was implemented for English major second-year students to determine the effectiveness of the course. Introduction to English Literature course based on blended learning combined with a critical thinking process can enhance the English reading ability of English major students at Xi'an University. There may be the following reasons: First, in the preparation stage before developing a blended learning process, the researcher analyzed the advantages of blended learning and critical thinking process, and elaborated the principles, objectives, contents, learning process, learning materials, learning assessment, and existing blended learning design process for blended learning process design. Concerning the blended learning design steps proposed by domestic and foreign experts and scholars, blended learning with a critical thinking process is proposed, on which a practical new model of blended learning with a critical thinking process is constructed. Second, it focuses on the design of 5 steps in 3 stages: Stage 1: online learning is mainly based on the teacher's release of learning tasks and students' independent learning. Stage 2: offline learning mainly focuses on teachers setting up learning situations and organizing learning activities around teaching objectives and learning content. Stage 3: Online learning is for homework consolidation and learning evaluation. Learning evaluation also adopts a diversified evaluation method in terms of evaluation subjects, evaluation methods, and evaluation approaches. Third, the teaching process of developing critical thinking is designed according to the four steps of the process of practicing critical thinking proposed by Graham Wallas: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification (Graham, 1926). Fourth, according to Guilford's view, the four elements of fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration are used as dimensions to measure critical thinking (Guilford J.P., 1967), and the measurement instrument is constructed in conjunction with the Torrance Test of Critical Thinking. In addition, teachers' skills and attitudes, awareness of students' needs, flexible course structure, and effective classroom interactions are key factors in developing blended learning with a critical thinking process that enhances students' English reading ability.

Through blended learning with a critical thinking process, students' satisfaction is improved. There are several reasons for this: First, blended learning with a critical thinking process advocates "student-centered" principles, and students' needs are the priority in every teaching stage and step. Second, students learn independently and have much freedom to decide their way of material exploration and think freely without many constraints, which inspires students' learning motivation and results in better learning outcomes. Third, blended learning with a critical thinking process emphasizes the cooperation and co-construction teaching process under the guidance of the teachers' leading role, and teachers should make full use of the limited time for students' efficient learning.

Recommendations

Recommendation for implication

1) Encourage teachers to adopt "blended learning combined with the critical process". Blended learning applies to two kinds of teaching situations: online and offline. Blended learning with a critical thinking process allows students space for learning, extends students' learning span, supplies students with more abundant teaching materials and media, enables students to learn more independently, and trains students to analyze critically. Based on the characteristics of blended learning with the critical process, teachers need to adapt and change, especially for teachers who are accustomed to the teacher-led face-to-face classroom teaching model under the traditional teaching concept, and then learn how to apply blended learning with the critical thinking process in the Introduction to English Literature course.

2) Since the blended learning process needs to be carried out in both online and offline environments, to ensure the smooth development of blended learning with a critical thinking process, schools need to provide an appropriate teaching environment, including hardware equipment and software services. The hardware equipment mainly includes the server and high-speed network equipment (switch and router) used to construct the online teaching situation. Multimedia classrooms, electronic blackboards, mobile desks and chairs, touch display screens, etc., are used to construct offline teaching situations. Software services mainly include a teaching management platform, a learning management platform, a knowledge sharing platform, and a classroom interaction platform.

3) In the post-pandemic era, blended learning with a critical thinking process has a certain value in stabilizing the continuity of teaching and improving the teaching quality of students to meet the needs of the new times, and it can be promoted and applied in other universities as well.

Recommendation for further research

1) To further combine with advanced technologies like big data and artificial intelligence. In the background of the information era, further research should skillfully apply advanced technologies like big data and artificial intelligence to make the Introduction to English Literature course more scientific and rigorous with more updated, in-depth media and resources, more attractive in-class and out-class activities and enables the analysis on the collected teaching data and test data more efficient.

2) The experimental design should be further studied in an expanded scope. The design of the teaching experiment should conform to the overall educational environment and be carried out in other subjects for different students. Further research should be done in different universities of different categories in different regions of China. By promoting further research in a wider range, blended learning combined with a critical thinking process could go further in enriching the teaching practice and enhancing college students' comprehensive abilities.

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