A Review of Studies on Blended English Teaching Models (2014-2024)

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Abstract

This paper explores the current research status of blended English teaching models in China over the past decade and its future trends by analyzing articles from authoritative journals in CNKI between January 1, 2014 and August 1, 2024. Specifically, it delves into the annual distribution of papers' publications, keywords and concludes the future trends related to researches concerning blended English teaching models. The study indicates that researches on blended English teaching models in China have progressed from an initial sluggish stage, through a period of notable growth, to a stable and balanced development phase. The research focus within this field has been predominantly concentrated on the blended teaching models in college English. And this paper forecasts several prominent trends in future researches on blended English teaching models. Firstly, there will be an in-depth exploration across different educational segments to expand the application scope of blended English teaching models. Secondly, the introduction and application of cutting-edge theory such as "activity theory" will provide a more solid theoretical foundation for the design and implementation of blended English teaching models. Thirdly, empirical research methods will undergo further refinement and widespread adoption, thereby enhancing the scientific rigor and practical applicability of research outcomes.

Keywords

Blended English Teaching Models, Overview of Research Development, Research Hotspots, Research Trends.

1. Introduction

In the age of information technology in the 21st century, the rapid development and popularization of the Internet has brought unprecedented opportunities of change for education. In this context, as the product of the integration of information technology and education, the blended teaching models have gradually gained recognition and popularization since its appearance in the United States in the 1990s. In education innovation, it has become a significant direction of development, and its influence has steadily increased. He Kekang (2004:1-6) proposed the concept of blended teaching in China. And according to the search results in CNKI, there was only one research on the topic of "blended teaching models" before 2004, and this research did not propose the concept of blended teaching models, but only discussed the Web-based teaching mode from the perspective of computer engineering. However, more than 20,000 papers about "blended teaching models" have been published since 2004. It can be seen that He (2004) putting forward the concept of "blended teaching models" in China marked the beginning of domestic scholars' exploration and practice of this model.

With the acceleration of globalization and further implementation of China's opening-up strategy, international exchanges and cooperation are becoming increasingly frequent. The vigorous development of foreign trade has not only greatly promoted the prosperity of China,

but also put forward more urgent and diversified requirements for high-level English talents. The traditional English teaching models cannot meet the increasingly complex and diversified social needs any more. In this context, blended English teaching models have been provided a strong driving force for the rise and development. In addition, according to the search results on the topic of "blended English teaching models" in CNKI, the researches on "blended English teaching models" started late, and the recent decade is the key period for the gradual rise of researches in this field. Focusing on this period of time can more accurately reflect the latest trends and hotspots of the current blended English teaching models, so as to further explore the future research trends.

In view of this, on the basis of combing related concepts, this study analyzes the domestic researches on "blended English teaching models" from January 1st, 2014 to August 1st, 2024, and explore the research status, with a view to providing ideas for future researches.

2. Literature Review

This chapter aims to define the core concept of "blended English teaching models" to clarify and specify the research contents. Meanwhile, the author will summarize the relevant studies on review of " blended English teaching models" in China.

2.1. Definition of "Blended English Teaching Models"

Foreign scholars JOYCE B and WEIL M (1972:2-12) defined the teaching models as "a plan or paradigm for setting up courses (long-term learning programs), selecting teaching materials, and guiding teaching activities in classrooms and other environments." Chinese scholars have elaborated on the connotation of teaching models based on relevant theories and long-term teaching practices. For instance, Ye Lan (1991:333) believed that the teaching models is a holistic and systematic operational pattern from teaching principles, teaching contents, teaching goals and tasks, and teaching processes to teaching organization forms.

The concept of blended teaching models originated in the United States in the late 1990s. Since its inception, blended teaching has attracted the attention of experts and scholars in the education field worldwide. However, scholars have not got a unified understanding of blended teaching's definition. Singh & Reed (2001:1-11) viewed blended teaching as a teaching model that achieves a balance and optimization between learning costs and learning outcomes. Driscoll (2002:1-4) pointed out that blended teaching combines various network technologies, teaching theories, and teaching designs to achieve good teaching effects through integration with classroom teaching. The concept of blended teaching was introduced to China in the early 21st century. In 2004, Professor He Kekang from Beijing Normal University proposed the concept of blended teaching, which integrates traditional classroom teaching with E-learning. It emphasizes not only the teacher's guiding, inspiring, and monitoring role in the teaching process but also fully reflects the students' initiative, enthusiasm, and creativity as the subject of the learning process. In recent years, more and more domestic scholars have explored the concept of blended teaching. For example, Feng Xiaoying et al. (2018:13-24) believed that the focus of the blended teaching models should not be on the ratio of online and offline teaching but on creating a truly highly engaging and personalized learning experience for students. Yu Jie (2023:258-160) considered the blended teaching models as combining online courses with traditional courses, allowing students to use various tools to acquire knowledge through self-study, and enhancing their self-learning ability and classroom efficiency. And teachers can make the learning systematic by helping students solve their problems from online classes.

Based on the above concepts, this study defines blended English teaching models as a deeply integrated teaching model that combines traditional face-to-face classroom teaching with online teaching. It aims to combine the offline advantages of teacher guidance and instant

feedback with the online characteristics of abundant resources and flexible learning, providing students with efficient, personalized, and highly engaging learning experiences through well-designed teaching activities.

2.2. Research Status of "Blended English Teaching Models" in China in the Past Decade

When exploring the current research status of "blended English teaching models" in China, the author finds that in CNKI the number of review studies focusing on this topic is relatively limited, but there are still some inspiring research achievements. For example, Li Hongmei and Lin Jing (2021: 1-5) used CiteSpace to conduct a visual analysis of 352 papers published in core journals from 2004 to 2021, exploring the development sequence and hotspots during this period, and future trends of blended English teaching models in China. Liang Wenhua et al. (2022: 32-38+116) selected 98 papers on researches on "blended teaching in college English" from CSSCI journals and master's and doctoral dissertations from 2006 to 2020, summarizing diachronic characteristics through their annual publications and hot keywords. They also explored the research methods, subjects, environments, and themes to summarize synchronic characteristics and further explored the development prospects of blended teaching in college English. Li Yuzhen et al. (2022: 58-63+111) selected 95 papers published in CSSCI journals from 2001 to 2021, combing researches on "blended teaching in college English" in China, reviewing the effects of blended teaching practice from both student and teacher perspectives, and exploring future research hotspots.

Based on summarizing and drawing on the researches of the above scholars, this paper selects a more recent time period from 2014 to 2024, which is closer to current educational practices. The author selects the authoritative journals in the CKNI database as research subjects. It covers not just blended teaching models in college English but encompasses a broader spectrum of blended English teaching domains. Subsequently, this paper analyzes the annual distribution of articles, keywords mentioned in articles so as to reveal the latest research status and future trends in domestic studies on "blended English teaching models".

3. Research Design

Based on the foundation of the literature review, this chapter will focus on four main parts, namely, research questions, research methods, and literature sources.

3.1. Research Questions

The present research is made to systematically analyze the domestic literature on blended English teaching models from 2014 to 2024, aiming to answer the following three questions:

What is the general development status of domestic researches on blended English teaching models in the past decade?

What are the research hotspots in domestic researches on blended English teaching models in the recent ten years?

What are the future research trends of studies on blended English teaching models?

3.2. Research Methods

This study employs the method of content analysis. By sorting out the development overview and research hotspots, this study further forecasts the future research trends of blended English teaching models in China.

3.3. Literature Sources

In exploring the current status of domestic researches on blended English teaching models, the author has particularly focused on authoritative domestic journals including Peking University

Core Journals, CSSCI, AMI, CSCD, and WJCI. These journals, renowned for their academic rigor and influence, serve as vital windows reflecting the research dynamics in this field within China. Utilizing the CNKI database, the author searches with the theme words "blended English teaching models" and "blended teaching models & English" based on the definition of blended English teaching models for this study. After multiple rounds of meticulous manual screening, strictly excluding literature not directly related to the theme, a total of 158 papers are obtained from the aforementioned authoritative journals. This comprehensive sample collection has laid a solid foundation for subsequent analysis of development status, research hotspots, and future directions.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Overview of Researches on "Blended English Teaching Models" in China Over the Past Decade

Analyzing the annual publications of the researches on blended English teaching models reveals the evolution of researches in this field. As shown in Figure 3.1, the number of publications in authoritative journals on "blended English teaching models" in China has increased significantly, from 1 article in 2014 to 158 articles in 2024, which indicates that research activities in this field are constantly increasing. In general, the researches on blended English teaching models in China can be divided into four stages.
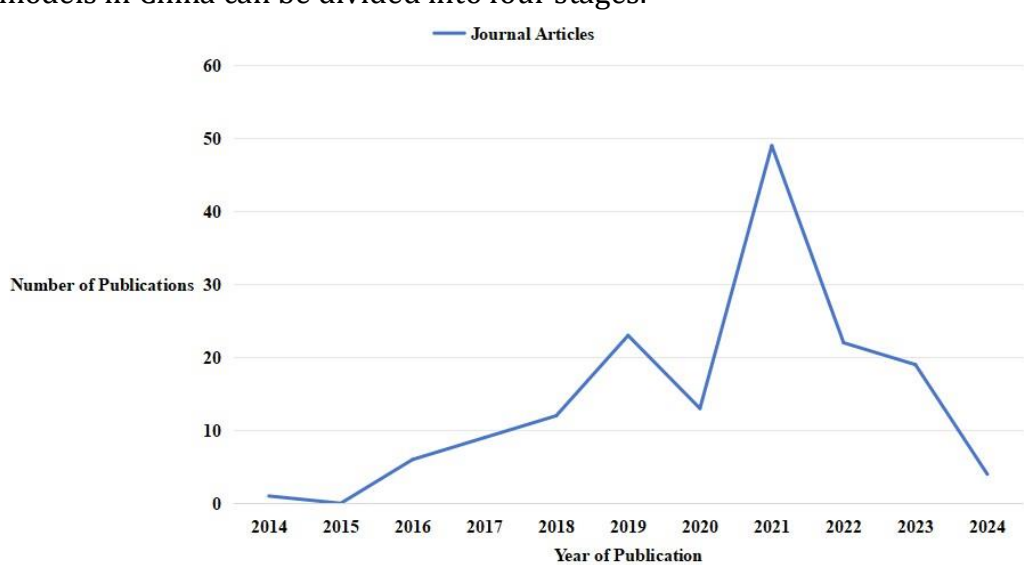

Fig. 1 Publication Trends of Studies on "Blended English Teaching Models" from Authoritative Journals in CNKI

Specifically, the first stage spans from 2014 to 2015, marked by minimal and slowly growing publications, with only one paper published in authoritative journals during these two years. This suggests that domestic scholars were still in the initial stages of exploring blended English teaching models. The second stage, from 2016 to 2019, represents a period of development, with a notable increase compared to the previous years, peaking in 2019. This surge can be attributed to the issuance of The College English Teaching Guide by The National Administry Committee on Teaching in Higher Education in 2016, which "encouraged teachers to develop and utilize micro-courses, MOOCs, leverage high-quality online educational resources to transform and expand teaching contents, and implement blended teaching models such as flipped classrooms based on offline and online courses" (Wang Shouren, 2016). The third stage, from 2020 to 2021, is characterized by rapid expansion and development, with a surge in publications in authoritative journals. The global pandemic prompted an unprecedented focus on and promotion of online teaching due to its flexibility, adaptability, and ability to avoid large

gatherings. With the impact of COVID-19 pandemic decreasing, teachers and students returned to school. During the epidemic period, online teaching has become one of the mainstream teaching methods, which prompts teachers and students to quickly adapt to and explore how to effectively integrate online and offline teaching and learning after returning to school, so as to promote teaching and learning effects. The fourth stage, from 2022 to present, sees a stable and sustained development with a consistent volume of publications. As the search deadline of this paper is August 1, 2024, the final number of papers in 2024 remains to be further observed. However, the current data are sufficient to show that the research in this field has entered a relatively mature stage.

4.2. Research Hotspots on "Blended English Teaching Models" in China over the Past Decade

The research hotspots in blended English teaching models are primarily reflected by keywords. Analyzing these keywords can reveal the research focuses in this field. After analyzing, the top three hot topics are "blended teaching", "college English", and "flipped classroom".

Through a thorough review of literature and analysis, this paper identifies several salient features in the researches on "blended English teaching models" over the past decade.

Firstly, the research field exhibits a degree of concentration. "Blended teaching" stands as the primary and core concept across all recorded literature, representing the thematic focus of this study. "College English" emerges as the secondary core keyword, indicating that domestic researches on "blended teaching" have predominantly centered on the realm of college English education within the past ten years.

Secondly, there is a pronounced emphasis on reforming college English teaching models and constructing blended English teaching models of college English. A significant body of the researches has tackled this from the perspectives of "teaching reform" and "teaching model construction", addressing the shortcomings of traditional teaching methods and striving to advance teaching reforms further. These efforts aim to devise teaching models that better align with contemporary demands and cater to students' developmental needs. For instance, Zhang Dan (2021: 71-77+91+12) leveraged Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, POA theory, and blended learning theory to construct a theoretical model for blended golden courses in college English and validated its effectiveness in practice, with the goal of improving the effect of college English teaching. Chen Shaoying and Shen Tong (2024: 81-88) explored the construction of blended teaching models from five dimensions, theoretical foundation, teaching objectives, operational procedures, enabling conditions, and teaching evaluation, aiming for efficient blended English teaching that genuinely fosters holistic student development.

Thirdly, there is a keen exploration of specific teaching methodologies within college blended English teaching. Researchers and scholars have paid close attention to popular pedagogy such as "flipped classroom", "autonomous learning", and "production-oriented approach". These methods not only go beyond the limitations of traditional classroom teaching but also emphasize learners' initiative, engagement, and practical skills, offering unprecedented vitality into English language teaching. Numerous scholars have delved into the implementation and application of blended English teaching theories in actual classrooms. For example, Cao Peisheng (2020: 87-94) applied a flipped classroom blended teaching model to ESP courses via smart teaching platforms and assessed its effectiveness by using Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Evaluation Model. Wang Yaqin (2022: 117-122) designed an online-offline blended teaching model based on the production-oriented approach, experimenting with it in two control groups, one adopting the new approach and the other maintaining traditional teaching methods. The study examined the impact of this method on students' academic performance through final exam scores.

Fourthly, the professionalism and academics of language in blended college English teaching is emphasized. Researches related to "English for Academic Purposes" underscores the growing importance of academic English in college English teaching amidst increasing international exchanges. There is a heightened focus on cultivating students' academic English writing and communication skills. For example, Chen Jing et al. (2024: 68-77) constructed a blended teaching ecosystem for academic English writing from an ecological classroom perspective and explored its effectiveness through case studies, offering both innovative research perspectives and strong practicality.

Lastly, the significance of ideology and politics in college blended English teaching is underscored. Many studies have integrated blended English teaching with ideological and political education, a crucial topic in education in recent years. This underscores the importance of infusing ideological and political education into specialized courses, indicating that experts and scholars are not only concerned with enhancing students' language abilities but also nurturing their patriotism, social responsibility, and intercultural communication skills. For instance, Li Rui (2021: 67-74) attempted to construct a multi-dimensional blended teaching model based on precise ideology and politics integration in college English classes. Applying this model to workplace English teaching, an empirical study was conducted from the perspectives of students, teachers, and enterprises, revealing its effectiveness in enhancing the educational outcomes of ideological and political education in foreign language courses.

4.3.　Future Research Trends of Blended English Teaching Models in China

Domestic researches on blended English teaching models over the past decade have primarily focused on college English education. However, with the maturing of blended teaching researches, the accumulation of teaching and learning experience, and the continuous advanced information technology in education, blended English teaching models are increasingly being applied to secondary education, including junior and senior high schools, as well as vocational schools. Therefore, the author believes that the researches of blended English teaching models will expand to secondary and even primary education in the future.

Furthermore, notably, "activity theory" and "empirical research" emerged as key terms in 2021 and have continued to be prominent until 2024, with an anticipated increase in influence in the future.

Based on the above analysis, the future research trends of blended English teaching models in China will exhibit several notable characteristics as follows.

A tendency of cross-grade Researches. With the successful implementation and wide recognition of the advantages of blended teaching models in higher education, their application will further penetrate into basic education (e.g., primary and junior high schools) and vocational education. This cross-grade integration will emphasize designing more personalized and efficient learning paths tailored to students' cognitive development characteristics and teaching objectives at different educational stages. For instance, in primary schools, blended learning may incorporate more gamification and storytelling to stimulate students' interest in learning, while in high schools, it may focus on utilizing online resources for deep learning and fostering critical thinking.

Strengthening teaching design guided by "activity theory". As a recently emerging keyword, "activity theory" emphasizes that teaching activities should revolve around problem-solving in real-life contexts, highlighting learners' initiative, sociality, and interactivity. In the future, blended English teaching models will prioritize creating a student-centered learning environment by designing diverse teaching activities that facilitate collaboration and communication among students, thereby enhancing their language proficiency and comprehensive literacy.

Widespread application of empirical research methods. The continuous growth of "empirical research" as a keyword indicates that future researches on blended English teaching models will place greater emphasis on data-driven and evidence-based approaches. Researchers will adopt more rigorous experimental designs, questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, and other methods to collect and analyze data on students' performance, learning outcomes, emotional attitudes, and other aspects during the learning process. This scientific approach will provide reliable evidence for optimizing teaching design.

5. Conclusion

This study, grounded in the clear definition of blended English teaching models, systematically analyzes relevant researches on "blended English teaching models" published in domestic authoritative journals from January 1, 2014 to August 1, 2024. The findings reveal those researches on blended English teaching models over the past decade have roughly progressed through four stages, showing a transition from an initial sluggish start to a rapid rise and finally stabilizing into a mature phase. The focal point of those researches in recent 10 years has been the blended teaching models in college English education, specifically focusing on its reform and construction, specific teaching methodologies, the emphasis on the kind of classes focusing on linguistic professionalism and academic rigor, as well as the integration of ideological and political education within this model. The future trends encompass cross-grade researches, strengthened guidance by "activity theory", and the extensive application of empirical research methods.

This study's literature sources are exclusively drawn from CNKI. Although rigorous screening was conducted, there may still be some omissions. In the future, the author will leverage both CNKI and high-quality foreign databases to conduct a comparative study of blended English teaching models both domestically and internationally, exploring their similarities and differences, with the aim of enhancing the research level and quality within China.

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