

A Study of the Blended Teaching Model for Oral English under the Production-Oriented Approach

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Abstract: With the rapid development of the Internet, the blended teaching model has gradually become more and more popular. In response to this trend, this paper explores how to improve college students' oral English skills under the blended teaching mode of online and offline. Moreover, Considering that nowadays many students can only understand knowledge but find it difficult to apply knowledge, this research will be guided by the Production-Oriented Approach to explore new ideas for improving students' productive ability. The study selects the first chapter of Book 2 of Fluent Oral English Course (Second Edition) as the teaching content and adopts a blended teaching method, which includes online pre-class warm-ups, a combination of online and offline teaching during class, and online homework submission after class. To be mentioned, the teaching process is structured around the principles of motivation, enabling, and assessment. It is hoped that this research will provide valuable references for future studies on the blended teaching model guided by the Production-Oriented Approach and offer inspiration for enhancing oral English instruction.

Keywords: Blended Teaching Model, Production-Oriented Approach, Oral English Skills.

1. Introduction

The blended teaching model has emerged as a significant trend in the educational field, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many institutions to shift to online teaching. This transition accelerated the integration of online and offline instruction, providing learners with a more flexible, convenient, and enriched learning experience [1]. Additionally, in response to President Xi's call to build a "community with a shared future for mankind" and to "tell China's story well in foreign languages," strong English oral skills have become crucial for Chinese university students. Therefore, enhancing students' English oral abilities within a blended teaching model warrants attention.

However, blended English oral instruction currently faces challenges. On the one hand, while online teaching resources are abundant and diverse, their quality varies widely. Students also display significantly different proficiency levels, making it challenging for online resources to meet individual needs. On the other hand, offline teaching methods often lean toward exam-oriented approaches, lacking authentic and effective English learning environments. This limitation affects students' oral proficiency and often results in a disconnect between learning and application [2]. A review and analysis of relevant literature on the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) reveals that past research on blended English instruction primarily focused on the blended teaching model itself, lacking specific guidance on teaching methods. Thus, this paper aims to propose an

effective blended teaching model to improve students' English oral skills and enhance instructional quality and outcomes.

2. Literature Review

This study focuses on establishing an effective blended teaching model guided by the Production-Oriented Approach (POA) to enhance English oral skills. Therefore, this section reviews previous research from two perspectives: the current status of blended teaching in oral English and the theoretical framework of POA.

2.1. Research on the Blended Teaching Model for Oral English

According to CNKI, many scholars have investigated integrating various teaching methods with the blended teaching model. For instance, Li examined the application strategies of the task-based teaching method in three phases: pre-class guidance, in-class instruction, and teaching evaluation in blended college English education [3]. She argued that the task-based teaching method fosters a shift from passive to active learning while also mitigating resource waste. However, Wu introduced a novel teaching model guided by the POA, which includes “pre-class online driving and facilitation—during-class offline output and evaluation—post-class online evaluation and driving.” [4]. This model effectively transforms receptive knowledge into productive skills, aiding in the enhancement of students' English output abilities. Although the selected teaching methods differ, both studies provide valuable pedagogical references for improving the effectiveness of the blended college English teaching model.

Moreover, some research has focused on the teaching process, exploring specific practical applications of the blended teaching model in college English speaking courses. For example, Wang et al. addressed limitations in college English teaching in the “Internet+” era, such as the large-class format, which makes it difficult to cater to varying student proficiency levels [5]; the lack of engagement with a singular textbook; and students' insufficient autonomous learning abilities. They conducted a case study on a blended teaching model using the “New Horizons College English” textbook. This study integrates online and offline teaching platforms effectively, resulting in more systematic and coherent instructional content, and employs a diversified evaluation system that accurately reflects students' learning outcomes and progress, thus providing valuable insights for instructional design. However, their study has certain limitations. For example, it primarily organizes research by class, which does not sufficiently account for individual differences among students. Additionally, there are few systematic studies focusing on oral skills, which represents an area for future research to address.

In addition, previous studies have thoroughly discussed the use of educational technology in blended teaching of college English speaking. For example, Yang et al. presented a teaching practice called “Practical English Listening and Speaking” implemented during an English summer camp [6]. They designed a blended teaching activity based on MOOCs and the Rain Classroom platform, consisting of 50% face-to-face instruction and 50% online learning. The research included satisfaction surveys and data analysis for both teaching assistants and students. From the perspective of teaching platforms, this study offers a new angle on blended teaching in college English speaking, suggesting that enhancing learning outcomes can be driven by educational technology. However, the study did not employ specific teaching methods and primarily outlined issues without providing detailed solutions. Moreover, it mainly focused on two platforms, lacking exploration of other platforms. Additionally, the researchers primarily integrated teaching technology before and after class, with limited use during class time. Therefore, our study aims to incorporate more specific teaching methods into the blended teaching model and introduce a broader array of technological

tools, such as Tencent Conference, Bilibili, and WeChat, alongside MOOCs and Rain Classroom. Additionally, this research will attempt to utilize teaching technology during class to improve efficiency and enrich classroom formats.

2.2. The Production-Oriented Approach

The Production-Oriented Approach (POA) is a foreign language teaching theory with Chinese characteristics, developed by Professor Wen Qiufang and her team. This approach aims to address issues such as the separation of learning and application in foreign language education in China. Professor Wen noted that traditional teaching methods often focus on knowledge input while neglecting the development of students' language output abilities, resulting in difficulties for students when applying the language in practice [2]. Consequently, she and her team gradually developed the theoretical framework of the POA to better cater to the needs and characteristics of Chinese students learning foreign languages.

This approach centers around the principle of integrating learning and application, dividing the teaching process into three main stages: motivating, enabling, and assessing [2]. In the motivating stage, teachers should create real communication scenarios or tasks, making students aware of the gap between their existing knowledge and skills and what is required to complete the task, thus stimulating their desire to learn. For example, teachers might assign a task involving an English skit, allowing students to recognize their shortcomings in language expression and cultural knowledge during real interactions. The enabling stage involves teachers providing various teaching resources and activities to help students acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to complete the task. This includes offering explanations of relevant language knowledge, analyzing model texts, and organizing group discussions to enhance students' language abilities. In English speaking classes, for instance, teachers can provide a variety of speaking assignments that guide students in learning standard pronunciation through imitation. They may also showcase excellent speaking examples, such as TED Talk videos, to help students understand the standards of high-quality oral expression, further boosting their motivation to improve their speaking skills. Finally, the assessing stage evaluates students' learning outcomes, which includes various forms of immediate feedback from teachers on student performance, as well as self-assessments and peer evaluations. Through this feedback, students can gain insight into their learning progress and identify issues. Teachers can also adjust their teaching strategies based on the evaluation results.

This teaching method offers numerous advantages. Qiu highlighted in her research that, under the guidance of POA, real task-driven activities enhance students' listening, writing, and speaking skills, fostering comprehensive development [7]. Moreover, POA effectively stimulates students' potential in learning English, promoting the practical application of their knowledge. Additionally, POA is highly appreciated by students as it boosts their motivation and deepens their interest in learning. However, this teaching method also has specific conditions for applicability. For instance, Qiu pointed out that teachers must possess high teaching capabilities and relevant competencies [8]. They should design speaking tasks effectively and provide useful teaching resources for students to learn and practice. Yin noted that the output-oriented approach's applicability in English major intensive reading classes needs to be justified from both the perspective of student learning conditions and alignment with teaching objectives [9]. This implies that the method's suitability must consider the specific learning contexts of students and the degree of alignment with teaching goals.

Although the POA is a relatively mature teaching method, its application in college English speaking classes remains inadequate. For instance, Qiu conducted research focusing on the entire class, without considering individual student differences [7]. Jia also pointed out that the development of teachers' skills in implementing POA is still lacking [10]. Moreover, during the literature review,

it was found that the application of this teaching method within the blended learning model is still insufficient. There remains room for future research endeavors.

3. Case Analysis/Teaching Design

Under the guidance of the Production-Oriented Approach, this research designs a teaching plan for 20 freshmen majoring in English, using Unit 1, “Friends,” from Book 2 of Fluent Oral English Course (Second Edition) as an example. The aim is to explore the blended teaching model for improving oral English proficiency.

3.1. Teaching Objectives

(1) Language Knowledge Objective: Students will master vocabulary and phrases related to friends, including their hobbies, personalities, and interactions. (2) Language Skill Objective: Students should be able to introduce their friends to others in fluent English. (3) Emotional Attitude Objective: Students should understand the true meaning of friendship, enhance cross-cultural communication awareness, and recognize the differences in friendship interaction patterns across cultures.

3.2. Teaching Key Points and Difficulties

Teaching Key Points: (1) Mastering vocabulary and expressions related to friends. (2) Conducting effective oral language production using the acquired knowledge.

Teaching Difficulties: (1) Improving the complexity, accuracy, and fluency of language expression when describing friends. (2) Exploring and understanding the differences in friendship interaction patterns across cultures.

3.3. Teaching Process

The class design follows the guidance of the Production-Oriented Approach and includes three parts: motivating, enabling, and assessing.

3.3.1. Motivating

To stimulate students’ interest in learning, the motivating stage is carried out first and consists of three steps: presenting communicative scenarios, having students engage in communicative activities, and explaining the teaching objectives and output tasks [2].

First, teachers play videos to present communicative scenarios. Before assigning the task of introducing a friend, the teacher posts a video link from Bilibili on Rain Classroom titled “The Friends’ Character Analysis Series” and requires students to watch it before class. Students are also instructed to accumulate relevant expressions from the video to stimulate their interest in learning. Additionally, this video serves as a starting point for guiding students to imagine introducing their own friends to foreign friends.

Next, a speech task is assigned during class, and students are organized to give presentations. The teacher asks students, “If you were to introduce your good friend to a foreign friend, how would you do it?” The teacher then randomly selects one student from each group to give a one-minute impromptu speech.

Finally, the teaching objectives are explained, and the output task for this unit—introducing one of your good friends and describing a suitable gift for them—is assigned to the students.

3.3.2. Enabling

To bridge the gap between input learning and output, teachers should utilize the concept of “scaffolding” and conduct the enabling stage to assist students in completing the output task [2]. Following this teaching method, after assessing the difficulty of the task and its expected outcomes, the teacher divides the task of introducing a good friend and explaining a suitable gift into three subtasks. These subtasks are designed to progressively help students complete the output task. Each subtask includes three components: the teacher explains the goal of the subtask; students engage in selective learning with teacher guidance and feedback; and students practice the output, with ongoing teacher guidance and feedback.

Subtask 1: Learn Relevant Vocabulary and Expressions

This subtask is the initial step in preparing students to complete the task. The aim is to establish a foundation for students to accumulate language knowledge for effective output. Before class, the teacher posts a video on Rain Classroom, which helps students understand the richness of expressions used when describing friends and provides a preliminary exposure to relevant phrases. To assess students’ autonomous learning and encourage the accumulation of additional relevant expressions, the teacher creates a shared document on WeChat where students input the expressions they have gathered. Subsequently, students are asked to complete a fill-in-the-blank exercise (Exercise 2 on P9) after reviewing Exercise 1 on P8. During this exercise, students practice using relevant phrases such as “click straightaway,” “have a lot in common,” “hit it off,” and “have our ups and downs.” Finally, students take photos of their completed exercises and upload them to Rain Classroom. The teacher reviews the students’ submissions and posts the correct answers.

e.g. Question:

‘We liked one another as soon as we first met’=we clicked / we hit it

Answer: straightaway/ off

Subtask 2: Connect with Foreign Teachers to Guide Students in Exploring Cultural Differences in Friendships

To create a realistic task scenario and immerse students in a language-rich environment, this subtask involves connecting with foreign teachers via Tencent Meeting. The goal is to assist students in completing the output task. The foreign teacher will discuss difficulties encountered when giving gifts to Chinese friends and then guide students in using what they have learned to explore the topic. This process helps students identify cultural differences in gift-giving practices both domestically and internationally. For example:

Foreign Teacher (T): Hi there! My name is Mike, and I come from America. Nice to meet you!

Student A (S): Nice to meet you too! I am Li Ming from China. It’s an honor to communicate with you! How are you doing?

T: Actually, not so well. I’ve had some conflicts with my Chinese friend recently, but I’m not sure how to resolve them.

S: I’m sorry to hear that. What kind of conflicts are you experiencing? Maybe we can figure out a solution together.

T: It’s about giving gifts. I gave my Chinese friend a gift, but she seemed a bit upset. I’m not sure why.

S: That’s interesting. In China, there are cultural differences in gift-giving. Perhaps you unintentionally did something that caused discomfort. For instance, did you consider the appropriateness of the gift?

T: I thought I chose a nice gift. It was a bottle of expensive perfume.

S: In China, people often prioritize the practicality and symbolic meaning of gifts. Generally, gifts are chosen based on friends' personalities, hobbies, and shared experiences. Sometimes, overly expensive gifts might make people feel uncomfortable or suggest ulterior motives.

T: I didn't realize that. Could you provide a specific example? What kind of gift would you typically give a friend?

S: Of course! Let me use my experience as an example. My good friend is outgoing and enjoys playing badminton, and I share the same interest. We hit it off from our first meeting. Despite having some ups and downs in our relationship, we've grown closer and I've come to understand her better. For her eighteenth birthday, I gave her a pair of badminton rackets and a diary notebook. She was very touched and gave me a big hug.

T: Wow! That's a touching story! Thank you for your help. Maybe I'll call her to explain once we finish our talk.

Finally, the teacher reviews the students' speeches and facilitates a discussion about the cultural differences between China and other countries highlighted in the dialogue.

Subtask 3: Students Record Speech Videos and Complete Assignments

After completing the first two subtasks, students should have mastered the skill of describing their friends and recognized the differences in expressions related to friendship both domestically and internationally. In this subtask, students are required to introduce one of their close friends and explain a suitable gift for this friend. They should record a video of approximately 3 minutes and submit it to Rain Classroom. The video must include at least five relevant expressions accumulated during the class. For example:

S: Hello everyone! Today, I'd like to introduce one of my very good friends.

She is warm-hearted and loves reading. Interestingly, I also have a great passion for books. From the moment we met, we hit it off. It felt as though we had known each other for a long time. Although there have been some ups and downs in our relationship, we have gradually come to understand each other more deeply through these experiences. I discovered that behind her warm-hearted exterior lies a profound sense of thoughtfulness.

Therefore, on her birthday, I gave her a beautiful bookmark and a classic novel. The bookmark is not only practical but also a symbol of our shared love for reading. Every time she uses it, it reminds her of our friendship and the joy of diving into the pages of a good book. The classic novel is a gift I carefully selected, knowing her taste in literature. It's a story that can take her on a journey of emotions and imagination, much like our friendship has taken us on many adventures.

She was thrilled when she received these gifts. It was as if I had understood her deepest desires without her having to say a word. This is the beauty of our friendship. We understand each other's passions and quirks, and we can always find the perfect gift to express our love and appreciation for one another.

In conclusion, when choosing a gift for a friend, it is important to consider their personality, hobbies, and unique qualities. By doing so, we can give a gift that is not only meaningful but also a reflection of our deep connection and understanding. Thank you!

3.3.3. Assessing

(1) Peer Assessment: The teacher divides the students into five groups. Members within each group score each other on a scale of 10 points. The scoring criteria are as follows: content suitability accounts for 3 points, coherence and fluency for 2 points, language accuracy and richness for 3 points, and pronunciation and intonation for 2 points. The student with the highest score in each group is then selected as the "Excellent Star."

(2) Teacher's Comments: After completing the peer assessment, the teacher evaluates all students' videos, taking into account both the students' scores and the teacher's assessment. The teacher's score accounts for 80% of the final grade, while the students' scores account for 20%. The video of the student with the highest final score will be shared with the entire class for learning purposes.

4. Teaching Reflection

After teaching, the teacher should reflect on their practice through student feedback and self-evaluation to identify strengths and areas for improvement, facilitating future progress.

4.1. Student Feedback

The teacher will administer an open-ended questionnaire to gather information on students' experiences and perceptions of the class. The questionnaire covers four areas: "learning insights," "evaluation of teaching forms," "evaluation of teaching methods," and "suggestions for teachers."

(1) Learning Insights: A. What is the greatest benefit you gained during the learning process? B. What do you consider the most challenging aspect of the learning process? (2) Evaluation of Teaching Forms: A. Do you think the current blended teaching mode, combining online and offline components, is effective for learning spoken English? B. Do you believe it is necessary to adjust the proportion of online versus offline teaching? (3) Evaluation of Teaching Methods: A. Do you think this teaching method effectively improves your oral English skills? B. Do you think this teaching method enhances your interest in learning? (4) Suggestions for Teachers: A. In which areas do you hope the teacher can provide additional support? B. What improvements do you suggest the teacher make to the teaching process?

4.2. Self-Reflection

In this teaching case, applying the Production-Oriented Approach and utilizing a blended teaching mode has yielded certain successes, while also highlighting areas needing improvement.

4.2.1. Advantages

(1) Innovative Introduction Method: Requiring students to watch character reviews from the American classic TV series "Friends" before class has stimulated their interest and made learning more enjoyable.

(2) Clear Output Tasks: By setting clear output tasks related to describing friends, students have been guided to apply language knowledge more effectively, improving their oral expression skills.

(3) Realistic Scenario Design: Collaborating with foreign teachers during class immerses students in an English communication environment, enhancing their practical communication skills.

4.2.2. Deficiencies

(1) Insufficient Attention to Individual Differences: While individual differences are considered in after-class assignments, there is still a lack of differentiation for varying student levels during class.

(2) Low Participation of Some Students: Due to limited class time, only a few students can be selected for interactive activities.

5. Conclusion

Guided by the Production-Oriented Approach (POA), this study analyzes how to enhance students' oral English proficiency using a blended teaching model. The curriculum design, based on POA, is

divided into three phases: motivating, enabling, and assessing, which progressively guide students through oral English production tasks. In addition to using common online teaching platforms like MOOCs and Rain Classroom, this study incorporates online tools such as WeChat and Tencent Meeting. By connecting with foreign teachers via Tencent Meeting, the class creates an authentic language environment for students. This approach not only aids students in completing their production tasks more effectively but also allows them to experience the nuances of cross-cultural communication. It is hoped that these methods will inspire future research.

However, this study only involved a questionnaire survey conducted after a single class session. There is a lack of follow-up evaluation regarding the long-term impact of blended oral teaching on students' oral English proficiency and their application skills post-graduation. Therefore, future research should include long-term follow-up studies to more comprehensively assess the effectiveness of the blended oral teaching model.

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