

## Blended Learning in EIR Course based on SPOC Platform

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of blended learning beads on SPOC (a small private online course) in EFL education. To this end, an empirical study, a survey and an in-depth interview were executed. The participants were 60 pre-service English teachers enrolled in a teacher training program at a west university in China. 15 of them were willing to participate in the interview. The results of the study revealed that the contents and objectives of SPOC blended learning in English Integrated Reading (EIR) course had significantly improved their overall English academic performance. Meanwhile, more than 50% of the participants strongly agreed that information searching, knowledge integrating and communication skills were improved greatly. Additionally, the majority of the participants agreed that the multi-dynamic evaluation mode was helpful monitor learning process and evaluate learning effect effectively.

### 1. Introduction

With the rapid advancement and wide application of information technology in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), EFL teaching is facing great opportunities and challenges. Blended learning breaks the boundary of traditional classroom, and students can learn diverse course contents through iPad or mobile phone almost anytime and anywhere. In the field of EFL blended learning research, scholars have conducted a great number of researches and achieved rich results from the perspectives of teaching design, influence factor analysis, and teaching effect evaluation. For example, Tomlinson & Whittaker (2013) proposed that the designer of blended learning curriculum should consider four problems, namely, teaching situation, teaching design, participants and evaluation, and only when these four aspects were carefully planned, designed and implemented, could effective blended learning happen. Yang et al. (2017) summarized the application mode and characteristics of blended learning in the course of Life English Communication, and put forward valuable suggestions for implementing effective blended learning. Liu et al. (2018) proved the effectiveness of a multiple-index evaluation system for blended learning in Computer course. Cai (2019) carried out an empirical study of project-driven blended learning mode, and the results indicated it could effectively cultivate students' academic English skills. However, the existing literature in the field of EFL has not extensively explored SPOC blended learning in English reading course at tertiary level. Therefore, based on production-oriented approach (POA) (Wen 2018) in EFL teaching design, this study was executed to examine the effectiveness of SPOC blended learning in college EIR course. This study attempts to answer the following two questions.

(1) Did the teaching contents and objectives of SPOC blended learning in EIR course improve students' overall English academic performance?

(2) Did SPOC blended learning in EIR course improve students' learning abilities and evaluate learning effect effectively?

### 2. The construction of blended learning in EIR course based on SPOC platform

EIR course was built on ChaoXing (Superstar) SPOC platform, and students could use ChaoXing

app to learn the course. Online tasks, tests and interaction, offline attendance, classroom discussion, presentation, and homework were all included to make multi-dynamic evaluation of the learning process. In the design of SPOC blended learning mode, students, teachers, resources, tasks, media, strategies, evaluation and other teaching elements (Meng 2015) were integrated to construct the framework, which had three learning stages, autonomous learning before class, inquiry learning in class and consolidation learning after class, in order to solve the problems of insufficient deep learning and low classroom learning efficiency in EFL education.

The blended learning included online and offline learning, so formative evaluation was carried out in the teaching process, the teaching content and strategies were adjusted appropriately according to the feedback from formative evaluation. Therefore, according to the multi-dynamic evaluation mode for EIR course, learning and evaluation was implemented simultaneously to realize the purpose of assessment of learning, for learning and as learning. The different parts of the evaluation included online learning (20%), phase tests (20%), discussion and presentation (20%) and final test (40%).

### **3. Methodology**

This mixed-method study was undertaken to examine the effectiveness of blended learning in EIR course based on SPOC. At the end of the empirical teaching practice, a questionnaire survey was designed with reference to Garrison's (2010) & Yang's (2017) studies. In order to ensure the reliability of the questionnaire and interview, a pre-test was done with 5 volunteer participants. According to their feedback and suggestions, the final version of the questionnaire and interview items was made. In addition, 15 participants were willing to take part in an in-depth interview to gain a deeper understanding of blended learning mode in EIR course based on SPOC to complement the survey results.

### **4. Participants**

Two groups of participants from second year pre-service English teacher training program were selected for this study. Most of them started to learn English from grade three in primary school. When they were enrolled to the university, their scores for English course in the National College Entrance Examination were from 90 to 110 (the full score was 150). Hence, the two groups had similar English language proficiency, and they didn't have formal blended learning experience before. There were no other differences for curriculum and teachers except the SPOC blended learning in EIR course.

The first group, 30 students from class 1801, was taken as the experimental class, and the second group, 30 students from class 1802 with traditional classroom teaching, was the control class. Most of the students in the two classes had high interest in English learning, but they didn't like to discuss, present or share ideas in classroom.

### **5. Data collection and analysis**

The data collected in this study were from EIR course score, the survey and the in-depth interview. In the first place, two classes' EIR course scores were gathered and analyzed by SPSS. In the second place, the survey conducted by class 1801 were collected, and the results were carefully analyzed. Additionally, the in-depth interview of the 15 volunteer participants were audiotaped and transcribed into texts afterwards. The transcripts were repeatedly read to fully understand the interviewees' ideas and opinions. Furthermore, the transcripts were analyzed, classified and sorted according to the topics and dimensions involved in the interview.

### **6. Results and discussion**

In this section, the survey and the interview data were reported and interpreted in terms of the study's two significant research questions to form in-depth discussion of issues related to SPOC blended learning in EIR course as well as EFL education.

At the end of the semester, the experimental class and the control class took the same final written test, the contents of which were compiled in strict accordance with the requirements of the course syllabus. EIR course scores of the two class were computed and compared. The average score of the experimental class was 5.92 points higher than that of the control class, and the independent sample t test was 0.002, indicating that there was a significant difference in the course scores between the two classes. These results were in agreement with Wu's (2010) findings that students' academic performances were better promoted and facilitated in blended learning environment. Judging by this, it may be inferred that the blended learning mode had a significant effect on the improvement of students' overall performance in EIR course.

According to the survey results, more than 50% of the students strongly agreed that information searching, knowledge integrating, communication skills, teamwork, information tech ability etc., were greatly enhanced in SPOC blended learning mode in EIR course. In terms of problem solving, inquiry, and practical work ability, over 40% of students believed these abilities were also improved a lot. The results confirmed Yang's (2017) survey that the ability of language communication and problem analysis had been improved. This study also revealed that critical and creative ability improved quite slowly, which needed the active use of blended learning in other courses to gradually improve the high-level abilities.

In addition, 93.33% of the participants in the interview agreed that: "the effect of SPOC blended learning in EIR course were very good, and they gained a lot in many aspects." 73.33% of them believed that "the learning resources could meet their leaning needs, and the multi-dynamic evaluation methods could help monitor learning process." 86.67% of the interviewees mentioned that "they like class discussion and presentation activities most, because they can better practice communication skills." On the whole, the teaching contents and objectives of SPOC blended learning in EIR course could improve students' overall academic performance, and evaluated learning effect effectively.

## **7. Conclusion**

The study presented the effects of SPOC blended learning in EIR course for pre-service English teachers. It contributes to scholarly understanding and practical implementation of SPOC blended learning in EFL education at tertiary level. The findings revealed that this teaching practice not only enhanced the participating students' overall academic performance, but also improved their learning abilities and evaluated learning effect quite effectively. However, several limitations of the study need to be addressed. First, as data were collected from a small number of pre-service English teacher training program in a university in China, the findings of the study may not be directly applicable to blended learning in secondary education or other research contexts. Secondly, the study lasted solely one semester, and it is thus possible that the findings would have been different if the study had been conducted in a much longer period of time. Thirdly, the proportions of the multi-dynamic evaluation were framed according to the learning characteristics of EIR course, finer dimensions and proportions may need to reframe in other disciplines.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into blended learning and evaluation and has some significant implications for EFL tertiary education. Firstly, instructors may need to have a careful design, strict organization and scientific implementation for blended learning in order to achieve distinctive teaching effects. Secondly, assessors of blended learning could consider different dimensions and the dynamic data reflecting learning completion and participation of the learning process to evaluate students' learning outcome, so that it can effectively promote EFL teaching, students' learning and development at colleges.

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