Blended Teaching Mode Based on the "Rain Classroom" Platform – A Case Study of the Course "Basic German Grammar" at Beijing International Studies University

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Abstract: The blended teaching is an "online + offline" teaching mode that integrates the dual experience of traditional classroom and online learning, which is a hot topic that educators at different levels are currently paying attention to and studying. The "Rain Classroom" is a new teaching platform developed with the support of information technology, which promotes the development of the blended teaching mode, improves teaching effect, monitors teaching process in real time, and enhances the effectiveness of teaching management. This paper takes the academic course of "Basic German Grammar" at Beijing International Studies University as an analysis case. Based on the online courses developed by the lecturer, while according to the characteristics of "Rain Classroom" as well as the principles and steps of the blended teaching, a blended teaching mode is constructed from multiple dimensions. Course design, teaching methods, teaching process and teaching evaluation are the different dimensions that have been developed. Thus forming a teaching system of "self-study before class + practice in class + review after class", which effectively enhances the students' knowledge, self-learning ability, and problem-solving ability.

Keywords: "Rain Classroom", blended teaching mode, "Basic German Grammar" course, hybrid learning, multimodal learning, video in education, flipped classroom, innovative pedagogies

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Introduction

With the further development of the Internet and information technology, all walks of life have begun to use Internet platforms to realize online office work, and the education field has also begun to use network platforms to build online teaching and learning systems. In April 2018, the Ministry of Education of China officially released the "Education Informatization 2.0 Action Plan", proposing to actively promote the development of "Internet + Education" and realize blended teaching with large-scale application of information technology, which opened up a new path for teaching. This coupled with Internet development and technology has become an inevitable trend to reform the teaching mode.

In the past few years since the COVID-19 pandemic began, colleges and universities around the world began to teach online via the Internet. After the pandemic ended, the classrooms that returned to offline teaching still retained the beneficial parts of online teaching. Today, the "online + offline" teaching has become an effective teaching mode. This mode breaks through the limitations of time and space on teaching and learning, and is of great benefit for improving students' autonomous learning ability, innovation and exploration awareness.

The course "Basic German Grammar", as an important basic course for German majors in foreign language universities, aims to systematically build a knowledge framework of German grammar for students, improve their language analysis and application abilities, and impart language learning methods and national cultural knowledge in teaching, so as to cultivate students with cross-cultural communication abilities and international vision, thus playing an important role that cannot be replaced by other courses.

Based on the above considerations, the teacher of the course "Basic German Grammar" at Beijing International Studies University, conducted an in-depth analysis on the reform of the teaching mode of the course, and created the online courses "Basic German Grammar" in 2019. Furthermore, the teacher carried out blended teaching practice. In the meanwhile, the teacher constantly thought about and adjusted her teaching mode, in order to improve the teaching methods and enhance the teaching effects.

1. Goal Setting

The German grammar course is an important part of the undergraduate curriculum system of the German major. The main source of students for the German Department at the Beijing International Studies University are high-level college entrance examination candidates from all over China, who come from different regions and nationalities, such as Han, Uyghur, Tibetan, etc., and their learning needs and habits are also different. In special periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic, students from all over the country have a greater demand for a combination of online and offline teaching mode.

Therefore, the primary goal of the construction of the blended course "Basic German Grammar" is to provide students with convenient learning resources and approaches by creating high-quality online courses. The online courses systematically outline the context of knowledge points, clarify the connections between each knowledge point, and build a complete knowledge framework, which helps students make efficient use of fragmented time and gives them more flexible and effective learning methods to choose from.

The second goal of the construction of the blended course "Basic German Grammar" is to stimulate students' interest and desire to explore German learning by visualizing the vivid and interesting teaching process through online courses, to promote students' learning autonomy, enthusiasm and thinking ability, in order to cultivate high-level, application-oriented talents with international vision and compound abilities.

The online courses "Basic German Grammar" are not only an important, innovative and efficient part of the "online + offline" teaching mode that combines pre-class preparation, after-class consolidation and in-class teaching, but can also be used as independent courses. This is because each grammatical phenomenon forms an independent module, which together form a systematic grammatical map. Therefore, the online courses can be used in conjunction with classroom teaching, or as a systematic independent course for elective courses, minor courses, self-study or other learning purposes. This is the third goal of the blended course construction.

The online courses are open to all undergraduate students majoring in German, as well as students of other majors with German as a second foreign language. It can also be used as a high-quality learning resource for senior students of German major to consolidate what they have learned. The course audience also includes people from all walks of life who are interested in German and plan to study, work or travel in German-speaking countries, providing them with

convenient resources to learn German anytime and anywhere. In short, the complete set of high-quality online courses can be provided as open courses for various universities, enterprises, institutions, etc.

2. Course Design

The offline curriculum for the course "Basic German Grammar" at Beijing International Studies University is as follows: 18 weeks per semester, 2 class hours per week, 1 week for teaching practice and 1 week for review lessons. The online courses design covers a total of 4 semesters for the basic learning stage of the lower grades. In consideration of the offline teaching progress, the corresponding online courses are set to 16 lessons per semester. The main practice objects of the online and offline blended teaching mode are 2 classes of sophomores majoring in German, with about 25 students in each class.

The content of the online courses is mainly derived from the 1st to 4th volumes of the general German textbook "Studienweg Deutsch" for Chinese universities. It takes the grammar progress of the textbook as the guideline, and on this basis, some modular teaching innovation attempts are made, and extracurricular materials are supplemented for the grammar part of the textbook. Because the grammar points of the textbooks are based on text scenes, the division of grammar points is relatively scattered, and the depth of after-class exercises and the breadth of knowledge in the textbook still need to be expanded, so this online courses re-integrates and divides the grammar teaching resources according to knowledge modules to improve the systematicness and effectiveness of grammar teaching.

According to the target groups of the course, the teaching objectives are divided into two categories:

1) For undergraduate students, through learning of the courses, they can reach the B2 level of grammar application of the European Common Language Standards, understand and master all the grammatical phenomena covered by the intermediate German textbooks, and be fully prepared for the Examination of German studies in the basic course (German: Prüfung Germanistik im Grundstudium, *abbr.* PGG-Prüfung).

2) For second foreign language students and self-learners, they can understand the general framework of German grammar, understand grammatical logic, and master basic application approaches, so as to be able to communicate and exchange ideas using correct grammar in daily life and specific occasions.

Table 1

Outline of the online courses "Basic German Grammar", lecturer: Lu Zou

Semester	Week	Grammar point	Video Duration (min)
1	1	Overview of German grammar	10
	2	der Nominativ	18
	3	Verb-Konjugation von regelmäßigen Verben im Präsens	13
	4	Verb-Konjugation von unregelmäßigen Verben im Präsens	22
	5	der Akkusativ	13
	6	der Imperativ	15
	7	das Perfekt	17
	8	das Possessivpronomen	13
	9	der Nullartikel und negative Artikel	14
	10	das Modalverb	23
	11	der Dativ	16
	12	Verben mit Dativ- und Akkusativobjekt	12
	13	trennbare und untrennbare Verben	19
	14	Präpositionen mit Akkusativ und Dativ	13
	15	Wechselpräpositionen	21
	16	Satzklammer	8

Semester	Week	Grammar point	Video Duration (min)
2	1	der Genitiv	32
	2	Präpositionen mit Genitiv	15
	3	Deklination der Adjektive	23
	4	Gebrauch des Adjektivs	20
	5	Ordnungszahlen und Interrogativpronomen	17
	6	das Passiv: Satzbau	21
	7	das Passiv: Zeitform und Ersatzform	20
	8	das Präteritum	23
	9	Reflexivpronomen	10
	10	reflexive Verben	14
	11	das Adverb	18
	12	Komparativ und Superlativ	21
	13	der Objektsatz	18
	14	der Subjektsatz	10
	15	der Infinitiv	17
	16	der Finalsatz	11
3	1	der Relativsatz: Relativpronomen (Nom. Akk. Dat.)	15
	2	der Relativsatz: Relativpronomen (Gen.)	14
	3	der Relativsatz: Relativadverbien	18
	4	Konjunktiv II: Konjugation	9
	5	Konjunktiv II: Zeitform und in Passiv	8
	6	Konjunktiv II: Höflichkeit	9
	7	Konjunktiv II: Irrealität	12
	8	Konjunktiv II mit Modalverben	11
	9	der Kausalsatz	8
	10	Ersatzform vom Finalsatz	8
	11	der Konzessivsatz	8
	12	Ersatzform vom Konzessivsatz	8
	13	der Konditionalsatz	9
	14	der Konsekutivsatz	9
	15	der Vergleichssatz	11
	16	der Instrumentalsatz	8
4	1	der Zeitsatz: wenn/als	8
	2	der Zeitsatz: bevor/nachdem	7
	3	der Zeitsatz: während/seitdem	6
	4	Partizip I	10
	5	Partizip II	12
	6	Konjunktiv I: Konjugation	10
	7	Konjunktiv I: Zeitform	13
	8	Futur I	10

Semester	Week	Grammar point	Video Duration (min)
	9	Futur II	8
	10	Indefinitpronomen 1	13
	11	Indefinitpronomen 2	8
	12	Indefinitpronomen 3	10
	13	Demonstrativpronomen	12
	14	Valenz des Adjektivs	15
	15	Funktionsverbgefüge	9
	16	Umformung von Nebensätzen in Präpositionalphrasen	16

Figure 1

Display of "Basic German Grammar"

Furthermore, the online courses "Basic German Grammar" have two supporting courses as preparatory courses. The combination of the three together constructs a complete online teaching system for the basic stage, aiming to cultivate students' ability of independent learning and lifelong learning. The other two courses are as follows:

1) "German Pronunciation for beginners", which is a basic German phonetics course that covers all the phonetics knowledge in the basic stage. There are 25 lectures in total, each lasting less than 10 minutes. It is a necessary course for beginners learning German.

Figure 2

Display of "German Pronunciation for beginners"

2) "Oral German for beginners", which presets 11 common oral scenarios, allowing students to master communication skills in different scenarios, familiarize themselves with the general situation of Germany, and prepare for all-round adaptation and enjoyment of German life.

Figure 3

Display of "Oral German for beginners"

3. Teaching methods

Blended teaching mode combines online with offline teaching. It makes full use of the advantages of modern information technology, combines face-to-face teaching in traditional classrooms with autonomous learning and collaborative learning on the network platform, and makes up for the shortcomings of the traditional teaching mode. Blended teaching mode enriches the teaching content and form by introducing information technology tools such as learning platforms and teaching software, expands the time and space for learning, and makes the learning process more flexible and diverse.

The traditional teaching mode of the course "Basic German Grammar' mainly faces the following problems:

1) The selected textbooks do not have corresponding online resources.

2) The traditional education mode mainly focuses on face-to-face teaching. It fails to reflect the dominant position of students, weakens the process of students' exploratory learning, and fails to fully develop students' autonomy and enthusiasm for learning.

3) Students' ideas cannot be fed back to teachers in a timely manner, and the effect of face-to-face learning cannot be systematically fed back with data. It is difficult to monitor the learning status of each student and to improve the teaching efficiency on a large scale.

4) The assessment and evaluation mechanism is homogeneous. Traditional teaching emphasizes the proficiency of knowledge, the standardization of answering questions and the authority of standard answers. This makes it difficult to comprehensively assess students' skills and qualities in all aspects.

In this regard, based on existing teaching experience, the teacher has developed series of online grammar courses, and used the "Rain Classroom" platform to provide solutions to the problems of traditional teaching mode.

The "Rain Classroom" is a new smart teaching solution that can be used through PowerPoint plug-in and a WeChat official account. The teacher conducts smart teaching by opening a PPT in class and digitizing traditional classrooms, live streaming can also be utilized at the same time. Students can enter the teacher's smart classroom by entering the WeChat public account "Rain Classroom" on their mobile phones. The "Rain Classroom" can also record the big data and provide playback of the teaching contents.

The implementation process of the blended teaching mode based on the "Rain Classroom" includes the following **stages**:

1) Online self-study: The teacher publishes the basic German grammar points to be learned in form of videos and exercises to the "Rain Classroom" platform and publishes preview tasks through WeChat public account. The students then learn online and check the effect of self-study through online tests.

2) Offline cooperation and interaction: In real classrooms, the teacher organizes teaching activities for the key points of grammar courses, including discussions, speeches, scenario simulations, etc., so as to guide students to think deeply through practical applications, and improve their abilities to work in groups and interact with each other.

3) Online expansion and consolidation: Using the online platform, students can repeatedly watch the videos of the teaching process in class, read texts, and complete exercise assignments to strengthen their cognition and consolidate learning effects.

4) Process evaluation and improvement: Based on the teaching data feedback generated by the "Rain Classroom", the students' learning efforts and results in the three stages of before, during and after class are evaluated. The teaching strategies are flexibly adjusted according to the individual characteristics of the students, and the teaching resources and methods are updated in time.

4. Teaching process

1) Preparation before class

Add the "Rain Classroom" through WeChat (mobile) public account, create online classes and courses. Students join the created class through the class invitation code. The teacher publishes tasks before class, which contains online videos courses and simple exercises corresponding to the knowledge points to be taught in class. Through the feedback function of the "Rain Classroom", the teacher can see the length of time each student has watched the videos in preview, and adjust and improve the preview content accordingly as to adapt to the students' preview habits.

2) Activities in class

In class, the teacher opens the PPT to play the courseware, and opens the live streaming of the "Rain Classroom" at the same time, so that students can watch the full playback of the lesson at any time after class. Students can sign in after entering the "Rain Classroom". During the lesson, students can watch the PPT played by the teacher through the "Rain Classroom" (mobile). If they have doubts about the content, they can click the corresponding PPT and click the "Don't understand" button. Students can also raise their own questions through anonymous bullet comments, and the teacher can adjust the teaching rhythm according to the actual real time situation.

The teacher uses the "Rain Classroom" to set some questions in the PPT in advance and attach the answers. During the lesson, the questions can be pushed to students with the help of the question publishing function, and students can submit the answers within the time limit. When the answering time is up, the teacher clicks on the "answer status" and sees the details of the answers (including the number of correct answers, etc.). The teacher can understand the students' answers the first time and adjust the teaching rhythm in time. The notes taken by the teacher using the whiteboard function are also automatically generated as part of the presentation.

3) Follow-up after class

After the class, a summary report will be generated by the "Rain Classroom" and sent to the teacher, including the number and list of students who signed in, who were absent, and who participated in the class discussion, as well as the percentage of answers to class exercises, the completion of exercises, etc. Based on this, the teacher can grasp the learning progress of each student, reasonably select after-class exercises and review materials, and then send relevant learning suggestions and materials to relevant students, so that they can review and consolidate the corresponding knowledge in a targeted and timely manner. After class, students can also discuss with the teacher about the questions and difficulties they have online.

5. Teaching evaluation

The evaluation mechanism is a key part of teaching design. It is necessary not only to evaluate students' learning effect, but also to evaluate teachers' teaching abilities. The two complement each other and promote each other. The evaluation of students' learning effect helps to provide timely feedback on learning status and consolidate learning effect; the evaluation of the teacher's teaching abilities is based on the evaluation of the students' learning effect, and helps the teacher further improve the teaching mode and methods.

In view of the characteristics of the blended teaching mode, the teaching evaluation mechanism should focus on diversity and process. First of all, the teaching evaluation mechanism should be diverse, and the main criteria are whether the students have mastered the knowledge taught in classes, whether the teacher has cultivated students' ability to analyse and solve problems independently, and whether the teacher has enabled students to gain self-confidence and a sense of accomplishment. These factors, in turn, become the evaluation criteria for teachers' course

design, teaching content and teaching methods. Specifically, the evaluation criteria can be set by setting evaluation standards in three stages: before class, in class, and after class.

Firstly, the evaluation of students' involvement before class can be judged by *the number and duration of video courses* watched before class, which also reflects their satisfaction with the content and form of the preview materials provided by the teacher.

Secondly, the evaluation of students' learning effect in class can be judged by *the frequency of participation* in classroom interaction and their *enthusiasm* for it, and their *ability to actually answer questions*.

Thirdly, the evaluation of students' learning effect after class can be judged by *the submission speed* and *quality of homework*, *the content of after-class summary and questions*, which are also the evaluation criteria of after-class teaching effect.

After comparing the teaching practices of sophomores majoring in German for 2 semesters, it was found that **through blended teaching, the learner autonomy and their enthusiasm have been improved, classroom activity has increased significantly, and the average scores of in-class tests and end-term tests have also improved slightly**. In addition, **some introverted students also said that compared with pure offline teaching, the blended teaching mode has made them receive more attention**. In short, developing an effective teaching evaluation mechanism will help to continuously improve teaching methods, enhance teaching quality, better cultivate students' learning ability, creativity and innovation awareness, enable them to gain a sense of accomplishment in the process of online and offline interaction, and make blended learning more valuable.

Conclusion

The practice of the "online + offline" blended teaching mode of the course "Basic German Grammar" achieves the educational goals of stimulating interest, cultivating ability, and improving quality through rich and diverse teaching resources, a step-by-step teaching process, and a multi-dimensional teaching evaluation system. The blended mode takes the video courses created by the teacher as the online resource basis, and the teacher's many years of practical experience as the offline resource support, and the online courses "German Pronunciation for beginners" and "Oral German for beginners" as extracurricular resources, it finally forms a complete online course system to support the basic stage learning of the undergraduate majoring in German.

As a new teaching platform widely used in Chinese universities, the "Rain Classroom" promotes the development of blended teaching mode, improves teaching effect, monitors teaching process in real time, and enhances the effectiveness of teaching management. In the blended teaching mode, the teacher can grasp the real learning effect of students without delay, and students can also understand their real learning effect immediately. In this way, students are more fully prepared in terms of knowledge and psychology, and the teacher' lectures will be more targeted, which is conducive to teaching students in accordance with their aptitude and improving the quality of teaching and learning. In the future, the teacher will continue to improve the course design, teaching methods and teaching evaluation, and polish each stage of the teaching mode "self-study before class + practice in class+ review after class" to promote students' personalized development and deep learning ability, which ultimately promotes the common development of teachers and students.

Further information

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