

# Improving Students' English Learning Experience under the Background of Internationalization

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**Abstract:** Globalisation has increasingly pushed academic institutions towards internationalization. As such it has become an institutional priority in many Asian countries. Internationalization in “higher education has multiple dimensions – curricula, students and faculty, technology, and programs” . This paper focuses on how these five dimensions can be brought together, and implemented, such that they provide students with accelerated learning opportunities during the internationalization process. How global events impact the day-to-day operations tends to be unique to the university. Recent events resulting from the 2019 COVID-19 global pandemic have required extensive institutional adaptation. Almost overnight, face-to-face instruction was stopped in favour of online teaching. In China, the government launched an emergency policy initiative aimed at continuing education in the face of the pandemic. The policy was called “suspending classes without stopping learning” . The policy began the process of transitioning to online education. This paper discusses the five dimensions of the internationalization process in light of recent events that are making e-blending learning a part of the daily lives of Chinese students.

**Keywords:** Internationalization; E-blending Learning; Chinese Students; Policy

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## 1. Introduction

The internationalization process in higher education is supported by multiple elements: School-wide networks, research activities, creative works, cross-institutional exchanges, professional development, curricula development and related institutional partnerships . This study introduces how university networks and curricula were leveraged and integrated into online education as a result of the sudden outbreak of COVID-19. It then focuses on the learning experiences of non-English major undergraduate students when faced with online English learning. The study provides an analysis of e-blended teaching methods for improving student learning experiences. Further, it discusses how such methods can lead to internationalization within higher education.

### 1.1 Context of Study

A novel coronavirus called SARS-COV-2 virus led to a global pandemic. The virus-caused pneumonia-like symptoms were given the name COVID-19 by the World Health Organization . UNESCO reported that the resulting nationwide closures from the virus affected more than 87% of the world's students . In the hopes of limiting its spread, In China, the virus promoted the suspension of university classes for a four-month period from February to May 2020. At the same time, a policy framework called the ‘suspend classes without stopping learning’ initiative was introduced by the Chinese government. Colleges and universities began the process of migrating courses to online platforms so students could continue their education with limited disruptions.

This study aims to answer the question: During the three months of online education, how was the student experience? In a survey of 5,769 non-English major undergraduates from a university, students were asked how satisfied they were with online English courses during the pandemic. The responses were as follows:

Response	Percent of Total Responses	No. of Student Responses
<b>Very Satisfied</b>	12.16%	702
<b>Satisfied</b>	44.10%	2,544
<b>Basically Satisfied</b>	38.57%	2,225
<b>Dissatisfied (via personal communication)</b>	5.17%	298

As we all know, Western civilization is deeply influenced by ancient Greeks, while eastern civilization is deeply influenced by ancient Chinese philosophy. Confucius is one of the Chinese educational philosophers who had a profound influence on the oriental civilization and respecting teachers is one of the main contents of his education philosophy<sup>[1]</sup>. Traditionally, Chinese teachers are conferred with an authority not subject to challenge. In the identity relationship between teachers and students, teachers are considered dominant, and authoritative and their identity is to be respected. Interpreting the results of the survey through the lens of Chinese cultural norms, the “Basically Satisfied” response in the survey carries with it an implicit expression of dissatisfaction. Given this cultural understanding, the survey shows that a very significant portion of the online English teaching student experience left students feeling dissatisfied.

## 1.2 E-Blending and Student Experience

Interaction between the curriculum, students, faculty, technology and the program (as a whole) is a multi-dimensional problem. A complex interplay of extrinsic and intrinsic factors comes together for a satisfactory experience. While the university cannot control the experience of the student, in their remote home environment, they can control the remaining dimensions. The control exerted on these remaining variables and responses with respect to student satisfaction can be regarded as metrics for the internationalization process of college English teaching and learning. This paper aims to look at these institutional and extrinsic variables (i.e., curriculum, faculty, technology and program). It aims to explore and propose a solution that can improve student English learning experiences in distance learning situations. This proposal will focus on programs for blended learning models (i.e., ones that combine online, or electronic, and offline, or traditional, classroom activities). Such e-blending approaches merge concepts of synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning.

## 1.3 E-blending, English Courses and Internationalization

The driving force for the internationalization of higher education is the integration of the world economy. This integration was partially derived from communication technologies. Countries face an increasingly competitive environment that necessitates the sharing of knowledge to maintain economic prosperity. The role of English is significant here <sup>[2]</sup>. The internationalization of Chinese higher education has become a key element of national policy aimed at developing World-Class Universities <sup>[3]</sup>. The ability to improve English education through English teaching reforms has been consistently explored by universities because of the added value that the language adds for establishing a global presence and improving economic and social returns <sup>[4]</sup>. The importance of English is thus increasing in China. At the same time, the university’s educational product can become more attractive if offered in an internationalized English curriculum <sup>[5]</sup>. Therefore, English education resonates strongly with the goal of educating “international talents”. Therefore, the use of modern technology to improve the level of English teaching and to cultivate student comprehension has become an important factor for Educators <sup>[6]</sup>. The information technology infrastructure developed to allow academic exchanges and to manage universities more effectively can be leveraged to develop new teaching and learning models <sup>[7]</sup>. Free knowledge exchange is essential for researchers and scholars from all over the world to acquire and share knowledge. However, some barriers exist. Copyright restrictions and the traditional periodical system have caused some restrictions to free access <sup>[8]</sup>. E-Blended learning can leverage existing infrastructure to acquire knowledge <sup>[9]</sup>

## 2. Literature review

E-Learning is a concept ambiguously used to encapsulate ideas of distance learning. It is also used sometimes to refer to blended learning <sup>[10]</sup>. It is important to note that online education is not limited to distance education just because it involves a set of learning/teaching programs completed via the internet. For this reason, e-blending is used to label a more holistic method of teaching that goes beyond what is traditionally regarded as distance learning. This hybrid learning is a tool for personalized learning to adapt to the ever-changing needs of the globally competitive world. Modern experiences are unprecedented and create pressures and require an intense pursuit of new knowledge <sup>[11]</sup>.

The final phase of distance education is generally called e-learning and might make use of network technologies combined with satellite to deliver teaching materials and provide interactive distance education <sup>[12]</sup>. The rate of development of modern technology has meant that systemic educational reform is increasingly requiring faster and faster implementation. Computer network-assisted English

teaching has been extensively piloted in universities where they adopt a variety of teaching methods. These include the use of online and offline, fixed and mobile, asynchronous and synchronous, and distributed and centralized hybrid teaching modes <sup>[13]</sup>.

Subsequent to the COVID-19 pandemic, many institutions (such as the International Bachelor's Degree Organization) cancelled or suspended year-end examinations in Europe and North America. This has had a significant impact on Asian countries. Students have felt abandoned and isolated and have felt that their futures have been jeopardized. The impact has been an increased investment and acceleration towards a more comprehensive online learning model for higher education. Schools are increasingly likely to organize more systematically (compared to previously) with the aim of developing a technology-based learning approach that is robust and more applicable to future needs on an international scale <sup>[14]</sup>.

In China, COVID-19 fits into the policy framework for "Public Emergency Management". In response to the outbreak, a series of urgent management decisions were taken by the Chinese government with the aim of "Suspending Classes Without Stopping Learning" – an initiative that was launched by the Ministry of Education to switch teaching activities into large-scale online teaching while schools were closed <sup>[15]</sup>. The aim of this policy is "to integrate the teaching resources of national and local schools and provide all students in the country with a set of rich, diverse and high-quality online resources" (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2020).

### **3. Proposal**

As discussed earlier, the student experience is problematic in the area of online English learning. The internal survey that led to this conclusion was one done by the College English Teaching and Research faculty - obtained via personal communication by the author of this paper. To remedy this low satisfaction, this paper proposes a set of improvements to the student online learning experience in blended teaching curricula. This method will be carried out as a kind of change management policy and will be written as a plan in this proposal. There are two elements in this proposal. The first one is the policy guiding the change activity. The second one is the participants involved in this policy including staffs, teachers and students.

#### **3.1 Institutional levels: relevant policies**

First, let us look at the macro aspect. That is the establishment of policies which are dedicated to accelerating the e-blending reformation and improving students' learning experiences. It is very important to make from an institutional perspective, relevant policies need to be formulated to guide online mixed teaching activities. Despite having some common features across the world, the internationalization of higher education is heavily influenced by the specific university and country of location.

E-blended English teaching and learning plans should be designed around their specific cultural circumstances vis-à-vis teaching and learning activities. Moreover, the plan must remain dynamic and must be revised and improved in due course according to feedback from teachers, staff and students during the implementation process.

#### **3.2 Problems that influences the students' learning experiences**

Next, let us find out some existing problems from the micro aspect, that is, from the aspect of the specific implementation of the policy. It can provide further suggestions for the formulation of our plan.

First, students feel that the platform and software equipment that can be used to support online learning experience is poor and that the school does not have its own developed equipment. Communication lines drop easily as a result of network congestion during synchronous teaching activities.

Second, the software used by teachers for live online courses is usually QQ, WeChat or other similar software not explicitly designed for English courses for their particular school curricula. The result is that teachers and students are unable to teach face-to-face. Some students do not actively listen to lectures seriously after signing in and continue to do their own things. The result is that they are unable to keep up with the taught material as it progresses. Since students feel accustomed to traditional face-to-face teaching, online teaching reduces engagement and does not allow for adequate supervision by teachers. The result is a lack of timely guidance and supervision after class leading to laziness in learning.

In short, there are technical difficulties in blended teaching. Further, English teaching ability is weakened, and a communication gap is created between students and teachers. These constitute the three major obstacles in e-blended education. In addition, the managers do not set standards in time to measure the effectiveness of teachers' teaching activities and students' learning activities, so teachers' and students' online teaching and learning activities are in lack of supervision.

#### **3.3 Swot Analysis**

SWOT is a means of strategic analysis. The combination of internal resources and the external environment can be evaluated and analyzed through a framework of strengths (S), weaknesses (W), opportunities (O) and threats (T) <sup>[16]</sup>.

With the help of SWOT analysis, it is possible to demonstrate this proposal which contains e-blending teaching of English and exact measures that have been taken. There are advantages, disadvantages, external opportunities and challenges. Among these, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

First, let us look at the “strength” of the proposal. All the reforming ideas are directly from the students, staff and teachers. It is easy to be accepted and carried out step by step. Moreover, the schemes for the reform manuscript are clear and cover most of the participants’ interests. What’s more, blended learning combines online learning, traditional teaching and self-study. The question then arises of how blended learning combines traditional teaching, self-study, online learning modules and interactive online module? And can the implementation of blended learning improve the efficiency of English learning, thus affecting the internationalization of the organization? Blended teaching technologies focus on the widespread use of the Internet as part of a hybrid teaching model. The use of synchronous and asynchronous learning allows learning to cater to different types of learners and frees up the traditional constraints associated with normal school environments. This method has the potential to fully meet the requirements of educators and students, not only now during issues related to COVID-19, but also in the future and in communities normally isolated from learning centers. Blended learning is likely here to stay.

Then, let us look at the opportunities of this proposal. That is the sudden outbreak of COVID-19, has brought more opportunities for the implementation and exploration of this e-blending method. That is to say, more chances to practice this proposal. More researchers will focus on this and practices make perfect.

From the perspective of students, although this blended teaching has changed the traditional teaching approach it has had an impact in enabling learners to work together and collaborate. The removal of strict time and space constraints provides the opportunity of slower learners to pace their learning as well<sup>[17]</sup>. The approach allows students and teachers to share curriculum tools with other universities while providing relevant personnel at administrative levels and management levels an understanding of the international trajectory of the institution. This is reflected in the school’s ability to correct its weaknesses relative to other institutions and make necessary improvements.

From the perspective of internationalization, at the classroom level, teachers need embrace a global vision of the world and combine it with local awareness. They must adapt to the online classroom environment and convey this sense of how the students are connected to the rest of the world. To do this, teachers may also need to empathize with the student learning experience and adapt the class accordingly to create a truly international classroom. Here the role of the teacher from an internationalization perspective is to bridge the gap between different communities and backgrounds.

This study has some limitations. It is worth noting that the research was conducted in an ordinary university in China. Considering the potential scope and level of internationalization among different universities, the research results cannot be extended to other backgrounds. In addition, the study only discusses the views of non-English major undergraduate students in the school, without focusing on the experiences and feelings of English major students and foreign students. A comparative perspective is needed – this is left for future research. It would be of significant benefit to make more detailed observations and carry out interviews and surveys to examine how Chinese and international students improve their learning experience through e-blending methods.

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