

# **Exploration and Practice of Blended Learning in History Teaching in Chinese Universities— An Analytical Framework Based on the Three-Phase Instructional Model**

Lu Han<sup>1</sup>, Yang Pei<sup>2\*</sup>

1. School of Political Science and Public Administration Neijiang Normal University, Neijing, Sichuan, 641100, P.R. China.
2. Chinese Cultural Teaching Center, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, Suzhou, Jiangsu 210023, P. R. China.

Author : Lu Han

\* Corresponding author: Yang Pei

## **Abstract**

The traditional offline teaching method is a common teaching approach in Chinese universities. However, with the widespread adoption of Internet technology and the evolving demands of modern education, online teaching methods have gradually been introduced into university history courses. Online and offline teaching methods each have their own limitations. Only by organically integrating these two approaches can educators ensure that they complement each other to a certain extent, thereby enhancing the quality and efficiency of teaching. At present, the research and practice of blended learning in Chinese higher education institutions are still in the exploratory stage, and educators inevitably encounter problems such as the separation of offline and online teaching, and the disconnection between blended learning and the teaching of various disciplines. History teaching is people-oriented, with its focus on nurturing students to develop comprehensive ability, which particularly needs the integration of online and offline teaching methods. Therefore, this article practically integrate the three-phase of blended learning models of pre-class, in-class, and post-class into university history teaching, trying to provide a reference for improving the overall quality of history teaching in Chinese higher education institutions. Such integration can effectively boost students' motivation for studying history, improve

their professional skills, and further optimize teaching outcomes, as well as fostering a positive feedback loop of mutual growth between teaching and learning.

**Key words:** Blended learning; History pedagogy in higher education; Three-phase instructional model

## 1. Introduction

As a traditional discipline, history is pivotal in the preservation and transmission of nations' cultural heritage, and also has consistently played an irreplaceable role in cultivating personal qualities and promoting social development. Traditionally, Chinese university history instruction has primarily relied on textbooks as the core teaching tool, supplemented by a limited use of visual aids. Despite the gradual incorporation of multimedia resources, traditional offline teaching methods are still facing several challenges. In 2016, Hebei North University conducted a survey among 35 freshmen majoring in history to assess their engagement and mental state during classes. The findings revealed that nearly half (48%) of the respondents rated their classroom experience as either “average” or “poor”, indicating a need for pedagogical innovation.<sup>1</sup> In the past two years, in the context of the “non-stop classes” implemented for the prevention and control of the COVID-19, blended learning—integrating online and offline instructional strategies—has gained widespread adoption and practical application. Its innate advantages of this approach have been increasingly acknowledged by educators, leading to a growing consensus that the integration of online and offline education is essential for establishing a high-quality educational system and fostering students’ core competencies.<sup>2</sup> However, in 2020, A survey focused on different levels of history students in three higher normal colleges in Hebei Province by Lishuo Zhang and Cuiping Yang revealed a concerning trend: “most history students in China maintain a moderate level of professional identity, but a relatively high degree of learning burnout.”<sup>3</sup> This suggests that, despite the potential of blended learning, its implementation in higher education institutions remains limited, and multimedia-assisted teaching has yet to fully realize its potential

in enhancing history education.

Since 2000, mixed teaching method has attracted the continuous attention of scholars and practitioners. Current research on blended learning across various disciplines reveals that it is predominantly concentrated in fields such as English, ideological and political theory, physical education, and other theoretical disciplines. Notably, studies related to the application of blended teaching methods in history rank outside the top ten.<sup>4</sup> The research content in university-level blended teaching generally encompasses several key areas: the conceptual framework, theoretical underpinnings, and functional aspects of blended teaching; the development and use of intelligent teaching tools; the design of blended teaching models; evaluation of blended teaching quality; and the training of educators for blended teaching environments. Western researchers have adopted a more comprehensive approach to investigating blended teaching systems, focusing on the construction of a student satisfaction model within the blended learning environment. The main contents include teachers' professional skills, teachers' support, students' perceived task value, achievement goal expectation, self-efficacy, learning environment, interaction, etc., all of which are critical determinants of student satisfaction.<sup>5</sup> It is evident that most research perspectives on blended teaching tend to emphasize macroscopic theoretical discussions or isolated analyses of either online or offline models. Meanwhile, the design of blended teaching approaches specifically tailored to the humanities remains underexplored.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, there is a need for improvement in the design of blended teaching environments, particularly in terms of flexibility, interest, and emotional engagement.<sup>7</sup> This indicates that blended learning has faced challenges in both research and practice, including the separation between online and offline teaching and a disconnect between theoretical frameworks and practical applications.

In conclusion, the rapid advancement of information technology has prompted university history educators to incorporate a limited amount of Internet-based tools into their teaching practices. While progress has been made in the research and application of blended learning, the current efforts remain insufficient to fully leverage its potential. What are the limitations of current teaching approaches? Is the

current “blended learning” the same concept as the “mixed teaching” in the early 2000s? What is the optimal balance between online and offline instructional methods? How to use blended learning to create a truly participatory and personalized learning experience for students? How can the blended learning approach be effectively integrated into the practice of history teaching? These issues highlight the urgent need for comprehensive exploration and development of new models and practices that integrate blended learning with various academic disciplines. There is also a pressing requirement for in-depth research on the preparation, design, implementation, and evaluation of blended learning, ensuring they meet the evolving needs of both educators and learners. Addressing these challenges will be crucial for advancing the quality and impact of history education in the digital age. To address these challenges, it is imperative to transform the existing teaching model into one that fosters active and participatory learning. This transformation should emphasize interactive dialogue, collaborative inquiry, and critical analysis, enabling students to develop a deeper understanding of historical events and their significance. By incorporating more dynamic and student-centered pedagogical strategies, educators can enhance student engagement, promote independent learning, and cultivate the analytical and innovative skills necessary for effective historical inquiry. Blended learning can become a significant and promising choice.

## **2. Findings : problems existing in the current history class**

### **2.1 Lack of interaction and communication between teachers and students**

College history, inherently a vibrant and engaging discipline rich with fascinating historical narratives and profound humanistic allusions, should naturally appeal to students. However, in the traditional offline teaching model, instructors often adopt a “spoon-feeding” approach, unilaterally imparting knowledge while students remain in a passive receptive state. Even though teachers have consciously adopted advanced teaching methods to improve classroom efficiency by incorporating multimedia elements such as images and videos, history class is still a “one-man show” for teachers. Because the fundamental pedagogical paradigm of teaching has not

changed, the teacher just changed the original “human irrigation mode” to the current “machine irrigation mode”.A research from Merrill, a professor at Utah State University in the United States, reveals that high-quality multimedia and distance education products, which focus solely on the refinement of information design without aligning with student learning needs, tend to reinforce teacher-centered instruction..<sup>8</sup> A survey conducted among history students highlights these issues. When asked about the teaching methods employed by their instructors, 90% of respondents indicated that traditional lecture-based approaches were predominantly used. In response to whether they had experienced impactful history activities such as lectures, plays, or debates, 95% of students answered negatively. Furthermore, when queried about the frequency of teacher-student interactions through discussions and questions in class, 90% of students reported that such interactions occurred only occasionally.<sup>9</sup> These findings suggest that while advanced teaching tools and resources can enhance the delivery of content, they do not necessarily transform the learning experience if the core teaching philosophy remains unchanged.

Specifically, the course of “History of Western Civilization” course, widely offered by the history schools of Chinese universities, has the potential to be one of the most engaging and popular courses for students. This course provides a unique opportunity for students to gain an intuitive appreciation of the rich and diverse cultural heritage of Western Europe across various domains, including literature, art, philosophy, and science. However, the course often fails to captivate students due to the one-sided, lecture-based approach adopted by some instructors. When introducing the knowledge of the Crusades, teachers typically present the background, content, and impact of this historical period to students. However, students rarely take the initiative to critically think about or explore the underlying causes and broader implications of the Crusades during class. The lack of interactive engagement between teachers and students results in diminished interest in history learning for some students, making it challenging for them to engage with the subject independently. The study of history, however, demands a high level of cognitive and analytical skills from students, requiring strong learning abilities and logical

reasoning.<sup>10</sup> The existing teaching model has not undergone fundamental reform, leaving students in a predominantly passive role as recipients of information. This status quo significantly hampers teacher-student interaction and student participation in the history classroom, adversely affecting both teaching effectiveness and the overall learning experience. Additionally, the absence of meaningful collaboration among students limits the sharing of diverse perspectives and insights, thereby constraining the development of critical thinking and innovative capabilities. The current teaching approach overlooks the importance of active student participation. Students are seldom encouraged to engage proactively in the analysis and resolution of historical problems, instead being relegated to merely taking notes according to the teacher's instructions. The “full-classroom teaching” method, characterized by continuous lecturing, can render the classroom environment monotonous and unengaging, leading to reduced student interest. Consequently, this approach results in low efficiency, insufficient divergent thinking, a lack of problem awareness, and limited viewpoints in the teaching process.<sup>11</sup>

## **2.2 Lack of flexibility and diversity in teaching content**

University history instruction continues to face challenges related to a lack of flexibility and diversity. Under the prevailing "full-classroom teaching" approach, instructors typically adhere to fixed syllabi and predefined knowledge points, resulting in teaching content and methods that remain static over extended periods. Consequently, the curriculum often becomes outdated, with the scope of instruction limited to the content of prescribed course materials. This rigidity fails to accommodate the evolving characteristics and diverse needs of students across different academic stages, leading to a lack of adaptive responsiveness. In the long term, this approach risks further neglecting students' individual learning situations and needs. University education, characterized by a tolerant and resource-rich environment with ample class hours, should strive to transcend the traditional “guided teaching” model. Instead, it should embrace more open, flexible, diverse, and innovative teaching methodologies.<sup>12</sup> For instance, when teaching the course “History of Western Civilization”, instructors often introduce key points about the rise

of medieval universities in Europe. Given the students current academic context, many of them are naturally intrigued by this topic. However, most teachers continue to present the emergence, development, and significance of medieval universities in a procedural and syllabus-driven manner, rarely considering students individual differences and learning interests. There is little flexibility in adjusting the sequence of knowledge points or comparing and analyzing the evolution of universities across different periods and countries with contemporary institutions. “Enabling students to master relevant historical knowledge is not the only and ultimate goal of university history teaching. It is necessary to deeply explore the inherent deep structure of historical knowledge, such as British relations, development and changes, in order to comprehensively enhance the humanistic literacy of history undergraduate students.”

<sup>13</sup> Each student possesses unique strengths and specialties, yet the current learning model fails to help them unlock and develop these potentials. The absence of individualized teaching further constrains students' interest and capacity to actively explore historical issues. The rigidity of teaching methods transforms what could be a vibrant and engaging history course into a monotonous and standardized experience. This stylization diminishes students' interest in the subject, making it challenging for them to fully stimulate their innovative thinking,<sup>14</sup> and consequently hinders the cultivation of their humanistic qualities. To address these challenges, it is crucial to adopt more flexible and personalized teaching strategies that encourage critical thinking, comparative analysis, and active engagement with historical material, such as blended learning.

### **2.3 Unequal quality of teaching materials**

The competencies required in the study of history encompass three key dimensions: mastering and understanding fundamental historical knowledge; comprehending the context and processes of historical development; and the ability to analyze and solve problems using historical data. According to a survey of university students, when asked about their preferred types of exam questions, 95% chose fill-in-the-blank, term definitions, and short-answer questions. These question formats primarily assess basic knowledge retention, whereas essay questions and source

analysis tasks not only test foundational knowledge but also challenge students to develop their analytical and problem-solving skills.<sup>15</sup> Textual analysis is a crucial method for nurturing students' abilities to critically engage with and resolve historical problems. Historically, textbooks have been the primary resource for students to acquire historical knowledge, the extra-curricular reference books related to the course content are the main way to expand the students' subject knowledge. However, the update speed of paper resources is relatively slow, making it challenging to reflect the latest research findings and emerging trends in the field. The conclusions drawn in traditional textbooks tend to be static and unidimensional, offering limited perspectives. Moreover, students are unable to engage in real-time interaction with authors, relegating them to a passive role as mere recipients of information. The advancement of science and technology has significantly expanded the sources of historical texts. Databases and e-books have proliferated, providing a wealth of resources that greatly broaden students' horizons and deepen their understanding. However, the Internet era presents a unique challenge: the proliferation of information at varying levels of quality and reliability. Students often find it difficult to discern the authenticity of such knowledge based solely on their personal learning experiences, leading to their skepticism about the veracity of many historical claims. Furthermore, under the influence of long-term thinking patterns, when discussing historical issues, students lack horizontal and vertical connections to historical issues, and are also confined to the only ready-made answers in textbooks. This constrains their analysis to the pre-packaged answers found in textbooks, fostering a dependency on established narratives. Consequently, students may exhibit cognitive inertia, finding it difficult to think critically or innovatively. When they struggle to articulate their views in class, they are less likely to attempt new interpretations or propose original insights.

Based on the aforementioned challenges, it is evident that while current history classroom instruction incorporates multimedia as an auxiliary teaching tool, the issues stemming from a singular offline teaching approach have not been adequately addressed. In fact, the introduction of multimedia-assisted teaching has, in some cases,

introduced new problems. Firstly, multimedia is formalistically used. Despite the adoption of offline teaching models in university history classrooms, the integration of multimedia often remains superficial, serving more as a formality rather than a substantive enhancement to the learning experience. Secondly, the teaching model is lack of Integration. Online and offline teaching methods are frequently treated as separate entities, simply layered on top of each other without full integration. This disjointed approach fails to leverage the unique strengths of each mode of instruction. Indeed, both online and offline teaching methodologies possess distinct advantages and limitations, as summarized in Table 1. These advantages and disadvantages are, to a certain extent, complementary. Therefore, the critical issue facing advanced history education is not whether to incorporate multimedia teaching but how to organically integrate multimedia resources with offline instruction. Such integration can enhance the flexibility of teaching methods, capitalize on the complementary strengths of various educational materials, and stimulate student engagement. Ultimately, this approach aims to achieve a synergistic effect, where the combined impact of these methods exceeds the sum of their individual contributions.

Table 1

Advantages and disadvantages of online and offline teaching methods

	Offline teaching	Online teaching
advantage	Facilitating emotional communication between teachers and students	Flexible teaching location and time
	Flexibly adjust teaching effectiveness and difficulty	Wide range of teacher-student communication and interaction
	Direct supervision by teachers and timely motivation of students by teachers	The course is more interesting
shortcoming	Centered around teachers	Platform instability
	Lack of teacher-student interaction and communication	There are many external interference factors
	Low classroom efficiency	Students have limited self-control
	Teaching resources are limited	The Blindness of Student Learning

Garrison, a professor at the Teaching and Learning Center of the University of Calgary, Canada, emphasizes that the university education community should function as a collective of teaching communities formed around academic purposes and shared interests, and the establishment of exploratory community frameworks such as cooperative exploration and cultivating academic interests should be the key to university education.<sup>16</sup> The Community of Inquiry (CoI) model, which is cyclical in nature, is illustrated in Figure 1.<sup>17</sup>

The elements within a Community of Inquiry interact in a reciprocal and interdependent manner, without hierarchical primacy. For instance, social presence influences cognitive presence, and conversely, cognitive processes also shape social interactions. On one hand, the blended teaching can avoid the disconnection between theory and practice, ensuring a more cohesive learning experience. On the other hand, beyond enhancing the traditional classroom environment, blended teaching provides opportunities for the creation and sustenance of inquiry-based communities. In recent years, the Chinese history curriculum standards at all levels have introduced and emphasized the concept of the “five core competencies in history”. The five core competencies encompass: historical materialism, temporal and spatial concepts, historical evidence, historical interpretation, and a sense of family and country. These competencies undoubtedly set new expectations and requirements for the development of education. In the context of current teaching and learning practices, while fundamental changes may be challenging to implement, the quality of the learning experience has garnered increasing attention from scholars. The traditional dualistic approach, which separates online and offline instruction, no longer aligns with the needs of cultivating history talent in the new era. Instead, teachers and students can organically integrate both teaching methods, leveraging their respective strengths and combining offline interaction with online engagement. Given this context, what constitutes genuine blended learning?

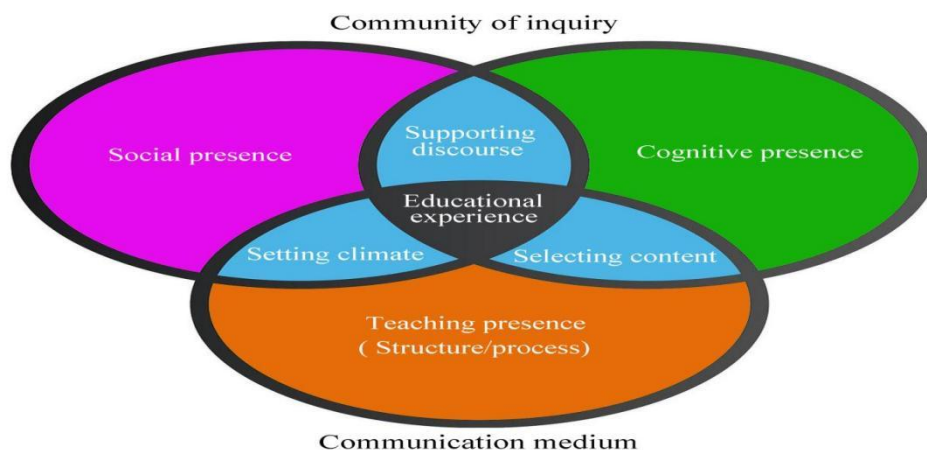


Figure.1. Learning and Exploration Community

### 3. Analysis: Online and offline blended learning

#### 3.1 Basic Concepts

Blended learning is an innovative educational approach that emerged with the widespread adoption of the Internet in the early 21st century. According to the research by Dziuban and Hartman, blended teaching integrates traditional offline classroom instruction with online learning components to enhance teaching effectiveness and foster students' social development.<sup>18</sup> Jianhua Yu and Dongrong Liang assert that blended teaching represents the integration of traditional offline instruction with online learning, allowing educators and learners to achieve educational goals and improve teaching effectiveness through both in-person and virtual interactions.<sup>19</sup> Blended learning is definitely not a simple reinforcement of the original multimedia assisted teaching method. Xiaoying Feng et al. characterize the development of blended teaching as a dynamic and evolving process, delineating it into three distinct stages.<sup>20</sup> As shown in Table 2, each stage of blended teaching emphasizes different dimensions and focal points, with the depth and complexity of its implementation advancing incrementally. At this stage, the concept of blended teaching places significant emphasis on a “student-centered” approach. As Goodyear observes, the term “blended” not only refers to the integration of offline and online teaching but also to the seamless merging of instructional and tutoring methodologies within a student-centric learning environment.<sup>21</sup> In essence, blended teaching is an

educational model that utilizes modern information technology to integrate the entire teaching and learning process.<sup>22</sup> Irrespective of how the definition of blended teaching evolves, most Chinese and international scholars concur on the importance of organically combining online platforms with offline classroom instruction and learning activities. The aim is to leverage the complementary strengths of both online and offline learning modes, thereby promoting deep and meaningful learning among students. Additionally, scholars highlight that the integration of online and offline teaching will likely become the “new normal” in future educational practices.<sup>23</sup>

Table 2

The evolution of mixed teaching concept

	Technical application stage	Technology integration stage	Internet + stage
Physical dimension	Combination of online and face-to-face teaching	Clearly define the proportion of online users	The combination of mobile technology, online, and face-to-face teaching
Teaching dimension	Application of technology	Mixing teaching strategies and methods	Learning experience
Focus on key points	Information technology	Interactive teaching	Student centered approach
Focus on perspective	A technical perspective	Teacher's perspective	Student's perspective

In current teaching practices in China, various forms of blended learning that combine online and offline instruction have emerged. These include offline blended models such as the flipped classroom, which reconfigures the use of in-class and out-of-class time by shifting the locus of learning control from the teacher to the student. Additionally, there are online mixed teaching modes like Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and the more recent Small Private Online Courses (SPOCs).<sup>24</sup> Barbara Means has noted that in blended teaching, the proportion of total teaching time allocated to online components can range from 30% to 80%. Specifically, when online teaching constitutes less than 30% of the total, it is considered supplementary to classroom instruction; conversely, when it exceeds 80%, it is predominantly online.<sup>25</sup> While this quantitative division provides a clear and simple framework, it does not fully capture the organic integration of online and

offline elements, which is a critical aspect of effective blended learning. Xiaoying Feng et al. have proposed a more nuanced classification of blended teaching modes, dividing them into three categories: offline-led blended teaching, online-led blended teaching, and fully integrated blended teaching.<sup>26</sup> This categorization is more objective and reasonable, as it acknowledges the varying degrees of integration between online and offline components. Moreover, it allows teachers to select one or more models based on the specific needs of different teaching content, while students can choose methods that best suit their individual learning situations.

### 3.2 Advantages

Bloom, American educational psychologist, divides educational goals into cognitive, emotional and motor skill fields. As shown in Figure 2, the educational goals in the cognitive field are divided into knowing (knowledge),comprehending (understanding), application, analysis and comprehensive evaluation.<sup>27</sup> Different educational goals correspond to distinct cognitive levels, each of which reflects varying degrees of thinking. Cultivating basic, intermediate, and advanced cognitive levels is essential, with each level being interlinked and progressively building upon the previous one. Bloom's taxonomy of the cognitive domain aligns well with the cognitive development of college history students, indicating that students must first acquire a foundational understanding of historical events before they can advance to intermediate levels of applying or analyzing historical issues. Ultimately, they can reach the advanced level of evaluating historical events, figures, and generating new perspectives. The objective of college history education is to nurture individuals with higher cognitive abilities. According to Bloom's cognitive hierarchy, this necessitates the adoption of diversified teaching methods in college history classes, as a single approach cannot adequately meet the complex training requirements for developing high-level cognitive skills. The blended teaching model has evolved from the integration of established offline and online independent teaching modes, combining the strengths of both environments. This model offers more robust and versatile characteristics, making it particularly suitable for fostering deep and meaningful learning.

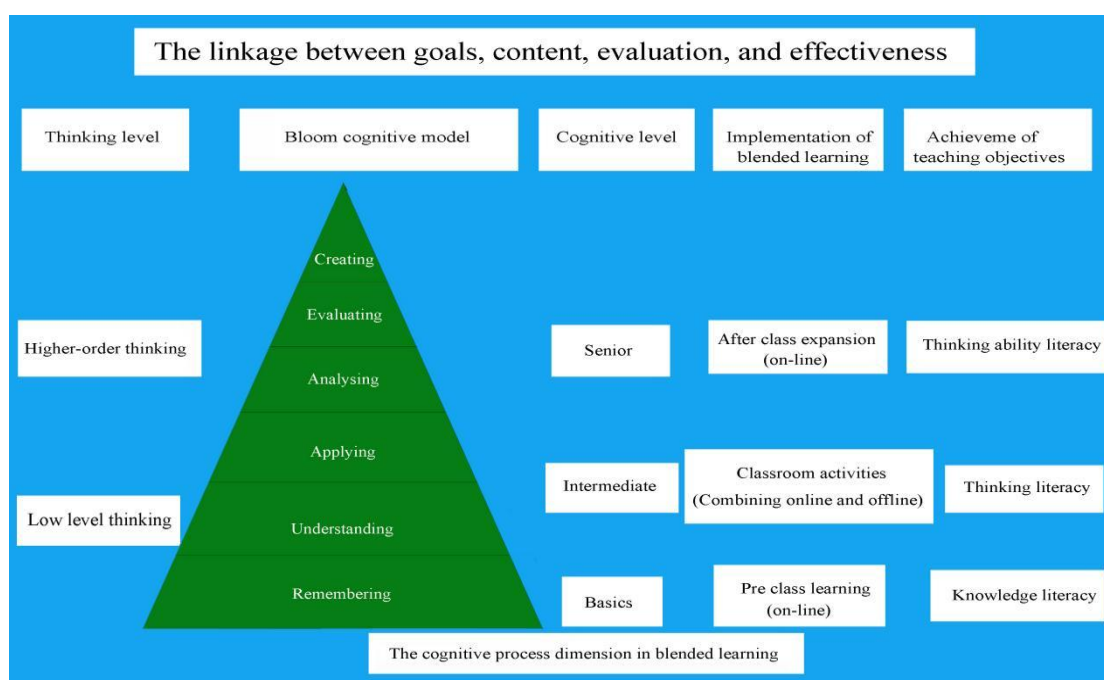


Figure 2: Cognitive process dimensions in mixed teaching

(1) Flexibility in teaching time and location. Compared to traditional single-mode online or offline instruction, blended teaching leverages modern information technology to transcend temporal and spatial limitations, offering students a wider array of accessible and versatile learning resources.<sup>28</sup> Building upon years of blended teaching practice at Athabasca University in Canada, grounded in constructivist theory, Garrison et al. have identified three essential elements of blended learning: social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence. According to their framework, effective learning can only occur when these three forms of presence are developed to a high degree.<sup>29</sup> In recent years, another professor, Cleveland-Innes, has added a fourth element to the model: emotional presence, and has verified it through empirical research.<sup>30</sup> The diversity of learning resources breaks the limitation of students' learning time and space. Learners can now opt for traditional face-to-face instruction, live online sessions, or engage in self-directed learning through online courses at any time and from any location, based on their individual needs. This flexibility not only fosters a stronger sense of learning presence among students but also bridges the gap between knowledge and learners, facilitating rapid engagement in their studies. By breaking down the barriers of time and space,

blended learning environments are better equipped to eliminate institutional and disciplinary boundaries. Students from different universities and majors can select complementary courses that align closely with their own fields of study, thereby enhancing interdisciplinary learning. Moreover, this approach promotes academic exchange and collaboration among students from diverse disciplines, enriching the educational experience.

(2) Student-centered. Blended learning can harmonize the distinct methodologies of online and offline instruction, creating complementary strengths that enhance the educational experience. In essence, “blended teaching facilitates the deep integration of information technology with curriculum design, while addressing the limitations of traditional teaching structures.”<sup>31</sup> The blended teaching method emphasizes a diverse array of online and offline instructional formats, resulting in a rich and multifaceted learning experience. Unlike traditional teaching methods, which center primarily on teacher-led instruction, blended teaching places significant emphasis on the central role of students in the learning process. In this model, teachers assume the roles of facilitators, guides, and organizers, supporting students as they engage in their own learning journey. This pedagogical approach effectively stimulates students' interest by encouraging them to take an active role in finding, exploring, and solving problems. It fosters a sense of enjoyment and discovery in learning, thereby significantly enhancing learning efficiency. Research by Berk and Walch demonstrates that blended instruction not only improves students' sense of learning acquisition but also enhances their problem-solving skills, reflective abilities, and metacognitive strategies.<sup>32</sup>

(3) Integrate teaching resources. Educational resources can be primarily categorized into paper-based and digital (network) resources, with traditional teaching modes traditionally relying more heavily on paper-based materials. Digital educational resources, however, transcend geographical limitations, making it possible to deliver educational content across different regions and countries. Beyond conventional methods of imparting professional knowledge, teachers can also leverage a wide array of online teaching resources, including instructional videos,

electronic courseware, handouts, exercises, and cutting-edge academic papers. For example, when teaching the course “Contemporary International Relations”, instructors must keenly capture and analyze a substantial volume of current international news. This includes updates on developments such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the U.S. presidential election. Such dynamic information is essential for students to grasp the complexities of contemporary international relations. Static paper-based resources are clearly insufficient to meet this demand. Therefore, extensive online resources have become an indispensable means of gathering up-to-date teaching materials. The expansion of teaching resources is bidirectional, allowing students to access and download educational materials from universities in different regions and countries, provided they are motivated to learn. By integrating a variety of online learning tools and resources with traditional offline instruction, blended learning fosters enhanced collaboration and interaction, thereby enriching the overall learning experience for students.<sup>33</sup> Simultaneously, these online teaching resources significantly augment students’ knowledge base, broaden their perspectives, and enhance their innovative capabilities.

(4) Improve the interaction and timeliness of teaching. The online teaching platform offers a wealth of interactive tools, such as online discussions, real-time Q&A sessions, and more. While traditional teaching methods can facilitate classroom discussions, they are limited by the constraint that only one student can be called upon to answer at a time, and class time is finite. Consequently, the opportunity for students to participate in answering questions is significantly reduced. Blended learning addresses this limitation by sequentially posting teachers' in-class questions on the online platform according to the course’s progress. This approach allows every student to engage in real-time responses, enabling teachers to quickly analyze and provide feedback on students’ answers. As a result, blended learning significantly enhances teacher-student interaction and boosts students’ interest in active participation. Furthermore, the online teaching platform can track and record students’ learning behaviors and outcomes. Teachers can monitor and evaluate student

performance through data analysis and assessment tools, allowing for timely adjustments to teaching strategies. Akyol and Garrison have investigated the learning performance of U.S. master's students in blended learning environments, with their findings indicating that students in these settings achieve higher levels of cognitive presence and superior learning outcomes.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, a comprehensive study conducted by American scholars, surveying tens of thousands of college students across six universities in Florida, demonstrated that students enrolled in blended courses consistently achieved significantly higher scores compared to those in purely offline or fully online courses..<sup>35</sup>

As discussed above, the blended teaching method offers several advantages, including a student-centered approach, flexible teaching times and locations, and the effective expansion of teaching resources. This pedagogical model significantly enhances the interactivity and timeliness of the teaching process. Moreover, it facilitates the achievement of educational objectives aligned with Bloom's cognitive domain, promoting the development of higher-order thinking skills among college students.

### **3.3 Challenge**

Despite the numerous advantages of blended teaching, its implementation faces significant challenges. First of all, Firstly, blended teaching places high demands on classrooms and infrastructure. To accommodate evolving teaching needs, audio-visual equipment must be regularly updated and maintained, and wireless network coverage must be comprehensive throughout learning areas. Universities are required to invest substantial financial resources to modernize and upgrade outdated teaching hardware, ensuring that facilities meet the technical requirements for effective blended instruction. Secondly, blended teaching imposes higher standards on the professional competencies of educators. In traditional teaching environments, instructors primarily rely on paper-based reference materials and textbooks to convey knowledge. However, in a blended setting, the wealth of educational resources is both extensive and varied, necessitating that teachers invest additional time and effort in curating and

evaluating these materials. Moreover, there remains a notable gap in research concerning the instructional design of blended teaching. Specifically, there is a lack of comprehensive studies on the integration of online and offline teaching strategies, the application of media in education, and the evaluation of blended teaching methods.<sup>36</sup> In addition to mastering online teaching technologies, teachers must skillfully integrate digital resources with textbook content and coordinate the relationship between online and offline instruction to fully leverage the positive impact of blended learning. Ultimately, blended teaching emphasizes student-centered learning, where teachers assume a guiding role, ensuring that learning becomes a truly autonomous endeavor for students. As noted by Jongpil Cheon and other scholars, the success of learners in a blended learning environment primarily depends on their ability to engage in independent learning, manage practical tasks, exhibit maturity and responsibility, and effectively apply information technology.<sup>37</sup>

#### **4. Discussion: Practice of blended online and offline teaching**

The flipped classroom model inverts the traditional teaching structure, wherein foundational knowledge acquisition occurs before class, and deeper learning and application of that knowledge take place during class sessions with the guidance and support of instructors. Both the flipped classroom and blended learning share conceptual consistency, similar implementation methods, and comparable educational outcomes. Integrating the flipped classroom approach into blended learning can transform the conventional offline classroom experience, further stimulating students' ability to engage in independent learning and problem exploration. By leveraging the complementary strengths of both models, this integration can lead to enhanced teaching effectiveness and improved learning outcomes.<sup>38</sup> American scholar Robert Talbert's concept of the flipped classroom model is widely admired for its simplicity, clarity and ease of implementation. The idea is to divide the flipped classroom into two phases: online before class and flipped during class.<sup>39</sup> However, Professor Robert Talbot focused primarily on the pre-class and in-class aspects of flipped learning but did not delve into the analysis of post-class learning situations or the summarization

of feedback following the class. Building upon this, Chinese scholar Fengqing Li proposed a more comprehensive three-phase instructional model for blended teaching that encompasses “pre-class”, “in-class”, and “after-class” phases. Li’s model links these stages to the processes of learning preview, active learning, and evaluation, thereby providing a structured approach to blended instruction. Figure 3 shows three-phase instructional model process.

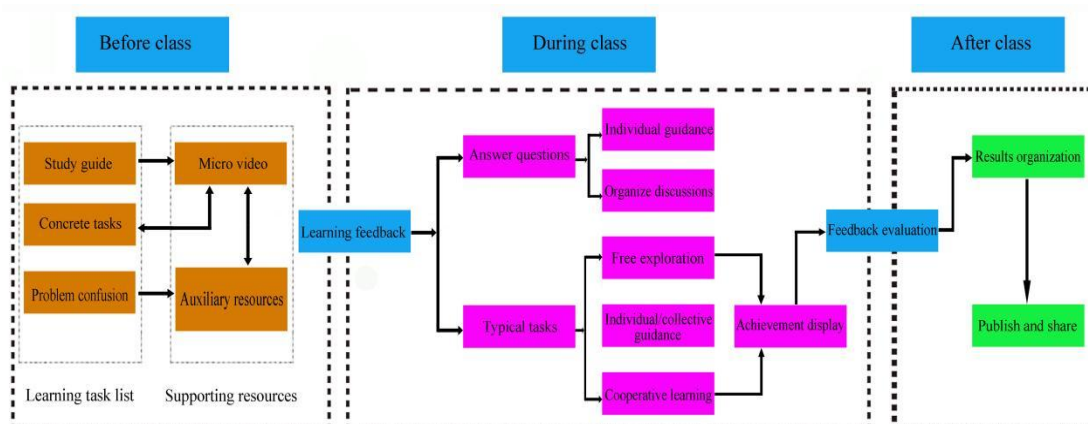


Figure 3: three-phase instructional model process

This three-phase instructional model is illustrated in the figure below.<sup>40</sup> During their university years, students enjoy an unprecedented degree of freedom and autonomy, enabling them to independently select their majors and delve deeply into areas of personal interest. The abundance of free time offers ample opportunities for students to engage in peer interactions and explore a wide range of topics. As distinguished educators and researchers, university faculty members provide high-quality, innovative, and inspiring teaching experiences. University history education plays a crucial role in fostering students' multiple competencies, including critical thinking, research skills, and cultural awareness. The advanced hardware facilities, rich software resources, and superior learning environment at universities create unique conditions that are ideally suited for the implementation of a three-phase blended learning model.

#### 4.1 Online pre-class preview

In university history teaching, the integration of offline course resources with online teaching materials through pre-class previews aims to enhance students' learning interest and class participation. Pre-class preview has traditionally been a crucial component of history education, serving as a key element in student-centered instruction. However, due to insufficient motivation, guidance, and effective supervision, pre-class preview has often become a mere formality. In the context of blended online and offline teaching, educators can establish an online communication platform to facilitate interaction and discussion among students and teachers. By leveraging various online teaching platforms—such as QQ groups, WeChat groups, and other digital communication tools—teachers can create a robust online course environment that supports and enhances the pre-class preview process. This approach not only provides structured guidance and supervision but also fosters a more engaging and interactive learning experience.

As illustrated in Table 3, teachers can utilize the online platform to disseminate a variety of resources, including questionnaires, preview materials, course outlines, historical micro-lesson videos (short videos focusing on single knowledge points or concepts), references, and key issues for in-class discussion.

Table 3:  
Design ideas of pre-class preview

learning activities	Activity intention	Electronic learning resources
Student:	Student:	Electronic history books
Read relevant literature	Master the knowledge	Historical documentary
Watch instructional videos	framework	Micro lesson fragment
Complete pre class quizzes, surveys, and forums	Discover problems	Online question bank
	Stimulate interest in learning	Testing for self-assessment
		Conduct in class assessments around relevant historical issues
		Forum

Through this platform, teachers can gain a clear understanding of each student's grasp of historical knowledge, while students can select and explore content that aligns with their individual interests and preferences. This allows students to engage with the materials that most interest them, enhancing their motivation and engagement. Upon completing the preview phase, students can transfer any questions to the communication platform, enabling teachers to assess the effectiveness of the preview and prepare for the key components of the offline class in advance. Teachers can then carefully design the teaching content, ensuring it is tailored to address students' specific needs and areas of confusion. During this stage, the materials are curated by teachers, and students do not operate entirely independently but complete the preview under the guidance and supervision of the instructor, ensuring a focused and goal-oriented approach. This preview method facilitates a deeper understanding of the course's fundamental principles, structure, methods, and objectives. It also provides students with access to additional learning resources, stimulating their interest in independent exploration. Consequently, the teaching videos and online courses offered through the platform not only comprehensively cover students' basic learning requirements but also precisely cater to their personalized learning needs. Each student can explore their interests and identify knowledge gaps based on their own level of preparation, thereby optimizing their readiness for offline classroom learning.

## 4.2 Offline in-class teaching

Upon completing the online preview, teachers and students can transition into the offline classroom session with a clear and specific goal. The offline classroom serves as a critical space for addressing teaching challenges and delving into complex topics. The teaching process for this stage is outlined in Table 4.

Table 4:

Design ideas of classroom cooperation

learning activities	Activity intention	Electronic learning resources
Student: Read relevant literature Watch instructional videos Complete pre class quizzes, surveys, and forums	Student: Master the knowledge framework Discover problems Stimulate interest in learning	Electronic history books Historical documentary Micro lesson fragment Online question bank Testing for self-assessment Conduct in class assessments around relevant historical issues Forum

The first stage is the introduction stage, in which teachers do not need to follow a chronological sequence to introduce the background, process, outcome, and impact of a particular historical event. Instead, they can categorize the questions that emerged from students' pre-class previews and begin the lesson with a simple yet engaging question that piques students' interest. This approach allows for heuristic teaching, where teachers guide students toward discovery and deeper understanding. To further stimulate engagement, teachers can incorporate visual aids, such as images or short videos relevant to the current discussion, which can help capture students' attention and provide context.

The second stage is the exploration stage of key questions. Teachers can introduce the current academic concerns about the content of this course, and students can discuss different historical issues by independent exploration or group cooperative exploration. Many historical topics are interconnected, and the discussion may lead to deeper insights and more nuanced thinking. This stage fosters critical analysis and encourages students to explore multiple perspectives, enhancing their ability to think critically and synthesize information. For instance, "The History of the Ancient World" is a core course for history students in Chinese universities, with the rise of medieval cities in Western Europe being a pivotal knowledge point. Under the guidance of teachers, it is crucial to inspire students to engage in deep reflection on the characteristics of these cities during this period. To provide students with a more comprehensive understanding of the unique features of medieval Western European cities, experienced educators often guide them to compare these urban centers with those of the Tang and Song dynasties in China, thereby highlighting both the

similarities and differences between the two. Upon completing this comparative analysis, many thoughtful students are likely to pose the question: “Why did capitalism first emerge in medieval Western European cities?” In such instances, teachers should encourage students to engage in further reflection and discussion. They can permit students to use mobile devices or tablets to research answers online, thereby fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This approach not only enhances students’ ability to seek out and evaluate information independently but also deepens their understanding of the historical context and development of economic systems.

Following the completion of independent or collaborative exploration, the third stage of the course is dedicated to the presentation and exchange of results. During this phase, students have the opportunity to present their group or individual perspectives on the topic through various formats such as classroom presentations, time-limited speeches, debates, and other interactive methods. Individual or group opinions can also be uploaded to the classroom cloud platform, where teachers can select novel and representative viewpoints for objective evaluation and provide answers to any questions raised. Given that many historical questions do not have a single definitive answer, it is crucial for teachers to encourage students to consider multiple perspectives on the same issue. Rather than enforcing uniform responses, this approach fosters students' divergent thinking abilities, promoting a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of historical events.

The fourth stage of the teaching process involves summarizing the class session. To reinforce learning, the teacher assigns several exercises for all students to complete after class via the online platform. These exercises typically include multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blank questions, and true/false questions, designed to help students consolidate key knowledge points covered in the lesson. Special emphasis is placed on reinforcing and consolidating areas that are commonly misunderstood or prone to errors, ensuring that students have a solid grasp of the material.

### 4.3 After-class teaching assessment and feedback: combining online and offline teaching

Teaching evaluation and feedback constitute the final and most critical components of blended learning models. This phase encompasses both detailed assessments of each class session and a comprehensive evaluation of overall teaching effectiveness at the conclusion of the course. It is essential to address not only the qualitative aspects of teaching quality but also the quantitative dimensions of teaching quantity, thereby forming a comprehensive, dynamic, and longitudinal evaluation process. In order to comprehensively evaluate the teaching effectiveness, It is necessary to adopt three different levels: stage learning process evaluation, learning effect evaluation, and course final assessment, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5:

Evaluation system of mixed teaching of university history

Evaluation type	Evaluation content and method	Evaluation subject	Electronic learning resources
Assessment of learning process	Online preview situation Quality of question answering Classroom participation Group discussion results	Teacher Student peer evaluation	Display the online classroom situation (before, during, and after class)
Evaluation of learning effectiveness	Basic knowledge mastery and understanding Classroom answer situation Completion status of homework after class	Teacher Student self-assessment Student peer evaluation	Showcasing student assignments and achievements (past and present)
Final evaluation	Enhancement of comprehensive abilities Reading notes Course paper Examination	Teacher	Display and analyze survey questionnaire results

During the evaluation of the learning process, teachers can monitor students' attendance and gather feedback on their in-class interaction through the online learning platform. Additionally, teachers can assess the quality of students' responses to questions, providing a comprehensive overview of their engagement and understanding. Building on this foundation, teachers can also organize online peer evaluations, which serve as a valuable reference for the overall assessment. Peer evaluation is particularly beneficial in blended teaching environments, as it enhances students' learning interest and improves their academic performance.<sup>41</sup> The evaluation process primarily involves written assignments assigned both online and offline, including in-class test results, questionnaires, and other assessment tools. Students' self-evaluation and peer evaluation can also be conducted through in-class questionnaires. The final assessment should not be confined to traditional examinations, which are often contingent on a single performance, but should place greater emphasis on the actual improvement of students' abilities. Teachers should focus on the changes in students before and after learning, such as increased enthusiasm for learning, enhanced self-study skills, and improved problem-solving awareness. This requires teachers to innovate in assessment methods and develop a diversified evaluation system. To ensure the objectivity of the evaluation, teachers can quantify students' achievements using various online data, increasing the weight of online test results, student self-evaluations, and peer evaluations, while appropriately reducing the proportion of traditional examinations and teacher evaluations. As illustrated in Figure 4, after the evaluation, teachers can use the comprehensive results of the teaching evaluation to guide future improvements in history instruction. These results can be transformed into reusable learning resources and educational reform materials, promoting the education system into a spiraling “super cycle” and self-organizing system.<sup>42</sup>

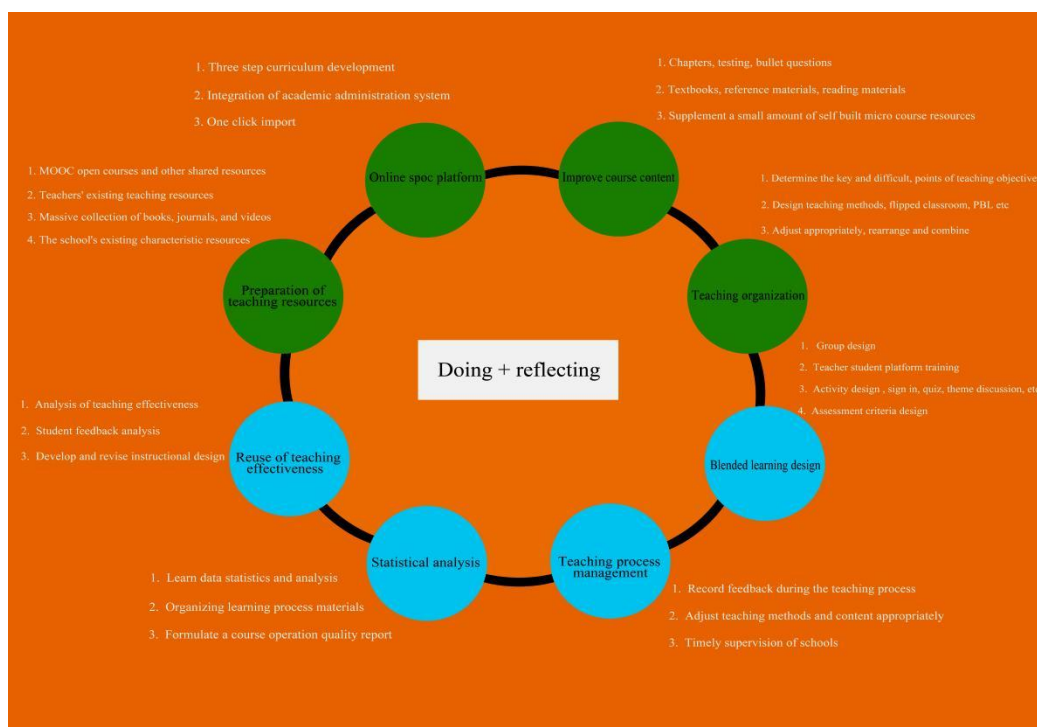


Figure 4: The super cycle system of the course

## 5. Conclusion

At present, the integration of “online teaching” and “offline teaching” in many university history programs remains largely fragmented. The so-called blended teaching model often operates as a “dual-track alternating” approach rather than a truly integrated “dual-track mixing” system. Such a teaching mode struggles to achieve organic cohesion between online and offline components, limiting its effectiveness. In reality, the adoption of blended learning does not entirely exclude traditional offline teaching methods but rather seeks to expand and optimize them. By integrating online resources and interactive tools, blended learning can effectively address some of the limitations of traditional instruction, enhancing both the depth and breadth of the educational experience. This approach not only complements traditional teaching but also fosters a more dynamic and engaging learning environment that better meets the diverse needs of students. Therefore, this integration facilitates a blended learning environment where the strengths of online and offline teaching are leveraged to overcome their respective shortcomings, ultimately contributing to more effective educational outcomes.

The reform of history teaching methods is not an end in itself but a means to achieve deeper educational goals. Blended learning must remain grounded in the principle of student-centered education, avoiding rigid and uniform models. Instead, it should be flexibly adapted to meet the diverse needs of students and the dynamic nature of teaching practice. The primary objective is to enhance students' learning abilities and self-discipline, thereby improving classroom efficiency. Looking forward, we should continue to encourage the application of blended learning in higher education and other relevant fields. Simultaneously, it is crucial to strengthen the integration of research and practice in blended learning, ensuring that it benefits both “teachers’teaching” and “students’ learning”. By organically integrating teaching and learning, we can provide students with a more enriched and interactive learning experience. Blended learning calls for bold experimentation at various stages and across different disciplines. More importantly, university educators must become adept at leveraging technology and approach teaching and learning with a fresh and innovative perspective. This will enable them to create a more engaging and effective educational environment that fosters critical thinking, independent learning, and collaborative skills.

**Funding Declaration**      Not Funding

**Clinical Trial Numbe**      Not applicable

#### **Author contribution statement**

All authors listed have significantly contributed to the development and the writing of this article.

#### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

#### **Data availability statement**

No data was used for the research described in the article.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Wang Xiaoli, Li Ruijie, et al. Investigation and Analysis of the Learning Status and Subject Abilities of Freshmen majoring in History: A Case Study of the History Major at Hebei North University Journal of Guangxi University of Education, 2016, (05): 88-92.
- <sup>2</sup> Hou Chunxiao, Wang Yubiao, Tian Aili The historical context and evolution mechanism of the integrated development of online and offline education[J] Digital Education, 2023, 9 (01): 1-7.
- <sup>3</sup> Zhang Lishuo, Yang Cuiping The relationship between the identification of history majors in higher normal universities and learning fatigue [J] Modern Vocational Education, 2020, (27): 56-57.
- <sup>4</sup> Sun Yuli, Liu Rui A review of blended learning research in domestic universities [J] Journal of Chongqing Jiaotong University (Social Sciences Edition), 2022, 22 (04): 96-103.
- <sup>5</sup> Diep A N, Zhu C, Struyven K, et al. Who or What Contributes to Student Satisfaction in Different Blended Learning Modalities? [J]. British Journal of Educational Technology, 2017 (2) : n/a-n/a.
- <sup>6</sup> Li Chao Exploration and Practice of Blended Teaching in Flipped Classroom in Colleges and Universities: Taking the Course of "History of International Relations" as an Example [J] Journal of Changchun University of Education, 2022,38 (06): 45-50
- <sup>7</sup> Ruth Boelens & Bram Wever et al. Four Key Challenges to the Design of Blended Learning: A Systematic Literature Review [J] . Educational Research Review, 2017 (22):1 - 18.
- <sup>8</sup> Merrill M D. First principles of instruction[J]. Educational Technology: Research and Development,2002,(3):43-59.
- <sup>9</sup> Wang Xiaoli, Li Ruijie, et al. Investigation and Analysis of the Learning Status and Subject Abilities of Freshmen majoring in History: A Case Study of the History Major at Hebei North University Journal of Guangxi University of Education, 2016, (05): 88-92.
- <sup>10</sup> Wang Lei, Jiang Xiao, Zhao Lijuan, etc Application Practice of Information Resource Library in Core Courses of History Major [J] Journal of Qiqihar Normal College, 2020 (05): 120-121.
- <sup>11</sup> Cai Wanping Analysis of the role of multimedia assisted teaching in the reform of history teaching in universities[J] Chinese Journal of Multimedia and Online Teaching (First Edition), 2023 (06): 88-92.
- <sup>12</sup> Cai Wanping Analysis of the role of multimedia assisted teaching in the reform of history teaching in universities[J] Chinese Journal of Multimedia and Online Teaching (First Edition), 2023 (06): 88-92.
- <sup>13</sup> Wang Yizhi A Preliminary Discussion on the Teaching of Confucianism in Song and Ming Dynasties Based on Integrated Thinking [J] History Teaching (Second Half Monthly), 2023, (09):

47-53.

<sup>14</sup> Meng Xiangyuan Cultivation of innovative thinking ability in history teaching in the Internet era - Comment on History Teaching and Thinking Innovation [J] Research on Technology Management, 2021, 41 (20): 246

<sup>15</sup> Wang Xiaoli, Li Ruijie Investigation and Analysis of the Learning Status and Subject Abilities of Freshmen majoring in History: A Case Study of the History Major at Hebei North University Journal of Guangxi University of Education, 2016, (05): 88-90+92.

<sup>16</sup> Garrison, D. Randy, Martha Cleveland-Innes, and Tak Fung. "Student role adjustment in online communities of inquiry: Model and instrument validation." Journal of asynchronous learning networks 8.2 (2004): 61-74.

<sup>17</sup> Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education. The Internet and Higher Education 2(2-3): 87-105, 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Jitendra Singh & Keely Steele et al. Combining the Best of Online and Face - to - Face Learning:Hybrid and Blended Learning Approach for COVID-19,Post Vaccine,& Post Pandemic World[J] Journal of Educational Technology Systems,2021(2):140-171

<sup>19</sup> Yu Jianhua, Liang Dongrong Interaction Analysis in Blended Learning [J] Teaching and Management, 2019 (6): 16.

<sup>20</sup> Feng Xiaoying, Wang Ruixue, Wu Yijun A review of the current research status of blended learning at home and abroad: an analytical framework based on blended learning [J] Distance Education Journal, 2018, 36 (03): 13-24.

<sup>21</sup> Goodyear V, Dudley D. "I'm a Facilitator of Learning! " Understanding What Teachers and Students Do Within Student-Centered Physical Education Models [J]. Quest, 2015(3):274-289.

<sup>22</sup> He Kekang. New Developments in Educational Technology Theory from the Perspective of Blended Learning [J]. Research on Electronic Education, 2004 (3): 1-6.

<sup>23</sup> Porter W W, Graham C R, Spring K A, et al. Blended Learning in Higher Education: Institutional Adoption and Implementation[J]. Computers & Education, 2014(3):185-195.

<sup>24</sup> L ü Jingjing Exploring the New Connotation of Blended Teaching in Open Universities: Insights from SPOC [J] Distance Education Journal, 2015 (3): 72.

<sup>25</sup> Means B, Toyama Y, Murphy R. The Effectiveness of online and Blended Learning: A Meta-analysis of the Empirical Literature [J], Teachers College Record, 2023(3):1-47.

<sup>26</sup> Feng Xiaoying, Wang Ruixue, Wu Yijun: A Review of the Current Research Status of Blended Teaching at Home and Abroad: An Analysis Framework Based on Blended Teaching [J] Distance Education Journal, 2018, 36 (03): 13-24.

<sup>27</sup> Feng Xiaoying, Wang Ruixue, Wu Yijun: A Review of the Current Research Status of Blended Teaching at Home and Abroad: An Analysis Framework Based on Blended Teaching [J] Distance Education Journal, 2018, 36 (03): 13-24.

<sup>28</sup> Liu Hui, Teng Meifang, Zhang Peng What are the difficulties of blended learning

design-Analysis of Online and Offline Blended Teaching Design Scheme Based on Rasch Model [J] China Higher Education Research, 2020, (10): 82-87+108.

<sup>29</sup> Garrison D R, Anderson T, Archer W. Critical Thinking, Cognitive Presence, and Computer Conferencing in Distance Education [J]. American Journal of Distance Education, 2001(1):7-23.

<sup>30</sup> Cleveland -Innes M, Campbell P. Emotional Presence, Learning, and the Online Learning Environment[J]. International Review of Research in Open & Distance Learning, 2012(4):269-292.

<sup>31</sup> Yu Shengquan Blended Teaching in the Network Environment: A New Teaching Model [J] Chinese University Teaching, 2005 (10): 55.

<sup>32</sup> Ahmet Ustun & Monica Tracey. An Innovative Way of Designing Blended Learning Through Design - based Research in Higher Education[J]Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, 2021(2): 126 - 128.

<sup>33</sup> Annelies Raes & Loulou Detienne et al. A Systematic Literature Review on Synchronous Hybrid Learning: Gaps Identified[J] Learning Environments Research, 2020(23):269 - 290.

<sup>34</sup> Akyol Z, Garrison D R. The Development of a Community of Inquiry over Time in an Online Course: Understanding the Progression and Integration of Social, Cognitive and Teaching Presence[J]. Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 2008(3): 3-22.

<sup>35</sup> Garrison D R, Vaughan N D. Institutional Change and Leadership Associated with Blended Learning Innovation: Two Case Studies[J]. Internet & Higher Education, 2013(4):24-28.

<sup>36</sup> Lan Guoshuai, Wei Jiakai, et al. "Future Higher Education Teaching: Macro Trends, Key Technological Practices, and Future Development Scenarios"2021 Horizon Report (Teaching Edition)" [J] Open Education Research, 2021 (3): 17-23

<sup>37</sup> Cheon J, Lee S, Crooks S M, et al. An Investigation of Mobile Learning Readiness in Higher Education based on the Theory of Planned Behavior[J]. Computers & Education, 2012 (3):1054 - 1064.

<sup>38</sup> Xing Cuifang, Liu Yu, Lv Haiyan Design and Implementation of Hybrid Teaching in Flipped Classroom from the Perspective of Deep Learning [J] Computer Education, 020 (3).

<sup>39</sup> Talbert, Robert. (2017). Flipped Learning: A Guide for Higher Education Faculty. Sterling: Stylus Publishing, LLC, p. 42-43.

<sup>40</sup> Li Fengqing, Han Xiaoling. Construction and Practice of Quality Evaluation System for Blended Teaching [J] China Electronic Education, 2017 (11): 108-113.

<sup>41</sup> Miyazoe T, Anderson T. Viewing and Participating:Blog Visualization and Its Learning Outcomes in Blended Learning [C]// Professional Communication Conference. IEEE, 2011:1-9.

<sup>42</sup> Sang Xinmin The bidirectional construction and overall generation of learning subjects and learning environments: creating a learning culture and educational wisdom in the era of globalization Research on Educational Development, 2009, (23): 125-127.