Research on the Application of Blended PBL-CLIL to the Teaching of "Understanding Contemporary China--Chinese-English Translation"

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Abstract: *Against the backdrop of the coordinated evolution of educational digitalization and curriculum ideological and political education development, this study focuses on the course "Understanding Contemporary China--Chinese-English Translation," which integrates three dimensions: translation competence cultivation, value shaping, and international communication of Chinese discourse. By integrating online self-directed inquiry with offline collaborative learning, this research constructs a PBL-CLIL teaching model and explores its pedagogical effectiveness. A quasi-experimental study revealed that students in the experimental group receiving blended PBL-CLIL instruction demonstrated significantly higher translation competence than those in the control group, showing substantial improvements in the accuracy, cultural adaptation, and political appropriateness of political term translation. Questionnaire surveys indicated broad acceptance of the new teaching model among experimental group students, with most recognizing its positive role in fostering critical thinking and enhancing cross-cultural communication skills. This study provides a theoretical framework and practical paradigm for achieving organic integration of knowledge impartation, competence cultivation, and value guidance in foreign language education, offering referential significance for ideological and political teaching in the new era.*

Keywords: *blended PBL-CLIL teaching model; Understanding Contemporary China; Chinese-English translation; ideological and political education*

1. Research Background

With the rapid development of digital-intelligent technologies, blended teaching has become a mainstream teaching model in the education sector, and its integration with PBL (problem-based learning) is reshaping the ecological landscape of disciplinary teaching. Meanwhile, higher education is undergoing a profound transformation from one-way knowledge indoctrination to multi-dimensional ability construction, with national identity and problem-solving ability having become important components of university students' core competencies[1]. Ideological and political education serves as a crucial approach to cultivating students' national identity. The "Understanding Contemporary China" series of courses, as a key vehicle for the development of ideological and political education, aims to overcome the disconnection between language skill cultivation and value guidance in traditional foreign language teaching, thereby fostering foreign language talents with international perspectives and national sentiment. The course "Understanding Contemporary China--Chinese-English Translation," due to its unique function of political discourse transcoding, has become an ideal choice for observing this teaching reform. Its teaching objectives not only address language conversion challenges in cross-cultural communication but also carry the significant mission of shaping students' correct values and promoting the international dissemination of Chinese discourse.

In general, the ideological and political education in foreign language courses at Chinese universities faces three major challenges: firstly, there is tension between the demand for cultivating internationalized talents and the education of local cultural identity; secondly, traditional translation teaching overemphasizes language form training while neglecting the cultivation of conceptual reconstruction ability in political discourse; finally, face-to-face instruction struggles to meet students' needs for in-depth study of contemporary Chinese political texts. These issues have become more prominent since the "Understanding Contemporary China" series of courses were incorporated into the university curriculum system, and there is an urgent need to explore new teaching models to resolve them. Existing research indicates that although purely offline PBL can enhance students' practical

translation ability[2], its effect on improving political discourse translation competence has not been explored to date; and conventional blended teaching often lacks systematic consideration in value guidance design.

Therefore, this study integrates PBL and CLIL (content and language integrated learning) to construct a blended PBL-CLIL teaching model. Through the organic integration of online self-directed inquiry spaces and offline classroom teaching, it fully leverages the respective advantages of PBL and CLIL, striving to achieve three breakthroughs: in the cognitive dimension, strengthening the conceptual processing of political terminology; in the behavioral dimension, optimizing the adaptive selection of translation strategies; and in the affective dimension, promoting the autonomous construction of core values. The quasi-experimental teaching implemented in this study reveals how the blended PBL-CLIL teaching model, through the combination of online and offline approaches and driven by authentic translation problems, enhances the political discourse translation ability of university English majors. Meanwhile, questionnaire surveys indicate that students in the experimental class generally recognize the positive effects of this teaching model in understanding contemporary Chinese culture, enhancing critical thinking, and improving cross-cultural competence. This study provides a replicable new teaching model for implementing ideological and political education in foreign language disciplines in universities.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Constructing the Blended PBL-CLIL Teaching Model

PBL was first introduced by American neurology professor Barrows in 1969 at McMaster University in Canada. It is defined as "a learning method based on real-life problems, centered on students rather than teachers."[3] Generally speaking, PBL includes five basic teaching steps.[4]

2.1.1 Problem Presentation

Learners encounter an ill-structured real-world problem with no fixed solution, which serves as the starting point for learning.

2.1.2 Self-Directed Learning

Learners independently investigate the problem, identify the knowledge required, and gather relevant information.

2.1.3 Group Collaboration

Learners share information through team collaboration, engage in discussions, and integrate multidisciplinary knowledge.

2.1.4 Application and Re-analysis

Learners apply the acquired knowledge to the problem, re-analyze it, and propose solutions.

2.1.5 Reflection and Summary

Learners reflect on their learning processes and outcomes through instructor-guided summary sessions to consolidate their knowledge.

Originally developed for medical students, PBL has since been widely adopted across various academic disciplines, and its educational effectiveness has been universally recognized. However, its application in translation education remains scarce and continues to face various challenges[5]. In the post-pandemic era, with the rapid advancement of digital-intelligent education, traditional offline PBL has increasingly integrated with new technologies, making blended PBL the predominant teaching model.

CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) is a teaching approach that combines subject content learning with second or foreign language acquisition. The term was introduced by David Marsh in 1994, with its core concept being "learning by using"—that is, simultaneously studying academic subjects (such as science, literature, history, geography, art, etc.) while naturally using and acquiring the target language[6]. The CLIL curriculum model is typically built upon the "4Cs" framework, which effectively integrates subject content with language learning: Content, which refers to the disciplinary knowledge and skills within the curriculum; Communication, which emphasizes using the target language for interaction between teachers and students and among students to increase practical

language use opportunities; Cognition, which focuses on developing students' thinking abilities, such as analysis, synthesis, and problem-solving skills; and Culture, which aims to promote cross-cultural communication and understanding through language learning, fostering students' global perspectives and international communication competencies. "Understanding Contemporary China — Chinese-English Translation" organizes teaching content based on contemporary China's national conditions. The course's primary objectives are to help university students deeply understand contemporary China's realities, cultivate national sentiment, and develop their ability to use English to narrate China's stories. In this sense, CLIL serves as an ideal method for organizing teaching content, fundamentally transforming the conventional approach of structuring translation education around translation skills.

The integration of CLIL theory into blended PBL teaching makes it possible to enhance students' translation competence, facilitate political discourse learning, and promote the international communication of discourse with Chinese characteristics. Its core concept lies in breaking the traditional separation between content and form in language teaching. In the "Understanding Contemporary China" series of courses, the "4Cs" framework of CLIL has been endowed with new connotations: the content dimension focuses on the political discourse system with Chinese characteristics; the cognitive dimension strengthens conceptual thinking training; the communication dimension emphasizes cross-cultural interpretation strategies; and the cultural dimension deepens the construction of value identity. This integration establishes a symbiotic relationship between translation skill development and political discourse communication. As highlighted in the research by Liu Lu and Li Taotao, the blended PBL teaching model can diversify learning contexts, materials, and interactions[7], thereby creating favorable conditions for the cognitive reconstruction of political discourse.

Constructivist theory provides theoretical support for the integration of blended PBL and CLIL in the teaching of "Understanding Contemporary China — Chinese-English Translation." Constructivist theory emphasizes the core concept that knowledge is actively constructed through social interactions in authentic contexts. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory further expands this framework, particularly focusing on the crucial role of mediating tools (such as linguistic signs) in cognitive development, as well as the mechanism through which scaffolded guidance within the zone of proximal development (ZPD) enhances competencies[7]. These two theories collectively explain how students in a blended PBL environment complete individual knowledge construction through online self-directed inquiry and subsequently internalize social knowledge via offline collaborative learning.

The concept of mediation in sociocultural theory holds particular significance in the blended PBL-CLIL teaching model. The online guidance materials and offline task scaffolds designed by instructors serve as primary mediating tools, while multimodal teaching resources and parallel texts function as secondary mediating tools, collectively supporting learners in achieving the cognitive leap from language conversion to value internalization. This structured mediation system enhances students' decision-making capacity in complex political contexts. The blended PBL-CLIL model emphasizes the design principle of "cognitive conflict," utilizing student-autonomous problem discovery and textbook-designed problematic scenarios highlighting differences between Chinese and Western political discourse systems to stimulate students' need for conceptual restructuring. This approach subsequently guides them in updating cognitive schemas and enhancing translation competence through resolving political discourse translation challenges.

The advantage of the blended PBL-CLIL teaching model lies in its explicit incorporation of the ideological dimension of political discourse into the content scope of CLIL, thereby breaking through the value-neutral assumption of traditional translation teaching and aligning with the requirements of ideological and political education. Within the integrated online-offline learning ecosystem, translation training and value guidance are no longer mutually exclusive choices. Instead, through PBL's problem design and CLIL's learning methodology for systematically studying contemporary China's national conditions, the enhancement of translation competence, the learning of political discourse, and value guidance form an organically unified whole. This provides theoretical feasibility for achieving the three-dimensional objectives of "knowledge impartation - ability cultivation - value shaping" in foreign language courses, while also pioneering new pathways for ideological and political development in foreign language education amid the digital-intelligent transformation of education in the new era.

2.2 Literature Review

Current research on the application of blended PBL in translation teaching, both domestically and

internationally, demonstrates multidimensional exploration, yet systematic studies targeting the specific domain of political discourse translation remain scarce. The international academic community's discussion of PBL originated in medical education before gradually expanding to language teaching and other domains. Hmelo-Silver noted that the core advantage of PBL lies in promoting deep learning through solving authentic problems[8], a characteristic that makes it particularly suitable for practice-oriented activities like translation with strong problem-solving dimensions. The introduction of PBL into translation teaching by international scholars began in the early 21st century, with their research findings indicating that PBL application helps cultivate more adaptive, practice-oriented, and innovative translation talents. For instance, Inoue's research demonstrated that PBL fosters students' critical thinking, collaborative skills, and autonomous learning capabilities, enabling them to better cope with evolving demands and technologies in the translation industry[9].

In recent years, Western scholars have begun to focus on the application of Technology-enhanced PBL in translation teaching. For instance, Mellinger explored the potential implementation of PBL in computer-assisted translation (CAT) instruction[10]. He noted that PBL places students within a constructivist-based educational model, aiming to cultivate their autonomous learning, collaborative skills, critical thinking, and reflective abilities. In CAT teaching, PBL can serve as a component of the curriculum, encouraging students to apply existing knowledge and techniques to solve realistic, open-ended problems that simulate challenges encountered in the translation industry. Furthermore, PBL not only enables students to master the use of translation technologies but also fosters professional competencies and problem-solving abilities that extend beyond technical proficiency. Although Western research on PBL in translation teaching has a relatively long history, most studies have concentrated on commercial or technical text translation, with little attention given to the teaching of political discourse translation.

Since 2012, domestic scholars have explored the application of PBL in translation teaching from multiple dimensions. For instance, Yang Xiaohua investigated the epistemological foundation, instructional design, teaching strategies, teaching process, and pedagogical effects of applying PBL in MTI cultural translation teaching, concluding that PBL not only deepens students' understanding of translation knowledge but also enhances their higher-order thinking skills[11]. Yuan Xianghua examined the role of the PBL model in undergraduate translation programs in improving students' translation competence and market competitiveness, as well as enhancing teaching quality[12]. Yu Bifang employed a quasi-teaching experiment to explore the effectiveness of a PBL-based Chinese-English translation teaching model, with results demonstrating that PBL improved students' translation abilities[13]. Li Dechao analyzed the challenges faced by PBL in domestic translation teaching and proposed effective solutions[5]. In recent years, domestic scholars have begun to apply Technology-enhanced PBL and blended PBL to translation teaching. For example, Liu Lixiang conducted a case study to explore the application of the PBL translation teaching model in a CAT environment and summarized its implications[14]. Wang Lixin and Duan Luqi explored the integration of the flipped classroom and PBL teaching approach in translation pedagogy to enhance students' active learning and collaborative learning abilities[15]. However, no scholars to date have investigated the pedagogical effects of applying PBL within the "Understanding Contemporary China" curriculum system.

Literature reveals that, within the context of ideological and political education, existing research on PBL application in translation teaching faces two main issues: firstly, most current studies focus on general language skill development, lacking targeted design for the unique cultural transcoding mechanisms of political discourse; secondly, there is a noticeable tendency toward one-dimensional evaluation, with the majority of research measuring only the accuracy of language output without considering dimensions specific to political discourse translation, such as political appropriateness and cultural adaptation. It can be argued that although blended teaching technologies have matured and the application of PBL in translation teaching is still gaining momentum, few studies have organically integrated "technology empowerment" with "value guidance" while focusing on political discourse translation. Particularly against the backdrop of the comprehensive advancement of the "Three-Into Education" initiative, there remains a lack of systematic theoretical explanations, practical models, and evaluation methods for achieving the transition from superficial language conversion to deep value transmission through blended PBL. Therefore, the blended PBL-CLIL model constructed in this study will not only fill the gaps in methods and evaluation approaches for political discourse translation teaching but will also enhance students' ability to translate political discourse and their capacity for autonomous learning through the design of a collaborative online-offline problem chain (problem identification-inquiry-resolution-reflection), while simultaneously reshaping the cognitive mechanism of value guidance.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Questions

To achieve the teaching objectives of "Understanding Contemporary China--Chinese-English Translation," this study constructs a blended PBL-CLIL teaching model and aims to address the following two questions:

a: Can the blended PBL-CLIL teaching model effectively enhance students' Chinese-English translation competence?

b: What are students' perceptions and attitudes toward this model?

3.2 Quasi-Teaching Experiment Design

This study employed a non-equivalent control group pretest-posttest design within quasi-experimental methodology to examine the teaching effects of the blended PBL-CLIL model in "Understanding Contemporary China—Chinese-English Translation" through systematic control of extraneous variables. The experiment was conducted during the fall semester of the 2023-2024 academic year in the English major of a university, spanning 16 weeks with 2 class hours per week. It involved two intact classes totaling 63 students, with 32 students in the experimental class receiving blended PBL-CLIL instruction and 31 students in the control class maintaining the traditional 3P (presentation, practice, production) teaching method. All participants had completed the "English-Chinese Translation Theory and Practice" course in the previous semester. To ensure intergroup comparability, an independent samples t-test was performed on the final course scores of both student groups, revealing no significant difference in mean scores between the two groups ($t(61) = 0.34$, $p = 0.73$). The experimental group demonstrated mean scores and standard deviations of $M = 83.35$, $SD = 3.80$, while the control group showed $M = 83.69$, $SD = 3.90$, indicating comparable translation competence between both groups prior to the implementation of the quasi-teaching experiment.

The implementation process of the quasi-teaching experiment was divided into three phases.

Preparation Phase (Week 1): Students in the experimental class were introduced to the teaching objectives, requirements, and the pedagogical concepts and procedures of the blended PBL-CLIL model for the "Understanding Contemporary China--Chinese-English Translation" course, and were required to cooperate with the implementation. Students in the control class were introduced to the teaching objectives, requirements, and the pedagogical concepts and procedures of the traditional 3P (presentation-practice-production) model, and were required to cooperate with the implementation.

The teaching intervention phase (Weeks 2-15) implemented differentiated designs: The experimental class followed a closed-loop process of "online exploration to identify problems - offline discussion to resolve problems - reflection and iteration to enhance competence," distributing the five fundamental teaching steps of PBL across online and offline activities. The online component utilized the "Learning Terminal" platform to deploy conceptual micro-lectures on terminology (such as micro-videos explaining "Chinese modernization"), where students completed translation exercises and documented translation problems. Offline instruction was conducted through group collaboration, with students forming teams of 5-6 members to discuss translation problems encountered online. They utilized the multilingual database platform of Shanghai International Studies University and the Corpus of Contemporary American English for retrieval, explored solutions, presented revised translations in group reports, and conducted peer evaluations and reflections. Throughout the teaching process, the instructor acted as a facilitator and promoter. According to the teaching schedule, one unit was completed each week. The control class followed a linear teaching approach based on the traditional 3P model.

Post-test Phase (Week 16): Both student groups underwent an English translation test comprising three Chinese-English passages of approximately 150 Chinese characters in total, covering topics related to Chinese culture, foreign policy, and cross-strait relations. Two translation specialists were responsible for grading the translations based on four evaluation dimensions: accuracy of language, precision of political terminology, cultural adaptation, and political appropriateness, with each dimension accounting for 25% of the total score. The two instructors independently scored each translation, and the average of their scores was calculated to assess the teaching effectiveness of the blended PBL-CLIL model. Subsequently, a questionnaire survey was administered to students in the

experimental class to investigate their perceptions and attitudes toward the new teaching model.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis Methods

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative data collection included assessments of students' translation performance and surveys measuring their satisfaction with the new teaching model. For translation competence evaluation, a scoring rubric was constructed based on four dimensions: accuracy of language, precision of political terminology, cultural adaptation, and political appropriateness. For satisfaction measurement, a questionnaire survey was administered comprising ten multiple-choice questions that required participants to respond based on their authentic learning experiences. Qualitative data were primarily derived from post-test translations produced by students in both classes. Quantitative data were analyzed using independent samples t-tests in SPSS 26.0, while qualitative data were examined through content analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Effect Analysis of Blended PBL-CLIL on Students' Translation Competence

Following the quasi-teaching experiment, a closed-book examination was administered to both the experimental and control classes. The data revealed that the experimental class achieved significantly higher mean scores than the control class, with a statistically significant difference ($t(61) = 2.47$, $p = 0.02$). The experimental class demonstrated mean scores and standard deviations of $M = 86.97$, $SD = 4.83$, while the control class showed $M = 84.39$, $SD = 3.30$. These results indicate that the blended PBL-CLIL teaching model effectively enhances students' political discourse translation competence. This finding not only confirms the feasibility and effectiveness of applying PBL in Chinese-English translation teaching[13], but also demonstrates the efficacy of the blended PBL-CLIL model for the "Understanding Contemporary China--Chinese-English Translation" course, which is rich in ideological and political elements. Furthermore, the application of this model has been shown to enhance students' political discourse translation competence.

A detailed reading and comparison of the translations from the experimental and control classes revealed that the experimental class's translations demonstrated notable advantages across three core dimensions of political terminology translation: accuracy, cultural adaptation, and political appropriateness. Regarding terminological accuracy, students in the experimental group exhibited a more precise grasp of political concepts with Chinese characteristics. Taking the translation of "两岸关系" as an example, 90% of the experimental class students provided the correct rendition "cross-strait relations," whereas only 62% of the control class students answered correctly, with some even mistranslating it as "Sino-Taiwan relations." The higher accuracy in political terminology among experimental class students may be attributed to the online conceptual multimodal micro-lectures and offline parallel corpora along with English corpus retrieval tasks implemented in this study, which provided students with a comprehensive reference framework for terminology cognition. This approach helped students accurately understand the connotations of political terms, thereby improving translation precision. Relevant research indicates that multimodal input can enhance students' language comprehension[16], while the use of parallel corpora in translation teaching can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of translation learning[17].

In terms of cultural adaptation, students in the experimental class demonstrated greater flexibility in adjusting translation strategies to accommodate the cultural cognitive background of the target audience. For instance, when translating the phrase "（文艺才能）接住地气、增加底气、灌注生气" into English, approximately 32% of the experimental class students employed explanatory translation strategies adapted to the cognitive characteristics of English-speaking audiences, rendering it as "reflect the reality, strengthen confidence, and absorb energy," whereas no students in the control class achieved complete accuracy. This strategic flexibility in the experimental class may be attributed to the collaborative learning approach embedded in the blended PBL-CLIL teaching model. According to research by Liu Lixiang and Li Dechao, group collaboration in PBL can stimulate students' creativity and facilitate the production of high-quality translations[18]. When translating this Chinese sentence into English, students should avoid mechanical literal translation and instead engage in creative translation based on comprehensive understanding of the source text while considering the cognitive context of English-speaking audiences. This demonstrates that the group collaboration within the blended

PBL-CLIL teaching model can effectively cultivate students' creativity.

In terms of political appropriateness, the results of this study indicate that students in the experimental class demonstrated a more accurate grasp of the balance between "faithfulness" and "acceptability" when handling sensitive political expressions. For example, when translating the proposition "祖国必须统一," all students in the experimental class correctly rendered it as "Our country must be reunified," whereas 12% of the control class students mistranslated it as "Our country must be reunited." In English, "unify" refers to national unification, while "unite" emphasizes the alliance of different entities for common objectives; thus, translating "统一" as "reunited" is inappropriate within China's political context. The translation disparity between the two classes suggests that the blended PBL-CLIL model, through the coordinated division of online and offline teaching tasks and the integration of CLIL's "learning by using" pedagogy, effectively helps students in the experimental class develop sensitivity and professional judgment in political discourse translation. The underlying reason is that PBL enables students to identify authentic translation problems and develop practical problem-solving abilities, which are essential qualities for professional translators. Previous research has also demonstrated that implementing PBL contributes to enhancing student translators' professional competence[9].

4.2 Student Satisfaction Survey on Blended PBL-CLIL

Following the teaching experiment, a questionnaire survey was administered to students in the experimental class. A total of 32 questionnaires were distributed and 32 were collected. The survey results are as follows:

No.	Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I believe the blended PBL-CLIL teaching model has effectively helped me understand the culture and values of contemporary Chinese society.	78%	14%	8%		
2	The implementation of this teaching model has stimulated my independent thinking and problem-solving abilities.	91%	9%			
3	The Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach has enhanced my Chinese-English translation competence while studying political theories.	85%	13%	2%		
4	The blended (online + offline) teaching arrangement of the course has provided more flexible learning schedules and methods.	74%	18%	8%		
5	I believe this teaching model enables me to engage in cross-cultural communication more effectively.	82%	11%	7%		
6	The integration of course content with the discourse system with Chinese characteristics has helped me better understand and utilize Chinese discourse.	92%	8%			
7	The group collaborative learning component has promoted communication and cooperation among my classmates.	88%	8%	4%		
8	I believe this teaching model can effectively cultivate my critical thinking skills.	90%	6%	4%		
9	The online learning resources provided in the course (such as videos, reading materials, etc.) have been very helpful for my learning.	85%	12%	3%		
10	Overall, I am satisfied with the blended PBL-CLIL teaching model implemented in this semester's "Understanding Contemporary China--Chinese-English Translation" course.	88%	6%	6%		

The questionnaire survey revealed a high overall satisfaction rate of 94% among students regarding the blended PBL-CLIL teaching model. The positive effects of this teaching model in the "Understanding Contemporary China — Chinese-English Translation" course include the following findings: 97% of students reported that the integrated online resources (such as videos and case study materials) positively influenced their understanding of course content and completion of learning tasks; 96% of students believed that group discussions and reflection reports helped cultivate their autonomous learning abilities and team collaboration spirit; 98% of students indicated that the implementation of the new teaching model enabled them to both master political theories and improve translation competence; over 90% of students acknowledged that this teaching model significantly enhanced their critical thinking skills, cross-cultural communication competence, and comprehensive language application abilities. These findings corroborate previous conclusions that PBL teaching can effectively enhance students' critical thinking[19]. This cognitive quality was developed throughout the implementation process of blended PBL-CLIL, with group discussions, peer evaluations, and reflection phases playing particularly prominent roles.

Conclusion

This study constructed a blended PBL-CLIL teaching model and validated its effectiveness in cultivating political discourse translation competence within the "Understanding Contemporary China--Chinese-English Translation" course through quasi-teaching experiments and questionnaire surveys. The research findings demonstrate that this model significantly enhances students' political discourse translation abilities, with widespread student recognition of its positive impact on understanding contemporary Chinese culture, developing critical thinking, and improving cross-cultural communication skills. This study holds methodological significance for the transformation of foreign language education in the digital-intelligence era. The blended PBL-CLIL model is not only applicable to Chinese-English translation courses but also offers referential value for ideological and political education in other disciplines through its dual-drive mechanism of "technology empowerment + value guidance." Particularly amid rapid advancements in artificial intelligence, exploring the deep integration of AI with the blended PBL-CLIL teaching model to further enhance the effectiveness of value education represents a promising frontier topic worthy of in-depth investigation.

Fund Projects

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