

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Mobile Blended Reading Circle Model to Improve Primary School Student English Reading Ability and Attitude

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated a mobile blended reading circle model to improve primary school students' English reading ability and attitude. The study focused on the objectives of exploring the opinions of teachers and students on English reading teaching to develop a model for primary school students to enhance their English reading ability and attitude. A mixed-methods approach using both qualitative and quantitative methodology was adopted. Semi-structured interview schedules were used to collect qualitative data from 4 sixth-grade primary school teachers, while a student opinion questionnaire was designed to investigate 108 sixth-grade primary school students drawn from the population of 149 sixth-grade primary students about English reading teaching. The qualitative data was analyzed through narratives, while the quantitative data was analyzed through descriptive analysis. The study showed that the MBRC Model is a promising new teaching model. They affirmed its feasibility in primary schools' English reading teaching.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, people incorporate lifelong learning into their spiritual pursuit of life, and reading is a bridge leading to this goal. Being an international language, in multilingual contexts English is the language of scientific communication (Galloway, 2013), deliberated as "a symbol of modernization" (Galloway, 1985), and adopted worldwide as a medium of instruction, predominantly in countries with non-native speaking as a tool of future access to the technological progress in the developed countries (Surur, 1981; Tang, 2020) as well as to additional education overseas and careers (Evans, 1999; Liu, 2011).

To compete in the world economy (markets), China

is required to encourage its citizens to communicate in English in order to enhance their competency in the global economy (Zheng et al., 2009). This global economic competition led China to strongly emphasize English reading ability administered by the Ministry of Education at primary and secondary schools (MEPRC, 2001).

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) project, hosted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, has been committed to assessing student reading literacy to test reading ability; this project proposed that digital technology has made reading accessible to most people. At the same time, after the outbreak of COVID-19, people gradually

realized that by cultivating students independent and mature reading abilities and strategies, they could alleviate the fear of facing future uncertainties and prepare for the challenges that come at any time (McDiarmid and Zhao, 2023). Schleicher (2019) pointed out that the method of forced memory in the past could not adapt to diverse learning needs. In the new era, the collection and integration of people's information, application, and innovation put forward higher requirements, and forming these abilities is inseparable from reading ability.

For students of English as a second or foreign language, reading is an essential skill to acquire for several reasons (Pardede, 2012). In 2001, English, as a formal subject, gradually began to enter Chinese primary classrooms. The "Guiding Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Actively Promoting the Opening of English Courses in Primary Schools" stipulated that the starting grade for English courses in primary schools was generally the third grade. To promote the steady development of the primary school English curriculum, China carried out a series of attempts and reforms and continued to explore the localization of the primary school English curriculum. Since the release of "English Curriculum Standards (Experimental Draft)" in 2001, the English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education in China was revised every ten years. Compared with the 2011 Edition, the "Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards 2022 Edition" put forward higher requirements and more details for English reading and vocabulary.

Objectives of the study

The study was based on following objectives:

- To study the perspectives of teachers and students on English reading teaching.
- To develop a model for primary school students to enhance the English reading ability and attitude.

Research questions

The following research questions were followed for conducting the study:

- What are the opinions of teachers and students about English reading teaching and learning?

- What are the specific components of the MBRC model?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mobile Blended Learning (MBL)

Mobile blended learning has become an emerging term (Hou et al., 2014). In order to promote the continuous development and innovation of mobile technology in higher education, mobile blended learning is a unique form of blended learning (Glahn and Gruber, 2018). Baek (2021) mentioned that it is feasible to integrate these two different structures in English teaching. Similarly, Ustun (2019) stated that most scholars agreed that MBL integrated the advantages of blended learning and mobile learning.

Mobile blended learning model

Suartama et al. (2019) stated that teachers use the platform to evaluate and summarize the content submitted by students. Rifa'i et al. (2018) summarized four principles of MBL respectively: classroom tasks, smartphone and web-based aids, and strategies. Baek and Lee (2018) designed a mobile-assisted blended learning (MABL) model based on the KaKaoTalk APP, and mobile apps were also part of this model.

Klímová and Pražák (2019) designed a mobile learning app to support the retention and practice of new English words and phrases based on students' needs. Hariadi et al. (2022) designed a five-step model for the Blended Web Mobile Learning (BWML) Model based on MoLearn.

Advantages of mobile blended learning

Pyo and Lee (2022) said that blended learning provides learners with more opportunities for social interaction and authentic input.

Baldauf et al. (2017) highlighted that to understand their acceptance of modern games from the perspectives of students. Taki and Jafari (2017) expected to use spaced repetition to improve the vocabulary learning outcomes of Iranian EFL students using computer software. Nugrahini (2019) explored the impact of mobile technology-assisted language learning (MALL) and found it productive.

Conceptual framework of the research study

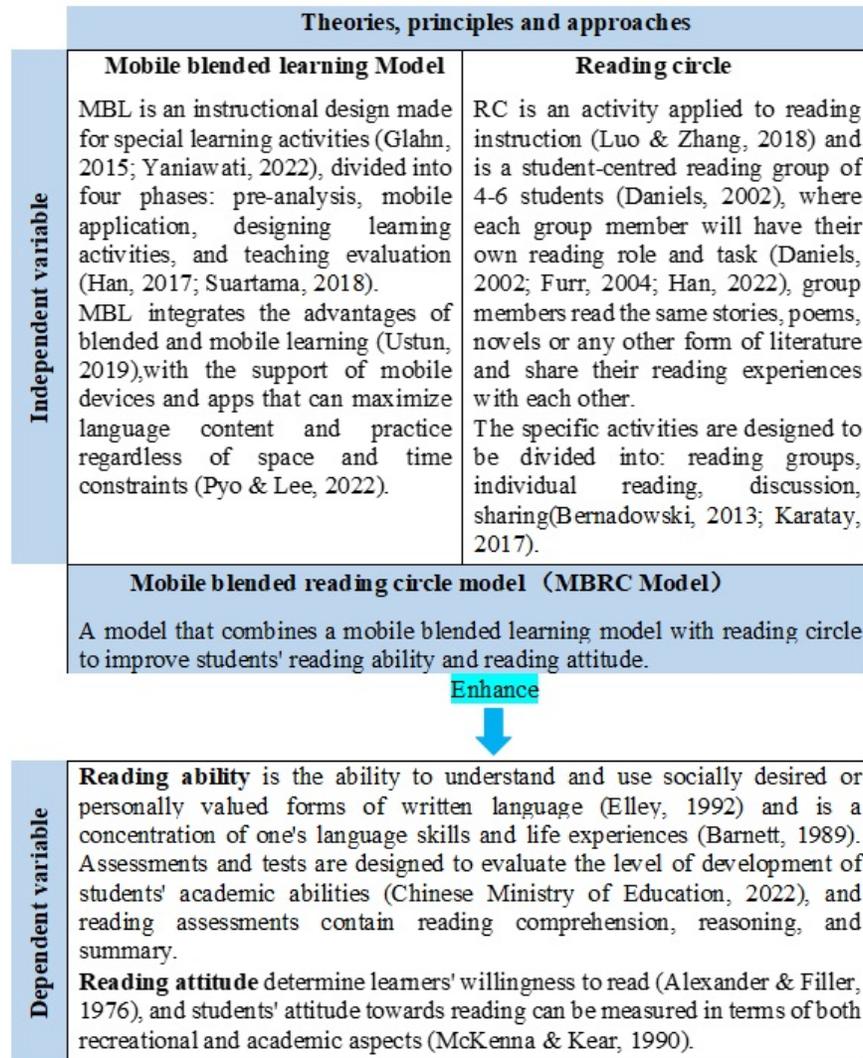


Figure 1: Research framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method research design was adopted for the current study, using both qualitative and quantitative methodology.

Population and sample

The English student status survey was conducted by distributing questionnaires to 108 students, who were drawn from the population of 149 students in the sixth-grade primary school, No.3 Middle School. Semi-structured interview schedules were used to collect qualitative data from 4 sixth grade primary school teachers.

Research instruments

Quantitative data was collected from student reading teaching opinions questionnaires collected from primary school students: the questionnaire was

adapted from one about mobile assisted blended learning class (Baek and Lee, 2018; Bilal et al., 2022) to meet the needs of this study. It was used to find the reading teaching opinions of these students through textbook content, classroom activities, teacher-student interaction, peer interaction, and mobile technology; it had 21 items, using a five-point Likert scale to measure each item, 5 for Strongly agree, 4 for Agree, 3 for not sure, 2 for Disagree, 1 for Strongly disagree. The student opinions questionnaire was validated through Item Objective Congruence (IOC).

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The MBRC Model

Qualitative data results

According to the students' and teachers' opinions

on current English reading teaching, this study summarizes the teachers' prominent opinions as follows:

Key Aspects of Reading Ability: In cultivating reading ability, we should start from three aspects: reading comprehension, reasoning, and summary, and set up targeted teaching activities to help students understand the text better.

English Reading Problems: The current reading problems of students mainly focus on low motivation in reading as well as lack of confidence in reading, so we can try some characteristic classroom interactive activities to increase the fun and attractiveness of the classroom to improve the students' attitudes towards reading in English.

Reading Methods or Approaches: Teachers currently rely mainly on traditional teaching methods to teach English reading, but they realize that these methods may not be sufficient to stimulate students' interest and participation, and despite some attempts to improve them in teaching, the results are not satisfactory.

Improvement of Reading Teaching: Current reading teaching can be improved by providing more diversified and enriched reading resources, integrating multimedia resources (e.g., audio, video, and images, etc.), increasing interactive activities among students, and providing a platform for teachers to communicate with each other.

Views on Mobile Technology: Mobile technology has potential in English language teaching, but it should be utilized wisely, and students should be instructed and supervised with care.

Choice of the Mobile APP: Teachers are optimistic about the use of Coco Baby and Ding Talk in English reading teaching.

Views on Reading Circles: A willingness to try new teaching methods and a passion for continuous improvement in education.

Quantitative data results

The study summarized the students' prominent opinions as follows:

Textbook Content: The current textbook content must be more attractive for students. They think the content is boring or not practical enough, and they want the textbook content to be more attractive, practical, and appropriate to their level in terms of language difficulty.

Classroom Activities: Students find the current classroom interactions could be more exciting and need to be improved. They want to design a variety of classroom activities that are practical and help students apply their reading abilities to real-life situations.

Teacher-Student Interaction: There needs to be more teacher-student interaction in the classroom. Through positive teacher-student interaction, a closer teacher-student relationship can be established, students' doubts can be better addressed, and comprehension and learning can be improved.

Peer Interaction: limited and formal opportunities for student cooperation and mutual assistance. Students should be promoted to solve problems together by organizing students to participate in group activities, and teachers should encourage students to learn from each other and share their experiences.

Mobile Technology: Students are willing to apply mobile technology to the English reading classroom to enhance the learning experience.

Therefore, meeting these expectations requires innovative current teaching methods and careful selection of materials to improve the attractiveness, relevance, and effectiveness of the English reading classroom, supplemented by appropriate mobile technology, which will help students become more actively engaged in their learning and improve their reading ability and attitude.

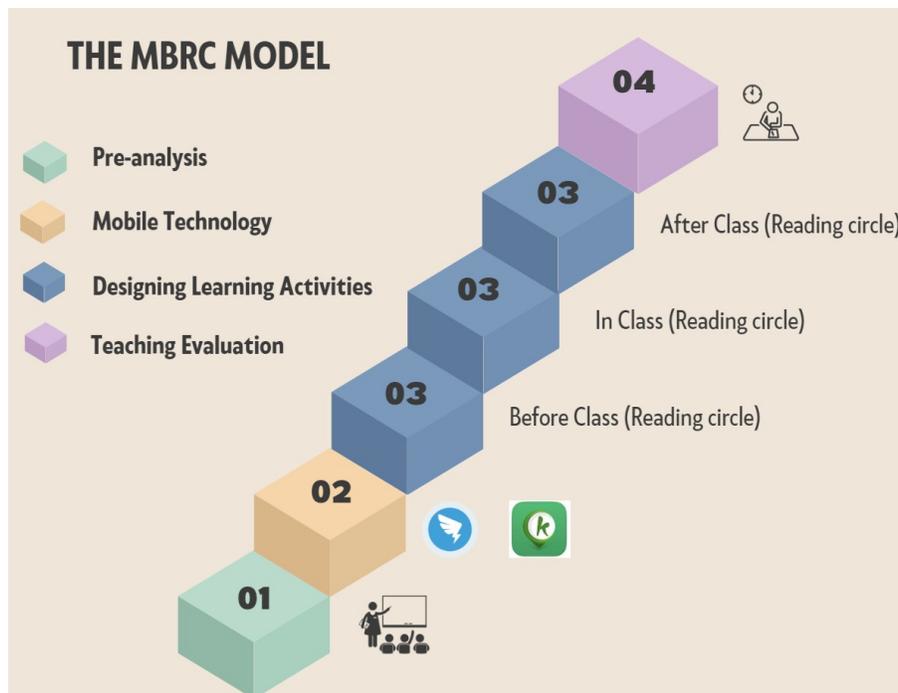


Figure 2: The MBRC model

DISCUSSION

The first research objective of this study was to find out teachers' and students' opinions about English reading teaching to determine whether the current teaching model needs to be improved to enhance the quality of teaching. This process can be regarded as the first phase of the model development: pre-course analysis, which means the teaching preparation phase, where analysis of learner characteristics, learning content, etc., is necessary before the curriculum is set up (Huang, 2008; Kirkgoz, 2011; Suartama et al., 2019; Almazova et al., 2020; Hariadi et al., 2022) to assess whether the current teaching model matches and meets the needs of the learners. In addition, since two-way interactions between teachers and students occur in classroom teaching and both are actively involved (Rido and Sari, 2018; Kaewsang-On et al., 2022), the teachers' perspectives were also fully considered in this study.

There are many English reading models, such as the common bottom-up approach, the top-down approach (Gumartifa, 2021), and so on. Currently, traditional reading teaching adopts the bottom-up approach, in which the teacher usually dominates the English classroom, and students need more time to learn independently and autonomously.

Over time, students gradually develop the habit of passively accepting knowledge and are also shy about expressing their views in the classroom. In the face of the teacher's questions, students develop the psychology of avoidance, fear of answering incorrectly, and need more self-confidence, so students seldom actively participate in classroom interaction. Whereas interaction is a crucial feature of the teaching and learning process, this interaction refers to the mutual communication and information sharing between the teacher and the students, which is especially crucial in the language classroom (Pustika, 2020).

In addition, there are relatively few opportunities for collaborative learning among students, and the effectiveness of collaborative learning is limited. Although teachers set up some opportunities for cooperative learning in every lesson, such cooperation is usually limited to learning between the same table or front and back tables, and the content of cooperative learning often needs more depth and valuable knowledge exchange. The Ten-Year Development Plan for Education Informatization (2011-2020) emphasizes the effective use of information tools to assist learning and achieve cooperative learning. It points out that the general environment of informatization demands students' learning abilities, which means that students will take

more initiative. At the same time, improving the digital literacy of teachers and learners and developing efficient teaching and learning models are essential to meet the challenges faced in modern education (Baek and Lee, 2018).

This in-depth analysis in the early stages is crucial for innovative teaching and curriculum design. At the same time, the process of synthesizing the feedback from teachers and students makes it possible to combine the professional insights of teachers with the learning experiences of students, providing valuable insights and new ideas for the improvement of the teaching model and ensuring that the teaching model is designed to be effective, practical, and relevant.

CONCLUSION

In the early stage of the study, relevant specialized literature was read to understand teachers' and students' opinions on the current teaching of English reading. Based on this reality, an outline of teacher opinion interviews and a student opinion questionnaire were designed to investigate teachers' and students' opinions about English reading teaching.

Teachers' opinions were collected from four sixth-grade English teachers through interviews in the form of an outline that passed the IOC validity test, and based on their rich teaching experience, they answered the eight questions posed in this study. The content analysis of the teachers' interview results revealed that, in the opinion of the teachers who spent time with each other, students lacked enthusiasm for reading in English because of test-oriented education. Meanwhile, the traditional methods of teaching English reading need to be more effective in actual teaching; the reading materials are not attractive, and the classroom teaching activities need to be reasonably designed to stimulate students' interest and active participation. Teachers believe that improving students' reading ability should be promoted by focusing on three aspects: reading comprehension, reasoning, and summary, and they also express their desire to improve current reading teaching through technology or diversified teaching methods.

Responses from 108 sixth-grade students were collected on the Student Opinions Questionnaire, a

21-item covering five dimensions: textbook content, classroom activities, teacher-student interactions, peer interactions, and mobile technology, which passed both IOC and Cronbach's Alpha tests. The data results of the questionnaire showed that the students showed dissatisfaction with the current textbook content, classroom activities, teacher-student interactions, and peer interactions, especially in the areas of classroom activities and peer interactions, and that they longed for more practical and enriching classroom activities and more effective opportunities for peer exchanges, and that they were interested in the application of mobile technology to English reading.

Based on the teachers' and students' opinions about the current English reading teaching, it can be seen that they are generally concerned about instructional design and teaching methods and have positive attitudes towards changing the current teaching model and using technology in teaching, which can help to promote the innovation of a new teaching model and further develop teaching methods that better serve students and teachers.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in light of the findings of the study:

Teaching Activity Design: To achieve the research objectives, the model integrates reading circle activities and teaching activities, so firstly, it is recommended that the design of teaching activities should take into full consideration the teaching objectives, which will help students achieve the expected learning outcomes. Secondly, it should consider the participants' characteristics, including the student's age and the needs of the subject requirements. Finally, it should be flexible and make timely adjustments based on learners' needs and feedback. Teaching is dynamic but needs to be continuously improved and optimized based on student response.

Teacher-Student Relationship: In this model, it is crucial to establish a harmonious teacher-student relationship. Teachers play the roles of guide, facilitator, and organizer in it. Teachers should establish a good interactive relationship with students, listen to their needs and opinions, and share their English reading experiences, encouraging

them to participate actively in discussions and sharing. In addition, teachers need to emphasize students' sharing in groups, understand the progress of activities through careful observation, and provide timely feedback to help students reflect and improve. At the same time, positive encouragement and affirmation can help enhance students' self-confidence and motivate them to participate more actively in learning activities.

Individualized Learning: To solve the problem of inconsistent progress in the discussion session, the teacher should ensure that there is as little difference in the ability of the members of each group as possible when forming the groups based on respecting students' wishes.

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