

A CASE STUDY OF IMPLEMENTING HIGHER- ORDER THINKING SKILLS (HOTS) IN BLENDED LEARNING FOR ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) READING CLASSROOM

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HE XIANGJUN

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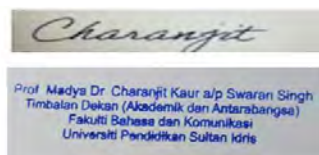
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I started my Ph.D during Covid-19, and it was tough in the beginning. Later, I became used to the norm, and the journey was not smooth sailing during the unexpected moments. When I came to Malaysia and stepped into UPSI land, I felt the pressure of the Ph.D. Sleeplessness became a frequent companion during my thesis writing. However, the beautiful ambiance of UPSI and the wonderful hospitality of the people in Malaysia, especially in Tanjung Malim, made my stay easier. Spending time in the library and walking near the lake in the evenings made me think more about my Ph.D. It has been a wonderful journey, stressful but with no regrets. Therefore, I am grateful to express my sincere thanks to many people.

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of the study is to investigate the implementation of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in a blended EFL reading classroom. The objectives are to examine teachers' strategies for incorporating HOTS in teaching reading via blended learning, explore the influencing factors on teachers' incorporation of HOTS as well as students' responses, and propose guidelines for incorporating HOTS in teaching reading via blended learning in the Chinese EFL context. A qualitative research design was employed, specifically, a case study of an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher and six students. Data were collected utilizing classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Data obtained from the classroom observation and semi-structured interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, and data from the document analysis was analysed using content analysis. The findings revealed that factors such as the teaching environment, application of Chaoxing, elements of HOTS, teacher's pedagogical beliefs, and students' factor influence the incorporation of HOTS. Notable findings reported that the integration of HOTS in the blended classroom improved student reading comprehension and fostered active learning. Based on these findings, a guideline for incorporating HOTS in the blended EFL reading classroom was proposed, providing valuable insights for curriculum developers, course designers, and language teachers. The conclusion of this study suggested the significance of constructivism theory in informing the application of HOTS in language teaching, offering a foundational framework for understanding their implementation. The study implicates both practical application and theoretical foundations, advancing the understanding and practice of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) into blended EFL reading instruction.



KAJIAN KES UJIAN GABUNGAN HOTS PENGAJARAN MEMBACA DALAM PEMBELAJARAN TERADUN KELAS EFL UNIVERSITI DI CHINA

ABSTRAK

Matlamat utama kajian adalah untuk menyiasat pelaksanaan Kemahiran Berfikir Aras Tinggi (KBAT) dalam bilik darjah bacaan EFL gabungan. Objektifnya adalah untuk mengkaji strategi guru untuk menggabungkan KBAT dalam pengajaran membaca melalui pembelajaran teradun, meneroka faktor yang mempengaruhi penggabungan KBAT guru serta tindak balas pelajar, dan mencadangkan garis panduan untuk menggabungkan KBAT dalam pengajaran membaca melalui pembelajaran teradun dalam bahasa Cina. konteks EFL. Reka bentuk penyelidikan kualitatif telah digunakan, khususnya, kajian kes seorang guru Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) dan enam (6) orang pelajar. Data dikumpul menggunakan pemerhatian bilik darjah, temu bual separa berstruktur, dan analisis dokumen. Data yang diperoleh daripada pemerhatian bilik darjah dan temu bual separa berstruktur dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik, dan data daripada analisis dokumen dianalisis menggunakan analisis kandungan. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa faktor seperti persekitaran pengajaran, penerapan Chaoxing, elemen KBAT, kepercayaan pedagogi guru, dan faktor pelajar mempengaruhi penggabungan KBAT. Penemuan ketara melaporkan bahawa penyepaduan KBAT dalam bilik darjah bercantum meningkatkan pemahaman bacaan pelajar dan memupuk pembelajaran aktif. Berdasarkan penemuan ini, garis panduan untuk menggabungkan KBAT dalam bilik darjah bacaan EFL gabungan telah dicadangkan, memberikan pandangan berharga untuk pembangun kurikulum, pereka kursus dan guru bahasa. Kesimpulan kajian ini mencadangkan kepentingan teori konstruktivisme dalam memaklumkan aplikasi KBAT dalam pengajaran bahasa, menawarkan kerangka asas untuk memahami pelaksanaannya. Implikasi kajian ini menawarkan kaedah secara praktikal dan teori asas serta meningkatkan pemahaman dan amalan dalam Kemahiran Berfikir Aras Tinggi (KBAT) menerusi pengajaran bacaan EFL secara pendekatan integrasi gabungan.



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since China initiated its national opening-up policy in 1980, the significance of English within China's education system has steadily risen. English has transcended from being a mere subject to an essential tool for accessing global resources, conducting international business, and staying updated with worldwide developments (Li & Li, 2018). This shift is deeply intertwined with China's globalization endeavors and its aspirations for modernization. As a consequence, English language studies have been mandated from the third grade of primary school through university, with English being a compulsory subject in the national university entrance exam (Gaokao) (Fang, 2017).

The increasing demand for English proficiency in China has spurred significant growth and development in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching.

There has been a notable emphasis on adopting innovative teaching methodologies and integrating technology to enhance students' English language acquisition. This evolution underscores the importance of English language education in China's socio-economic landscape. From its initial status as a mandatory subject in schools to its current role in facilitating international communication and trade, English has become indispensable for individuals and the nation alike.

The journey of English language education in China exemplifies a trajectory marked by adaptation and advancement, driven by the imperatives of globalization and national development goals. The integration of English proficiency into the educational framework signifies China's commitment to embracing global interconnectedness and cultivating a competitive edge in the international arena. This continuous evolution underscores the transformative impact of English language education on China's socio-economic landscape and its broader engagement with the global community.

1.1 Background of Study

The Core Competencies and Values for Chinese Students' Development, released by the Chinese Association of Education (2016), delineates six key qualities: rational thinking, critical questioning, courage to explore, diligent reflection, problem-solving, and self-management. Thus, the future objective of language teaching is to nurture students' higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), aiming to produce innovative talents for future society.



According to Ali et al. (2022), reading is an essential skill for foreign language learners as it provides opportunities to engage with English in contexts with limited input. Reading emerges as a fundamental language skill that lays the groundwork for success. Strong reading abilities enable students to effectively navigate any academic environment (Ding, 2020; Li, 2022; Huang & Ngan, 2015; Mulatu & Regassa, 2022). Moreover, reading aids students in interpreting meaning across various texts, thereby enhancing their vocabulary, speaking, and writing skills.

Reading is a goal-oriented process, necessitating not only proficient reading ability but also strategies for analysis, reflection, evaluation, and judgment (Cirino et al., 2019). Goals may evolve and adapt within the dynamic interplay between reader, text, and context, demanding readers' continual cognitive engagement (Afflerbach, Cho, & Kim, 2015). The Teaching Syllabus for English Majors (2000) in China underscores the importance of cultivating thinking and innovation abilities, urging students to consciously analyze, synthesize, diversify, generalize, and solve problems from multiple perspectives. Consequently, EFL teachers must navigate the interplay between reading and thinking abilities in English instruction.

Given the pervasive influence of the internet on the new generation's upbringing and socialization, there's an increasing demand for educators to adopt innovative technological solutions for instructional purposes (Szymkowiak et al., 2021). However, this shift presents dual challenges in teaching and learning. While technology integration offers opportunities for enhanced engagement and learning, it also poses challenges in adapting traditional teaching methods to effectively incorporate digital tools and platforms. The Ministry of Education's Education Informatization 2.0 Action Plan, aligned with the



China Education Modernization 2035 action plan, highlights the insufficient integration of IT and teaching (Yan & Yang, 2021). Recognizing information technology as a teaching aid, blended learning emerges as a pedagogical approach that combines various teaching modes with the goal of optimizing learning outcomes, such as enhancing student motivation (Peng & Fu, 2021). By fostering active learning and facilitating knowledge construction, blended learning holds the potential to catalyze profound changes in teaching and learning methodologies.

1.1.1 Teaching and Learning of Reading in Chinese Universities

The significance of reading as a compulsory course for undergraduate students, both English majors and non-English majors, is underscored in educational literature (Renandya, Hu, & Xiang, 2015). Chinese national examinations, such as the National College English Test (CET-4/6) administered by the Ministry of Education, place considerable emphasis on reading comprehension, as performance in English is closely tied to reading proficiency (Tang, 2023). This emphasis is evident in various English level tests, where reading comprehension constitutes a significant portion of the assessment criteria, ranging from 30% in the Practical English Test for Colleges to 45% in the College Entrance Examination (Gui, 2020).

For many Chinese students with limited English reading abilities, the pressure to pass the National College English Exam is a daunting challenge. Often, these students have relied heavily on textbooks rather than engaging with original English literature prior to university, leading to a lack of reading fluency critical for comprehension (Chandran,



2019). Consequently, students commonly adopt a word-by-word reading approach, resulting in prolonged text comprehension and heightened reading anxiety (Faruq, 2019; Mardianti et al., 2021).

In addressing these challenges, English language teachers traditionally prioritize grammar instruction and vocabulary expansion through translation exercises (Dhillon et al., 2020). However, this approach tends to inhibit students' fluency and interest in reading, as they primarily focus on deciphering linguistic complexities rather than engaging with the thematic essence of texts (Wang & Kim, 2021). Moreover, a teacher-centered approach limits students' autonomy and critical thinking, hindering their ability to delve into deeper textual meanings and develop cognitive skills (Hu & Baumann, 2014; Chen, 2015).



extracurricular reading among students (Zhang & Gao, 2016). This restricts the scope of learning and knowledge acquisition, particularly as traditional teaching methods often overlook the incorporation of diverse, multimodal, and digital sources (Greenleaf et al., 2023). To address these shortcomings, educators advocate for a shift towards extensive reading practices and the inclusion of culturally diverse materials to foster deeper comprehension and engagement (Sandretto & Tilson, 2014; Sun, 2020).

In contemporary society, where students encounter a multitude of communication modes daily, the traditional approach to English teaching falls short in cultivating competent and interested readers (Huang, 2014). Despite efforts to enhance reading abilities, the efficacy of English teaching remains unsatisfactory, with students exhibiting limited interest and proficiency (Coiro, 2021; Singer et al., 2023). Therefore, it is



imperative to integrate higher-order questioning and critical thinking skills into reading instruction to empower students to construct meaning independently (Samelian, 2017; Wu, 2017).

Critical thinking plays a pivotal role in enabling students to navigate and analyze complex texts effectively (Afflerbach, Cho, & Kim, 2015). By engaging in higher-order thinking processes such as analysis, reflection, evaluation, and judgment, students can deepen their comprehension and develop essential cognitive skills (Thamrin et al., 2019). Recognizing this, educational authorities have advocated for a holistic approach to reading instruction that emphasizes not only reading strategies and linguistic knowledge but also the cultivation of critical thinking abilities (Teaching Guidance Committee for Foreign Languages and Literature Majors, 2020).

In light of these developments, the role of teachers is evolving from mere disseminators of knowledge to facilitators of learning experiences that promote student autonomy and individualized learning (Darling-Aduana & Heinrich, 2018). Furthermore, as reading comprehension is closely intertwined with cognitive development, effective readers employ strategic thinking processes to achieve their comprehension goals (Singh & Shaari, 2019). Thus, educators must prioritize the development of higher-order thinking skills to equip students with the tools necessary to navigate complex texts and construct meaning independently (Hidayati, Inderawati, & Loeneto, 2000). By embracing critical thinking as a cornerstone of reading instruction, teachers can empower students to engage with texts thoughtfully and meaningfully.



1.1.2 The Development of HOTS in China

Since the onset of the 21st century, there has been a notable emphasis on the development of higher-order thinking competence as an integral component in enhancing the quality of education. The integration of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) has been actively advocated by educators, who engage students in participatory teaching methodologies that involve analysis, synthesis, and evaluation activities (Du & Yang, 2021; Fitriani et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2020). As the significance of higher-order thinking continues to be underscored, the fundamental premise of learning is intrinsically linked to individuals' capacity to leverage their potential and recognize their self-worth. According to Howells (2018), education assumes a pivotal role in nurturing not only knowledge and skills but also attitudes and values that predispose individuals to collaborate with diverse perspectives, explore untapped opportunities, and devise multiple solutions to challenges. Thus, it is imperative for educators not only to foster learners' capacity for independent thought but also to enhance their abilities in analysis, evaluation, and judgment.

The cultivation of thinking skills did not feature prominently in educational syllabus until the issuance of China's Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline in 2002. This landmark document delineated the specific objective of curriculum reform: to counteract the prevalent trend of rote learning and instil a positive learning ethos, wherein the acquisition of foundational knowledge and skills transcends mere assimilation to become a journey of self-directed learning and the cultivation of sound values. The following excerpt is drawn from the Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline (2002):



“Change the current situation of "difficult, complex, partial, old" within book knowledge, strengthen the connection between the course content and students' life and the development of modern society and the development of science and technology, and pay attention to students' learning interests and experience by selecting the basic knowledge and skills necessary for lifelong learning. Change the situation of too much emphasis on rote learning, mechanical training in the implementation of the curriculum, advocate students to take the initiative to participate, to explore, to do in practice, and cultivate students' ability to collect and process information to acquire new knowledge, the ability to analyse and solve problems, and the ability to communicate and cooperate (pp. 1-2).”

The discourse underscores the importance of students' initiative and their capacities for analysis, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration within the framework of the new curriculum system. However, despite these imperatives, the absence of a well-established education quality evaluation system persists, with both high school entrance examinations and the National Higher Education Entrance Examination serving as primary benchmarks for assessing educational quality. Consequently, there's a pressing need, as noted by Lin (2017), to urgently construct a system aimed at fostering core qualities in students to facilitate the comprehensive implementation of quality education, which encompasses critical and creative thinking.

While innovation ability is intricately linked to thinking prowess, the latter serves as its foundation. Nevertheless, inadequate thinking skills remain a prevalent issue among English major students in China (Peng & Fu, 2021). Instructional strategies must intertwine with the cultivation of students' humanistic literacy and higher-order thinking abilities, as education pivots towards modernization, global perspectives, and future-oriented paradigms (Li, 2019). Recognizing this imperative, the Chinese government has devoted significant efforts to advancing quality-oriented education, particularly in compulsory and general high school education, with a focused emphasis on nurturing advanced thinking

encompassing critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, communication, cooperation, and discussion (Yang, Li, & Li, 2021).

The Ministry of Education, through the Teaching Guidance Committee for Foreign Language and Literature Majors, released comprehensive guidelines in 2020, addressing deficiencies in language proficiency, cross-cultural competence, critical thinking, and independent learning abilities in professional education (Chang, 2020). These guidelines stress the judicious utilization of modern educational technologies and the development of independent learning and critical thinking skills.

Furthermore, the MOE introduced revisions to the National English Language Curriculum Standards in 2022, emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between critical thinking development and language proficiency. The updated curriculum mandates the inclusion of real-world language usage, cross-cultural communication, diverse viewpoints, and data-driven reasoning, fostering logical, critical, and creative thinking among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Consequently, the discourse underscores how the core quality-oriented curriculum reform has propelled research into higher-order thinking to the forefront.

Chinese higher education advocates for a pedagogical shift, progressing from mere knowledge and skill acquisition to the cultivation of thinking abilities and deep comprehension and application of knowledge (Chen, 2016). In light of the information deluge in the big data era, educators at universities must address how to nurture students' thinking abilities coupled with innovation consciousness (Chen, 2022; Feng, 2023). As higher-order learning transcends traditional classroom settings towards open network

learning, educators must guide students in navigating and critically evaluating the wealth of online information, synthesizing complex concepts, and analyzing data across diverse contexts.

In 2018, the Ministry of Education issued the Opinions on Implementing First-class Undergraduate Curriculum Construction, with a focal point on higher-order thinking to foster national and provincial first-class undergraduate courses aimed at nurturing innovative, multidisciplinary, and application-oriented talents. This strategic initiative underscores the commitment to advancing educational paradigms that align with contemporary societal demands and aspirations.

“Strengthen classroom design of a good class, put an end to simple transferring of knowledge and stop ignoring quality training. Strengthen the deep integration of modern information technology and education and teaching, solve the problem of the innovation of teaching and learning mode, and put an end to problems of simplification and formality with the application of information technology. Strengthen the interaction between teachers and students, students and students, solve the problem of innovative and critical thinking training, and put an end to the phenomenon of teachers’ full lecturing and students’ passive listening (pp. 20-21).”

The excerpt highlights the imperative need for innovating teaching methodologies, asserting that the conventional approach to English language learning, centered on rote memorization of vocabulary and grammar, alongside limited textbook reliance, falls short in meeting the demands of contemporary curriculum reforms. Teachers are urged to adopt a student-centered approach, fostering independent, interactive, and inquiry-based learning (Jiang, 2020). Additionally, in accordance with The Opinions of Implementing First-class Undergraduate Curriculum Construction, integrating information technology into teaching to cultivate Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) is underscored. Consequently, educators must shift their roles in the classroom towards prioritizing the quality and efficacy of

student-centered instruction, guiding learners in engaging with inquiry and personalized learning (Ma & Zhang, 2021).

In the present digital age, a paramount objective of higher education is to cultivate learners' HOTS to meet the evolving demands of society (Van Velzen, 2017). Students must be equipped with autonomy and collaboration skills to effectively address these demands. Mere acquisition of factual knowledge is deemed insufficient; rather, learners should attain profound comprehension of complex concepts. Wu (2018) advocates for the Golden Course standard, wherein "higher request" entails the seamless integration of knowledge, skills, and attributes to foster advanced cognitive and problem-solving abilities in students. HOTS empower individuals to become sophisticated thinkers, constituting a vital component of global education (Fatimah, 2021; Fitriani, 2021; Schulz & FitzPatrick, 2016). Hence, language teaching practices must integrate HOTS strategies to effectively nurture learners' cognitive prowess.

1.1.3 Using Blended Learning to Foster HOTS in Reading

Technology has become an integral component of contemporary networked society, significantly expanding avenues for independent knowledge acquisition. The advent of new technologies has notably alleviated the burden of acquiring lower-order knowledge and skills for humans. Undergraduate education now places greater emphasis on fostering comprehensive problem-solving abilities and advanced critical thinking skills, a shift facilitated by blended online and offline classes (Wu, 2018). Critical thinking, crucial for analyzing and assessing complex information, underscores the importance of integrating

digital competence with students' critical consciousness and reflective capacities (Yan & Yang, 2021).

The evolving role of teachers has transitioned from merely applying information technology to innovating teaching methodologies leveraging such technology. However, apprehensions among educators regarding potential obstacles in adopting technology-based teaching methods often deter them from embracing these approaches (Bouguebs, 2020). Thus, there exists a need for exploring how technology can synergize with the cultivation of higher-order thinking skills and language development, particularly in the domain of foreign language education.

The 2018 TESOL China Congress Declaration underscores the significance of English reading literacy and the integration of technology in foreign language education. Recognizing reading as a social and cognitive endeavor, the declaration emphasizes lifelong reading and the cultivation of advanced reading comprehension strategies among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students (Chen, Hwang, & Chang, 2019). However, traditional English reading instruction predominantly focuses on in-class activities, neglecting preparatory and follow-up stages. Such pedagogy often centers on linguistic aspects, neglecting thematic exploration and higher-order thinking. Consequently, there is a pressing need for EFL educators to leverage appropriate information technology measures to enhance student motivation and learning outcomes (Huang & Hong, 2015), aligning with the demands of the information age.

The Ministry of Education's Department of Higher Education (2020) advocates for blended teaching methodologies in universities, encouraging innovative adaptations to



local contexts. This directive underscores the ministry's recognition of the pivotal role of information technology in augmenting both in-class and extracurricular learning experiences. Blended learning, characterized by a combination of online and face-to-face interactions, has emerged as a favored approach in Chinese higher education, catalyzing technological advancements in language teaching and learning processes (Ashraf et al., 2022; Ding et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021; Yu & Wang, 2023). By mitigating the limitations of solely e-learning environments and offering strategic resources to address classroom challenges, blended learning stands as a promising paradigm in contemporary education.

Recent years have witnessed the proliferation of teaching strategies amalgamating face-to-face instruction with online discussions to foster critical thinking skills among higher education students. Mobile teaching platforms like Chaoxing Learning and DingDing Classroom have gained traction, offering features such as panel discussions, online assessments, and interactive dialogue sessions (Bu, 2022; Jiang, 2020; Wang et al., 2021). Leveraging these platforms empowers educators to facilitate self-regulated learning and enhance students' reading strategies and language comprehension in technologically enriched environments. Flipped classroom approaches, a cornerstone of blended learning, have been lauded for their efficacy in nurturing higher-order thinking skills and fostering student engagement (Rodríguez et al., 2019; Chen, Jiao & Hu, 2021). Such innovative teaching methodologies, coupled with interactive digital tools, empower students to learn autonomously while fostering collaborative learning experiences.

The integration of technology into language instruction has yielded notable benefits, including enhanced academic performance, motivation, and learning processes (Geng et



al., 2019; Shadiev & Yang, 2020). This trend has spurred the adoption of diverse instructional approaches aimed at optimizing language instruction efficacy (Zhang & Zou, 2022). In the realm of reading instruction, technology aids EFL students in acquiring requisite skills for navigating the information and technology-driven era. Cultivating critical literacy through synthesis, comparison, analysis, and evaluation of information from diverse sources has emerged as a paramount objective in modern language education (Wu, 2020; Shi, 2020). By integrating technology into reading instruction, educators not only bolster students' comprehension skills but also equip them with the critical tools necessary for navigating the complexities of the IT era (Wang et al, 2021).

1.2 Problem Statement

The teaching mode in many Chinese classrooms is primarily focused on low-order cognitive skills, neglecting the development of students' higher-order thinking abilities (Zhou et al., 2020). A survey indicates that most students reject teachers' verbose lectures, with over 80% of university students expressing a desire for English classes characterized by interactivity, cooperation, and communication (Zhang, 2019). Despite spending an average of 7.2 class hours per week on English, dissatisfaction with English teaching effectiveness in universities is widespread, reaching 71.6% (Lu et al., 2016).

In numerous Chinese universities, reading courses often adhere to a teacher-centered approach, wherein teachers primarily focus on teaching vocabulary and grammar ((Zeng et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2023). The instructional objective for many English reading courses is confined to explaining difficult sentences and completing exercises,

discouraging student engagement and critical inquiry (Wu, 2017). Consequently, English reading is reduced to mere passage comprehension and basic question answering, hindering the development of students' independent learning and cooperative skills (Qi & Wang, 2019).

The selection of simplistic reading materials further exacerbates the issue, resulting in outdated content that fails to captivate students' interest (Zhang, 2019). Moreover, the prevalent use of traditional printed texts over online multi-mode texts not only increases preparation time for teachers but also contributes to student fatigue and disinterest (Wang & Zheng, 2019). As a consequence, English education in China is predominantly driven by exam-oriented instruction, fostering learners who excel in assessments but lack proficiency and critical thinking skills (Gao, 2020; Meng, Tang, & Wu, 2021; Zou, 2021).

To address these challenges, there is a pressing need to cultivate higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) in both teaching and learning processes (Wu, 2018). Traditional instructional models are inadequate in achieving this objective, given students' limited vocabulary, reading exposure, and critical thinking abilities (Chu et al., 2020; Liu, 2021; Qi, 2021). Therefore, educators must reconsider teaching methods and prioritize the development of HOTS alongside fostering a conducive learning environment and evaluation criteria should be implemented as suggested by Tian (2017), Yang et al. (2021) and Zhu (2023).

Blended learning, which integrates online and offline learning modalities, presents a promising approach to address these shortcomings (Kofar, 2016; Liang et al., 2021). By combining face-to-face interactions with digital resources, blended learning accommodates

diverse learning styles and encourages open communication, enriching the English learning experience (Teaching Guide for Undergraduate English Majors, 2018). However, the design and implementation of blended learning require further refinement, as many teachers struggle to transition from traditional teaching methods to more nuanced blended approaches (Wang et al., 2019; Sheng et al., 2022;).

Successful integration of blended learning hinges on teachers' ability to design activities that stimulate higher-order cognition and align with the learning environment (Zhang, 2023). This necessitates a shift in instructional focus from rote memorization to activities that promote critical thinking and problem-solving (Li, 2021; Huang 2021). Moreover, there is a need to bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application of blended learning in English reading instruction (Shi, 2020).

As such, future research should explore the incorporation of higher-order thinking skills in blended learning environments, particularly in the context of English reading instruction (Kofar, 2016; Bai, 2020; Marie, 2021; Shi, 2021; Ma, 2021, Wang et al., 2021). By examining factors influencing teachers' implementation of HOTS and soliciting student feedback, guidelines can be developed to enhance the effectiveness of teaching reading in blended EFL classrooms within the Chinese educational landscape, see Table 1.1 summary of the problem statement.

Table 1.1

Current Problems Affecting the Teaching of HOTS and Reading in Blended Learning

No	Problems	Descriptions
1.	Teaching Mode	Many Chinese classrooms prioritize low-order cognitive skills, neglecting higher-order thinking development (Zhou et al., 2020).
2.	Student Preferences	A survey indicates that most students prefer interactive, cooperative, and communicative English classes (Zhang, 2019).
3.	Dissatisfaction	Despite spending significant class hours on English, dissatisfaction with teaching effectiveness is prevalent among students (Lu et al., 2016).
4.	Teacher-Centered Approach	Reading courses in Chinese universities often adopt a teacher-centered approach focused on vocabulary and grammar (Zhu et al., 2023).
5.	Limited Engagement	Students exhibit limited engagement and reluctance to question or debate with teachers (Wu, 2017).
6.	Lack of Critical Thinking	Emphasis on exam-oriented instruction leads to a lack of critical thinking among students (Gao, 2020).
7.	Outdated Content	The use of outdated and simplistic reading materials contributes to student disinterest (Zhang, 2019).
8.	Blended Learning	Blended learning integrates online and offline modalities, offering diverse learning experiences (Liang et al., 2021).
9.	Challenges in Implementation	Teachers struggle with the design and implementation of blended learning, prioritizing memorization over critical thinking (Sheng et al., 2022).
10.	Need for Higher-Order Thinking Skills	There is a need to cultivate higher-order thinking skills in both teaching and learning processes (Wu, 2018; 2021).
11.	Role of Blended Learning in Addressing Challenges	Blended learning presents an opportunity to bridge the gap between traditional teaching methods and modern educational needs (Teaching Guide for Undergraduate English Majors, 2018).
12.	Research Gap	Limited research exists on the incorporation of higher-order thinking skills in blended learning environments, particularly in English reading instruction (Shi, 2020).
13.	Future Research Direction	Future research should explore factors influencing teachers' implementation of higher-order thinking skills and solicit student feedback

No	Problems	Descriptions
		to enhance the effectiveness of teaching reading in blended EFL classrooms (Shi, 2021).

Table 1.1 outlines various problem in English language teaching in Chinese universities, including the dominance of low-order cognitive skills, student preference for interactive classes, and dissatisfaction with teaching effectiveness. It also highlights the role of blended learning in addressing these challenges and identifies research gaps and future directions.

Despite the acknowledged advantages of blended learning and the dire need to foster higher-order thinking skills in English reading teaching, substantial gaps persist in efficiently incorporating these skills within the blended learning framework. Principally, Chinese classrooms focus lower-order cognitive skills, leading in restricted student engagement and development of critical thinking skills. The traditional, teacher-centred approach, dated content, and an examination-oriented concentration aggravate student disinterest and dissatisfaction. Although blended learning suggests varied educational exposures and experiences, its implementation is frequently challenged and confronted by teachers' struggles to develop and deliver teaching that cultivates critical thinking. Past studies particularly addressing the integration of higher-order thinking skills in blended learning settings is scarce, highlight an important need for further studies. The present study is needed to investigate the implementation of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) by teachers in the blended EFL reading classroom, along with the associated processes, probe into the factors affecting teachers' capability to teach and carry out these skills and enthusiastically obtain student feedback to enhance and improve teaching practices in blended EFL classrooms.



1.3 Purpose of Study

Primarily, this study aims to investigate the implementation of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) by teachers in the blended EFL reading classroom, along with the associated processes. Furthermore, it seeks to identify the factors that influence EFL teachers' integration of HOTS in reading instruction within the blended classroom context. Through the analysis of responses obtained from interviews conducted with both teacher and students, this study also endeavors to evaluate students' reactions to the incorporation of HOTS in the blended EFL reading classroom. Subsequently, it will propose guidelines for integrating HOTS into reading instruction within the blended classroom, specifically within the context of EFL teaching and learning in China. These guidelines will serve to enhance the quality of reading instruction and promote effective learning outcomes among EFL students in the Chinese educational setting.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study is guided by the following research objectives:

- i. To investigate the EFL teacher's strategies of incorporating HOTS to teach reading via blended learning
- ii. To identify factors that influence implementation of HOTS in the EFL blended reading classroom in a university of China



- iii. To examine the EFL students' perspectives regarding the incorporation of HOTS in reading via blended learning
- iv. To propose guidelines for incorporating HOTS in teaching reading via blended learning in the Chinese EFL context

On the whole, this study intends to gain insights into the teacher's implementation of incorporating HOTS in the blended EFL reading classroom as well as the process involved in it, so that some guidelines can be well proposed. These guidelines will facilitate the adjustment of teaching strategies for reading in the blended EFL classroom. Furthermore, they will serve to bolster understanding regarding the integration of HOTS into reading instruction in the blended learning environment. Consequently, teachers will be better equipped to discern their students' needs when employing strategies to incorporate HOTS in their own EFL classrooms. These proposed guidelines are essential for updating teachers' knowledge in teaching reading, enabling them to instruct students to become autonomously efficient learners who can think critically, question, and solve problems. Through this comprehensive approach, teachers can better prepare their students for success in the blended EFL reading classroom.

1.5 Research Questions

Based on the four principal areas that serve as the foundation of the research questions, the study seeks to investigate the following:

1. How are HOTS incorporated by the teacher in the blended EFL reading classroom?
2. What are the factors that influence HOTS implementation in teaching reading in the EFL blended classroom in a Chinese University?
3. What are the students' perspectives on the incorporation of HOTS via blended learning?
4. How have these HOTS strategies incorporated by the teacher in the blended EFL reading classroom contributed to the development of the guidelines?

The first research question aims to investigate the implementation of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in teaching reading within the blended classroom, focusing on the processes involved. The second question delves into the factors influencing the integration of HOTS by teachers in teaching reading within the blended classroom. The third question seeks to comprehend the perspectives of students regarding the integration of HOTS in the blended reading classroom. Given the limited literature on the integration of HOTS in teaching reading within the blended classroom, the fourth question endeavors to propose guidelines for incorporating HOTS in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading specifically tailored to the context of the Chinese blended classroom. This systematic approach to addressing research questions enables a comprehensive exploration of various aspects related to the incorporation of HOTS in the blended learning environment, laying the groundwork for informed pedagogical practices and educational advancements.



1.6 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding the incorporation of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in teaching reading within the blended classroom setting stems from a thorough literature review and the researcher's personal teaching experience. This framework serves to elucidate the study's objectives and delineate the interrelations among its pivotal components. Given the study's focus on proposing guidelines for integrating HOTS into reading instruction in the blended classroom, it commences with a document analysis aimed at elucidating the foundational theories underpinning the policies outlined by China's Ministry of Education.



Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), which provides a structured approach to understanding cognitive processes and levels of thinking. This taxonomy serves as the cornerstone for conceptualizing the integration of HOTS into reading instruction. By aligning with this taxonomy, the study aims to ensure a systematic and comprehensive approach to fostering higher-order thinking skills among students.

Moreover, the conceptual framework draws upon insights gleaned from the literature review, which encompasses a wide array of scholarly works spanning educational philosophy, cognitive psychology, and instructional design. Through this synthesis of existing knowledge, the framework endeavors to capture the multifaceted nature of HOTS development and its relevance to reading instruction in the blended classroom context.



Central to the framework is the recognition of the blended learning environment as a dynamic and interactive space where traditional teaching methods intersect with technological innovations. As such, the framework emphasizes the importance of leveraging digital tools and resources to enhance student engagement and facilitate meaningful learning experiences. By integrating technology-mediated activities and collaborative learning opportunities, the framework seeks to cultivate critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills among students.

Furthermore, the framework underscores the role of the teacher as a facilitator of learning, responsible for guiding students through the process of inquiry, exploration, and reflection. Through differentiated instruction and scaffolding techniques, teachers can support students in developing their cognitive abilities and advancing their understanding

The conceptual framework for the incorporation of HOTS in teaching reading in the blended classroom is informed by a synthesis of theoretical insights, empirical evidence, and practical expertise. By adhering to the principles of the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy and embracing the affordances of blended learning, the framework endeavors to provide a robust and effective approach to promoting higher-order thinking skills among students in the context of reading instruction.

Figure 1.1

Conceptual Framework of the Proposed Guidelines for Incorporating HOTS in the Blended EFL Reading Classroom

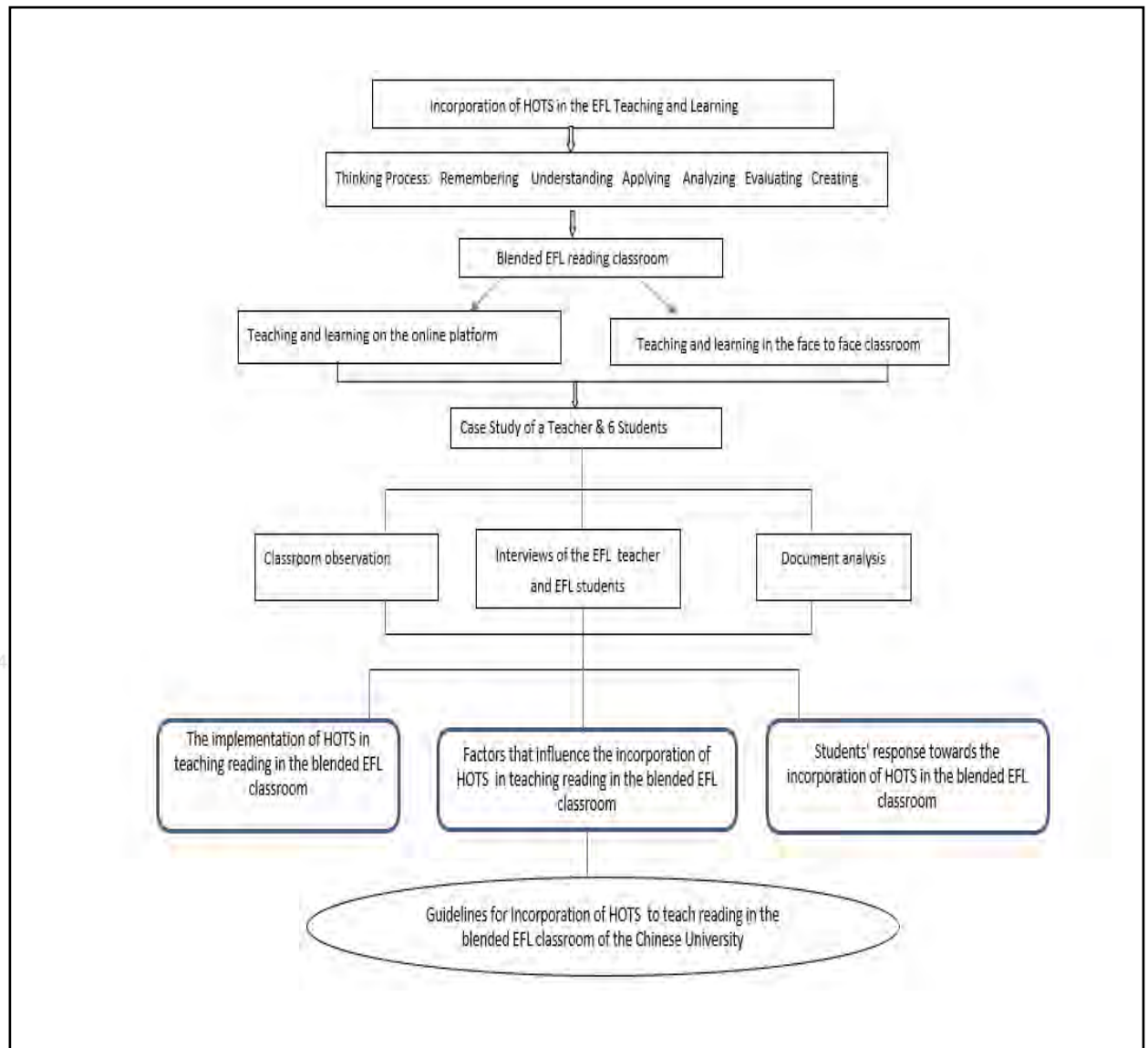


Figure 1.1 illustrates how the implementation of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) by the EFL teacher influences her teaching strategies within the blended learning environment. The EFL teacher's proficiency in integrating HOTS not only facilitates the students' development of HOTS in reading but also enhances their critical thinking skills, comprehension abilities, and overall understanding of the text. The teacher firmly believes that by infusing HOTS elements into teaching and learning activities, students can cultivate

deeper insights into the subject matter. This alignment between the teacher's expertise in HOTS implementation and the desired outcomes underscores the significance of strategic pedagogical approaches in fostering higher-level cognitive skills among learners.

1.6.1 Cognitive Learning Theories

This section presents a theoretical exploration of the cognitive processes involved in education that foster the development of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). Given that thinking is an outcome of cognitive development, theories concerning the formation of cognitive processes significantly influence students' comprehension and engagement.

Dewey (1933), a prominent educational philosopher, emphasized the centrality of thinking in the learning process. His philosophy advocated for an experiential approach, positing that education should be grounded in students' real-life experiences. Dewey characterized thinking as an active and dynamic process encompassing problem-solving, inquiry, and the integration of theory and practice. He rejected the dichotomy between theory and practice, advocating instead for a holistic understanding derived from the meaningful application of knowledge. Dewey viewed thinking as a continual reconstruction of experiences, fostering adaptability and evolving comprehension. Importantly, he underscored the social context of thinking, highlighting the role of dialogue and collaboration in enriching cognitive processes.

The constructivist theory synthesizes various theories into a unified framework, drawing from the works of Dewey (1933), Piaget (1964), and Vygotsky (1978). This



framework emphasizes both cognitive and social learning perspectives. Constructivist thinking significantly influences perceptions of cognitive development and has profound implications for education. Wu et al. (2022) suggest that by integrating cognitive and social approaches, e-learning platforms can be tailored to enhance the learning experience and outcomes.

In the realm of blended learning, Barfi et al. (2023) observed that students thrived when engaging with blended learning environments, facilitating interaction with teachers and peers, providing rapid feedback, and fostering collaboration. Given the advancements in technology, Chuang (2021) emphasizes the importance of employing constructivist pedagogy in instructional reform. Teachers' ability to link various teaching strategies to real-world contexts and their flexibility in adapting to evolving learning environments are



As highlighted by Kirschner et al. (2004), an educational system comprises pedagogical, social, and technological components. Mishra and Koehler (2006) argue that technological knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and content knowledge offer a constructive approach to addressing challenges in integrating educational technology in classrooms. This study aims to investigate the teaching of HOTS in blended learning classrooms by EFL teachers. Rakes, Fields, and Cox (2006) suggest that constructivist teaching and learning theories are likely to foster meaningful learning and support students' development of higher-order thinking abilities.

The cognitive processes of learners are dynamic and continually evolving, shaping the growth of higher-order thinking skills. It is imperative for teachers to adapt their



pedagogical approaches to meet student needs in blended learning environments. For this study, learning theories pertinent to the development of HOTS include the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Skills (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). This taxonomy provides a framework for defining cognitive activities at the levels of applying, analyzing, evaluating, and generating, facilitating the measurement of higher-order thinking skills.

These theories collectively contribute to the conceptual framework of this study, elucidating how EFL teachers incorporate higher-order thinking skills into their teaching practices and how these practices facilitate students' development of reading skills with HOTS.

05-4506832 **1.7 Significance of the Study** Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

The findings of this study aim to provide insights into innovative teaching methods and strategies, offering policymakers and curriculum developers fresh approaches to enhancing the quality of English language education in Chinese universities. This research holds the potential to influence curriculum development strategies by offering practical insights and recommendations for improving English language education quality, particularly within the context of blended learning environments. Additionally, it is expected to provide recommendations for adjusting the current curriculum to better integrate Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) into reading instruction.

These findings are anticipated to enlighten China's Ministry of Higher Education regarding the construction of First-class undergraduate Courses through the proposed



recommendations. This, in turn, would ensure continuous improvement by China's Ministry of Education in adopting information technology to enhance teachers' teaching abilities for cultivating innovative, compounded, and applied talents. Moreover, the study draws attention to deepening thinking on the essence of education and the development of thinking, thereby offering research value for nurturing higher-order thinking talents and fostering core literacy.

Furthermore, the study aids teachers in understanding specific strategies for implementing HOTS among students. It serves as an invaluable experience for EFL teachers, informing them of the factors supporting the teaching of HOTS in EFL contexts. Understanding the factors influencing the development of higher-order thinking skills among students enables teachers to employ effective learning strategies, create conducive learning environments, and design relevant activities that incorporate HOTS within blended learning frameworks.

Moreover, the research findings shed light on the responses of both EFL teachers and students towards the incorporation of HOTS in teaching reading within blended classrooms. These responses offer guidance to teachers on enhancing their ability to implement HOTS via blended learning. The input from both teachers and students significantly influences the development of fruitful guidelines, proposing activities and learning strategies for incorporating HOTS in EFL teaching and learning practices

The proposed guidelines resulting from this research aim to inform teachers in China about the implementation of higher-order thinking skills in teaching reading within blended EFL classrooms. They are designed to promote the seamless integration of





information technology in English language teaching and learning, see Table 1.2 the summary of the significance of the Study.

Table 1.2

Summary of the significance of The Study.

No	Aspects	Significance of The Study
1.	Impact on Ministry of Higher Education	These findings are anticipated to enlighten China's Ministry of Higher Education regarding the construction of First-class undergraduate Courses through the proposed recommendations. This, in turn, would ensure continuous improvement by China's Ministry of Education in adopting information technology to enhance teachers' teaching abilities for cultivating innovative, compounded, and applied talents. Moreover, the study draws attention to deepening thinking on the essence of education and the development of thinking, thereby offering research value for nurturing higher-order thinking talents and fostering core literacy.
2.	Benefits for EFL Teachers	The study aids teachers in understanding specific strategies for implementing HOTS among students. It serves as an invaluable experience for EFL teachers, informing them of the factors supporting the teaching of HOTS in EFL contexts. Understanding the factors influencing the development of higher-order thinking skills among students enables teachers to employ effective learning strategies, create conducive learning environments, and design relevant activities that incorporate HOTS within blended learning frameworks.
3.	Responses of EFL Teachers and Students to HOTS Incorporation	The research findings shed light on the responses of both EFL teachers and students towards the



No	Aspects	Significance of The Study
4.	Guidelines for English Language Teaching Enhancement	incorporation of HOTS in teaching reading within blended classrooms. These responses offer guidance to teachers on enhancing their ability to implement HOTS via blended learning. The input from both teachers and students significantly influences the development of fruitful guidelines, proposing activities. The proposed guidelines resulting from this research aim to inform teachers in China about the implementation of higher-order thinking skills in teaching reading within blended EFL classrooms. They are designed to promote the seamless integration of information technology in English language teaching and learning.

Table 1.2 shows the study's significance lies in enlightening the Ministry of Higher Education, benefiting EFL teachers with strategies, shedding light on teacher and student responses, and proposing guidelines for EFL teaching enhancement.

1.8 Operational Definitions

In the context of this study, several key terms are utilized, each with specific operational definitions outlined as follows:

1.8.1 Pedagogical Belief

Teachers' pedagogical beliefs have a direct influence on their teaching practices, which in turn permeates their cognitive processes and instructional strategies. Pedagogical beliefs can be defined as "a set of beliefs that determine priorities for pedagogical knowledge and how students acquire knowledge" (Ertmer, 2005). Teachers who adhere to constructivist beliefs are inclined to view technology not merely as an informational resource but also as a facilitator for fostering higher-order thinking skills among students (Tondeur, 2020). Understanding teachers' pedagogical beliefs is essential for enhancing the effectiveness of classroom instruction.

In this study, the teacher holds the belief that technology-enhanced learning can support students in effectively accessing online resources, and that online learning platforms can enable personalized learning experiences. Moreover, the teacher recognizes the importance of implementing constructivist-based teaching activities to strengthen interactions among teacher-student and student-student. Additionally, the teacher maintains that students should be positioned at the center of the class, necessitating the design of activities that foster the utilization of thinking skills such as application, analysis, evaluation, and creation. It is imperative to explore how these beliefs are developed by the teacher and how they contribute to nurturing students' essential competencies and skills. In order to cultivate 21st century skills encompassing learning skills, literacy skills, and life skills, teachers can employ constructivist pedagogy (Holt-Reynolds, 2000). By actively engaging students in participation, the teacher guides them to appreciate multiple perspectives reflectively and construct meaning, both individually and socially.

1.8.2 HOTS

HOTS, or Higher-Order Thinking Skills, are cognitive faculties that become activated when learners encounter challenging problems or intricate situations. They encompass a blend of critical, logical, reflective, metacognitive, and creative thinking (Nguyễn & Nguyễn, 2017). HOTS represent an advanced level of cognitive ability, involving skills such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis, as categorized in Bloom's taxonomy. These skills necessitate distinct learning strategies, moving beyond mere memorization of facts and concepts (Krishnan, 2014). Learning involving complex judgment, critical thinking, and problem-solving all fall within the realm of HOTS.

Thinking processes occur ubiquitously, encompassing a series of cognitive activities to process information, establish connections, and make judgments and decisions.

HOTS can be conceptualized as a strategic approach, wherein critical, systemic, and creative thinking serve as tactics to achieve overarching goals. Critical thinking, in particular, stands out as a core component of HOTS, serving as a focal point in the ongoing foreign language education reform in China. HOTS in the Teaching Guide for Undergraduate English Majors entails the integration of knowledge, skills, and qualities to nurture students' comprehensive abilities and advanced problem-solving skills. Therefore, applying can be considered as higher ordered thinking skills if it is related to what students gained from reading into certain complex problem-solving tasks.

In this study's context, educators employed strategies to infuse HOTS throughout reading instruction, incorporating elements such as knowledge transfer, problem-solving,

and critical thinking into both face-to-face classroom sessions and online learning platforms.

1.8.3 Reading Ability

Learning any language requires extensive reading; thus, individuals who engage in more reading are poised to acquire a language proficiently. The ability to comprehend written text significantly aids in interpreting meaning across various contexts, gradually fostering effective communication through both oral and written expression. Proficiency in reading is paramount in expanding one's intellectual horizons and generating new ideas. It is often shaped by a student's cognitive development, influenced either by formal instruction or personal life experiences. Cognitive and metalinguistic skills are fundamental in cultivating proficient reading abilities. In today's information age, individuals must develop multimodal reading skills, extracting information from visual, semantic, conceptual, and linguistic sources. Given that reading is purpose-driven, aimed at comprehension and knowledge acquisition, it is imperative for educators to employ strategies that not only enhance comprehension but also foster critical thinking and facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), reading proficiency extends to critical analysis, synthesis of information, and evaluation of ideas conveyed in English texts. This entails mastery of reading strategies such as inference, comparison, contrast, analogy, summarization, and analysis. Thus, to transition students from passive recipients to active participants in the reading process, teachers can integrate interactive activities that

incorporate elements of higher-order thinking skills, thereby engaging students in more profound cognitive processes.

1.8.4 Blended Learning

In contemporary society, the rapid advancement of information and technology across all sectors has prompted the design and implementation of new modes in the teaching and learning processes. Blended learning has emerged as a solution to address the limitations of traditional face-to-face learning by integrating various teaching modes, tools, and resources in EFL contexts.

Blended learning, as defined by Kaur (2013), involves the effective mixing of different delivery modes, teaching models, and learning styles within interactive and meaningful learning environments. The Oxford Learner's Dictionary characterizes blended learning as a method that combines classroom instruction with the use of diverse technologies, including online learning platforms. Blended learning is the fusion of face-to-face and online instruction, with interchangeable terms such as "hybrid," "mixed," "online and offline," or "integrative." This approach is gaining popularity due to its flexibility and dynamism, which reshape traditional learning models by integrating teacher-led instruction with mobile and web-based technologies, thereby providing multi-dimensional learning experiences enriched by diverse inputs and resources.

With the pervasive influence of technology in modern society, many educators recognize the importance of leveraging technology to enhance teaching and learning



experiences. Various digital tools such as mobile phones, educational apps, and interactive whiteboards have become integral components of the educational landscape. The integration of digital technology into the curriculum is now an essential aspect of teaching practices.

In Chinese higher education, there is a growing emphasis on helping teachers acquire and master information technology skills, fostering student-centered education concepts, and exploring blended learning pedagogies. Platforms like the Chaoxing learning App (also known as Xuexitong or Superstar) have gained popularity for their user-friendly interfaces, enabling flexible and convenient blended learning experiences by integrating curriculum resources, assessments, and interactions. Utilizing intelligent teaching systems, teachers facilitate autonomous and personalized e-learning experiences for students, accessible via mobile phones or computers. Blended learning facilitates asynchronous teaching and learning, allowing students to engage in independent learning activities at their own pace. Asynchronous learning involved students independent learning which does not demand being online simultaneously as the learning material has been already posted on the learning platforms.

Drawing on the context of Chinese higher education, this study adopts a perspective of blended learning that encompasses both face-to-face classroom instruction and online learning. In this study, teachers deliver two hours of face-to-face instruction weekly, followed by students' engagement with the Chaoxing online learning platform via mobile phones or laptops, where they spend approximately 1.5 hours completing assigned tasks and activities. Thus, both the teacher's face-to-face instruction and the students' online learning process on the Chaoxing platform are integral components of the study.



1.8.5 Strategies

In order to meet the HOTS standard, teachers must master both the knowledge and corresponding teaching strategies necessary to plan and integrate thinking skills into the subjects they teach. Through careful planning and the adoption of suitable strategies to incorporate higher-order thinking skills, teachers can effectively enhance their students' cognitive abilities. However, obstacles such as students' low language proficiency, time constraints in class preparation, and teachers' negative perceptions of HOTS present challenges for English teachers when teaching the subject (Singh et al., 2020). Therefore, teachers need to cultivate creative strategies and leverage current technology in their lessons, seeking methods and resources to help students develop HOTS. Research indicates that in a technologically advanced environment, students demonstrate higher-order thinking abilities. Employing strategies to assist students in developing their higher-order cognitive skills will enable them to progress through the learning model's stages, encompassing remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and ultimately producing.

Within the scope of this study, strategies refer to teachers' implementation of methods to integrate HOTS into the blended reading classroom, as well as the process of designing curriculum and instructional activities to foster active learning among students. Koehler and Mishra (2005) emphasize the integration of technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge into educational environments. In this study, strategies are employed to establish a rich and engaging learning environment aimed at promoting knowledge transfer,

critical thinking, analysis, and problem-solving, thereby preparing students for more complex and intellectually demanding reading tasks.

1.8.6 EFL Teacher

An EFL teacher, specializing in instructing the English language to non-native speakers, operates in diverse global environments, aiding students in attaining proficiency to effectively communicate in English. Within the Chinese higher education milieu, a Chinese EFL teacher assumes the role of a lecturer within a university, tasked with educating Chinese students in English language acquisition, emphasizing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills across various proficiency levels. Within this study's framework, the EFL teacher is engaged in instructing freshmen majoring in English at the School of Foreign Languages within a Chinese public university. Possessing fifteen years of tenure at the institution, the teacher has extensive experience in EFL pedagogy. Furthermore, she has actively contributed to curriculum enhancement by integrating information technology into teaching methodologies. Specifically, she employs blended learning techniques to conduct multiple reading classes for English major students.

This teacher, a seasoned professional, has been instrumental in shaping the language education landscape through her tenure at the university. Her adeptness in employing innovative teaching methodologies has significantly influenced the evolution of the curriculum, ensuring its relevance in contemporary educational paradigms. Moreover, her dedication to incorporating information technology in pedagogical approaches underscores her commitment to fostering an enriched learning environment.

The integration of blended learning strategies, particularly in reading classes for English major students, exemplifies her forward-thinking approach to education. Through such endeavors, she cultivates a dynamic learning atmosphere that caters to the diverse needs of her students.

In the realm of English language teaching, the utilization of technology has emerged as a pivotal tool in augmenting instructional efficacy and enhancing student engagement. By embracing blended learning methodologies, educators can leverage the benefits of both traditional and digital learning modalities, thereby enriching the educational experience. The integration of information technology not only facilitates interactive and multimedia-rich learning experiences but also empowers students to take ownership of their learning journey. In the context of the EFL classroom, the adoption of blended learning enables teacher to deliver tailored instruction that caters to the individual learning styles and preferences of students.

The role of the EFL teacher within the Chinese higher education landscape is multifaceted, encompassing not only the transmission of language skills but also the cultivation of critical thinking abilities and cross-cultural competence. Through the integration of information technology and the adoption of blended learning methodologies, educators can effectively meet the evolving needs of their students, fostering a dynamic and enriching learning environment. As such, the EFL teacher serves as a catalyst for educational innovation, driving curriculum reform and empowering students to achieve linguistic proficiency and academic success.

1.8.7 EFL Students

EFL students, an abbreviation for English as a Foreign Language students, represent individuals who are learning English as a secondary language, typically in a non-English-speaking country. In this study, the EFL students were drawn from the English department at the School of Foreign Languages of a Chinese public university. Specifically, the participants were selected from the first semester of the inaugural academic year. The total cohort consisted of 33 students, encompassing the entire class of that particular cohort.

1.8.8 Guideline

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The guideline proposed in the study delineates a set of instructions and recommendations that delineate the approach, methods, and considerations for integrating higher-order thinking skills into the teaching of reading within a blended EFL classroom. These guidelines encompass specific strategies, pedagogical techniques, and steps for teachers to follow in order to effectively incorporate higher-order thinking into reading instruction via blended learning within a constructive learning environment at a Chinese university. The overarching purpose is to furnish teachers with a structured framework for enhancing the critical thinking skills of students within the language learning context.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

While the research delivers valuable insights into the implementation of HOTS in the blended EFL reading classroom, some limitations must be taken into consideration. Since this study primarily adopts a qualitative approach, data were collected and interpreted utilizing a triangulation of observational data analysis, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. However, several limitations warrant attention and consideration for future research endeavors. Primarily, the generalizability of the results may be constrained as the study employed a case study design with purposeful sampling, involving six EFL students and one EFL teacher from a single university. Moreover, the findings were derived solely from the performance and responses of the EFL teacher and students during a specific semester, disregarding potential variations across different semesters.

Additionally, the study's focus lies in examining the strategies employed by EFL teachers to integrate Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) into reading instruction via blended learning at the university level. Consequently, the outcomes cannot be readily extrapolated to other cohorts of teachers. Nonetheless, the findings presented herein offer valuable insights that can serve as a basis for further exploration into the intricacies of incorporating HOTS into reading instruction within the context of university-level EFL education.

Only one teacher and six students were observed in this research within a single university. This small and limited sample size might not entirely represent the variety of instructional practices and student feedback across varied contexts. The present research was carried out using a case study as the research approach in one single university, which



limits the generalizability of the findings. The dynamic features of the teacher, students, and university encompassed may affect the results, causing it demanding to apply the conclusions to other educational contexts. Although qualitative studies give in-depth insights, it may be subject to researcher interpretation and bias. The subjective nature of qualitative data analysis can affect the reproducibility and objectivity of the results. Also, the research does not portray for long-term impacts of the strategies put forward by the teacher on students' HOTS. A longitudinal approach may give a better picture and comprehension of the constant effect of these teaching approaches. The research setting, namely the particular single university, educational standards and policies, cultural background, may influence the execution of HOTS. These related factors can limit the pertinency of the results to diverse academic contexts. The emphasis on one classroom and small number of participants shows that the research may not depict the whole spectrum of responses and strategies exist in other blended EFL reading classrooms. A wide-ranging observation across several universities and classrooms can give a better holistic interpretation.

1.10 Conclusion

The incorporation of the Golden Courses standard underscores a paradigm shift towards cultivating higher-order thinking skills within educational frameworks. Such an approach is particularly pertinent in the realm of English language instruction, where the development of critical thinking abilities is essential for effective communication and comprehension. Blended learning emerges as a fitting platform for this endeavor, allowing for the integration of diverse instructional methods and resources to engage learners in



meaningful language exploration. However, the effective integration of higher-order thinking skills, particularly in the context of reading instruction, presents challenges that necessitate systematic inquiry and exploration.

The study's focus on investigating teachers' implementation of higher-order thinking skills in the blended EFL reading classroom is both timely and significant. By examining the strategies and processes employed by educators, the research aims to shed light on effective pedagogical approaches and potential areas for improvement. Understanding the factors influencing the integration of these skills can inform the development of tailored interventions and instructional support mechanisms to enhance teaching practice. Moreover, examining students' responses to instruction within the blended reading classroom provides valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of these approaches on learning outcomes.

In delineating the importance of the study, it is essential to acknowledge its inherent limitations. While efforts have been made to provide comprehensive insights, the research is bounded by certain constraints, including the specific context within China's EFL teaching and learning environment. Furthermore, the scope of the study may preclude an exhaustive exploration of all factors influencing the implementation of higher-order thinking skills in the blended reading classroom. Nevertheless, by delineating these limitations, the study seeks to provide a transparent framework for interpreting its findings and implications.



1.11 Chapter Summary

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 presents the introduction and background of the study, including the problem statement, research objectives, and research questions. This is followed by an exploration of the significance of the study. Chapter 2 reviews past studies and research gaps, along with a discussion of the theoretical framework. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological aspects, including data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter 4 presents the analysis and discussion of findings. Finally, Chapter 5 provides the summary of the discussion, conclusion and implications of the study.

