# The Blended Model of Online and Offline Instruction of "Five Links and Two Stages": A Case Study of Outline of Chinese Modern and Contemporary History

**Guangxia Ma**[*]

*Shanghai Institute of Technology, Shanghai, China*
*Corresponding Author.*

**Abstract: In the current digital era, actively exploring the integration of online and offline teaching empowered by technology stands as a pivotal responsibility for educators. It embodies the core duty of the educators, and the effective way to implement the fundamental task of "cultivating morality and cultivating people". Drawing on the rich tapestry of indigenous cultural resources and the foundation laid by four distinct classroom settings, an endeavor is made to craft a blended instructional design known as "Five Links and Two Stages" within the framework of the course *Outline of Chinese Modern and Contemporary History*. This design seeks to elevate the efficiency and caliber of offline teaching through the synergy of online and practical instruction. The concept of Five Links encompasses "Online Learning, Thematic Contemplation, Team Implementation, Collective Reflection, and Advancement", whereas the Two Stages encapsulate theoretical discourse and practical application.**

**Keywords: Four Classroom Settings; Indigenous Cultural Resources; Five Links and Two Stages; Blended Online and Offline Instruction; Outline of Chinese Modern and Contemporary History**

## 1. Introduction

In the year 2010, the National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) explicitly called for the acceleration of educational informatization. It emphasized the revolutionary impact of information technology on educational development, stressing the necessity for heightened focus on the construction of an online teaching resource system [1]. Embracing the advent of the digital age, blended learning has emerged as the predominant trend in educational model reform. It not only embodies the fundamental task of "cultivating moral character" but also serves as an effective path in embodying the "student-centric" educational philosophy. Upholding tradition while fostering innovation and actively exploring the effective blended learning model that integrates online and offline elements to enhance the specificity and appeal of course instruction and elevate students' sense of achievement, is the inherent responsibility of every educator. Therefore, grounding instruction on the foundation of four distinct classroom settings, utilizing indigenous cultural resources, and implementing the instructional design known as "Five Links and Two Stages", represent a beneficial and constructive endeavor.

## 2. Why: The Main Problem to be Solved

The concept of blended learning has demonstrated remarkable effectiveness since its inception. Originating in 1999 with the definition by the Sloan Consortium in the United States as "a combination of a certain proportion of face-to-face teaching and online teaching" [2], blended learning has been a catalyst for substantial change in the traditional "teacher-centered" approach prevalent in the field of basic education. It has reinvigorated the position of the student as the focal point of education [3]. In 2019, the Ministry of Education issued the Implementation Opinions on the Construction of First-Class Undergraduate Courses, which advocated for the transformation of teaching methods to enliven classroom activities and emphasized the imperative of "enhancing a deep integration of modern information technology with educational instruction, and

effectively addressing the innovation of teaching and learning modes" [4].

Indeed, as an innovative teaching model within the classroom setting, blended learning transcends the limitations of existing educational systems by "providing services beyond the current educational framework for students" and offering "a broader scope for the academic development of teachers" [5]. For both educators and students, this innovative approach signifies not only a transformation in teaching environments but also a shift in cognition. Professor Han Xibin from Tsinghua University vividly likened higher education informatization to a metaphorical analogy, where network infrastructure represents the "roads", application platforms signify the "vehicles", and educational resources and information data equate to the "cargo" [6]. From the perspective of teachers, it can be asserted that blended learning has redefined the role of educators. University teachers need to delve into extensive teaching data to analyze teaching effectiveness, strategically refine their teaching objectives and methods, and meticulously design highly engaging personalized learning experiences for students at every stage of the instructional process to heighten their sense of achievement [7].

Building upon these principles, within the context of blended learning in Outline of Chinese Modern and Contemporary History, a concerted effort is made to investigate and address certain perplexities and deficiencies present in traditional teaching methodologies.

1) How can the issue of repetitive and mundane teaching content in the secondary school stage, leading to a lack of freshness and interest among students, be addressed? Due to constraints in credits and class hours, the curriculum materials are limited to themes, major historical narratives, and significant historical issues, often resulting in dry instructional content that may stray from current major theoretical and trending topics, failing to address students' genuine intellectual quandaries. Through online teaching platforms, supplementary and expansive content can effectively be introduced to facilitate the transition of knowledge education towards faith-based education.

2) How can the problem of over-reliance on classroom lectures in the teaching process, resulting in a disconnect between theory and practice and hindering students from engaging in social practical investigations, be resolved? Traditional teaching methods lack catalytic means to assist students in transforming knowledge into belief, leading to a dearth of precise guidance from teachers, making it challenging for students to step beyond the classroom and delve into practical investigations within society. Only through blended learning can the roles of teachers as guides and students as active participants be effectively leveraged to progressively deepen students' understanding from knowledge points to thematic considerations and further into social practices through instructional design, maintaining interactive guidance throughout the student's learning journey.

3) How can the problem of assessment in courses focusing heavily on knowledge quizzes, employing singular methods that inadequately evaluate students' comprehensive abilities and qualities, be resolved? Traditional course assessments prioritize attendance tracking and final exams while overlooking day-to-day performance. Exams primarily emphasize theoretical aspects, leading students to solely focus on end-of-term cramming and regurgitation, resulting in lackluster engagement and observable deficiencies in abilities during regular class activities. Only by utilizing data from teaching platforms can a procedural, diversified assessment and evaluation mechanism be constructed to comprehensively evaluate students' capabilities and skills.

## 3. What is it: The Teaching Design of "Five Links and Two Stages"

As the research highlights, the advancement and prevalence of new technologies such as "Internet +" and "Smart +" have led to transformations in educational ideas, knowledge dissemination methods, instructional organizational structures, teacher-student relationships, teaching evaluation management, and campus learning environments [8]. This course primarily adheres to the curriculum education principles of "transforming knowledge into wisdom and wisdom into virtue", constructing a "Five Links and Two Stages" blended teaching design. This approach aims to enhance the efficiency and quality of offline teaching through a combination of online instruction
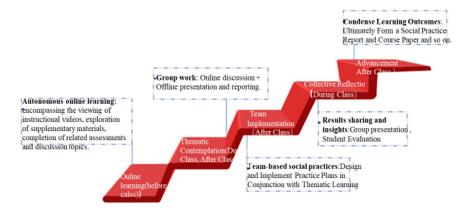
and practical teaching.



**Figure 1. Instructional Design of Five Links and Two Stages**

The course is divided into two main stages: theoretical teaching and practical teaching. In practice, small groups serve as the foundational units for course instruction, divided into five segments - Online Learning, Thematic Contemplation, Team Implementation, Collective Reflection, and Advancement (as illustrated in Figure 1). Each group is responsible for studying a particular theme, encompassing self-learning through instructional videos, thematic contemplation, and social practices, thereby transitioning from theory to practice for a deeper understanding.

The first step involves autonomous online learning, encompassing the viewing of instructional videos, exploration of supplementary materials, completion of related assessments and discussion topics, and engaging in preliminary experiences and exploratory assignments in virtual simulated classrooms.

The second step involves thematic contemplation and discussions, where students present a "captivating ten minutes" on the theme through scheduled presentations, followed by free discussions, exploration, and assessments on various topics by other students.

The third step entails team-based social practices, where students conduct on-site research at relevant locations based on the theme, process and integrate research materials to generate a series of social practice outcomes, encouraging innovative achievements such as pictorial books (with a plagiarism rate not exceeding 30%), micro-videos, simulation game software, and other creative products.

The fourth step, results sharing and insights, is primarily carried out through presentations of practical outcomes, with group leaders serving as evaluators, focusing on evaluations through peer reviews.

The fifth step entails systematic summarization and enhancement. First, within-class practices include students' theoretical presentation sessions, where course scripts are meticulously refined. Particularly outstanding presentations are recommended to participate in the annual university student theoretical presentation competitions (at the university, city, and national levels). Secondly, extracurricular social practice segments involve refining the outcomes of social practices, compiling them into books or editing them for publication, allowing for expansion and enhanced participation in university-level and high-level social practice competitions. Thirdly, it includes learning reflections and summaries. "Learning reflection is an effective strategy to promote learners' deep understanding of knowledge, active construction of personal meaning, application of experiential skills transfer, solving complex problems, and development of metacognition" [9]. Therefore, through tasks like writing learning summaries or practice journals, students are guided by teachers to reflect on their learning objectives, processes, and outcomes. This process can effectively enhance students' self-awareness, self-assessment, self-treatment, and self-development capabilities [10].

## 4. How to Improve: Curriculum Content, Resource Development, and Implementation

In transforming the course content and resource development and application, emphasis is placed on the integration and refinement of course content and the enhancement of course resources.

Initially, the course content is consolidated based on thematic integration. The teaching of

*Outline of Chinese Modern and Contemporary History* closely follows the pulse of the times, necessitating continuous updates to the teaching syllabus to align with modern trends. Following the guidance from the Ministry of Education's teaching steering committee, the 10 chapters in the course are integrated into 13 thematic units that trace the main theme of the past century's struggle for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the logical progression of historical development.

Subsequently, a multidimensional resource development is perfected, encompassing the production of instructional videos, expansion of resource databases containing classic literature, original texts, supplementary readings, relevant journals, e-textbooks, chapter-specific case materials, related visual and audio resources, and student social practice works. Furthermore, enriching and refining the test bank involves organizing and editing supplementary test question sets for each chapter and stage assessments. Knowledge mapping involves aligning the latest edition textbooks with the requirements of thematic teaching, establishing connections between key knowledge points and the question bank. Virtual simulation software development is undertaken to meet the requirements of the curriculum and objective historical facts. Through the application of VR simulation and animation technologies, a comprehensive virtual recreation of significant events in Chinese history is created. This transformation aims to change the traditional theoretical learning into practical insights, segmental historical instruction into holistic historical teachings, and conventional teaching methods to incorporate advanced technology instruction. Regarding local cultural practice sites, several Shanghai-based local cultural practice sites corresponding to 13 themes are identified. Each site's historical events, educational resources, and practice methods are detailed to guide students in engaging in social practices.

Moreover, the creation of four classroom settings is prioritized. Designing course material with a thematic teaching approach and utilizing four distinct classrooms to execute and enliven course content.

The online classroom primarily facilitates independent student learning through teaching videos, courseware, teaching aids, and classic literary works stored in the online resource library, leveraging a knowledge map. Online learning emphasizes knowledge, information, and foundational theoretical content. Assessment criteria are based on factors such as the progress and duration of video learning, test scores, the frequency of online discussions, peer evaluation mechanisms for online assignments, and the submission of reflective assignments like post-reading responses.

The physical classroom involves interactive teaching through thematic discussions. Beginning with the textbook content and focusing on the key points, difficulties, and current issues of modern Chinese history, thematic teaching designs are developed. These themes are further divided into specific topics, provided to students in advance for pre-class preparation based on social practices and online resources. During the flipped physical classroom sessions, teachers start with introducing new lessons, outlining the activities and requirements for the class. Following this, there is a captivating ten-minute activity led by class representatives, prepared representatives from duty groups carry out teaching demonstrations, allowing time for student participation in discussions and debates. Finally, a portion of established conclusions is left for students to contemplate. Throughout the entire process, teachers provide continuous feedback and conclude with a final summary. Assessment criteria are based on attendance, the engaging ten-minute sessions led by students, classroom discussions, and quizzes.

In the practical classroom setting, teachers integrate local cultural resources from Shanghai. In the first class after commencement, historical events occurring in Shanghai related to each chapter are revealed, and respective locations are assigned to each group (students may also discover new historical sites). Through practical engagement, students authentically unite theory with practice, embodying the concept of knowledge in action. Assessment criteria are based on various stages such as proposal presentation, midterm assessment, final project submission, defense, and the compilation of practical outcomes, each corresponding to different scores.

In the simulation classroom, the team of educators utilizes self-developed virtual simulation software to create an immersive experience in the virtual classroom. Through this simulation, participants are able to perceive

and appreciate the vicissitudes and splendor of China's century-long history. The evaluation mechanism primarily relies on attendance records, completion of practice exercises, and corresponding grades.

Finally, establishing the course grading methodology is essential. The alignment of teaching and assessment objectives is crucial, as the effectiveness of teaching predominantly hinges on students' learning outcomes rather than solely on the teaching methodologies or content. Thus, "the best design should follow a 'backwards' approach that starts with the end in mind, contemplating from the reverse based on learning outcomes" [11]. This course implements a procedural assessment approach, ensuring that assessment accompanies every aspect of learning, with corresponding assessment criteria and methods set for each learning juncture. Routine assessment and the final examination each contribute 50% towards the final grade, whereby: online quizzes primarily assess students' grasp of high-frequency and challenging topics; thematic reflection questions (captivating ten minutes) evaluate students' ability for critical thinking; social practices evaluate students' capacity for accurately understanding and applying historical facts, teamwork, and effective communication skills. The final exam assesses students' profound comprehension of historical regularities, comprehensive mastery, and rational articulation of key historical issues.

## 5. Conclusions and Reflection

The entire teaching design embodies the following characteristics:

1) Embodying a student-centered approach, fully engaging students throughout the teaching process. The course implementation adheres to the principles of interactive teaching between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves. Building upon students' independent pre-class study and thematic contemplation, each class session features a "spectacular ten minutes" section where student groups present their thematic reflections. Furthermore, incorporating student-led assessments and peer assessments maximizes student engagement within the process-oriented evaluation framework.

2) Emphasizing experiential education, leveraging independent online learning to propel offline team investigations. Grounded on the pillars of the subject matter, teachers, and students, this course follows the developmental laws of disciplines, educational practices, and students' growth, actively exploring an immersive teaching model comprising four classroom settings. This model integrates online and offline interactions, on-campus and off-campus engagement, transforming the traditional classroom-centric educational approach into a multidimensional educational experience. By restructuring the teaching content around thematic units and integrating online self-study, classroom lectures, thematic reflections, and social practices, the course effectively elevates the breadth and depth of its teaching strategies. With practical education as the foundation of course innovation, social practices primarily leverage Shanghai's local cultural resources, curating selected practical sites related to each chapter, encouraging students to expand their practice topics to the university, city, and national levels, further enhancing and deepening experiential learning.

3) Leveraging information technology support to explore precise teaching and evaluation strategies. By constructing knowledge maps and linking online teaching content with test banks, supplemented by phased quizzes every two chapters, teachers and students are able to promptly track learning progress, leading to the development of more personalized learning profiles. Importantly, utilizing student learning data from online platforms (such as task completion in instructional videos, thematic discussions, phased quizzes, and practical assignments) allows for a more precise assessment of each student's participation and mastery level, contributing to more accurate and tailored teaching assessments.

In the continuous development of educational reforms, the following points should be considered:

1) Enhancing and refining thematic teaching to elevate the academic rigor of the instructional content. It is essential to address the notion that thematic teaching may lack sufficient depth in terms of intellectual and scholarly aspects. The aim is to enhance thematic teaching content beyond the textbook while reinforcing the critical thinking aspects of each theme. Exploring the application of expanding knowledge maps to cater to individualized learning needs is crucial. Utilizing open-ended questions to assess students' fundamental

historical perspectives and thought processes is recommended. Advancing team teaching by implementing collaborative teaching by subject-specific teams, where each teacher specializes in lecturing on relevant themes based on their research focus.

2) Strengthening the experiential education system to ensure a comprehensive integration of practical components throughout the entire process. Resolving issues related to the concentration and repetition of student project topics is vital. Encouraging students to proactively seek information and venture outside the school premises is crucial. Through comprehensive assessment segments such as project initiation assessments, in-depth classroom discussions, midterm evaluations, project conclusions, and final presentations, outstanding works are identified. Regarding exceptional projects, steps include refining the presentation scripts and potentially elevating them into competitions after several rounds of refinement. Additionally, recommending participation in relevant category projects within the school's social practice initiatives with opportunities for continual advancement. Building upon the practical works, fostering innovation and development is key.

3) Collaborating with sister institutions to engage in joint educational research. Addressing the issue of resource sharing for experiential education across different schools and regions is imperative. Organizing joint research endeavors to share educational achievements and strengthening partnerships with primary and secondary schools, communities, and practical bases to enhance collaborative efforts and community integration.

## Acknowledgments

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