
A Practical Study on the “Three-Integrations” Model of Chinese Language Teaching in Higher Education Based on Flipped Classroom: A Case Study of Beijing Union University

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Abstract: With the acceleration of the internationalization of Chinese education, the education of international students in China has encountered multiple challenges, including national policy requirements, institutional demands for international development, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Taking Beijing Union University as an example, this paper explores the rationale and outcomes of a comprehensive reform in Chinese language teaching for international students based on the flipped classroom model. By implementing a “three-integrations” approach—combining online and offline learning, integrating classroom instruction with self-directed study, and bridging formal classroom teaching with extracurricular activities—the university has achieved significant improvements in Chinese language education for international students. These improvements include enhanced performance in the HSK examination, strengthened institutional branding, a refined curriculum system, and elevated quality in talent cultivation. The findings indicate that the integration of the flipped classroom model with cutting-edge pedagogical theories offers innovative solutions to the challenges in Chinese language teaching for international students.

Keywords: International students in China; Chinese language teaching; Flipped classroom; Teaching reform

Online publication: June 26, 2025

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the accelerated internationalization of China’s education sector, the education of international students in China has garnered significant attention. Key policy documents, including Several Opinions on Promoting Education Opening-Up in the New Era issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, as well as the Education Action Plan for Advancing the Joint Construction of the Belt and Road Initiative promulgated by the Ministry of Education, have outlined the medium-to-long-term development roadmap for international student education in China.

Regulatory frameworks such as the Administrative Measures for the Enrollment and Cultivation of International Students and the Quality Standards for Higher Education of International Students in China (Trial) have established

specific requirements and clear benchmarks for educational quality. However, current implementation reveals critical gaps, particularly in Chinese language proficiency. Many students in English-taught programs struggle to meet the mandated HSK (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi) standards set by national policies.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic's disruptions and advancements in educational technology have necessitated a fundamental reevaluation of pedagogical paradigms for teaching Chinese to international students in this new era. These converging factors underscore the imperative for comprehensive reforms in Chinese language education for international students.

2. Research Background and Problem Statement

2.1. Mandatory Requirements at the National Strategic Level

“International Chinese Education constitutes a vital component of educational international exchange and cooperation, serving as a crucial platform for China’s integration into the world and for global understanding of China”^[1]. “Beijing has thoroughly implemented the central government’s directives on educational opening-up in the new era. In alignment with the overall plan for the internationalization of education in Beijing, the city has formulated a series of work plans and action initiatives, further clarifying the guiding principles, fundamental tenets, primary objectives, and key tasks for educational opening-up in the new period”^[2]. The Quality Standards for Higher Education of International Students in China (Trial) issued by China’s Ministry of Education explicitly stipulates: «For disciplines and majors using Chinese as the medium of instruction, the Chinese proficiency requirement shall meet at least Level 4 of the International Chinese Language Proficiency Standards. For disciplines and majors using foreign languages as the medium of instruction, higher education institutions shall clearly specify the requisite foreign language proficiency requirements in their admission criteria for international students”^[3]. If strictly adhering to these national policy-mandated admission standards, the majority of prospective students would be excluded. Our university’s Chinese proficiency requirements for degree-seeking international students stipulate that undergraduates in Chinese-taught programs must achieve HSK Level 5, while those in English-taught programs must attain HSK Level 4. According to 2019 data from Beijing Union University, the pass rates for these requirements reveal significant challenges: only 24% of students in English-taught programs met the HSK Level 4 requirement, while merely 68% in Chinese-taught programs achieved HSK Level 5. These outcomes directly reflect the generally low Chinese proficiency levels among incoming students. Consequently, in exploring reforms for international students’ Chinese language education, we must adopt a dual approach: not only enhancing the quality of Chinese language instruction for international students in China but also improving the Chinese proficiency standards of overseas student recruitment. This two-pronged strategy has been identified as the essential pathway to break through the current impasse.

2.2. Endogenous Demands of Institutional Internationalization

During 2017-2019, 72% of international students admitted through Beijing Union University’s overseas partner institutions had zero prior Chinese proficiency, yet were required to complete both disciplinary studies and language proficiency requirements within a limited two-year period. This situation necessitated innovative solutions to deliver Chinese language education during students’ overseas study phase while intensifying language training after their arrival in China. In 2020, the university implemented structural reforms in international student education management, establishing cooperative programs to extend Chinese language instruction to partner institutions abroad, thereby ensuring students attain sufficient proficiency before arriving in China. A dedicated Language Education Center was established to oversee Chinese language teaching, while academic departments assumed responsibility for discipline-specific instruction under a converged management framework. Through pre-departure Chinese courses, the university exported high-quality Chinese language teaching resources to overseas partner institutions. Notably, the university pioneered a reverse “2+2” dual-degree program in collaboration with prestigious foreign universities, where students complete foundational and pre-departure Chinese courses (Years 1-2) abroad before progressing to specialized and advanced Chinese studies (Years 3-4) in China. This

initiative has injected new vitality into the university's internationalization efforts while imposing higher standards for the quality and effectiveness of Chinese language education.

2.3. Restructuring Teaching Paradigms Under Pandemic Impact

The outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020 precipitated profound transformations in global education. International student education in China faced unprecedented challenges, including students' inability to enter China and the dual constraints of spatiotemporal limitations and lack of immersive language environments. In response, the university swiftly transitioned to online teaching and adopted innovative pedagogical models to enhance international students' learning autonomy and intrinsic motivation, thereby improving the quality and efficiency of Chinese language instruction. In the post-pandemic era, international student education has entered a new phase of on-campus learning, yet significant disparities in students' initial Chinese proficiency levels and growing demands for personalized learning have highlighted the urgent need for further optimization of teaching models.

3. Theoretical Foundations of the Flipped Classroom Model

Against the aforementioned multifaceted background, promoting the reform of Chinese language education for international students has become both a necessity to adapt to global trends and an inevitable requirement for institutional development. Beijing Union University has actively explored innovative teaching models, giving rise to the flipped classroom approach, which emerged as a pivotal strategy during and post-pandemic to enhance the quality and efficiency of Chinese language education for international students.

3.1. The Concept and Characteristics of the Flipped Classroom

The core of the flipped classroom model lies in the reallocation of in-class and out-of-class time, shifting knowledge dissemination from the classroom to pre-class activities while focusing classroom time on deepening and applying knowledge and skills. As He Kekang noted, the flipped classroom embodies the advantages of blended learning, aligns more closely with human cognitive patterns, facilitates the construction of new teacher-student relationships, and promotes the effective utilization and research of teaching resources^[4]. These aspects have been fully realized in our university's implementation of the flipped classroom. By relocating certain teaching content to pre-class sessions and leveraging the interactive and personalized features of online platforms, we have not only optimized the teaching process but also significantly enhanced students' autonomous learning abilities and classroom engagement.

The pre-class components of the flipped classroom are primarily delivered through platforms such as Rain Classroom, which support diverse teaching resources, including text, images, audio, and animations. These platforms enable the creation of multimodal course materials and various assignment types while recording students' learning time, progress, assignment completion, and questions. Interactive features such as bullet-screen comments, real-time quizzes, and assignment submissions are also integrated. Utilizing these online platforms, teachers can systematically and diversely design pre-class learning resources, flexibly adjusting content and pacing based on student feedback and progress. Data on students' learning time, assignment completion, and quiz performance help teachers precisely identify learning difficulties, providing a basis for targeted classroom interaction and Q&A sessions.

Moreover, the flipped classroom model accommodates the personalized learning needs of international students through flexible online resource design. Students can independently select learning content based on their abilities and interests, revisit unmastered material, or skip familiar content. This emphasis on personalized learning not only boosts student motivation and fosters autonomous learning skills but also significantly improves teacher-student interaction. Post-class activities primarily consist of tasks and extended exercises designed to consolidate and strengthen students' comprehensive Chinese language proficiency. Compared to traditional classroom teaching, the flipped classroom model demonstrates clear advantages in teaching efficiency.

3.2. Theoretical Underpinnings of the Flipped Classroom

The success of the flipped classroom relies not only on technological tools but also on theoretical exploration and continuous practical refinement. In practice, our university has integrated advanced pedagogical theories such as deep learning theory, Outcome-Based Education (OBE), and the Production-Oriented Approach (POA) to optimize teaching processes, gradually developing a distinctive teaching model tailored to our institutional context.

Deep learning theory emphasizes the active construction of knowledge and the cultivation of critical thinking, focusing on students' proactive participation and in-depth engagement during learning. The OBE approach centers on student-focused, outcome-driven education, advocating for backward design in teaching content, processes, and evaluation systems. This philosophy aligns closely with the flipped classroom model, as both prioritize autonomous learning and practical skill development, guiding teaching activities and goal-setting with clear learning objectives, multidimensional evaluation systems, and real-time teacher-student feedback to ensure desired outcomes.

The POA theory, meanwhile, focuses on learning-centered instruction, using language output to drive language input through a “motivating-enabling-evaluating” teaching cycle^[5]. This approach facilitates learning activities and helps students improve language proficiency through practical application. For instance, in pre-class sessions, teachers design challenging tasks to guide active exploration and reflection; during class, group discussions and role-playing activities encourage language output and skill development. As noted in prior research, “OBE principles, with their backward design, inform the entire talent cultivation process and guide curriculum development and content selection, while POA is more suited to enhancing language teaching effectiveness for international students in classroom settings”^[6]. In the process of integrating theory with practice, the university has continuously optimized the flipped classroom teaching model. Building upon the foundational online flipped classroom approach, it has incorporated upgraded theories and expanded explorations such as flipped learning^[7], seamless flipped learning^[8], creation-driven flipped classroom^[9], deep flipped learning^[10], and generative flipped learning^[11]. Furthermore, the institution has explored various integrated models including flipped classroom + OBE concept, flipped classroom + POA theory, and flipped classroom + deep learning theory. Through multiple developmental stages, the teaching process has been progressively refined, leading to enhanced instructional effectiveness.

Additionally, the university has enhanced teachers' pedagogical and technological proficiency through regular teaching workshops and training sessions. Initiatives include organizing online teaching skill development programs, sharing exemplary teaching cases, and encouraging innovative practices. Pre-class resource development and post-class reinforcement activities are also incorporated into teaching workloads to motivate teachers and foster a sense of responsibility. This continuous improvement mechanism has not only optimized the implementation of the flipped classroom but also contributed to teachers' professional growth, providing robust support for teaching reform.

4. Exploration and Innovation in the “Three-Integrations” Flipped Classroom Teaching Paradigm

Beijing Union University has profoundly recognized that traditional teaching models no longer meet the demands of the new era and has actively explored innovative teaching paradigms to address the evolving needs of international students in Chinese language education. The university has proposed and implemented a “three-integrations” teaching paradigm centered on the flipped classroom, namely the integration of “online and offline learning,” “classroom instruction and autonomous learning,” and “formal curriculum and extracurricular activities.” This paradigm breaks through temporal and spatial constraints by employing diversified teaching methods and abundant learning resources, providing international students with more personalized and varied learning experiences, thereby driving the high-quality development of Chinese language teaching.

4.1. Integration of Online and Offline Learning

The university has vigorously developed online flipped classroom resources, systematically creating a wealth of online teaching materials. These include complete course resources for Chinese language learners from beginner to HSK Level 4, suitable for language students, preparatory students, and Phase I “2+2” program participants, as well as comprehensive Chinese courses and Chinese reading/writing courses (Levels 1-3) for international students at HSK Level 4 and above and Phase II “2+2” program students. In the post-pandemic era, the university has further optimized online teaching resources by developing HSK Level 4 preparatory courses, Introduction to China, and Chinese Characters and Culture courses. Through various formats such as MOOCs, the Rain Classroom platform, and pre- and post-class task sheets, the university has implemented an enhanced version of the flipped classroom, creating conditions for personalized student development and learning scaffolding. This allows students of different proficiency levels, needs, and learning styles to utilize appropriate online resources and receive real-time teacher guidance and support during their learning process, meeting the diverse needs of international students. It encourages students to explore personalized learning methods and utilize diversified learning resources, striving to “teach them how to fish rather than just giving them fish.”

At the same time, teachers are encouraged to further optimize learning content and online teaching aids. By incorporating the development of pre-class flipped classroom materials into their workload, teachers are motivated to devote more effort to creating online resources and providing online tutoring. Although developing online teaching resources requires significant effort, these resources can be reused and continuously improved in the long term, and their rational use helps enhance teaching efficiency. In recent years, both teachers and students have become increasingly adept at using online teaching resources, with the majority of language courses and some specialized courses adopting a blended online-offline teaching model. This has formed a virtuous cycle that fosters students’ autonomous learning awareness and motivates teachers to proactively optimize teaching resources for sustainable development.

4.2. Integration of Classroom Instruction and Autonomous Learning

While the development of online teaching resources has laid the groundwork for flipped classroom reform, challenges remain, such as difficulty in monitoring pre-class learning outcomes, insufficient emphasis on students’ active knowledge construction, passive knowledge internalization processes, and challenges in ensuring deep learning outcomes. To address these issues, the university has drawn on cutting-edge research in flipped learning, deep flipped learning, creativity-driven flipped classrooms, and generative flipped learning. The goal is to build on strengths and avoid weaknesses, further enhancing the effectiveness of the flipped classroom model based on temporal restructuring, promoting more effective teacher-student interaction, and fostering a genuinely learning-centered, personalized talent development model.

In classroom teaching, the university has incorporated outcomes from OBE and POA language teaching practices, using optimized classroom instruction to drive autonomous learning. Measures such as reforming flipped classroom course design, revising assessment methods, increasing the proportion of formative evaluation in overall grading, and incorporating pre-class flipped classroom learning into attendance requirements ensure that all students can maximize learning opportunities both in and out of class. Additionally, the university has addressed the disconnect between language teaching and practice through online teaching resources, text, audio, video materials, and online tutoring. By reforming course design, optimizing pre-class, in-class, and post-class flipped classroom components, revising assessment methods to include pre-class learning in attendance requirements, and strengthening the knowledge internalization process to guide students in actively constructing knowledge systems, the enhanced flipped classroom model has improved student motivation and learning outcomes. Students with relatively weaker foundations and learning abilities receive more systematic support, while the personalized learning needs of students with stronger Chinese proficiency, faster progress, and higher motivation are also met.

4.3. Integration of Formal Curriculum and Extracurricular Activities

The visible demonstration of learning outcomes further stimulates students’ learning needs. If the “online-offline

integrated” flipped classroom model and learning support system make students feel “like fish in water,” the “formal curriculum + extracurricular activities” approach makes them feel fulfilled and highly motivated. Leveraging its unique advantages as a comprehensive municipal university in Beijing, the university employs a “curricular-extracurricular integration” approach to guide international students in extensive Chinese language and cultural immersion activities across tourism, culture, arts, trade, and other fields. This strengthens learning motivation from multiple perspectives and increases opportunities for language practice.

During the pandemic and for Phase I “2+2” program students unable to come to China and experience an authentic language environment, the university addressed the disconnect between language teaching and practice by providing online teaching resources, sharing text, audio, and video language learning materials, and increasing online tutoring. Post-pandemic, the university further expanded language acquisition opportunities and reinforced learning motivation and capabilities by designing flipped classroom pre- and post-class task sheets and organizing language teaching practice activities that integrate curricular and extracurricular components.

During their studies, students participate in activities such as Chinese speech contests, essay competitions, Chinese song performance contests, dubbing shows, “Tourism + Chinese” short video competitions, “China Stories in My Voice” contests, and the “Study at BJU, Discover Beijing” cultural immersion and practice series. By combining campus learning with social practice, the university enhances the perceived value of Chinese language learning and enriches the study-abroad experience for international students. Through China’s excellent traditional culture and the great achievements of its modernization, the university strengthens international students’ education in Chinese national conditions and fosters international understanding.

5. Practice and Outcomes of the “Three-Integrations” Flipped Classroom Model

The exploration and implementation of the “three-integrations” flipped classroom model at Beijing Union University have not only effectively addressed teaching challenges during the pandemic but also provided innovative approaches for post-pandemic educational reform. Through practical experimentation, the university has achieved remarkable results in teaching methodologies, curriculum development, and educational management, establishing a distinctive Chinese language teaching system for international students. This system offers valuable insights for the innovation and advancement of international student education in higher education institutions.

5.1. Innovation and Optimization of Teaching Models: Transition from “Teacher-Centered” to “Learning-Centered”

The adoption of the flipped classroom model signifies a profound shift in the university’s Chinese language instruction for international students—from a traditional teacher-centered approach to a learning-centered paradigm. This model emphasizes student autonomy while focusing on achieving teaching objectives and facilitating effective learning activities. Through a comprehensive design encompassing pre-class self-study, in-class interactive practice, and post-class reinforcement, students engage in self-directed learning tailored to their proficiency levels before class, actively participate in discussions and practical activities during class, and consolidate their knowledge through diverse tasks after class. Teachers, in turn, adjust classroom content and strategies based on pre- and post-class learning data.

This model not only enhances teaching efficiency but also fosters deep learning and knowledge internalization. By integrating deep learning theory, the Production-Oriented Approach (POA), and Outcome-Based Education (OBE), the university has further refined the flipped classroom process. Deep learning theory underscores active knowledge construction and critical thinking; POA emphasizes output-driven language input; and OBE ensures each teaching phase aligns with students’ language proficiency goals through precise learning objectives. The synergy of these theories has rendered the flipped classroom design more scientific and systematic, providing robust support for personalized learning.

5.2. Curriculum Development and Resource Creation: Building a Diversified Learning Ecosystem

Through years of curriculum development, Beijing Union University has established a comprehensive Chinese language course system for international students, ranging from beginner to HSK Level 5 proficiency. The curriculum includes skill-based courses in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as specialized courses such as Chinese Culture and Introduction to China. These courses, delivered through blended online and offline formats, cater to students of varying levels and needs.

The university has also leveraged platforms like Rain Classroom and MOOCs to develop extensive online resources, offering students diverse learning options. These resources encompass instructional videos, interactive exercises, and online assessments, supported by intelligent learning management systems that track student progress and provide teachers with precise feedback. Such initiatives have not only elevated teaching quality but also cultivated a more personalized and autonomous learning ecosystem for international students.

5.3. Teaching Management and Assessment Reform: Data-Driven Decision-Making

To ensure the effective implementation of the flipped classroom model, Beijing Union University has enacted bold reforms in teaching management and assessment. Key measures include: Incorporating pre-class flipped classroom participation into attendance requirements. Increasing the weight of formative assessments in final evaluations to motivate student engagement. Utilizing platforms like Rain Classroom to monitor student progress in real time, enabling data-informed teaching adjustments.

These data-driven management practices have enhanced the scientific rigor and flexibility of teaching administration, providing a foundation for refining instructional content and methods. Additionally, regular teaching workshops and training programs have elevated faculty competencies in pedagogy and technology. Educators have embraced a “learning-centered” philosophy and adopted evidence-based management approaches, optimizing teaching processes and fostering professional growth.

5.4. Teaching Outcomes and Institutional Branding: Advancing Internationalization Through Quality Enhancement

The flipped classroom model has yielded significant outcomes in Chinese language instruction for international students at Beijing Union University. From 2019 to 2021, over 90% of enrolled international students passed HSK Levels 4 and 5, with some programs achieving a 100% pass rate. These results underscore the success of the teaching reforms and solidify the university’s foundation for internationalization.

Graduates of the reverse “2+2” dual-degree program have attained language proficiency sufficient for postgraduate studies, with many choosing to pursue advanced degrees at Beijing Union University or other prestigious Chinese institutions. This trend has bolstered the university’s academic reputation and invigorated the “Study at BJU” brand. Furthermore, the university has made strides in international student recruitment and global visibility. In recent years, enrollment numbers have grown steadily, and the institution’s international profile has risen markedly. The “Study at BJU” brand has gained traction, attracting more students worldwide. Through high-quality instruction and innovative teaching models, the university has earned widespread recognition from global partners and students, paving the way for expanded international development.

Funding

This research was supported by the Beijing Union University Teaching Reform Project “Application of Flipped Classroom Based on Rain Classroom in Elementary Chinese Reading Courses” (Grant No.: JG2024Y004).

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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