

# Differential Reactions of Urban and Rural Teachers to Blended Learning: Evidence From Chinese Secondary Schools

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## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided an opportunity for implementing blended learning in Chinese secondary schools. However, teachers have encountered several problems and challenges with the new pedagogical paradigm. Therefore, this study aims to identify the factors influencing the implementation of blended learning in urban and rural secondary schools from the perspective of secondary school teachers and to examine the teachers' different responses to these factors. Interview data were collected from 13 secondary school teachers in Guangdong Province, China. The findings identify seven factors influencing the implementation of blended learning from the teachers' perspective, including blended learning curriculum design, teaching resources, teaching ability, teacher-student interactive behavior, teacher motivation, students' ability, and workload. The distinct differences between urban and rural teachers' responses to the aforementioned influential factors provide a reference for the government and schools to establish a moderating mechanism for blended learning implementation.

## KEYWORDS

Blended Learning, Secondary School Teachers, Students Ability, Teacher Motivation, Workload

## INTRODUCTION

Information and communications technology (ICT) is progressively being integrated into every aspect of education and teaching, supporting innovation in secondary school teaching and learning, and driving ongoing changes in school curricula. Furthermore, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, new educational approaches have been introduced worldwide (Dhawan, 2020). In China, many secondary schools have adopted blended learning (BL) as a teaching model combining classroom teaching and online learning. Secondary schools expect that BL will become the norm in future secondary education reform, as it will change the existing teaching model and resolve the problem of limited personalized learning for students (Cheng & Wu, 2020). BL has demonstrated its significant

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advantages in improving learners' performance, including enhancing interest and satisfaction in learning, optimizing learning outcomes, developing self-directed learning skills, and improving attitudes toward learning (Larmuseau et al., 2018; Serrano et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2020). As an innovative model that can re-integrate learning time, BL will drive the future of education in China (R.H. Huang et al., 2022). However, there are few case studies on the effectiveness of BL practices in Chinese secondary schools (Fu et al., 2021). While teachers' focus on BL is still on the technical level, the significant challenges faced in the practice process must be addressed. Specifically, as implementers of pedagogical theory applications and direct leaders of teaching practice activities, teachers must still summarize and analyze their experiences in BL practices well. It has led to few studies analyzing the problems in BL practices from the teachers' perspectives (Bowyer & Chambers, 2017; Mozelius & Rydel, 2017). Therefore, this study aims to identify the challenges and influential factors in implementing BL in Guangdong, China, from the perspective of secondary school teachers and to understand the perceptions of urban and rural teachers about these dilemmas. For this purpose, this study is the first to compare the BL experiences of rural and urban Chinese secondary school teachers based on their reflections. Therefore, it gives rise to the research question: What are the differential reactions of urban and rural teachers in secondary schools to their experiences of BL implementation? Data were collected primarily through qualitative research. In addition, the descriptive analysis of the survey questions was conducted from the secondary school teachers' perspectives. By identifying the challenges and factors affecting BL implementation in China, this study can serve as a reference for the government, schools, and teachers in their efforts to improve the learning experience and help the teachers adapt to new models of teaching innovation.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on BL and explores the challenges encountered in its implementation. Section 3 describes the methodology used in this study. Section 4 presents the results, while Section 5 discusses them. Finally, Section 6 summarizes the findings, identifies the study's limitations, and offers recommendations for future research.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Blended Learning**

The concept of BL has evolved with technology, with various definitions offered. For example, Ramirez-Arellano et al. (2019) defined BL as a combination of online and face-to-face instruction using online learning activities designed to guide and complement face-to-face instruction. In 2020, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) provided a universal definition of BL as "a way of learning that combines distance learning and face-to-face learning to improve the student experience and ensure continuity of learning" ("Concept Note," 2021). Implementing BL can effectively solve several practical problems in teaching and learning, accomplish teaching objectives or activity design that cannot be achieved individually by face-to-face instruction or online learning, maximize teaching and learning outcomes, and enhance students' independent abilities. With the development of new technologies, the platforms used to support BL are no longer limited to specific media types, as all-in-one tools, social media platforms, mobile digital resources, and online access modes can support face-to-face teaching and learning. Moreover, with the development of BL practices owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese scholars have proposed that BL relies on a hybrid infrastructure and open educational practice (OEP). BL integrates online and offline learning spaces in real-time while teaching students seamlessly in physical and online classrooms (R.H. Huang et al., 2021).

Due to the broad concept of BL, Chinese secondary school teachers may have differences in understanding its definition. Some scholars believe BL should include a combination of online and offline learning and emphasize the integration of different technologies, theories, and teaching

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