

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Exploring Chinese EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Blended Learning in English Extensive Reading Course: A Qualitative Study

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## ABSTRACT

Significant transformations have occurred in the educational field due to the continued progress in information technology and thus blended learning has gained significant attention worldwide, providing students with diverse learning opportunities. To stay up-to-date with the advancements in educational technology, English teachers at Chinese universities have incorporated blended learning into the instruction of English Extensive Reading Course. English Extensive Reading Course is a mandatory course designed for students learning English as a foreign language, focusing on practicality, humanity, and communication. This study investigates teachers' perceptions of blended learning in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course, employing semi-structured interviews. This study identifies critical challenges teachers come across in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course, including reduced teacher-student interaction, challenging selection of teaching materials and students' insufficient learning engagement. To improve students' effective learning experience, three strategies are adopted by teachers, involving in establishing clear course objectives, injecting materials from diverse resources and organizing appealing course activities. Additionally, the study highlights the multifaceted roles teachers undertake in blended learning environment of English Extensive Reading Course. These roles include course designer and organizer, learning facilitator, and instruction deliverer, with the first two roles being particularly significant. It is revealed that proper implementation of teachers' roles can facilitate students' effective learning experience in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course.

**Keywords:** Blended Learning; English Extensive Reading Course; Challenges; Teachers' Roles

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### ARTICLE INFO

Received: 27 January 2025 | Revised: 22 February 2025 | Accepted: 4 March 2025 | Published Online: 13 March 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i3.8583>

### CITATION

Lyu, C., Sulaiman, N.A., Hashim, H., 2025. Exploring Chinese EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Blended Learning in English Extensive Reading Course: A Qualitative Study. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 7(3): 611–624. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i3.8583>

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# 1. Introduction

Significant transformations have occurred in the educational field due to the continued progress in information technology and thus blended learning has gained significant attention worldwide and enjoyed great popularity all through the world, providing students with diverse learning opportunities<sup>[1]</sup>. To stay up-to-date with the advancements in educational technology, teachers who are responsible for English language teaching have embraced the changes and integrated blended learning into their instruction of different English courses, including English Listening Course<sup>[2]</sup>, English Speaking Course<sup>[3]</sup>, English Reading Course<sup>[4]</sup>, and English Writing Course<sup>[5]</sup>. Simultaneously, Chinese educators responsible for the instruction of English Extensive Reading Course have also involved blended learning into their instructional approach<sup>[6]</sup>.

English Extensive Reading Course is a mandatory course designed for students learning English as a foreign language, focusing on practicality, humanity, and communication, with the goal of developing students' reading skills, improving their logical thinking abilities, fostering a greater interest in reading, and expanding their vocabulary<sup>[7]</sup>. In the English Extensive Reading Course, students must engage in a significant amount of reading practice to enhance their reading skills and reading speed and thus blended learning is advantageous in improving students' learning experience and outcomes in this course<sup>[4, 6]</sup>. However, the integration of blended learning into English Extensive Reading Course offers EFL teachers challenges at the same time<sup>[8]</sup>. Nevertheless, there is a lack of research specifically exploring teachers' teaching experience and roles in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course in a Chinese context, which creates an important research opportunity for the current study.

The objective of this study is to explore Chinese EFL teachers' perceptions of blended learning in English Extensive Reading Course, which contributes to the field of blended learning by offering a unique perspective and has both theoretical and practical significance. Based on the research objectives of this study, three research questions are proposed:

RQ1: How do Chinese EFL teachers perceive their teaching experience in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course?

RQ2: How do Chinese EFL teachers improve students' learning experience in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course?

RQ3: What roles do Chinese EFL teachers play in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course?

# 2. Literature Review

## 2.1. Blended Learning

Blended learning, also known as hybrid learning, has been in existence for a long period of time<sup>[9]</sup>. According to Hrastinski<sup>[10]</sup>, blended learning should not be defined in isolation; instead, multiple definitions coexist simultaneously. To enhance the learning process, promote the learner's learning outcome, and improve the efficiency of learning, Saliba et al.<sup>[11]</sup> defined blended learning as a methodical and planned approach that combines traditional in-person instruction with virtual means of learning in the educational process. In addition, Tarus et al.<sup>[12]</sup> stated that blended learning consists of a technological module, an organizational module and a pedagogical module. According to Meier<sup>[13]</sup>, blended learning can be regarded as an expansion of e-learning, as it is a way of e-learning to some degree.

Based on the relevant research on blended learning, scholars in this area primarily focused on teaching effectiveness, course design, and influencing factors. In the research field of teaching effectiveness, researchers have carefully evaluated students' satisfaction and achievement using various approaches to determine the effectiveness of blended learning and find the best teaching approach. Sheerah<sup>[14]</sup> examined the way students perceive blended learning and how it impacts their improvement and learning outcomes. Prifti<sup>[15]</sup> focused on the satisfaction level among students regarding a university-based course, specifically examining the impact of Learning Management System (LMS) elements on students' level of satisfaction. The results suggested that students' belief in their ability to use a learning management system (LMS) has a beneficial impact on their level of satisfaction with their education. Researchers in the field of teaching design have provided recommendations derived from their own theoretical frameworks and views. Lai et al.<sup>[16]</sup> proposed two design methods for blended learning based on their analysis of three blended learning situations. Amanda et al.<sup>[17]</sup> identified 10 areas of practice to enhance the ef-

fectiveness of blended learning based on interviews with students. Ustun and Tracey<sup>[18]</sup> utilized a design-based research methodology to assist instructors and create a blended learning course for higher education. According to them, when creating and implementing the BL course, it is important to carefully identify and follow necessary principles that will lead to the construction of a highly efficient and effective course. The concept of influencing factors is currently a prominent subject in the study of blended learning. According to Diep et al.<sup>[19]</sup>, many factors such as technical support services, the online learning platform, student-related factors, and instructor-related factors collectively influence learner satisfaction in blended learning. Viet<sup>[20]</sup> investigated the impact of several types of interactions (such as student-technology interaction, student-learning content interaction, student-student contact, and teacher-student interaction) on learning outcomes. Wei et al.<sup>[21]</sup> investigated the key factors that influence students' academic self-efficacy in blended learning, considering personal, interpersonal, and environmental factors.

## **2.2. Blended Learning in English Extensive Reading Course**

Reading proficiency is not only the fundamental basis and requirement for the advancement of English language skills such as listening, speaking, writing, and translation, but also a crucial means to improve the quality of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL)<sup>[22]</sup>. The English Extensive Reading Course is essential for students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) as it is the most efficient way to enhance their language awareness, vocabulary, and reading skills.

Blended learning is a teaching approach that incorporates the benefits of both online learning and offline learning<sup>[23]</sup>. English Extensive Reading Course requires students to regularly participate in reading activities in order to improve their reading competence. Owston et al.<sup>[24]</sup> found a direct relationship between the amount of time students spend engaging in English reading activities and their degree of reading proficiency. The research conducted by Ghazizadeh and Fatemipour<sup>[25]</sup> and Djiwandono<sup>[26]</sup> revealed that EFL students who were taught by blended learning methods showed enhanced performance on reading assessments. Furthermore, the utilization of blended learning has facilitated

learners' learning effect and improved their reading comprehension. Pitaloka et al.<sup>[4]</sup> argued that students participating in blended learning can benefit from receiving instructions, practicing explanation delivery, and receiving feedback from both peers and instructors online. This approach can enhance students' comprehensive abilities and motivation to learn in an English Extensive Reading Course.

Additionally, blended learning has been implemented in English Extensive Reading Courses in various countries, including Indonesia<sup>[27]</sup>, South Sumatra<sup>[4]</sup>, Thailand<sup>[28]</sup>, Egypt<sup>[29]</sup>, and China<sup>[6]</sup>. Syakur et al.<sup>[27]</sup> investigated the influence of website-based blended instruction on students' English reading proficiency in the context of an English Reading class. The results indicated that 81.99% of participants held positive attitudes towards the combination of blended learning approach with "absyak" media websites. Pitaloka et al.<sup>[4]</sup> did a study on the implementation of blended learning in an English Extensive Reading Course at a university in South Sumatra. The study aimed to gather students' perspectives on the use of blended learning in the reading course. Mahmoud<sup>[29]</sup> conducted a study to investigate the impact of online extensive reading activities in blended learning on students' reading comprehension abilities in Egypt. The findings revealed that students who participated in a blended learning environment demonstrated superior reading comprehension abilities compared to those who engaged in traditional learning methods. Qiao<sup>[6]</sup> has developed a blended teaching model for English Extensive Reading class that combines mobile reading apps and online reading platforms. This model is crucial in stimulating students' learning interest and effectively integrating online and offline learning. Zhu<sup>[30]</sup> concluded that the blended learning approach is extensively used in English courses in China, leading to significant enhancements in teaching quality and the promptness of education. This paradigm can be fully utilized by using the inherent benefits of blended learning to enhance the teaching objectives of the English Extensive Reading Course, hence improving students' comprehension.

## **2.3. Gaps in the Literature**

While existing research on blended learning and English Extensive Reading Courses has provided valuable insights, there are still notable gaps.

The majority of previous studies primarily focused on the general application of blended learning, without delving deeply into the specific needs and characteristics of Chinese EFL teachers. However, different cultural context and educational context in China may shape teachers' perceptions of blended learning and implementation of blended learning differently, which has received little attention in prior research. Moreover, studies in various countries, including China, have demonstrated the positive impact of blended learning in English Extensive Reading Course. However, existing research rarely explored how to adapt blended learning to the specific needs of Chinese EFL teachers. Furthermore, English teachers have implemented blended learning in the instruction of English Extensive Reading Course and achieved various learning outcomes. Nonetheless, previous research has focused exclusively on students' opinion of teaching methods and the impact of blended learning when it comes to integrating the English Extensive Reading Course, having neglected to address the importance of teachers' involvement in the blended English Extensive Reading Course.

In summary, the existing literature associated with blended learning and English Extensive Reading Course has provided insights for blended learning research. Nevertheless, there is a lack of research specifically exploring teachers' teaching experience and roles in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course in a Chinese context, which creates an important research opportunity for the current study. This current study is to explore EFL teachers' perceptions of blended learning in English Extensive Reading Course in a Chinese context, which offers a unique perspective and great opportunities.

### 3. Methodology

Qualitative research is a widely utilized approach in the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and education. Its primary objective is to investigate and comprehend the subjective interpretations and significance that individuals or groups assign to a social or human problem<sup>[31]</sup>. The objective of this current study is to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions of blended learning in English Extensive Reading Course in a Chinese context. Because the study is emergent, the researcher's relationship with the event being studied is mostly unpredictable beforehand<sup>[32]</sup>. Consequently,

the study is of an exploratory nature and is considered an exploratory qualitative study based on the aforementioned grounds. Based on the research questions in the study, the case study, which refers to the ideal research design to comprehend and interpret observations of educational phenomena, is utilized<sup>[33]</sup>.

In this qualitative study, four teachers at a university in Northwest China were selected based on the research objectives and research questions. The participants were chosen using purposive sampling, a non-probability selection strategy that relies on the researcher's expertise and understanding to select a sample from a community for a study<sup>[34]</sup>. When selecting participants, three specific criteria were established. Initially, all teachers who participate in this current study should teach an English Extensive Reading Course between February 2024 and July 2024. Moreover, participants' teaching experience of the English Extensive Reading Course should be considered, which ensures that the participating teachers are well-acquainted with the course's teaching objectives, instructional approaches, and educational outcomes. Furthermore, the expertise of teachers in blended learning should be carefully evaluated to ensure their comprehensive comprehension of this instructional strategy. Each participant received an email with an informed consent form that outlined the project's objectives, data-gathering procedures, and their voluntary involvement. It is imperative that all individuals willingly participate in the research.

Semi-structured interview, in which an outline of topics and questions is prepared by the researcher previously, is the most frequently utilized type of interview in qualitative study<sup>[36]</sup>. In this current study, semi-structured interview was applied to gather qualitative data. A comprehensive interview protocol, encompassing not just a series of interview questions but also a meticulously crafted script outlining what individuals would say prior to and following the interview<sup>[36]</sup>, was formulated and created (**Appendix A**). The interview protocol was developed based on the three questions in this study, incorporating five questions on teachers' teaching experience, five questions on strategies teachers adopt to improve students' learning experience and three questions on teachers' roles in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course. The designed interview protocol was checked by two experts to ensure that questions fit

the research objectives and research questions. Participants were interviewed face-to-face individually and each of the interviews lasted for 60 minutes to ensure the amount of data. In order to create a comfortable and natural environment for the interview, a quiet place was selected. Based on the interviewees' answers on certain questions, probes were provided so that complete data on the interview questions were obtained. Furthermore, in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the research questions, the interviews were conducted several times until data was enough.

Thematic analysis was utilized to explore teachers' perceptions about blended learning of the English Extensive Reading Course. Inductive thematic analysis was chosen due to its adaptability and flexibility, making it suitable for analyzing qualitative data collected through research methodologies<sup>[37]</sup>. The method of thematic analysis consists of three phases: the set up phase, the analytical phase, and the interpretation phase<sup>[38]</sup>. In the set up phase, data were prepared, organized and transcribed accordingly. Additionally, the transcripts were examined to verify the accuracy and fidelity of the transcripts. In the analytical phase, researchers categorized the transcripts to produce descriptions of data by using inductive coding. The diverse codes were synthesized into potential themes and all the themes were examined, reviewed and refined. After the examination of themes, the essence of each theme should be defined based on relevant literature and a detailed analysis was composed.

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, four criteria were taken into consideration, including credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability<sup>[39]</sup>. The credibility of this current study was enhanced by prolonged engagement and member checking. Moreover, the transferability was addressed by providing detailed and rich descriptions of the background and context, participants, method of data collection, analysis, and findings in this case study, so that the reader could assess the applicability of the findings to similar contexts. Furthermore, in order to improve the dependability, peer debriefing was utilized by inviting experts to check the interview protocol and read through the themes with their embedded interpretation. Additionally, to ensure the confirmability of this current study, a transparent description of the research process was created, which allows future researchers to replicate it.

## 4. Findings

In order to preserve the confidentiality of the participants, the researcher used a pseudonym to represent each study participant. Every presentation of the study's findings was supplemented with excerpts from interviews with teachers. The researcher assigned the term "SI" to the interview transcript. The label (Gong, SI) represents specific information, in which "Gong" is the family name of the participant and "SI" indicates the semi-structured interview with Teacher Gong.

### 4.1. Findings of RQ1: Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching Experience in Blended Learning of EERC

The instructor bears the primary responsibility for the implementation of a course, including the course design, course organization and course evaluation. Additionally, teachers are also associated with students' learning motivation and engagement. English Extensive Reading Course has been taught through a blended learning model, with the integration of online teaching and offline teaching and teachers who are responsible for the teaching of this course hold various opinions of their teaching experience. Some EFL teachers in this study deemed that they had got positive teaching experience when integrating blended learning into the English Extensive Reading Course. However, all teachers in this current study expressed that they are faced with challenges in blended learning of the English Extensive Reading Course. Among challenges reported by teacher-participants in this study, reduced teacher-student interaction, the challenging task of teaching materials selection and students' insufficient leaning engagement are frequently mentioned.

#### 4.1.1. Reduced Teacher-Student Interaction

In blended learning of the English Extensive Reading Course, teachers combined online learning with offline learning and applied online platforms to communicate with students. However, although online teaching platforms provided convenient learning approaches, they reduced the effective communication between teachers and students. For instance, when conducting an English Extensive Reading Course, Ketangpai, an online learning management system,

was applied and teachers tended to assign various learning tasks on this online platform. Among various functions of this online platform, the discussion board was frequently utilized by teachers to cope with the post-class activities. However, the interaction on the online discussion board mainly focuses on text-based communication, which is difficult to convey emotions and tones. As was reported by Teacher Hai, “Some students only reply with a few words and cannot deeply express their understanding of the reading materials” (Hai, SI). Teacher Li held the same idea, stating that “when completing the post-class discussion online, my students only listed some existing viewpoints I illustrated in the class, lacking vivid communication and ideological collisions” (Li, SI). Additionally, blended learning prioritizes students’ autonomous learning. However, some students have not developed good autonomous learning habits, not willing to express their opinions both online and offline. Teacher Zhang complained that her students do not actively participate in the class activities, saying that “I want to have fun and be productive in my reading class. But the reality is totally opposite to my ideal” (Zhang, SI). Teacher Gong faces the same challenge, clarifying that “some students are willing to share all the time. Some students have relatively little initiative and motivation to learn” (Gong, SI). This situation makes it difficult to create effective interactions between teachers and students and among students.

#### **4.1.2. Challenging Selection of Teaching Materials**

When setting up the blended English Extensive Reading Course, teachers are responsible for choosing appropriate teaching resources and materials for the course. In this study, teachers carefully selected both online teaching materials and offline teaching materials. Compared with offline teaching materials which primarily include textbooks, teachers are confronted with the challenge of how to select online teaching materials that can benefit students’ English extensive reading study. When selecting online teaching materials, teachers have multitude choices, consisting of MOOC, micro-lessons, audio materials and video materials. Some teachers always depended on the foreign language learning websites in China and abroad. As was stated by Teacher Bai, “I searched for MOOCs from similar online websites and my students like the MOOC materials” (Bai, SI). Despite the

diverse selection of online and offline instructional materials, the primary issue for educators lies in ensuring that these resources are appealing. As was illustrated by Teacher Li, “I have to choose the proper materials to help my students to have a better understanding in reading skills, comprehensive reading, poetry reading and short story reading. However, no one tells me how to choose it properly” (Li, SI).

#### **4.1.3. Insufficient Learning Engagement**

Blended learning integrates online learning and offline learning. Hence, students have to engage in a variety of course activities both online and offline. However, teachers find that students perform better when completing activities in the classroom and have insufficient learning engagement in online portion. It indicates there exists a lack of clear communication and feedback mechanisms between teachers and students in the online learning process. As was expressed by Teacher Gong in the semi-structured interview, “In my course, students study a pre-class micro-learning for each unit. While the self-study micro-lessons only take about 10 minutes, students may spend more than 10 minutes” (Gong, SI). Teacher Hai also encountered a similar challenge, pointing out that “some students do not complete the learning task that I assigned online and I have to remind them again and again” (Hai, SI).

### **4.2. Findings of RQ2: Strategies to Facilitate Students’ Effective Learning Experience**

Students are significant in the educational process and whether they can achieve effective learning can be a vital portion to the evaluation of the course. In order to improve students’ learning experience in blended learning of the English Extensive Reading Course in this current study, teachers have implemented specific strategies, including setting up clear course objectives, injecting materials from diverse resources and organizing appealing course activities.

#### **4.2.1. Establishing Clear Course Objectives**

Teaching objectives delineate the precise knowledge, abilities, and values that students should be capable of demonstrating upon completion of the learning experience. A good establishment of teaching objectives in a course set up for EFL students should focus on students. Consequently,

when formulating the teaching objectives of an English Extensive Reading Course in blended learning environment, teachers initially take students' needs into consideration. Teacher Zhang expressed that "students are the center in this course and thus we should make sure the objectives of this course should be in accordance with their specific conditions" (Zhang, SI). Additionally, teachers also take account the features of English Extensive Reading Course, involving in its practicality, humanity and communication. As was expressed by Teacher Hai, "This course focuses on language training, mainly for students to master the skills to appreciate different types of reading genres and thus enlarge their vocabulary and further improve their overall language ability" (Hai, SI).

#### 4.2.2. Injecting Materials from Diverse Resources

The trend of incorporating online resources and multimedia materials into teaching has been facilitated by the advancement of technology. It helps instructors improve the effectiveness of their instruction and enhance the digital learning skills and information literacy of students. In order to address the unique learning requirements of each student, enhance their interest in learning, and develop their comprehensive English reading skills, teachers integrate knowledge from a variety of resources into the blended learning of the English Extensive Reading Course. These resources involve academic databases, e-book resources, MOOCs and movies.

Teachers initially employed academic databases acquired by the university, such as VIP and CNKI, to evaluate academic papers and research reports associated with the English Extensive Reading Course. These resources can offer comprehensive analyses of the language acquisition, teaching methods, and literacy theories. According to Teacher Gong, "When I teach reading strategies and reading skills, I always use some important empirical research papers" (Gong, SI). Secondly, teachers suggest classic English e-books from a variety of platforms that cover a variety of genres and topics. They assign reading assignments and facilitate online discussions in accordance with the course's progress and the requirements of the students. In Teacher Tian's point of view, "When studying the literature reading module, students are arranged to read the e-version of *Pride and Prejudice* and discuss the literary value of the work in the

light of the relationship between the characters in the book and the background of the times, so as to enrich their literary literacy" (Tian, SI). Thirdly, instructors prioritize MOOC resources when selecting online resources, as they are crucial to modern education. Teacher Bai always depended on the foreign language learning websites in China and abroad, expressing that "MOOC I choose covers the fine courses of China's fine universities, as well as multimedia resources" (Bai, SI). Fourthly, educators choose suitable English films and documentaries, believing that students can gain exposure to authentic language environments and cultural background knowledge through the viewing of these materials. As was stated by Teacher Zhang, "I always selected suitable English films and documentaries. My students love it" (Zhang, SI).

#### 4.2.3. Organizing Appealing Course Activities

The organization of various course activities plays an essential role in the teaching and learning process of blended English Extensive Reading Course. Educators employ organization of course activities as a pedagogical method for instructing the blended English Extensive Reading Course. In this phase, they judiciously selected and organized course activities, regardless of whether they were conducted asynchronously or synchronously.

In asynchronous mode, the majority of teachers reported utilizing supportive digital tools such as annotated slides, interactive videos, online quizzes and discussion forums. They aim to enhance students' participation and focus and thereby foster students' engagement. "At the pre-class stage, I set up some learning tasks on the Ketangpai Platform, asking students to preview and understand in advance and have online discussions to prepare for classroom reading" (Tian, SI). Teacher Gong added "After the class, I put a specific question on the discussion board on Ketangpai Platform and asked my students to take part in the discussion in the forum" (Gong, SI). During synchronous class, various activities and tasks were designed to foster active learning and improve students' behavioral engagement. These activities included problem-solving tasks, case studies, role-playing exercises, group discussions and debates. As expressed by Teacher Zhang, "Students would engage in discussions on a topic or analyze a case in teams, then presenting their conclusions to the entire group (Zhang, SI).

### 4.3. Findings of RQ3: Teachers' Roles in Blended Learning of EERC

Teachers play a variety of roles in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course, which involve in central axis, helmsman, guider, observer, course designer and organizer, learning facilitator and instruction deliver. Among these various roles, three roles are mentioned frequently in the semi-structure interviews in this current study, which are demonstrated as course designer and organizer, learning facilitator and instruction deliver.

#### 4.3.1. Course Designer and Organizer

In a conventional blended educational framework, the teacher functions as the designer and organizer of the course, while the learner takes on the role of the receiver. In the blended English Extensive Reading Course in this current study, teachers' roles as course designers and organizers are multi-faceted and indispensable. By carefully integrating teaching resources, designing diverse learning activities, managing the learning process, and facilitating peer interaction and teacher-student interaction, teachers can effectively promote students' extensive reading ability, language proficiency, and critical thinking skills. As was asserted by Teacher Hai, "I have to design online pre-class activities, in-class activities and the effective feedback of post-class activities. In my opinion, it is very important for students, because it can help improve their ability" (Hai, SI). From Teacher Li's point of view, "Through well-designed classroom teaching activities, teachers complete the examination of students' online learning results, help students complete the consolidation and transformation of knowledge, and guide students to achieve higher-order learning" (Li, SI).

#### 4.3.2. Learning Facilitator

A significant role teachers undertake is learning facilitator, because they play vital part in encouraging students to participate in the course actively so that they can obtain effective learning experience. Based on this current study, teachers facilitate students by organizing various class activities such as group discussion and reading workshop, and encouraging students through various methods and strategies including providing incentives and building a supportive community. As was mentioned by Teacher Li, "the role of teachers is not only to impart knowledge, but more importantly to stimulate stu-

dents' learning motivation" (Li, SI). Teacher Zhang expressed that "I often organize discussion in the class and workshop after class. I think it is helpful to encourage their learning enthusiasm" (Zhang, SI). In addition to the organization of various types of course activities, teachers also encourage students to engage in the learning process of blended English Extensive Reading Course. According to Teacher Hai, "I have different methods to encourage students both online and offline. The online grading mechanism is to assign points for a task well done, such as adding star cards. Offline as well, the grade is accumulated" (Hai, SI). Teacher Gong expressed that "I encourage students to share their reading experiences, difficulties, and insights" (Gong, SI).

#### 4.3.3. Instruction Deliver

Apart from the two roles mentioned above, teachers also play a role of delivering instructions to students in classroom learning as well as in online learning of the blended English Extensive Reading Course. When giving classes in this blended course, teachers always ask students questions to identify whether they can understand the course content in blended English Extensive Reading Course. Additionally, when organizing discussions, teachers always center on specific questions. By anticipating students' needs and providing timely information and assistance, direct instruction can help the learning community achieve the learning outcomes. In line with Teacher Gong, she always "looks through the passage in depth, analyze the key points and difficulties of the reading materials, and prepare a series of questions to improve students' understanding in the process of reading" (Gong, SI). In order to promote students' engagement in the learning process and obtain better understanding of the course content in blended English Extensive Reading Course, teacher always focus on specific questions when organizing various types of discussions, such as online discussion, group discussion and debate. According to Teacher Zhang, "in order to provide students with abilities to improve their critical thinking ability, I organized a group discussion, guiding students to discuss deeply of the passage they learned" (Zhang, SI).

## 5. Discussion

This study employs a qualitative research method to provide valuable insights and comprehensive knowledge re-



garding teachers' teaching experience, strategies adopted by teachers to promote students' learning experience and teachers' roles in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course. Discussion on these themes will be conducted in this section.

### 5.1. Teachers' Teaching Experience in Blended Learning of EERC

Over the past decade, blended learning has seen significant transformations due to advancements in technology<sup>[40]</sup>. These innovations have also led to disruptions in teaching and learning<sup>[41]</sup>. In this study, teachers revealed barriers to integrating blended learning into the teaching of English Extensive Reading Course, including reduced teacher-student interaction, challenging task of teaching materials selection and insufficient online engagement. The issues mainly arise from two factors, specifically the perspectives of teachers and students, which can be supported by previous studies<sup>[14, 17–20, 42–44]</sup>.

From the teachers' aspect, they are confronted with the challenge of how to select and inject proper materials in the process of teaching. In the realm of blended learning, teachers and learners have the opportunity to access not only the courses and instructional materials provided by textbooks, but also a vast array of multimedia learning resources available on the Internet. This allows for personalized learning depending on the available resources. Thus, curriculum development should not solely focus on creating the "text curriculum" (such as teaching plans, syllabus, and textbooks), but should also prioritize the development of an experiential curriculum that allows learners to actively engage and experience the material<sup>[42]</sup>.

From the students' aspect, they are faced with reduced interactive engagement with teachers as well as peers and insufficient online engagement in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course. Initially, in a blended learning setting, students experience a sense of isolation due to limited opportunities for classroom engagement with both teachers and peers<sup>[43]</sup>. Furthermore, certain courses suffer from inadequate design and implementation in the blended context and thus students are unable to actively participate in the blended learning process and fail to acquire a fulfilling educational experience<sup>[44]</sup>. These issues have motivated scholars with an interest in blended learning to carry out investigations in

the field of blended learning<sup>[14, 17–20]</sup>.

### 5.2. Strategies to Facilitate Students' Learning Experience in Blended Learning of EERC

This study proposed three strategies teachers can adopt in addressing various challenges that arise in blended learning of the English Extensive Reading Course to improve students' learning experience, including setting up clear course objectives, injecting course materials from diverse resources and organizing appealing course activities. All these three strategies play vital roles in promoting students' learning engagement in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course.

Teachers face challenges when designing course objectives in the context of blended learning and the design and organization of the course, which precedes the actual teaching, is crucial for achieving success in a blended course<sup>[45]</sup>. To guarantee students receive a productive learning experience in blended learning, teachers must carefully set up the course objectives and take students' individual need into considerations, which can be supported by past studies<sup>[46, 47]</sup>. Recently, educational institutions have been adopting instructional design formats and employing instructional design professionals to improve the structural support provided to their teaching staff<sup>[46]</sup>. As a result, when designing the course, the instructors should have the capacity to create course objectives that are clear and suitable for students. The combination of these qualities, together with instructors who actively engage and encourage dynamic discussions, has been determined to be the most dependable indicators of course effectiveness and the educational experience of learners. The design and organization of a course are essential in enabling meaningful discourse and delivering direct education<sup>[47]</sup>.

Based on this current study, teachers injected various materials from various resources, centering on both offline teaching materials and online teaching materials, which was similar with the findings of the previous studies. It was asserted that the coursebook has become a ubiquitous element in English language instruction<sup>[48]</sup>, as it serves a beneficial function in the daily practice of English teaching and learning. In contrast to offline teaching materials, educators in this study regard MOOCs as superior among online resources, believing that MOOCs can enhance students' communica-

tion skills and community engagement, thereby facilitating knowledge exchange<sup>[49]</sup>.

In accordance with this current study, course activities can be considered as a vital section in English Extensive Reading Course in which teachers always deliver direction instructions to help students solve misconceptions. The remarks and inquiries made by the teacher, which are given as explicit instruction, possess considerable importance<sup>[50]</sup>. The teacher has a wide range of knowledge about resources that can be used to guide students in various activities. This means that numerous sorts of course activities can be incorporated into the blended learning process<sup>[51]</sup>.

### 5.3. Teachers' Roles in Blended Learning of EERC

The study identified that teachers play a variety of roles in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course, involving in central axis, helmsman, guider, observer, transmitter, designer, organizer and facilitator, among which course designer and organizer, learning facilitator and instruction deliver are regarded as the most significant.

The process of curriculum design encompasses various elements, such as developing curriculum materials, establishing course objectives, determining course outcomes and choosing subjects and activities<sup>[52]</sup>. In the designing process of the course, teachers should employ specific tactics to guarantee the course is engaging for students, hence facilitating effective learning. Additionally, teachers can supply precise explanations by utilizing proper methods, such as sharing personal insights or delivering mini-lectures. After establishing the curriculum and procedures, it is crucial to impose time constraints. This entails establishing unambiguous deadlines and formulating precise course timetables. In addition, it is advisable to create schedules for collaborative project tasks<sup>[9]</sup>. The choice of media in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course is essential for sustaining student engagement, which is a crucial teaching technique that promotes interaction and feedback<sup>[53]</sup>. The construction of netiquette entails the development of prescribed norms for proper conduct in blended situations<sup>[54]</sup>.

Additionally, this study indicated that teachers should serve as learning facilitator in the blended learning process. This discovery is confirmed by Simanjuntak et al.<sup>[55]</sup>, demonstrating that lecturers have the ability to assume the roles of

mentors and discussion partners in the context of blended learning. Different from other blended course, English Extensive Reading Course possesses its own characteristics and features. It is a mandatory course designed for students learning English as a foreign language, focusing on practicality, humanity, and communication, with the goal of developing students' reading skills, fostering logical thinking abilities, increasing their interest in reading, and expanding their vocabulary<sup>[7]</sup>. Due to these characteristics, it is imperative for teachers to support students throughout the entire educational process in order to cultivate their practical skills, empathy, and communication abilities. Unlike the course design and organization handled by the teacher in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course, the facilitation part requires the instructor to work together with the learners' community<sup>[56]</sup>. The facilitating process not only enables but also promotes the formation of individual significance, while at the same time impacting and confirming shared comprehension<sup>[57]</sup>. In order to enhance students' satisfaction with blended English Extensive Reading Course, teachers should promote conversations and exchanges, as well as offer prompt feedback. The facilitating strategies involve integrating real-life experiences into teaching in the discussion forum, replying to student posts with prepared discussion responses, and addressing any confusion about the material<sup>[58]</sup>.

Furthermore, this study indicated that teachers possess the role of instruction deliver. Teachers, regardless of the environment, have the responsibility of providing clear and direct education that utilizes their expertise in the subject matter and teaching skills<sup>[59]</sup>. The instructor fulfills a crucial and esteemed function in delivering information and asking questions to both the entire class and individual students. Instructors can enhance the discussion by directing attention to particular concepts or information that are crucial for understanding or furthering the acquisition of knowledge<sup>[60]</sup>.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper highlights the perceptions of blended learning in English Extensive Reading Course from the perspectives of four teachers who are responsible for English Extensive Reading Course teaching at a university in Northwest

China. The study revealed that teachers serve as various roles in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course, among which course designer and organizer, learning facilitator and instruction deliver are regarded as the most significant. Additionally, this paper reveals challenges brought about by the integration of blended learning in the teaching of English Extensive Reading Course. From the teachers' aspect, they are confronted with the challenge of how to select and inject proper materials in the process of teaching and from the students' aspect, they are faced with reduced interactive engagement with teachers as well as peers and insufficient online engagement in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course. In order to promote students' learning experience in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course, this paper proposes three strategies teachers can adopt in addressing various challenges in blended learning of the English Extensive Reading Course, including establishing clear course objectives, injecting materials from diverse resources and organizing appealing course activities.

## Author Contributions

All authors have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work, including but not limited to Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Writing—Original Draft, and Writing—Review & Editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## Funding

This work received no external funding.

## Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

## Informed Consent Statement

All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were guaranteed and participants' participation was completely voluntary.

## Data Availability Statement

Data will be made available on request.

## Acknowledgments

The authors appreciate the editors and all reviewers for their comments and suggestions. The authors also thank the people who patiently participated in the study.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Appendix A

### The Interview Protocol

#### Introduction

1. Greet the participant and clarify the purpose of the interview.
2. Guarantee confidentiality and explain the consent form.
3. Introduce the structure of the interview.

#### Section 1: Perception of Teaching Experience (RQ1)

1. How long have you been teaching English Extensive Reading Courses, and how do you perceive the integration of blended learning into English Extensive Reading Course?
2. What are the opportunities brought by the integration of blended learning into English Extensive Reading Course? How do you seize the opportunities?
3. What are the biggest difficulties and challenges you have encountered when teaching English Extensive Reading Course in the blended learning environment? How do you overcome the difficulties and challenges?
4. What are the differences in students' learning outcomes between traditional and blended-learning-based English Extensive Reading Course? What factors do you think contributed to these differences?
5. How do you think your own teaching style has adapted to the blended English Extensive Reading Course?

## Section 2: Strategies to Facilitate Students' Learning Experience (RQ2)

1. What specific teaching strategies do you adopt to promote students' engagement in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course?
2. When selecting reading materials for this blended course, what criteria do you use to ensure they meet students' diverse needs and levels?
3. How do you design learning activities in both online and offline settings to improve students' learning experience in English Extensive Reading Course?
4. What feedback mechanisms do you establish to help students better understand their progress and areas for improvement in the blended English Extensive Reading Course?
5. In your opinion, what technological tools or resources are most beneficial for enhancing students' learning experience in the blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course, and how do you integrate them into teaching?

## Section 3: Teachers' Roles (RQ3)

1. How do you perceive your roles in blended learning of English Extensive Reading Course?
2. Compared with the traditional English Extensive Reading classroom, in what ways do you think your role has changed in blended learning environment?
3. What do you think is the most crucial role of teachers in the blended learning of English Extensive Reading? To better play this role, what kind of training or support do you hope to receive?

## Closing

Thank the participant for their participation.

Provide contact information for further questions.

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