

## **Towards a Principled Approach to Blended Learning: Investigating Moodle-Based English-Medium Classes for Chinese University Students**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigated the utilization of various types of Moodle course materials (including resources and activities) by 190 Chinese students from five classes of an English-medium instruction (EMI) course, their views regarding the utilization, and their academic achievements. It aimed at finding out the types of Moodle course materials positively associated with students' learning achievements, and identifying the specific features and practices with the course materials that might contribute to the learning effectiveness. Data were collected from an in-class survey, focus group interviews, and retrieval of Moodle activity logs and grade reports. Of the types of Moodle course materials that were found to have students' access frequencies significantly correlated with their course total scores, comments from focus-group data that were related to the effective utilization were analysed using an inductive approach. Then the emergent themes were mapped on to the headings "appropriate resources and tools," "integrative multimodal tasks," and "sustainability beliefs and practices" for establishing guiding principles for designing blended-learning content courses for second/foreign language learners. This article suggests that EMI course

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instructors consider offering learning scaffolding through various means and providing supports when students are interacting with the learning management system, in particular when they are dealing with assessments.

*Keywords:* learning management system, English medium instruction, post-secondary education, foreign language learner, teaching/learning strategies

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The rapid expansion of English-medium academic courses/programmes at various educational levels in English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) contexts over the past two decades has made the engagement with *English-medium instruction* (EMI) a major research topic in the field of English language teaching (Macaro et al., 2018; Pecorari & Malmstrom, 2018). EMI involves an educational setting where EFL learners are expected to use English for instructional purposes to learn a content subject other than English and where English is expected to be learned in an incidental way (Pecorari & Malmstrom, 2018). Some instructional accommodations may occur in an EMI classroom to guarantee learners' comprehension and understanding of content (Aguilar, 2017), which may include using a combination of digital tools online or face-to-face to scaffold English language learners' acquisition of content and academic English language (Andrei, 2017; Hernandez-Nanclares & Jimenez-Munoz, 2016).

*Blended learning*, as a combination of face-to-face and online teaching (Sharma, 2010), could enable greater versatility and flexibility in EMI teaching and learning. The delivery of the online part of a blended learning course typically involves a Learning Management System (LMS), such as Moodle or Blackboard, and comprises the use of synchronous and asynchronous electronic tools (Sharma, 2010). Whereas large scale studies of blended learning courses have been conducted over a range of second/foreign language programs, such as, lower-division language programs (Anderson, 2018), English-for-Academic-Purposes, English-for-Specific-Purposes and general English programs (Tomlinson & Whittaker, 2013); relatively little work has been done on examining blended learning in EMI courses for EFL learners. We propose that models for blended language learning can serve as a basis for similar work in EMI.

Guiding principles or pedagogical con-