

## The Application of Blended Learning Mode into the Course *Comprehensive English*

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**Abstract:** This paper describes and discusses experimentation with the use of blended learning in teaching *comprehensive English* course. Previous iterations of the course in a traditional lecture and learning mode had seen a decline in student attendance and a fall in student achievement at the higher grade levels. A blended learning via using mobile teaching app *super star* in the course was employed to facilitate students learning motivation and cultivate their language proficiency, cross-cultural awareness and critical thinking ability with a wider time and space. The experiment was implemented in two classes for 10 weeks. Student feedback indicated that the changes to the delivery method were received positively, although some questions do remain concerning levels of student engagement. The findings of this research indicated that the use of mobile app in *comprehensive English* is more effective than other learning modes, which can be promoted usefully to other fields or disciplines, especially as more and more courses take up blended learning.

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Blended Learning and Comprehensive English

The concept of “Blended Learning”, in foreign research, first developed in 1960s, but it did not take its current form until the late 1990s. Initially, the term “Blended Learning” was vague. Since 21<sup>st</sup> century, it has been focused on by so many researchers, in which the 5R (Right) definition proposed by Harvey Singh (2003) and S. Gaither Reed, trainers of ASTD, has been highly recognized. They believe that blended learning is a learning method that optimizes learning results by adopting multiple delivery methods to reduce educational expenses. In 2006, the term “Blended Learning” became more concrete with the publication of the first *Handbook of Blended Learning* by American Mooc experts Bonk and Graham. They defined blended learning as the combination of face-to-face teaching and computer-aided online learning. Looking back on the development of blended learning, foreign researchers focused more on blended learning mode mainly through enterprise training at the end of the 20th century. For example, Thomson used blended learning to carry out relevant applications and practices in enterprise training, and IBM and General Electric used blended learning for employees or manager training. In the 21st century, blended learning mode has gradually been introduced into the research practice of universities. For example, the National Open University of South Korea conducted adaptive training for freshmen with “Blended Learning” mode through experiments and found that it can effectively help students to integrate into the new environment and quickly get involved in learning.

In China, the research on blended learning mode was first introduced by professor He Kekang from Beijing normal university (2003), who proposed that blended learning is to combine the advantages of traditional learning mode with the advantages of e-learning. Teachers should play a leading role in guiding, enlightening and monitoring the teaching process, and students’ initiative, enthusiasm and creativity as the main body of the learning process should be fully reflected. Subsequently, blended learning mode has been widely used in education teaching in China. Professor Li Jiahou believes that teachers and students should skillfully apply various teaching modes, strategies, methods, technologies and media in teaching activities according to teaching needs. And then, Professor Li Kedong from South China normal university started his research from the perspective of information transfer channel, instructing people how to choose media or media

combination to achieve the highest learning effect at the lowest cost. He proposed the design steps of blended learning and mainly illustrated how to choose channels and media.

In the past decade, it has also found that blended learning mode has increasingly formed a shape in the research of our country via researching the key word “blended learning” on CNKI from 2008 to 2018. The number of academic papers of blended learning mode showed a trend: especially in the past four years, the growth rate of the study became faster, and became a hot topic in teaching research.

The course *comprehensive English*, as the basic compulsory course for freshmen and sophomores of English major, is to cultivate the students’ language competence, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability. At present, the main teaching method is mainly a traditional mode, in which teaching contents were taken more accounts through students’ glossary learning, grammatical analysis, text analyzing. In this way, the deeper level of students’ cultural learning and critical thinking and language application were thus ignored. This traditional learning mode has restricted students’ learning ability, and cannot adapt to the development of foreign language teaching informatization in the new era of tertiary education.

## **1.2 Mobile Teaching APP Super Star**

As for the application of blended learning, online learning needs a functional technology to support. In previous researches, there were diversity of modern information technology applied in English teaching, often include software installed in computer. Teachers should take the computer from online to offline teaching. Inconvenient as it was, the students still took the class as a traditional way and they merely focused on their course in class. Meanwhile, they always use their mobile phones in class secretly. In order to make the course *Comprehensive English* more eye-catching than the other apps in their mobile phones, *Super Star*, a very easy-operation and convenient Mobile teaching APP is an ideal one. With its flexible, convenient features, *Super Star* can be easily installed in both the teacher and students mobile phones that automatically collect students’ data and measures academic progress, providing teachers and students data. Often, tests are automatically scored, providing instantaneous feedback. Students’ logins and work times are also measured to ensure accountability. Compared with the other teaching platform, it takes priority in the function such as attendance, vote, select quick answer, discussion, test, live video, survey, group task, and rate etc. which can be carried out in traditional classroom. It can also be taken anywhere at any time, teachers cannot correct the students exercises and papers at a given time and a given place. A great resources base is also an advantage. Moreover, the interaction between the teacher and students can also be closely intensified from online to offline class. At present, there are about 31 million *Super Star* users in China. In the first Mobile Teaching Competition of Jiangxi province, more than 20 colleges and universities in the province participated in the course competition through using the app of *super star* and achieved good learning results. Under the background of Big data, mobile teaching APP has become an effective way of changing the students’ traditional learning mode.

## **1.3 Research aims and questions**

Blended learning mode applied in tertiary English courses has drawn a great attention in China. As a tertiary EFL teacher in China, the researcher began to develop some research questions and formulate a conceptual framework for the research .It was based on her long years of teaching experiences and her exploring minds in new educational technology. Considering insufficient teaching resources and utilization rate of *comprehensive English* course, the researcher hopes to solve the problems by implementing blended learning mode, optimizing the use of teaching resources, and making online learning become more freely to organize teaching activities in face-to-face teaching via mobile teaching app *super star*, so as to improve teaching efficiency. In addition, through the classroom application of the model supported by *super star*, she aims to change the traditional “teacher-centered” classroom teaching mode coupled with English major students’ individual differences and let them enter the participatory learning experience rather than single teaching form. As a result, they will enjoy independent space, take advantage of their

initiative and creativity to its full and become the main participants and promoters in the learning activities in which their self-learning ability will be also improved.

Reviewing the literature and reflecting upon her skillful operation of *super star* and many years of teaching experiences in this course, the researcher developed assumptions that it has a better teaching effect of comprehensive English course by using mobile teaching app *super star* than the traditional or other teaching modes. This enables her to consider how to activate the students to make full use of this App *super star* in terms of language competence, teaching strategies and effectiveness, which further motivate them for their learning habits. Another question is what the impacts of the experiences on both the teacher and students are.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Participants

Participants came from English major class and translation class of the same grade 2017 in Nan Chang institute of technology. There were 51 students (5 males and 47 females) in Experiment Class, and 67 students (17 males and 50 females) in control Class.

Students in the two classes were new to mobile teaching app *super star*. Therefore, it was presumed that their backgrounds did not exert validity-threatening difference in the study. A survey-purposed needs analysis of blended learning designed by the research groups, which consists of 32 optional questions and one open question. And meanwhile, Independent-sample t-test of their entrance examination showed that their mean scores did not exhibit significant disparity ( $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, they could be treated as approximately identical in language proficiency. Then, the experiment class used the blended learning mode in terms of mobile teaching app *super star* and ran through the whole teaching process of comprehensive English course. The control class was taught in a traditional physical classroom.

### 2.2 Design

This research combines the actual English proficiency of grade 17 English majors (including college entrance examination score + freshmen entrance score + final score of the first academic year) to design a blended online and offline learning model. Based on the *theoretical model of investment structure in online learning*, students' social interaction in the process of investment (the interaction between teachers and students, peer interaction and peer mutual) are supposed to take into consideration to promote students' positive emotional engagement (the sense of belonging, self-efficacy, self-worth), so as to promote students' cognitive (metacognitive learning strategies) and behavioral inputs (time and concentration, finishing the homework and getting good grades). In the process of offline face-to-face learning, students' social interaction input should be considered to promote the other three aspects of investment, so that students can fully devote themselves to learning, achieve satisfactory learning results and obtain positive learning experience.

The main design of the research includes three steps: pre-class (online independent learning), in-class (face-to-face learning) and after-class (online group learning). The features of Comprehensive English course lies in its integration of basic knowledge of language. So, before class, the experiment students would be assigned online learning tasks include listening to audio, watching video, related preparatory work to the text and important language points of discussions which can effectively save class time. While in the offline class teaching activities, it mainly includes: knowledge and understanding online learning (check), analysis (content supplement and extension) and application (group discussion, practice, testing), reflection and themes learned from the lesson (reflection), evaluation (formative and summative evaluation), finally returned to the online and offline practice project, such as role plays, discussions, exercises, writing, etc. (Tang lei's blended teaching mode, 2016).

### 2.3 Procedures

The experiment was implemented between September and December, 2018, i.e. the fall semester

of the school year 2018-2019. Before the experiment started, the survey of Needs analysis was carried out. And the Entrance examination scores and academic year scores were put into Spss to have a data analysis.

Afterwards, the experiment initiated and lasted approximately 10 weeks .The researcher taught experiment class: English major class 2 in grade 17 and the other taught control class: translation major class 1in grade 17. The two teachers were generally very cooperative, and the researcher was allowed to make a live video of five lessons to observe whether the proper treatment was implemented or not. When there were problems about the treatment, modifications were made with no considerable delay. When the duration of the experiment closed, the survey of satisfaction and post-tests (the final exam) and the motivation scale were carried out.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1 Survey findings

First of all, the survey revealed that all the participants strongly agreed to change the traditional mode of teaching and learning comprehensive English course. They believe that blended learning will give them a better learning mode to learn this course. 85% of the participants agree to use mobile phones to learn the course. Most of them have the habit of using mobile phones, which creates a condition for implementing the experiment. Of all the participants, 55.5% would like to improve their critical thinking ability while 43.5% need to improve their cross-cultural ability. It has a close association with language and that cross-cultural and critical thinking ability can play an important role in EFL teaching. However, 97.4 % of the participants found it challenging in explaining culture-specific and critical thinking issues in EFL teaching due to the lack of their personal cross-cultural experiences in English speaking countries and also the higher level of language proficiency. As for the app of *super star*, 95% of the participants knew it. Thus, the experiment can be carried out without so many difficulties. These quotes are from the questionnaire data of needs analysis.

#### 3.2 Effects on using mobile teaching APP *super star*

As for the satisfaction of this course, most experiment class students believe that it has a great impact on their study of this course in terms of their using mobile teaching App *super star*. Treatment was effective in participants' proficiency development in listening, speaking, reading and writing as well as their cross-cultural ability and critical thinking ability. During the research, the teacher set an activity of attendance for 28 times, the rate was 96.1% which is higher than the control class. This activity saves a lot of time for the teacher and makes students more active in attending the class. On the other hand, as is shown on the statistics in *super star*, the teacher can trace the accessing of the students into the App. They can also be guided in adjusting their learning styles and habits with the help of the teacher simultaneously. After using this App, the participants' interests were greatly aroused. They changed their previous study habits and earned many credits from online to offline mainly through attendance, quick answer, vote, discussion and watching course videos, finishing tasks etc. Their credits and comprehensive scores would be taken as a part of their final examination, which activate them to use it well and learn more. In the post test (final examination), the average scores of the experiment class is higher than that of the control class, which shows the blended learning with using *super star* has a significant effect on this course. Moreover, some comments of this new learning mode in this course from the students are as it follows:

I like Comprehensive English most because of the lovely teacher. With the use of Super Star, the class is filled with a lot of fun and diverse knowledge, and the participation of students can be viewed directly. What's more, teachers can assess students in different ways and communicate with them more. How nice!!!

From Li Zihang in Class 2 grade 2017

Comprehensive English obtains a lot of knowledge, such as grammar, reading and translation.

Superstar provide many study resources for us. We can use It to read the class knowledge and search for some good masterworks. With the use of this APP, We can communicate with our teachers more. In a word, I like it.

From Zhou Neng in Class 2 Grade 2017

This is the first time to use this software for learning, I think it is very helpful for learning, not only can we learn professional English knowledge, the teacher will also pass on some extracurricular knowledge, can better increase our knowledge.

From Jiang Ping in Class 2 grade 2017

As is shown in the above comments, the English majors think it an effective way to motivate them to learn this course and they can acquire more resources from this app. Those who get high scores in this course can be prized and get a certificate which makes them more active than the control class.

Compared with the same level class, the experiment class post test shows the following results:

There is significant difference in Final Examination of the fall semester in the two classes ( $F=8.976$ ,  $5.436$ ,  $\text{Sig.} = .000$ ,  $.001$ ). Since the comparison clearly shows the experiment class which makes a higher scores than those of the control class, it helps to prove that the blended learning mode is a feasible and suitable mode for implementing in this course.

#### 4. Conclusion

Blended learning mode applied in comprehensive English course is more effective in terms of motivation enhancement, language proficiency development of the students, when it matches students' learning habits and learning styles. More specifically, learning online or offline as blended learning mode can make a good interaction together, rather than each of them alone, contribute to language proficiency development, cross cultural awareness and critical thinking ability . This is good proof that students' feelings on blended learning mode and evaluation of their own learning effect can be presented in the form of notes in *super star*.

Blended learning model via mobile APP technology makes a construction of autonomy and individuality, creates a collaborative learning environment due to its advantages of limitlessness of online participation. In current case, it has changed the domain of the teacher in traditional classroom. Teacher becomes a guide and follows the rule of "learning by doing" (Xia Jimei) in having this course, whatever online or offline. The prominent characteristics of both independent and collaborative learning create a communication space for students.

In short, using mobile teaching app in the course of comprehensive English is a very effective mode. It can be promoted to other courses of English majors and non-English majors and even to other colleges and universities. However, some deficiencies still exist in this research, such as time-consuming and technology-reliance. Further researches will be focused more on them.

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