

Research on Blended Teaching Ability of College English Teachers

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Abstract

In the context of “Internet+”, college English teachers urgently need to improve their blended teaching ability. The purpose of this research is to deeply understand the current situation of college English teachers’ attitudes and abilities towards blended teaching and the factors that affect the improvement of college English teachers’ blended teaching ability, and to discover methods and approaches that can effectively improve college English teachers’ ability of blended teaching. First, the essay introduces the development of blended teaching and learning and the current situation of researches at home and abroad. In the second part, the essay introduces the difficulties and uniqueness of this research. Theoretical basis and methodology are discussed in detail respectively in part 3 and part 4, followed by implications in part 5.

Keywords

Blended Teaching, College English, Teachers’ Professional Development

1. The Uniqueness and Difficulties of This Research

1.1. The Shortcomings of the Current Research on Blended Teaching Home and Abroad

Although the research on blended teaching at home and abroad has become more and more mature, the author still finds that in the research of blended teaching, some researchers focus on teaching mode, teaching design, curriculum construction, and evaluation of teaching effects. Among them, the teaching mode and teaching design are the specific practice of the teacher in teaching, based on the teacher’s understanding of the curriculum and students; the curriculum construction requires the teacher to combine the teaching materials and the content of the curriculum, the teaching process and the characteristics of the students. Therefore, the effect of the blended teaching model depends largely on

the teacher's attitude and ability level.

Although in the second stage of the development of blended teaching, the core role of teachers has attracted the attention of researchers, it is more only to improve the level of information technology, and it does not put the improvement of the comprehensive ability of blended teaching as the focus of research. At present, there are very few researches on the blended teaching ability of teachers at home and abroad, and even fewer researches on the blended teaching ability of college English teachers.

1.2. From a New Perspective of Foreign Language Teachers' Abilities, Further Research on College English Blended Teaching

In blended teaching, the concept of "interaction" is very important, which means that teachers must not only guide teacher-student cooperation, student-student cooperation, but also guide students to cooperate with information technology. Therefore, as a bridge connecting courses and students, the important role of teachers is beyond doubt. The teacher's blended teaching ability level determines the final teaching effect. However, the existing research results show that teachers' blended teaching ability is generally insufficient, especially in the lack of preparation in teaching methods (Vygotsky, 1978).

Compared with other courses, college English has more particularities: 1) College English courses are public basic courses, facing students of different majors, different disciplines, and different learning styles, with a wide audience and far-reaching influence. 2) College English aims to improve students' ability to use English and cultivate students' English cultural literacy, which is of great responsibility. 3) In recent years, college English courses have been reforming.

2. The Development of Blended Teaching and Current Research Situation at Home and Abroad

With the continuous development of information technology such as the Internet, cloud technology, and mobile communications, teaching activities are developing in the direction of digitization and intelligence. Since the 1990s, after more than 20 years of development of mixed teaching at home and abroad, whether researchers, teaching practitioners, governments and educational institutions have basically reached a consensus: blended teaching will become "The New Normal Mode" (Porter et al., 2014) in the future of education. Blended teaching has gone through three stages of development.

2.1. Technology Application Stage (Late 1990s-2006): The Core Status of Technology

The most representative research on the definition of blended teaching at this stage is the definition of the Sloan Consortium: "Blended teaching is a combination of face-to-face teaching and online teaching, combining two separate historically independent teaching mode: traditional face-to-face teaching and on-

line learning. That is, a certain proportion of online teaching and face-to-face teaching are combined in the teaching content.” (Allen & Seaman, 2003) The blended teaching at this stage is mainly understood as a new kind of learning methods, with emphasis on the core role of technology in teaching and learning (Bonk et al., 2009).

2.2. Technology Integration Stage (2007-2013): The Core Status of Teachers

At this stage, blended teaching is no longer just a transitional stage between on-line teaching and offline teaching, but as a new teaching model that has attracted the attention of domestic and foreign researchers. The Sloan Alliance first updated its definition of blended teaching, clarifying that only “30% - 79% of the teaching content adopts online teaching” can be called blended teaching (Jones, 2006). Means et al. further defined it as “In the teaching content included in the assessment part, more than 25% use online teaching” (Wasoh, 2016). Definition by Bliuc et al. (2007): Blended learning describes a new learning method, which realizes the combination of face-to-face (on-site) interaction and online interaction between students and students, students and teachers, and students and resources.

2.3. “Internet+” Stage (After 2013-Present): The Core Status of Students

The concept of blended teaching has evolved from “a blend of online teaching and face-to-face teaching” to a “teaching situation based on the combination of mobile communication equipment, online learning environment and classroom discussion” (Smith, 2017). More and more scholars have pointed out that blended teaching is not a simple blend of technology, but to create a truly highly participatory and personalized learning experience for students (Goodyear & Dudley, 2015; Xiao, 2016). The emphasis of the blended teaching concept at this stage is “student-centered”. Goodyear emphasized: The so-called hybrid is not only a mixture of face-to-face teaching and online teaching, but also a mixture of teaching and tutoring in a “student-centered” learning environment.

3. Theoretical Basis

3.1. Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivism was first proposed by Swiss psychologist Piaget (Piaget, 1973) in the 1960s. He believes that children gradually construct knowledge of the external world through the interaction with the surrounding environment, so as to develop their own cognitive structure. This view that emphasizes the individual cognitive process is regarded as the main point of individual constructivism. Later, Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978) put forward the theory of social constructivism, emphasizing the role of “activity” and “cooperation” in the cognitive process, which is called social constructivism. In the context of “Internet+”, the development of information technology provides technical support for the ideas advocated by constructivism, making it a reality. Constructivism provides theo-

retical support and guidance for informatization teaching (Piaget, 1973). Whether it is individual constructivism or social constructivism, it emphasizes that knowledge is actively constructed by learners. Therefore, constructivism advocates learner-centered learning, emphasizes interaction, and emphasizes the creation of a learning environment that helps students construct meaning. Blended teaching is based on this concept. In blended teaching, the interaction between teachers and students, students and students has been greatly strengthened, which has a positive effect on promoting efficient classroom teaching, improving teaching quality and promoting students' independent learning. At present, one of the outstanding problems in college English course is students' passive learning, which means the poor enthusiasm and inability to meet the individual needs of students. Therefore, in the context of blended teaching, it is necessary to emphasize the guidance of constructivist theory which is very necessary to solve these outstanding issues.

3.2. Blended Teaching: A Combination of Multiple Teaching Concepts

With the continuous development of the traditional teaching model, its drawbacks began to show slowly. In order to make up for the shortcomings of traditional classroom teaching, online learning initially began to appear as a supplement to traditional teaching. However, whether it is traditional teaching or online teaching, a single teaching mode will have its own shortcomings. With the continuous updating of teaching models today, in the context of the era of "Internet+", a more efficient teaching model that can adapt to the trend has become the focus of more and more researchers and teachers. In view of this, a blended teaching that combines online learning and face-to-face teaching came into being, so blended teaching embodies the idea of seeking advantages and avoiding disadvantages and complementing each other's advantages. In the form of blended teaching, it is a combination of online and face-to-face teaching and learning. Compared with pure classroom teaching or pure online teaching, it is not only a different learning method, but also a different concept. Blended teaching embodies the spiral development of learning philosophy. It does not one-sidedly emphasize the application of online learning environment while ignoring traditional face-to-face teaching, nor does it one-sidedly emphasize students' focus while ignoring the leading role of teachers, or one-sided emphasis on certain learning theories (such as constructivist theory) while ignoring the guidance of other learning theories (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, the combination of multiple teaching concepts emphasized by the author here is not to limit the teaching mode, teaching method and teaching medium to a certain framework, but to regard mixed teaching as a continuous growth and flow process. All of the teaching choices should be based on the final learning effect of the students.

3.3. Blended Teaching: Teacher Competence Framework

In 2014, iNACOL (Powell et al., 2014) released a report focusing on the abilities

that teachers should possess in a blended learning environment. Before elaborating on the specific content of competence, the report first gave the definition of “ability”: the basic personal characteristics that are causally related to effective or excellent performance. Different from the skills and levels defined in previous studies that can be quantified based on certain standards, the “ability” here refers more to the “intangible” qualities that teachers should possess, such as motivation, thinking ability, values, knowledge, Teaching methods and strategies, etc. Based on this, the report divides the abilities of blended teaching teachers into four dimensions and further subdivides them into twelve specific abilities, as shown in **Table 1**.

With these theories, the essence of blended teaching will become clearer and clearer. At the same time, in the context of “Internet+”, the blended teaching abilities that teachers should possess also have more specific and specific content. This provides a solid theoretical foundation and framework system for further research.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Object

The research object of this project is college English teachers who are working in colleges and universities. The teachers who filled out the questionnaire have participated in the WeChat group of college English teaching and research and academic seminars nationwide, and they belong to the group that is more active in teaching and research activities.

4.2. Research Questions

1) What is the status quo of college English teachers’ attitudes and abilities towards blended teaching?

Table 1. Blend teaching competencies.

Domain	Blend Teaching Competencies
Domain 1: Mindsets	Competency 1: New vision
	Competency 2: Orientation toward change and improvement
Domain 2: Quality	Competency 1: Grit
	Competency 2: Transparency
	Competency 3: Cooperation
Domain 3: Adaptive Skills	Competency 1: Reflection
	Competency 2: Continuous improvement and innovation
	Competency 3: Communication
Domain 4: Technical Skills	Competency 1: Data practices
	Competency 2: Instructional strategies
	Competency 3: Management of blended learning experience
	Competency 4: Instructional tools

- 2) What are the factors that affect the improvement of college English teachers' blended teaching ability?
- 3) How to improve the blended teaching of college English teachers?

4.3. Research Tools and Data Collection

The choice of research tools serves for the research question. This research mainly includes two research tools, namely questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire can be used to measure behavior, attitude, and facts. These three aspects are all involved in this research: 1) College English teachers' attitude towards blended teaching is an attitude issue, and the status quo of ability preparation is a matter of fact; 2) Factors that affect teachers' blended teaching ability preparation include teacher beliefs, teachers' own factors and external factors such as platform conditions. The former is a question of attitude and the latter is a question of facts; 3) How to effectively help college English teachers prepare for blended teaching ability is a behavioral question. Therefore, this research uses the questionnaire method to investigate these contents. The questionnaire mainly uses multiple-choice questions and the Likert Scale to collect data. Compared with the extensiveness of the questionnaire method, the interview method is more purposeful and enlightening. The interview part of this research adopts a semi-structured interview method, which means that open-ended questions are set, but the interviews are adjusted in time according to the interviewee's answers to inspire the interviewee to give more answers. The overall design framework is shown in **Table 2**.

4.4. Content Design of Questionnaires and Interviews

Like research tools, the specific content of questionnaires and interviews also depends on the research question. Based on the previously proposed constructivist theory and guided by the framework of blended teaching teacher competence, the specific content of the questionnaires and interviews corresponding to each research question are as follows.

4.4.1. Survey of Teachers' Basic Information

Using questionnaire method, which will be shown in the form of multiple choice

Table 2. Design framework of the questionnaire.

Research Questions	Research Tools	Data Collection
1) What is the status quo of college English teachers' attitudes and abilities towards blended teaching?	Questionnaire	Interview
2) What are the factors that affect the improvement of college English teachers' blended teaching ability?	Questionnaire Interview	Interview Interview corpus collection
3) How to improve the blended teaching of college English teachers?	Questionnaire Interview	Interview Interview corpus collection

questions. The content of the questionnaire involves obtaining the personal information of the participants, such as gender, age, educational background, professional title, years of college English teaching, the type of university, and the type of college English courses. The questionnaire is shown in **Table 3**.

4.4.2. The Cognition and Attitudes of College English Teachers to Blended Teaching

Questionnaire method will be used, which will be shown in the form of multiple choice questions. The content involves whether you are willing to expand your own teaching horizons, whether you understand “blended teaching”, whether you have used the “blended teaching mode”, and whether you agree to apply the “blended teaching mode” to college English teaching. The questionnaire is shown in **Table 4**.

4.4.3. The Specific Content of College English Teachers’ Blended Teaching Ability

Questionnaire method will be shown in the form of multiple choice questions. The content involves what aspects should be included in the blended teaching ability, the specific content of the mentality, what qualities should be possessed, technical ability and adaptability, etc. (**Table 5**).

4.4.4. Factors Affecting the Improvement of College English Teachers’ Blended Teaching Ability

Questionnaire method and interview method will be used. The questionnaire

Table 3. Basic information of teachers.

1	Gender	A. Male B. Female
3	Title	A. prof. B. assistant prof. C. tutor
4	Years of college teaching	A. 0 - 5 years B. 6 - 10 years C. 11 - 15 years D. 15 - 20 years E. more than 20 years
5	degree	A. PH. D B. post graduate C. bachelor
6	College type	A. comprehensive university B. institute of technology C. teachers’ college D. medical university E. financial university F. other
7	Course you are teaching	A. writing B. listening C. reading D. speaking E. other _____

Table 4. Cognition and attitudes of teachers.

1	Are you willing to broaden your horizon in college English teaching?
2	Do you know blended learning?
3	Have you used the mode of blended learning?
4	Do you agree to apply blended learning into college English teaching?
5	Are you satisfied with the real effects of blended learning?

Table 5. Contents of blended teaching ability.

1	Which abilities should be involved in blended teaching?	A. mentality B. quality C. adaptive ability D. teleological ability E. other _____
2	Mentality should Include:	A. Updating teaching view B. orientation in innovation C. other _____
3	Quality should Include:	A. Perseverance B. transparency C. collaboration D. other _____
4	Adaptive ability should Include:	A. reflection B. reform and innovation C. communication D. other _____
5	Teleological ability Should include:	A. Digital collection ability B. processing ability C. teaching strategy D. management E. application of teaching tools F. other _____
6	Which ability is most important?	A. mentality B. quality C. adaptive ability D. teleological ability E. other _____
7	Which ability is most challenging?	A. mentality B. quality C. adaptive ability D. teleological ability E. other _____

method first appeared in the form of multiple-choice questions. The content involved four aspects of teaching ability, which aspect was the most important and most challenging. Then it will be shown in the form of quantitative questions. The teacher made a choice among five options: strongly disagree, disagree, uncertain, agree, and strongly agree, representing 1 to 5 points in turn. The content of the quantitative questions involves whether teachers should learn more and use multimedia information technology to improve teaching quality, whether teachers will organize student discussions and other activities in online and off-line courses, whether teachers can operate network platforms proficiently, and whether online and offline teaching content is clear. The division of labor, whether to record and analyze the online learning of students, whether to encourage students to learn cooperatively, whether there is a system for evaluating students' blended learning, etc.

The interview method will be shown in the form of open-ended questions. The content involves how to understand blended teaching, how to design college English courses to meet the needs of blended teaching, how to balance online and offline teaching in blended teaching, and how to truly achieve online On-line mixing, whether the teacher's own technical ability can meet the needs of mixed teaching, etc.

The questions are shown in **Table 6**.

4.4.5. How to Effectively Improve College English Teachers' Blended Teaching Ability

Questionnaire method and interview method will be used. The questionnaire method will be shown in the form of a quantitative table, and the content involves the operation of the online teaching platform, whether teachers regularly participate in lectures on teaching concepts, whether teachers are divided and cooperating, and teachers can solve technical problems in a timely manner.

The interview method will be shown in the form of open-ended questions, and the content involves whether teachers have questions and needs for blended teaching, and what kind of teaching and research activities they hope to participate in with blended teaching as the theme. The questions are as follows:

Table 6. Factors affecting teachers' blended teaching.

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- 1) How do you prepare for a blended learning course? For instance, do you use any resources to inform the development of the course?
 - 2) Do you prepare differently for an undergraduate versus a graduate level blended learning course? If so, how?
 - 3) How do you integrate the online portion of the course with the in-class portion of the course?
 - 4) How do you take student motivation into account when planning the course?
 - 5) Describe how opportunities for discussion in blended courses differ from the traditional (on site) courses you teach.
 - 6) What types of activities are completed online?
 - 7) What types of activities are completed in-class?
 - 8) How do you communicate with your students in this blended learning course?
 - 9) What is your response policy on student work (assignments and questions)?
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- 1) What are the challenges you face with the blended course or have faced in the past?
- 2) What will you do differently the next time you offer this blended course?
- 3) What advice would you give to other faculty members who are thinking about implementing a blended learning course?

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

5.1. The Shortcomings of the Current Research on Blended Teaching at Home and Abroad

After research, we found that after 20 years of development, the practice and research of blended teaching has gradually matured; blended teaching is generally favored and considered to be the main form of teaching in the future; the government and educational institutions have also given more attention, strategic and policy support to blended teaching. However, we have also found that existing research mainly focuses on the design and implementation of blended teaching and the evaluation of blended teaching, while less attention has been paid to teachers' blended teaching ability, and related current surveys are lacking. In order to ensure the success of blended teaching, it is not only necessary to understand the attitudes and abilities of teachers and students towards blended teaching, but also to help teachers and students prepare for blended teaching. The current research and practice in this area are even more lacking. Relatively speaking, relevant research and courses on online learning, student's ability preparation in distance learning environment (such as self-learning ability training) have been relatively mature, and these results can provide reference for

students' ability preparation in blended teaching environment. However, how to help teachers prepare for blended teaching is a problem that needs to be solved urgently. Whether from the perspective of preparation, design and implementation, support, or from the perspective of influencing factors, teachers' attitudes and ability preparation do have a direct and significant impact on the effectiveness of blended teaching. Therefore, there is an urgent need to strengthen research and practical courses that help teachers develop the models and methods of blended teaching ability.

5.2. Differences in Blended Teaching Ability of College Teachers (4 Domains)

On the whole, most of the sampled teachers already have the basic ability of informatization teaching, but the proportion of teachers with higher application level is low, especially the ability of teachers to innovate teaching models with the help of information technology, and the ability of informatization teaching research. There is still much room for improvement.

From the survey of the four domains, namely the awareness, literacy, ability, and research of the integration of information technology into teaching, teachers have a high sense of recognition for the necessity of carrying out teaching reforms in the information environment; teachers have basic skills to use information technology tools, and technology is no longer a barrier that restricts teachers from carrying out informatization teaching; teachers' insufficient ability to carry out effective teaching in the context of Internet+ education is still the core factor restricting the development of informatization teaching; teachers' understanding of curriculum teaching The research still remains at the level of lesson preparation and reflection in the face-to-face teaching environment, and lacks research capabilities in learning analysis, teaching optimization, and instant evaluation feedback based on online data, which has become a restrictive factor in the sustainable development of informatization teaching reform and innovation. On the whole, there is still a big gap between college teachers' informatization teaching ability and the goal of "in-depth integration of information technology and curriculum teaching" proposed by the state.

5.3. Teachers' Training on Blended Teaching and Professional Development

We should not only view blended teaching from the perspective of ability preparation, but also view it from the perspective of teachers' professional development. On the one hand, the ability of blended teaching will definitely become an indispensable part of the framework of future teachers' professional competence. Therefore, it is not only necessary to provide in-service teachers with related courses and training of blended teaching, to help teachers understand and master the methods and abilities of designing, implementing, and evaluating blended teaching, but also to supplement it in the professional curriculum system of teacher pre-service education. Relevant courses for teaching methods will

help teachers prepare for blended teaching skills before entering the job. On the other hand, blended teaching itself is also an effective way to promote teachers' professional development, and it is an inevitable trend for teachers' training and professional development in the future. Due to the advantages of blended teaching, more and more universities at home and abroad have adopted blended teaching to carry out teachers' training and research. This experience itself can not only bring teachers more convenient and efficient professional development, but also help teachers to better understand blended teaching through personal experience, and then better design and implement it.

The process of integrating information technology into curriculum teaching has gone through the process of starting awareness, gradually comprehending and deep understanding, and finally possessing the stage characteristics of innovative teaching. It is a systematic development and reform process of application, research and innovation, which reflects that teachers' teaching is a reflective practice, embodying the development and change of teaching practical wisdom guided by academic accumulation.

Blended learning is becoming more and more common on campuses across the country. We sought to explore how higher education faculty address course preparation, course design, communication and motivation when teaching blended courses. The process of integrating information technology into curriculum teaching has gone through the process of starting awareness, gradually comprehending and deep understanding, and finally possessing the stage characteristics of innovative teaching. It is a systematic development and reform process of application, research and innovation, which reflects that teachers' teaching is a reflective practice, embodying the development and change of teaching practical wisdom guided by academic accumulation. We found that the faculty interviewed sought resources on best practices and implementing technology. Several of them also worked collaboratively with others in their department to build off each other's expertise.

Each faculty member described explicitly considering course preparation, course design and communication while motivation was felt to be the students' responsibility and not that of the professor. Although technology is changing how we interact personally, professionally and educationally, it is not enough to simply "slap" technology onto what is already being done in traditional courses. Most courses will need to be redesigned to reflect best practices of teaching blended courses. Designing the course with quality activities and communication will positively affect the motivation of the students to engage and learn. Once a blended course is in place, it is important to reflect at the end of each semester on what worked well and what can be improved upon. Looking for new ideas and resources should be something that everyone who teaches blended courses should continue to do.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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