

## A Practical Study on the Blended Teaching in College English

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### Abstract

With the consideration of the characteristics of the teaching objectives and subjects of College English courses in vocational colleges, the construction of blended teaching of college English courses is carried out in the study. The educational integrated platform “*Tsinghua Education Online*” is applied in the experimental teaching. Results show that the application of the blended teaching mode and the online testing mode designed in the study are conducive to improving the efficiency of college English teaching and learning, stimulating students’ enthusiasm for English learning and facilitating students’ autonomous learning.

**Key words:** College English; Blended teaching; Online testing

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### INTRODUCTION

In vocational colleges, most students’ English proficiency level is relatively low and there is a lack of self-learning consciousness. The traditional face-to-face English class mode easily reduces students’ learning motivation. To improve this condition, blended teaching and learning

has been widely advocated in recent years, with which teachers can give full play to their leading role while students enjoy more flexible learning. In this research, a blended teaching mode is designed and applied in the comprehensive English course *College English I* with the online teaching platform “*Tsinghua Education Online*” applied to improve the effect of English teaching and learning.

### 1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

#### 1.1 The Application of Blended Learning Mode in College English Teaching

Blended learning began in the late 1990s. Researchers have defined blended learning from different perspectives. Domestic researchers generally believe that blended learning embodies the integration of various teaching theories, the integration of teachers’ leading and students’ learning initiatives, and the integration of physical classroom and network media.

The domestic empirical research on blended learning in college English teaching mainly explores the effect of blended learning in improving learners’ English listening and speaking ability, writing ability and translation ability. Hou (2010) proposes that blended teaching mode is conducive to improving students’ English listening and oral expression ability. Ma et al. (2011) hold that blended teaching mode strengthens students’ oral ability. Meng (2011) finds that for students, improper online learning methods and poor self-monitoring are common problems in blended learning. Qi et al. (2007) believe that the arrangement of autonomous learning tasks through the network, the development of group cooperation, the combination of teachers’ classroom teaching and multi-level monitoring and evaluation means and methods are effective in improving English learning and language ability.

In the practice of blended learning, mobile learning has become an indispensable part. In recent years, software for memorizing words on mobile phones has appeared in China. It is widely believed that mobile learning is beneficial to increase the learners' interest in vocabulary learning, to facilitate monitoring learning process and performance, and to help students make full use of fragmented time (Yang, 2012; Xu, 2015; Sun et al., 2016). However, mobile learning has disadvantages, including the lack of obvious long-term effect on vocabulary learning and long-term online learning, which makes students tired and discourages learning interest (Lin et al., 2017; Lei, 2017).

### 1.2 Comprehensive English Course *College English I*

*College English I* is one of the compulsory basic courses for the first year of non-English majors in Beijing City University. The total teaching hours of the course are 60 hours. Its follow-up courses include *College English II* and *College English III*. The teaching objectives of the course are to enable students to master the basic language knowledge of vocabulary, word formation, expression, sentence pattern, grammar, and to gain the ability to skillfully use language skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation for effective communication in specific situations. Additionally, the course aims to help students obtain certain understanding of relevant cultural knowledge and establish conceptions of harmony, integrity, fairness, etc.

In view of the teaching objectives as well as the teaching contents and the characteristics of the students, there are favorable conditions to introduce the blended teaching mode in *College English I*. Online teaching resources can enable students to preview, review and strengthen their learning before and after class without being confined to time and space; digital resources is suitable for offline teaching of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation; online vocabulary testing is convenient for students to carry out vocabulary learning repeatedly so as to enhance vocabulary acquisition; network teaching platform and Youmooc V8 mobile terminal make teaching management more efficient. Moreover, the application of online resources, digital resources and teaching platform in the course teaching is conducive to the formation of students' autonomous learning habits. Under this background, this study is to construct *College English I* as a blended teaching course.

### 1.3 "Tsinghua Education Online" Educational Integrated Platform

"Tsinghua Education Online" educational integrated platform is the network teaching platform applied in the study. The platform is developed by Institute of Educational Technology of Tsinghua University for teaching and learning. It supports the release of course

information, organization and management of teaching content, question answering and topic discussion, teaching evaluation and automatic tracking, etc. With V8 Youmooc terminal, students can preview, review, participate in topic discussion, submit assignments and take tests online anytime and anywhere with mobile phones. Based on the network teaching platform, the construction of *College English I* as blended teaching course is conducted.

## 2. CONSTRUCTION OF COLLEGE ENGLISH I AS BLENDED TEACHING COURSE

### 2.1 Design of Blended Teaching Mode

In order to encourage students to participate actively in class and increase autonomous off-class learning, a blended teaching mode is designed: "Online learning+ in class teaching and learning+ online learning". Before class, students are to watch videos of phonetic teaching and cultural points on *College English I Online Course* and share learning difficulties in the discussion sector online. In class, teachers and students co-analyze key points and difficulties, with students participating in classroom activities such as dialogue makeup, situational dialogue simulation, reading task and works presentation. After class, students take part in online activities, including taking vocabulary tests, submitting personal learning works and exchanging experience with peers in the discussion sector.

### 2.2 Design of Online Testing Mode

Online vocabulary tests are designed in the study corresponding to the teaching units of *College English I with the* online test database built up by the study adopted. The target vocabulary is the given vocabulary in listening, speaking and intensive reading sectors of each unit and the testing type is Chinese-to-English translation.

Each test lasts for the whole semester so that students can take the tests anytime during the whole semester and they are required to take tests for each unit at least 10 times. Keys and scores are released automatically after the test is submitted.

### 2.3 Construction of Network Resources of *College English I*

According to the blended teaching mode designed, the construction of *College English I* network course resources is carried out, covering course information, teaching modules, online test database and digital resources, etc.

The basic information of the course includes course introduction, syllabus, and information of professors. All notices, including examination arrangements, course resource release schedule and various English contests, are updated in real time for students to refer to at any time.

The construction of the course resources focuses on *College English I* Textbook online resources (Table 1), the online test database for the vocabulary assessment test (Table 2) and mini-teaching videos for phonetics and reading teaching (Table 3).

**Table 1**  
**Online Resources of *College English I***

Categories	Number of resources (unit)	Total
Listening and text audio	8	40
Oral training video	1	5
Keys to listening and speaking exercises	6	30
Keys to warming up for intensive reading	1	5
Reading activity template	1	5
Translation of passages	3	15
Keys to reading exercises	3	15
Keys to vocabulary exercises	1	5
Total		120

**Table 2**  
**Online Test Database of *College English I***

Type	Origin
Blank filling	Word lists in listening, speaking and intensive reading
Multiple choice	Intensive reading lexical and syntax exercises; Reading comprehension exercises
Total	758

**Table 3**  
**Mini Videos of *College English I***

Categories	Contents	Unit
Pronunciation	ʊ ʌ ɒ ə e i æ; i u ə ɔ ɜ i	Unit 1
	ə ʊ ə aɪ ɔɪ əʊ eə əʊ e	Unit 2
Intonation and stress	h l r; m n ŋ; w j b d d ʒ g; k f v θ s ʃ; ð z ʒ p b t d t	Unit 4
	Changes in meaning with different word stresses	Unit 5
Cultural points	The Ivy League	Unit 1
	Grade Point Average	Unit 2
	Anorexia-Nervosa	Unit 5
	Western Food Culture	Unit 5
	Johann Sebastian Bach	Unit 6

### 3. EXPERIMENTAL TEACHING OF COLLEGE ENGLISH I AS BLENDED COURSE

The blended teaching mode and testing mode designed in this study has been applied in *College English I* for a whole semester of 15 weeks. The teaching subjects are 2018 non English majors (8 majors) in Beijing

City University, with a total of 16 intact classes as the experimental classes.

The blended teaching mode applied in *College English I* is as follows: pre-class online activities include watching videos related to listening, speaking and reading; participating in topic discussion. In-class activities include dealing with difficult points, making up dialogues and situational simulation, group work for reading tasks. After-class online activities cover group works submission, vocabulary tests and learning experience sharing.

The online vocabulary test mode is adopted in the experimental teaching for the whole semester. Totally 5 vocabulary tests are administered for 5 teaching unit with impromptu online tests carried out in class.

### 4. RESULTS

A questionnaire survey is conducted among the 16 experimental classes with 15-week blended teaching. 557 questionnaires are handed out and collected. The questionnaire survey covers the effect of the application blended teaching mode, the preference to the blended and traditional evaluation mode, the experience of using network teaching platform in learning and the effect of online course resources.

#### 4.1 Effect of the Application of Blended Teaching Mode

In the questionnaire the effect of blended teaching mode together with classroom participation, time input for preview and review before and after class are surveyed. 92% of the subjects think that blended teaching is efficient, interesting and convenient. 32.1% of the subjects can actively participate in the classroom against 7.5% rarely participating in the classroom and 0.7% never participating in the classroom. 41.3% of the subjects prefer “group task” classroom organization while 12.6% like “individual task” more. For the most ideal preview and review time, the largest proportion is one hour (61.8%). Less than 15% of the students spend 3 hours doing preview and review.

The results show that when designing students’ after-class tasks, it is appropriate to arrange preview or review tasks that require 1-2 hours with the optimal time being 1 hour. Appropriate adjustments are to be made in the subsequent design of online learning tasks. Moreover, the online and offline mixed assessment mode is effective in reflecting students’ time and energy input in the course. Moreover, the online vocabulary test mode is helpful in students’ making full use of fragmented time to memorize English vocabulary and in freeing teachers from heavy load of grading papers.

#### 4.2 Effect of Application of the Online Testing Mode

Most students can complete the online vocabulary tests

as required. The test scores are between 80 and 100. The expected effect of enhancing vocabulary acquisition is achieved.

However, some students lacked initiative in taking the tests and failed to meet the requirements of taking the tests more than 10 times for each unit. In view of this, more effective measures are to be taken to ensure such students complete the tests in time.

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## CONCLUSION

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Based on the characteristics of the course objectives and teaching contents of *College English I*, the present study makes a preliminary attempt to construct *College English I* as a blended teaching course with “Tsinghua Education Online” platform employed. A blended teaching and assessing mode as well as an online vocabulary testing mode are designed and applied in one-semester experimental teaching practice. Results show that these modes gain some advantages compared with traditional teaching in teaching, assessing and vocabulary learning.

The first-stage application of the blended teaching mode in *College English I* has achieved the expected effect and provides useful experience for the subsequent blended teaching reform. Meanwhile, effective measures are to be taken in the future study to improve online resources application and as well as online test participation.

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