Study on Factors Affected English Acquisition of Chinese Minority Students Majored in Nursing in a Blended Learning Environment

Blended learning is an increasingly prevalent trend in College English acquisition. In order to study the influence of a blended learning environment to English acquisition and the differences between the high-achieving learners and the low-achieving learners for Chinese minority preparation college students in English acquisition, 80 of them are selected as the research subjects, and the research instruments of questionnaire and interview question are used to collect data. The study results show that a blended learning environment to some degree can help learners overcome anxieties and cultivate autonomous learning abilities. In addition, high-achieving language learners are willing to ask for help from others when they encounter problems; they are able to choose their learning strategies on their own, and have the strong ability of self-learning.

Keywords: Chinese, Nursing, English, Acquisition, Blended Learning

Introduction

Current studies on second language acquisition (Wen & Johnson, 1997; Yao, 2010, 2014, 2019) find that the aspects on learners are essential to the acquisition activities, which determines the success or failure of second language learning. Therefore, in recent years, many scholars (Norton & Gao, 2008; Yao, 2010; 2014, 2019) focus their studies on how the learners’ character-learning affect their English acquisition.

China is a multiethnic and multilingual country with 56 ethnic groups recognized officially, more than 130 languages and a population of over 1.36 billion (Yao & Zuckermann, 2016). Among them the Han people compose the largest ethnic group, who constitute about 91.51% of the total population. The other 55 ethnic groups are called minority ethnic groups. Except Hui, other minority ethnic groups have their own language or languages, respectively.

In current China almost all secondary school students from grade 7 to grade 12 and college students are required to learn a foreign language, and even primary students from grade 1 to grade 6 in some places. Most of the students choose English as their foreign language to learn. The Chinese minority students are also required to learn English, but they are different from other students in China regarding English acquisition. Usually English learning is the “third language” acquisition to Chinese minority students and most of them learn English with the help of Chinese language (their second language). Usually Chinese minority students’ English abilities are not as good as other Chinese students when they graduate from high school.
In China the high school students who hope to continue their study in a college must succeed in the competitive College Entrance Examination. Usually the full mark for the examination is 750 while the required minimum entrance mark is from 500 to 700 according to the students’ hometown and the target college’s academic position in China. For example, Tsinghua University is one of the top universities in China, which requires that new students have an excellent college entrance exam mark. In 2015 the required minimum mark was 704 in Hebei province, in which 95.8% of its residents are Han people; while 637 was the mark in Qinghai province where 47.7% of its residents are ethnic minorities. Regarding these figures, the Chinese government try to help more minority students to access top universities.

Another way that the government helps minority students to access tertiary education, especially top universities is the Preparation College Students program, which is set up by the State Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People’s Republic of China and the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China cooperatively in 1984. Through the program, the minority students can access a university as preparation students with an entrance score as much as 80 less than the minimum required score. That is to say, minority students in Qinghai province with an entrance mark more than 557 can apply for a preparation student position in Tsinghua University in 2020. The preparation students will improve their knowledge studied in high school (such as Chinese, math, English) in the preparation school in the following year. If preparation students cannot speak Chinese fluently, one more year is required to improve their Chinese abilities.

The Preparation College Students program requires the preparation students to catch up with other freshman in the level of all academic subjects (of course, including English) after one year’s or two years’ study, which is a heavy task for them. At the same time, they are faced with different English acquisition environments when they begin their college preparation study. Usually it is a teacher-centred learning environment for Chinese primary and secondary students, but a blended learning environment for some preparation college students and college students. Through College English Curriculum Requirement, Chinese college students as well as preparation college students are required to acquire English online after class and output English in the class; while the English teacher is required to instruct the students’ English acquisition in class (The Ministry of Education of People’s Republic of China, 2007). Therefore, it is an urgent task for researchers and teachers to study the factors that affect minority preparation college students’ English acquisition in a blended learning environment and try to help them improve their English acquisition.

Literature Review

The term “blended learning” (also called hybrid learning, technology-mediated instruction learning, web-enhanced instruction learning,
mixed-mode instruction learning) is an increasingly prevalent term often used to
describe the combination of web-based technologies and face to face teaching,
when used as an alternative to more traditional course structures (Bonk &
Graham, 2006). It brings together traditional physical classes with elements of
virtual learning (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). Originally, blended learning first
gained widespread currency in corporate training situations describing the
combination of teaching and learning approaches that included coaching,
mentoring, online interactions, face-to-face classes and on-job training (Gruba
& Hinkleman, 2012). This training model is widely popularized and accepted
within companies due to its effectiveness, adaptability and flexibility, and thus
is gradually applied in traditional school education.

In spite of its traceable origin, the term “blended learning” means many
things to many people, even within the relatively small online learning
community. Oliver and Trigwell (2005) think blended learning is arguably an
ill-defined concept and may also refer to the “blending” learning theories, or
even blending different technologies. Probably the most common meaning of
blended learning in the literature is some combination of face to face instruction
with online teaching, such as forum, blog, and wiki (Bliac, Goodyear & Ellis,
2007).

Recently many scholars (Bekele & Menchaca, 2008; Garrison & Vaughan,
2008; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010; Neumeier, 2005; Shih, 2010) have focused
their studies on blended learning and learning English as a foreign/second
language. Neumeier (2005) establishes the models in a blended learning
environment for language learning and teaching purposes, which are mode,
model of integration, distribution of learning content, objectives and assignment
of purpose, language teaching methods, involvement of learning subjects, and
location. Shih (2010) establishes a blended teaching and learning model
combining online and face to face instructional blogging; He believes that this
model could contribute to learning effectiveness and student satisfaction if the
blended model is implemented with sufficiently supportive equipment and
course plans; most importantly, peer and instructor’s feedback and the blog
characteristics like free access, ease of revision, and interesting material for
learning are major factors that enhance students’ learning satisfaction by
motivating them to learn effectively. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) outline
seven blended learning redesign principles, explaining the professional
development issues essential to the implementation of blended learning designs
and present six illustrative scenarios of blended learning design. Miyazoe and
Anderson (2010) examine the effectiveness of three different online writing
activities (forums, blogs, and wikis) in formal university education. Their study
reveals students’ positive perceptions of the blended course design with online
writings: wikis being the most favourable followed by blogs and forums. Bekele
and Menchaca (2008) identify many studies on the positive influences of
blended learning on student performance, student participation and motivation,
the cost-effectiveness of blended learning, and so on.

In the beginning of the 21st century, blended learning appeared in China
with the contribution of textbook publishers. In order to enhance their products’
competitiveness, some textbook publishers offer supplementing online learning materials in their leaning management system (LMS) and some forums for learners to discuss with each other. Thus, the blended learning environment is established in some universities in China.

In recent years, many scholars (Chen & Wang, 2013; Jin, 2014; Wang, 2011; Yu & Zhang, 2013) studied the effectiveness of blended learning in China. The results of their study indicate that blended learning requires high autonomous abilities to English learners, and it is a more effective model for Chinese students to learn English than traditional learning and pure e-learning, especially for college students; furthermore, blended learning can improve the learner’s English proficiency and learning motivation.

Since 1980s on Chinese scholars have paid much attention to minority students’ English acquisition (Wu, 2007). Their studies contribute to almost all aspects of English learning, such as the management of minority education (Yang, 2006), the learning motivation (Zhou, 2013), learning strategy (Xu, 2009; Xu & Cao, 2012), learning anxiety (Huang & Deng, 2008; Li & Lin, 2013), autonomous ability (Liu, 2013; Wang & Wang, 2013; Zhang, 2005), and so on. The aforementioned studies reveal some characters of Chinese minority students in English acquisition. First, Chinese minority students prefer affective strategies to other strategies in English acquisition (Xu, 2009). Second, the desire of integrated personal development is the greatest motivation for Chinese minority students to learn English (Zhou, 2013). Third, 80% of the minority undergraduates experience moderate or high levels of speaking classroom anxiety (Li & Lin, 2013). Fourth, learners’ autonomous abilities are the most important factors affecting their English acquisition, which determines the success or failure of their English acquisition to some degree (Liu, 2013; Wang & Wang, 2013; Zhang, 2005).

Chinese minority preparation college students are a special type of Chinese minority college student. They are at the transition period from high school students to college students. Unfortunately, few scholar focus on Chinese minority preparation college student’s English acquisition, especially those majored in nursing. Yao (2014) has studied Chinese minority preparation college student’s English acquisition in a traditional learning environment and reveals some characters of their English acquisition: compared with other factors, four factors including the learning strategy, the emotion in learning, the help-seeking ability and the ability of autonomous learning are the most important factors affecting the learners’ English acquisition, which determines the achievements of the learning activities; in addition, the Chinese minority preparation college students’ anxiety levels are a little higher than the moderate level and their academic help-seeking abilities are at the moderate level in English acquisition; furthermore, Chinese minority preparation college students are weak at English autonomous learning abilities and some of them cannot choose the learning strategies on their own.

As the blended learning is a newly-born teaching model in China, the study on the factors affecting Chinese minority Preparation College students’ English acquisition in a blended learning environment is still in the dark. Previous study
(Yao, 2014) has revealed that the four factors including the learning strategy, the emotion in learning, the help-seeking ability and the ability of autonomous learning are the most important factors affecting the learners’ English acquisition in a traditional learning environment. Therefore, this study will investigate how the aforementioned factors affect the English acquisition for minority preparation college students majored in nursing and analyse how language teachers can help the learners to improve their English acquisition in a blended learning environment.

Research Methodology

This study is an empirical and pilot study approved by the Committee of Ethnics and Integrity in Research with Humans in Tanjin Chengjian University. As we know a lot of factors can affect foreign language acquisition and it is impossible to study all the factors in one study. The previous studies (Cao & Yao, 2010; Yao, 2011; 2014; 2019) report that factors such as learning anxiety, academic help-seeking behaviour, learning strategies and autonomous learning ability play very important roles in English acquisition for Chinese minority college students in a traditional class. Therefore, the current research tries to examine the differences of English acquisition between the high-achieving learners and the low-achieving learners of Chinese minority preparation college students majored in nursing in a blended learning environment regarding the aforementioned aspects.

In the current study the research instruments of questionnaire and interview question are used to collect data. At the first step the research investigated 148 students’ data about their English learning anxiety, academic help-seeking behaviour, learning strategies and the autonomous English learning ability. Then the research selects the top 40 subjects (on their English examination results) in the 148 students as the high-achieving learners and the bottom 40 as the low-achieving learners. The 80 students’ data are analysed qualitatively and quantitatively to study the differences of English acquisition between the high-achieving learner and the low-achieving in a blended learning environment. Regarding the differences, the study tries to find the factors affecting English acquisition of Chinese minority preparation college students majored in nursing in a blended learning environment.

Research Subjects

In China there are nearly 3000 new preparation college students in each year. These students are distributed in 6 universities. Take the year of 2019 as an example, 2945 ethnics are enrolled as preparation college students. Among them, 846 students are enrolled in Southwest University for Nationalities, 537 in South-Central University for Nationalities, 473 in Minzu University of China, 414 in Dalian Nationalities University, 375 in Northwest University for Nationalities, 300 in Beifang University of Nationalities (State Ethnic Affairs
Commission of the People’s Republic of China & Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2019). This study takes Minzu University of China as the investigation spot, as this University is the oldest university in the aforementioned universities, which has a high prestige in Chinese higher education. In addition, one of the authors has studied in Minzu University of China. It is convenient to collect data in this University.

In the current study, all the subjects are selected from Preparation Education School in Minzu University of China. At beginning of the research, all the bilingual or multilingual students in the school (154 students) are investigated. Then the study gets 148 valid questionnaires which are from 34 different ethnics, such as Mongolian, Uygur, Kazak, Zhuang, Buyi, Tujia, and so on. 48.6% of them (72 subjects) are male while 51.4% of them (76 subjects) are female. 52.7% of them (78 subjects) come from rural areas, while 47.3% of them (70 subjects) come from cities or towns (38 subjects are from small towns, and 32 subjects are from the big cities). Their ages distribute from 18 to 21 years old and the mean age is 19.2.

At the same time, the study gets all the subjects’ English final exam results. As the purpose of the study is to examine the differences between high-achieving English learner and low-achieving English learner, it is necessary to pick out all the middle-achieving learners. Based on their final examine results, the study selects the top 40 students as the high-achieving learner group and the bottom 40 students as the low-achieving learner group. The 80 selected students are the research subjects in the study. Their data are analysed and they are interviewed for a deep research.

Research Content

This study focuses on the differences in four aspects (including English learning anxiety, academic help-seeking behaviour, English learning strategies and English autonomous learning ability) between high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners of Chinese minority preparation college learners in a blended learning environment. It aims to answer the following questions:

1. Are there any differences in anxiety degrees, anxiety performance, academic help-seeking motivations, academic help-seeking behaviours and autonomous English learning ability between high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners in a blended learning environment?
2. What kind of English learning strategy do the high-achieving English learners or the low-achieving learners prefer?
3. How do these factors affect learners’ English acquisition in a blended learning environment?

Research Tools

The study aims to study the differences between high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners of minority preparation college students in their
English acquisition in a blended learning environment. It references the research tools of previous studies on the differences between high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners of Chinese college students in a traditional learning environment (Yao, 2014) as well as in a blended learning environment (Yao, 2017). The research tools include four questionnaires and some interview questions. All questions in the questionnaires have five scales, including (A) Totally Agree, (B) Agree, (C) Neither Agree Nor Disagree, (D) Disagree, (E) Totally Disagree.

The research method of interviewing is a complement data collection method in the current study by which the researcher has a face-to-face communication with the research subjects on the topic of English learning anxiety, academic help-seeking behaviour, English learning strategies and autonomous English learning abilities. To relax the interviewee, the researcher records the interview covertly by a recorder rather than writes down what the subjects said on the spot. With the interviewee’s permission, the researcher transcribes the interview materials after the interview.

Research Process

The data are collected from a collective test. After all the subjects are aware of the research purpose and know the requirements, they are asked to finish the questionnaire on the spot while the test time is unlimited. When all the subjects finish their work the researcher withdraws the questionnaires.

After 10 days of the questionnaire test 20 subjects (10 male students while 10 female students; 10 students from rural areas while another 10 students from towns or cities; 10 students who are high-achieving learners while 10 students who are low-achieving learners, respectively) are selected to do the individual interviews.

After removing all the invalid questionnaires, the researcher evaluates the operation and puts the data into a computer. With the help of the software SPSS 22.0, the Independent-Samples T-Tests are made to exam whether there are significant differences between the high-achieving learners and the low-achieving learners of Chinese minority preparation college students in their English acquisition in a blended learning environment.

Results and Discussion

The study analyses its data. It finds the characteristics of Chinese students in English acquisition and the differences between high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners.

On English Learning Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety is “a distinct complex constructs of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language
learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process” (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986, p.128). It is useful to draw parallels between the foreign language anxiety and another three related performance anxieties: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension is a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people; Test-anxiety refers to a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure; Fear of negative evaluation, defined as “apprehension about others’ evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively,” is a third anxiety related to foreign language learning (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986, p.130). MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) believe that anxiety can have deeply effects on many aspects of foreign language learning.

Previous study (Yao, 2014) reports that the anxiety level for Chinese minority preparation college students in English acquisition is a little higher than the moderate level in a traditional learning environment. Among the three subtypes of English learning anxiety, the test anxiety is the highest while the negative evaluation anxiety is the lowest in Chinese preparation college students. The differences of the English learning anxiety between the two groups in a blended learning environment are as Table 1.

### Table 1. Differences in English Learning Anxiety

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<th>High-achieving learners</th>
<th>Low-achieving learners</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication apprehension</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test anxiety</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>0.83</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fear of negative evaluation</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign language anxiety</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>0.35</td>
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</table>

Table 1 reveals that the level of text anxiety as well as the fear of negative evaluation for high-achieving learners are slightly higher than those of low-achieving learners, but the T-test results show that there are no significant differences between them ($p = 0.217, 0.899$, respectively; both are more than 0.05). Both groups are anxious of English exams (4.21 and 3.99, respectively) and do not care about the negative evaluation (2.86 and 2.85, respectively). In the interviewing, some students said: “I am afraid of the English exam, especially the College English Band-4 (or College English Band-6) exam. I am not afraid that the teachers criticize at me. I know the criticism is helpful for me to improve my English abilities.”

There are significant differences in the level of communication apprehension and foreign language anxiety between high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners in English acquisition ($p = 0.008, 0.000$, respectively; both are less than 0.05). In the details, the high-achieving learners have a higher
anxiety level of communication apprehension (3.20 VS. 2.88) and foreign language anxiety (3.57 VS. 3.08).

The aforementioned data show that both high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners have the high level of anxiety in English acquisition (3.57 and 3.08, respectively; both are higher than the median level 3) in a blended learning environment, which is harmful to their study (Yao, 2014). Therefore, the teachers may need to focus on learners’ emotions in English acquisition and help the students to lighten their anxiety.

**On Academic Help-seeking Behavior**

Help-seeking is a kind of social behaviour with which the help-seeker can get help from others. It may be fundamental in the development of mature give-and-take social relations with others. It also plays an important role in cognitive and academic tasks as well (Gall, 1981). In Gall’s view, the help-seeking methods can be divided into two kinds: instrumental help-seeking and executive help-seeking. The former refers to instances in which the help requested is limited to the amount and type needed to allow students to solve problems or attain goals for themselves, while the latter refers to those instances in which the student’s intention is to have someone else solve a problem or attain a goal on his or her behalf. Academic help-seeking is a necessary skill in second language acquisition, which to some degree determines the success or failure of the second language acquisition (Yao, 2011; Zhang, Xia & Jiang, 2014). In the existing help-seeking literature, there is a study on age-related or grade-related differences in student help-seeking (Gall, 1985), which indicates that Fifth graders’ help-seeking is appropriate more often than is that of the third graders. However, studies about the differences between high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners in academic help-seeking are very limited.

Previous study (Yao, 2011) reveals that the academic help-seeking abilities for Chinese minority preparation college students are at the middle level in their English acquisition in a traditional environment; meanwhile the students prefer executive help-seeking rather than instrumental help-seeking, as most of them believe that English acquisition is only a kind of rotting memory activity. The differences between high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners in academic help-seeking are as Table 2.

<table>
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<th>Table 2. Differences in Academic Help-seeking</th>
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<tr>
<td>High-achieving learners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instrumental help-seeking</td>
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<td>Executive help-seeking</td>
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<td>Academic help-seeking</td>
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Table 2 shows that the level of executive help-seeking for high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners are 3.70 and 3.24, respectively. Both of them are higher than the median level (3). While the level of instrumental help-seeking are 2.77 and 2.48, respectively. Both of them are lower than the median level (3). The research data show that both high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners of minority preparation college students prefer the executive help-seeking rather than the instrumental help-seeking.

Another finding is that the levels of academic help-seeking (3.3 vs. 2.86), executive help-seeking (3.70 vs. 3.24) and instrumental help-seeking (2.77 vs. 2.48) for the high-achieving learners are higher than those for low-achieving learners. And all the differences are significant (p = 0.000, 0.001, 0.005, respectively; all are less than 0.05), which may indicate that high-achieving learners are more willing to ask for help from others than the low-achieving learners.

The aforementioned findings are similar with those reported in Good et al (1987), which indicate that high-achieving students ask more questions than low-achieving students over time. In the interview process, some low-achieving learners tell the researcher that they rarely ask for help from others in the class forum or after class as they do not learn English well and are shamed of asking help from others. They also feel that their teachers are not patient enough to them. When they meet some problems in their English acquisition, they prefer to get the answers directly from other students. These factors result with low-achieving learners being unwilling to ask help from others.

On English Learning Strategy

Learning strategies are defined as “specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques—such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task—used by students to enhance their own learning” (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992, p63). They are composed of at least six sub-strategies: memory strategy, cognitive strategy, metacognitive strategy, compensation strategy, affective strategy and social strategy (Oxford, 1990).

The previous study (Yao & Ren, 2011) reports that Chinese minority preparation college students cannot choose the learning strategies on their own or select the strategies instinctively in a traditional learning environment. Most of them only know the memory strategies and compensation strategies while they are weak at the social strategies and affective strategies. The differences between high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners of minority preparation college students in English learning strategy in a blended learning environment are as Table 3.
Table 3 reveals that the mean scores of high-achieving learners are higher than low-achieving learners in all six strategies (4.22 vs. 4.18, 3.51 vs. 2.88, 3.21 vs. 2.71, 3.89 vs. 3.64, 2.76 vs. 2.59, and 2.76 vs. 2.68, respectively). It means that high-achieving learners apply more strategies in English acquisition than low-achieving learners. This result is consistent with those reported in Jiang (2003) and Oxford & Burry-Stock (1995).

There are significant differences between high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners in the applying of cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, compensation strategies and affective strategies (p = 0.000, 0.000, 0.000, 0.003, respectively; all are less than 0.05), while no significant differences in the memory strategies and social strategies (p = 0.563, 0.376, respectively; both are more than 0.05). Part of the reasons for the findings is that in China teacher-centred classroom learning has dominated English education for a long time. In this model, teachers have sovereign power to determine what to teach and how to teach. At the same time, recently almost all Chinese high schools put the college-entrance-rate at a most important position, and students are asked to practice more for examinations. This learning model causes the students to look important in acquiring language knowledge and the memory strategies in language acquisition, but look down on the communicative abilities and the social strategies (Yao, 2017). Although studying in a blended learning environment, they are still used to the memory strategies in English acquisition.

On English Autonomous Learning Abilities

Autonomous learning ability is the ability to take charge of one’s own learning, to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning (Holec, 1981). Autonomous learning is seen (Holec, 1981) as a double process. It entails learning the foreign language as well as learning how to learn the foreign language.

In recent 30 years many scholars (He, 2004; Holec, 1981; Lin, 1987; Lin, 2008; Ni, 2010; Xu, 2012; Yan, 2010) discuss the definition and connotation of autonomous learning, the affection aspects of autonomous learning and how to help the learner to cultivate the autonomous abilities. In recent years scholars...
(Ni, 2010; Yan, 2010) believe that the autonomous learning abilities are composed of at least three aspects: setting up learning schedule and learning arrangements; management and evaluation the learning; adjustment and correction the learning schedule.

The current study divides English autonomous acquisition abilities into a more detailed system, which includes five aspects: knowing the learning purpose, setting up learning schedule and learning goals, selecting suitable learning strategies, adjusting learning strategies, adjusting and evaluating English learning. Previous study (Cao & Yao, 2010) reports that Chinese minority preparation college students are weak at English autonomous acquisition abilities in a traditional learning environment; most of them aren’t good at selecting suitable learning strategies, adjusting learning strategies, adjusting and evaluating English learning. The differences between the two groups in English autonomous learning abilities in a blended learning environment are as Table 4.

The data in Table 4 reveal that high-achieving learners have stronger autonomous learning abilities than low-achieving learners (2.57 vs. 1.95), and the differences are significant ($P = 0.000 <0.05$). Furthermore, high-achieving learners are significantly better than low-achieving learners on all the subcategories of self-learning ability except the selecting suitable learning strategies (2.51 vs. 2.18, 2.57 vs. 2.16, 2.41 vs. 2.09, 2.74 vs. 1.76, respectively), and the differences are significant ($P = 0.007, 0.002, 0.004, 0.000$, respectively, all are less than 0.05). The aforementioned results suggest that there is a positive correlation between students’ self-learning ability and their academic achievement in English acquisition in a blended learning environment.

<table>
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<th>Table 4. Differences in English Autonomous Learning Ability</th>
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<td>High-achieving learners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowing the learning purpose</td>
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<td>Setting up learning schedule</td>
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<td>Selecting suitable learning strategies</td>
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<td>Adjusting learning strategies</td>
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<td>Adjusting and evaluating English learning</td>
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<td>English autonomous learning ability</td>
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Interviews in the study verify that high-achieving learners have stronger self-learning ability. Most of them have the following features: understanding of the teaching intent and teaching purpose well, willing to develop study
programs, having strong perseverance, willing to learn from others and constantly adjust their learning methods.

Conclusion

As said above, the previous studies (Yao, 2014) find that in a traditional learning environment the Chinese minority preparation college students’ anxiety levels are a little higher than the moderate level and their academic help-seeking abilities are at the moderate level; they are weak at English autonomous learning abilities and they cannot choose the learning strategies on their own. This study gets the similar results of Chinese minority preparation college students’ English acquisition in a blended learning environment. The comparison results show the anxious degrees in a blended learning environment are a little lower than those in a traditional learning environment, while no notable difference in the abilities of academic help-seeking and choosing English learning strategies. That is to say, a blended learning environment in some way can help learners overcome anxieties and cultivate autonomous learning abilities.

The results in this study suggest that both high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners experience a high degree of anxiety. High-achieving learners are willing to ask for help from others when they encounter problems or difficulties; they are able to choose learning strategies on their own, and have a strong ability of self-learning. However, some of the low-achieving language learners are not willing to seek for instrumental help when they encounter problems or difficulties; parts of them are not good at choosing their suitable learning strategies, and they are weak at self-learning abilities. Although we cannot contribute the achievement of English acquisition only to the aforementioned factors, it is undeniable that these factors are the important factors influencing their English acquisition in a blended environment for Chinese minority preparation college students.

Both high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners of minority preparation college students experience high degree of anxiety, which is not a good environment for conducting to the students’ physical and mental growth, let alone their English acquisition (Yao, 2014). Therefore, in the teaching process, teachers should not only teach students knowledge, but also help ease the anxiety of English acquisition, which requires the teachers to improve their teaching quality, and to master more psychological knowledge and provide students with rich and diverse lectures (Wang, 2012). They are also required to become friends with students and stimulate the students’ academic interests (Wang, 2010). Traditionally, Chinese students and their parents look high on their academic performance and their teachers’ attitudes toward them. Teacher’s praises or criticisms to them in some way determine their feelings in English acquisition. Teachers, therefore, are suggested to praise students rather than pick up their errors in their English teaching. In one sentence, the teachers may need
to try all the methods to lighten the students’ anxieties in their English acquisition.

Academic help-seeking abilities are the necessary abilities for the success of language acquisition. The current study finds that due to the fear of being embarrassed, some learners, especially the low-achieving learners do not want to ask for help from other persons when they encounter difficulties in their English acquisition. In order to help students to cultivate academic help-seeking abilities, teachers may need to encourage students to ask questions and help them become more confident to themselves. In addition, some tutorial lectures need to be established, where students can get help from teachers.

As said above, all the learning strategies are equal to each other. Neither one is better nor worse than others. The current study finds that both high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners of preparation students only prefer the memory strategies. Parts of the reasons are that the learners do not master more necessary language learning strategies, which requires teachers to offer students some help. English teachers, on one hand should master a variety of learning strategies, on the other hand should be familiar with students’ different learning characters. In addition, some programs about strategy on language acquisition need to be set up, where students can master more strategies and the ways to choose suitable strategies. Similarly, teachers may be able to help students better with choosing individual strategies. In this way teachers may be able to help students better with choosing individual learning strategies, and the English acquisition activity can play a multiplier effect.

Most importantly, teachers may need to help students improve their English autonomous learning abilities. The current study reveals that Chinese minority preparation college students are weak at English autonomous learning ability, which is not consistent with the teaching aims set by the College English Curriculum Requirement (The Ministry of Education of People’s Republic of China, 2007). Therefore, teachers should help learners (especially the low-achieving language learner) with autonomous learning abilities. They also need to help them with developing learning plans, scheduling study time, choosing strategies as well as checking the strategies implementation. English teachers, therefore, need to explain the significance of the autonomous learning ability to the learners and invite some high-achieving learner to share their successful experience with others. The learners, in this way, can master not only the knowledge of the English acquisition abilities, but also the skills of regulating their abilities.

In summary, it is an unavoidable fact that some learners are good at English acquisition while others cannot learn English well. Therefore, teachers should look straight at the discrepancy and concern about the learners, especially the low-achieving learners. They should help them overcome anxiety, develop academic help skills, choose the suitable strategies, and constantly improve the self-learning capabilities.

The current study takes Chinese minority preparation students as research subjects. The aim of the research is to help the Chinese minority preparation college students’ English acquisition in a blended learning environment, as well
as to call for more attention to their acquisition. As said above, many factors affect minority students’ English acquisition. Because of the limitation of time, the current study only examines the differences between high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners on four aspects. Maybe there are still some other important factors for the Chinese minority preparation college students’ English acquisition. It is hoped that further studies be carried out regarding the factors affecting their English acquisition in a blended learning environment.

References


