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THE EVALUATION OF A COLLEGE-ENGLISH APPLICATION SUPER STAR IN A BLENDED-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

To improve the quality of instruction and boost effectiveness of teaching, many English teachers in China colleges adopt blended teaching method which combines "online" and "offline" teaching together. The latest trend has observed the increasing use of mobile applications for teaching and learning. However, unlike public university students, the students in private colleges struggle with English. Most often, their proficiency is poorer, and they have low interest in learning English. This quantitative study surveyed 673 respondents who were students of non-English major from a private college in China. They were asked to evaluate "Super Star", a blended learning application for learning College English, a general language proficiency course implemented at the college. Students' perception on the effectiveness of "Super Star", the influence of "Super Star" on the learning behavior and on the formative evaluation of "Super Star" and what are students' attitude towards the use of "Super Star" in College English learning were explored. The data were analyzed using frequencies. The students' responses indicated their positive attitude towards the learning application "Super Star". However, based on the survey, this paper finds that students lack self-supervision, and the learning effect is not conclusive. In view of the above problems, the teachers are suggested to refine the teaching objectives, choose proper teaching contents and optimize the teaching plan. Besides, teachers should also make full use of learning applications, conduct data-driven learning analysis, provide timely feedback and achieve integration of teaching, learning and evaluation, so as to improve the teaching effect.

Keywords: College English, blended teaching, private college, Super Star

1. Introduction

With the development of economy in China, the Internet and multimedia technology developed quickly and are widely used in people's life. It has become an urgent task to adopt modern educational technology to reform the teaching content, teaching means, and teaching methods of College English (Rossiter, 2020). In China, the concept of education informatization refers to the application of modern information technology in the field of education. The modern information technology based on computer, multimedia and network communication should be applied comprehensively in the course of education (Liu, 2020). China's Ministry of Education has continually asked teachers to integrate information technology for teaching effectively. In 2022, Ministry of Education points out several key strategies in "2022's Working Points": Implementing digital education, developing "Internet Plus" education, enriching digital education resources, deepening network learning space application, improving teaching model and evaluation model, and deepening integration of information technology and education and teaching. Under this guide, blended teaching is flourishing and various smartphones applications concerning education came into being. To enrich teaching resources and improve teaching proficiency and quality, English teachers in colleges and universities combine information technology in their instructions. The shortcomings in traditional College English teaching model were improved to some extent, and the monotonous teaching mode is gradually diminishing. Under the background of information technology, mobile tools and network platform such as teaching applications, play more and more important roles in College English teaching, and the teaching applications are necessary part in realizing blended College English teaching (Gu, 2019). Educators can adopt a collection of language learning applications that are suitable for their courses for them to benefit in language learning. Participants were also concerned about the size of smartphones for learning activities (Shadiev & Yang, 2020).

Private universities are an important part of higher education in our country. As of September 25, 2022, there are 774 private colleges and universities in China (Han, 2021). The students in private colleges have their own features: First, they have a strong sense of inferiority. Due to the low score of the college entrance examination, students in private colleges generally show a strong sense of inferiority. Consequently, most students do not value themselves much in their studies. Second, they have high self-esteem, but lack good study habits. For private college students, self-esteem is an expression of inferiority to some extent. Some students develop very high self-esteem because of low self-esteem. In learning, they do not want to face up their deficiencies in learning habits and methods, but they are extremely eager to get the affirmation of their teachers and parents. Therefore, they show extremely strong resistance to criticism, despite knowing the merit of the criticism and therefore still refuse to accept it. Third, they also lack self-discipline. They often follow the trend and are incapable of exercising proper judgement in analyzing the rights and wrongs. In addition, most students in private colleges have weak English foundation, and most of them have low interest in English learning (Tong & Yang, 2022). The traditional teacher-oriented teaching model in China makes students feel bored and have no strong sense of classroom participation. They do not pay enough attention in class and are easily distracted. Some measures have been taken to address the unique needs of students in private colleges in China, especially policies on integrating information technology in teaching and learning.

This paper presents the findings of a questionnaire that was carried out among students in a private college which focused on the effectiveness of "Super Star" application for College English teaching to help the English teachers in private colleges adjust their teaching model and improve their teaching quality. "Super Star" in figure 1 is one of the mobile learning platforms which are recommended by China's Ministry of Education. It can be used by smartphones and tablet computers. "Super Star" has abundant learning resources, and users can give and take classes through it. Students could make use of their time to learn English effectively. "Super Star" is widely used by college and university English teachers to implement blended teaching. It has been applied in teaching in H college for more than three years. Under the background of informatization and the impact of COVID-19, blended teaching based on mobile learning applications became a trend. As a typical application, "Super Star" were widely used in many colleges. Therefore, it's important for students to evaluate this learning application.

Figure 1. Super Star Application

This study takes the College English courses of private universities as the research object, combined with the actual situation of the university where the author works, to explore the necessity and feasibility of integrating the new model of mobile learning into College English teaching. At the same time, this study proposed teachers in private colleges should take the medium of mobile devices, guide and supervise the students reasonably using mobile devices for mobile learning English, to stimulate students' interest in learning English, enhance students' motivation to learn English, improve students' English learning efficiency, and improve the students' English comprehensive ability and autonomous learning ability.

1.1. Research on Blended Learning in China

Blended teaching concept is the result of foreign blended learning concept. In a narrow sense, blended teaching is a combination of online learning and classroom face-to-face teaching (Hobson, 2020). Blended learning is a combination of the advantages of online and offline learning, and emphasizes the construction of a teacher-led, student-dominated new teaching structure, and the creation of a learning atmosphere of "autonomy, inquiry and cooperation", which is conducive to the cultivation of innovative talents in China (He, 2004). Blended learning model provides evidence for the introduction and development of a systematic integrated learning model that is useful for improving the quality of teacher and higher education outcomes (Tran et al., 2021). Combining advantages of online and offline teaching, blended teaching breaks through the limitation of time and space, and is favorable to solving the problems

of insufficient in-class learning time and insufficient extra-curricular language learning situation in College English courses (Ige & Hlalele, 2017). It is conducive to improve the quality of College English teaching. Under the "Internet Plus" higher education model, blended teaching is an inevitable trend of College English reform.

The research on blended College English teaching in China shows an overall upward trend, which can be divided into three stages: (1) The initial stage (2004-2016) where the number of relevant papers published is very small and the growth is slow, and the annual number of published papers is less than 5. (2) Development stage (2017-2019): the annual number of publications was between 8 and 13, which increased significantly compared with the previous, and reached the peak in 2017 (13). The reason for this change was attributed to the issuance of College English Teaching Guide by the College Foreign Language Teaching Steering Committee which encourages teachers to build and use micro-courses and MOOCs, and make use of high-quality online education resources and expand teaching content, implement blended teaching models such as flipped classroom based on classroom and online courses, and enable students to develop towards active learning, independent learning and personalized learning (Wang, 2016). (3) Rapid development stage (2020-2021), the number of published papers increased and reached the peak in 2021 (21). The surge in the number of papers at this stage was mainly related to the proposal of the Ministry of Education's "Double Thousand Plan" to build a large-scale combination of online and offline first-class courses and the promotion of the novel corona-virus epidemic. During this period, a large number of domestic scholars made researches on blended teaching. Most of the related researches are empirical and used questionnaire as the instrument.

The results of literature review show that the empirical research of blended College English teaching mainly evaluates the teaching effect from the aspects of teachers and students. Studies also show that the empirical research of blended College English teaching mainly evaluates the teaching effect from the aspects of teachers and students. For students, the changes of learning satisfaction, such as their perception on the influence of blended teaching on learning behaviour, formative evaluation of blended teaching and blended teaching's effectiveness in teaching, language ability, learning ability, thinking ability and ideological and political quality are mainly investigated. For teachers, the changes are mainly evaluated from four dimensions: teaching ability, teaching faith, IT ability and teaching satisfaction. Related studies show that in the blended teaching mode, teachers' teaching ability, especially the ability to use information technology to make teaching design increased significantly, most of the teachers' teaching satisfaction increases. However, some studies have found that teachers hold negative attitudes towards the workload, student cooperation and actual teaching effect of blended teaching (Zhang & He, 2020). In general, College English teachers' blended teaching ability needs to be improved.

According to the quantitative findings, students' satisfaction with blended College English teaching is generally higher than that of traditional teaching. Most studies have found that students' overall level of English listening, speaking, reading and writing has been greatly improved after the experiment, especially their writing ability (Liu, 2021). A few studies have found that for students with poor level, blended College English teaching has no significant effect. Study found that the blended teaching mode can reduce students' anxiety of learning English, arouse students' enthusiasm and interest in learning (Khoshsima, 2021), increase students' learning motivation. In terms of thinking ability,

relevant studies found that students' higher-order thinking and cognitive ability was significantly improved in independent learning, while students' teamwork spirit, perspective-taking ability and collectivism concept were enhanced.

The studies on blended teaching mainly focused on public colleges and universities. Since private colleges have their own features, this paper does a research on blended College English teaching based on "Super Star" in H College, thereby providing references for the reform of College English teaching in private colleges in China.

2. Research Questions

The following three questions were formulated for this study:

i. Q1: What are students' perception on "Super Star"'s effectiveness in College English teaching?
ii. Q2: What are students' perception on the influence of "Super Star" on the learning behavior?
iii. Q3: What are students' perception on the formative evaluation of "Super Star"?
iv. Q4: What are students' attitude towards the use of "Super Star" in College English learning?

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to explore students' perception on the effectiveness of blended teaching based on "Super Star" private colleges, helping the English teachers in Private college improve teaching quality and cultivating students' autonomous learning ability.

4. Research Methods

This quantitative research study adopted a questionnaire titled "A Survey on the Status Quo of College Students' English Learning with 'Super Star' Application" by Yang (2018), which was also adopted by other studies such as Wang and Li (2021). The questionnaire was designed for studying blended teaching based on the application "Super Star". The use of questionnaire was the right instrument for its cost-effectiveness and high efficiency. Modification was made according to the actual situation of H College. Compared with Yang (2018), this research adds questions about students' attitude towards different functions and the formative evaluation of "Super Star". A probability sampling technique was used. The population was 5000 students from different majors in a private college in China who are/have used Super Star Application. The sample size was projected to be 700 and 673 were specifically identified.

The survey instrument consists 16 questions using Likert Scale. Two questions are for the students' basic information, five questions with five items measuring students' perceptions on the effectiveness of "Super Star", three questions with three items measuring the influence of "Super Star" on students' learning behaviour, four questions with four items measuring students' attitude to the formative evaluation by "Super Star" and two questions with eight items for each measuring students' attitude to the use of "Super Star" for College English Learning. The questionnaire was sent to the students by English teachers in H college by using Wen Juan Xing, an online questionnaire, which is similar to Survey Monkey.

Pilot testing of the instrument was done to increase validity and reliability (Mertens, 1998). A web-based survey with 32 students from the cabin crew major in H college was conducted. The respondents were instructed that they are encouraged to note any ambiguities. Findings yielded the alpha coefficient value of each construct as the following: i: Students' Perceptions on the Effectiveness of "Super Star"=0.85, ii. Students' Perceptions on "Super Star's" influence on the learning behavior=0.81, iii. Students' perception on the formative evaluation of "Super Star"=0.89, iv. Students' attitude towards the use of "Super Star" for College English learning=0.91. The above reliability scores are adequate as all scores are ranging from 0.7 to 0.950 (Lance et al., 2006). The pilot study had 19 female and 13 male. All of the respondents are freshmen. 71% kept positive attitude towards the effectiveness of "Super Star"; 69% kept positive attitude towards the influence of "Super Star" on the learning behavior; 75% kept positive attitude towards the formative evaluation of "Super Star". 72% kept positive attitude towards the use of "Super Star". The obtained data were quantitatively analyzed. The questionnaire was conducted in Chinese which is the native language of the respondents. The research is anonymous, and the participants only points out their gender and age.

4.1. Participants

The participants were all undergraduate students from H College, who enrolled in College English Course in the 2021/2022. A total of 673 students from different majors were selected to participant in this research. Table 1 is the basic information of the respondents, including 408 females, accounting for 60.62% and 265 males, accounting for 39.38; 430 freshmen, accounting for 63.89%, 243 sophomores, accounting for 36.11%.

Table 1. Respondents' Demographic Information

Item	Option	Number of respondents	Percentage
Gender	Male	265	39.38%
	Female	408	60.62%
Grade	Freshman	430	63.89%
	Sophomore	243	36.11%

5. Findings

5.1. What are students' perception on the effectiveness of "Super Star"?

There are 5 questions in this construct as presented in Table 2, which are investigated from 5 aspects. In summary, students' evaluation of these 5 aspects is relatively positive, which is in line with previous studies, but the satisfaction rate shows an increasing trend. The proportion of the positive reply is more than 67% for all five items. Among them, satisfying convenient needs (75.11% agreement) and timely task reminding (78.37% agreement) were fully affirmed by students, while the number of students holding negative views was less than 4%. In the five aspects, students' evaluation of "improving learning interest" is relatively conservative, with the lowest positive value (67.70% agreement), and the highest neutral and negative value, indicating that the impact of "Super Star" on students is mainly focused on learning style, while in the aspects of changing learning awareness and cultivating learning interest,

further efforts are still needed to yield positive outcome. These findings correspond with Wang and Li (2021) in which students tend to have a positive response to new intervention in language learning, especially related to smartphone application.

Table 2. Students' Perceptions on the Effectiveness of "Super Star"

Responses	Item 1 improving interest	Item 2 satisfying convenient needs	Item 3 cultivating independent learning ability	Item 4 assisting in checking and filling gaps	Item 5 timely task reminding
complete agreement	29.63%	30.22%	30.07%	29.93%	30.81%
agreement	38.07%	44.89%	41.33%	38.96%	47.56%
uncertainty	27.85%	20.89%	23.11%	25.78%	18.67%
disagreement	2.67%	2.81%	3.41%	3.26%	1.93%
complete disagreement	1.78%	1.19%	2.08%	2.07%	1.03%

5.2. What are students' perception on the influence of "Super Star" on the learning behavior?

There are 3 questions in this module, which are investigated from 3 aspects, which are used to understand the influence of "Super Star" on students' learning behavior from three aspects: classroom participation, after-class consolidation and review and summary of learning methods. In general, the result of this study ties well with previous studies. According to Table 3, "Super Star" has the highest influence on students' participation in class (76.60% agreement). With more and more front-line teachers actively trying to carry out blended teaching reform, the personalized learning needs of students in the blended learning environment have been better met, and the students' autonomous participation in learning has also been further enhanced (Corcuera & Alvarez, 2021). Compared with previous studies, "Super Star" has the lowest influence on after-class consolidation and review (69.84% agreement), which shows the restraint and supervision effect of class on students from the side, and also reflects the current situation of students' lack of consciousness when using applications and the need to improve their independent learning ability.

Table 3. Students' Perceptions on "Super Star"'s influence on the learning behavior

Responses	Item 1 classroom participation	Item 2 summary of learning methods	Item 3 after-class consolidation and review
complete agreement	29.93%	28.44%	27.70%
agreement	46.67%	41.48%	41.78%
uncertainty	19.85%	25.93%	25.04%
disagreement	2.22%	2.22%	3.11%
complete disagreement	1.33%	1.93%	2.37%

5.3. What are students' perception on the formative evaluation of "Super Star"?

Formative evaluation is an important means of College English teaching evaluation and is to track, supervise and feedback the process of teaching and learning, College English Guide (2020 edition).

Under the background of "Internet Plus", the blended teaching supported by "intelligence plus" technology will be the trend and normal of teaching in the future, and it is inevitable to integrate online teaching or learning data into evaluation so as to realize the diversification of evaluation mode. With the help of instant data, such as in-class quizzes and discussions, the achievement of teaching effects is continuously assessed so that classroom teaching is relaxed and detailed (Delgado-Gonzalez & Herrera-Rivas, 2021). This questionnaire investigates students' attitude towards the evaluation of "Super Star" learning data.

According to Table 4, the evaluation of "Super Star" learning data was supported by most of the students (69.48% agreement), which is higher than 58.14% (Wang & Li, 2021) in previous study. It indicates students in H college are more satisfied with the evaluation of application. The percent of improving studying interest, studying motivation and studying effect are 70.52%, 71.11% and 69.33% respectively, also higher than previous study. The "Super Star" can be used to clearly record the learning track of students in the score statistical function, and the completion of various learning tasks will be directly presented in the form of scores, realizing the " whole-process and all-round diversified assessment and evaluation mode", and thus promoting "students' autonomous learning, process learning and experiential learning". But it also suggest the evaluation of "Super Star" will demotivate part of the students. This is because this part students don't have a clear recolonization about "Super Star".

Table 4. Students' perception on the formative evaluation of "Super Star"

Responses	Item 1 integrating online data into evaluation	Item 2 improving studying interest	Item 3 improving studying motivation	Item 4 improving studying effect
complete agreement	27.85%	29.78%	29.33%	29.63%
agreement	41.63%	40.74%	41.78%	39.70%
uncertainty	23.70%	21.93%	21.19%	24.89%
disagreement	4.00%	4.44%	4.89%	3.41%
complete disagreement	2.81%	3.11%	2.81%	2.37%

5.4. What are students' attitude towards the use of "Super Star" in College English learning?

Two questions investigated which functions the students are most interested in "Super Star" as presented in Table 5, and of which function the students think most useful. The data reflect that 72.13% of the students hold a positive attitude towards the use of "Super Star". The top three functions that they are interested most in are signing up (58.22% agreement), voting (51.70% agreement) and topic discussion (48.49% agreement), and the three most useful functions are class practice (62.52% agreement), group discussion (59.11% agreement) and signing up (45.63%). The result of this study ties well with the study done by Zhang (2021). In Zhang's study, most the students perceived as having positive attitude to the use of "Super Star" and it shows that use of "Super Star" in English can enhance students' learning ability and flexibility, increase the convenience and immediacy and make students become the subject of learning. In addition, the top three functions that students are interested most in are voting, quick answer and topic discussion. The three most useful functions also are class practice, group

discussion and signing up, the same with this study. This shows the functions of "Super Star" are useful for students' studies. In view of this, teachers should make full use of the functions which could arouse students' interest. They can integrate the knowledge with the functions, therefore make the process of learning more interesting.

Table 5. Students' attitude towards the use of "Super Star" for College English learning

Responses	Item 1 signing up	Item 2 selecting student	Item 3 class practice	Item 4 topic discussion	Item 5 quick answer	Item 6 questionnaire	Item 7 group task	Item 8 voting
most preferred function	58.22%	38.96%	44.15%	48.89%	47.56%	32.44%	37.33%	51.7%
most useful function	45.63%	35.26%	62.52%	59.11%	42.81%	34.52%	36.44%	30.52%

6. Conclusion

In general, blended teaching based on "Super Star" is effective for H College's College English teaching based on the responses gleaned from 673 students. "Super Star" seems to have the advantages of convenience and speed, which can make learning English happen anytime and anywhere. It can also improve students' learning interest, learning motivation and learning effect, cultivate students' independent studying ability. Students' participation in class was also improved by the use of "Super Star". The evaluation of "Super Star" realizes the "whole- process and all-round diversified assessment and evaluation mode. However, some issues arose with the use of "Super Star," such as students lacking consciousness and self-discipline in independent learning, doubts about their learning gains, especially at higher levels of ability improvement, and a preference for traditional teaching methods. Moreover, online teaching is more susceptible to interference due to its reliance on electronic devices and networks. To address these issues, teachers should encourage students to improve their independent learning abilities and set clear teaching goals for each unit and lesson. Big data can be used to provide timely teaching feedback and evaluation, allowing for adjustments to be made in a timely manner to improve teaching effectiveness. While technology should be used to enhance teaching and learning outcomes, it should not be relied on exclusively. Innovation is crucial, and the application of information and intelligent technology should serve the purpose of improving teaching and learning outcomes and enhancing teaching quality.

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