

## Study on Factors Affecting English Acquisition of Chinese Minority Students Majoring in Nursing in a Blended Learning Environment

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Blended learning is an increasingly prevalent trend in College English acquisition. This research seeks 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. Eighty students were selected as the research subjects, and the research instruments included questionnaire and interview questions to collect data. The study results show that a blended learning environment, to some degree, can help learners overcome anxiety 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 students, nursing, English as a foreign language, acquisition, blended learning

### Introduction

Current studies on second language acquisition (Wen & Johnson, 1997; Yao, 2010, 2014, 2019) find that learners' characters 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 a population of over 1.36 billion, 56 ethnic groups recognized officially, and more than 130 languages spoken (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 contemporary 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

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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 studies in a college must succeed in the competitive college entrance examination. Usually a perfect score for the examination is 750, while the required minimum entrance score 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 governments try to help more minority students to access top universities.

Another way that the governments help minority students to access tertiary education, especially top universities, is the Preparation College Students program. This program was founded 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 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 of higher than 557 could apply for a preparation student position in Tsinghua University in 2020. The preparation students will improve their knowledge studies 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 freshmen in the level of all academic subjects (of course, including English) after one academic year, 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 (BLE) for some preparation college students and college students. Through the *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 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 BLE and try to help them to 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). This mode of teaching and learning 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-the-job training (Gruba & Hinkleman, 2012). This training model is widely popularized and accepted within companies due to its effectiveness, adaptability and flexibility, and thus has been 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. With the development of studying blended learning, most scholars have agreed on the definition of blended learning. 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 (Vanslambrouck et al., 2018; Wichadee, 2017).

Scholars have paid attention to blended learning in three aspects. The first aspect is to discuss what a learning environment is and how to establish a BLE (Allen & Seaman, 2016; Bates, 2018; Lakhali & Meyer, 2019; Shih, 2010). For example, 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 sufficient 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. This model is still used by teachers in recent times. The second aspect is to evaluate the learning performance in a BLE (Berga et al., 2021; Gjestvang, Høye, & Bronken, 2021; Jalinus et al., 2021). The research findings show that a blended environment enables students to, "have the potential to foster innovative and flexible learning opportunities" (Berga et al., 2021), to "acquire professional competence relevant to practice" (Gjestvang, Høye, & Bronken, 2021), and to improve students' cognitive abilities, affective abilities, communication abilities, collaboration abilities, cooperation abilities, and creativity abilities (Jalinus et al., 2021). The third aspect is to evaluate the influence of a BLE on students' learning styles, such as learning motivation (Firat, Kılınç, & Yüzer, 2018; Yusoff, Yusoff, & Noh, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2020), self-control abilities (Zhu, Au, & Yates, 2016) and self-esteem abilities (Giofrè, Borella, & Mammarella, 2017). These studies report that a BLE and these learning styles (such as learning motivation, self-control abilities, and self-esteem abilities) are interacted with each other. It is hard to say which one is the independent variable and which one is dependent variable.

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 learning management system (LMS) and some forums for learners to discuss with each other. Thus, the BLE was established in some universities in China.

Since 1980s onwards, 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), 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 traits 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 (CMPCS) are a special type of Chinese minority college student—they are at the transition period from high school students to college students. Unfortunately, few scholars focus on CMPCS English acquisition, especially those majoring in nursing. Yao (2014) has studied CMPCS' 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 CMPCS' 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, CMPCS are weak at English autonomous learning abilities and some of them cannot choose the learning strategies on their own.

As blended learning is a newly-born teaching model in China, the study on the factors affecting CMPCS' English acquisition in a BLE is still not clear. 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 CMPCS majoring in nursing and analyze how language teachers can help the learners to improve their English acquisition in a BLE.

## **Research Methodology**

This study is an empirical and pilot study approved by the Committee of Ethics and Integrity in Research with Humans in Tanjin Chengjian University. As we know, many factors can affect foreign language acquisition and it is impossible to study all of 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 behavior, 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 CMPCS majoring in nursing in a BLE regarding the aforementioned aspects.

In the current study, the research instruments of questionnaire and interview questions are used to collect data. In the first stage the researchers investigated 148 students' data about their English learning anxiety, academic help-seeking behaviour, learning strategies and the autonomous English learning ability. Then the researchers identified the top 40 subjects (on their English examination results) of the 148 students as the high-achieving learners and the bottom 40 as the low-achieving learners. The data of the sample size of the 80 students were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively to study the differences of English acquisition between the high-achieving learner and the low-achieving in a BLE. Regarding the differences, the study tries to find the factors affecting English acquisition of CMPCS majoring in nursing in a BLE.

## **Research Subjects**

In China there are nearly 3,000 new Preparation College Students in each class year. These students are distributed among six universities. Take the year of 2019 as an example; 2,945 ethnic students were enrolled as Preparation College Students. Among them, 846 students were 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 research location site, 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 of this study 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 the beginning of the research study, all the bilingual or multilingual students in the school (154 students) were investigated. The researchers then collected 148 valid questionnaires which were from students from 34 different ethnicities, such as Mongolian, Uygur, Kazak, Zhuang, Buyi, Tujia, and so on. Of them, 48.6% (72 subjects) are male while 51.4% of them (76

subjects) are female; 52.7% of the total sample size (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 range from 18 to 21 years old and the mean age is 19.2.

### **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 BLE?
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 BLE (Yao, 2017). The research tools include four questionnaires and some interview questions. All questions in the questionnaires have a five-point scale, 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 behavior, English learning strategies and autonomous English learning abilities. To relax the interviewee, the researcher records the interview 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 of 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 vs. 10 female students; 10 students from rural areas vs. another 10 students from towns or cities; 10 students who are high-achieving learners vs. 10 students who are low-achieving learners, respectively) are selected randomly to do the individual interviews.

After removing all of the questionnaires with incomplete information, the researcher evaluates the operation and inputs 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 CMPCS in their English acquisition in a BLE.

## **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 behaviors 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). Aslan and Thompson (2021) report that classroom anxiety has a relationship with classroom performance and learning confidence.

Yao (2014) reports that the anxiety level for CMPCS 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 BLE are revealed in Table 1.

Table 1. Differences in English Learning Anxiety

	High-achieving learners		Low-achieving learners		T	P (two-tailed)
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation		
Communication apprehension	3.20	0.52	2.88	0.52	2.739	0.008
Test anxiety	4.21	0.75	3.99	0.83	1.244	0.217
Fear of negative evaluation	2.86	0.33	2.85	0.38	0.127	0.899
Foreign language anxiety	3.57	0.29	3.08	0.35	6.776	0.000

Table 1 reveals that the level of test 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 interviews, 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 a 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 behavior 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, and it 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). In the existing help-seeking literature, Denise, Barry and Todd (2021) study the gender differences in academic help-seeking with the Help-Seeking Scales and the Traditional Gender Script Questionnaire. On their report, those with higher scores on the masculine gender script subscale Mastery and Control of feelings are reluctant to seek help. However, studies about the differences between high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners in academic help-seeking are very limited.

Yao (2011) reveals that the academic help-seeking abilities for CMPCS 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 revealed in Table 2.

*Table 2. Differences in Academic Help-Seeking*

	High-achieving learners		Low-achieving learners		T	P (two-tailed)
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation		
Instrumental help-seeking	2.77	0.60	2.48	0.58	2.882	0.005
Executive help-seeking	3.70	0.49	3.24	0.69	4.676	0.001
Academic help-seeking	3.23	0.38	2.86	0.42	5.568	0.000

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 levels 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 (3.23 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. All of 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 Parnes, Kanchewa, Marks, and Schwartz (2020), 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 ashamed 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, behaviors, 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, p. 63). They are composed of at least six sub-strategies: memory strategy, cognitive strategy, metacognitive strategy, compensation strategy, affective strategy and social strategy (Ardayati & Ramasari, 2021; Oxford, 1990).

The previous study (Yao & Ren, 2011) reports that CMPCS 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 BLE are revealed in Table 3.

Table 3. Differences in English Learning Strategy

	High-achieving learners		Low-achieving learners		T	P (two-tailed)
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation		
Memory strategy	4.22	0.45	4.18	0.19	0.581	0.563
Cognitive strategy	3.51	0.66	2.88	0.46	4.981	0.000
Metacognitive strategy	3.21	0.39	2.71	0.28	6.513	0.000
Compensation strategy	3.89	0.28	3.64	0.19	4.646	0.000
Affective strategy	2.76	0.37	2.59	0.34	2.218	0.030
Social strategy	2.76	0.39	2.68	0.44	0.890	0.376

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 Dwinka (2020).

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 were found 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 think highly of 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 (Du, 2020). Autonomous learning is seen (Du, 2020; Holec, 1981) as a double process; it entails learning the foreign language as well as learning *how* to learn the foreign language.

In the last 30 years many scholars (Aripova, 2021; Lou, 2021; Marantika, 2021; Vaklifard & Sabokbar, 2021) discuss the definition and connotation of autonomous learning, the affection aspects of autonomous learning and how to help the learner to cultivate autonomous abilities.

Based on the definitions of autonomous learning, the current study divides English autonomous acquisition abilities into 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. The previous study (Cao & Yao, 2010) reports that CMPCS 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 revealed in 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 4. Differences in English Autonomous Learning Ability

	High-achieving learners		Low-achieving learners		T	P (two-tailed)
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation		
Knowing the learning purpose	2.51	0.53	2.18	0.53	2.748	0.007
Setting up learning schedule	2.57	0.54	2.16	0.59	3.248	0.002
Selecting suitable learning strategies	2.11	0.46	1.97	0.36	1.523	0.132
Adjusting learning strategies	2.41	0.52	2.09	0.44	2.989	0.004
Adjusting and evaluating English learning	2.74	0.72	1.76	0.57	6.681	0.000
English autonomous learning ability	2.57	0.30	1.95	0.19	11.172	0.000

Interviews in the study verify that high-achieving learners have stronger self-learning abilities. Most of them have the following features: understanding of the teaching intent and teaching purpose, 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 (Chen, 2021; Chen & Chen, 2018; Setya & Anis, 2020; Xiao & Liu, 2021; Yao, 2014) find that in a traditional learning environment the CMPCS' 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 CMPCS' English acquisition in a blended learning environment. The comparison results show the degrees of anxiousness 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 BLE in some way can help learners overcome anxiety (Lane, Hoang, Leighton, & Rissanen, 2021) and cultivate autonomous learning abilities (Wang, Chen, Tai, & Zhang, 2021), as a BLE can give learners more freedom to control one's own learning activities.

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 for 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 important factors which influence their English acquisition in a blended environment for CMPCS.

Both high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners of minority preparation college students experience a 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 co-construction of English knowledge, 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 highly upon their academic performance and their teachers' attitudes toward them. Teachers' 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 in themselves. In addition, some tutorial lectures may 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 the others. The current study finds that both high-achieving learners and low-achieving learners of preparation students only prefer the memory strategies. Some reasons for that 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, and on the other hand should be familiar with students' different learning characteristics. In addition, some programs about strategy on language acquisition need to be established where students can master more strategies, and the ways to choose suitable strategies. Similarly, teachers may be able to better help students 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 CMPCS are weak in their English autonomous learning abilities, 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 learners) 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 learners 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 of 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 CMPCS' English acquisition in a BLE, 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 CMPCS' English acquisition. It is hoped that further studies be carried out regarding the factors affecting their English acquisition in a BLE.

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## Appendix

### 1. Questionnaire of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (外语课堂焦虑调查问卷) (Yao, 2014)

姓名 name\_\_\_\_\_ 性别 gender\_\_\_\_\_ 出生年月 born\_\_\_\_\_ 民族 ethnic\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 家庭住址 address\_\_\_\_\_ 联系电话 mobile number\_\_\_\_\_

A1. 在外语课说英语很没有信心 (I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.);

A2. 我不担心外语课上会犯错 (I do not worry about making mistakes in language class.);

A3. 外语课上老师叫我时会发抖 (I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.);

A4. 外语课上没听懂老师用外语说什么会感到害怕 (It frightens me when I do not understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.);

A5. 即使上更多的外语课,我也不觉得受困扰 (It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.);

A6. 上外语课时在想一些和课堂内容无关的事 (During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.);

A7. 我总觉得同学的英语能力比自己好 (I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.);

A8. 对外语课上的一些小测验感到放松 (I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.);

A9. 外语课上做没有准备的发言时感到恐慌 (I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.);

A10. 我担心外语课不能通过 (I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.);

A11. 我不懂为何有些人在外语课上会如此心烦不安 (I do not understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.);

A12. 外语课上很紧张以致知道的东西都忘了 (In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.);

A13. 在外语课上主动发言会使我感到尴尬 (It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.);

A14. 和外国人说英语不感到紧张 (I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.);

A15. 不理解外语老师纠错内容时会很不自在 (I get upset when I do not understand what the teacher is correcting.);

A16. 对外语准备得很充分,还是感到焦虑 (Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.);

A17. 经常感觉不想去上外语课 (I often feel like not going to my language class.);

A18. 在外语课上发言很自信 (I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.);

A19. 外语老师要纠正我错误时很害怕 (I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.);

A20. 快被叫到回答问题时我会感到心跳得很厉害 (I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.);

A21. 外语考试准备得越多越觉得没底 (The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.);

A22. 我不觉得课前做好准备会有压力 (I do not feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.);

A23. 我觉得其他同学的英语讲得比我好 (I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.);

A24. 在其他同学面前说英语会很拘谨 (I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.);

A25. 外语课的进度很快,我担心跟不上 (Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.);

A26. 我上外语课比上其他课更紧张和不安 (I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.);

A27. 在外语课上发言讲英语时会感到紧张和困惑 (I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.);

A28. 去上外语课的路上感到有信心 (When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.);

A29. 没听懂外语老师讲的每一个词我会感到很不安 (I get nervous when I do not understand every word the language teacher says.);

A30. 学外语要学那么多规则使人头疼 (I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.);

A31. 说外语时担心别的同学取笑 (I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.);

A32. 和外国人在一起感到轻松自在 (I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.);

A33. 老师问事先没有准备的问题时感到紧张 (I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.).

## 2. Academic Questionnaire of Help-seeking Scale in English Acquisition (英语学习课业求助调查问卷) (Yao, 2014)

姓名 name \_\_\_\_\_ 性别 gender \_\_\_\_\_ 出生年月 born \_\_\_\_\_ 民族 ethnic \_\_\_\_\_

家庭住址 address \_\_\_\_\_ 联系电话 mobile number \_\_\_\_\_

H1.当我遇到不会的问题时,我会查阅参考书或上网查询,直到自己完全理解这部分内容 (When I meet difficulties in learning, I go to internet or check reference books.);

H2. 当我做错了题却不知道自己在什么地方时, 我会请老师或同学讲解 (when I cannot find out the reasons for my mistake, I will ask for help from my teachers or classmates.);

H3. 对于不会的题目, 我会请别人替我完成 (I invite others to complete my assignments if I do not know how to finish them.);

H4. 如果遇到不会的问题, 我会请老师或同学给我一些提示 (I ask for tips from my teachers or classmates if I meet difficulties in learning.);

H5. 虽然我自己动动脑筋也能做出题目, 但这样做很麻烦, 所以我会请别人告诉我正确答案 (I know I can solve the problem if I try my best. However, in order to save my time and energy, I prefer to get the keys from others directly.);

H6. 英语课上如果有听不懂的地方, 我会直接举手, 当堂向老师请教 (If I cannot understand my teacher in English class, I will ask for explanation on the spot.);

H7. 英语学习中遇到困难, 我会在课下找老师或同学为我反复讲解, 直到我完全明白 (If I cannot understand my teacher in English class, I will ask for explanation after class.);

H8. 英语学习中遇到问题时, 我不做任何尝试就去问别人正确答案 (If I meet difficulties in English learning, I will ask for the keys from others directly.);

H9. 遇到不会的题目我会照抄别人的 (If I meet difficulties in my English assignments, I prefer to copy the keys from others.);

H10. 遇到不会的问题, 我会在网上直接搜索答案 ((If I meet difficulties in my English assignments, I prefer to find the keys from websites.).

### 3. Appendix Three English Learning Strategy Questionnaire (英语学习策略调查问卷) (Oxford, 1990; Chinese translated by the author) (Yao, 2014)

姓名 name\_\_\_\_\_ 性别 gender\_\_\_\_\_ 出生年月 born\_\_\_\_\_ 民族 ethnic\_\_\_\_\_

家庭住址 address\_\_\_\_\_ 联系电话 mobile number\_\_\_\_\_

S1. 我会去思考学过的和新学的英语之间的关系 (I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.);

S2. 为了记住新学的英语单字, 我会试着用这些生字来造句 (I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.);

S3. 我会在脑海中想出可以配合英语声音的图片或意象, 以便记住某个单字 (I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.);

S4. 我会在脑中制造出某个生字出现的情境, 以这种方法把单字背起来 (I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.);

S5. 我会使用押韵的方式来记住生字 (I use rhymes to remember new English words.);

- S6. 我会使用闪示卡来背生字 (I use flashcards to remember new English words.);
- S7. 我会把生字用肢体演出来 (I physically act out new English words.);
- S8. 我常常复习英语课程 (I review English lessons often.);
- S9. 我会按照生字或词组出现在课本、黑板或是街道广告牌的位置, 来记住生字或词组 (I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street.).
- S10. 我会重复说或写英文生字好几次 (I say or write new English words several times.);
- S11. 我会想把英语说得像以英语为母语的人一样 (I try to talk like native English speakers.);
- S12. 我会练习英语的发音 (I practice the sounds of English.);
- S13. 我会把学过的英文字用在不同的方面上 (I use the English words I know in different ways.);
- S14. 我会以英语开启对话 (I start conversations in English.);
- S15. 我会看以英语发音的电视节目或电影 (I watch English TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.);
- S16. 我阅读英文做为休闲活动 (I read for pleasure in English.);
- S17. 我会以英语来记笔记、信息、书信或是报告 (I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.);
- S18. 我会先略读英语的文章(很快地把文章看过一遍), 然后再回来细看 (I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.);
- S19. 我会在我的母语里找寻和英语相同的生字 (I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.);
- S20. 我会找出英语的构成方式 (I try to find patterns in English.);
- S21. 我会把英语拆解开来, 找出自己懂的部份, 藉以了解单字的意思 (I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.);
- S22. 我不会逐字逐句翻译 (I try not to translate word-for-word.);
- S23. 我会把听到或是读到的英文信息做成摘要 (I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.);
- S24. 遇到不熟悉的英文单字, 我会去猜它的意思 (To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.);
- S25. 在对话中, 我如果想不出某个字英文怎么说, 我会使用表情和动作 (When I can think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures);
- S26. 如果我不知道英语该怎么说, 我会自己创造新字 (I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.);
- S27. 阅读的过程中, 我一遇到生字就马上查字典 (I read English without looking up every new word.);
- S28. 我会用英语试着去猜别人接着会说什么 (I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.);

S29. 如果我想不起来某个英文单字, 我会用别的字或词组来转述同样的意思 (I can think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.);

S30. 我会尽量找机会练习英语 (I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.);

S31. 我会注意我所犯的错误, 藉此帮助自己学得更好 (I notice my English mistakes and I use that information to help me do better.);

S32. 当有人在说英语时, 会引起我的注意 (I pay attention when someone is speaking English.);

S33. 我会想办法让自己成为更好的英语学习者 (I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.);

S34. 我会好好规画时间, 以便有足够的时间学英语 (I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.);

S35. 我会找能用英语谈话的人练习英语 (I look for people I can talk to in English.);

S36. 我会尽量找机会阅读英语 (I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.);

S37. 对于如何增进英语能力我有相当清楚的目标 (I have clear goals for improving my English skills.);

S38. 我会去思考我在学英语上的进步程度 (I think about my progress in learning English.);

S39. 每当我感到害怕要用英语时, 我会尽量放轻松 (I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.);

S40. 即使我很怕会说错, 我还是鼓励自己多开口说英语 (I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.);

S41. 当我在英语方面有良好表现时, 我会犒赏自己 (I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.);

S42. 我会注意当我在研读或使用英语时是否会紧张 (I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.);

S43. 我会把我的感觉记录在语言学习日记里 (I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.);

S44. 当我在学英语时, 我会告诉别人我的感觉 (I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.);

S45. 如果遇到听不懂的英文, 我请他放慢速度, 或是再讲一次 (If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.);

S46. 当我说英语时, 我请以英语为母语的人纠正我的错误 (I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.);

S47. 我和别的学生练习英语 (I practice English with other students.);

S48. 我求助英语母语人 (I ask for help from English speakers.);

S49. 我以英语来问问题 (I ask questions in English.);

S50. 我想知道英语国家的文化 (I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.)

#### 4. Questionnaire of Autonomous English Learning Ability (英语自主学习能力调查问卷) (Yao, 2014)

姓名 name\_\_\_\_\_ 性别 gender\_\_\_\_\_ 出生年月 born\_\_\_\_\_ 民族 ethnic\_\_\_\_\_

家庭住址 address\_\_\_\_\_ 联系电话 mobile number\_\_\_\_\_

AU1. 对教师教学目的与要求的了解情况 (I am familiar with the teaching purposes and teaching requirements.);

AU2. 把教师的教学目的转化成学生自己的学习目的的情况 (I can set up my learning goals on the teacher's requirements.);

AU3. 把教师的教学目的转化成学生自己学习目的, 并在此基础上努力学习 (In order to achieve my goals that are set up on the teacher's requirements study English hard.);

AU4. 我能理解教师在课堂上采取某项教学活动提高学生语言能力意图的情况 (I always understand the purpose of teaching activities and know how these activities improve students' language skills.);

AU5. 课堂上是否能跟上教师教学进度的情况 (I can keep up with the learning progress with my English teacher.);

AU6. 除了教师布置的学习任务, 学生制订自己英语学习计划的情况 (except completing teacher's assignments, I have my own plan to study English after class.);

AU7. 根据自身实际确立学习目标的情况 (I can set up my own learning goals on my actual situation.);

AU8. 调整学习计划的情况 (I can adjust my learning programs in new situations.);

AU9. 规划英语学习时间的情况 (I can manage my English learning time.);

AU10. 根据《大学英语教学大纲》的要求确立学习目标的情况 (I can set up my learning objectives on 'College English Syllabus'.);

AU11. 对学习策略的了解情况 (I know how to choose the suitable strategies myself.);

AU12. 有意识使用有效听力策略的情况 (When I listening to English, I use listening strategies consciously.);

AU13. 有意识使用有效交际策略的情况 (When I communicate in English, I use communication strategies consciously.);

AU14. 有意识使用有效阅读策略的情况 (When I read in English, I use reading strategies consciously.);

AU15. 有意识使用有效写作策略的情况 (When I write in English, I can use writing strategies consciously.);

AU16. 对交际策略使用的监控情况 (I can monitor my communication strategies effectively.);

AU17. 对写作策略使用的监控情况 (I can monitor my writing strategies effectively.);

AU18. 对阅读策略使用的监控情况 (I can monitor my reading strategies effectively.);

AU19. 对听力策略使用的监控情况 (I can monitor my listening strategies effectively.);

AU20. 评价学习方法以找出存在的问题和解决办法的情况 (I always evaluate my learning strategies to identify my learning problems and try to solve them.);

AU21. 意识到学习方法是否切合实际的情况 (I can realize whether my learning strategies are workable.);

AU22. 在课外主动寻找各种机会学习英语、运用英语的情况 (I look for the opportunities to learn and practice English consciously.);

AU23. 克服不利于英语学习的情感因素的情况 (I can control my negative emotional factors in English learning.);

AU24. 利用已有学习资源的情况 (I try to use all my resources to learn English.);

AU25. 把新学的知识应用到语言实践中去的情况 (I try to practice my English knowledge.);

AU26. 与他人合作学习的情况 (I always learn English with others corporately. );

AU27. 在语言学习过程中能否意识到自身错误的情况 (I can realize my errors in English acquisition.);

AU28. 在意识到错误的同时能否找到错误原因, 并采取相应措施更正错误的情况 (I can correct my errors by myself in English acquisition.);

AU29. 能否选择有效学习途径使自己成为一个更好的语言学习者的情况 (I can choose the effective ways to learn English efficiently.);

AU30. 在完成某项语言任务过程中能否同步检测自己预先制订计划完成的情况 (I always complete my English learning task and check my English acquisition plan concurrently.);

AU31. 在完成某项语言任务过程中能否检查并更新自己对前面知识理解的情况 (I always complete my English learning task and check my comprehension of learned knowledge concurrently.).

##### 5. Interview Questions (Yao, 2014)

姓名 name\_\_\_\_\_ 性别 gender\_\_\_\_\_ 出生年月 born\_\_\_\_\_ 民族 ethnic\_\_\_\_\_

家庭住址 address\_\_\_\_\_ 联系电话 mobile number\_\_\_\_\_

1. 你是否喜欢上英语课, 为什么? 你是否害怕英语考试, 为什么? 你是否喜欢用英语与他人交流, 为什么? 在英语学习中你是否担心受到老师的批评, 为什么? (Do you like attending English lecture? Why or why not? Are you afraid of English test? Why or why not? Are you interested in communicating in

English? Why or why not? Are you scared of being criticized by your English teacher? Why or why not?)

2. 学习英语遇到问题时你更愿意找谁去帮你解决这些问题? 为什么? 你更希望他们怎么帮助你, 为什么? (When you meet difficulties in English learning, where do you want to get help? Why? What kind of help do you want to get? Why? )

3. 英语学习过程中你是否反复记忆学过的英语单词, 为什么? 遇到不认识的单词时是否通过上下文猜测这个单词的意思, 为什么? 当用英语交流遇到困难时, 你是否使用身势语言帮你完成交际, 为什么? 学习英语过程中你是否出现过焦虑的情绪? 你认为焦虑情绪是否影响英语学习? 现在你掌握多少种英语学习策略? 你认为哪些学习策略最适合你? (Do you remember English words by rotting? Why or why not? When you meet new words in reading, do you guess its meaning on context? Why or why not? When you have difficulties in expressing in English, do you employ gestures to help your communication? Why or why not? Do you feel anxious in learning English? Do you think the feeling of anxiety will affect English acquisition or not? How many English acquisition strategies do you know? Which strategy (or strategies) is (or are) the best for you? )

4. 英语学习过程中你是否了解教师的教学目的和对你的要求? 你是否为自己制定学习计划? 你是否根据学习进度调整自己的学习计划和策略? 你是否经常反思自己的英语学习以便找出更加适合自己的学习方式和风格? (Do you know the teaching purpose and your English teacher's requirement to you? Do you set up your English learning schedule? Can you set up and adjust your English learning schedule and strategy? Do you often consider how to learn English well?)

5. 你认为影响英语学习的因素都有哪些? (In your opinion, what factors affect English acquisition?)