# Research on the English Teachers Competence of Rural Junior High School in Western China from the Perspective of Blended Learning

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*Abstract*—This research aims to explore the competence of rural junior high school English teachers in Western China under the blended learning background and provide strategies to enhance their competence. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and observations, to collect data from a sample of rural junior high school English teachers in Western China. The findings indicate that the competence levels of these teachers are generally low, and the challenges they face in implementing blended learning include a lack of training and resources, insufficient support from school administrators, and inadequate student motivation. Based on the findings, the study proposes several strategies to enhance the competence of rural junior high school English teachers in Western China under the blended learning background, including providing training and professional development opportunities, increasing support from school administrators, and implementing student-centered approaches to motivate students. The study concludes with recommendations for further research in this field.

*Keywords*—English teacher, competency, blended learning, rural junior high school

## I. INTRODUCTION

English language education is becoming increasingly important in today's globalized world, and it is particularly crucial for students in rural areas to have access to quality English language education. The education level, economic development level, and urban-rural development gap vary greatly in China's western regions. Due to the lack of educational resources in rural areas, the task of building a qualified teacher workforce is daunting [1]. Overall, the education background and English proficiency of rural English teachers in western China are relatively low, and they have limited opportunities for professional development and training in information technology. Additionally, schools in these areas have relatively backward education resources and teaching facilities, which greatly affect the teaching of basic English education in rural areas. With ongoing educational reforms, rapid advancements in educational information technology, and changing demands for

English education and teaching, it is particularly urgent to study the competency of rural English teachers in Western China, especially in the context of blended learning.

However, rural junior high school English teachers in Western China face numerous challenges in providing effective English language education to their students, including limited resources, inadequate training, and a lack of support from school administrators. To address these challenges, blended learning has been proposed as a potential solution to enhance the competence of these teachers and improve the quality of English language education in rural areas.

This research aims to explore the competence of rural junior high school English teachers in Western China under the blended learning background and provide strategies to enhance their competence. The study seeks to answer the following research questions: What are the competence levels of rural junior high school English teachers in Western China under the blended learning background? What are the challenges faced by these teachers in implementing blended learning? What are the strategies to enhance their competence in blended learning?

This research will employ a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and observations, to collect data from a sample of rural junior high school English teachers in Western China. The findings of this study will provide insights into the competence levels of these teachers and the challenges they face in implementing blended learning. Additionally, the study will propose strategies to enhance the competence of rural junior high school English teachers in Western China under the blended learning background, which may be useful for improving English language education in rural areas. The research will contribute to the field of English language education in rural areas in Western China and inform the development of policies and programs to support English language teachers in these regions.

## II. BLENDED EARNING AND TEACHERS' COMPETENCE

### A. Blended Learning

Blended learning has gained popularity in recent years as a flexible and effective way to deliver education,

especially in areas where resources are limited or access to traditional classroom instruction is difficult. In addition, blended learning has been found to improve student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes, as it allows students to learn at their own pace and provides opportunities for individualized instruction.

Blended learning [2], also known as hybrid learning, is an approach to education that combines traditional face-to-face classroom instruction with online learning activities. Blended learning can take many forms, but it typically involves a mix of in-person and online instruction, with students completing some coursework and assignments online and attending in-person classes or workshops for hands-on activities or group work.

Charles R. Graham, a professor in the Department of Educational Technology at Brigham Young University and an expert in the field of blended learning, defines blended learning as "a teaching method that combines face-to-face teaching and online learning to improve learning and teaching effectiveness. The key to blended learning is to combine face-to-face teaching and online learning in a way that promotes student self-directed learning and collaborative learning. This teaching method typically establishes connections between face-to-face teaching and online learning to encourage students to supplement and enhance their learning in both modes" [2].

This definition emphasizes the essence of blended learning as the integration of different teaching modes and resources to maximize student learning and teaching effectiveness. At the core of this teaching method is the encouragement of students to establish connections between face-to-face teaching and online learning to promote self-directed and collaborative learning.

Many researchers have conducted studies on blended learning and its effectiveness in various educational settings. A review of the literature shows that blended learning has been found to be effective in improving student learning outcomes in a range of subjects, including mathematics, science, and language learning. Additionally, blended learning has been shown to increase student engagement and motivation, as well as improve the quality of instruction and teacher-student interactions.

### B. Teacher Competency and Blended Learning

Javanmardi [3] defines teacher competency as "the set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that teachers possess and utilize to perform their roles and responsibilities effectively in the teaching profession". This includes practical skills and foundational knowledge, as well as the ability to develop and adapt these competencies over time. Competencies including knowledge, skills, self-perception, traits, motivation, social roles, attitudes, and values, are individual and measurable, and can be assessed to ensure that teachers are meeting required standards of performance.

Blended learning requires a different set of competencies from teachers compared to traditional face-to-face teaching. Picciano [4] emphasizes that blended learning requires teachers to have different skills and abilities. Teachers need to know how to use technology tools to design and implement online learning activities, and be able to effectively manage face-to-face and online learning activities in a blended classroom. Additionally, teachers need to have the ability to adapt to different learning styles and abilities, and provide personalized support and guidance.

Furthermore, teachers need to be proficient in using technology, to be able create a learning environment that promotes active engagement and collaboration among learners, both online and offline. This involves designing and delivering learning activities that encourage students to work together [5]. Teachers also need to be able to monitor student progress and provide timely feedback, both online and offline, to ensure that students are on track to achieve their learning goals.

In summary, blended learning requires teachers to possess a unique set of competencies that blend traditional teaching skills with technological and pedagogical expertise. Teachers who are able to develop these competencies will be better equipped to facilitate effective blended learning experiences for their students.

In the context of English language education in rural areas in Western China, blended learning has the potential to overcome many of the challenges faced by teachers and students, such as a lack of resources, limited access to high-quality instruction, and insufficient student motivation. However, research is needed to explore the effectiveness of blended learning in this specific context and to identify strategies to enhance the competence of English language teachers in implementing blended learning.

## III. RESEARCH DESIGN

### A. Research Participants

The participants in this survey are rural junior high school English teachers in Western China. The study sample is located in Ankang, Hanzhong, and Xianyang cities in Shaanxi province.10 rural middle school principals and education bureau officials.

### B. Research Purpose

The purpose of this survey is to understand the current status of teacher competency among rural junior high school English teachers in Western China, in order to provide a basis for strategies to improve their competency in the context of blended learning.

### C. Research Method

The survey is conducted by using a questionnaire. The questionnaire is distributed in paper form to rural junior high school English teachers in western China, and an online survey is also used to increase coverage and efficiency.

Interview Method: Randomly select 10 rural middle school principals and education bureau officials to conduct interviews on the current status of English teachers' competency in rural junior high schools under mixed learning backgrounds.

*D. Instrument*

The Survey Questionnaire on the English Teachers Competency of Rural Junior High School in Western China under Blended Learning is used as instrument in the research. Along with the personal and background information, there are 17 questions on teaching methods philosophy, educational technology ability, teaching resources, teaching effectiveness, teacher development, and training included in the survey. The questionnaire is specific and detailed, and could comprehensively and objectively reflect the teachers' competency under blended learning.

## IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Result and Analysis of Survey Questionnaire

Survey results: A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed to English teachers in the rural junior high school, and 96 valid questionnaires were collected. Using SPSS to statistically analyze the data from interviews and questionnaire surveys, the survey results show that in rural junior high school English teachers in western China, the vast majority of teachers lacks adequate education and training, teaching resources, student interest and motivation, and up-to-date teaching methods, all of which constrain their competence. At the same time, there are also some teachers who perform well in certain aspects, such as innovative teaching methods and active engagement in extracurricular activities. These results provide a basis for developing strategies to improve the competence of rural junior high school English teachers in the context of blended learning.

(1) Factors influencing the competence of rural junior high school English teachers under the background of blended learning

The competence of rural junior high school English teachers is not directly related to their age, gender, and work experience.

Their education and professional background have a direct impact on the competence of rural junior high school English teachers. In this survey, 65% of teachers graduated with an English major, 20% with a Chinese language and literature or ideological and political education major, 12% with a science and engineering major such as mathematics and chemistry, and 3% with other majors. Among the graduates, 55% graduated from universities at the level of second-tier or above, 33% graduated from junior colleges and then applied for correspondence undergraduate programs, and 12% graduated from vocational schools. Through data analysis and interviews, it was found that rural junior high school English teachers with an English major have significantly stronger competence than those with other majors. Teachers with a bachelor's degree have significantly higher competence than those with a college degree or other teachers.

The teaching philosophy, effective teaching evaluation ability, and professional development ability of rural junior high school English teachers have an important impact on their teaching competence. Teachers with a clear understanding and mastery of English teaching philosophy and methods, teacher education information technology, and online teaching ability have significantly higher competence than other teachers. Teachers who frequently participate in professional training and focus on personal professional development have higher competence than those who are satisfied with the status quo and do not improve their personal professional and vocational abilities.

(2) Analysis of the current situation of the competence of rural junior high school English teachers under the background of blended learning

① Rural junior high school English teachers' learning and mastery of teaching philosophy and methods are not enough.

Questions 1–4 mainly investigated the learning, understanding, and application of current English teaching philosophy and methods by rural English teachers. 65% of the teachers answered that they have learned less about advanced teaching philosophy and do not know much about it. Regarding blended teaching methods, 40% of the teachers said they are not familiar with them, and 75% of the teachers said they have basically not tried them. Question 5 mainly investigated ways to improve students' learning motivation: 79% of teachers improve students' English learning motivation through criticism, preaching, and encouragement, while 11% of teachers use rewards and competitions. 10% of teachers use personalized teaching methods that take into account students' physical and mental characteristics, ideological status, and personality traits to improve students' English learning motivation.

② Rural junior high school English teachers' educational information technology abilities are weak.

Question 1: Only 23% of rural junior high school English teachers believe they can conduct online teaching and online guidance. 75% of the teachers believe that online teaching is relatively difficult. Question 2: Only 19% of the teachers can use English teaching/learning platforms or tools proficiently. 81% of the teachers do not use English learning platforms and tools at all. Question 3: Only 8% of English teachers believe that they can effectively integrate information technology into English teaching, while 92% of teachers believe that new educational information technology is too difficult and cannot be effectively integrated into English teaching.

③ Rural junior high school English teachers have poor online teaching ability and lack teaching resources.

Question 1: 88% of rural English teachers believe that schools cannot provide sufficient online and offline teaching resources, while 11% are unsure whether schools have adequate resources. Question 2: Due to a lack of experience with blended learning, 70% of teachers believe that they cannot effectively design and select online and offline teaching and learning tasks, while 20% think it may be possible. 5% of teachers are unsure.

④ Rural junior high school English teachers have low effective teaching evaluation abilities.

Question 1: 72% of teachers believe that the evaluation method is mainly based on written tests, and they are not familiar with formative and multi-dimensional evaluation methods, which hinders their ability to effectively evaluate students' language learning outcomes. 25% of teachers have tried non-test methods such as oral exams to evaluate students' outcomes, while 3% are uncertain.

Question 2: 70% of teachers believe that students' confidence improves slowly, and rural students' motivation and academic performance in English learning improve slowly. The overall atmosphere for English learning is low.

⑤ Rural junior high school English teachers have limited opportunities to participate in professional training, and their awareness of professional development is weak.

Question 1: 88% of rural English teachers believe that there are limited opportunities to participate in professional training related to English education, modern educational technology, and other related fields both inside and outside of schools. 12% of teachers believe that training is not meaningful to them due to their age. Questions 2–4 focus on the current status of teachers' autonomous professional development abilities and awareness. 70% of English teachers feel that their work tasks are heavy, and they do not have time to focus on personal professional development. 20% of teachers believe that their personal abilities are not sufficient, and they lack appropriate training and guidance. 10% of teachers believe that the professional and vocational abilities required for junior high school English teachers are not high and there is no need to specialize in personal professional development.

(3) Result and analysis of interview

Interview results: 10 rural middle school principals and education bureau officials were randomly select ed to conduct interviews on the current status of English teachers' competency in rural junior high schools under mixed learning backgrounds.

According to the interview with 6 principals and 4 education officials, there are several challenges facing rural English education in China. Specifically, 9 participants (90%) believe that rural English teachers have low competency, 10 participants (100%) believe that teachers lack skills in blended teaching, and 10 participants (100%) believe that there is a shortage of teaching resources in rural English education. In addition, 8 participants (80%) believe that improving teacher competency through training and professional development, strengthening English teaching resources and facilities, can effectively promote the quality of rural basic English education.

This data suggests that there is an urgent need for targeted and comprehensive professional development for rural English teachers in China. Additionally, efforts should be made to improve access to resources and facilities for English education in rural areas. By addressing these challenges, it may be possible to improve the quality of rural English education in China.

## V. COUNTERMEASURES ON ENHANCING COMPETENCE OF RURAL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS IN WESTERN CHINA UNDER BLENDED LEARNING

### A. Improving Learning and Application of English Teaching Philosophy and Methods

Philosophy and methods are important guarantees for effective teaching [6]. Effective teaching requires a deep understanding of how students learn, a clear understanding of the goals of education, and a range of strategies and techniques for achieving those goals. Teachers must continually evaluate and refine their teaching practices based on research and best practices, and must have a deep knowledge of subject matter and teaching methods. Local education bureaus or schools can promote the learning of advanced English education teaching philosophy and teaching methods among teachers through organizing specialized training, workshops, teaching observation, and teaching competitions. They can also guide teachers to apply them to specific teaching practices.

### B. Enhancing Teachers' Educational Information Technology Capabilities

With the continuous deepening of education and teaching reform and the continuous development of educational information technology, the educational information technology capabilities of teachers are particularly urgent [5]. In the face of the current situation of rural English education, targeted and systematic educational information technology training can be conducted to improve teachers' application level of educational information technology, cultivate teachers' ability for online teaching and online tutoring, and strengthen the school's investment in educational information technology, providing teachers with advanced educational information technology equipment and platforms.

### C. Strengthening Teachers' Online Teaching Ability and Teaching Resource Support

Schools or relevant departments can organize online training to provide teachers with teaching skills and knowledge in online teaching. They can also actively provide technical support to help teachers familiarize themselves with online teaching platforms and tools, such as providing technical guidance and troubleshooting. Establishing an online teaching resource library to collect and organize online teaching courseware, videos, exercises, and other teaching resources for teachers to use. Teachers can also share their own teaching resources in the resource library to improve the quality and diversity of resources. Encouraging teachers to explore and innovate in online teaching, conducting teaching practices and research. Smith and Johnson [7] stressed that encouraging teachers to experiment and innovate with different online teaching methods can lead to improved student engagement and outcomes. Schools can set up awards to encourage teachers to innovate and improve in teaching. Enhancing teachers' online teaching design and

support capabilities to improve teaching and learning effectiveness.

### D. Promoting Diversified Teaching Evaluation System and Enriching Educational Resources for Teaching and Learning

Improving and enhancing the education evaluation system and enriching educational resources are critical components of education reform. The implementation of a multi-dimensional evaluation approach and the provision of rich and diverse educational resources can improve the quality of education and promote student growth [8]. Promoting diversified teaching evaluation methods through organizing online teaching observation and communication, providing online teaching and teaching resources, and conducting online teaching design and planning training. By providing training on multiple teaching evaluation methods, teachers can be assisted in mastering the methods of formative and multi-dimensional evaluation, encouraging them to use multiple evaluation methods and promoting the development of students' comprehensive abilities.

### E. Enhancing Teachers' Awareness and Abilities in Professional Development

Professional development refers to the process of continuous learning and growth that educators engage in throughout their careers [9]. It is important for teachers to stay up-to-date with the latest teaching methods, technologies, and research findings to provide the best education possible for their students. The limited opportunities for professional development and training in information technology faced by rural English teachers in western China [10] have greatly affected their competencies in hybrid teaching.

There are various ways to enhance teachers' awareness and abilities in professional development. One effective method is to provide regular training and workshops that focus on new teaching techniques and technologies. Another way is to encourage collaboration among teachers. By working together and sharing their experiences, teachers can learn from each other and develop new ideas and strategies for improving their teaching. Peer mentoring and coaching programs can also be implemented to provide ongoing support and feedback to teachers. In addition to formal training and collaboration, it is important for teachers to engage in self-reflection and self-evaluation [11]. This involves regularly reflecting on their teaching practices, identifying areas for improvement, and seeking out resources and support to help them grow professionally.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the competence of rural junior high school English teachers in western China under the blended learning background is an important area of research that requires attention. With the increasing adoption of blended learning in rural areas, it is essential for teachers to develop the necessary skills and competencies to effectively use technology in their teaching practices. This research highlights the need for training and support for teachers in rural areas, particularly in the areas of technology integration, lesson planning, and assessment. By addressing these areas, rural English teachers can better support the learning needs of their students and improve the overall quality of education in their communities.

### APPENDIX A QUESTIONNAIRE

Survey Questionnaire on the English Teachers Competency of Rural Junior High School in Western China under Blended Learning

*Dear Teacher,*
*We are conducting a study on the English teacher competency of rural junior high school in Western China under blended learning. Your participation in this study is very important to us. Please answer the following questions honestly and to the best of your knowledge. All information will be used for research purposes only and kept confidential. Thank you!*

#### I. Personal Information
Name:        Gender:        Age:        Location:

#### II. Education Background
Major:                Graduating Institution:
Years of Teaching:        Current School:

#### III. Teaching Methods Philosophy
1. Are you familiar with the current major English teaching methods and approaches?
2. Do you frequently apply advanced teaching methods and approaches in your English classroom?
3. Are you familiar with blended learning methods?
4. Do you use blended learning methods in your junior high school English teaching?
5. Do you frequently use various strategies, such as personalized teaching and innovative teaching, to enhance student motivation to learn English?

#### IV. Educational Technology Ability
1. Are you proficient in conducting online teaching or guidance in English teaching?
2. Can you proficiently use English teaching/learning platforms or tools?
3. Can you effectively integrate information technology into English teaching?

#### V. Teaching Resources
1. Does your school provide sufficient online and offline teaching resources?
2. Can you effectively design and select online and offline teaching and learning tasks?
3. Can you obtain the teaching resources you need successfully?

#### VI. Teaching Effectiveness
1. Can you effectively evaluate students' learning outcomes in blended learning?
2. Do the students you teach have noticeable improvements in confidence and academic achievement in English learning?

VII. Teacher Development and Training

1. Does your region or school regularly provide teacher training?

2. Do you frequently attend education and teaching methods training organized by the school or education bureau?

3. Do you often consciously and actively learn to improve your personal English education and teaching ability?

4. Do you often consciously and actively learn to improve your personal online teaching educational technology skills?

*Thank you for participating in this survey. Your feedback will help us understand the current situation and provide recommendations for improving teacher competence under blended learning in rural areas of Western China.*

## APPENDIX B  INTERVIEW

### Interview Outline for Competency of Rural English Teachers in Western China

(For middle school principals and education department officials)

1. How would you evaluate the overall competence level of rural English teachers in western China?

2. How do you think the educational background and English proficiency of rural English teachers affect their teaching?

3. What is the situation regarding rural English teachers' mastery of information technology, and are there any relevant training opportunities available to them?

4. In English teaching, what are the main challenges faced by rural English teachers?

5. In your school, are there sufficient teaching facilities and educational resources for rural English teachers?

6. What measures have schools and education departments taken based on blended learning to enhance the competence of rural English teachers?

7. What are your suggestions and opinions on the development prospects of the competence level of rural English teachers in Western China?

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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