

Practice and Exploration of Vocational English Curriculum Group's Intervention in College English Teaching for the National Unified Examination of Network Education

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Abstract

College English is one of the public basic courses for the national unified examination of the network education in the pilot university of Modern Distance Education. With the development of network higher education, some public basic courses for the national unified examination of the network education have been playing a more and more important role in guaranteeing the quality of network communication. As to the current situation of college English in the national unified examination of the network education, seminar on English teaching for all English teachers from the Radio and Television Universities (RTVU) in the province is held annually and vocational English curriculum group was established in September, 2015 so as to mobilize the collective power of teachers in teaching. Besides, a provincial questionnaire survey was conducted on the English's current situation in the national unified examination of the network education. The main statistics of this paper are from that survey on students and partly from the survey on teachers. Through the analysis on the result, problems and reasons are found, which provided the first hand information for finding out the countermeasures and the ways of improving the pass rates.

Key words: Curriculum group; College English; The national unified examination of the network education; Intervention teaching

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1. PARTICIPATING TEACHING OF VOCATIONAL ENGLISH CURRICULUM GROUP

participating teaching of Vocational English curriculum group is one of the prior classroom teaching methods initiated by the Ministry of Education and the Provincial Department of Education, and it also indicates the future trend in the reform of teaching methods. *National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)* in the requirements of cultivating innovative personnel, clearly emphasized the combination of learning and thinking, and advocated participating teaching so as to help students learn how to study.

Zhejiang Province's long-term education reform and development plan (2010-2020) also made it clear: "On the basis of in-depth study of classroom teaching, being subject to students under the guidance of teachers, being cooperated with a combination of learning and thinking and forming a correct relationship between teaching and learning". Advocating applying teaching methods of participation, heuristic, exploration and discussion to arousing students' curiosity and interest in study and helping students learn actively and think independently, paying more attention to cultivating students' interests and ability in learning, thinking, innovation and helping students learn how to study, how to live, how to behave and how to be successful. The classroom teaching reform theories and practices indicate that participating teaching is better than other teaching methods in

students' participation and innovation for its features, open to teaching content, interactive in teaching process, and processive in teaching evaluation. For example, compared with lecture teaching, although more effective in helping students master what they learned well and in the fulfillment of cognitive teaching objectives, it does not change the fact that the students is at the negative position in study process because teacher's tasks are giving knowledge and students are waiting for knowledge still, which is difficult to help students become active and innovative.

2. PARTICIPATING TEACHING IS OF GREAT NECESSITY IN IMPROVING SCHOOL TEACHING QUALITY AT SCHOOL

Zhejiang Radio and Television University attaches great importance to the reform of classroom teaching methods. Since 2009, the application of the teaching quality projects concerning the reform of teaching methods has been conducting many times, which facilitated its class-teaching reform. For the present, more and more teachers tend to apply project teaching and research case teaching, which to much degree has improved the quality and efficiency of class-teaching and also has helped the school personnel cultivating be more qualified.

A statistical analysis conducted by the project team on approved teaching method reform project of Zhejiang Radio and Television University found that the project-based teaching, research-based teaching and case-based teaching are the three main teaching methods relevant to the projects approved by Zhejiang Radio and Television University, accounting for 38%, 22% and 13% of the total amount of projects respectively, as shown in Figure 1. In

2009 and 2010, the school started to lead teachers to carry out research-based and project-based teaching methods, therefore, these two teaching methods got more projects approved. However, according to the quantity and types of projects approved in 2011 and 2012, projects regarding the reform of teaching methods declared by teachers showed a diversity.

3. OVERALL SITUATION

According to the Ministry of education, the undergraduate students under open education enrolling in the fall of 2004 or later must participate in national unified examination of public basic courses organized by the Ministry of education. Since the reform of the question types in 2014, some changes have taken place in the overall situation of the national unified examination of network examination, taking Zhejiang Radio and Television University as an example. The total amount of candidates of the test in April 2015 in Zhejiang Radio and Television University is 6,214, the total number of candidates having participated the test is 5,336, the participating rate is 85.87%, the number of candidates that passed the exam is 4198, the pass rate is 78.67%; in September 2015, it's 5,695, 4,716, 78.86%, 3,719, and 78.86% respectively.

From the pass rates of that two tests, the pass rate of the subject, college English B, is above the national average.

The pass rate is directly relevant to graduate rate of undergraduates in the Network colleges or Universities, and finally it will be an important reference for students whether to apply for them.

The Table 1 shows a comparison of the passing rate of the test in April and September 2015 between Zhejiang Radio and Television University and the whole nation.

Table 1
Comparison of the Passing Rate

Subject	Unit	Passing rate in April 2015	Passing rate in September 2015
College English B	The whole nation	74.74%	73.35%
	Zhejiang TV niversity	78.67%	78.86%

4. A SURVEY OF CANDIDATES FOR THE TEST

4.1 Candidates' Age and Basic Situation

235 among the investigated 460 candidates think the test has no relation with their present job.

A survey on the students' age and English foundation was conducted. Besides those that can be admitted without examination, students, basically are part-time students.

According to our survey, the students at the age of 20 to 25 accounted for 27.3%, 26 to 30 accounted for 32.5%, 31 to 35 accounted for 26%, over 36 accounted for 14.3%. Thus, the age of undergraduate students in distance education was mainly from 20 to 35 and the average age was about 30. Their grades in the entrance examination were low, English foundation was poor, and especially their vocabulary was poor, about 65% of them were less 2,500 words while the vocabulary requirement of the test was 3,000.

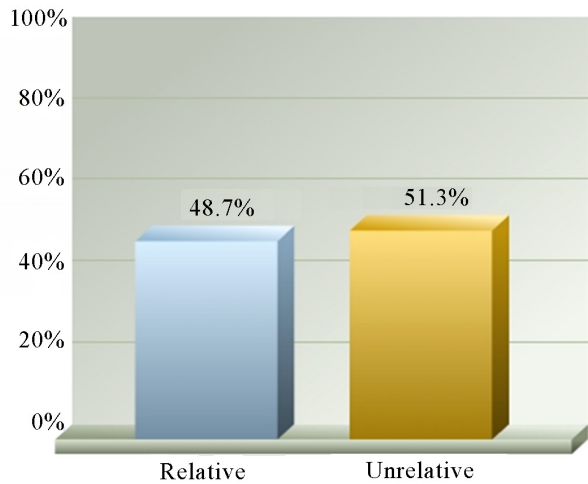


Figure 1
Correlative Condition Analysis on This Exam and Job

Table 2
Class-Attending investigation

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
1 hour or less	232	50.43%
2-3 hours	184	40%
4-5 hours	8	1.74%
0 hour	36	7.83%
Effective fill	460	

Except in the classroom teaching, students spend less time on study in their free time. 50% or more of their study less 1 hour.

5. TEACHING SITUATION

5.1 An Investigation on Teaching

A research for students on “What kind of teaching for teachers would you like?” shows that 41.4% of the students choose to “pay attention to grammar” and 34.3% of them choose to “pay attention to reading”. In view of this, adult students’ English learning still focused on grammar explanation and reading comprehension training. When being asked “Do you think English teaching now, should focus on textbook-oriented teaching or test-oriented teaching?” 7.1% of the students agree with the former, 17.1% of them agree with the latter, and 75.8% of them agree both, which shows for the present students would like teachers to extend some knowledge about the test on the basis of textbook teaching. Briefly, it is “base on the textbook, aim at the test”, which set a higher standard for teachers. As a result, passing the test is very important for the part-time students.

5.2 A Survey on the Current Situation of Tutoring for the Test in the School of Various Regions

Survey content: Reference book arrangement of teaching,

4.2 Students’ Attendance and Learning Situation in Face to Face Learning at School

Investigation of part-time students’ attendance rate of face to face learning at school, 15.4% of the students never come, 37.8% rarely come, 18% always come, 28.8% come all the time, which shows that the attendance rate each time is less than 50%. According to our communication with the teacher and other teacher in charge of this exam and this survey, the attendance rate each class is even lower than 45%, even 0% sometimes. The factors for low attendance rate include work, family, but it’s more of a personal reason that awareness of class-attending was weak and some also chose to give up because they thought they couldn’t understand it even if they attended the class because their knowledge foundation is poor.

teacher’s information.

- Survey respondent: Students who participated or will participate in this Examination.
- Survey fields: The college or university where students participated or will participate in this Examination.
- Survey methods: A questionnaire through “SO JUMP”.
- Students can fill the questionnaire by entering website or scanning the code in computer or other devices which can connect the internet.
- Questionnaire recovery: 520 in total, including 460 of students, 60 of teachers.

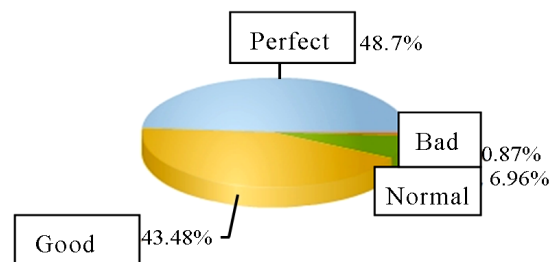


Figure 2
Survey on the Degree of Satisfaction of Tutoring in Our University

As Figure 3 shows, students are most satisfied with the arrangement of teaching hours.

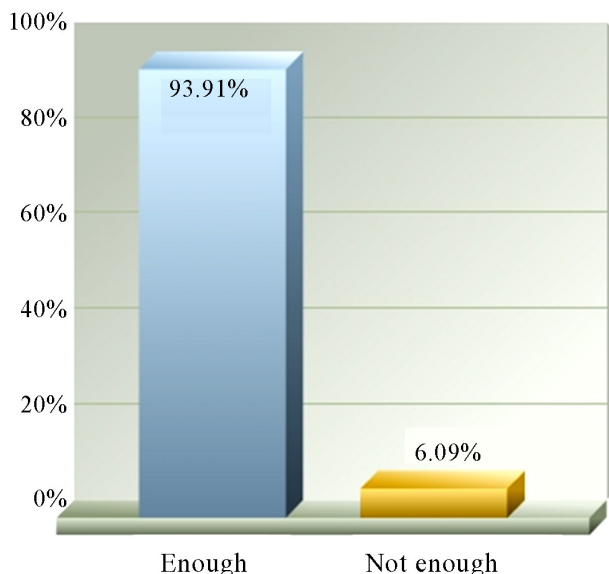


Figure 3
A Survey on Arrangement of Teaching Hours

Only 6.09% of students suppose the teaching hours is scarce and most of the students think the teaching hour is enough.

6. THE DIFFICULTY DEGREE OF EACH QUESTION TYPE AFTER REFORM

Since the November in 2014, the question type of the test has had some changes that there was a new supplement of the original item bank.

According to the feedback of the students, we analyzed students' preparation for the examination in regard to students' knowledge of the question type, amounts of the question, and the scores of each question type. As a result, it shows that 34.3% of the students know it well, 51.4% know a little, 14.3% know nothing. Therefore, most of the candidates are not familiar or not familiar enough with the format of the test, which also indicates that we, English teachers, teachers in charge of a class did not finish our work well.

Table 3
Necessity Investigation

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Very necessary	56	12.17%
Necessary	212	46.09%
Not necessary	192	41.74%
Effective fill	460	

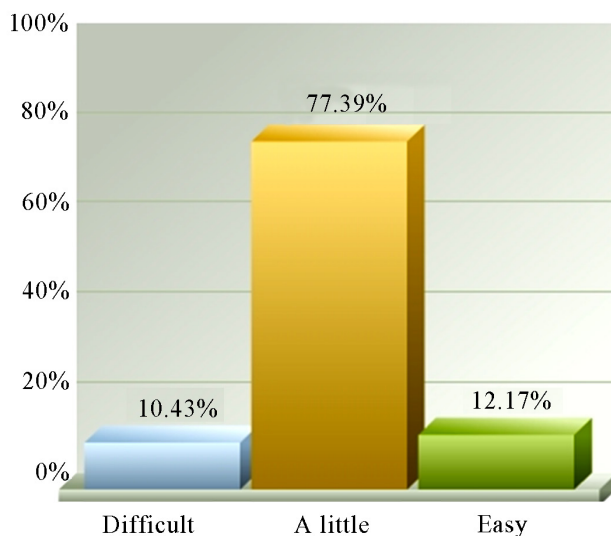


Figure 4
Students' Feedback to Difficulty of the New Question Type

As shown in Figure 5, the question types of this test include communicative knowledge, vocabulary and grammar, cloze, reading comprehension, English to Chinese translation and writing. The analysis of various questions shows that students think the most difficult is writing, followed by reading comprehension, cloze, vocabulary and grammar, English to Chinese translation. It's generally considered that communicative knowledge is the simplest.

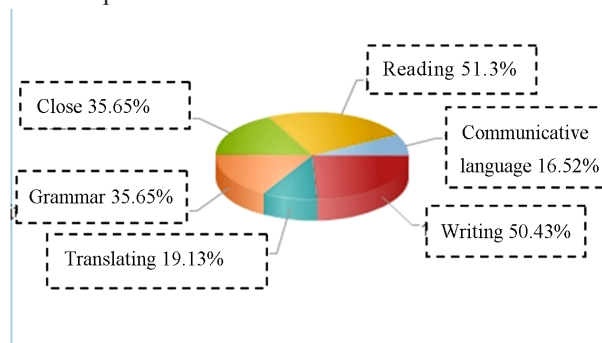


Figure 5
The Difficulty of Each Question Type

After the reform, the amount of the E-C translation increased. Among all the students surveyed, 58.26% of the students thought the reform was necessary and 41.7% of the students thought it was unnecessary or not working.

As shown in Figure 6, practising in the network examination system is helpful for most students to improve the scores and only 4.35% of the students thought it made no difference. Even though, we have to try our best to meet students' needs and provide more chances for them to practice in the network examination system.

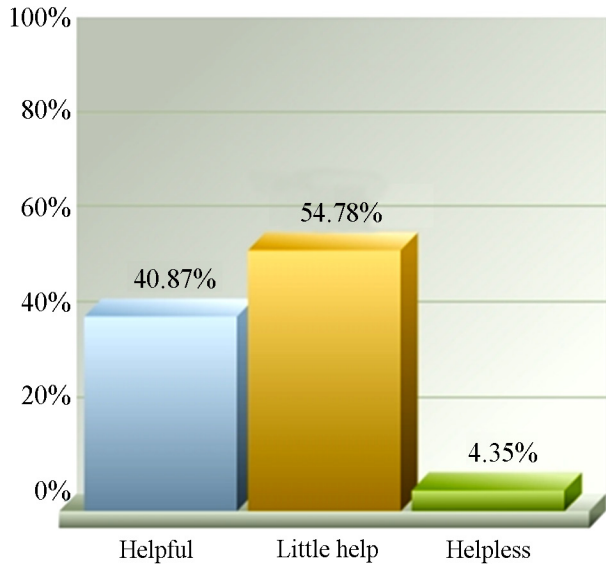


Figure 6
Whether It Is Helpful to Practice in the Network Examination System?

7. EFFECTIVE MEASURES OF IMPROVING THE PASS RATE IN THIS EXAM

7.1 Cultivating Students' Independent Learning Ability and Improving the Initiative of Learning English

7.1.1 Encourage Students to Participate in the Team and Enhance Their Confidence in Learning

In view of the fact from the survey that it is difficult for students to guarantee the time of attending classroom teaching at school and after-school reading. Therefore, on the process of teaching in distance Education, curriculum group teachers have been emphasizing the importance of English learning to make them read English articles within their ability, watch movies, and give learning tasks by themselves. In addition, teachers always remind them that they will not graduate successfully if they fail to pass this exam to inspire their consciousness that they, instead of teachers are the master of their own study and they should be responsible for themselves, which may be helpful in getting rid of their dependence on teachers, strengthen their self-consciousness of learning, and become active in English learning. Furthermore, teachers always remind students that they are always with them, which may give inspiration to the students.

7.1.2 Improving Students' English Learning Strategies Through the Curriculum Group

First, help students set learning goals, and make a learning plan. Every school should take on different ways such as questionnaire, meeting discussion, telephone, QQ, BBS, e-mail, etc., to have a knowledge of students, help students set learning goals, including general goals, semester goals, month and week goals. Besides, curriculum group team can share related and helpful resources and information in some fields and on this basis, students can work out their own plans according to their different learning conditions and abilities, choose appropriate methods for study, and arrange the learning content properly.

Second, to help students improve their self-monitoring ability through the curriculum group team. Curriculum group helps students strengthen the guidance and have conscious self-monitoring of their own learning plan, content, progress, methods and efficiency. Through this, students can have a clear recording of their study and their reflection to adapt to the distance education, form good learning habits and improve learning bit by bit, reflect on the learning process, in order to adapt to the distance education, and gradually form a good habit of learning, improve their ability in English learning by themselves.

Third, to help students have a correct and objective evaluation of their own study. The province's occupational English curriculum group consisted of English teachers and teachers who are in charge of this exam, which provided a better access for teachers to students' strengths and weaknesses and also for students to their own progresses and drawbacks in their learning process. Consequently, when a unit is finished, students can have a good awareness of their learning efficiency and have a good analysis and self-evaluation through the unit test.

Fourth, through regular discussion, curriculum group get to know that their teaching should focus on the exam outline and the knowledge students considered difficult with a combination of teaching tasks and content to have a detail description of learning strategies in vocabulary, grammar learning, reading comprehension, translation, writing, communication and etc. Meanwhile, teachers can help students to study independently and actively.

Fifth, teachers should also be good at communicating with students through QQ, e-mail, short sessions, text messages, telephone, etc. so as to help students exchange learning experience, relax, regulate nervousness, overcome loneliness and anxiety, and improve their ability to communicate with others.

7.2 Enhance the Teaching Management and Improve English Teaching Quality

7.2.1 Emphasizing English Teacher's Conscience, Enhancing Team Cooperation, Transforming Teaching Concept, and Improving Teaching Quality

In modern distance education, teachers shoulders the responsibility of facilitating and guiding student's study.

The quality of teachers who are in charge of the exam in the pilot school also has a great influence on the passing rate of the test. Those qualities are showed in teaching, application of modern information technology, knowledge in modern distance education theory. Emphasizing English teacher's improvement in those aspects is helpful to improve teacher's teaching level, internet teaching quality and the pass rate. Through team cooperation, an obvious improvement in teacher's personal quality is achieved.

Currently, 60% of English teachers in fundamental are only responsible for English tutoring and not too much involved in the network examination management. The curriculum group and communication within it are helpful for local English teacher's complete participation and understanding over the whole process of teaching, tutoring, and this exam. Teachers should change the teaching concepts, transforming "teaching" to "guiding, facilitating, checking, and evaluating" correctly handle the relationship between their role and student-centered independent study, guide students how to learn independently and how to carry out cooperative learning, guide students to use learning strategies, help them solve difficult problems in their study and in the exam preparation, help them to set up learning confidence, facilitate them to finish their learning tasks on time and check their learning process, evaluate and analyze their learning effectiveness, and give them full support and some suggestions.

7.2.2 Enhancing Teaching Process, and Ensuring Student's Attendance

In order to improve the pass rate, paying attention to the teaching process and time guarantee is necessary. Even if the main participants of this test are students, the study efficiency and understanding of the knowledge can't be guaranteed by themselves for lacking of independent study consciousness. Therefore, classroom teaching at school is still an important part of learning. To strengthen the teaching process is to grasp the normal classroom teaching. Emphasizing teaching process is having a good management of classroom teaching and carrying out this part completely. Unified preparation materials and unified teaching materials for all curriculum groups are good for teacher's communication and growth.

7.3 Strengthen the Centralized Tutoring and Practice and Improve the Test Ability Before the Test

7.3.1 Help Students Set Up Test Confidence, Analyse the Test and Themselves Correctly, and Make Review Plan

According to the result that 77% of the students thought English in this test is very difficult, the teachers in every test point should first help students set up confidence that they can pass the test through their own efforts. Confidence is the base of a good review. Second, teachers

should help students to have all-round knowledge of the purpose, question types, amounts of questions, time arrangement of the test, testing environment and other related information. Third, teachers can help students analyse their own strengths and weaknesses and then to make them have a specific training to overcome their weaknesses one by one. Finally, teachers can help students to make a proper and practical review plan according to their situation and have a regular review.

7.3.2 Strengthening Students' Mastery of Problem Solving Skills and Cultivating Correct Methods for the Test

Having a true understanding of some problem solving skills can help students save time, improve efficiency, and increase the correctness of their answer. The questionnaire survey showed that it was common to have a professional training before the test but there was a lacking in the training concerning the basic skills of answering questions. For example, in situational dialogue part, students can get the answer by comparing its consistency or by exclusion method. As to answer sequence, students can do it from easy to difficult. As to multiple choice questions, it is a must to choose an answer by guessing or other methods.

7.3.3 Emphasizing the Tutoring of Review Materials

Teachers should carefully study the tested papers, find the difficult points and key points, conclude the testing strategies, combine the classroom teaching at school, and enhancing the pertinence of the review materials. When in finding the rare teaching resources, working together like the curriculum group is more effective than doing that alone. Through the participation of curriculum group, review materials are more perfect and all-round. One month before the test, teachers should collect many materials such as *College English B for national unified network examination* and *College English (Revised in 2010) for the public courses of the national unified network examination* to have a detailed explanation to help consolidate student's knowledge in grammar and vocabulary. Besides, more attention should be paid to write training and practice.

7.3.4 Enhancing Simulation Training Before the Exam

Through simulation training, students can learn to apply the problem-solving skills to practise and improve the ability for testing. 94% of the students thought that practising in the network testing system is helpful or very helpful to improve their scores. As for the students who have the access to this website, they can also practise at home. Through pertinent practice and training and communication with teachers and other students, students can consolidate what they learned better and can also have a test of their ability so that they can find their weaknesses and have specific review with the help of teacher's explanation and their own summary to improve their effectiveness and scores quickly.

Factors affecting the pass rate of the test involved in many aspects. Among them, that students' English foundation is weak and their efforts are not enough to make a great difference. In the face of the current situation of this exam, if we want to improve teaching quality and pass rate, we have to construct bigger and better teaching team to have discussions, be strict with teaching management, improve teaching quality, cultivate study independence, and make their English learning more actively. Strengthening the tutoring and practice and cultivating ability for testing before the test is the foundation of achieving good English grades in this test.

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