

Current College Public English Study in China

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Abstract

Recently, English education in college has become the keynote of cultivation of overall quality and the improvement of university education level. English education is one category of linguistics, which has the same characteristic as other languages. At the same time, it has its own specialty that differs from mother language education. In this article, research on how to improve the English level in university has been done with integration of the reality and the law of development of the English education in domestic university.

Key words: College student; English education; Problem; Solution

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INTRODUCTION

College English education for non-majors is also called public English education in universities; the aim is not only to undertake the basic knowledge, but also to use English to communicate with others. By the way, promoting Chinese culture is of considerable importance at the same time. After researching some resources, we may find that there are still many problems in our college English education. The problems ask pay attention to this field and try to predict its direction based on the analysis of the current situation and demands of college English education. As the globalization of the world English has

been used more and more frequently in the international activities. China, as one important part of world politics and economy, has an influential ability to involve in the international activities and businesses. College students are the main force to promote the development of the society, and university is responsible for the cultivation of the talent for the society. Therefore, English education in university has become the keynote of cultivation of overall quality and the improvement of university education level. English education in university starts lately in China. It was not until 1980s did the education developed rapidly as the reform to a larger degree. Recently, more than 99% registered universities and colleges have set up English course. English is also regarded as an important aspect when enrolling master and doctor. However, after several decades' development some problems in the college English education system have been arisen that are worthy of being studied and considered.

1. PROBLEMS EXIST IN THE COLLEGE ENGLISH EDUCATION

1.1 Content of English Courses

The set-up of the content of courses emphasize on the construction of grammar rather than the ability of using the language. Generally speaking, because of the flaw of education system, more attention has been paid on the basic knowledge for most subjects little has been paid on the ability of practicing. English also faces the same problem. Many students reflected that after finishing the English course in the university, they just accumulate more vocabulary and learn more grammar on the basis of high school English study. There's no essential difference from high school in the method of education and examination. If things continue this way although college students will get a better grade in the English examination, they are lack of practicing ability.

1.2 Singularity of The English Examination System

The modern educational theory considers that it is diversification and systematization rather than singularity of written examination that should be the criteria of the students' level. In the process of assessment of college students' English level, written examination are mostly adopted as the main method that emphasize on the ability of reading rather than oral expression and listening ability.

1.3 Pattern in the English Class Does Not Meet the Need for the Student

English is the obligatory course in many universities which takes place in the classroom. However, in the process of the English teaching, teacher is always the main body of the class. On the other hand, student could only comprehend and memorize mechanically according to the teacher. This pattern is not in favor of the cultivation of students' interests and learning ability, it also lead to the situation that English education is lower for long period and it could not meet the need for the students.

2. NEED FOR CHANGE

It is understandable that many teachers have become familiar with their traditional way of teaching and cannot adapt themselves to changes in their pedagogical practice. With this in mind, I will begin by arguing for the necessity of reform in English education.

2.1 Strengths and Weaknesses

China has managed to train a legion of brilliant English majors under very poor conditions. They have performed excellently in various sectors of the country, such as education, foreign diplomacy, foreign trade and commerce, cultural exchange, etc. (Xu, 1985). They have ranked No. 2 in TOEFL scores in Asia, next only to India, English being India's omical language and the lingua franca among various tongues in India. Chinese overseas students have also been highly appreciated by their professors in English-speaking countries (Hu, 2002).

In spite of all this, there are still weaknesses in China's English language teaching, such as learners' relatively poor performance in listening and speaking, passivity in communication, and narrowness in knowledge make-up.

It was for these very reasons that by the end of 1996, at a national conference on foreign language education, a state official openly criticized the overall inadequacy in China's English education. There exists the problem of spending longer time but getting poor results with regard to our country's foreign language teaching proficiency and methods, which badly need improvement" (Wen, 1996). Small wonder some educationalists and foreign language teachers started to change their tone from sweetness to bitterness despite the fact that the most advanced and effective communicative approach had already dominated China's English syllable for 10 years.

2.2 Pressure of Globalization

With the world moving in the direction of globalization, English has become the chief lingua franca in various organizations and social gatherings. This has become all the more direct and important when the 112th plenum of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) held in Moscow voted for Beijing, a city with a 3 000-year history, to host the 2008 Olympic Games, as well as since China joined the WTO at the Doha Ministerial Meeting in November 2001.

Together with China's functions in many international organizations such as WHO, World Bank, World Monetary Organization, International Environment Protection Organization, World Tourism Organization, UNESCO, UNEDO, etc. China needs not only interpreters but also professionals in the public and private sectors to communicate with their counterparts in foreign languages, especially English. To do so, we have to find ways to train more English speakers in shorter periods of time.

2.3 Exploration of Language Planning Which Fits the Needs of the Country

Although English resumed its dominant status after 1976 as previously mentioned, many problems arise in practice and are waiting to be clarified and solved, such as:

- Is learning English earlier better? Do we have to teach English in kindergarten?
- What is the right amount of time input for English teaching in school and university education? Who should make the decision, the teacher or the official?
- Is English a foreign language or a second language in China?
- Is bilingual education a must in China?
- Is reading detrimental to the learning of English, or to the learner's command of listening and speaking skills?

One can list more questions. One thing is clear: all these questions will have to be answered by way of reform.

2.4 Introduction of New Philosophies in Foreign Language Teaching

For many years, English teachers in China have been familiar with various teaching approaches, such as grammar-translation method, the direct method, the audio-oral method, the visual-audio-oral method, the pattern-and- drill approach, the immersion approach, the functional approach, the notional syllabus, and the communicative approach, to say nothing of the more recent innovation of L2 acquisition, task-based learning, autonomous teaming, collaborative learning, interactive learning, modular learning, etc. Faced with such a galaxy of innovations, it would be difficult to say which are truly effective. In this sense, reform of foreign language education is to encourage people to move from old practices to new philosophies generally, and to ascertain which approaches are most promising particularly.

Whether you agree with a particular method or not, reform is a touchstone. Your approval or disapproval can only be answered or tested in the reform process. For instance,

- Which is more important, acquisition or learning?
- Are there problems in the communicative approach?

Why do people sometimes talk about the communicative-grammatical approach?

- Is new technology applicable in the teaching and learning process?

2.5 English Proficiency Tests

English proficiency tests have long been held to be the best way to measure the execution of new syllable and the proficiency level of the learners. According to Vice Education Minister Wu, CET Band-4 started in 1987 and Band-6 in 1989. There were only 100 000 test-takers for the Band-4 test in 1987, but by 2004, there were 11 000 000 test-takers for the two tests. Thus, China's College English Test turned out to be the world's largest test in scope. Nevertheless, people today have talked much about the negative consequences of the College English Test. First, many universities have refused to confer Bachelor degrees to those who failed the tests; second, many government institutions or private companies have refused to accept applicants without test certificates. As a result, many universities have been forced to lay emphasis on the test scores and turn teaching and learning into a sort of test-oriented education. In the meantime, some students have indulged themselves in cheating in the classroom, some teachers have leaked the content of test papers to their students so as to raise the class average illegally, and some university staff have even broken the law by selling test papers for money. All this has seriously damaged the reputation of CET and threatened its fairness and impartiality. Naturally, the situation has called for reform in proficiency testing, both in constructing new tests and in improving the management system.

2.6 Development of Modern Educational Technology

Language teaching was a face-to-face process for thousands of years. When the grammar-translation method was practiced, it called for a textbook, a grammar book, and a dictionary. Teachers and learners in those days never thought of the possibility of facilitating their teaching and learning with the help of new technology and equipment. What seemed impossible in the past has turned out to be real and natural today.

Beginning in the 1980s, many new devices have poured into the market, introducing foreign language teachers and learners to (cassette) recorders, televisions, Xerox machines, computers, and (electronic) overhead projectors, which have helped develop new teaching methods such as multi-media education, remote education, and network education. One has to admit that the new advanced equipment is sure to exert influence on foreign

language teaching. For instance, the teaching of listening skills can benefit a lot from the use of language labs or cassette recorders by having a language learner listen to a native speaker's voice or to his own, so that the learner can find ways to improve his/her own pronunciation. The visual-audio-lingual method has been popularized with the development of television technology. The use of photocopying machines suggests greater freedom for teachers who do not have to depend on one textbook and teach linearly. The teacher does not have to read his teaching notes or take time to write on the blackboard if he/she has a projector at hand. And learners know very well how to discuss things and search and download necessary reference materials from the Internet. All this suggests we need reform to cope with the changes in this field. If a teacher doesn't know how to operate a computer or other devices, he/she will find it difficult for him/her to stay in this profession. It is also true for a learner who cannot do as well as his/her peers.

3. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS FOR IMPROVE ENGLISH EDUCATION IN CHINA

3.1 Setting up All-Round Ability

Perfect the setup of the subject and cultivate the all-round ability to use the language. English is one category of linguistics, college should update its education concept, perfect the setup of the subject according to the general law reasonably, cultivate the all-round ability to use the language, reasonably allot the teaching time to cultivate the students' learning ability. College should fully study the development law of linguistic education; some useful experience in Chinese language could be used. Update the educational pattern in the classroom. Classroom education is always the main field for college English education. In recent years, interactive pattern in the class has been widely adopted in education field. It is a pattern that constructs a new relationship, and teacher would arouse the enthusiasm of the student to participate in the classroom activity. In the English classroom, group discussion English improvisatory debate and presentation, English short play could be adopted to encourage the student to concentrate on the class, to improve study efficiency. Teacher could also use high-tech to create an interactive learning environment, such as use multimedia to realize the real-time interactivity in the process of listening class.

3.2 To Use IT in English Education

The existing style of English education confronts great challenge coming from the IT English education. Compared with the traditional education, it owns the following advantages.

3.2.1 It Provides a Great Mass of Language Resource

In traditional language environment, the main language material is schoolbook. For student, the content of schoolbook is little and it takes much time to seek suitable language material what they want. The tapes of language book are not plenty. But now there are many resources about foreign language. The way to seek language material is easy to learn. It costs little time. It is easy for people to search the book or something else what they want or are interesting. The types of foreign language material are also enough. Almost every type language material is here. For instance, you can read newspaper; magazine; novel; poem, and even online. People also can find information they need, such as thesis, report, accurate figure and date. Many databases were made for special item. Now there are already grammatical database; literature database and so on. it is a good way for teacher and student to update their knowledge, improve their level and enrich the language material according to their interesting

3.2.2 Reflection of the Latest Changes in English

In traditional education environment, the language that students learn is the “frozen language”. The update of schoolbook cannot keep pace with the changing of language in objective reality. In 80 years, once some American scholar visit Tsinghua University. The students play drama for welcoming them. One of the act’s lines is “I am gay. I am gay”. But at that time, guy mean not only happy but also mean homosexual. In American, people can tell other that he or she is homosexual. So the foreigner gets a big surprise. They ask the assistant “why is there so many gay.” So we can understand the importance of know the current meaning of words.

3.2.3 Diversity of Methods

Different student should be differently taught. This goal cannot be achieved with the traditional English teaching method. But IT can do this. Traditional education neglects the individual personalities and development of student’s creativity. Teachers are the ruler of class. Teachers explain everything and cram everything into the hearts of students. But at the same time, the freedom that students enjoy to mediate is deprived. Now the modern IT can deal with this question. Discriminating treatment to students with different abilities becomes possible in the web-based education environment. Students can control their learning content and speed according to their situation. Students also can get instruction in time if need be. For example, some people record the content of a famous teacher’ class, and then put it on- line for others to share. Student can choose whatever class fits their abilities. It is a good way for them to lean on their own initiative, maintain their learning interest. In a word, it is a good tool for students to process learning autonomy.

3.2.4 Vivid Classroom Atmosphere

IT not only makes class more vivid but also can arouse

the learning enthusiasm. Multimedia features audio-video perception vividness. “Multimedia is defined as the technologies that facilitate that integration of two or more type of media, such as text, graphics, sound, full-motion, video, or animation into a computer-based application” (Li, 2004, p.124). As to the real inter-active language communication environment, IT can possess the superiority that the traditional teaching tool cannot compete. For instance, multimedia is prevailing because it is interactive and permits two-way communication. People can use multimedia—teaching sessions to learn at any time of a day at their own convenience. Instructors can easily explain words, sounds, and pictures. They live and animate video to carries out lessons that can capture student’s imagination. The real language communication environment can finish the test for arousing the student’s rich imagination and their learning enthusiasm. Students can get a good train including writing, reading, listening, and speaking.

3.2.5 Advanced Learning Instruments

The foreign language environment can be created on. IT gives rise to changes in learning methods, and makes students use the advanced learning tools, accelerates the teacher’s role shifting from knowledge teller to the organizer and the instructor of the learning and teaching activity. Students give role shifts from the passive receiver to the active explorer of knowledge. The application of much excellent learning software releases the learning burden and improves the learning efficiency. For example: in the past student spent much time on doing copying work, take words table to recite. But now, it is quite another picture. Students use keyboard, mouse, and some other graphic, sound software. The function of electric dictionary saves much time in order to help student to look up words and raise the speed of reading. The information technology is not only a good tool for students but also for teachers. In the past, if teachers need some information about their lesion, they only have to consult their colleague or look for the answer from books. It cost much time and sometimes they cannot make sure the accuracy. Now if a teacher wants some information about their lesion, the teacher just need to search it online. He or she can find whatever they want.

CONCLUSION

In tradition, the aim of college English education is to learn the basic knowledge of English instead of using it in practice. Currently, we advocate improving the practical ability with others in order to absorb the different excellent culture and promote our prosperous civilization to the world at the same time. What’s more, the use IT is the new direction and field of the college English education, it is significant in the future.

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