



## On the Fairness of Chinese College Classroom English Teaching

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### Abstract

Higher education equality attracts more and more attention, but the fairness in the college English classroom teaching is neglected. Uniformity of large class teaching, the unified curriculum system, the single evaluation method result in unfairness in all aspects of teaching. Hierarchical teaching, need-based teaching, evaluation reform of College English Test 4 and 6 can promote the fairness in college English teaching.

**Key words:** Higher education; Education equality; Classroom teaching; College English

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### INTRODUCTION

The fairness of education over the years is mainly aimed at the compulsory education stage. National Long-term Education Reform and Development plan (2010-2020) points out: It is a national basic education policy to promote fairness. Education fairness is an important foundation for social justice. The basic requirement of educational equity is to guarantee citizens shall enjoy the equal right to education. The key is the equal opportunity. The focus is to promote the balanced development of compulsory education and support disadvantaged groups, and the fundamental measure is to narrow the education gap by a rational allocation of educational resources of

the rural areas, outlying and poverty-stricken areas and ethnic minority areas.<sup>1</sup> It is not difficult to see that the education fairness mainly emphasizes the education fair allocation of compulsory education resources. However, with the rapid development of China's higher education, the higher education fairness has aroused the attention of scholars.

### 1. CLASSROOM TEACHING: A FORGOTTEN CORNER OF THE FAIRNESS OF EDUCATION

Some scholar in China has counted the keywords in the papers concerned with educational fairness between 2001 and 2012 (CNKI), and found that "higher education" ranked the third among the top 20 keywords, which over-numbered "compulsory education". This shows that Chinese scholars focus more attention on higher education fairness. Other words include harmonious society, education resources, education policy, vocational education, equal educational opportunity, government responsibility and so on (Hu, 2014). Through the analysis of keywords, it is not difficult to see the current research is mainly focused on the macro higher education fairness, lack of the research on the micro level. In order to obtain the related research, the author searched the papers with the keywords of "higher education fairness" and "classroom teaching" in CNKI from 2001 to 2014, but unfortunately, no paper available. Classroom teaching has become a forgotten corner of the education fairness, not to mention the College Classroom English teaching.

<sup>1</sup> See [http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2010-07/29/content\\_1667143.htm](http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2010-07/29/content_1667143.htm)

## **2. UNFAIRNESS EXISTS AT ALL LEVELS IN COLLEGE ENGLISH CLASSROOM TEACHING A BIG CLASS TEACHING: CANNOT TREAT STUDENTS FAIRLY WITH DIFFERENCES**

An unprecedented increase of China's higher education enrollment began in 1998 and soon China entered the stage of popularization of higher education. According to Ministry of Education statistics in 2014, the number of college students in regular institutions of higher education in China has reached about 24 million, higher education enrollment rate 74.33%, undergraduate admission rate of 38.7%.<sup>2</sup> The popularization of higher education caused the shortage of infrastructure of colleges and the lack of teachers. College English Teaching is usually taken in large classrooms, 80-100 people having lessons together in one class. Because of large amount of class, the teacher lack of time and energy to deal with different students differently in the teaching process. They can only take infusion teaching method, which affects the quality of teaching seriously.

In the same class, some students may have exceeded the College English Band-4 level, while others will not in two years of study. Because students differ in abilities and personalities, teachers should have different expectations and attitudes for them, and students should get different education. When we gaze toward the classroom teaching level, we see that the neglect of the differences of students and teaching uniform is the main reason for the education unfairness. The surface fairness of education denies the true sense of the educational equity and educational opportunities for individual development needs of each student.

## **3. UNIFIED CURRICULUM SYSTEM CAN NOT SATISFY DIFFERENT NEEDS OF STUDENTS**

Guidance document for College English curriculum at present is mainly College English Curriculum Requirements revised in 2007. The curriculum goal is "to cultivate the students' English comprehensive application ability". Although the college English textbooks are from different publishers in different forms, but all of them are designed to help students lay a foundation of language and improve the comprehensive application ability of the students; the difficulty of all teaching materials is controlled by lexical coverage and recurrent rate of CET-4 or CET-6 vocabulary.

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.edu.cn/xin\\_wen\\_dong\\_tai\\_890/20140707/t20140707\\_1147310\\_3.shtml](http://www.edu.cn/xin_wen_dong_tai_890/20140707/t20140707_1147310_3.shtml)

College English is one of the most important compulsory courses for college students, but it is also one of the curriculum college students are most dissatisfied with. In 2010, Cai Jigang conducted a survey of 16 undergraduate colleges and 1246 sophomore and junior students in 8 provinces and found that only 3.9% felt that their English level is much higher than that of admission, 35.39% narrowly satisfied with College English teaching, 12.65% not satisfied (Cai, 2012).

Why is the university English teaching effect still unsatisfactory when we have abundant teaching resources, better teachers and language environment? Monotonous and unified university English curriculum should account for it, which did not meet the needs of students at different levels and learning targets. College students think that the university English will be very different from high school English. But after they enter the university, they discover no difference. The teaching goal is still to lay the foundation on listening, speaking, reading and writing. Some students plan to study abroad through the College English learning, others want to learn English they can use in the future career but they find it impossible. Therefore, students gradually lose interest in English. The only learning purpose seems to be to pass the exam and take the credit. So it is difficult for college English to meet the needs of the students in terms of the curriculum goal, or the teaching content.

Each student has his practical need for English, but the college English teaching can not provide the corresponding services. So, when the school education can not meet their needs, many training institutions came into being. These institutions have a broad market just because they can meet the needs of college students. The slow response to the needs of college students and the market account for the discontent with the university English Curriculum.

## **4. THE SINGLE EVALUATION METHOD CAN NOT MEASURE STUDENTS' PROGRESS FAIRLY**

Our country's "Only English" phenomenon in university foreign language education has a lot to do with a single mode of university public English evaluation. College English Test 4 and 6 have been the only tool for evaluation of university foreign language learning for many years. Although the Ministry of Education Affairs requires the score of college English test band 4 grades shouldn't limit the acquisition of education degree, but still many colleges and universities put forward corresponding requirements for College English Test Band 4 scores as part of the degree according to their respective conditions. Also, some units of the society don't employ the students with no college English CET certificate. After a in-depth analysis of Cet-4 and 6, it is not difficult to find that there are more

unfairness. The national college entrance examination is to recruit students according to the scores of the provinces. However, CET is a unified national standard score. From January 2005, the full exam mark is 710 points. The score of 426 points or more is recognized by the society. China has a vast territory with different development level of economy and university development from the west to the east and some universities even have quite a few minority students. For them, Chinese is the second language, so English is equal to a third language. Obviously, the single foreign language assessment scale is unfair (Liu, 2010).

## **5. STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE THE FAIRNESS OF COLLEGE ENGLISH CLASSROOM TEACHING: IMPLEMENT HIERARCHICAL DIFFERENCE TEACHING BASED ON THE NETWORK**

Does giving any student equal treatment mean the fairness? In fact, this is the superficial understanding of educational equity. In the process of education, each individual has different degrees in development level, development potential, development advantages and development direction. In the face of these differences, in addition to the guarantee of their right to receive equal education and opportunities, what is more important is to face and respect these differences and take different measures to promote their full development on the original basis, and ultimately realize the true meaning of fair education.

The teacher should implement teaching according to the students' different levels, set different goals and development directions, adopt different teaching methods according to students' different learning styles, assign different learning tasks according to different knowledge level, take different evaluation criteria methods. As for the introverted students who rarely take the initiative to participate in classroom activities, teachers should help them find their own way to participate in the classroom activities. As for the students with outstanding oral English and outgoing personality, they can be given opportunities to make oral presentations in front of the whole class. Each student's progress in the class should be given a positive evaluation. A student with poor spoken language may never exceed the level of outstanding students, but the teacher's words of encouragement or praise will enhance the student's confidence and courage to participate in the classroom teaching.

Education is not a panacea, neither is classroom teaching. It is not realistic and even impossible to solve all the problems of students' with learning difficulties in classroom teaching. However, autonomous learning by network is a good solution to reduce individual differences between students. The network course's characteristic of temporal and spatial separation is conducive to the

realization of fair education (Zhou, 2007). Students can choose courses and arrange the learning time and schedule according to their actual situation. Students who want to improve oral English ability can choose the teacher training of oral English online, students who want to improve the writing ability of students can rely on online English writing assessment system of composition, students who did not understand the course today can choose the famous domestic colleges and universities' open videos class and learn it all over again. Even at home, you can learn the Harvard University public courses.

Moocs' (Massive Open Online Courses) arrival will narrow the gap between students effectively and provide more humane care for students with learning disabilities. It may be not right to say that the future university English teachers will not exist, but the uniform university English teaching model will surely be abandoned by the times.

## **6. PROVIDE DIFFERENT FOREIGN LANGUAGES TO MEET DIFFERENT TASTES**

First of all, let us think about a question, should students learn English as the only one public foreign language object at university? The answer is certainly negative. We should offer a variety of foreign selection menu to the students according to their interests and needs so that they can choose. We should implement the "student oriented" principle so that students can choose a foreign language to learn according to their own interest and expertise, rather than designate English as the public foreign language. According to the survey of relevant scholars, the Japanese average university has opened more than 5 public university foreign language classes, the number of Chinese and Korean courses increasing significantly. It is indicated that Japanese universities not only pay attention to the developed countries' languages, but also have come to realize the necessity of learning languages of neighboring nation (Li, 2012).

And what is China's situation? Take the Tsinghua University as an example. The college foreign languages teaching of Tsinghua University is undertaken by English Department and the Departments of Japanese, German, Russian, and French together. Russian, French, German and Japanese teaching is an important part of public foreign languages teaching there. In each semester, more than 1,000 undergraduates, master and doctoral students take Japanese, German, Russia, and French as the first or second foreign language.<sup>3</sup> However, most of the Chinese colleges and universities do not confine the kind of foreign language in enrollment, but English is often the

<sup>3</sup> See <http://news.tsinghua.edu.cn/publish/news/6705/2011/20110225231734890289256/>

only choice in the college foreign language curriculum. In the university where the writer teaches, Department of foreign languages has some teachers of Russian, Korean and Japanese. However, because the non-English major enrollment scale is small, and some even enroll every other year, the teachers often can't finish the required classes, they have to teach college English to complete their teaching workload. On the one hand, the students' needs for learning a second language can't be satisfied. On the other hand, it also causes a huge waste of valuable teaching resources. Therefore, we need to open a door to the students with special requirements and interests and provide as many choices of foreign languages as possible, so that they can go into a wider world of foreign languages learning.

"Educate according to students' need" can truly reflect the diversity and fairness of education. At present, Chinese foreign languages circle has gradually reached a consensus: College English Teaching must transform from EGP (English for General Purpose) to ESP (English for ESP Special Purpose). Shanghai is at the forefront of the reform. In February 2013, it promulgated *Shanghai College English Teaching Reference Frame (for Trial Implementation) (Non-English Majors)*, taking the first substantial step from EGP to ESP, which provides a reference and a basis of theory and policy for other universities to guide the college English so that they can implement the classification guidance, follow the principle of individualized teaching and make scientific, personalized syllabus according to the actual situation of the school. In the aspect of teaching contents, College English must provide different materials with different starting points according to different levels, majors, learning objectives and different types of courses. To the students who are willing to further study, they can provide academic writing, academic reading and academic English courses. For employment, they can teach vocational English like business English, tourism English and aviation English. Some experts have predicted that the future college English teaching will include more than one teaching mode, more than one teaching method, more than one kind of learning motivation, more than one teaching program, more than one English textbook, more than one test method, even more than one kind of English to learn (Graddol, 2006).

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## 7. TRANSFORM FROM THE CET-BASED EVALUATION METHOD TO A MULTI-EVALUATION MODE

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Relevant experts believe that the test scores of CET-4 and CET-6 have been devalued. Many domestic enterprises no longer recognize the certificate in employee recruitment. Some colleges and universities like the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the University of Hong Kong have refused

to accept the scores of CET-6 from 2015 in postgraduate admission, but accepted the IELTS and TOEFL scores (Cai, 2014). The reason is that even if many students in CET-6 get high grades, the ability of using English is still very poor, which can not meet the requirements of further study in universities and work in enterprises.

We have to reflect on whether there is a necessity for CET to exist, which has been implemented for many years? In University English Teaching, CET plays a practical role of hidden curriculum (Cai, 2012). Many colleges and universities design the College English teaching syllabus and set up listening, writing, translation and other required courses and elective courses according to CET content and requirements. Such a national uniform exam for more than 1,000 undergraduate colleges and universities across the country results in teaching in the blind pursuit of the passing rate, and it is difficult to evaluate teachers and students fairly and comprehensively.

Based on the actual situation, the formative assessment and summative assessment should be combined organically to explore a multi-evaluation system. In the process of formative assessment, the "learning portfolio" can be used to record the students' problems and achievements in the learning process. We can assign research projects related to text subjects, require students to search for information, review literature, design research methods and collect data and make an oral or written presentation to the class in groups. Finally, through self-assessment, peer review group of students, teachers comment on the results of evaluation. It is not scientific to judge the students of different basis and majors with a piece of test paper against modern education ideas. The test can focus on practical application ability like listening and speaking for students who are trained to be applied talents. For those research university students, the focus should be on the academic English aptitude.

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## CONCLUSION

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As China's higher education has entered the post-massification era, higher education has been transformed from the pursuit of quantity to the pursuit of quality. University English classroom teaching quality is directly related to whether we can cultivate international talents to meet the economic globalization. It may be long and complex to realize the classroom teaching equality, but the deepening of Chinese College English teaching reform will promote the realization of educational fairness.

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