

On the Present Situation, Problems and Suggestions for College English Teaching in China

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Abstract: *Focusing on the problems encountered by the author in the process of college English teaching and after the combination with author's own English teaching experience, this paper analyzes the causes of the problems in the current college English teaching process and gives targeted suggestions and countermeasures, in an attempt to provide thoughts and suggestions for universities to better integrate into the trend of globalization, tell Chinese stories well and effectively as well as achieve the goals of college English teaching.*

Keywords: *English teaching; present situation of English teaching; teaching reform; evaluation system*

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the hosting of the Beijing Winter Olympic Games in China, heads of state and government have gathered in Beijing to participate in the grand event, and the importance of foreign exchanges is self-evident. At the same time, China's comprehensive national strength has been continuously improved, and its foreign exchanges have become closer, especially in the fields such as politics, economy, trade and culture among others. In addition, at the Central Foreign Affairs Working Conference held in 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed to enhance China's cultural soft power and tell Chinese stories well. It can be seen from above that Chinese society constantly puts forward new and higher requirements for English language talented people, especially for those who have mastered professional knowledge. While at the same time, college English teaching in China has failed to keep up with the demand for high-quality talented people with language background, which seriously hinders the development of high-level internationalization in China.

2. Problems in College English Teaching

2.1 Exam-oriented education has become the mainstream, and quality education is "sinking into the sea"

Since College English Test Band 4 (CET-4) and College English Test Band 6 (CET-6) started in the 1990s, schools in China began to make comparison of the proportion of those who have passed the CET-4 and CET-6 and formulated corresponding pass indicators. What's more, colleges and universities directly link CET-4 and CET-6 with students' graduation conditions, but that enabled students to only pay attention to whether they can pass CET-4 and CET-6 or not, while ignoring the central goal of English learning in China, that is, to broaden students' international vision and cultivate students' ability of international communication and critical thinking. Although Chinese society has been calling for the implementation of "quality education" in recent years, that is, education should not merely focus on scores. Instead, it should assess students in the actual implementation process. While in realities, colleges and universities run counter to the goal of quality education. In the process of college English teaching, the author once met a junior student who achieved excellent results in CET-4 and CET-6, especially in listening and reading part, which was close to full marks. However, in the actual communication with international friends and foreign teachers, the student was stunned and "speechless". The reason is that students always take exams only for the sake of "exams", and after achieving their goals at a specific stage, they put English learning on the shelf, which makes it difficult for them to serve as messengers and bridges of cross-cultural communication in the process of international communication, and they do not possess the basic communication and communicative skills of language, which means they cannot tell Chinese stories in English well.

2.2 The teaching method is a single mode, and the teaching lacks effective interaction and feedback

Since the implementation of college English teaching, college English teachers have been adhering to the basic idea of "preaching, teaching and dispelling doubts", teaching students English language knowledge and supplementing corresponding cross-cultural communication skills. However, the majority of English teachers often give too much detailed information in English teaching, blindly supplementing students with translation and grammar knowledge, while ignoring the basic communication and communicative functions of English language. In college English classes, after explaining the basic vocabulary knowledge and usage, the teacher often chooses to translate the long and difficult sentences and core meanings in the article and supplements the background knowledge. While for students, they only tend to receive information blindly with a lack of effective interaction with teachers, and have no output or feedback at all. This teaching behavior ignores the basic mode and path of language learning. Teachers become "speakers", while students become listeners or spectators. College English teaching class has thus become a monologue of English teachers, which also contributes to students' inertia and dependence on English teachers, and students will not choose autonomous learning or interaction as a result. In addition, Professor Shu Dingfang has done a relevant research which found that 75% of college English teachers admit that they do not understand the effectiveness of communicative approach in college English learning, but given students' different understanding in English, class time constraints, teachers' own language skills, students' pressure to review exams, among others, they often resort to "translation approach", which turns out to be obviously closer to the actual teaching mode in practice[1].

2.3 Students hold high score yet with low proficiency, and they are afraid to express.

In recent years, Chinese students have been learning English knowledge and memorizing English words since the third grade of primary school and even started that since the first grade of primary school. English learning has been with students for nearly 20 years, and English has never been absent from any major examinations. However, it should be noted that Chinese students are indeed very proficient in English vocabulary usage and basic knowledge, but every time they meet international tourists or friends, they can't open their mouth to express their inner thoughts. In other words, the phenomenon of "dumb English" is not a single case in China. Admittedly, the emergence of "dumb spoken English" is not caused by a single factor. First of all, exam-oriented education is the main method in China at present. Focusing on scores, students study only for the sake of exams. At present, oral English and listening account for a relatively small part in English examination, and students still rely on reading and writing to improve their scores, thus widening the gap between textbook knowledge and real practice. So they do not pay sufficient attention to oral English and listening part. In other words, they ignore the importance of basic language communication skills, and only regard language as an effective means to pass the examination and graduate with flying colors. Secondly, most of the students come from rural areas, who lack resources and conditions, and there is no authentic English language environment for them to practice. Over time, students' English learning only stays in classrooms and schools. Thirdly, when teachers teach students English courses, they also pay attention to students' "effective memory" of what they have taught, but do not motivate students to apply English to the actual communication process, which leads to the phenomenon of "high scores yet with low proficiency in English". In order to effectively cope with this phenomenon of "dumb English", the Ministry of Education has decided to add oral examination to English subjects in Beijing College Entrance Examination starting from 2021, with a total score of 50 points together with listening scores. In addition, CET-4 and CET-6 have also added the oral test part in recent years, but it is still in the pilot stage, and students are free to choose to take it or not. Fourth, the lack of teachers is another serious and salient problem. High-quality college English teachers can effectively guarantee students' English learning effect. However, the current problem of college English teachers in China lies in the fact that the overall quality of English teaching needs to be improved, and the teacher-student ratio is relatively low. Teachers undertake too many teaching tasks in the actual teaching process, which makes it difficult for teachers to pay attention to every student's English learning ability. In addition, due to the heavy burden of scientific research, college teachers rarely devote themselves to the teaching process. Taking the college where the author works as an example, more than 50 English teachers are responsible for the English courses teaching for over 3000 freshmen and sophomores. That can help one to better understand the teaching pressure of English teachers. In addition, the teaching ability of college English teachers is uneven. Some teachers can devote themselves passionately to the teaching process in class, but others just read their previous slides according to the script, and they never analyze the students' learning situation, and only teach through their old ways. Therefore, it is extremely urgent

to improve the quality of college English teachers.

3. Suggestions to solve college English teaching problems

3.1 Teaching students in accordance with their aptitude and reforming college English curriculum

According to College English Curriculum Requirements issued by the Ministry of Education in 2020, college English serves as a teaching system which is guided by foreign language teaching theory, with English language knowledge and application skills, cross-cultural communication and learning strategies as its main contents, and it also integrates various teaching modes and teaching methods. Meanwhile, college English serves as the organic part for new liberal arts, as well as the forceful support for construction of new engineering, new agricultural science and new medical science[2]. The goal of college English teaching is to cultivate students' comprehensive English application ability, especially listening and speaking ability, so that they can communicate effectively in English in future study, work and social communication, and at the same time it can help to enhance their autonomous learning ability and improve their comprehensive cultural accomplishment, so as to meet the needs of China's social development and international communication. College English course is not only a basic language course. More importantly, it serves as a quality education course to broaden students' knowledge and help students understand world culture. It is both instrumental and humanistic. When designing college English course, one should also give full consideration to the cultivation of students' cultural quality and the teaching of international cultural knowledge. However, at this point, both teachers and students in college English teaching in China are still at the stage of reading and writing, and the emphasis on listening and speaking ability still needs to be further strengthened. After setting up oral English courses in some colleges and universities, students' participation and enthusiasm are not high, as students believe that they will not use the knowledge of oral English for job hunting in the future, so they just ignore it. In the meantime, English courses do not really meet the requirements of different students' goals. College English Curriculum Requirements also points out that whether it is mainly based on computer or classroom teaching, its setting should fully reflect individuality by considering students from different starting points, taking care of students whose English ability is weak, and creating developmental space for students who have a strong ability in English learning. That can not only help students lay a solid language foundation, and more importantly, it can help to cultivate their strong practical application ability, especially listening and speaking ability. Besides, it is necessary to not only ensure the steady improvement of students' English language level during the whole university period. More importantly, it is helpful to facilitate students' individualized learning to meet the development needs of their different majors. However, in the current English teaching process, few colleges and universities will carry out hierarchical education on English teaching or learning, let alone teach students in accordance with their aptitude. It is this factor that makes it difficult for students to learn individually during their English courses. Therefore, the author believes that it is necessary to strengthen English hierarchical teaching, change the traditional college English curriculum, and focus on training different students in order to help students find the most suitable learning methods and truly teach students in accordance with their aptitude. College English teaching should introduce students to the history, geography, politics, literature, philosophy and art of English-speaking countries, so that students can fully understand the history, values, outlook on life and aesthetics of the people of English-speaking countries. That can help students to understand the commonalities and differences of national spirits and ways of thinking, experience the humanistic spirit, cultural traditions, behaviors and thinking patterns in different historical contexts, and improve humanistic literacy and cross-cultural communication skills [3].

3.2 Changing the traditional teaching mode

For a long time, College English teaching has always been a "teacher-centered" rather than "student-centered" approach. That is, teachers dominate the class teaching process in teaching. The teaching mode is basically translation + teaching, that is, when explaining key points and difficulties, teachers take Chinese thinking as the core and English texts as the basis or foundation, translate long sentences and difficult sentences, explain related collocation and grammar and vocabulary knowledge, and require students to practice with the explained contents in class, in order to consolidate the basic knowledge of learning. In that process, students are only passive information "receivers", and students can't independently participate in the classroom, which completely violates the "student-centered" concept. To enhance students' interest in learning, we must change the traditional teaching mode.

Supported by multimedia technology, teachers nowadays can employ abundant teaching resources to explain, which is well received by students. At the same time, teaching supported by multimedia technology also enhances students' active participation in the classroom. In the process of college English teaching, the author will use some English and American sitcoms interspersed in the classroom teaching process to attract students to learn authentic English through sitcoms and improve students' cross-cultural communication ability. At the same time, the English teachers need to consider the different starting point for students and then determine their key or difficult points of teaching content [4].

3.3 Increasing the scale and training of teachers

With the continuous improvement of China's comprehensive national strength and closer foreign exchanges, the demand for talented people with cross-cultural communication awareness and ability is even more diverse. At the same time, the number of college students enrolled in China is increasing, and the number and size of classes are getting larger and larger, which requires more college English teachers to teach students college English courses with basic listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation skills. At present, teachers still use cramming teaching in the teaching process, trying to enable students to remember, write and memorize more in class, while ignoring the basic learning rules. Therefore, this teaching method cannot meet the increasing demand of students for promotion of basic abilities such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. At the same time, college English teachers are faced with heavy teaching tasks, and at the same time, they have to undertake numerous scientific research and professional title evaluation. However, the latter forces some teachers to focus on scientific research and papers instead of teaching, which will also lead to the decline of teaching quality. Therefore, Chinese society should strengthen the training of college English teachers and improve the quality and quantity of college English teachers in an all-round way.

3.4 Reforming the evaluation system and highlight quality education

At this point, English examination and evaluation in China's education system pays special attention to students' basic grammar and language knowledge application, but fails to pay sufficient attention to students' actual oral communication ability. For example, the author has met a great number of English major student in the process of job hunting, and the written test scores for those students are excellent, yet they can't understand the most basic oral communication topics, which is a great pity. When these students meet with international friends, it is hard for them to even "strike up a conversation". How can they focus on telling Chinese stories well in English? Admittedly, the education department has realized this problem at present. Taking CET-4 and CET-6 as an example, oral examination has been added, which means that students' transcripts will present two parts of scores; one part is written test scores and the other part is oral test scores. Moreover, employers now pay an increasingly growing attention to students' actual listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities. For example, according to the data from Survey on English Ability of Applied Undergraduate College Graduates in Post, 56% of the world's top 500 enterprises explicitly require that CET-4 be listed as the recruitment condition of enterprises, and 61% of the world's top 500 enterprises will focus on and examine the listening and speaking ability of candidates. Therefore, the author thinks that in the future examinations, we should continue to increase the proportion of oral English and communicative competence, and evaluate students' English language application ability in practical communication in a diversified way. To better motivate students to actively learn English, college English courses should give students the opportunity to choose on their own the learning content, learning method and evaluation method. Besides, schools and teachers should constantly revise teaching curriculum so as to meet the demand of students [5]. Meanwhile, after the outbreak of Covid-19, exams cannot be conducted online in large numbers, and as a result, formative evaluation concept begins to penetrate into teacher's minds as students' performance can easily be evaluated through online activities which is highly in line with online classroom setting [6].

4. Conclusion

To sum up, College English teaching and evaluation system has been overwhelmed under the current exam-oriented education system in China. The slowly moving progress in college English teaching has seriously affected the goal of cultivating Chinese students' international vision and cross-cultural communication ability, which in return, affected the development of internationalization

process, and hindered the pace of China's integration with the international community. In a nutshell, it has become a stumbling block or obstacle to telling Chinese stories well and spreading Chinese culture in English. Therefore, it is extremely urgent to make clear the objectives of college English teaching, that is to cultivate students' comprehensive application ability, cultural accomplishment, as well as independent learning ability [7]. That can be achieved by reforming the traditional teaching mode, strengthening the training of teachers and diversify evaluation method, both of which can effectively deal with and help to solve many problems encountered in the actual teaching process.

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