

On the Methods of College English Teaching Reform

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Abstract—Actively promoted by the Ministry of Education, Chinese universities have explored and carried out many fruitful reforms in the aspects of both English content and English teaching methods, and have got some good results. This paper analyzes the current condition of college English teaching, aiming at exploring and finding out some effective methods and paths to reform of English teaching. It can make some contributions to College English reform.

Keywords—College English; Teaching Reform; Methods; Paths

I. INTRODUCTION

College English teaching is an organic component of China's higher education and course of College English serves as a required basic course for college and university students. Since the beginning of the 21st century, science & technology have been developing rapidly and interdisciplinary subjects have been emerging, and interpenetration and integration of the humanities and natural science have been occurring, in addition to which social information and fast-changing information communication technology have been intensifying cultural exchange, collision and cooperation among various countries in the world. We must be aware of those opportunities and challenges brought about by the new century to foreign language education in colleges and university. Expectation of the society on college and university students has been increasing, for which interdisciplinary talents with specialized knowledge and great English proficiency are becoming well-received. With more rapid development of China's comprehensive strength and the trend of knowledge-based economy around the globe, English, as an international language, became an indispensable tool in people's work and life and an important bridge for opening up to the world and getting on the international arena. How to fit in with such situation through our English teaching becomes an important and challenging task faced by various schools in China. Therefore, intensifying reform of English teaching and improving quality of foreign language learners become a consensus in China. However, because of many reasons, there is a gap between English teaching and overall foreign language proficiency of students and development and requirements of the times, which should be carefully thought and researched by foreign language researchers.

II. THE CURRENT CONDITION OF COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING IN CHINA

A. Backward Teaching Concepts, Methods and Means

Although outstanding results have been achieved in China's English teaching for the last 20 years, traditional teaching concepts, methods and means have been dominant in teaching practice. Foreign language teaching is characterized by its practical nature, but most of teachers in colleges and universities are still be dominant in foreign language classes, and the teacher-dominant foreign language classes are still commonly seen. Teaching content of foreign language courses is relatively outdated, in addition to which horizontal integration between such teaching content and other knowledge is insufficient. In practical classroom teaching, grammatical rules, translation of text and application of vocabulary are emphasized, but practical application of language is ignored. As for arrangement of course, close connections between language and science & technology, society and culture as well as the practical nature of language are ignored. Traditional model of college English teaching is very simple and backward and can't fit in with development in the 21st century. Foreign language education is highly time-sensitive, which is required to keep up with the times. Therefore, computer, multimedia and the Internet will be widely used in teaching process. As for comprehensive application of modern technology, no other discipline can be compared with foreign language. We can expect fast-changing and innovation-based teaching methods definitely.

B. Various Levels of Quality of Teachers

In recent years, China's higher education has been developing rapidly. In particular, since beginning of increase in enrollment by colleges and universities in 1999, number of students has been growing rapidly. However, building of teaching team is far from being satisfactory for meeting various requirements, which results in serious imbalance of ratio of teachers to students. According to statistics, ratio of teachers to students as for college English classes in China is 1:130. It isn't difficult to know that such ratio brings about unprecedented difficulties to organization of classes and thus results in the difficulty in ensuring teaching quality. Furthermore, continuous increase in enrollment by colleges and universities causes imbalance between educational background structure and teaching tasks of English teachers in

China's colleges and universities. Proportion of teachers with a master's degree or above is too low and such situation causes huge pressure on knowledge composition and personnel assignment, which can't be solved in a short period. Uncoordinated teaching teams and constraints on development of teaching are caused by many reasons, such as that teachers lack opportunities to study abroad, engage in further education and realize improvement and various schools don't provide sufficient generous policies and financial aid to teachers for further education.

C. Wide Gap between Actual Proficiency of Students and Teaching Requirements & Difficulties in Realization of Teaching Objectives

Foreign language teaching should be continuous and college English teaching serves as the extension of English teaching in high schools. Due to limited conditions of local schools and those undergraduate schools based on top-up program, they have low rankings in the list of colleges and universities in China. Students achieve great results in college entrance examination will not apply for such schools. Therefore, most of students in these schools have a weak foundation of foreign language proficiency and fail to meet requirements during their learning process in high schools. For example, in the aspect of vocabulary, students should grasp 2400 words at graduation according to requirements in the current syllabus for English teaching used by high schools. However, according to requirement CET-4 on vocabulary, students should grasp 4500 words. Students from the above mentioned schools can't meet this requirement on vocabulary. It isn't easy for them to fill the gap and grasp more than 2000 words within a short period of two years. In addition to such gap in vocabulary, there are relatively wide gaps between their proficiency and required proficiency in grammar, listening, speaking and writing. This is the actual and commonly-seen severe situation faced by local colleges and universities in reform of foreign language teaching.

III. PATHS TO REFORM OF ENGLISH TEACHING IN COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

A. Transform Roles Played by Teachers and Realize Innovation in Teaching Models

College English teachers should break those traditional teaching concepts based on teacher-centered theory and make students become the main body of learning. Firstly, teachers must serve learning activities of the main body. Classroom teaching activities should be student-centered. Serving as designers of classroom activities, teachers should serve as helpers who provide assistance to the main body in order to improve memory of their students, demonstrators who help the main body understand language materials, organizers who arrange language practice for the main body and judges who determine whether the main body can express their ideas and feelings correctly by using what they learnt. Secondly, emotional factors in English teaching are put into an unprecedented position. Attention should be paid to establishing harmonious relationship between teachers and students during English teaching process, which will bring

huge sense of psychological security to students and release their defense mechanism and thus create great objective conditions for students in their cognitive activities and improve the efficiency of their communications through using foreign languages. Secondly, task-oriented teaching model is advocated and such model will build a learning platform based on autonomy, experience, exploration, cooperation and communication and encourage students to participate in teaching activities based on autonomy, experience and exploration in order to complete their tasks, which will finally help students find pleasure in learning English, form a virtuous circle composed by learning, application, re-learning and re-application and motivate them to achieve high English proficiency and then play their social roles and achieve self-improvement through their high English proficiency.

B. Apply Modern Information Technology & Reform Teaching Means

It is pointed out by Mr. Zhang Yun in Cultivation of Creative Talents & Reform of Foreign Language Teaching that: Each reform of technical tools pushed forward reform in people's cognitive style, way of thinking and way of practice. Their application in the educational field created new teaching models and improved level of talent cultivation. [6]Supported by modern information technology, especially network technology, foreign language teaching models should relieve English teaching from constraints in time and location and make English teaching go toward personalized learning and active development. Requirements of educational modernization include strengthening construction of teaching infrastructure and digital campus, having a sufficient number of modern multifunctional classrooms such as multimedia classroom, web-based language laboratory, building advanced web-based teaching platform, realizing share and dissemination of high-quality teaching resources, information resources and intellectual resources, improving high-level interactions between teachers and students and realizing web-based and informationized library resources, which serve as material basis and guarantee for cultivating and training foreign language talents with comprehensive quality. In recent years, for the purpose of facilitating interaction between teachers and students during teaching process and improving teaching level and efficiency, schools with appropriate resources have been making efforts to develop interactive application software for foreign language teaching, build question banks and item banks for mock examination, go toward establishment of a three-dimensional teaching material system including multi-typed resources such as paper-based teaching materials, audio & visual teaching material, multimedia courseware, interactive teaching software and online courses as well as multi-layered resources such as unified teaching materials, supplementary teaching materials and test question banks, combine multimedia teaching with conventional teaching in an organic way in order to increase amount of information used in teaching process, create diversified teaching environments, realize share of teaching resources and thus realize a more optimized allocation of educational resources and more efficient educational and teaching process.

C. Intensify Construction of Teaching Teams and Improve Quality of Teachers

In recent years, workload of existing English teachers has been increasing because of increase in enrollment, due to which no attention is paid to on-the-job and follow-up training for these teachers. English teachers become tired of their onerous teaching tasks and lack spirit of innovation, and there is no mechanism of competition in management of teaching teams, which is one cause for high time consumption and low efficiency of English teaching in China. Construction of teaching team is a key link of teaching reform. High-quality teaching team serves as an essential condition for training and cultivation of qualified talents. In teaching reform process, on-the-job self-improvement should be encouraged, in addition to which various types of further studies outside their schools, regular attendance of classes taught by their peers and comments of students on teaching effect achieved by their teachers should be arranged. As for young teachers, in addition to assignment of experienced teachers for helping and guiding them, some activities such as regular teaching contests, contest of self-improvement in professional work, contest of scientific research and academic reports may be arranged and organized. In addition, various types of commendations and rewards may be implemented, which can be deemed as a condition for promotion in professional title. Scientific research serves as a booster for improving teaching quality, and promotion of teaching through scientific research is an important approach to improvement of teaching quality in colleges and universities. Without support from scientific researches, teachers will not be able to have timely and in-depth understanding on cutting-edge trends of various subjects, and it will be very difficult to improve teaching quality based on the objective of cultivating innovation ability. Not only can scientific researches increase depth and extension of teaching, but they can also update teachers' knowledge system and improve their comprehensive quality. The key point of improvement of English teaching quality lies in improvement of quality of English teachers. Therefore, it is very necessary to develop long-term and standardized on-the-job and subsequent training plans and scientific management systems for English teachers.

D. Implement Layered Teaching and Improves Teaching Management System

Based on the problem of wide gap among students from different schools, and layered teaching management should be gradually implemented by colleges and universities with proper resources. Newly enrolled students should go through English proficiency test immediately after their registration, after which based on their test results, traditional specialty-based arrangement of classes should be broken and all students should be managed in a layered manner during basic English teaching phase. Those students with a relatively high proficiency may enter into a high-level learning phase, while students with a relatively low proficiency may start with basic learning phase. Such practice will involve some aspects such as allocation of teaching resources and teaching facilities, arrangement of teaching curriculum, organization of examinations and development of regulations and rules. Colleges and universities may encounter some difficulties and

resistance in practice, which can be solved only when sufficient attention from various departments may be attracted. On one hand, existing resources should be sufficiently used to tap potential and realize the largest benefit from the existing teaching resources; on the other hand, increase of income and reduction of expenditure should be realized, based on which a larger amount of investment should be made to improve teaching resources. If layered teaching is expected to play an active role, implementation of supporting teaching management system must be ensured. Improvement of English teaching quality will be effectively facilitated through taking some measures such as establishment of question banks characterized by separation of teaching and examination based on the actual situation of school, implementation of student status management mode based on flexible school system, organization of collective scoring, proper analysis and assessment on examination papers and construction of teaching materials and files and by using incentive mechanism and restriction mechanism.

E. Strengthen the Construction of Campus Culture and Create a Great Atmosphere for Foreign Language Learning

Construction of campus culture is indispensable to strengthen cultivation of creative foreign language talents. Some activities, such as English corner, campus network, radio station, foreign language festival, foreign language speech and various types of foreign language contests, serve as channels for sufficiently tapping students' potential, create a great environment for foreign language learning and improve students' comprehensive ability and consciousness of innovation. Colleges and universities should organize and provide lectures about foreign languages and cultures, play foreign language films, and engage a certain number of foreign teachers to conduct classroom teaching in order to create strong humanistic and academic atmosphere, which will give cultural influence and inspire them academically and thus cultivate them spiritually and realize improvement of their culture taste.

IV. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the current situation and effective and important paths to reform of college English teaching are discussed and analyzed in this paper. Reform of college English teaching is objectively inevitable, which meets objective requirements including continuous social development, large-scale increase in enrollment by colleges and universities and the current situation of college English teaching. At present, as for reform of college English teaching, importance should be attached to clarifying objectives and direction of improvement of students' ability in comprehensive application of English language and building a framework of teaching models for modernized, personalized and active learning. Meanwhile, some measures such as transforming teaching concepts, improving overall quality of teaching teams and increasing investment in such reforms must be implemented for the purpose of ensuring smooth proceeding of reform of college English teaching. There is still a long way to go and challenging tasks to be completed as for

reform of college English teaching. In addition to the abovementioned situations and paths, there will be new phenomena and problems in the ever-changing environment. Multi-aspect, multi-angle and multi-layer personalized models for college English teaching can gradually established only through continuous detection and solution of problems.

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