

The Key to College English Teaching in China

Chengxing Li^{1, a}, Ning Han^{1, b}

¹College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Heilongjiang Bayi Agricultural University, Da Qing, Heilongjiang, China.

^achxli2000@126.com, ^bsammiehn@163.com,

Abstract

College English teaching in China has made great efforts in “teaching” and “learning” English and achieved gratifying successes in both theoretical and practical aspects. However, it has been constantly criticized by the people. The main reason is that college English teaching focuses too much on the “teaching” and “learning” of English while attaches less value to the “using” of the language. The author believes that the key to successful college English teaching is the organic integration of “teaching”, “learning” and “using”, and especially is the “using”. On the basis of Learning-using Integrated Principle, this paper, through questionnaires, demonstrates the importance of “language output” in improving college students’ English linguistic ability, and puts forward corresponding solutions in light of the current situation of college English teaching in China.

Keywords

College English Teaching, Language Output, Put What One Has Learned into Practice.

1. Introduction

College English teaching has accompanied the country’s Reform and Opening-up policy through the whole journey for 40 years. The university English educators have devoted their efforts to the theoretical research and practice of English teaching and the achievements include the fruitful theoretical research, renewed teaching methods and the increasing papers and books as well. However, college English teaching has been constantly criticized by the public for being time-consuming and inefficient. That is mainly because college English teaching failed to meet the goals set by the “College English Teaching Requirements” which was issued by the Ministry of Education, and did not do well in university talents cultivation. We do not have to question the scientific and reasonable conduct of the standards and policies formulated by the relevant government departments, because they have been extensively researched and repeatedly demonstrated by experts and constantly improved. So where is the problem? After many years of thinking, the author believes that the main reason for the criticism is that we do not pay enough attention to “use” in college English teaching. The goals set by the “College English Teaching Requirements” and the university talents cultivation require English learners to have a certain ability to use language, and this ability can not be obtained only by teachers’ classroom teaching and students’ after-school learning. There is no doubt that knowledge needs to be taught and learned while the linguistic application ability needs to be nurtured and improved in practice. Over the years we have been treating English as a course to “teach” and “learn” and working so hard on “teaching” and “researching”. With the development of science and technology, learning resources are continuously enriched and teaching methods are constantly updated, however, we do not pay enough attention to the natural process of linguistic acquisition. Therefore, the organic combination of “teaching”, “researching”, “learning” and “using” in college English require more in-depth study. Because only in this way, can we make full use of the law of linguistic acquisition and help students acquire the ability to use language.

2. Survey on the Use of English in College English Teaching

(1) Design of the Questionnaire

The research group consulted relevant literatures and data and designed the questionnaire in the light of the students' learning state and the problems they encountered in practical teaching. There are 34 questions covering five aspects in the questionnaire: ① in-class use of English ② out- of- class use of English ③ learning habit ④ major influence factors ⑤ students' suggestions on the idea of "putting what learned into practice". Basically speaking, the design of questionnaire is reasonable.

(2) Results and Analysis

The survey was conducted in paper questionnaires among different kinds of universities, such as agricultural universities, forestry universities, normal universities, medical universities, engineering universities and comprehensive universities. The research group took into account the factors such as the location of universities, the students' major, gender, and tried their best to make the subjects of the survey representative when they distributed a total of 1,000 questionnaires. The survey targets were mainly freshmen and sophomores and all the questionnaires turned out to be valid. Through the analysis of the questionnaires, several findings are as follows: ① most students had limited opportunities to use English in class, which cannot meet their needs of using English; ② students' out-of-class autonomic learning is inadequate and they are not willing to use English actively; ③ most students did not have good English learning habits and lacked awareness of practising listening, speaking, reading and translating. The reasons for these phenomena are as follow: ① Teachers are more likely to communicate with students in Chinese instead of English in class; ② Students' weak linguistic knowledge causes fear, anxiety and lack of confidence in using English, which directly affects the linguistic output in their learning ③ Students have no situations of using English, few opportunities to communicate with teachers, classmates and English native speakers in English, no opportunities to do some part-time jobs related to the use of English; ④ There is a lack of initiative in learning English, and the internal motivation is not strong. These factors directly or indirectly affect the "use" of English in the learning process.

3. Solutions to the Problems

(1) Theoretical Basis

In October 2014, at the "7th International Symposium on English Teaching in China", the Production-Oriented Approach was proposed, of which the core theory is "Learning-using Integrated Principle". The so-called "Learning-using Integrated Principle" means that in the study of English, all learning tasks should be closely linked to the use of language, and "learning" and "using" should not be separated as two parts. This theory aims to solve the problem of "separation of learning and using" that appears in teaching practice. It advocates "using" in the process of "learning", and combining "learning" with "using". In other words, it attaches great value to a close combination of input and output of language.

At present, college English teaching in China generally starts with the textbooks, mainly by teachers explaining the structure, the main idea, vocabularies, phrases, language difficulties and writing skills of passages. However, the students are rarely given the opportunity to use the language after the explanation. In other words, teachers do not focus on cultivating students' comprehensive ability to use English. This approach leads to a disconnect between input and output of language. As a result, although students have completed the process of "learning" and accumulated a certain amount of knowledge, this knowledge cannot be turned into output capacity and cannot be used in practice.

Learning-using Integrated Principle should be adopted as the theoretical basis in college English teaching. That is to say, “learning” and “using” should be integrated and all language teaching activities are closely linked with the “using” in classroom teaching. Students are no longer just “learning” textbooks, but learning by means of textbooks to learn how to output in English. For students, the ultimate goal is that they can complete a certain task in daily life in English within their own abilities, regardless of their level.

(2) Implementation Strategies

①. Driven by Teachers

In college English teaching, teachers have an extremely important guiding role for students. Therefore, in order to cultivate students’ ability to use English, teacher’ drive can not be ignored.

First of all, teachers should assign suitable output tasks that meet the students’ English level. When designing a task, the teacher should pay attention to the fact that this task must have practical meanings, which can arouse students’ interest and meet the actual needs of students. Second, teachers should provide new materials and resources to students in due time. New input materials can help students replenish language knowledge so as to complete output tasks well. Therefore, when providing materials, teachers should make sure the materials are consistent with the output tasks and they can meet the learning needs of students.

In addition, the teacher should give timely help when students try to complete the output task to ensure that the linguistic ability of the student can be gradually improved. Teachers should also give timely and exact evaluation and feedback to students when they complete the task so that the students can continuously enhance the level of language use and maintain the enthusiasm of participating in the activities.

②. Create a “Learning-using Integrated” Environment

To promote the language output of students, it is necessary to create a “Learning-using Integrated” environment as much as possible. In a non-English language environment, we need to create a variety of communicative situations, such as English speeches, writing competitions, reading competitions, English debates and so on to provide students was many opportunities to conduct listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating training. Such activities will force students to use grammatical knowledge as much as possible, help students consciously to expand vocabulary and to correct expression errors, strengthen communicative judgment and narrow the gap between language input and output.

For example, teachers can use the Reading-Writing Integrated Continuation Task to create a “Learning-using Integrated” environment in order to promote the language output. This method is currently used less in college English teaching, but it is very effective in promoting students’ English learning. Teachers can select a suitable article based on the student’s English level, erase the end and ask students to continue writing to complete the end of the article in English. Students are required to pay attention to the continuity of the plot and logic. The length is not limited. By Reading-Writing Integrated Continuation Task, students can at first improve their reading comprehension ability because they need to understand the original text before they continue their writing. Second, they can improve their writing level in that what the students write are required to correspond with the original text in the aspect of context and discourse. In addition, it can cultivate students’ creative and innovative thinking, stimulate students’ imagination and desire to express and communicate.

③. Improve the Motivation of Language Output

Having the right motivation to learn English is the key to being able to learn English well, the same is true of the output of language. Through the survey, we know that the majority of students study English only for the purpose of passing CET4 or CET6 examination or Postgraduate Entrance Examination, and they pay insufficient attention to the improvement of

communication ability because they think that English is rarely used in the future. As a result, students regard English just as a course and attach too much importance to the study of language points. Consequently, they ignore the use of language, which leads to poor language output. Therefore, college English teachers should not only focus on teaching linguistic knowledge, but more importantly, they should cultivate students' motivation to use English. To do so, the most important thing is to stimulate students' intrinsic motivation in English learning. That is to say, students should have a strong interest in English learning and learn English spontaneously and voluntarily. Because interest has a great influence on students' motivation and behavior, cultivating students' interest in English is so crucial for stimulating their motivation to learn and use English.

At present, most of the English teaching in China still adopts traditional methods. Teachers explain the language points and dominate the class while students are still passive recipients and feel bored about the learning process. The resistance to the teacher and the lack of interest in English learning will inevitably lead to the loss of motivation, confidence and perseverance. In such condition, the cultivation of English application ability is hard to achieve.

Therefore, the traditional role of teachers should be changed from explainers into instructors of knowledge, managers of the classroom and the organizers of the class activities. Students should become the main body of class and solve problems themselves. However, it does not mean that teachers have nothing to do in class. Teachers need to create an equal and harmonious class atmosphere where teachers and students participate in class activities together. At the same time, they also need to organize teaching activities according to the teaching objectives, encourage students to participate in class activities, inspire them to find and solve problems and arouse their interest in English learning. Teachers design class activities according to the student's ability, then give them positive and timely feedback. In this way, students will voluntarily learn and gradually improve their English application skills.

In college English teaching, teachers need to help students to set learning goals at different stages and adopt corresponding learning strategies, to make learning plans and to guide them to do autonomic learning. Students come to realize that college English learning requires four years of continuous study. During the period, teachers will often give guidance to students and help them to reflect on and develop their learning motivation.

College English teaching should not only focus on the training of basic English skills, but also develop students' intercultural communication ability and critical thinking. For most students, the change of thinking mode is quite challenging for them, and they will feel confused and do not know what and how to learn. At this time, as foreign language teachers, we should help students to clarify learning goals, plan learning tasks, and guide students to the right path. What the teachers do is just to give advice, provide guidance, respect the opinions of students, and do not dampen the enthusiasm of students. In the process of learning, teachers should give supervision, point out students' mistakes and urge them to reflect on. However, for students' achievements, teachers need to give praise and encouragement. The learning tasks at different stages should be continuous so that students can gradually achieve higher goals, gain self-confidence. Only in this way, can students be willing to learn English and gradually develop English language output ability.

④. Alignment

Interaction is necessary for linguistic acquisition and it should run through the whole process of "learning" and "using" language. Interaction includes interaction between teachers and students, interaction among students and interaction between students and teaching resources. The interaction between teachers and students is one of the most basic forms of interaction in the teaching process. The teachers will adopt multimodes to ensure the amount of information the students can gain, thus stimulating students' interest in learning. In this process, teachers

can use multimodal language to set language points into various tasks, and then guide students to think, judge and supplement the information obtained and consciously instruct students to use multimodal language to transfer, adjust and deliver information. Students process the information they have learned to gain knowledge.

In addition to the interaction between teachers and students, interaction between students and students is also an important link that can not be ignored in the teaching process. It plays a significant role in improving teaching quality and increasing teaching efficiency. Teachers set certain tasks on given topic in lead-in section, such as listening to a song, or seeing a set of pictures or a video, and then guide students to discuss the tasks. This kind of interaction can broaden the knowledge, help students learn from each other and develop their interest in learning, which can lay the foundation for the next stage of learning. From students' discussion, the teacher can judge to what extent the students master the language points and adjust the teaching content accordingly. At the same time, teachers guide students to actively participate in class activities to obtain information and knowledge. Finally, teachers should guide students to consolidate and reflect on what they have learned. This process enables students to master the correct thinking methods and learning strategies as well as to enhance their research capabilities. Therefore, after the completion of each unit's learning tasks, teachers can further urge students to conduct research-based learning. The research findings can be in the form of a paper, a report, or a role-play. Through this process, students not only acquire the knowledge but also improve their linguistic abilities.

Modern information technology provides rich resources for English teaching and a good environment for students' autonomic learning. The autonomic learning platform is an extended form of classroom teaching. Unlike classroom teaching, students can log in to the learning platform to take the course at any time through internet. With the platform, teachers can share course videos and related materials, and repeat the difficulties and key points in the class. The open learning environment makes learning content no longer limited to abstract knowledge, which enables students to put what they have learned into practice and to stimulate their learning initiative. Meanwhile, we can take advantage of the platform to enhance the interaction between teachers and the interaction between students and to maximize students' autonomic learning so as to make the students use the language more accurately, fluently and decently. It can be concluded that strengthening the interaction in teaching and actively using interactive approach to closely combine language input with language output is an important means of improving students' ability to use English.

⑤. Resources Utilization

With the application of information technology in college English teaching, creating an "Internet+" environment can effectively improve students' enthusiasm for learning English and using English. Teachers can integrate and reconstruct network resources according to the course content to meet the teaching needs. At present, you can use the resources such as MOOC and micro-course to supplement the in-class teaching contents. You can also use WeChat to strengthen the students' autonomic learning and take advantage the related APPs for English learning. At the same time, through various online platforms, teachers can provide students with a variety of tests and evaluations, online assignments, one-to-one explanations. All these teaching methods can promote students' understanding of teaching content and broaden their knowledge, so constructing an "Internet +" college English teaching environment can greatly improve students English application ability.

4. Conclusion

In view of the status quo of college English teaching in China and on the basis of Learning-using Integrated Principle, the article objectively demonstrates the dialectical relationship between

language input and language output. In college English teaching, because of inadequate instructions of teachers and poor English abilities of students, students cannot put what they learn into practice. Weak internal motivation and the loss of language environment is also responsible for it. Therefore, in order to change this status quo, the following changes should be made: First, teachers should give full play to the role of “scaffolding” and closely combine the “input” and “output” links in teaching; second, give students appropriate guide to help them overcome bad emotional factors; Third, cultivate students’ correct learning motivation and linguistic output motivation; Finally, integrate resources and provide conditions for students to use English. And only by this way, college English teaching can achieve the goals set by the “College English Teaching Requirements” issued by the Ministry of Education.

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