

Reflections on College English Reform in China

Quanhong Jiang*

School of Foreign Languages
Beihang University
Beijing, China
jiangquanhong@buaa.edu.cn

Ziang Chen

Shoue College
Beihang University
Beijing, China
chenziang@buaa.edu.cn

Mei Sun

School of Foreign Languages
Beihang University
Beijing, China
18600679691@163.com

Abstract—In recent years, the integration of global economy and culture is gradually accelerating, and the market demands on the English proficiency of graduates are constantly improving, which requires the English education in universities to keep up with the pace. This paper will investigate the English teaching methods in most universities in China at the present stage, analyze their teaching objectives and emphases, investigate the students' habit of learning English, and point out the shortcomings of current college English teaching by combining some practical problems, so as to illustrate the importance of college English teaching reform. Then it points out the reform direction of college English teaching from the aspects of targeted applied English, cross-cultural differences, listening and speaking ability, use of the Internet, critical thinking and so on. Finally, combining with the existing teaching conditions, the development countermeasures faced by the implementation of the reform will be discussed.

Keywords: *English teaching reform, targeted applied English, overseas culture learning, multimedia network teaching, critical thinking*

I. INTRODUCTION

With China's growing status and role in the world, the degree of attention to the English education in China gradually rises. The scale of the current English education in China is very large [1]. From 2007 to 2016, foreign language professional undergraduate enrollment an average of about 200000 people a year [2], and most for non-English majors in colleges and universities are opened the English courses. Since the 18th national congress, Xi Jinping has attached great importance to the reform and development of China's education [3]. As China's reform and opening-up drive deepens, the communist party of China (CPC) believes that education reform should be carried out to tap human resources and enable China to participate more in the world economy. Since 1999, the ministry of education has started a new round of English curriculum reform. The reform was open to all students, and through the "task-based" teaching approach, it aimed to cultivate students' comprehensive ability of language use and develop their awareness and ability of cross-cultural communication, so as to lay a foundation for students' all-round development and lifelong development [4].

At present, China has the largest scale of English education in the world. According to the statistics in 2015, the total value of China's English training market is between 200 billion yuan and 500 billion yuan [5]. In China's education system, from entering primary school to graduating from undergraduate or graduate school, English learning runs through the whole

process, and even some kindergartens offer English courses [6]. The British council estimates that by 2020, the number of people learning English in China will reach one billion, exceeding the total number of native English speakers in the world [7]. However, such a large scale of education has not brought about significant improvement in English proficiency. According to EF's eighth EF EPI report (2018), China ranked 47th out of 88 non-native English-speaking countries in the English proficiency test, with a low level of proficiency and a drop from 2017 [8]. English proficiency has not increased in Asia, including China, despite a high emphasis on speaking English and high investment in English learning, according to the report. Due to the lack of talents who are proficient in both English and technology in China, many famous multinational enterprises have encountered difficulties in their development in China [9]. China's current English doesn't have capacity to keep up with the speed of economic growth and development of science and technology. The problems in English education, such as low efficiency and poor effect still haven't been solved fundamentally [10]. The problem is from various aspects, especially the curriculum, examination form, teachers, teaching environment and so on, if from a macro point of view, including political factors, economic factors, historical and cultural factors, etc. [4]. Therefore, it is of great significance to formulate a more specific and feasible reform plan.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In China, as a foreign language learning, English learning has irreplaceable benefits in many aspects such as personal development and social culture. First of all, full mastery of another language can bring considerable economic benefits. At the same time, for the children of immigrants, the lack of bilingual skills has caused a loss of income [11]. In addition, a foreign language is not only a means of communication to accurately express one's own views in another language, but also a carrier of a complete set of values of a country or region and a guide to perceive this set of clear values. Learning foreign languages is a process of developing universal spiritual values and achievements of global culture, which can maintain individual intellectual and emotional development [12]. And, according to research in visual search tasks (such as found in the shape of interference target shape), in some cases, the recognition speed of bilinguals is faster than the monolinguals', which provides the evidence for the truth that bilinguals are able to control visual attention better [13].

English education reform in China has a long history. In each era, it had a specific significance. In 1989, Francois Vaillancourt, a Canadian economics professor, pointed out in

his book *population language and Canadian bilingualism from the perspective of economics* that language is not only a tool, but also a human capital. In today's global economic integration, English is not only the first language of international conferences, but also the most frequently used language for communication and cooperation and data storage [14]. The great expansion of English education is driven by the great demand for English talents in the economy and society. Since the reform and opening up, the country has a large and wide demand for English talents. High-level English talents are needed in the fields of diplomacy, economy, culture, education, national defense, science and technology, foreign trade, and global governance. China's total foreign trade volume is huge. Take the quantifiable total trade volume of imports and exports for example, China's total import and export volume has increased from more than 20 billion us dollars in 1978 to 4.8 trillion us dollars in 2017. In recent years, China's GDP relies on import and export trade more than 40%. Obviously, only large-scale professional foreign language education can support such a large-scale import and export trade [2]. However, according to the current investigation and research, the current status and effect of English teaching are far from meeting the requirements of international competition in the 21st century, and it is urgent to reform English teaching [15].

At present, the reform of English education in China can be heard without end, and many scholars have put forward their own opinions and Suggestions. From the perspective of learning environment, language is a social mechanism, and any language learning takes place in a social environment [16]. China's native language is Chinese. In daily life, Chinese has met the requirements of the vast majority of life, and for students in China, the use of English tend to occur in the unnatural environment (classroom environment), resulting in students lack for a long period of time, accurate, authentic English input (listening), and independent English output (speaking) with purpose. In addition, teachers often use simplified and controlled English expressions in class, which hinders students from learning more advanced and idiomatic English to some extent [6], which is the most basic problem in English teaching. In terms of learning content, domestic English teaching often neglects the cultivation of students' interest in language, and the boring cramming teaching, tens of thousands of words and complicated grammar rules all inspire students to be afraid of English learning [15]. Without interest in learning, students cannot generate long-term motivation for autonomous learning, which will do more harm than good to language learning.

From the perspective of teaching methods, English teachers tend to focus on the cultivation of students' English skills, but ignore the cultivation of compound qualities. Therefore, their teaching methods are often limited to textbooks, explaining texts, words, grammar, etc., without more abundant teaching methods to diversify the classroom and cultivate students' comprehensive English quality [17]. College English is not only the cultivation of English skills, but also the training of students' ability to use English for communication, cooperation, reception and expression. Effective English education can cultivate students' observation ability, attention, thinking ability,

communicative ability, reading ability, memory ability and problem-solving ability.

From the perspective of teaching evaluation methods, the current assessment methods for college students in China are mainly large-scale centralized examinations. For a long time, China's secondary school education has taken the college entrance examination as the baton, and doing exercises takes up most of students' time in learning English, emphasizing vocabulary and grammar while neglecting listening and speaking ability and application ability [13]. After entering the university, most college students still focus on the examination of English learning. Passing CET-4 and CET-6, postgraduate entrance examination, IEUS, TOFEL, GRE and other tests has become the sole purpose of college students' English learning [18]. This kind of teaching evaluation method of large-scale centralized examination makes students' learning too utilitarian and goes against the original intention of English education.

III. METHOD

Supply-side structural reform is an economic term that focuses on "eliminating backward, low-end and surplus supply and providing high-end and high-quality supply to meet the needs of people at different levels" [19]. In 2015 Xi Jinping put forward the supply-side structural reform for the first time in the 11th meeting of central finance leading group, aiming at optimizing economic structural from the Angle of supply, by the effective optimization to meet the needs of market economy. Informally, that means we produce what markets need. By the same token, for the education industry, talents need to meet the demand of the labor market. The seller's market dominated by education will be gradually transformed into the buyer's market of talent demand [20]. On the other hand, for colleges, universities and students, the supply-side relationship is also very obvious. Colleges and universities open courses for students, need to take students' needs into account, adjust the course supply from the direction of students' interest and demand direction, in order to improve the efficiency and effect of education.

According to the problems exposed in the current English education, different education environment and the situation of undergraduate students, through literature research, case study and classified discussion, the paper puts forward diversified mode of the reform of English teaching, feasibility, advantages and disadvantages analysis respectively, and makes the reasonable judgement in order to provide guidance in the process of transition from theory to practical reform.

IV. DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTION

With the new normal development of the national economy, college education is gradually falling behind the requirements of economic transformation. There is a gap between talent cultivation and economic development in colleges and universities in terms of labor market demand, and a student's graduation does not mean that he or she has become a qualified worker [21]. This is especially true in English. Language is a means of communication, the purpose of learning English is to apply, for English majors and non-English majors, English learning should be closely related to their professional direction,

future employment direction. English teaching is divided into general English and applied English, which can not only improve the efficiency of English learning, but also optimize the quality of English application.

The general English course is similar to the current English course teaching idea. It aims to cultivate students' basic English listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities by means of sample text explanation, media watching, communication and discussion. The teaching goal is to train students' basic English skills. This course is open to all students. The applied English is different for non-English majors and English majors. For the students who are not English majors, colleges and universities should set applied English courses for the students. The applied English course is based on the general English course. By combining students' professional knowledge, the English learning direction is more specific. The course contents include but are not limited to the study and explanation of English literature of the major, the study and summary of professional academic vocabulary, and the courses of professional knowledge in English or semi-English. The teaching objective of the applied English course is to enable students to understand and learn English knowledge about the major, adapt to the English use environment in future work or scientific research, and help students to skillfully use English literature and resources for the study of the major. The content of applied English courses is different for students of each major, and the courses are limited to students of the same major. For English majors, there are a variety of English learning courses in their current English learning, such as English writing, translation theory and practice, introduction to linguistics, selected reading of English literature, etc., but they are still in the stage of universal English courses with unified teaching and teaching. Colleges and universities need to offer more targeted applied English courses in translation, education, foreign trade and English literature according to students' interests. Students can choose courses according to their employment goals and personal interests to enhance their experience in English application.

Due to the cultural differences between Chinese and foreign huge, both in the foreign economic and trade, or in the process of cultural exchanges with other countries, the two sides due to the lack of the understanding of each other countries culture and cognition and lead to misunderstanding is often happened [22], so, in the process of English learning, to grasp the Chinese and foreign cultural differences, learning appropriate diplomatic etiquette, for smoothly or win-win economic and trade cooperation has great significance [23]. At present, the English teaching in China is not ideal in the aspect of cross-cultural difference learning. Some scholars have conducted detailed studies on the "crisis" of Confucius institutes in the United States, and found that there are huge cross-cultural differences between China and the United States, such as the trust in the government, the understanding of "academic freedom", the understanding of "information disclosure" and "transparency", and the cognition of "intellectual freedom". At the same time, some of the standards are unclear and vague provisions will lead to concerns of American personnel. This cross-cultural difference has seriously affected China's foreign economic and cultural exchanges. To add the study of overseas

culture into the classroom, firstly, teachers are required to have certain overseas visiting experience and have certain knowledge accumulation of cultural differences between China and foreign countries and diplomatic etiquette. The teaching contents may include the appreciation and comments of foreign films and TV programs, and simulated melodrama, etc. In the teaching process, teachers should pay close attention to the English dialogues and actions in class, and provide timely correction and guidance to students. Foreign teachers can also be invited to share their experiences with students to make it more interesting.

Listening and speaking ability is an important part of English. At present, many students have good scores in the written test, but they always encounter difficulties in their daily English communication [10]. Nowadays, some colleges and universities have divided English courses into listening and speaking classes and reading and writing classes, which go hand in hand with each other. This has improved students' listening and speaking ability to some extent. However, there are still some deficiencies. In the listening and speaking class, the training focuses on the listening ability, and the expression training for students is not enough. The reason may be that the listening score is higher than the speaking score in the current English test. Colleges and universities can arrange part of English corner in class or after class to create an environment for students to discuss and communicate with each other in English, which can not only cultivate students' habit of being good at expressing themselves in English, but also broaden students' scope of knowledge.

With the continuous promotion of information technology, the Ministry of Education began to advocate the deep integration of information technology and education [2]. A large number of courseware, software, systems and platforms specially designed and produced for English learning have emerged. Rich learning approaches can meet the diverse learning needs of students, and a new classroom teaching mode represented by flipped classroom has been developed, enabling students to use the fragmented time after class for learning. Since 2012, various MOOCs appeared successively. The learning mode has changed from MOOC's completely independent learning to mixed learning, flipped classroom, collaborative learning and inquiry learning [19]. The essence of MOOC system is the sharing of educational resources, which greatly improves the efficiency of the use of educational resources and enriches students' learning. Students can choose diversified classroom contents according to their own interests to improve their learning interest and expand their knowledge fields. Flipped classroom is established on the basis of Internet teaching. Teachers collect video, audio and text materials, record teaching video and other forms in advance and distribute them to students online. Students learn independently online before class, summarize questions and points of interest, discuss and communicate in class, and give full play to students' initiative [24], so that students can more intuitively participate in class and apply English.

The cultivation of critical thinking is the key to the cultivation of high-quality innovative talents [25]. The development of critical thinking is conducive to the establishment of students' awareness of inquiry, the

improvement of their innovation ability and the cultivation of critical thinking spirit, as well as the establishment of healthy and stable psychological characteristics of students [25]. About the cultivation of critical thinking, American colleges and universities are in many ways superior to the Chinese universities [26]. Researchers have found that Chinese students are lacking practice in critical thinking [27]. Therefore, it is necessary for Chinese colleges and universities to develop or enhance the cultivation of students' critical thinking. In order to develop students' critical thinking consciousness, some activities may be useful, such as using task-based driving way in class, asking students to independently collect information, combined with their own knowledge accumulation and large amount of information, to judge the accuracy of information, screening and finishing, to put forward a solution to determine its feasibility. After that, students should demonstrate to teachers and classmates according to their own plans, and clarify their own basis and method. In the whole process, the independent judgment ability and information integration ability of students are emphasized. The teacher should make an objective evaluation of the students' presentation, point out the advantages and disadvantages, and give further guidance and encouragement.

V. CONCLUSIONS

As the world's second largest economy, China's economic and cultural development is bound to be sustained and diversified, and communication with the world is essential. English, as the main tool of communication between China and the rest of the world, is highly valued by the Chinese people. This paper focuses on the development and changes of the age, through the shortage of the existing reform measures and the summary of the analysis about the present situation of Chinese college English education, combining with Chinese and foreign contrast, puts forward suggestions to the reform of college English education. Then ensure the realizability through the feasibility analysis. There is still a long way to go in the reform of English education, which requires the unremitting efforts and persistence of numerous teachers and students. This paper proposes the expectation for the reform of college English in China, hopes to make a modest contribution to the development of English education reform.

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