

Research on College English Textbooks and Suggestions

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Abstract—This paper compares and studies the current College English Textbooks and make an empirical research among college students. Based on the result of their investigation, the authors put forward several suggestions on College English Textbooks: We should add some Chinese characteristics, humanities elements in our EFL textbooks and EFL teaching. Literary classics should be adopted as well. Our textbooks should convey the greatest ideas, wisdom, and culture to our students.

Index Terms—college English textbook, investigation, humanities, culture, suggestions

I. INTRODUCTION

After joining WTO, China has experienced the top-down reform in EFL teaching. The traditional "time-consuming, inefficient and deaf" English-study can no longer satisfy the newly demand for internationalization in current China. Learners not only need to understand the contents in reading materials, they also need to improve their abilities in listening and speaking so as to express themselves freely when communicating with native speakers. As a consequence, a profound reform in EFL teaching has been carried out and remarkable performance has been achieved. There is an emergence of a large number of EFL textbooks that adapt to new English syllabus. These textbooks undoubtedly contribute greatly to the improved quality in EFL learning and teaching in China.

In a sense, the current college English textbooks determine the English language level in Chinese intellectuals nationwide. We feel obliged to carry out our research on current EFL textbooks so as to meet the new demand for EFL learners in China. We need to bring up comprehensive and high-quality science and technology workers in China.

II. CURRENT EFL TEXTBOOKS

Most reading materials in current textbooks are selected from English newspapers, magazines and books. To some degree, they bear strong sense of times; as for genres, argumentation, expository essays dominate and science fiction accounts for a certain proportion. Themes in Listening textbooks are more or less the same.

A. *The Content in Textbooks*

As for the contents in textbooks, most materials deal with the environmental issues, education, western cultures, values, science and current affairs.

B. *Language Forms*

Authentic languages, strong sense of the times characterize the current EFL textbooks. The advanced EFL textbooks have an increasing degree of difficulties in languages. More difficulties in language and longer articles in length are the features of current textbooks.

C. *Students' Opinions about Current Textbooks*

The authors made an investigation on current English textbooks among their students. The following are the feedback from the interviewees. All the listed below are the original responses.

1. The textbook is treated as reading materials. Memorizing new words in textbooks is the main tasks in EFL learning.
2. There are too many reading tasks in the textbooks. Besides the reading materials are too complex and should be refined.
3. The textbooks are too boring to raise students' interest to read.
4. Textbooks should be different from articles and essays in newspapers and magazines. Textbooks should inspire the wisdom of learners through reading.

5. Reading materials in textbooks are so long and difficult that the students cannot understand without referring to the translations. Students do not have enough courage to finish them.

6. Reading materials are too obscure to be suitable for textbooks. There are so many repetitive drills and exercises, which turn out to be neither effective nor useful.

7. Reading materials are sort of out of time. We should adopt new articles and essays into textbooks.

8. There are too many spoken English in reading materials. Strongly suggest adding notes to excessive new words.

9. The narrative articles are too simple and ridiculous for college students to read.

10. There lacks a consistency in the degree of language difficulties in the reading materials. Knowledge-points are not clear.

11. The language is complicated, syntaxes are complex, and semantics is difficult to understand.

12. The reading materials are out of time and of poor-quality.

13. There are repetitive themes in both Intensive Reading and listening materials.

14. Reading materials in textbooks are dull.

15. Too many materials to learn, less class hours. The teachers do not have enough time to deal with them in class so that many are left for student's homework. Reading materials are difficult for students to learn by themselves, let alone appreciate them.

D. Students' Recommendations

1. Provide literary articles, short and pithy articles, fiction, classic speeches, classic drama.

2. Choose articles that are of moderate difficulty.

3. Choose great works of both classic and modern, especially the works of great men.

4. Pragmatic and humanities articles should characterize the College English textbooks. It is important to cultivate students' practical ability in English language, skills and to broaden their English knowledge range is equally important.

5. Provide after-class exercises with answers, more notes are welcome.

6. Convert CD-ROM format into mp3 player.

7. More pictures and detailed comments in textbooks are very welcome.

8. The textbooks should adopt more articles concerning hot topics.

9. Choose good articles and students can memorize them by heart.

10. More original essays and English literary classics are welcome.

III. SUGGESTIONS FOR COLLEGE ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS

With the rapid development of China's economy, technology, education, culture and the increasing trend of the globalization, foreign language (especially English) is becoming an important tool that most people need to grasp. English language learners doubled in number in recent years, and hence create a huge market and business opportunities. Foreign language schools thrive. Besides, the advent of modern technology, especially the development of the Internet has revolutionized the foreign language teaching methods and its models. The functionality of the language itself and its strong utilitarian dominate in the current EFL market. As Pang (2002) puts it that "there is a tendency that Chinese EFL teachers are focusing on training language learners and ignoring the humanities education for their students" (P.102). Too much emphasize on utilitarian and less on the humanities worry many EFL educators.

The irrational neglect of humanities and human care in EFL education has aroused great fear among Chinese educators and academic researchers.

A. Inevitability in EFL Textbooks Reform and the Preliminary Conception

We believe that innovative teaching methods should be considered when writing textbooks. Based on helping teachers with their classroom teaching practice, Chinese EFL teachers are exploring appropriate approaches. They believe EFL teachers must make fundamental change in the existing teaching models, which are mainly book-based and teacher-centered. They believe that EFL teachers should reduce the mandatory way of teaching and practice the open teaching. They should advocate building new teaching models which features in learner-centered and students' independently practiced activities. We believe that our EFL teaching should shift from "taught by teachers to the students-exploring activities". The real teaching and learning activities should be carried out based on students' self-exploration and initiatives. EFL teachers should create a favorable learning atmosphere for learners; help to train students in their innovation and in their creative abilities, which will benefit students in their future professional development. Also, teaching schedules should be different based on different professional learning. Different evaluation criteria should be introduced. Evaluation criteria should be diversified so as to meet the different professional demands in EFL learners. As for college English learners, we would suggest to practise a combination of formative assessment and summative assessment in the final exam and tests all through a semester. By doing so, students can be responsible for evaluating their own activities in class and thus become the masters in this evaluation system.

B. Weaken the Differences between General College English and English Majors

All around the world, we can see many great figures are those with comprehensive abilities. However, it is not rare for us to see many of our science students who are wholeheartedly engaged in learning science subjects, like maths, physics and chemic and the like. These science students have little chance to read art subjects like history, geography, etc. The only liberal arts they learn in the university are the essays in their textbooks. They have little chance to read classics, and meet great characters in literary arts. The narrow ranges of their knowledge would ultimately make them difficult to have a final success in their professional field. Besides, the lack of humanities in EFL textbooks, coupled with exam-oriented education, hinders the comprehensive qualities of our students. It is true that the training in language skills in EFL teaching is important, but we should also take into account the fact that education does not simply mean to deliver knowledge. As Li (2003) states in his book that our Chinese famous educator Tao Xingzhi once pointed out that the school's mission is to teach people the truth and to teach people to uphold the truth. Likewise, our textbooks should teach our students how to be real man and have them get in touch with the greatest of human thought, wisdom. Besides delivering some basic language skills, our mission is to teach them useful knowledge in life. Based on the above discussion, we hold that our textbooks should be humanities-oriented, provide students with useful knowledge, both in their professions and their life. Our ultimate goal should be cultivating our students and making them into truly healthy and versatile personalities.

C. *Add Ethnical Culture into EFL Textbooks*

All through current college English textbooks, vast selections are the works by British and American writers in Anglo-Saxon culture. Chinese elements (particularly Chinese culture) in EFL textbooks are rare. The selected authentic, elegant style essays will undoubtedly enables students to learn authentic English, stimulate their interest and help them to understand American culture. But, if looking from the perspective of culture-language, we can say the selected essays in EFL textbooks are not yet comprehensive. Language is the carrier of culture. EFL textbook should incorporate Chinese culture. English is a universal language. However, China is a great country with a long history of five thousand years and a splendid culture. The missing Chinese culture in EFL textbooks tends to give students the assumption or misunderstanding concept that learning English means learning British and American writers, their people and their cultures. Chinese cannot write great literatures, good English, etc. We are quite concerned about the current situation that if all EFL students' exposures are western cultures, western themes and Anglo-Saxon way of thinking, then one day our national cultural consciousness (culture awareness) is bound to be diluted. As EFL teachers, we have to remind ourselves that the ultimate goal in EFL learning and teaching is to communicate and carry out exchanges our ideas with people from other countries, to learn their advanced technology and to introduce our own history and culture to them. Just imagine Chinese students talk about how to spend Christmas in English, or how to make mashed potatoes and hamburgers, then would any Americans be interested in these topics? And the truth is quite a lot of Chinese college students can talk about Christmas, NBA, and Shakespeare in fluent English while they know less about the traditional Chinese cultures and influential figures in Chinese history, such as martial arts, Confusions, Chinese medicine, traditional customs, etc. This disappoints both English-speaking people and Chinese a little bit.

"Let the world understand China and let Chinese introduce their culture to the world" is not only the goal of China's foreign exchange policy but also the goal of our EFL reform. Thus, we strongly suggest that EFL textbooks writers add some Chinese elements--articles with Chinese characteristics into College English textbooks. However, Zhu (2006) argues that "when writing EFL textbooks we should avoid going to extremes" (p. 57). We uphold the compiled learning materials should be moderate---a combination of traditional Chinese and Western cultures. EFL textbooks can adopt both the original and the abbreviated works of Anglo-Saxon and Chinese cultures. We hold that the Chinese culture in EFL textbooks is necessary. English-speaking people may also be interested in them. In fact, some Chinese idioms and proverbs have the same meaning as their English translations, such as "one stone two birds (Kill two birds with one stone)" and "Double-edged sword (one arrow, two hawks)", etc. These Chinese idioms may enrich English language as well.

D. *Conflicts between EFL Teaching Modes and Our Traditional Testing System*

The existing EFL textbooks conflict with the current National College English examinations. This is also the concern of both teachers and students. The National College English Test can not reflect the actual English proficiency of college students. In CET 4 & 6 examinations, students are tested in traditional ways, focusing on the tests of reading, grammar, vocabulary. Listening test accounts for only a small proportion in CET4 & 6 and there is no assessment for students' oral competence. The current EFL writing section always involves some practical writing tasks, like learning to write apology, posters and invitation cards. The tests in writing mainly focus on writing argumentation essays. On one hand, the teachers and students have realized that in this new era EFL learners should enhance their comprehensive abilities to use English, especially in listening and speaking, so that in their future studies, careers as well as social interactions they will be able to communicate effectively. On the other hand, they ultimately have to fall back to meet the demand for the traditional test of CET 4 & 6. Because passing CET 4 & 6 means that students can get a well-paid job in the future. How do EFL teachers face this embarrassing situation and how do students deal with the conflict between "modern concept "and exam-oriented education? This is also the biggest challenge our EFL textbooks writers face. It is true that the national CET 4& 6 should not be a baton, but who can ignore the impact of this national university examination on the EFL teaching in current China?

E. Add Literary Classics in College English Textbooks

Textbooks should contain valued stuffs that students must learn by heart. Any language has its own literary classics. They are the wealth of all mankind. Take Chinese language for example: Poetry in Tang and Song Dynasty is our language treasures. Those who can write Tang and Song poems are considered to be learned talents, since they can not only memorize the great poems, understand the essence of poetry, but also can produce their own poems. As ELF teachers we are responsible to show power of language to students to enrich their lives. Also, students have desires and interests to search for some recitations of literary classics. However, According to the research, they have a concern that their understanding of some classics may more or less hinder their recitation since some of the students are lack of proper guidance in reading these materials. We would suggest our EFL textbooks writers should incorporate great literary classics, and famous sayings in textbooks. These will surely help EFL learners in their future career and life. After a period of understanding and memorization of great literary classics, EFL learners' English world will not be deserts any more.

F. The Utilitarianism and Humanism in EFL Education

As is known in Chinese culture, Master Confucius teaches six arts to his disciples: ceremony, music, writing, arithmetic, archery, riding. Master Confucius is a great education model in ancient China, training his disciples in terms of virtue and wisdom and comprehensive abilities. Until about one hundred years later, Ancient Greeks started to practice grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music in their education. According to the researches, two thousand and five hundred years ago, the productivity and living standard in both China and Greece were very low. Probably because of the simple, tasteless Greek food to feed their families, the ancient Greeks took their meals as troublesome things. Gao (1996) stated that "with loose white gown covering their bodies, ancient Greeks did not care much about their dresses and seldom flaunt their wealth" (p. 55). What they pursued is the freedom of mind rather than material wealth. We certainly cannot ask our contemporary being to learn their life style, but we hold the view that without strong support and coordination of spiritual civilization, the rapid development of material civilization will inevitably lead to current utilitarian, materialism and moral collapse. The mad pursuit of material comforts and the spiritual poverty are the terrible crises facing our contemporary people.

As university teachers, we hold that universities should cultivate their students on the basis of both pragmatism and humanism. Unlike vocational trainings, universities should not have instant success as their goals when they cultivate college students. British physicist Charles Bernard Shaw points out those scientific researches accounts for only a small part of the whole universe. Science exploration, in the true sense, should be the pursuit of the trinity of the truth, goodness and beauty of the whole universe. Teachers should develop scientific rationality and rational humanity among college students. Humanity education is especially necessary in universities. It would be a very scary and dangerous thing if EFL learners lack the humanities and their national spirits. The ultimate goal of higher education should be cultivating both students' professional and humanistic abilities.

Higher education should emphasize the humanities education, especially for science students. EFL textbooks should increase their share of literature. Description of cultures has always been the distinct feature in many outstanding literary classics. Great writers praise human truth, goodness, beauty, reveal and denounce the dark side of society and human nature. Literature always gives sharp and relentless criticism to the pragmatism, utilitarianism, materialism generated in the process of human modernization. Also we have many literary classics like Austen's "Emma" which advocates gentle aesthetic taste, sincere and generous praise. Fine literary classics will definitely have a great impact on learners' life path and their role of enlightenment can never be underestimated.

G. Develop Literary Appreciation and Improve Aesthetic Taste

EFL textbooks should incorporate a large number of great literature masterpieces and different cultures. However, our textbooks show little desire to encourage our students to read masterpieces from both cultures. That's what we need to improve in the future EFL textbooks.

In addition to teaching students some basic skills in English listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation, EFL textbooks have the responsibility to help students to improve their appreciation competence in the reading materials.

Although literature theories are quite complex, however, EFL teachers only need to explain some basic appreciation concepts like "What is literary appreciation" and "Objectivity and subjectivity of literary appreciation", etc.

It is true that examination can measure students' language level; however, cultivation of the humanities in students is difficult to determine in this evaluation system. With the strong dominance in utilitarianism in EFL field in China, humanity education really requires tender care support so as to avoid the long-term imbalance between the utilitarianism and humanities.

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