

Exploration of College English Reform

Yuxuan Zhou

Jilin Huaqiao Foreign Language Institute, China

Abstract—International cultural communication and trade exchange between China and foreign countries have greatly increased with China these years. Requirement of the employees who are able to carry out the international communication of science and technology in English increases as well. However, college English teaching and learning can not meet the need completely because of the obstacles in traditional teaching. Most educators and English learners agree that it is extremely necessary to reform the present college English teaching and learning. This paper attempts to probe the reform from the points of college English teaching purpose, teaching mode and students' learning mode.

Index Terms—teaching reform, learning, problems, student-centered, independent study

I. REFORM OF THE TRADITIONAL TEACHING

A. Significance of Teaching Reform

College English teaching is to cultivate the basic target of college students' practical ability in English application. The traditional teaching mode of focusing the knowledge learning and reading ability training, neglecting language output skill training, has not been able to adapt the development of the society nor meet the actual needs of the college students. Thus the traditional teaching concepts in modern college English teaching should be changed to student-centered teaching mode.

Student-centered teaching mode means that teachers should play as the leading factor, and to take the students as the main body of the teaching mode.

In this sense, students are the main body of learning activities, while teachers in the teaching process just play a leading role. Teachers should not only impart knowledge of English, but also to adapt to college students' learning characteristics and needs, to create appropriate learning conditions and environment, to guide and promote students to participate in English communication and practice, in order to cultivate and improve the students' practical application ability of the fundamental purpose. Taking the student as the center aims to understand and reflect students' ability in knowledge, intelligence, emotion, personality needs.

For a long time, college English teaching has been in the "teacher-centered" model, the teacher's detailed explanation of the text and related information occupies most of the class teaching time, so that students can never be given enough time and proper chance in classroom learning practice, they just receive the information poured onto them passively. In fact, the primary task of foreign language learning is to learn instead of to be taught, just as Johnson Morrow said that the teacher can help, advise and teach, but only the learner can learn. Corder also once pointed out that effective language teaching should not violate the natural process, it should adapt to the natural process, it should not inhibit learning, but should help learning and promote learning. Students shouldn't be made to adapt to the teacher and the teaching material, while the teacher and the material should adapt to students. English is different from other basic subject, it is a practical course, students' English language skills should be cultivated and improved through their practice a lot.

B. Means to Reformation

To take the students as the center does not mean to reduce the role of teachers, on the contrary it is just the reflection of teachers' role in teaching and learning is more important. Teachers need know more about the student individual information structure and demand, then design the most suitable classroom teaching activities and classroom communication for students to make more students actively participate.

Mehan says teachers should be good classroom organizers, supervisors and evaluators first of all, students are just the participants, enforcer and the evaluated.

Since the organizers rather than simply teach, the teacher should be in line with the arranging of language skills rather than infusing language information, should create for the students to practice and participate in the classroom teaching activities. The organizer of teachers role in class mainly consists of directing students in material collection for classroom practice, leading students participate class activities, like discussing, debating, speech delivering etc., especially motivating students to be initiative in learning. At the same time, the teachers keep evaluating learning all the way round in organizing the class, discovering in time and pointing out students' errors, and helping correct mistakes.

So it would be much better for student-centered teaching mode in the teaching of English be operated in the following several aspects:

Firstly, students' role as the main body should be fully functioned. This can be realized in the form of short passage

reading, topic retelling, and group discussion or else, like one of the students can play as a teacher, others help this student teacher with relevant preparations for teaching or giving a lecture. Sometimes, classmates know well of each other about their own English level, and even better than teachers do, for students can understand their classmates from their own experience and they may do more communication about their learning. The role exchange between teachers and students is not a completely new idea in some English classrooms, and proved to be a good means for evaluating students learning, and teachers can also get the first hand of reaction and response for their own teaching from such role exchange challenges, students can promoted in autonomous study.

Secondly, subject-oriented with various forms of situational real interactive teaching can be a good way of teaching. Various forms of teaching activities can be provided for students. Teachers should strive to make each class rich and colorful, making full use of limited hours, with reading, listening, writing, oral English, translating, the five language skills training kneaded together, each class between mutual penetration, mutual blending, utmost ground to train students' various language ability, rather than the mere kind of ability training. For example, communicating between teachers and students about the theme, background, meaning and so on with questions for student, advocating and encouraging students speaking English or discussing with teachers, exchanging thoughts about real situations, encouraging students to express their true thoughts and ideas. Also students can be required to retell the story, and write some key words or phrases, appreciate the deep meaning of the article. Students' ability thus will be cultivated. In addition, students can study and discuss the background knowledge about the text to cultivate their self-study habit. All these mentioned can arouse students' enthusiasm for study and avoid the teacher-centered mode. Students can acquire the language knowledge in the process of the exercise of speaking, listening, reading and all-way-round participating. Besides, pair work or group work is another good way. The students can be divided into different pairs or groups in activities.

Group activities can increase the students' chance to use and practice English, fully excavate students' English potential, cultivate students' habit of thinking in English, and improve the quality of the use of language, develop the students' ability of discourse, and at the same time the student's individual differences will be taken into consideration much better, making up for the defects of large-sized class teaching. The teacher in the team can provide help around or encourage and inspect task operation. Group activities provide the students with a more time for language practice; help enhance students' interest and confidence in study.

Group activities in college English classroom teaching play an important role. It can effectively implement relationship and achieve the best of teaching efficiency. First, teachers should make appropriate activities tasks and goals according to the student situation, control the activities of level difficulty, that is, to have students felt challenged with higher level tasks within the student master range; Meanwhile, teachers should also play a full role as a supervisor and the role as assessor in activities to help the student actively participate, provide necessary guidance and help, after completion of the activity, timely carry out inspection and appraisal; What's more, teachers should choose appropriate teaching material. In college English teaching, therefore, it is suggested that the teacher choose teaching materials to interactive activities.

Thirdly, students' role playing has been proved to be a better way in reforming the traditional teaching model. The teacher can design different scenes, with the students organized in different dialog context with specific role playing, devoting themselves to meaningful and real conversation context. This can put students into different real language context to help practice and improve their practical use of English.

Other ways are also available. Debating can help students practice their English thinking habit and speaking. Teachers can organize or prepare topics for debate. Through such practice, the students can also recognize their limit in using English. The layout of task-based activities can guide students to carry out activities after class to continue their study. College English classroom teaching time is extremely limited, it is impossible for students who want to learn English well only on teachers' teaching that is far from enough. Therefore, the teacher need arrange the proper task as a continuation of the English class teaching, so as to increase students' English learning atmosphere and enhance the language application ability. The following activities can be carried out: (1) with the aid of electrochemical education, ask students to watch English video, or broadcast program, or to listen to English listening materials to train their listening skills. (2) Student can participate in the speech contest, rehearse skits or sketch, for students to create as much as possible English language environment, students' oral English ability will be raised to a new level. (3) To ask students to do extracurricular reading and appropriate translation, so the appreciation together with reading and translation ability will both be improved. (4) The regular arrangement of writing, can make them use written form to express their thoughts, help the students use English to think. (5) Try to make the students exposed to popular English publications like "*English learning*", "*college English*", "*English world*" to guide students to learn. Students can also be suggested to read "*China Daily*" such English newspaper, in order to enlarge knowledge, strengthens their language skills.

C. *Problems for Student-centered Teaching Mode to Cope with*

Actually, with the teaching reformation, there are still some conflicts to be solved for the NEW teaching mode----student-centered.

The first is that the relation between cultivation of English using skill and the training of reading and mastering of English grammar should be balanced. In the teaching, the teacher try to let the students fully participate, so they can

actively, and freely use the foreign language by way of discussion, role-playing and other forms. In the training of students' use the language, the accuracy of language can not be ignored, that is grammar mistake should be avoided. And to consolidate grammar knowledge is an important means of improving the reading efficiently. Reading is the main source of language input, is the basis for listening, speaking, writing and translation.

The second includes the task of making two kinds of students, dependent and independent, interact positively and improve is still tough. The independent student here refers to those who have strong sense of independence, following their own way in study with no guidance from teachers or don't need teachers' guidance. This kind of students usually have their own stable language learning plan, they occasionally attend class for some special purpose like for some specific course or some specific information they can't obtain by themselves outside class. Such students tend to ignore the teachers' teaching purpose in organizing the lesson, they don't care how the class goes on, and they just come to get what they want. On the contrary, dependent students are those who need others especially the authoritative guidance from teachers. Their main purpose for class is to listen to the teacher explanation, with teachers arrangement of activities, what they do is only listen to teachers carefully, following teachers' guidance and directions, without any specific study plan of their own. Say there is such of group of three students in class for the task of writing a note of thanks, two of them are the independent type of students, of course the other one belongs to the dependent, how will the activity keep going? It is rather possible that the former two express their own point of view quickly, while the other dependent one was still aimless, waiting for the teacher's directions or his partner's help. So there comes the teacher's task of making both kinds of students perform effectively in this activity, not only should the independent students be encouraged to properly express their own right point of view and improve in doing so, but the other one be guided properly and improve properly.

The third one is to make the teacher play a true role as the guider or director in the class. In the student-centered teaching mode, teachers' role should not be weakened, but strengthened. To take the student as the center is not simply a redistribution of class time, it is how the teacher can organize the students' positive activities effectively in the limited time, without any loss of teachers' purpose and task in the well scheduled teaching plan. Actually, the teachers' task is rather heavier than before if student-centered teaching mode is carried out fully.

Last but very important is that teacher's cultural awareness should be enough or strengthened. In the teaching practice, most students can obtain knowledge through conscious hard work, but get language skills with more effective methods needs corresponding cultural experience. Students not only need a fluent and accurate knowledge of the language in communication, but to express different cultural information in words. So the teacher has to consciously arrange the teaching content, properly introducing English national culture to promote the cultivation of the students' language skills.

II. REFORM OF LEARNING--DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' INDEPENDENT LEARNING ABILITY

One of the college English teaching goals in College English Curriculum in 2004 is strengthen students' independent learning ability to meet the development of Chinese society and the needs of international communication. In order to achieve this goal, the ministry of education carried out the reform about college English course. The teaching mode is changed from passive learning mode to active mode. In this new mode, fostering college students' independent learning ability is the primary task of college English teachers. While teachers help students improve their integrated language skills, teachers can develop their students' independent learning ability to make students control over their own learning well. However, there are some problems in the process of the developing students' independent study.

A. *Significance of College Students' Independent Study*

As some definition goes, independent learning refers to a psychological activity of learners, which is related to learning process and content. Therefore, it is not so much a new teaching method as the ability to take charge of one's own learning. To be more exact, it refers to learners' ability not only to understand their learning goals, aims, contexts and learning methods but also set up an assessment system for their own learning. Such kind of ability should be combined with other learning forms in practice, thus making classes more active and efficient.

Independent learning has been advocated in college English teaching over many years. The main problem is college students are in lack of positive motivation. Foreign language learning motivation is language learners' desire and impetus to learn foreign languages, which can be divided into integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivated learners are willing to accept the culture of foreign language which causes their more language input, so that their motivation of learning foreign language may be strong and long-lasting. Instrumental motivated learners learn English for practical purposes, such as to find employment, go abroad, or in order to pass examinations. Such motivation can promote English learning. Most college students' motivation for learning English is instrumental motivation so they are in lack of awareness of independent learning. Like Wang you (2009) points out that college students are unclear about understanding of learning objectives. Some of them do not recognize the significance of learning English. Their understanding of English learning objectives merely focuses on final examinations in each semester and the College English Test, which really hinders developing their independent learning ability in English learning. Meanwhile, most of college students are lack of the learning objective, scientific and accurate English learning assessment. As students in the learning process are unable to get the teachers' timely advice and assistance, a lack of

effective self monitoring and a scientific assessment of learning outcomes, so they are entirely on the basis of their own individual needs, with no effective ingredients of independent learning.

In the domestic studies, most of researchers about independent study point out the significance of fostering college students' independent learning ability. Zheng Hong and Yuan Lingling (2009) present the three points, as follows:

Number one, independent learning is the requirements of the era. Today's society is in a time of when information is vastly needed and created so that people are alarming the rate of knowledge update. Living in this society, each person must learn how to learn and keep learning. Independent learning is the subversion of traditional teacher-centered mode of education. Its purpose of education is to cultivate a whole person with an independent personality by the exploring way to develop and make full use of learners' learning potential and by developing their learning strategies, critical thinking, decision-making and independent action ability.

Number two, independent learning is based on the essential characteristics of English language learning. The rules of learning English language are weak, but the custom of English language is strong. Learners must go through a long-term data on language acquisition so that the process of digestion and absorption can be internalized into their own language. In the process of English learning, the teacher's role is complementary. In essence, the role of teachers is a advisor for the students, who can provide spiritual food and help students better use them. This requires the students must have a strong motivation of learning and higher independent learning ability so that they can really learn English well.

Number three, Independent learning meets the actual situation in China. Since the college enrollment enlarged, the number of college students grows a lot. It is difficult for English teachers to take good care of every student when they face excessive number of students so that it's hard to use some of the teaching measures in class. This requires students to have to develop their independent learning habits and improve their language skills.

B. Ways to Developing Students' Independent Study

The author here just discuss several ways to develop students' such ability, all of which are intended to foster students' learning ability

First is to employ Network Technology in developing independent learning. Students can use the way of computer-assisted language learning to promote independent learning. Network's openness, sharing, interaction and unlimited expansion of information resources are the foundation of individualized independent learning. Network technology brings a new concept of English teaching. At present, many universities and colleges begin to offer students teaching courses via the web. This has great impact on English teaching and learning. And the network technology provides college students with a variety of options. A large amount of online texts and audio-visual materials can be provided to students for their choice. Different kinds of language activities enhance students' learning motivation. Students can independently strengthen language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) beyond class through online resources according to their needs and lack, and even take use of network technology to communicate with their teachers. Students' autonomy can be closely combined with classroom activities in the classroom because using network technology can create a better environment for independent learning. Network technology can build learning groups for students and provide different kinds of activities for them. Students can also make self-evaluation to determine their next learning plans through network technology, which can promote their learning motivation.

Second is to combine independent learning and Task-based learning. Task-based language teaching and learning approach appeared in the field of foreign teaching in the 1980s. It is the product of the integration of the two fields: communicative language teaching and the second language acquisition research. Skehan (1999) pointed out that the task-based teaching is a teaching method which students use in the class to complete the tasks given by their teachers. This approach enables the students to get the way which is close to the natural language acquisition mode, so that their potential language systems will be developed. Ellis analyzed tasks as activities with the following five essential factors: (1) tasks are seen from the task designer's or the participants' point of view; (2) linguistic skills are involved in performing tasks; (3) tasks need to correspond to some real-world activities; (4) tasks involve cognitive processes; (5) tasks result in some clear outcome. In task-based teaching model, teachers design a variety of teaching activities according to the teaching aims and language items. Students can learn even master language through the completion of these language learning tasks.

Autonomy in college English teaching and learning should be combined with task-based learning. By doing so, it will yield better learning results. In this way, college students are expected to apply their English language knowledge to completing all the tasks. In the process of completing those tasks, students can develop their skills to use language, being free from grammar practice and learning by rote. Students should practice speaking English in a conversation set in advance they can acquire the instinctive feeling for English through personal experience. Under the guidance of teachers, they are able to construct efficient learning strategies of their own by means of observation, analysis and induction. In College English Curriculum, it is pointed out that teachers should use task-based teaching methods to develop students' abilities. English teachers should create conversation situations about real life, but such situations are required to meet the needs of general goals of the standards, and to be combined with teaching contents. In this way, students are certain to get involved in teaching activities positively. Students can learn and use English through thinking, investigation, discussion and cooperation.

The last is to establishing a good teacher-student relationship that is crucial for encourage students' independent

learning. A good teacher-student relationship plays an important role in fostering college students' independent learning ability in English learning. If teachers are amiable, their students can be relaxed while learning English in class. That can activate students' intrinsic motivation and benefit learning. They, on the contrary, feel anxious, nervous and inhibited if their teachers are distant or over strict. It will greatly reduce students' learning enthusiasm. College English teachers should give students a lot of help when they are frustrated because of difficulties in the process of learning English. That can eliminate their anxiety while learning English. At the same time, teachers' help and patience for students can make it possible that they are not afraid of making mistakes when they speaking English. Besides, It would be much helpful for college English teachers to make good friends with their students beyond class. Heart-to-heart talks should be encouraged between teachers and students. Students can talk anything about themselves with their teachers whenever and wherever they want. That can make teachers understand their students deeply to form a good teacher-student relationship. In this way, poor students can get a lot of help from teachers about how to improve their English learning strategies. Teachers can know their students' learning conditions, and then will improve their teaching methods or give students some suggestions to improve their independent learning strategies. Top students can also help poor students learn English in their spare time. Thus there will be a positive relationship among teachers, top students and poor students. The collaborative learning also can motivate them learn English independently, promote communicating with each other, develop their interpersonal intelligence and broaden their mind. Teachers should respect students, respect their different opinions and personalities too. Only in this way can students be in the process of exploring English knowledge actively and independently and mastering English communicative skills.

III. CONCLUSION

What has been discussed above is just a drop of water in the sea of English teaching and learning reform. To test whether any kind of reform effective or not, there should be effective means to evaluate the result. Teaching and learning evaluation, in the author's point of view is a good way. Teaching and learning depends on evaluation, evaluation serves for the both. Teaching and learning evaluation is according to the teaching aims , teaching principle and learning effect, to use of all feasible method and technical means for analysis and interpretation of information, and the teaching process and the expected effect. Scientific evaluation method for teaching can provide good feedback, helping teachers understand the teaching effect and improve teaching quality and learning quality. Also it can help students understand their learning situation, the improvement the study method brings, the improvement of language ability in their new way of study. Requirement of evaluation system is to be followed soon after the student-centered teaching mode and independent learning are employed.

REFERENCES

- [1] Du shichun. (1985). *Psychological Linguistics*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [2] Ellis. (2003). *Task-based Language Learning and Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [3] Krashen, S. D. (1981). *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. New York: Pergamon Press.
- [4] Krashen, s. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. New York: Pergamon Press.
- [5] Liu runqing. (2001). *On College English Teaching*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- [6] Swain, M. (1995). *Three Functions of output in second language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yuxuan Zhou was born in 1972. She received her master degree in English Linguistics and Pragmatics from Northeast Normal University, China in 2012. She is currently an associate professor in Jilin Huaqiao Foreign Language Institute, China. Her research includes Pragmatics and Teaching Strategy.