

The Implementation of Module-based Methodology in College English Teaching

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Abstract—In response to recent reforms in the National College Entrance Exam and China's College English Curriculum Requirements issued in 2007, the research explores the module-based method college English teaching. Twenty students are recruited to participate and given extra help of one-hour long lesson each time in sixteen weeks. Enlightened by the arrangement of in-class used textbooks, the researcher distributes the 16-hour lessons into three modules: the module of five-hour vocabulary-grammar, the module of reading-writing, and the module of listening-speaking. The researches shows that this module-based can greatly stimulate students' interest in English learning, cultivate their potentials and develop their comprehensive skills.

Index Terms—college English test band four, module-based method, college English teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

Since early 1980s, China's College English Curriculum Requirements (henceforth the Requirements) have experienced five stages of reforms: 1980, 1985-1986, 1999, 2004 and 2007, which demonstrates that English plays a significant role in China's higher education. Considering varieties of axiomatic factors which might stand in the way of great efficiency in English teaching and learning, the latest version of the Requirements which took place in 2007 clearly states three objectives of assessment, namely they are basic objective, intermediate objective and advanced objective. For different levels (objectives), the 2007 Requirements make a detailed list of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation, all of which are thought very important for any learner to master a foreign language. For all Chinese college students, their major English learning goal is to pass College English Test band four (Hence CET-4), while for higher level of English proficiency, their goal is to pass College English Test band six although some might learn English well for further or oversea studies. Thus the Requirements propose that the overall objective of College English is to "is to develop students' ability to use English in a well-rounded way, especially in listening and speaking, so that in their future studies and careers as well as social interactions. They will be able to communicate effectively, and at the same time enhance their ability to study independently and improve their general cultural awareness so as to meet the needs of China's social development and international exchanges."

During the fifteen years of teaching career, the researcher notices that, although every new generation of students entering into college has an overall higher level of English proficiency, their English learning interest decreases, and as a consequence, they fail to work hard enough to pass College English Test Band 4, which is taken as a sign of skillfulness for college English learners. However, based on years of practical teaching, the researcher has found out that students' failure in CET-4 discourages them from making necessary adjustments to their English learning. Over two years of college English learning, their level of English proficiency declines sharply every semester. However, Recent cases also show that the higher scores the test-takers achieve, the more proficient their English is. Among other things such as students' individual efforts and scientific test-taking techniques, the greatest reason lies in that greater emphasis of national tests such as the National College Entrance Exam and CET-4 is laid on testing students' comprehensive skills.

Through further inquiry, we know about that quite a number of students feel goalless for their English learning. As we know, English is in close connection with their future job choice, advanced studies, and oversea opportunities. In better response to the 2007 requirements and helping students pass CET-4, college English teachers should focus on the following three aspects:

1. *How can we develop students' learning interest?*
2. *In what way can we dig into students' learning potentials?*
3. *And what can we do to reinforce students' comprehensive skills in language learning?*

II. PRACTICAL RESEARCH

A. Pre-research

The present research is based at a provincial university in west China. According to some official statistics collected by the university, the percentage of students who pass CET-4 in every academic year is about 10% lower than any other universities in the same province. However, this university is above the average in other academic activities.

In this research, the target students are freshmen. In order for students to fulfill their major goal for college English learning, the research implement a series of trials, among which module-based approach to *New Horizon College English* course is listed on top. Two textbooks supposed to be used for four-year undergraduates in class. One is Reading and Writing book, the other being *Listening and Speaking* book. For the first book there are four modules in each unit: text, vocabulary, exercise and structured writing, and for the second, as its name implies, the listening part and the speaking part. Obviously seeing, *New Horizon College English* books are in precise accordance with China's College English Curriculum Requirements. If used scientifically, it will build up students' comprehensive skills in English learning, and without doubt, help them pass CET-4. Enlightened by this arrangement of textbooks and the five objective of the 2007 Requirements, the present research implements the module-based method in practical teaching. As frontline teaching staff, all can be done is to practice, evaluate, rethink, improve, and back to practice.

Considering a large number of students in normal English class, the researcher recruits 20 students among eight natural classes of the English course (and total number of students is 236). Before recruitment, the research explains that the extra lessons are taken every Wednesday afternoon, the lesson is one-hour long and lasts 16 weeks this semester, and its purpose is to improve student's known difficult part of specific skills which are divided into vocabulary-grammar class, reading-writing class, listening-writing class and translation class. Besides that, students' strict self-discipline is expected as the lessons are totally out of volunteering actions completely disconnected with normal English performance. On the recruitment paper, three questions are asked: 1, What's your main goal of learning English? 2, What's the most difficult part in English learning? 3, What is your suggestion for English class or teachers? Based on how they answer the three questions above, the researcher gives lessons to 20 selected students on basis of module-based approach. This way can solve the following three problems: A, small class lets students abundant opportunities to participate in limited class time, and the teacher can pay as much attention to each students as he or she wants. B, students have a clear goal of each time learning in a certain period. Through attentive studies, more confidence are gained. C, all lessons can be taken in language labs: modern teaching methodologies are introduced, fun is added, and efficiency can be improved.

Here additional information needs clarifying. Firstly about 70% of students (165/236) say their main goal is to pass CET-4 in the first year of their university study, which makes students very excited to enroll in the extra lessons. Secondly nearly 89% (210) suggest various teaching methodologies be adopted, more English movies or songs be played, and pleasant (close) attention be wanted.

B. In Practice

Adapted from *New Horizon College English* books, the researcher designs four modules of teaching contents especially aimed at the specific designated difficulty in English learning.

1 Group 1 Vocabulary and Grammar

Concerning the importance of vocabulary and grammar, some quotes speak louder. "Lexis is the core or heart of language" (Lewis, 1993, p100), while Widdowson (1990) stressed that obviously grammar played a central role in the function of language. Wilkins (1972) explained further "while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed"(p111). Take Section A, Unit Three, Book II as an example. The topic of this unit is marriage across nations. Key words are underlined, and required to translate sentences from Chinese to English. When translating, emphasize that a complete sentence with correct grammar is a must. Before practice, play "New Word" in mp3 format, let students listen over and over till all ten students can pronounce every word correctly. As is known to all, proper pronunciation reinforces the memorization of vocabulary. While practice, help analyze the sentence structure in English mind such as the sentence patterns, the tenses or voices, and the exact key words or phrases. In order to expand their vocabulary in marriage, the teacher tries to design more examples related when practicing using new words. For example: to practice the usage of compromise, students are expected to translate this sentence "要维系一段幸福的婚姻, 其秘诀在于夫妻之间的包容。" The teacher illustrates three possible translations according to different level of students' English proficiency. *The couple's mutual compromise is the secret of a happy marriage. =A happy marriage lies in the couple's mutual compromise. =Mutual compromise is the secret for the couple to maintain a happy marriage.* What's more, the teacher needs help students learn by analogy and judge the whole from the part. For example, when introducing the usage of *harbor some reservations about sth*, the teacher lists the whole bunch of news words like suspicion, prejudice, and hesitation which can take the place of reservations. Respectively in sentences: *Gail's father harbors some suspicion about Mark's marrying her daughter; People harbor some prejudice about the black's marrying the white girl; and Gail harbors some hesitation about moving to her husband's country after marriage.* In order to strengthen this knowledge, the related vocabulary in the textbooks are on-spot check. As to the "sentence structure" part in textbooks, the teacher takes one as a model explanation, the rest are done under the guidance. After that the teacher will give more practice related so that mistakes can be corrected immediately. For

example, for the usage of *despite*. Students tend to use it as a conjunction, often followed by a complete sentence. In this case, the researcher compare *despite* with *even though*. Altered from test exercises in CET-4, similar practice are added in class. For example, “尽管经历了种种的艰辛与不幸, he never gives up the pursuit of knowledge”. Two companion translations are given: 1, *Even though he has encountered countless hardships and difficulties*; 2, *Despite countless hardships and difficulties he has encountered*. One time practice is never enough. In the beginning of next lesson, ten minutes will be spent on vocabulary dictation and grammar review.

2 Group 2 Reading and Writing

Before learning the text, homework questions will be designed and assigned to students so that they can preview the main idea and important details of the text. The development of answers is a process of understanding how the writer organizes the text, which is of much significance to constructing an English article. Take Section A, Unit One, Book II as an example. The topic of this unit is time-conscious Americans. Six questions are given: 1, What are the two things Americans save carefully? 2, How do you understand “Time is a precious resource”? 3, What is the first impression Americans leave on foreigners? Explain it with examples. 4, How do Americans do business in order to save time? 4. What do they do in order to save time? 6. What’s the difference between America and other countries in dealing with time and work? The ideal answer is that students understand the text, take some important information, and answer each questions with their own words based on their understanding and important information in complete sentences with correct grammars. The referable answers are as follows: 1. There are two things Americans save carefully: one is labor, and the other is time. 2. Time is a precious resource. Once time is gone, it will never return. 3. When arriving at America, foreigners notice that everyone is in a rush, often under pressure. e.g. In the store, we can see people are eager to complete their shopping. For working people, they race through their daytime meals so that they can go back to work within time allowed. 4. In business world, people talk business directly without extended talk or welcoming cups of tea or coffee. 5. In order to save more time, America invents a series of devices such as faxes and telephones, and people prefer electronic communication rather than personal contacts, which, they think, has little or no relation to the matter at hand. 6. In America, the importance of work determines the length of time, whereas in other countries, the length of time decides the importance of work. According to the minimum words for CET-4 composition, students are supposed to write an essay of at least 120 but no more than 180 words on a specific topic. Suppose there is a composition entitled *how Americans treat time*. Here if we put all the answers above together, it exactly is the CET-4 composition with much fluency. Back to the practice of vocabulary and grammar, the six answers have the language points and grammar knowledge of “one..., the other...”, “*Once*-clause”, “*When*-doing” pattern, “rather than or have little/no/much relation to sth”, “*whereas*-clause”(a new word in this unit). To practice writing skill, the first thing for the researcher is to emphasize the analysis of the text, let students comb the writer’s writing thread, and imitate writing a paragraph of main body with main structures. For example, Unit Three Book II: write a paragraph of cause-effect pattern. The following is listed for good of students. Topic: Problem for mixed marriages. Cause: cultural differences, prejudices and doubts; cruel to children from mixed marriages. Effect: higher divorce rates. As long as students can have a better comprehension of the text, they can understand how the writer constructs the text. If doing it by themselves, they should have a clear idea of how to organize the structures given and create a composition of their own. Later when encountering similar topic writing, undoubtedly they will do it well.

3 Group 3 Listening and Speaking

Through practice of vocabulary-grammar and reading-writing, students’ foundation of vocabulary and awareness of grammars build up day by day. Whenever they do translation, students can decide what exact words or phrases to put and what proper grammatical structures to choose. When reading, students are expected to read with questions in mind. We all know it is an efficient technique to read for a particular purpose. Along with after-reading tasks, students should make conscious efforts to understand text structure based on main idea and important details. On the issue of translation skill, as is seen, it runs through every part of the development of practical language skills. In order for students to improve their skills in speaking and speaking, the teacher makes it clear to students that, the first importance is to understand what others hear, listening is to show interest, obtain information from others, and discover the speaker’s attitudes while speaking is to give information, express feelings or share opinions. Obviously like translation skill, the speaking activity takes place throughout the whole process of language learning. During the course of listening and speaking practice, the teacher emphasizes four synchronous actions: listen (to what the speaker says) with ears, read (the speaker or the exercises on exam papers) with eyes, think (what is the connection with heard information and read information) with brains, and write (down what is heard important) with pens (or by hand). From this point of view, listening is the toughest skill to train. For each unit from *New Horizon College English*, the listening exercises are designed in accordance with the same topic of what’s learned in reading and writing book. For listening materials in the textbook, the researcher uses them at the first two time of listening to check students’ basic abilities as the text exercises are designed in multiple choices, which can be used speculatively by students, that is they don’t listen with techniques but make choices by trying their luck. For further understanding, the researcher revises some articles in forms of spot-dictation or short-answer tests. The overall principle is to devise exercises in connection with types of CET-4 tests.

C. Follow-ups

Till the semester ends, the participant students have taken altogether 16-hour extra lessons in four modules of English

learning. In order to test how they learn from this method, the researcher arranges a comprehensive test for vocabulary-grammar, reading-writing, and listening-speaking. In the meanwhile, the researcher adds "All suggestions are welcome" on the test paper. After checking students' test papers, the researcher finds out that their test-taking skills are greatly improved, and the relative knowledge has been mastered. When talking to them individually, students express that they enjoy this for the following three reasons: A, smaller class is pleasant. It enhances their class performance, stimulate their learning enthusiasm and force them to be well-prepared each time before class because they know they have opportunities to participate and teachers can give everyone enough time and attention. B, The module-based approach is of great efficiency in language teaching, especially within small groups. For each module students are given enough time to think and practice. In this way it helps students identify the difficult or important points and lets them form a systematic frame of knowledge. C, Language labs create more fun. Movie clips and music MV shown not only help students learn a language especially train their listening ability, but also it also widens their horizon in English culture. For example, when learning about the topic of true love, the researcher plays a movie entitled *Sleepless in Seattle*. The 20-minute clips show the general introduction of Sam (loses his wife) and Annie (gets engaged), the changing life of Sam (quarrels with Jonah) and Annie (starts marriage shopping), and the happy ending of Sam (flies to New York for Jonah) and Annie (confesses everything to her fiance and runs to Empire State). After viewing, the teacher explains some cultural knowledge like Uncle Sam, baby-sitter and Empire State and *An Affair to Remember*.

III. DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTION

On basis of honest analysis, the research concludes the following factors which might hinder students' level of English proficiency. The first, this university is characterized by science and engineering. What score in English course students achieve in the National College Entrance Exam is overlooked by the admission office. What they value is that students can measure up to the minimum standard of the university, especially for those who have conspicuously high score in Maths or Integrated science course (i.e. the comprehensive test of physics, chemistry and biology). The second, the diverse sources of students lead to a sharp difference of students' level of English proficiency. In recent years the university has expanded the scale of students all over the country, namely, from over twenty-three provinces or cities or areas. Such wide coverage brings about a huge gap among learners. In order to get exact information of how huge, the researcher asks 296 freshmen for their English scores in the National College Entrance Exam, which range from 138 to 53, but the total score is 150. The third, the hardware facilities are far from satisfaction both for teachers and for students. There are three campuses in the universities. Take where the researcher's work campus as an example, in total four language laboratories are open to 7,815 students, whereas multimedia classrooms are not best choice for language learners, with bad quality of sound system. Furthermore there are not many multimedia classrooms available for English course. As a consequence, English is usually taken in ordinary classroom, blackboard and chalk best choice. Demand is far too more than supply. The fourth, large English class discourages student participants in class. On average there are more than 60 students in one class each time. As we know, language learning involves numerous practice in class. Too many students decrease the chances of class participation and teachers' attention to students of less accomplished or poor performance. And the fifth, uncreative teaching methods are popularly used in class. The whole university uses the same textbook for the same level of learners. In the university three levels are classified: four-year undergraduates, three-year juniors, and art and music majors. Before new semester, some leader decides the general process of teaching, and thus teachers use the textbook mechanically for sake of convenience. At the end of each semester a uniformed exam paper has been designed to test students' language learning respectively.

To change its negation and push college English teaching to a higher level, the researcher suggests the following ways out. Firstly, from the angle of the university authority, when admitting students, allow in a small number of students with exceptional talent but poor level of English proficiency. Before students enter college, prepare enough language labs for a large scale of language learning groups. On the day of students' entry into college, have a graded test in order to put students in a proper class for English learning. When assigning teaching task to teachers, make the class smaller for the good of teaching and learning. Secondly, various teaching methods and flexible tests should be encouraged. Boring and dull classroom teaching is far from perfect. To learn a language, to know about a foreign culture. Relaxing ways of teaching are welcome. And thirdly, Considering students' main goal in CET-4, teachers are expected to reinforce their basic knowledge of vocabulary-grammar, reading-writing and listening-speaking. Module-based methods are worth trying.

IV. CONCLUSION

Recent reforms show that the importance of the English course hasn't been weakened in China's education of all levels. In the National College Entrance Exam its scores are not reduced but remain 150 as before. The difference is that students have twice chances to take the national tests. As for college students' CET-4, its difficulty will not be declined, but its variety of tests requires students to develop their comprehensive skills. To this end, the researcher recruits 20 students from 236 students and teach them three modules of English knowledge in language laboratory on Wednesday afternoon. After ten hours of each module learning, students'

learning interests, test-taking techniques and comprehensive skills have been greatly improved. In conclusion, front-line teachers are supposed to know about students' difficult points individually and strengthen the development of comprehensive skills. What's more, language learning should take place in a fun and pleasant environment. With a clear goal, students can reap lots of benefits of teachers' module-based method.

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