

# A Study on the Problems and Countermeasures of Oral English Teaching in Rural Junior Middle Schools under the Background of Man-machine Dialogue Examination in China

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**Abstract**—English is a main subject of high school entrance examination in China. Many Students have learned English for more than ten years, but they are still unable to communicate with others in English after they graduate from middle school or even high school because of the poor oral English. With the advocacy of the new curriculum reform and quality-oriented education, many provinces and municipalities in China have introduced oral English test into the English exam of high school entrance examination. However, comparing with urban students, students' oral English in rural areas is relatively weak, which is undoubtedly a huge challenge for rural junior middle schools. Hence, rural junior middle schools need to take measures to improve the oral English of students. This paper analyses the problems of oral English teaching in rural junior middle schools from the aspects of teaching facilities, teachers and students, putting forward some suggestions accordingly.

**Index Terms**—man-machine dialogue, rural junior middle school, oral English, problems, countermeasures

## I. INTRODUCTION

English, as a high school entrance examination subject, its essence is a language and a communication tool between people. A large number of students can write and read in English, but they are afraid to or cannot communicate with others in English because of the bad oral English. It is called “Dumb English” in China.

Listening, speaking, reading and writing are four basic language skills. According to Wilga M. Rivers (1982), listening, speaking, reading and writing respectively account for 44%, 30.3%, reading for 16%, and writing for 9.7% in language activities. That is to say, listening and speaking account for 74%, which shows the importance of oral communicative competence. Under the trend of the new English curriculum reform, more and more attention has been paid to students' oral English competence. Students have good language output ability and can better communicate with others, which also meets the requirements of quality-oriented education.

Nowadays, plenty of provinces and municipalities gradually realize the significance of oral communication under the requirement of the new curriculum reform, and finally incorporate oral English test into high school entrance examination. At present, most provincial and municipal oral exams are man-machine dialogue with the help of computer software. The man-machine dialogue mainly divided into four types: reading passages aloud, situational dialogue, answering questions and brief introduction of the given topic, which was closely linked, besides, its requirements increase stage by stage. The widest gap between urban and rural students in English learning is oral English competence. It is obviously a huge challenge for teachers and students in rural junior middle schools. It's high time for junior middle schools in rural areas to change the current situation of English teaching and take a series of measures to improve students' oral English gradually.

## II. PROBLEMS IN ORAL ENGLISH TEACHING IN RURAL JUNIOR MIDDLE SCHOOLS

The phenomenon of “Dumb English” is caused by various reasons. For many years, schools and teachers just pay attention to the listening and writing abilities of students but ignore the oral English ability both in urban and rural areas. According to the requirements of new English curriculum standards, which lays a solid foundation for students to learn oral English. The target framework of the new English curriculum standards includes language knowledge, language

skills, learning strategies and cultural awareness. Language skills include listening, speaking, reading and writing. These four skills promote each other in language learning and communication. Students can acquire the ability to use the language, so they have undergone a large number of specialized and comprehensive language training, laying a foundation for communication (English Curriculum Standards, September 9, 2011). We can't ignore each one.

Next, this paper will analyse the problems of oral English teaching in rural junior middle schools from three aspects: teaching facilities, teachers and students. Teaching facilities are external factors, which mainly include imperfect multimedia equipment, lack of voice training room in language teaching. Teachers and students are the main participants in class, meanwhile, they are the internal factors of problems in oral English teaching in rural junior middle schools.

#### A. Analysis on Teaching Facilities

As far as the present situation is concerned, most of the education funds obtained by schools can only be enough to maintain daily teaching work, and only a small amount can be invested in teaching facilities, which leads to the serious shortage of English teaching facilities in some rural areas. Teaching facilities have influence on the effectiveness of teaching, especially language teaching. Teaching facilities like multimedia equipment and voice training room can vividly show the situation by pictures and videos. Problems of teaching facilities are mainly as follows:

##### 1. Imperfect multimedia equipment

In recent years, with the support of the education department and all walks of life, teaching equipment in rural areas has been greatly improved, but for English, a highly interactive language subject, the current situation of teaching equipment can not meet the needs of English teaching.

##### 2. The lack of voice training room

Most schools in rural areas do not equip schools with voice training room and related software for oral English teaching and tests. There are four types of questions in the oral test of man-machine dialogues for high school entrance examination: reading passages aloud, situational dialogue, answering questions and brief introduction of the given topic. The requirements are as follows: in term of "listening", students can understand the speaker's intention according to intonation and stress; students can understand the conversation about familiar topics, and students can extract information and viewpoints from it; students can overcome the obstacles of new words and understand the main idea in accordance with context. In term of "speaking", students can read the text coherently; students can answer questions in English according to the situation; students can familiarize with the topic according to the information provided, and speak a paragraph in line with the above oral activities; the pronunciation, intonation should be natural, the tone should be appropriate. It can be seen that the oral test requires pronunciation, intonation, fluency and other aspects. Without a large number of training in a voice training room, students can not get language corrections and fluent expression. Even schools with voice training rooms are confronted with the predicament of large numbers of students and short supply of voice training rooms.

#### B. Analysis on Teachers

As we all known, English teachers play important roles in class, and they stand at a dominating position in the process English teaching. Teachers' self-development of English exactly affects the proficiency of student, including pronunciation, intonation, communicative ability, thinking method and learning method. Hence, the English teaching quality is closely connected with the professional level of English teachers.

Due to the harsh conditions, English graduates are reluctant to teach in rural schools, resulting in a relatively small number of English teachers. It is unable to meet the teaching needs. In addition, an English teacher has to teach several grades and classes concurrently, which leads to poor teaching effect.

##### 1. Teachers' oral proficiency are not of high level

Because the rural conditions are worse than those in cities, the level of English teachers in rural junior middle schools is uneven. Many rural English teachers are not English majors, and some have poor professional competence, including pronunciation, intonation and fluency, and so on. All of these influence the students' pronunciation and intonation imperceptibly.

##### 2. The teaching method of teachers is limited

Some English teachers just focus on vocabulary and grammar to explain and impart English knowledge under the pressure of the examination-oriented education, while they ignore the cultivation of students' comprehensive ability to use language. Many English teachers in rural junior middle schools don't adjust English teaching to the new syllabus and still adopt the Translation Method. Students' English ability cannot keep up with the development of knowledge and information age. Traditional foreign language education has been unable to adapt to the requirements of modern society. In order to be in accordance with the purpose of English teaching, the method of English teaching in rural area must be changed.

In Translation Method teaching, translation is the basic means and grammar learning is the key point of teaching. Students learn English by reciting vocabulary and grammar rules. This method is not taught in English in the course of class. Both the grammar knowledge and the content of the text is explained in Chinese, and the teacher is the center of class. Teachers in rural areas do not adopt the Task-Based Teaching Method which is strongly recommended at present. Under the teaching of Translation Method, students aren't encouraged to use English in class. Jespersen, a Danish

linguist, also emphasized that one of the significant factor of English teaching is that you should expose students to English as much as possible.

### C. *Analysis on Students*

From the perspective of student, the main problem is that students have psychological barriers in learning oral English. According to Affective-filter Hypothesis in Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory, the success of second language acquisition depends on learners' emotional factors. Emotional factors include self-confidence, anxiety and motivation.

Due to various reasons, rural students are less confident than urban students, which make them unwilling to show themselves too much. Students can cope with written examination. But if oral presentation is required, students usually show their refusal.

In addition, rural students are generally anxious about learning oral English. Anxiety refers to a person can not achieve their goals or overcome obstacles, so as to combat self-confidence, self-esteem, increasing the anxiety of failure. Anxiety in foreign language learning refers to the special psychological state of fear or confusion when English learners express themselves in English. If students feel anxious, they will form emotional shielding thus produce less input of English language, which is not conducive to the mastery of second language English, especially oral English. Language expression is a major obstacle. Students fear that they can't speak well and be laughed at, thus forming a vicious circle.

In terms of learning motivation, the lack of English language environment in rural areas and schools and students' wrong understanding of English leads to students' low learning motivation. Many students believe that the purpose of English learning is just taking exams, and they have no idea that English plays an important role in their future study and work.

## III. TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES OF ORAL ENGLISH TEACHING IN RURAL JUNIOR MIDDLE SCHOOLS

### A. *Suggestions for Teaching Facilities*

The Strategy of Rural Revitalization clearly puts forward "give priority to the development of rural education". Under the call of the Strategy of Rural Revitalization, the investment in education for rural schools will be increased. It is necessary to improve the multimedia facilities in teaching infrastructure, which can enrich the English classroom, and better strengthen students' understanding of knowledge. For example, using video, audio or picture to import teaching content will help to attract students' attention, make teaching more intuitive and interesting, and improve students' interest in English learning.

Rural schools should further improve multimedia equipment, establish a voice training room and install oral test software in the voice training room for students to practice in turn. Only through plenty of oral practice, rural students can gradually eliminate the lack of self-confidence, anxiety and tension, and be calmer in the daily communication and oral test, laying the foundation for the further study.

### B. *Suggestions for Teachers*

English teachers should design activities as effectively as possible in class and after class. Oral English transfers the internal language into the external language. English teachers should design effective and innovative class activities to create a good English atmosphere so that students can turn the language knowledge into practice. English teachers ought to make efforts to turn the English class into a place where students can communicate with each other effectively so as to gradually improve students' oral English competence.

#### 1. Various teaching methods are adopted in class

In class, teachers should abandon backward teaching methods, use diversified teaching methods and teach in English. Students should be encouraged to open their mouths and speak English aloud. This is in line with The Input Hypothesis, which refers that it is only when the learner is exposed to comprehensible language input, can language input produce acquisition (Krashen, 1985). In others words, the appropriate language input is a little higher than his current second language level. Teachers teach in English, which is slightly higher than students' understanding. This is conducive to students' second language input.

When students make language errors, teachers should pay attention to the ways of feedback and error correction. As we all know, mistakes are inevitable in the process of learning English. In oral English teaching, teachers should balance the relationship between fluency and accuracy. Speaking is a productive skill that requires fluency, accuracy, and appropriateness. In oral English teaching, fluency is a top priority, following is accuracy and appropriateness. Teachers should encourage students to use the language by designing exercises that imitate real-life situations (Ziwen Lu, 2012). Generally speaking, imitative spoken language should correct errors in order to ensure correct output and lay the foundation for accurate expression; communicative spoken language should tolerate errors, try not to interrupt students' thinking and eliminate students' enthusiasm, and correct typical errors after students consistently express their ideas. When giving feedback to students, we should also pay attention to language expression and use more encouraging language, such as "You did a good job! Very well!", in order to stimulate students' motivation and self-confidence.

The traditional teacher-centered English class makes students become passive learners and ignore their subjective

ability and creativity. Modern English classes should follow a student-centered, teacher-led teaching model. Teachers are no longer the authority on everything, and students are no longer the passive learners. English teachers should be promoters of English teaching instead of traditional knowledge disseminators.

## 2. Enriching teaching activities after class

English teachers should organize English activities on a regular basis and arrange a fixed time for the English activities to provide students with an efficient oral English communication and practice environment. During the activity, the organizer should set a theme in advance and inform the students, giving them time to prepare. In fact, the process of preparation is the process of learning English. Secondly, English teachers should give active guidance to students when they are free to express themselves and provide personalized guidance in time to make students' oral English expression more effective.

Only the language input in class can not meet the needs of students. After class, different ways should be adopted according to different grades and stages to stimulate students' interest and cultivate students' oral competence. There are three levels of oral activities: controlled activities, semi-controlled activities and open activities.

In the first semester of grade 7, students' language foundation is weak. Teachers can give each student an English name after class, so that students can have a sense of substitution in the language situation. After class, students are encouraged to read aloud and retell. Reasonable use of classroom retelling in English teaching is of great benefit. First of all, it can improve students' understanding of the text. Secondly, it is beneficial for students' oral expression ability. In the second semester of grade 7, students have a certain language accumulation. Each class can arrange students to talk about topics they are interested in English for three minutes, such as their family, favorite food, a trip, etc.

In the first semester of grade 8, English song contests can be held in the class meeting, and the most popular English singers can be selected. In the second semester of grade 8, students can rehearse the English drama and select the best performances. They can also participate in the school's New Year Art Performance on behalf of the class. At the same time, oral test should be included in the mid-term and final examinations, and the single evaluation method should be changed.

In the first semester of grade 9, the students' language foundation has been greatly improved. They can hold an English speech contest in the class, and even promote the contest in the whole school. In the second semester grade 9, there will be a high school entrance examination, which can organize multi-machine simulation tests and practice the examination skills.

## 3. Establishing a two-way communication mechanism

Education departments should establish a two-way communication mechanism between urban and rural teachers. Two-way communication mechanism refers to the exchange between the rural and urban schools to guide the balanced layout of excellent teachers.

On one hand, urban teachers teaching in rural areas can bring more diversified teaching methods and oral edification to students. On the other hand, rural teachers teaching in urban schools can learn more advanced teaching methods. Teachers in urban and rural areas should strengthen communication and jointly promote students' oral English communicative competence.

## 4. Strengthening the training of rural teachers

Teachers in rural schools need to keep pace with the times and strengthen training. The best way to solve the fundamental problems is to study new textbooks and design a set of textbooks suitable for local rural schools to learn oral English after the new curriculum standards.

There are various elements that contribute to the qualities of a good language teacher. These elements can be divided into three categories: ethic devotion, professional qualities and personal styles (Parrot, 1993). Educational administrators can establish regular training mechanisms for English teachers to improve their professional level in all aspects, especially teaching methods and oral English ability. Professional training can invite stunt teachers and excellent teachers to hold a lecture in the school, in order to improve teachers' English professional knowledge and oral English expression. In addition, Educational administrators can also try to find high-quality educational resources through the Internet to improve the comprehensive ability of our teachers. Video and other resources can be used to watch excellent teachers' class video.

## 5. Establishing the concept of lifelong learning

Lifelong learning represents the educational philosophy of learning. Since ancient times in China, there has been sayings that one is "Never too old to learn", "Knowledge knows no bounds" and "Knowledge is inexhaustible", which illustrates the principle that learning should take place throughout life. In recent years, it has become increasingly unlikely that what we learn in school will satisfy all the needs of our lives. With the rise of knowledge economy, lifelong learning has become a hot topic in international education circles (Ziwen Lu, 2012).

Teachers should set up the concept of lifelong learning and strive to improve their English level. Rural English teachers ought to insist on English reading, listening and speaking training every day, watching excellent teachers' videos in the spare time, and reflecting on teaching. With the development of the Internet, the cost of knowledge dissemination has been greatly reduced, which is conducive to teachers to enrich themselves by using network resources after class.

## C. *Suggestions for Students*

Students are the main object and focus of learning. Teaching facilities and teachers are just helpers, and only students are the ones who decide English learning. Rural students need to correct cognition that the purpose of English learning is just taking exams, develop good learning habits and learning methods. With the help of teachers, students should make good use of school recourses to practice oral English, overcoming psychological barriers gradually.

#### 1. Correct English learning cognition

Schools and teachers should gradually guide students to correct their understanding of English learning. English learning is not for exams. As a language, English plays an important role in students' further study and future work. Students should balance the relationship between oral English learning and oral English test, so as to make learning practical. At the same time, students should overcome their anxiety and inferiority through a lot of language practice.

In their spare time, students should make use of the abundant network and multimedia resources, listen to more standard English texts, read more authentic English expression and understand western culture. Only by understanding the cultural background can we learn English better and cultivate correct oral expression. Secondly, students with limited conditions can achieve ideal pronunciation and excellent English reading level by imitating the English texts they have learned.

#### 2. With the help of mobile spoken software

Nowadays, the society can contact learning resources in many ways. Junior middle school students in rural areas also have their own mobile phones. There are many mobile phone software for practicing oral English in junior middle school, such as "Fluent English Speaking", "English Imitation Show" and "Interesting English Dubbing", and so on. These mobile learning software are downloaded free of charge. There are a lot of interesting English video and audio resources on the platform. To begin with, it can attract students' attention, increasing their interest and understanding of British and American culture. What's more, it can help them learn the pronunciation and intonation, liaison, blasting and other phonetic skills in the communication of native language. Finally, they need to imitate video fragments. The platform can also save imitation audio, or share to Wechat, which can make students have a sense of achievement, and later they can observe their own language changes. It can make up for the shortcoming that can not take each student into account in class through the use of these oral softwares, so that each student can develop their listening and speaking ability. Besides, students will be more interested and more confident in oral learning. Meanwhile, it also plays an important positive role in the oral test.

### IV. CONCLUSION

Linguist L. G. Alexander (1988) proposed that "Listen before you speak, say before you read, read before you write". It can be seen that speaking is particularly important in a language. In China, English is a subject for high school entrance examination, college entrance examination and even the examination of postgraduate and doctoral students. Therefore, many people just regard it as an examination subject, and the phenomenon of "Dumb English" appears. At present, with the advocacy of the new curriculum reform and quality-oriented education, oral expression has also been paid attention to. Man-Machine dialogue examination of the high school entrance examination will improve students' oral expression ability to a certain extent.

However, many rural junior middle schools in China do not have an advantage in the man-machine dialogue test. Rural Revitalization Strategy clearly put forward the "priority development of rural education" and its overall arrangement. The key to the revitalization of rural areas lies in industry, among which the guarantee of industrial development lies in talents, and the fundamental of talent cultivation lies in education. Therefore, to realize the revitalization of rural areas, we must put rural education in an important position, especially English. Because English education is the weakest in rural education. This paper analyses the problems that restrict oral English teaching in rural areas, and the reasons are various. There is a long way to go in developing oral English teaching in rural middle schools. The author puts forward specific strategies to improve oral English teaching in rural areas from three aspects: teaching equipment, teachers and students. The improvement of oral English teaching can not be separated from the national macro-control, the attention of schools and the society. It is hoped that oral English can get more cooperation and support from educational administrators and even the whole society, so that rural students' oral English can be effectively improved, thus more talents can be cultivated and trained, building a talent base for the revitalization of rural areas.

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