MOTIVATION TRANSFORMATION IN ENGLISH LEARNING — A STUDY ON CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS

Gong Xueping
Sichuan Normal University

Abstract

This article examines the Chinese students’ motivation of their English learning and reveals an accessible way to learn with initiative by the strategies of performing the individualized teaching of practicing the policies of new assessment and credit system with real meaning and of developing language competence in two teaching settings. This paper also discusses some views on the new Curriculum Requirements of the Course of College English issued by the National Educational Bureau.

In the world of TESL/TEFL, the research on the curriculum standard for foreign language teaching has made an achievement. Each nation has its own course standard and common to all is the importance of the research aims at practicality of language learning. In China, competence-oriented teaching is also highly stressed today. A new Curriculum Requirements of the Course of College English issued by the National Educational Bureau in 2004 tends to link to the standards of the international world. We have made much research about the reform of English teaching and learning focusing on the students’ autonomous learning and the abilities of language use. The great obstacle we met to the present day reform is students’ passivity in learning. When did it occur? How can we alter the situation?

1. Cultural Trend vs Individuality in Thinking and in Teaching

Intellectual factors and non-intellectual factors concern greatly to students’ quality education as a whole. We can see that the Chinese learners like to listen not to speak in class, they feel it better to spend time in direct interaction with teachers than to speculate by themselves. They distinguish themselves from foreign students obviously in both the model of thinking and the way of learning. Their interest in their feeling in their motivation of learning and their personality etc., all these drive them to behave as they will.

The thing worth mentioning is that a certain model of thinking is surely decided by a certain cultural and traditional background. The norm of children’s education in China is quite different from that in western countries. “Obedience” behavior well team spirit and social obligations are stressed rather than “independence” self-mastery and creativity. Different moral training brings in different results. Children who don’t produce without the permission from parents or teachers are regarded as good ones. All the motivations of collective orientation are encouraged while any motivations of individualistic orientation are looked down upon. These moral traits are rooted in Chinese children at a very early age.

There are three teachings directly from Confucius which have been commanding Chinese school education and have impacted on Chinese life and society for more than two thousand years. The three teachings are

Respect your superiors
Memorize your lessons
Practice new skills repeatedly
Alex McKnight 1992

With all these in our society where different role relationships require correct behavior and respect for superiors the teacher-student relationship is very much like one of expert and disciple. Teachers in China are seen as the source of knowledge and the importance of memorization. Teachers in the United States do not have the expectation that students will memorize and restate information. In Japan, the teacher-student relationship is very much like that of a parent and child. Teachers in Japan are seen as the source of knowledge and the importance of memorization. Teachers in the United States do not have the expectation that students will memorize and restate information.

Individuality has been a hot point concerned by the whole world since 1980s. American Christians strived for it for about ten years and won till the end of 1990s. The result was that family school became lawful in fifty states of America. Hyack 2001 In Taiwan and in Japan the parents and teachers believe that every student has latent ability to achieve success in academy on the base of higher efforts. More American teachers and parents think the personal talent of a student is the key of higher success. Laura E. 1998 In China the National Educational Bureau NEB 2004 requires in CRCCE The teaching of College English should embodies the principle different classes by different guide different students by different instruction so that our teaching can suit the different cases and meet the individual needs. The essence of individuality of teaching and learning is humanism which shows more concern for the individual difference and pays close attention to all sorts of students. This concern calls back students initiative and inspires all sorts of students to response actively. Psychologically it lends a hand to draw students out of passivity even the timid students have a willing to perform before the class.

Besides the compulsory courses College English must open the selective courses for students to choose according to their own interest or need of speciality which is an urgent task of English teaching reform and also another strong push of individuality. Students complete their English learning of the basic level in one or two years they may choose translation advanced listening speaking writing or any other special English as their higher level of learning. This system of selective course offers students the freedom to make the arrangement of their learning and to choose their future therefore students initiative in learning arises.

II Sequelae of Examination System vs the New Inspiring Policies

Standardized examination system has a long history in China 1900 years ago China started the Imperial Examination System which required students to memorize the classics and to reproduce them. Those who passed the very difficult examination were provided with a position of authority. The examination system has been large a part of the social system and it continues to now while in the advanced countries they advocate
three "P" teaching methodology. Practicality and Possibility to meet the different cases.

From primary school to tertiary level, all the students read the same textbooks except those in minority areas. When the students finish the 9-year compulsory education, they will take a province-wide entrance examination for senior middle school, which is very competitive for the entry of elite schools. The only thing on their minds during this period is how to pass the national-wide matriculation examination and gain access to a university or college. How can they criticize, speculate, and hypothesize on their own? How can they develop their creativity? There is no room at all. The 12-year yoke makes the students catch a terribly chronic disease—being bored with learning, even if some of the university students may pursue a higher level study of MA and PhD. They have to continue with their old approaches of studying and focus on their learning on the theoretical memory. As a result, some of them may be hurt by the rigorous examination, even their dignities are destroyed; they will develop inferiority complexes and live in shame; their attitudes toward society gradually change, and finally they become dull and cold in life. Some of them may succeed by memorization, but still cannot make practical research or find a better way of studying. For them, a good academic performance is all they want. The old examination system neglects the fact that a fault in personality is a far more serious problem than a weakness in academic record. The fact above shows that the sequence of the old and the still-in-use examination system throw students into passive learning. Clamping down on the cruel matriculation examination and establishing a new assessment system should be the most urgent policy of our educational reform. Each semester's final test should work together and be designed to assess student proficiency that is to decide the student's succeeding level of education rather than the once-and-for-all matriculation examination. It's high time for government to make up a mind to destroy the old and establish the new policy of matriculation. Examination has been the commanding stick of learning all the time. Learners are stuck to it and engage in their learning accordingly. Only by putting down the once-and-for-all matriculation examination can we end the situation of passive learning.

Another policy is practicing credit with real meaning. The so-called credit system at present fails to give students the flexibility of time to learn. No university student could accomplish his learning shorter than four years.

CRCCE stipulates the content of examination. The examination of College English should aim at checking students' comprehensive abilities including listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating. The check of reading, writing, and translating cannot stand for all. Nor can the checks of listening and speaking. This clearly indicates that the content of the examination of College English composers of two tests: one is the sort of language knowledge; the other is language competence.

By the precisely stipulated tasks, students cannot expect to obtain the high scores by memorizing or reproducing the knowledge only; they now understand the aim of every learning, they may get free from the old approach and involved in every certain training for every certain task. With the progress of the new policy of examination, students are independent in thinking and active in learning; therefore, they are initiative.

Practicing the policy of credit with real meaning means establishing a sure judgment for a course learning. The policy not only brings students more flexibility of time to learn but also offers students right to select a certain course of credits corresponding to their hopes. They have freedom to decide how much time they are going to spend in learning English one year, two years, or even longer. They make a corresponding and responsible plan for themselves because they know they want to successfully finish their higher education. They must obtain the necessary credits; some may get the extra credits by choosing the relevant course to College English as they will. English learning becomes quite the affair of their own. The significance is that the policy entrusts students with confidence and freedom. Meanwhile, it shifts responsibility from teacher onto students, which students will come to realize in the process of learning. The circulation of freedom and responsibility, more freedom and more responsibility arouses a bigger initiative and creativity in students.

III Knowledge-oriented Focus vs Language Competence Development

As we mentioned above, the approach of
language learning in college and university is knowledge-oriented; students have accumulated a lot of knowledge of language, some of them even have a good mastery of vocabulary and grammar and can score high in examination but they are poor in language competence, feeling it difficult to listen, more difficult to speak and to write. Even if they have some ability, training the training is separated and isolated that is, listening without speaking, reading without writing. The low-grade trainings of listening and reading after all are the reproductions of the input instruction. Honestly, students are the last to blame for the passive and embarrassing situation because the teachers’ teachings from the very beginning focus on grammar and vocabulary and in this sort of teaching students are checked with language knowledge not the competence.

CRCCE prescribes that the aim of teaching and learning is developing students’ comprehensive abilities to use language, especially the ability to listen and to speak. Not only teach the basic knowledge and skills of language but also put the stress on the developments of students' language competence and self-learning ability. This manifests the aim of language learning and stresses the importance of language competence as well, the first thing of which should be the use of language, then the basic knowledge of it. What is the correct idea of developing language competence? The basic knowledge and skills refer to all the requirements in the textbooks such as the exercise of vocabulary, the exercise of structure, the exercise of listening and so on. Each requires one single skill; this is the concept of basic. While the comprehensive abilities or language competence requires a new transformation of the single skills combined that is, based on some input instruction students need to digest the input instruction and then can make their own output. Instead of the isolated training of a single skill, the solid training involves in several skills in a link. For example, students are required to write a summary or a comment after reading an article, not only make a choice from the multiple questions, after listening a text, they can make some analysis, can argue or talk about their own thinking, not only give some tips, this process means that the plane knowledge is transformed into the solid knowledge. Learning now becomes challenging and interesting, students do have initiative and creativity to the learning.

CRCCE defines the definite tasks for teaching settings. For the traditional classroom, the task of teaching is mainly concerning the courses of reading, writing and translating for computer aid, the main task is the training of listening and speaking as well as students' self-learning. This setting has been carried out in Sichuan Normal University. In his writing class, twenty or eight students at a time, the teaching model also calls for a mobilization of the initiative of both teachers and students. Stressing the central role of students in the process of teaching and learning, Daniel A. Kister, an American professor, teaches in Sichuan Normal University, he works as a good example. In his writing class, seven or eight students good at writing, serve as tutors for other students; they grade an assignment for other students not the teacher. Following the set norms, the tutors first give a tentative grade to the assignments of students who did not tutor. In the light of the tutor grade, each student then gives his/her own grade and returns the assignment to the teacher. If this grade differs from the tutor grade by more than three points, the student gives a sentence reason for altering it. The teacher reviews and gives the final grade, usually accepting the students’ grades of their own work. Daniel 2003 118 119. Other teachers followed Daniel’s suit or made some more try. They chose half of the class and made seven of whom be tutors each time, each teacher corrected the tutor assignments one by one and face to face. Then the seven tutors grade the assignments of students who did not tutor. This rather unusual grading procedure lessens the burden of teachers, correcting more importantly, it stimulates students’ responsibility in judging their own work, they become more interested and involved. This is a kind of self-learning full of challenge and research. As for teachers, they is always a guide and a designer in the whole process of teaching and learning.

The main contents of teaching under computer-based environment are listening, speaking and reading. Students are allowed to start from the different points in accordance with one’s own case and to choose one own level from online course or CD-ROM to learn. Only the student has accomplished the listening task of his chosen level can he get a credit. The whole process of learning is recorded. Students may need
help or communication with teacher in their self-learning, therefore a teacher is expected to give instructions directly or through “Discussion” or “Tutoring” of campus network based multimedia. In “Teacher’s Notebook” the teacher also keeps a record of each student’s learning data. When the teacher observes, evaluates and supervises the whole process of the student’s self-learning. Online courses are rich in meaning and countless in number. Students can find enough readings to drill. Quite like the drill of listening, student can start from his chosen level, taking the interesting materials to read. When he finishes the reading he will take a check. If he fails, he be required to try again till he successfully works it out. Computer aid may work as many teachers of many branches to help the students who hope to learn the other knowledge they are interested. Facing computer students are confident and feel they are masters of their learning as they are masters to handle the computer.

Computer based environment and traditional classroom are closely combined and form a new teaching model in which students develop their language competence effectively.

The most important is that two teaching settings reinforce students to learn with analysis, speculation and criticism. The exploration in learning impiles initiative and creativity. So two settings strategy is a good practice of quality education as a whole and the development of the faculty of self-learning, no doubt, manifests the success of initiative learning.

Notes
1. Teach English as the Second Language, Teach English as the Foreign Language.
2. [1997] [2002]

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