Exploration of Reforming Integrated English Course*

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Abstract—**In line with the trend of College English teaching reform, teachers have made various explorations in integrated English course, such as the improvement of teaching methods or the diversification of classroom activities, but the results seem to be not so satisfactory. The exploration of integrated English teaching should be centered on teaching content. Therefore, teachers should not only constantly improve their basic language skills, but also acquire the theories in linguistics. They should also have the ability of applying relevant theories to teaching practice so as to solve the problems in teaching. On the other hand, teachers should keep pace with the times, make use of new teaching resources, and innovating classroom teaching activities to fulfill the requirement that teachers play multiple roles, such as helper, inspirer and guide in teaching practice.**

Keywords—integrated English course; English teacher; linguistic theories; teaching resources

I. INTRODUCTION

Integrated English is an important course for non-English majors, aiming at improving students' comprehensive abilities of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. The texts in the textbooks are usually selected with a purpose of improving their ability of appreciation for literary works. Although this course has a long history, there are still some problems in it, such as students' lack of interest in learning, teacher-oriented pattern with students in a passive position [1], attention paid to reading and writing ability, ignoring the cultivation of listening and speaking ability, etc. [2]. In view of various problems in this course, College English teachers have made different attempts. This paper intends to discuss how to improve integrated English. Specifically, from the perspective of teachers, this paper will analyze what improvements teachers should make to be better qualified for their job, to better shoulder their roles as helpers, guides and inspirers, and hence bringing new vitality into this college course.

II. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF INTEGRATED ENGLISH TEACHING

Integrated English is one of the compulsory courses for college students. In order to meet the needs of globalization in training foreign language talents, communicative approach has been applied in classes in some schools to cultivate students' listening and speaking abilities. However, a large number of schools are constrained by the reduction of class hours. Integrated English still follows the traditional teaching methods. The teaching content is still mainly concerned with grammar, vocabulary and text translation, and generally follows the procedures of first vocabulary, phrase explanation, then language difficulties analysis, then text translation, and finally after-class exercises [3]. Listening and speaking ability can hardly be exercised in such a class. In such a class, students are almost completely passive, and they have little interest in the class. In a survey of more than 1,000 students in 12 universities in Beijing conducted by the theoretical group of Beijing College English Research Association, more than half of the students were unsatisfied with college English teaching [4]. Then, how to attract students' attention to and make them satisfied with integrated English course? This is the problem this paper tries to solve.

With the continuous reform of College English teaching, teachers have made various explorations but with the same purpose, that is, to improve students' interest in class and achieve ideal teaching results. Generally speaking, there are two kinds of different explorations, one is concerned with the teaching means, such as the use of multimedia, and the other is the organization of classroom activities, such as carrying out diversified classroom activities, including playing games. English teachers have undoubtedly made some achievements in their teaching practice. However, there are some drawbacks in these two kinds of explorations. That is the excessive or improper use of multimedia will distract students' attention, and the design of some classroom games may lead to the entertainment-oriented [5], which can only serve the purpose of entertainment and cannot make students benefit from it. Therefore, the author believes that there should be new thinking and exploration on how to reform integrated English course and this paper is such attempt.

III. AN EXPLORATION OF REFORMING COLLEGE INTEGRATED ENGLISH COURSE

In the new situation, to improve and reform the integrated English course in universities, teachers are what we can only rely on. This is because in the process of teaching, teachers are the main body of teaching activities besides students. As an English teacher, he should constantly improve his basic language skills, such as fluent oral English and excellent English-Chinese translation ability. In addition,

I think the following two aspects are equally important each of which should be emphasized.

A. Combining the Theoretical Knowledge and Ability of Applying Theories to Practice Together

On one hand teachers should constantly strengthen their theoretical foundation in linguistics, master theoretical knowledge in linguistics, and consciously apply theories to problems encountered in their teaching, so as to truly combine the theoretical knowledge and ability of applying theories to practice together.

College English teachers should raise the awareness of mastering theory and get out of the traditional misunderstanding that theory is an unnecessary part of integrated English. They should also abandon the view that an English teacher can teach his course well as long as he has a solid foundation of basic language skills. Admittedly, for an English teacher, fluent oral English and accurate pronunciation are important, but such abilities cannot guarantee the effective conduction of this course. In contrast, a certain amount of knowledge about theories, especially these related to linguistics, is more important. This is because only standing at the platform of theory, can we make a reasonable and comprehensive explanation of some linguistic or grammatical phenomena and at the same time can we attract students' attention and cultivate their spirit of theoretical research. For example, most English teachers are helpless when they encounter such a sentence as "he stood one head over his arm". There are no new words in the sentence that they don't know, and each word is used with its most common meaning. But what kind of language phenomenon is it and how could we explain it? If the teacher knows a little about construction grammar theory [6], he can easily explain this sentence. That is to say, this sentence is another variant of the most commonly used sentence pattern in English, namely "x is a", but in the variant as mentioned above, the linking verb "is" in the common sentence pattern becomes a dynamic verb "stand", and the whole sentence means "he stands one head taller than he". Similarly, the sentences like "the river ran black", "her hair hang black" and etc. are all variants of the above basic sentence pattern and hence can be explained in the same way

In addition, when a teacher has linguistics-related knowledge, he can help improve students' basic language competence and play his role as a helper in teaching. In college English teaching, besides the emphasis on the basic abilities of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation, the ability of interpretation is equally important and should be given enough emphasis. In fact, linguistic theory can effectively improve students' ability of paraphrase while assisting English vocabulary teaching. Generally in integrated English class, some teachers will introduce English affixes to students when explaining words. English differs from Chinese in morphological changes. By adding affixes, the class of a word can be changed. For example, the suffixes that can change verbs into nouns include -ion, -sion, -ation, etc [7], and the suffixes of adjectives are -ious, -able, -ly, -y, etc. Explaining affixes can help students remember words easily. Many teachers'

explanations of affixes are limited to this aspect. But the fundamental purpose of memorizing words is to use them. Students' knowledge about the affixes can help them improve their ability of paraphrase. And this is the most important use of explaining affixes and learning affixes, but it is often overlooked. In the text explanation, in order to help students understand the meaning of a sentence, the most common method adopted by teachers is translation, which has been widely accepted. However, the translation of a sentence not entirely equivalent to the original one, so teachers should help students understand the meaning of sentences by means of paraphrase. To do it, we must rely on affix knowledge. For example, in the sentence "she has a great passion for her career", the word "passion" is a noun and its adjective form is "passionate" which results from the addition of the suffix "-ate". With a reference to the knowledge of affix, the sentence can be interpreted as "she is passionate about her career".

In short, College English teachers should have knowledge about linguistic theories. Even if they can't grasp the theories deeply, they should at least have a preliminary understanding. For a long time, it has been emphasized that English teachers should have a systematic study of the theories of general psychology and educational psychology. In fact, in recent years, colleges and universities have offered teaching-related training for young teachers when they come into the profession of being teacher. Besides young teachers must obtain teacher's qualification certificates before they take up their posts. These measures largely compensate for the lack of knowledge about educational psychology. Therefore, at this stage, to improve the integrated English course in universities requires that teachers strengthen the study of linguistic theories, such as sociolinguistics, cognitive linguistics, systemic functional linguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, stylistics and so on. Only in this way can the reform of College integrated English be carried out with a depth. And only in this way can the exploration of this course avoid the previous form-oriented patterns (such as playing games and using multimedia to play some videos). Because no matter what kind of reform a course may have, its aim is to impart knowledge to students, so various teaching explorations should focus on the teaching content rather than deviate from it. Of course, it is far from enough for college English teachers to possess only certain linguistic knowledge. Therefore, it is also necessary to strengthen their ability of applying theories to teaching practice. College English teachers must be able to employ theoretical knowledge effectively and solve problems encountered in teaching. Without such ability, theory can only be theory and cannot play its part in teaching, and the exploration of college integrated English course can only be an illusion.

B. Cultivating the Notion of Life-long Learning in Teaching Practice

On the other hand, English teachers should keep pace with the times, master new teaching resources, constantly learn the use of new resources, enrich classroom teaching

activities, so that the notion of lifelong learning really penetrates into their teaching practice.

In the information era, with the rapid development of science and technology, teachers should keep up with the pace of the times, grasp the pulse of the times, understand the emerging new things or new teaching resources, and consciously apply them to their own classroom. At present, the use of multimedia in English teaching is quite common. Multimedia has changed the traditional way of teaching, making language knowledge visually presented to learners in the form of images, sounds and words, which has attracted students' attention greatly. In recent years, the development of information technology has bred other new things. As important teaching resources, online dictionary and online corpus can more effectively impart knowledge to students and assist them in improving their basic language abilities. But there are few teachers who apply them to their integrated English course. Online dictionary is a digital resource that provides information query to people on the basis of the Internet. It has more advantages than traditional paper dictionary in terms of timeliness and inclusiveness. Therefore, as an English teacher, if we can understand it, we can not only enrich the teaching methods, but also activate the classroom atmosphere with a high teaching efficiency.

The application of online dictionary in integrated English course is mainly related to vocabulary teaching. One of the goals of integrated English is to enable students to master the use of words. Therefore, how to carry out vocabulary teaching has become an important teaching task. The general vocabulary teaching follows such a procedure in which the pronunciation of word is taught first and then some sentence examples with the particular word is give with a purpose of teaching the usage of the word. To be specific, when example is given, the teacher says a Chinese sentence and the students translate it into English with a given word. Sometimes the teaching of vocabulary includes the discrimination between synonyms. The teacher first explains the differences between the two words, and then gives two sentences with blanks, and the students are required to choose the right words to fill in the blanks. Teachers usually use this kind of exercise to make students remember the differences between synonyms, and to examine whether students master the differences between words. With online dictionary, when teaching synonyms, teachers can present the retrieved sentences with the synonyms in front of students directly, let students observe two groups of sentences themselves, so as to find out the differences in their usage and make their own conclusions. In other words using online dictionary can train students' ability observation, as well as that of inference, making students become active participators in the class rather than passive receivers of knowledge, also making them have a deeper understanding of the differences between synonyms and memorize them more easily, because they participate in such a process of learning.

Online corpus is a huge language resource and it can be classified into different types according to different uses, such as English writing corpus of Chinese college students, spoken English corpus, translation corpus, and some foreign corpuses such as British National Corpus. In the classroom, as long as the network is connected, teachers can introduce these rich learning materials into the classroom. With a reference to these corpuses, students can not only find their own errors in English writing, oral English or pronunciation, but also write on their own or conduct oral training according to the subjects provided in the corpus and compare with the contents in the corpus, so as to find out the differences between the two and improve their listening, speaking and translation abilities. The Introduction of online corpus into classroom will certainly arouse students' great concern and interest, not only because it is a new thing, but also because it conforms to the cognitive principle of learning when teaching knowledge to students. At the same time, with the help of online corpus, a teacher can better play his roles of helper and inspirer in teaching activities, so as to make students become an active participator in classroom.

IV. CONCLUSION

Under the new situation, it is necessary for integrated English teachers to constantly explore how to teach this course to meet the new needs of students. However, the exploration should aim at imparting knowledge and improving students' abilities. The flashy and reputation-gaining exploration can only win students' temporary interest, and will eventually be rejected by students. The author believes that this exploration should be carried out from two aspects. On one hand, teachers should improve their theoretical level, especially those related to linguistics, and apply these theories flexibly to classroom teaching. On the other hand teachers should keep pace with the times, grasp the new trends and new things, making a better use of new teaching resources and innovating classroom activities.

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