

# Reflections on Leveled College English Course Teaching

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**Abstract**—This research is conducted for the purpose of understanding the extent to which the students in Ningbo City College of Vocational Technology would elevate their interests in English study in college. To do so, a new teaching method "Leveled College English Course Teaching" is used. The students are divided into three levels (Level A, Level B and Level C) in their College English Course. Students from different levels were given different textbooks, and their study performances were evaluated differently. In doing so, it is found that students' interest was increased and their confidence in English study was strengthened.

**Keywords**—Leveled College English Course Teaching; English study; education; reflection

## I. INTRODUCTION

On May 6, 2019, the Ministry of Education and other departments of China jointly issued the notice of the implementation plan for the special work of Higher Vocational enrollment expansion, which puts forward new requirements for the enrollment work of Higher Vocational Colleges and brings new opportunities of improving the quality of education.

The implementation plan for the special work of Higher Vocational enrollment expansion requires a large-scale expansion of about 1 million students, including not only undergraduates from High Middle schools, but also veterans, laid-offs and unemployed people.

Facing the new form of enrollment expansion in higher vocational colleges, it is imminent to apply leveled-teaching method to College English Course Teaching in higher vocational colleges, in order to better meet the different educational needs of various groups of students

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Leveled College English teaching method is based on Constructivism Theory.

Mahoney (Mahoney, J. (2005) once points out that "constructivism" and "constructivist" are relatively new psychological notions which appeared in 1960s. But the underlying ideas can be traced back two thousand years ago

in the Eastern philosophy and also can be found in Western thoughts three hundred years ago.

The idea of constructivism can be traced back to Socrates when he used direct questions to ask his followers in order to lead them to understand their weak thoughts. Such form is still important as being a way to help constructivist educators to evaluate their teaching and help them to lead their students to find a new way to learn. In 20th century, Jean Piaget (Piaget, J. 1997) developed a constructive theory for developing children's education. Such kind of education is called Progressive Education, which was evolved from Constructivism Theory.

Lev Vygotsky developed Constructivism Theory and his framework of social constructivism was from the angle of sociocultural learning. He tried to find that through the zone of proximal development, how the learners could form mental constructs through interacting with adults, and their more capable partners (Seifer, Kelvin & Sutton, Rosemary, 2009).

Besides the social cultural perspective, other scholars tried to deepen the constructive theory from the view of cognition, such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (Lave, Jean; Wenger, Etenne, 1991), Brown, Collins and Duguid (Brown, J. S., Collins, A., Duguid, P.,1989); Newman, Griffin and Cole (Newman, Denis; Griffin, Peg; Cole, Michael, 1989), and Barbara Rogoff (Rogoff, Barbara (1990).

In the constructivist classroom, the way of teaching knowledge is quite different from the way of traditional classroom. In constructivist classroom the students are not regarded as empty vessels; on the contrary, they are active learners and they can construct their knowledge and assess their understanding. The teachers are not the controller of the classroom. Actually, they work like coaches, guides, or facilitators. Asking good questions is their most important job to do in the classroom. In this way, students are given ownership of what they learn, and what they have learned can be transferred to real life.

### III. PREREQUISITES OF LEVELED COLLEGE ENGLISH COURSE TEACHING

#### A. *Analysis of Different Levels of College English Course Learners*

College English Course is an important compulsory course for Non-English Majors in higher vocational colleges. Its teaching goal is to cultivate students' ability of English application, so that they can adapt to and meet the needs of their future work. However, the composition of students in higher vocational colleges is more complex and diversified. There are not only high school students who have studied English for 12 years, and vocational high school students who studied English for 9 years, but also the students who have not received any English education before they go to college. With the expansion of higher vocational college enrollment, new types of students have emerged. For such new students, their learning experience is not consistent, because they dropped out from middle high school to join the army, or to get an employment in the workplace, so their English education process is very different from that of the normal students graduating from High Middle schools. All these differences will inevitably bring great challenges to College English Course teaching after the expansion of higher vocational colleges. Applying leveled English teaching can meet the needs of students for English learning at different levels to the greatest extent, and help them to successfully complete their education in college.

#### B. *The Specific Levels and Teaching Requirements in College English Course Teaching*

College English Course lasts for 2 terms.

For the first term, according to students' scores of college entrance examination and the types of students, College English Course can be divided into three levels, that is, 1A, 1B and 1C.

Students whose scores of College Entrance Examination are above 95 (inclusive) will go to 1A level class. Those whose scores between 60-94 (inclusive) will go to 1B level class; the rest students (whose scores are no more than 59 will go to 1C level class.

Through 2 terms' teaching, the students of different levels can pass Practical English Test for Colleges (Level A). Practical English Test for Colleges (PETCO) was recommended by the Ministry of Education, China for College English teaching. Through the leveled English teaching, quite a number of students can pass College English Test Band 4 and some students can even pass College English Test Band 6. The students are required to obtain the following ability after the leveled English teaching.

##### 1) *English listening ability:*

The students should be able to use their basic English listening skills to understand teacher's lectures (delivered in English), daily English conversation and general-topic English lectures, and they should understand the slow-speed (130-150 words per minute) English radio and TV programs, master the main idea and grasp the key points.

##### 2) *English speaking ability:*

Students can communicate in English during the learning process, discuss a certain topic, talk about daily topics in English, and make a brief speech on familiar topics after preparation, with clear expression and basically correct pronunciation and intonation. Students are able to use basic conversation strategies in conversation.

##### 3) *Reading ability:*

Students can read English articles with general themes at a speed of 70 words per minute. For the fast reading materials with longer length and lower difficulty, students' reading speed can reach to 100 words per minute. Students are able to use skimming and scanning ability to read materials. With the help of a dictionary, they can read English textbooks, newspapers and articles, grasp the general ideas of the materials and understand the main facts and relevant details.

##### 4) *Writing ability:*

Students should be able to master basic writing skills, and complete general writing tasks within 30 minutes with no less than 100 words on general topics, such as describing personal experiences, impressions, emotions and events, writing common practical articles, and so on. The content of their writings must be basically complete, with a clear idea, appropriate words, and coherent meaning.

##### 5) *Translating ability:*

The students should be able to translate the Chinese articles with familiar themes into English and translate English articles into Chinese with the help of dictionaries. The translation speed is about 300 English words per hour and 250 Chinese characters per hour. The translation is basically accurate and free of major errors in understanding and language expression.

##### 6) *The required vocabulary words:*

The mastery of vocabulary of students should reach about 4000 words and 700 phrases (including the vocabulary that should be mastered in their middle school English), of which about 2000 words are positive words, which requires students to be able to use such words skillfully in oral and written expression on the basis of cognition.

#### C. *The Leveled Teaching Materials for Different Students*

Among teaching materials, textbooks are the most important ones for course study. A textbook is comprehensive compilation of content in a field of disciplinary. Schoolbooks include textbooks and other books used in schools.

As to the selection of teaching materials, classical textbooks issued by the famous publishing houses can be used in addition to the selective materials suitable for students with different levels. Selective materials can be in the form of loose leaves or handouts as the supplements to improve the students' learning efficiency and maintain their interest in English learning.

Textbooks, as a kind of teaching materials, work as a carrier of the teaching idea, the teaching goal and the

teaching request. In addition, the relationship among textbooks, teachers and students is mutually influenced. Thus, textbooks which are chosen appropriately are conducive to teachers' teaching and students' learning. For the selection of textbooks, we should fully consider many factors, such as teachers' ability and the level of students so that the teaching goals will be achieved.

For Level 1A, students can use *New Horizon English College (Book 2)* as their textbooks. Students of 1B will use *New Horizon English Course, Book 1* as their textbooks. And 1C will use *New Horizon English Course (Starter)* as their textbooks.

#### *D. The Evaluation System in Leveled College English Teaching*

The evaluation system includes process evaluation and terminative evaluation.

For the process evaluation, students' performance will be evaluated based on many factors, including their online work, group projects, case studying, situational learning and work-process oriented learning for different levels of students. Students' performance of project report, case analysis, group presentation, etc., will all be included in their process evaluation.

For the terminative evaluation, students' performance will be graded on the basis of the requirements of curriculum teaching. Their scores and credit points will be obtained by their final examination and their points getting from College English Test Band 4.

Combing process evaluation with terminative evaluation, the multi-dimensional evaluation system has been formed to reflect authentically the students' study process and their study performance.

#### *E. The Required Achievements of Leveled College English Course Teaching*

Through the reform of stratified and classified teaching, the renewal of teaching materials and teaching methods, the full use of online and offline mixed curriculum teaching paradigm, and the practice of leveled college English teaching can help the teachers to meet the different needs of students for College English Course learning to the greatest extent, and activate the students' interest and potential in English learning and thus improve their English proficiency and language competence.

For Level A students, after one-year English study, they should pass College English Test Band 4; for Level B students, they should pass Practical English Test for Colleges (Level A); for Level C students, they should pass Practical English Test for Colleges (Level B).

## IV. THE PRACTICE OF LEVELED COLLEGE ENGLISH COURSE TEACHING IN NINGBO CITY COLLEGE OF VOCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

### *A. The Levels of Students' English Proficiency Before They Take College English Course*

In recent years, due to the expansion of our school's enrollment in other provinces and cities, there are bound to be more and more differences in English proficiency among those students. Taking oral English as an example, the oral English level of Zhejiang students is higher than the students from other provinces. Some students from western provinces even lack of basic phonetic training, which brings about the difficulty in teaching College English Course. Therefore, we will divide students into different levels according to their scores for College Entrance Examination.

### *B. Hybrid Teaching Methods in Leveled College English Course Teaching*

Two to three decades ago, for college English teaching, teachers often taught English in isolated ways instead of putting English teaching in a communicative way. Using such isolated teaching methods, it was very hard for students to learn how to pronounce English correctly, how to use vocabulary words properly, and how to understand English grammar thoroughly, thus their efficiency for English study was very low and their English proficiency was not satisfying. (Wu Suhong, Li Jinying, 2010).

With the advent of multimedia era and the introduction of advanced education concepts, the old and out-of-date teaching methods for College English Course in China should also be transformed from single dimension to three dimensions, integrating multimedia technology with college English teaching. English teachers are required to integrate multimedia technology with classroom teaching. And they should decide what are the proper teaching contents and teaching goals according to different levels of students, at the same time, they should make full use of the convenience brought by Computer Assisted Instruction, and try to use multimedia technology in classroom to build the cultural background of learning content for students, create the reality or connection similar to the authentic language environment, so that the students, after being immersed in such English language environment, can improve their interest in learning and elevate their English levels. In order to enrich the classroom teaching mode of College English Course, it is advisable for English teachers to assign proper tasks in the classroom to guarantee that students can actively participate in the classroom teaching. Students can complete such tasks with the help of modern information technology. By completing the tasks, students can improve their English comprehensive ability.

## V. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The leveled College English Course Teaching has been implemented for about 3 months. In order to make clear how this teaching method worked in improving the students' interest and their language proficiency in English study,

some interviews have been made. Generally, the response from students is positive. Most of the students say that leveled College English Course Teaching is suitable for them in that such leveled teaching method has allowed them to study according to their own levels and thus reduced their anxiety in study English. The relaxing study environment and appropriate study schedule have made them more active and enthusiastic in their English study, and their motivation for studying English has been promoted.

From the interview, we have also found that a few students do not welcome the new teaching method. They think the leveled College English Course teaching have reduced their motivation for English study, because the students in the same level with similar English proficiency will not provide a competitive study environment. They think such environment is not beneficial for stimulating their English study.

## VI. CONCLUSION

From the above findings, on the whole, leveled College English Course Teaching is effective in promoting students' interest and enthusiasm in English learning. But still there are some students who think such teaching method is not helpful for their English study. Based on the findings, some suggestions will be practical for College English teachers to apply the leveled College English Course Teaching.

First, it is necessary to analyze students' different study habits before applying the leveled method to College English Course Teaching. In doing so, we will make good arrangement for the leveled teaching and will achieve better teaching results.

Second, it is advocated that the teacher should help the students to develop their self-study ability when implementing the leveled College English Course Teaching. On the whole, the students in Ningbo City College of Vocational Technology are not very active in self-study. When applying the leveled method to teaching College English Course, teachers should provide the students useful techniques to help the students to cultivate their self-study habits, which will be valuable for their English study.

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