



Course Syllabus Design for Comprehensive English and Cultivation of Students' Ability

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Abstract. Comprehensive English Course is very important for English majors in colleges and universities. To help contemporary college English students understand the course better, master the skills in this course faster and develop their abilities more, an adaptable and effective course syllabus is necessary. To make it real, teachers need to make clear of the principles adapted, the course, the learners and the detailed steps to conduct. In this way, students' comprehensive abilities can be developed.

Keywords: College English students · Course syllabus design · Comprehensive English Course · Abilities

1 Introduction

To be a good teacher and to do the job well, teachers need to be able to design a good course syllabus. And to design a course syllabus, they have to make clear of the principle or philosophy while designing the syllabus.

2 The Principles or Philosophy While Designing the Syllabus

2.1 The Principle of Comprehensiveness

The course syllabus design needs to be oriented to all students to ensure fairness. And it needs to be student-centered and develop the students in an all-round way [1]. It needs to ensure the comprehensiveness of the content and evaluation system.

2.2 The Principle of Wholeness

The course syllabus design needs to take the whole course into consideration. Meanwhile, it should take the whole growth of the course participants into consideration, not just to learn the skills but the ability to use English to analyse and deal with the problems they encounter and to cultivate humanity accomplishment, etc. [2].

2.3 The Principle of Development

The course syllabus design should take the students' sustainable development into consideration. It is not the training of the skills but the cultivation of their long-term abilities. At the same time, the design should consider the sustainable development for the whole course to cultivate students who can satisfy the needs of the changing world.

2.4 The Principle of Prospective Methodology

The course syllabus design should aim at cultivating students with long-term vision, and cooperative learning abilities and lifelong learning initiatives [3].

3 The Procedural Steps

3.1 Getting to Know About the Course

It is a professional compulsory course for the first and second year English majors. As the name suggests, it is a comprehensive course, which means that teachers have to improve students' listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation skills in this course, which is general, not specific.

3.2 Getting to Know About the Learners and Their Background

Getting to know about the learners and their background including their English level, their family, their needs, etc. is the first step to improve their comprehension. The author's students can be taken for example: they are the first year English majors of public-funded normal students who are at the age of 18 or so. Their average English score for the College Entrance Examination is about 100. In total, it is 150. Therefore, they have already laid a relatively solid foundation for their English learning even though they are newcomers in college. They are specific learners, for the public-funded normal students, as the name suggests, are college students who are funded by the government. They enjoy the college education for free; what's more, they will receive 6,000 yuan for their cost of living from the government each year at college. But they have to make a contract with their local governments that they will go back home and be English teachers in their hometowns after graduating from college. Most of them come from some remote, mountainous or undeveloped areas that are lack of teachers. Now that they will be the future English teachers, they have to learn English well in an all-round way to be a qualified English teacher in the future.

3.3 Getting to Make Clear of the Goals of the Course

The goals of the course are as follows:

- To impart basic knowledge of English (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, discourse, text structure, language function / idea, etc.) and basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation);

- To cultivate students' ability to actually understand the content and use language to make effective communication;
- To develop students' ability to practice some effective learning methods;
- To cultivate students' ability to appreciate the culture, instead of focusing on the language itself;
- To develop students' ability of creative thinking, critical thinking and rational thinking.

3.4 Considering the Possibilities of the Resources and Constraints

Experienced and responsible teachers, reasonable course arrangement and the combination of online and offline education (superstar + mooc) are the necessary resources to improve the students' comprehension. And then teachers should make the corresponding timetable to make use of all these resources and try to get rid of the constraints of them.

3.5 Choosing the Appropriate Teaching Methods and Means

The teaching methods the author has adopted for the course syllabus is the "Mixed" teaching method. Even though the teaching procedure for each unit in this course is the same, the content varies from each other. And the units that we are going to learn in this course are highly selected not just for the language itself but for the theme delivered by the content. Unit 3 *Message of the Land* in book 1 can be taken for example: the author is Pira Sudham, a very famous writer in Thailand. He shared the readers the beautiful scenery and the traditional culture in his hometown in his writing [4]. The language is simple but beautiful. And the content is simple but thought-provoking. Readers need to figure out the message of the land on their own between the lines, which means they have to read beyond lines. They have to pay attention to the choice of the words to find the clues, so they cannot just focus on the language itself but the content and learning skill to develop their thinking ability by the process of enjoying a different culture. And it includes presentation, practice, production and assessment, including self-assessment, peer assessment, teachers assessment through investigation, and communication and interaction to evaluate the students by making the detailed criteria.

4 An Outline of a Unit

In order to make it clear, the author will take Unit 3 *Message of the Land* as the specimen unit.

4.1 Background Information

The present text is an essay in a very broad sense of the word, for it was written down by the writer who interviewed a farmer and his wife. From their interview, teachers have to figure out their understanding of the message of the land, because it is implied instead of being directly stated.

4.2 Glossary

Now that the essay is an interview about a farmer and his wife, the language is quite colloquial with small and simple words, short sentences and straightforward language. One thing teachers need to pay attention is that the author delivers the deeper meaning with all these simple words.

4.3 Theme

The theme of this essay is not directly stated but implied between the lines. We need to sharpen our eyes on the choices of the simple words, phrases and sentences to figure out the theme. And it is not settled, instead, it's quite open. The students can develop their own thinking about it on one precondition — with enough supporting details between the lines. Is it urbanization and resistance? Or industrialization and the death of traditional handicrafts? Or development and the loss of tradition? Or all of them?

4.4 Structure

The structure is quite clear-cut. The text can be divided into two parts. From para. 1–7, it is the first part, which talks about what the wife says. And it can be further divided into two sections — her family and their land from para. 1–3. And changes in the village the wife doesn't like from para. 4–7. From para. 8–11, it is the second part. It is about what the husband says. And it can be subdivided into several sections — the reason for his silence from para. 8–9 and his worry in para. 10 and his love of the land in para. 11.

4.5 Writing Style

Even though the words and sentence patterns in this essay is simple and easy, the author adopted several figures of speech to achieve vivid, expressive and appropriate description, such as simile, metaphor, personification and zeugma.

4.6 Text Analysis

IN language points —some examples are given as follows:

In para. 1, “I’m the only daughter in our family and it was I who stayed with my parents till they died”, the sentence uses the emphatic form “it is/was...that/who...” to emphasis the subject “I”. And if we cross this emphatic form out, the sentence should be complete, that is, I stayed with my parents till they died. One more example — “It was in this university she first met Professor Li”. In this sentence, the emphatic form is used to emphasis on the adverbial of place “in this university”. Here is another sentence in para. 1 — “My husband moved into our house as is the way with us in Esarn.” “As” here introduces a defining relative clause, and functions as its subject, representing what is stated in the main clause. Here is another example. “As is often the case, he was late for meeting.” In para. 2, teachers got this sentence. “He has always been patient and silent, minding his own life.” The usual phrase is “mind one’s own business”. Here, minding his own life refers to doing his duty and carrying on his life. Next one, in para.

4 “Only ten years ago, you could barter for things, but now it’s all cash”, the phrase, barter for, means to exchange one thing for another, so we can understand the sentence like this: Just ten years ago, we could exchange one thing for another, but today we have to pay to get everything we need. The narrator here is implying that in the past, we were more or less self-sufficient. But now we have to buy everything in the market. In para. 4 “Shops have sprung up, filled with colorful plastic things and goods we have no use for” means that shops have suddenly appeared in the village, with attractive plastic things and with things we don’t need. So here the phrase “spring up” means to appear or develop quickly and suddenly. We can say many tall buildings spring up all over the city. Now in para. 6 “If that kind of thing had happened when I was young, the whole village would have condemned such an ungrateful son, and his father would surely have given him a good beating.” Here the author used subjunctive mood to express the unreal condition. Teachers can use it to make sentences like — If I had worked harder, I would have made it...

To understand the essay better, students need to understand all these language points. But that’s not the end of the story. They need to know something about the content — the history, the tradition, the culture, etc. behind all these [5].

In content itself — The farmer and his wife want to pass on the land to their children because they want their children to remember their roots and inherit everything symbolized by the land: hard work, simplicity, thrift, self-reliance, kindness and generosity, love of nature, love of family, worship of gods... To put it simple, it is their history, their culture, their tradition. Then how about the old couple’s children? Teachers can not forget them. Even though they are the absent one, they are “here” in their parents’ voices, which produce a feeling of actually **being here**. **So teachers got two protagonists in this text — the visible** and the invisible. One is the old couple, the older generation, the attendant, who prefer traditional life style, the other is their children, the younger generation, the absent, who prefer modern way of life. The old couple want the land to tie their children down or call them back from the cities, to remember where they are from and inherit their tradition, while their children don’t see any attraction in farming and, as soon as possible, leave for the city. Modernization and industrialization have attracted significant percentages of rural population into seeking “better future” by joining in the rural to urban migration into cities, where there may be more job opportunities and higher pay. As a result, farming is left to the old. Hence, we have this urbanization. What is tradition? What is urbanization? And what is their relationship? A pair of contradiction or even opposition? According to Oxford Dictionary, tradition is a belief, custom or way of doing sth. That has existed for a long time among a particular group of people; a set of these beliefs or customs. Urbanization is the quality or state of being urbanized or the process of becoming urbanized, according to Webster. It is the process by which more and more people leave the countryside to live and work in cities or the process of creating towns in country areas. From their definition, we can see that tradition focuses on: “inheritance” — inheritance of the past; urbanization focuses on “change” — change for the past. It is inevitable that there are some contradictions and conflicts between the two. But it is not beneficial to focus on their differences all the time. Teachers can not ignore their similarities. They are products of the evolution of human civilization. In the past, teachers tried to improve productivity and accumulate materials to cope with

shortages and meet the basic needs of life. After that, teachers got indulged in it. Later, to a certain degree, it seemed that people made it in material-accumulating, while the environment was also destroyed. Some people keep thinking about returning to nature. This is not the concern in Thailand only, and many developing countries have the same concern. China is no exception, as a big agricultural country. How to solve it? Put the two in opposite positions? Take one and abandon the other? Well, this has nothing to do with age, with the tradition or urbanization represented by age, and there is no need to put them in opposite positions. The Chinese internet celebrity Li Ziqi can be taken for example, she is well-known for posting and sharing “traditional” videos to show Chinese traditional culture. And she has a large number of domestic and foreign fans. They like her way of life, so have they put it into practice? A question mark. It embodies the contradiction of human nature. These people who live in the city but yearn for a life style like her are those who have already abandoned tradition in the eyes of the old couple in the text. Perhaps even they’ll feel the same way. But Li’s video gave them a chance to find out the truth that “the root” has always been here. Tradition has always been here. So this is about whether we get our inner peace. As long as people get it, they’ll develop a harmonious relationship with themselves, with nature and with society. There is no contradiction, no opposition, only harmony. In this part, the teacher takes a lead to make the conclusion about the message of the land. After that, the students can develop their own understanding for the message of the land to develop their creative thinking ability.

4.7 Speaking Activities

Topics to discuss — the characters of the farmer and his wife; their fine qualities; their differences and similarities; student’s own understanding about the message of the land; their choices and reasons for doing it, etc. This is to practice their ability to make affective communication with what they have learned in this essay or beforehand.

4.8 Exercises After Text

Students should finish all the exercises after text, and the teacher will select some of them, especially the more difficult ones to explain for them to help them understand better.

4.9 Reinforcement

To enhance the students’ understanding of the text by retelling the story and discussing some closely-related topics is the reinforcement of this unit.^[6] And the teacher can ask the students to think about their own message to pass on to their children in the future. This is the output of learning this essay, which is a very good opportunity to improve their thinking abilities.

5 Conclusion

The world is constantly changing and people living in this world are changing too. And there is no exception for the students. Teachers and students are encountering the constantly changing students with different needs and purposes to satisfy, so the design of the course syllabus cannot be settled. It should keep changing according to changing participants.

Authors' Contributions. This paper is independently completed by Xiaoyan Li.

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