



# Research on College English Teaching Reform Based on *China's Standards of English Language Ability*

Xiaoqing Liu

School of Guangzhou Institute of Science and Technology, Guangzhou, Guangdong 510540, China

190803551@qq.com

**Abstract.** In recent years, with the in-depth development of the new curriculum teaching reform and the rapid development of the social economy, traditional English teaching is no longer suitable for the development of the current era. The setting of teaching objectives, the planning of the learning process, the setting of curriculum construction and the setting of evaluation systems cannot meet the current situation and requirements of students and teaching. English teaching reform is imminent, only reform can better meet the needs of social development, improve the quality of teaching, and promote the improvement of students' English ability. China's Standards of English Language Ability is a new English teaching concept born under the background of reform. The Scale provides a more scientific, effective, unified, and coherent standard for Chinese English learners in various stages of education, which has a great impact on college English teaching. Under the guidance of the Scale, this paper aims to optimize the existing college English teaching model, reconstruct the new teaching environment, and improve the quality of foreign language application-oriented talents training from the aspects of optimizing teaching, adjusting students' learning methods and perfecting the assessment.

**Keywords:** China's Standards of English Language Ability; College English; Cultivation of talents; Teaching reform.

## 1 Introduction

The Language Proficiency scale can be used as the basis of language assessment and can also provide direction for language teaching and learning. Currently, the most influential of several language proficiency scales in the world is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Although English is the most widely used foreign language in our country, and there are many kinds of English exams and involving huge numbers of people, there has been a lack of a unified English ability rating for a long time. In June 2018, the Ministry of Education issued China's Standards of English Language Ability to fill this gap. Based on many empirical studies, the scale describes English ability continuously, which not only describes the current ability level of English learners and users in China, but also stipulates the level to be achieved in the future

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S. Zhu et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Education, Language and Art (ICELA 2023)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 831,

[https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-214-9\\_25](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-214-9_25)

[1]. Liu Jianda and Peng Chuan (2017) also put forward that the scale is both descriptive and prescriptive. “The scale’s description reflects that it cannot only start from the current situation of Chinese English learners and scientifically reflect the distribution of Chinese English learners’ current level, but also can comprehensively and effectively describe the English skills of learners and reflects the English development level of learners at different educational stages or school ages. The specification is reflected in that the scale can provide scientific, effective, unified and coherent target description for English learners of different educational stages or school ages, and with different learning objectives, which reflects the talent training needs of English education in China and the requirements of the society on English application ability” [2].

As a self-made scale with Chinese local characteristics, the scale has attracted extensive attention from both Chinese and English educators and learners. Xu Yi et al. (2019) focused on the graded quantitative and qualitative verification of interpreting competence descriptors in China’s Standards of English Language Ability [3]. Gu Xiangdong et al. (2019) found that the students’ self-assessment of their reading ability was influenced by their actual English reading skills [4]. Zhang Wenjing (2020)’s study observed that the implementation of self-assessment techniques in junior high schools contributed to improved English scores among students [5]. According to Zhu Lanhui’s findings in 2020, individuals with higher levels of English proficiency demonstrated a greater ability to accurately self-assess their skills compared to those with lower English proficiency [6]. The student-centered approach of Wang Hua (2020) connects Shanghai Jiao Tong University English Proficiency Test (SJTU-EPT) with CSE [7]. In a study conducted by Mu Lei et al. (2021), revealed that when evaluated on the CSE scales, grade-three students scored lower in interpretation ability compared to grade-four students [8]. Through a review of previous literature, it can be found that although scholars have done much research on China’s Standards of English Language Ability, the research on the specific application strategies of the scale in college English teaching is not systematic and perfect. Therefore, this study can make up the gap to some extent.

## **2 The Guiding Significance of China’s Standards of English Language Ability for College English Teaching**

The scale consists of a general table, a sub-skill general table, a sub-skill table and a self-assessment table. Each English learner can not only accurately locate his or her stage through the general table and sub-table, but also directly make intuitive self-assessment through the self-assessment table. The scale has practical reference significance and a guiding role in English teaching, learning and testing in China. At the same time, the formulation and release of the scale make up for the gap in foreign language teaching in this field and is a comprehensive consideration of objective needs and feasibility. Wang Shouren (2018) said that the scale “will contribute to the top-level design and overall planning of foreign language education in China so that foreign language teaching at all levels and of all kinds can have clear and orderly goals, scientific testing and evaluation standards in language ability training.” It will provide a kind of macro

guidance for English teaching in China, which will have strong guidance for teaching, examination and evaluation [9].

## **2.1 To Change the Current Situation of “Exam-Oriented Education” and to Improve Students’ Comprehensive Proficiency in Applying English**

First, college English is faced with non-English major students, who generally have weak English application ability, serious polarization in English learning, and weak subjective initiative in learning. Secondly, for a long time, because of the limitation of "exam-oriented education", English teaching in our country has been difficult to get rid of all kinds of examinations, whether in primary schools, junior high schools, or universities, examination plays an extremely important position in teaching. These utilitarian tests make students lose interest in learning English gradually and are not conducive to the improvement of students' comprehensive English application ability. Due to the lack of learning motivation, purpose and enthusiasm of most students, the "student-centered" teaching reform plan is difficult to carry out.

Based on the Use-oriented principle and what the learners can do, according to China's national conditions, China's Standards of English Language Ability divides the English ability of Chinese English learners and users into three stages from basic to proficient, and nine levels from basic application stage to proficient stage. This grading method comprehensively covers all ability stages from primary to advanced. Compared with traditional English teaching, the scale proposes to reduce the number of examinations and reform the examination content. Moreover, after students take the grade energy examination, they can also achieve a variety of uses through one examination. Therefore, under the guidance of the scale, teachers can reduce the burden of students' examinations, and help them get rid of the tension in the examination, so as to change the status quo of "exam-oriented education". In addition, the scale describes the sub-abilities of listening, speaking, reading, writing, translation and language behavior in detail, which can make English teaching develop in a more diversified direction and emphasize the comprehensive application as the center of English teaching.

## **2.2 To Change the Teaching Mode of Separating Teaching and Testing Objectives and to Improve Students’ English Practical Application Ability**

First, in the current college English teaching, the situation of "emphasizing knowledge over skills" is still relatively common. On the one hand, many non-English major students do not pay enough attention to English; on the other hand, college English is a general course, and teachers pay more attention to vocabulary and grammar teaching. This teaching mode is not conducive to cultivating advanced applied talents. Secondly, college English is aimed at students from different majors with great differences in student level, but the textbooks used are almost the same, which cannot meet the learning needs of learners with different levels and requirements. Therefore, to cultivate students' comprehensive proficiency in applying English, so that they can get better development in study and job hunting, setting diversified and personalized teaching goals is an urgent problem to be solved in college English education. China's Standards of

English Language Ability proposes to reduce the number of tests, reform the test content, and pay attention to the cultivation of students' comprehensive proficiency in applying English, which can gradually solve the problem of the separation of teaching and testing objectives in the future.

### **2.3 To Change the Current Situation of Single Evaluation Criteria and to Cultivate Students' Autonomous Learning Ability**

First, the existing college English evaluation system still focuses on the final evaluation results. Teachers and students pay more attention to the examination rather than the process, which cannot achieve the purpose of promoting learning and teaching through evaluation. Secondly, the test content of most schools is separated from the teaching objectives, which cannot comprehensively examine the comprehensive language ability of students. Finally, China's English evaluation system lacks coherence from the primary to advanced level, and the evaluation criteria also lack unity due to the different requirements for English proficiency, which causes many problems. Therefore, English teaching is in urgent need of a set of quantitative and clear English ability assessment systems that can serve English teaching at all levels. The introduction of the scale provides a more scientific, coherent and unified evaluation table for English teaching. On the one hand, teachers can measure students' English level according to the scale, so that the assessment is more authoritative. On the other hand, under the guidance of the scale, students will not be troubled by the school grades. They use the scale to measure their English level, which can be well connected with large-scale tests at home and abroad, and clearly know their English level, so as to stimulate students' self-learning consciousness and to cultivate students' autonomous learning ability.

## **3 The Reform Path of College English Teaching under the Guidance of China's Standards of English Language Ability**

### **3.1 The Reform of Educational Theories and Related Policies, and the Establishment of Graded Teaching Standards**

At the school level, first, under the guidance of the scale, schools can change the previous way of classifying classes only based on the English score of the college entrance examination or the test score at the beginning of the semester. Schools can carry out grading tests on students in the two aspects of basic knowledge and language communication, and include written examination, oral examination and listening as the test items for class placement, to improve the proportion of application ability and rationalize class placement. Secondly, when the school formulates the teaching syllabus, the teaching materials can be reasonably graded based on the scale's description system, so that the teaching syllabus and activities reflect the ladder type, progressive and coherent. The use of unified standards to divide students and textbooks into different classes and grades can achieve accurate positioning, ensure individualized teaching from the source, and help promote the diversification and standardization of English courses.

Multi-level teaching is also one of the objectives of curriculum reform. Finally, in the course construction, teachers can transform the description based on "can do" in the scale into specific small teaching objectives with strong operability, refine the teaching design, and further clarify the teaching tasks and teaching focus.

### **3.2 The Reform of Curriculum Setting and the Perfection of the Teaching Process**

First, the amount of college English classes in most universities is relatively small, and the curriculum is usually 2-4 hours per week for two semesters. Therefore, to ensure that teachers have enough time to train students' various abilities, to achieve the purpose of cultivating students' application abilities. Under the guidance of the scale, schools can take college English courses as the leading role, take the training of language application ability as the main line, and increase the proportion of English practice courses. Such adjustment makes the curriculum system more scientific and reasonable, and more in line with the requirements of students.

Secondly, the scale adopts the principle of application and aims at language use, which has important reference significance for improving students' pragmatic ability in college English teaching. Through the combination of online and offline resources, teachers can set typical tasks and activities according to different levels of teaching objects and develop teaching plans with certain adaptability and variability, so as to realize the online and offline two-tier curriculum system. For example, teachers can combine the physical classroom content and make full use of the speaking platform and listening platform to assign different levels of tasks to students, so as to carry out human-computer interaction, teacher-student interaction and student-student interaction. In addition, China's Standards of English Language Ability contains verified language activities, which can be used as a reference for teachers to design teaching activities.

### **3.3 The Reform of College English Teaching Methods and the Optimization of Talent Training Programs**

The concept of scale overturns the traditional closed teaching concept, breaks the current situation of learning English for examination, and highlights the improvement of students' practical language ability. The English learning ability and autonomy of non-English major students in colleges and universities are generally not strong, and the basic purpose of the implementation of the scale is to change the traditional education and teaching method based on students' achievements. The scale emphasizes the cultivation of students' practical ability, so the focus of teaching has changed from the inculcation of knowledge to the cultivation of students' practical use and the output of language. Therefore, in the process of college English teaching, teachers can appropriately reduce the explanation of theoretical knowledge, and strengthen students' practical abilities. Through various forms of teaching interaction, students can gradually master various methods in a subtle way. For example, teachers can take the actual needs of English as guidance, focus on cultivating students' English application ability, carry out the discussion of information input, and assist students to conduct in-depth language

skills exploration and skills practice, so as to achieve effective output. In this process, teachers can design a variety of classroom activities, such as flipped classrooms, role-playing, specific situation settings, thematic teaching and so on, to fully mobilize students' internal motivation for language learning, so that students take the initiative to participate in the classroom, completely different communication tasks, so as to achieve the development of language ability. In addition, the scale gives a detailed description of students' English listening, speaking, reading and writing strategies. Therefore, teachers should also pay attention to the infiltration of relevant strategies into teaching methods in the teaching process, so that students can perceive the use of different strategies in the learning process, so as to achieve a silent effect and improve students' English autonomous learning ability.

### **3.4 The Reform of the Evaluation Mechanism and the Construction of Multiple Evaluation System**

As a programmatic document to standardize English proficiency standards, the scale provides an authoritative, coherent and unified evaluation system for English teaching, and has an important impact on improving the evaluation mechanism in college English teaching. Constructing a multiple evaluation system is an important part of college English teaching reform. Therefore, it is the duty and responsibility of each teacher to make effective use, organic integration and mutual promotion of formative evaluation and terminal evaluation. First, under the guidance of the scale, teachers can take formative assessment as a part of daily teaching and take it as a process assessment throughout the whole teaching process. The scale can measure all aspects of students' English level more scientifically and concretely. For example, in the process of college English teaching, teachers can use the portfolio method in the scale to record the learning process and effect of each student including learning plan, content, activities, reflection, comprehensive evaluation and other aspects. Electronic portfolios can effectively present students' learning outcomes and teachers' teaching feedback and play a positive role in teaching and learning.

Secondly, in college, some students take CET-4 and CET-6 as their English learning goals, but utilitarian learning often leads to the bad effect of failing to improve the language application ability or falling off a cliff of language knowledge after obtaining the certificate. The scale provides a uniform reference standard for these summative examinations, such as academic tests or graded examinations. At the same time, the evaluation results of the scale can also be directly connected with other tests, so that students can more clearly know the gap, achieve the purpose of "multi-purpose in one test", and promote the diversified development of the test evaluation system. Professor Liu Jianda (2018) pointed out that to further realize the classroom test and school-based examinations as well as national and even international examination smooth docking, teachers and students need interaction and communication to establish comprehensive, dynamic, inspiring, accessible and relevant high-quality formative evaluation <sup>[10]</sup>.

### **3.5 The Improvement of Teachers' Quality and the Renewal of Teaching Ideas**

Good teachers can make a difference in their students' progress (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005) <sup>[11]</sup>. In most studies, the quality of teaching practices, in other words, instructional quality, was communicated with three dimensions: effective classroom management, individual learning support, cognitive activation (Warwas & Helm, 2018) <sup>[12]</sup>. Teachers are the guides on the way of students' learning. Although students have acquired certain learning abilities and mature logical thinking abilities in university, the status of teachers in education and teaching is still irreplaceable. In the process of college English teaching, to carry out the new ideas of reducing the number of tests, reforming the test content and cultivating students' English language practical application ability advocated by China's Standards of English Language Ability, it is necessary to improve the comprehensive quality of teachers. Therefore, in college English teaching, to effectively carry out teaching and cultivate students' English language knowledge and practical application ability, on the one hand, schools can formulate some training courses, constantly strengthen the training of teachers, and expand the strength of teachers. On the other hand, to reduce the teaching burden for teachers and avoid their job burnout, it is necessary to optimize the teaching objectives and arrangement reasonably. In this way, as far as possible, they can carry out teaching with full enthusiasm in class, guide students to learn English knowledge and improve their comprehensive English literacy. At the same time, teachers should change their teaching methods and concepts, improve their teaching quality, and get ready for the development of English teaching.

### **3.6 The Change of Self-Cognition and Learning Consciousness, and the Cultivation of Students' English Comprehensive Ability**

College English teaching reform should focus on the cultivation of English ability. The scale not only has a positive effect on college English teaching but also has a positive effect on students' self-learning. The scale encourages English learners to develop their learning process, stimulate their internal motivation, and turn passive learning into active learning. In the process of college English teaching, teachers should learn to cultivate students' autonomous learning abilities, so that students give full play to the role of "the main bearer of learning" and let them explore the broad English knowledge by themselves, feel the charm of the English course.

First, the complete general table and sub-ability scale in the scale can intuitively and effectively enable students to carry out self-assessment, and the description of "I can" in the scale can locate the level of students' English ability in every aspect. Therefore, teachers can guide students to form a clear and accurate self-positioning of their English level by referring to the self-rating scale. After having an accurate self-cognition, students will have a clear direction for the next step of learning. This will greatly promote the cultivation of students' autonomous learning ability and strengthen their subjective initiative. With the ability of autonomous learning ability, students will be more willing to explore English knowledge, so their horizons will be wider and wider, and their abilities will be better cultivated.

Secondly, the scale is not only a rating scale for Chinese people to learn English knowledge but also an international rating scale. The analysis of English knowledge by the ability scale in scale is in line with international English knowledge, which can meet the diversified needs of different people and cultivate students' intercultural communication abilities. Therefore, when cultivating students' abilities, teachers should not only focus on cultivating student's ability in a certain aspect but also play the role of the ability rating scale in many aspects to cultivate students' comprehensive ability.

## 4 Conclusion

The existing college English teaching has many shortcomings, such as students' language ability not being effectively developed, the method and content of the teaching evaluation system being single, students' learning initiative is not high, and the teaching reform is slowly promoted. The introduction of the scale provides a breakthrough for college English teaching reform, which is conducive to the establishment and improvement of the college English teaching model in line with the trend of language development and application ability. In the reform of college English teaching, to promote the reform of English teaching, improve the level of college English teaching and enhance the English ability of college students, both teachers and students should study the content of the scale carefully from the aspects of teaching objectives, teaching contents, teaching methods and evaluation mechanism. Through this reform, we can better cultivate innovative application talents in line with international trends and market demand.

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