

# A Research into College English Curriculum Development

## -----From the Perspective of General Education

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**ABSTRACT:** Based on the philosophy of general education and the theories of curriculum development, and under the guidance of College English Curriculum Requirements (2007) and National Medium and Long-term Educational Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020), this study aims to explore the feasibility of College English curriculum development from the perspective of general education through an empirical study in Anhui Agricultural University, a key provincial comprehensive university, at the same time attempts to put forward the easily-conducted and practical learning framework of College English curriculum reform.

**KEYWORD:** College English; General Education; Curriculum Reform

### 1 LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 1.1 *General Education Curriculum*

General education curriculum refers to designing the schoolwork and its process according to the purposes and goals of liberal education. General education is to enable students to master extensive knowledge with common sense and form a unified understanding and world outlook. So enforcement of general education should be supported by the curriculum system made up with a plenty of knowledge in many specialties.

#### 1.2 *College English Curriculum*

College English refers to English classes opened exclusively for non-English major students, originally known as Public English. College English Curriculum Requirements (2007) (CECR) by Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education makes the new regulations concerning the character and objective of College English: College English is a required basic course for undergraduate students as an important part of higher learning. Under the guidance of theories of foreign language teaching, College English has as its main components knowledge and practical skills of the English language, learning strategies and cross-cultural exchanges.

Based on the two concepts of curriculum development and College English, College English curriculum development can be interpreted as: in order to attain the objectives of College English

education, all the colleges and universities, according to the goals of their respective talents training and specific circumstances, set a series of courses in a planned and organized way, including their objectives, contents, structures, implementation and evaluation.

#### 1.3 *Necessity and Significance of Developing a New College English Curriculum*

Let's take a broad view of the entire educational circles and we know the national higher education has developed into a new stage. In view of strengthening international exchanges and cooperation spirit required by National Medium and Long-term Educational Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020), the Ministry of Education has issued a large number of relevant documents in order to promote the international development of colleges and universities in educational concept and enrollment system, etc. And general education which is advanced really fits the needs of building the internationalized universities.

College English teaching reform in the past decade mostly stayed in the teaching structure, teaching framework or teaching hardware changes. Zhuang Zhixiang states (2010): language not only is a tool, but also should be one of the humanities and a social science. Therefore, our College English teaching should be shifted from pure framework reform to curriculum reform. College English course not only is a basic language course, but also should be a quality education course for students to broaden

their horizons and understand the world culture. General education aims to cultivate the world citizens with multicultural views. So it is self-evident that we should carry out College English general education teaching. The focus of College English teaching reform is to use English as language tool to impart general education; more precisely, foreign language should be changed into the content carrier, whereas general education is the main content of foreign language teaching.

## 2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this survey-based study a quasi-experimental study with a pre-test and post-test non-equivalent group design is used to test the feasibility.

### 2.1 Subjects

College English is a required basic course for undergraduate non-English major students. 61 subjects, who are from two intact classes of non-English freshmen in Anhui Agricultural University, are involved in this study. Class A is the experimental class, which consists of 30 students. Class B is the control class, which consists of 31 students. The two classes have the similar average English achievements now that their average scores for College English entrance exam are similar.

The two classes are assigned to the author at random by the university. They belong to the same department and they learn the same subjects. The age of the subjects ranges from 18 to 21. Eleven of them are females in experimental group while twelve females in control group.

English for general education is taught in the experimental class, Class A, while traditional basic English is taught in the control class, Class B. All of them take a pre-test which contains Band 3 questions. The teacher of the two groups is the present author. Since the researcher teaches both classes, the instructional differences caused by using teachers from different backgrounds can be easily controlled and the researcher can only concentrate on the contrasts caused by different teaching contents.

### 2.2 Instruments

The instruments used in this study are questionnaire and two tests (College English Test Band 3 and Band 4).

#### 2.2.1 Band 3 and Band 4 tests

Band 3 and Band 4 tests are held before experiment and after experiment. It is essential to do English test in order to know the similarities and differences between the two groups in their English level before the experiment so that their English level can be

compared after the experiment. The author uses the pre-test paper designed according to College English Test Band 3. After the experiment, the two groups are asked to do the post-test paper designed according to College English Test Band 4.

Both tests are finished within a set time (120 minutes according to CET-4)

#### 2.2.2 Questionnaire

According to the theory of need analysis, one of the key elements of curriculum development, any courses should be based on students' demands. So, one questionnaire is designed by the author for the research into the effects of College English curriculum embodying the philosophy of general education and the students' feedback. It is held among the students in Class A after the first term. The questionnaire, which is made up of two forms: multiple-choice questions and answering questions, aims to enable the author to know the students' learning needs and make further teaching improvements in the next term

### 2.3 Procedures

The experiment was conducted in the first term when the subjects began their first year college study in September 2012, which lasts two terms. The following are the experimental procedures.

In the first step, a pre-test is done. That is, before the experiment, the entire subjects take a College English Test Band 3, through which students' English levels in two classes are shown. By doing so, the author can collect the results of students' English levels in order to compare it with the results of a post-test. This step is indispensable because it is chiefly to explore whether College English curriculum development under the perspective of general education can improve students' performance in College English learning.

In the second step, the author begins to design the lessons and implement English courses embodying the philosophy of general education for Class A and traditional courses for Class B. All the English courses are taught by the author including intensive reading and listening courses for Class B and several English courses embodying the philosophy of general education for Class A. At the end of the first term a questionnaire was conducted in Class A in order to obtain students' feedback on the experiment and their further needs for English learning. By doing so, the author can form correct judgments and make appropriate improvements in the courses for the second term. The following tables are the teaching practice of the courses for two classes.

Table 1. Teaching practice of the courses for freshmen in the first term

Category of Class	Class A (experimental group)	Class B (control group)
Teaching period	4 hours every week Total: 60 hours	4 hours every week Total: 60 hours
Teaching model	Classroom-based Computer-based	Classroom-based Computer-based
Teaching materials and distribution of teaching hours	1. Appreciation of English Movies (1) (20 hours) 2. Intercultural Communication (20 hours) 3. A Comparison between Chinese and English Cultures (20 hours) 4. Encyclopedic Reading in English (2) (after-class reading for students)	1. Intensive Reading Book One (40hours) 2. Viewing, Listening and Speaking book One (20 hours)

Table 2. Teaching practice of the courses for freshmen in the second term

Class	Class A	Class B
Teaching period	4 hours every week Total: 60 hours	4 hours every week Total: 60 hours
Teaching model	Classroom-based Computer-based	Classroom-based Computer-based
Teaching materials and distribution of teaching hours	1. Mass Media Reading (20 hours) 2. Appreciation of English Movies (2) (20 hours) (20 hours) 3. Science and Technology English Writing (20 hours) 4. Encyclopedic Reading in English (2) (after-class reading for students)	1. Intensive Reading Book Two (40hours) 2. Viewing, Listening and Speaking Book Two (20 hours)

Two tables show that the courses for two classes are different. The courses designed for Class B are traditional College English intensive reading plus listening. College English teaching is restricted to helping students build a sound language base.

The courses designed for Class A are English courses embodying the philosophy of general education which cover a wide range of language and culture, science and technology, life and society etc. That is to say, in such courses English is used as a tool to spread world culture in every field. These courses not only expand the connotation and function of general English course but also enable students to read more extensive multidisciplinary knowledge while learning English language.

In the third step, one questionnaire was conducted among students in Class A in December 2012 at the end of the first term. This questionnaire aims to investigate students' feedback on the experiment, and find out the effects of English courses for general education and students' further needs for English learning.

In the fourth step, the students are asked to take part in a post-test (CET-4) in June 2013 and then the author makes record of their performance to check whether there is a sharp difference of English proficiency between the two groups.

In the fifth step, the collected data are analyzed, so the questions of the experiment will be answered.

### 3 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

#### 3.1 Data-collection and Analysis

##### 3.1.1 Questionnaire for Students' Feedback on the Experiment

This questionnaire aims to investigate students' feedback on the experiment, and find out the effects of English courses for general education and students' further needs for English learning. The questionnaire consists of 5 multiple-choice questions and answering question. The questionnaire was conducted in Dec.2012 at the end of the first term. The following is a brief analysis of students' feedback in Class A.

Table 3. Students' feedback in class A at the end of the first term (Students-S)

Question Number	Choice A		Choice B		Choice C	
	S	%	S	%	S	%
1	27	90%	1	3.3%	2	6.7%
2	25	83.3%	2	6.7%	3	10%
3	19	63.3%	4	13.3%	7	23.3%
4	22	73.3%	2	6.7%	6	20%
5	24	80%	2	6.7%	5	16.7%

From the table, we can clearly see that the majority of students (90%) are interested in the current College English teaching. The results of the second question show that 25 (83.3%) students have got the new idea of English learning after learning College English courses embodying the idea of general education for one term. The answers of the third question reveal that over half of the students

(63.3%) will have more confidence in communication with native speakers of English. The results of the fourth question prove that 22 (73.3%) students often search for relevant English materials concerning general education in order to broaden their knowledge horizon. According to the answers of the fifth question, most students (80%) do hope they can obtain more English courses embodying the idea of general education.

In answering questions, most students think that they have reaped a lot of benefits of College English courses embodying the idea of general education. They agree that these subjects have expanded their cultural horizons to a great extent. One of the students wrote: I find a new way to learn and use English through learning these subjects. Meanwhile, many students hope that they can learn more courses like these; especially English courses related to their specialties and get more teaching hours. They also want to see more English movies.

### 3.1.2 Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test

#### 3.1.2.1 Comparison of the pre-test

In order to get to know the similarities or differences of the students in their English ability between the two classes before the experiment so as to make a comparison with their English ability after the experiment, it becomes quite necessary to know their performances in the English test. The test paper is designed according to the College English Test Band 3 with high validity and reliability. The pre-test was conducted in September 2012. The data about listening, reading in depth, fast reading, cloze, translation and writing are shown in the following table.

Table 4. The average score of each item for pre-test

	Class A	Class B
Listening (25)	8.5	8.2
Reading In Depth (25)	15.3	16.1
Fast Reading (10)	7.1	6.5
Cloze (10)	6.5	6.7
Translation (5)	2.3	2.8
Writing (25)	14.7	14.9
Total (100)	14.7	55.1

This table provides information that 54.4 are the total average score of Class A, while the average score of Class B is 55.1. Their average scores remain almost at the same level and Class B is slightly better than Class A, especially in reading and translation which reveals that students in Class B have a bit better ability of English language application than those in Class A. Listening comprehension is poor in both of the classes. Class A is better in fast reading item but a little weaker in writing and cloze.

It can be seen that although there exist some slight differences in different items of the testing paper between the two classes, the average scores remain almost at the same level. So, it can be concluded that there seems no apparent difference in students' English ability before the experiment.

Table 5. Comparison of the pre-test results between the experimental and control classes

Class	Class A	Class B
Students	30	31
Average score	54.4	55.1
80-90	0	0
70-80	3	2
60-70	12	14
60below	15	15
Pass rate	50%	51.60%

Obvious from this table is that a large number of students in two classes didn't pass the test. 15 students in each class failed. Their passing rates are quite low, and just reach half percent, Class A is 50% and Class B is 51.6%.

#### 3.1.2.2 Comparison of post-test

In experimental study, College English courses embodying the idea of general education were employed in Class A whereas the traditional general English courses were used in Class B. This experiment was conducted at the beginning of the first term for the freshmen which lasts two terms from September 2012 to June 2013. After the experiment, in June 2013 the two classes were asked to take College English Test Band 4. The average performance of the students after the experiment is demonstrated in the following table.

Table 6. The average score of each item for post-test

Class	Class A	Class B
Listening (25)	16.2	14.7
Reading In Depth (25)	19.4	17.3
Fast Reading (10)	8.1	7.3
Cloze (10)	7.5	6.9
Translation (5)	3.8	3.5
Writing (25)	17.1	15.9
Total (100)	72.1	65.6

From the table, it can be seen that all of the students have made progress in all items. They made considerable improvements in listening, reading and writing. The students in Class A improved their total average score by approximately 32.5%. In contrast, the total average score in Class B was increased by approximately 19.1%. So, both classes achieved better scores after two-term College English learning, but compared with the control class, Class

B, the experimental class, Class A improved their scores to a relatively high degree.

Table 7. Comparison of the post-test results between the experimental and control classes

Class	Class A	Class B
Students	30	31
Average score	72.1	65.6
80-90	4	1
70-80	7	4
60-70	17	21
60below	2	5
Pass rate	93.30%	83.90%

This table shows that both classes improved a lot in their total average scores, but the average score in Class A is much higher than that in Class B. Compared with the number of students in the pre-test, there is much less number of students in two classes who failed in the test. Compared with the respective passing rate 50% and 51.6% in the pre-test, the passing rate is 93.3% and 83.9% in the post-test. There are 11 students in Class A whose scores are above 70 while only 5 students in Class B get their scores above 70. Obviously the students in Class A, the experimental class achieved better performance.

### 3.1.2.3 Comparison between the pre-test and post-test

In order to make a clear comparison of students' performance in the two tests, the increasing rates of students' average scores are shown in the following table.

Table 8. Comparison of both classes between the pre-test and post-test

Average score	Pre-test	Post-test	Increasing rate
Class A	54.4	72.1	32.5%
Class B	55.1	65.6	19.1%

The post-test average score in Class A is 17.7 points higher than the pre-test, increased 32.5%, while the post-test average score in Class B is 10.5 points higher than the pre-test, increased 19.1%.

This table definitely proves that the students' performance in English learning can be improved to a large degree if students are taught with College English curriculum embodying the idea of general education.

## 3.2 Research into the Feasibility of College English Curriculum Development from the Perspective of General Education

### 3.2.1 Analysis of Feasibility of Implementing General Education in College English Curriculum

Based on the data collected from the experiment, students taught with College English curriculum embodying the idea of general education perform better in their learning. So, College English curriculum redesigned with the idea of general education is very practical.

First, the aim of foreign language education is not just to master the language skills, and what's more important is the transmission of knowledge and cultural exchanges.

Second, there exist quite lot problems about the current College English curriculum: the curriculum is quite single, and its curriculum knowledge is not new or deep. So it can't form college students' intellectual challenge, cannot draw students' attention, or cannot excite young people's desire for knowledge. All those factors hinder College English from achieving its goals.

Third, with the increasingly fierce international competition, talent strategy has become the important step in the planning of social development in each country. College education aims to cultivate innovative talents who should have both the breadth and depth of knowledge. Undoubtedly this has brought new challenges for College English education, thus prompting the reform of College English training model in order to meet the social needs for talents with high quality.

### 3.2.2 Tentative Framework for College English Curriculum Development Embodying the Philosophy of General Education

CECR (2007) advances: College English should act on the principle of providing different guidance for different groups of students and educating them according to their aptitude in order to satisfy the specific needs of individualized teaching. Colleges and universities should set their own objectives based on their specific circumstances, make efforts to create favorable conditions, and enable the students with stronger capacity for learning and relatively higher English proficiency to meet the intermediate or advanced requirements.

Still according to CECR (2007), the course system, which is a combination of required and selective course, includes comprehensive English, language skills, language and culture, English for practical uses, and English of specialty. College English courses should ensure students make improvement in their ability to use English.

Based on the theories of general education and the character of College English, this paper tries to

set the objectives for College English courses embodying the idea of general education. This tentative curriculum, on the basis of other scholars' relevant research results, will highlight the combination of language skills and idea of general education.

According to CECR (2007), college students should be taught at three levels: basic level, intermediate level and advanced level.

After non-English majors enter the colleges or universities, they have to take English grading examination. According to the results of the examination, students are divided into two levels: intermediate level class and up-intermediate level class. Students with intermediate level start their comprehensive English learning for the first two terms, after that, they turn to learning College English core courses embodying the philosophy of general education while those with up-intermediate level begin to learn College English core courses embodying the philosophy of general education for four terms. All the courses are taught by College English teachers.

After four-term College English learning, in order to keep the four-year continuity of College English learning, all the non-English majors enter the advanced level for College English learning, and English courses of specialty are opened for juniors and seniors. English courses of specialty are chiefly undertaken by specialized teachers.

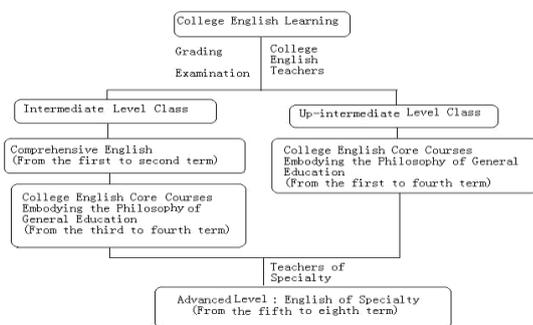


Figure 1. College English learning and curriculum development

#### 4 CONCLUSION

The study holds considerable pedagogical implications. In order to deepen College English teaching reform, first of all, the publicity of general education among teachers and students should be strengthened; secondly, teachers should change the idea of “exam-oriented” teaching; thirdly, teachers should improve their own quality because the quality of teachers is the key to success in College English teaching reform; finally, the formulation of scientific and systematic College English curricula should be appropriate to highlighting the individualized characteristics.

Based on the actual situation, the results of the study have certain representation, providing sufficient evidence for the feasibility and rationality of College English curriculum reform from the perspective of general education.

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