

# *Reflections on the Teaching Practice of British and American Literature*

-A Case Study of Sichuan Minzu College

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**Abstract**—British and American literature is a compulsory course for English majors. In recent years, more and more colleges and universities have reduced or weakened the study of literature courses in order to pursue the practicality of teaching and improve the employment rate of graduates resulting in the decline of teaching quality. This paper takes Sichuan Minzu College as an example to explore the teaching of British and American literature, hoping to promote the teaching quality and improve students' language ability.

**Keywords**—teaching practice; British and American literature; reflections

## I. INTRODUCTION

According to the "Teaching Syllabus for English Majors" issued by Ministry of Education in 2000, "Literature courses aim to cultivate students' ability to read, appreciate and understand English literary works, master the basic knowledge and methods of literary criticism, and promote students' basic linguistic skills and humanistic quality by reading and analyzing English and American literary works, enhance students' understanding of Western literature and culture." [1] However, that is not what happened. In order to meet the needs of the market and cultivate practical talents, the development of British and American literature tends to reduce or decrease, which leads to the decline of teaching quality. Therefore, this paper tries to conduct a research through combining the teaching and practice of British and American literature courses in our college, hoping to increase teaching quality and improve students' language ability.

## II. THE PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUE OF LEARNING BRITISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE COURSES

Literature is one of the manifestations of culture. To learn British and American literature is to learn the cultural characteristics and social reality of the specific historical period in Britain and the United States. Reading literary works not only enhance people reading ability, but also bring them spiritual comfort and psychological needs. Therefore, for the students, the study of literature courses not only improves their professional language ability, expands their professional cultural knowledge but also cultivates their humanistic quality, which has irreplaceable practical significance and value,

mainly reflected in the following aspects: First, literature comes from life, reflects life, and is a high summary of life. Generally speaking, it can preserve history but not all of it. The real life of the contemporary society presented in literary works can bring readers a certain degree of life perception and understanding. Secondly, reading literary stories can enhance the interest and hobbies of English learning, and will completely change passive acceptance into active learning. In the process of reading, students experience the ups and downs of life with words which are different from their mother tongue, so that students can get the influence of foreign culture and the spiritual enjoyment of heterogeneous culture, thus broadening their horizons and broadening their minds. Third, reading classical literary works can enlighten life, experience life in reading, understand life in reading, and ultimately realize the constant improvement of life. All kinds of characters will have a strong appeal to students, and bring positive and encouraging effect to students. Fourthly, reading literary works can directly improve students' thinking ability and become more rational and logical. As professor Wang Shouren, said, "British and American literature is a quality training course. Through reading British and American literary works, students actively participate in the process of finding, discovering and creating the meaning of the text, gradually develop a keen sense of ability, master rigorous analytical methods, and form an accurate expression. This kind of ability of feeling, analysis and expression, which elevates the rich perceptual experience to the abstract rational knowledge, will benefit the students infinitely." [2]

## III. PROBLEMS IN BRITISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE TEACHING

Due to the pressure of employment, more and more colleges and universities are reducing or weakening the study of literature courses in order to pursue the practicality of teaching. For example, they have added practical and effective courses such as translation practice, tourism English and business English, which lead to the decline of teaching quality. English learning only stays at the level of communication. It is widely believed that listening, speaking, reading and writing are enough. As a result, teaching only pays attention to the cultivation of language skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing, thus ignoring the role of British and American

literature in the cultivation of students' humanistic qualities, the expansion of knowledge and the cultivation of higher-level language ability. Students think that learning literature course has no practical application value, except a few students who want to continue to take postgraduate entrance examination, most students do not pay enough attention to literature course, resulting in inefficient learning. Taking Sichuan Minzu College as an example, the problems existing in the teaching of British and American literature are mainly in the following aspects:

1) *Be short of teachers.* Over the past 4 years, foreign teachers in our college have been undertaking the burden of teaching British and American literature. Although foreign teachers can teach English completely at the linguistic level, British and American literature, as a knowledge-based course, has a large amount of information, while students lack a considerable amount of professional knowledge to understand the teaching content, thus affecting the quality of teaching to a great extent. Secondly, due to the cultural differences between China and the West and different ways of thinking, there exist communication barriers between foreign teachers and students in textual analysis. Thirdly, there are also great differences in the selection of teaching content. Generally speaking, the teaching content chosen by foreign teachers will not be the works of selected writers compiled by foreign language experts in China. Therefore, it will undoubtedly lead to a lack of professional knowledge for students who want to continue to do Postgraduates study after graduation, thus increasing the difficulty of their examination. However, most of the local teachers are not competent for the teaching of this course because of the lack of comprehensive literary knowledge and solid literary foundation, and some even have a sense of teaching fear from the bottom of their hearts.

2) *Time limitation.* According to our syllabus, British literature and American literature are taught in only one semester. There are 1.5 hours a week and a total of 27 hours a semester. However, British and American literature courses, especially British literature, involves too much contents, and the number of writers selected for the course is so large that it is impossible to cover them all. In such a limited period of time, teachers can only selectively teach and explain contents according to their own interest, then students will be lack of systematic learning content, leading to students know little about professional knowledge, thus losing confidence and interest in the study of literature courses.

3) *Teaching methods are monotonous and boring.* British and American literature is an intellectual course with a long history, rich learning content and a wide range of knowledge scope. Classroom lecture is one of the popular ways in literature class, in that case, teachers talk more, students' participation is less, quite often students stay in passive acceptance. In addition, the amount of class hours is extremely limited, in the teaching process, the teachers make full use of every minute, and students can only be in the state of continuous listening, writing, thus resulting in a single teaching method and boring.

4) *The construction of teaching materials is not perfect.* At present, the teaching materials of British and American literature are used in our college. Only the writers and works are selected. There is no brief introduction of Britain and American literature history, and there is no introduction to literary criticism theory. The difficulty of preparing lessons is greatly increased. It is necessary to supplement the social and historical background and literary criticism of each stage, but there will inevitably be omissions or personal prejudices in the selection of material content.

#### IV. THINKING AND PRACTICE IN BRITISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE TEACHING

##### A. *Strengthening the Construction and Allocation of Teaching Staff*

The course of British and American literature is an intellectual course, which undoubtedly requires teachers to have a good knowledge of literature, language ability. Although foreign professors can give students a perspective of literary appreciation, the shortcomings of foreign teachers' mobility and instability are obvious. Therefore, it is suggested that schools should try their best to cultivate local teachers who wish to have attainments in the research of British and American literature. In this way, the continuity of teachers has been guaranteed, at the same time, it also gives students more choices, improve their interest in learning and learning efficiency.

##### B. *The Perfection of Teaching Materials and the Increase of Class Hours*

The compilation of textbooks is another important factor that affects teaching effectiveness. "Most of the textbooks in the course of British and American Literature are based on the compilation of the works, together with the necessary explanations of the text, several questions of thought, and a brief introduction to the author. "[3] They lack an introduction to literary theory, literary terminology and the basic components of literature, that is, literary grammar. Therefore, the way of compiling literary textbooks should be reformed. Only by increasing the introduction and training of critical theories and methods can people be taught how to fish. So it is more important to teach people how to fish than to give them fish. Therefore, it is suggested to compile textbooks combining theory with text reading so as to show the vitality of theory in text reading. It is obviously not enough to complete the course of British literature and American literature in one semester, eighteen weeks and 27 hours. It is suggested that the total number of hours per course be extended to achieve the real purpose and significance of studying British and American Literature as stipulated by the Ministry of Education.

##### C. *The Introduction and Practice of "Heuristic" Teaching Mode*

Optimizing the teaching mode can be carried out from the aspects of students' study, teachers' teaching, teaching methods and curriculum design. Applying heuristic teaching to the course teaching is able to improve the teaching quality and

effect. Firstly, the implementation of heuristic teaching classroom must be based on the strengthening of teacher allocation. Literature teachers should not only have a wealth of literary knowledge, but also practice how to better play the role of inspiration in classroom teaching within the limited classroom time, and teachers should also do a good job of interaction with students after class. Secondly, teachers must ensure that students can be inspired in the course of teaching, that is to say, students must be inspired, and can supervise students to consciously complete the homework. Therefore, cultivating the ability to accomplish the task consciously and arousing the initiative and enthusiasm of students have become an indispensable part of heuristic teaching. Only in this way can the significance of heuristic teaching mode be realized. Thirdly, in the future practice mode discussion, we must continue to improve the network platform, so that students can enjoy and access to more resources.

#### *D. Interpretation and Experience of Practical Teaching*

The essence of practical teaching is to let students actively participate in all aspects of teacher's teaching, including pre-class preview, classroom presentation, after-class thinking etc. Students' participation in classroom teaching not only improves their language ability, enriches their professional knowledge, understands the heterogeneous culture, strengthens their humanistic accomplishment, but also nurtures and influences their life experience. Through the interpretation, appreciation and experience of literary works, students are trained to be good at thinking, curiosity, insight and creativity, hoping to

shape students' harmonious, sound and healthy personality through reading.

#### V. CONCLUSION

In short, the serious drawbacks of "emphasizing skills and neglecting humanities" can be seen in university education. While paying attention to language education, we should pay more attention to the cultivation of humanistic quality. Only in this way can we cultivate outstanding college students who can adapt to social development. Under the guidance of the syllabus for English majors in Colleges and universities, we should actively explore the teaching methods and means suitable for British and American literature courses, so as to realize the real purpose and significance of literature courses, so as to achieve the purpose of promoting the cultivation of language ability and the improvement of humanistic quality.

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