

# Research on the Construction of An Ecological System for College English Teaching of Private Institutions of Higher Learning in the Era of We Media

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**Abstract**—As an important concept, ecological has been widely applied to teaching in recent years. Ecological teaching refers to the interactions between knowledge and teachers, between teachers and students and between students and knowledge. The above participants are connected and interact with each other, jointly forming a complete ecological chain. Currently, the ecological degree of teaching is also emphasized in the English teaching of private institutions of higher learning. Throughout the ecological system, the concept of students' ecological niche is particularly highlighted. In traditional English teaching, however, teachers still adopt traditional teaching modes. It is because ecological teaching mode has an incomplete evaluation system for teaching ecology, unclear subject status, inflexible teaching contents and lack of interactions and communications between teachers and students.

**Keywords**—*We Media; English Teaching of Private Institutions of Higher Learning; Ecological; Students' Ecological Niche; Douyin*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis, two American scholars, put forward the concept of We Media in the report of We Media—How Audience Are Shaping the Future of News and Information in 2003 for the first time. These two scholars defined We Media as a new reform of informational technology that occurs when modern technology and global knowledge system integrate with each other. It provides possible channels for offering facts and news to the general public or sharing such contents with them. Currently, the We Media platform commonly applied by the general public in China includes QQ, WeChat, QQ Zone, blog, forum and Douyin. Characterized with timeliness, openness, bi-direction and a wide range, such We Media platforms disseminate information timely and extensively. With popular design concepts, We Media effectively meets users' individualized demands and provides each citizen with a convenient means for sending, receiving and disseminating knowledge and information.

The online We Media on campuses has recently emerged following the prosperous development of online social media.

Due to its short history, it hasn't formed clear and complete explanations or norms regarding the definition of contents and relevant management level. Instead, it is taken as an auxiliary carrier and functional extension of an online media in the campus culture. Nowadays, an increasingly number of colleges and universities, university branches, star teachers and popular student clubs have opened officially certified accounts on Microblog, Renren, WeChat and Douyin. Correspondingly, social-network platforms start to play an ever-growing significant role in campus life, guiding students to see the huge communication potential and use values of social-network platforms. Hence some individual students and groups with creative thinking in universities gladly make use of the media values of online social-network platform and set up their self-operated platform accounts with relevant technology. Advocating a populist line, they provide varied practical functions and disseminate fresh information or news, which are gradually accepted by vast students and teachers. As time pass, such accounts turn into unconventional or unorthodox media brands. With continuous development and expansion, such online accounts further extend and enrich the connotations and representation form of campus online culture, eventually playing roles different from those of the official university media. Regarding operation modes, such official accounts seem to have been a new media of campus communication operated by students. With high media communication power and influences, it symbolizes the formation of online We Media on campus.

## II. ECOLOGICAL TEACHING AND STUDENTS' ECOLOGICAL NICHE

Ecological curricular system refers to taking curricular setting as a dynamic and open ecology in accordance with ecological principles. This system is characterized with being compatible, dynamic and virtuous. The theory of ecological curriculum advocates setting up a dynamic curricular system, in which all curricular elements depend on each other, have interactions and change according to the environment. In addition, the curricular system should have flexible coordination and dynamic balance to meet the diversified and

individualized demands of students from different universities and majors.

Compared with the past studies on college English teaching from the ecological perspective, this study started with students' ecological niche and particularly paid attention to students' learning behavior and process on the microscopic level. Ecological niche consists of ecostate and ecorole. Ecostate refers to the state of a biological unit, including energy, number, occupied resources, intelligence level and development level, which are results accumulated through the interactions between past growth and the environment. Ecorole refers to the real influences or domination power of a biological unit over the environment, including energy, the velocity of material exchange, productive force, growth rate, economic growth rate and the capacity of occupying the new ecological environment.

### III. AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS AFFECTING THE ECOLOGICAL ENGLISH TEACHING OF PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

#### A. Unclear Subject Status

The subject status is essentially about who lies at the center of college English teaching activities. Over the past years, teachers play a dominating role in teaching activities and determine class contents and learning schedule. Conversely, students are in the state of passive obedience in the teaching process. The educational circle has reached a consensus: Forced to study, students can hardly develop an interest in learning, while the teaching activities dominated by teachers fail to stimulate students' interest in study. The academic circle has thus continuously called on enhancing students' domination status in recent years. In addition, frontline teachers also made some trials, trying to encourage students to participate in classroom teaching activities, such as students' trial teaching and classroom games. As is shown by teaching practice in the frontline, however, one of main effects of such teaching activities is the increase in active students' learning opportunities at the cost of shrank learning space for average students. Dominated by teachers, such teaching activities tend to cause the Matthew Effect in teaching, namely the active students become more enthusiastic, while silent students become quieter. The fundamental cause of such a phenomenon is that the subject status remains ambiguous and all teaching activities are still oriented on teachers. As a result, students fail to become the core of teaching activities.

#### B. Rigid Teaching Contents and Lack of Flexibility

Chinese English teaching adopts fixed textbooks. On the one hand, this means is favorable for the unification and synchronization of teaching activities in colleges and universities. On the other hand, teaching contents are inadequately flexible. On the contrary, the English teaching of non-English departments in Britain universities adopt no fixed textbooks. Apart from teaching students in accordance with their aptitude and teaching objectives, teachers generally assign the materials needed by each class to students in advance to force students to preview before each lesson. Otherwise, students will be unable to meet the learning requirements in

class. For instance, the teacher may provide several students' speech videos in the English speech class and requires students to analyze lecturers systematically to find their strengths and weaknesses. In addition, the teacher arranges a related speech topic and gives students enough time and space for lecture activity. Based on watching videos, students learn about the skills and details of lectures directly. In addition, each student automatically learns from the structure of speech draft and the pronunciation skill of oral English through personal preparation. Furthermore, giving a speech in turn allows students to learn from each other's background knowledge and oral English.

#### C. Incomplete and Imperfect Evaluation System

The teaching ecology system is the process of input and output. The teacher and students respectively input time and energy in teaching and learning, while the output is improvement in students' knowledge. An evaluation system is essential for all input and output behaviors. Only when an input behavior is evaluated objectively can its output results be assessed effectively. With evaluation results, teachers can find their strengths and weaknesses and thus improve their teaching quality. Currently, there lacks a systematic teaching evaluation system and the evaluations of college English teaching in most institutions of higher learning adopt a sweeping approach. To get better evaluation results, a teacher is exam-orientated in class and lacks strong stimulus for reforming their teaching methodology. Similarly, students also study for examinations in such an evaluation system and study is less interesting or fun for them. Moreover, knowledge seems to be an item that students are forced to accept from teachers.

#### D. Hindered Interactions between Teachers and Students

In Chinese traditional teaching, teachers have always been strict masters in class and require students' absolute obedience with their instructions. After entering the phase of higher education, freedom within an appropriate range helps students to expand and explore their innovation abilities. Such freedom includes thorough interactions and communications between teachers and students. In the ecosphere of college English teaching in institutions of higher learning, the teacher and student are not in opposition. Instead, both parties should communicate and exchange opinions with each other thoroughly. For one thing, the teacher may ask about students' learning preferences, know their understanding of learning and grasp their learning process. For another, students gain knowledge of the teaching background, learn interesting facts from teachers and absorb teachers' learning experience. According to the teaching status, the interactions and communications between teachers and students are still inadequate. While teachers stand "aloof" on the platform, students are sitting below the platform passively receiving imparted knowledge. There lack effective dissemination and expression of information. Apart from the composition of subjects, the interactions and communications between subjects are also indispensable. Communication is the lubricant for knowledge imparting and effective teacher—student communications ensure the sustainability of teaching ecology. Only in this way can knowledge, teachers and students interact with each other efficiently.

#### IV. COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING OF PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

##### A. Clarify the Subject of Teaching

The ecological English teaching of colleges and universities is most importantly characterized with students being at the core and center in teaching process, while teachers should conduct teaching activities centered on students' needs. Restricted by inertial thinking and institutional limitations, teachers are accustomed to preparing for and teaching a class based on their personal thoughts. As a result, students' central status receives adequate attention. It is thus necessary to clarify students' subject status by some means. In this case, We Media is an excellent tool. Teachers can apply the individualized and humane designs of We Media learning software to assist their teaching and clarify students' subject status in class. From the perspective of We Media application, the construction of some learning platforms has been highly mature. Hence universities and colleges can choose to connect their English courses with such learning platforms and achieve multi-media teaching. In addition, virtual teaching also creates more opportunities for students to participate in, mobilizes students' enthusiasm for participation in a balanced manner and accentuates students' principal status consciously.

##### B. Give Continuous Play to the Advantages of We Media

Teaching contents are based on practical demands and meet such demands in turn. It is better to give full play to the content advantage of We Media and combine textbooks with We Media rather than rely on single textbooks. Such a practice emphasizes the combination of teaching and enhances the differences between teachers' teaching. The main means of giving play to the content advantage of We Media is to select We Media information with targeted purposes. For instance, teachers may follow certain WeChat official accounts to taken in usefule We Media contents. Currently, some WeChat English public accounts are widely applied. Such accounts are set up for people who are fond of learning English or studying English in spare time. In addition, the function of Douyin app turns students into "actors" who perform English perfectly. For college English teaching, teachers can take in and learn from the contents of such We Media platforms: apply their teaching materials in class and combine useful contents with teachers' instructions in teaching. Limited by unified teaching materials, the teaching of college teachers fails to display teachers' innovative teaching contents comprehensively. Hence teachers can choose We Media contents selectively and thus represent their unique teaching characteristics. For one thing, teachers have more independent space. For another, students are given access to frontline English knowledge.

##### C. Set up a Student—Teacher Communication Platform

Nowadays, students are accustomed to examination-oriented education and abide by teachers' instructions unconditionally. They are too intimidated and unwilling to communicate with teachers about other contents not taught. In fact, teachers play the role of guidance in class. For one thing, teachers should know students' true needs. For another, they should be aware of the deficiencies in their teaching.

Interactions and communications help to enhance the trust between schools and students, which accomplish teaching tasks better. Teachers can use We Media tools. For instance, quite a few English teaching apps are closely connected to the text and also provide other functions, including checking students' attendance, pre-class review, classroom interactions, study monitor and exercise connection. Nowadays, We Media is widely popularized. Nearly every class has set up a WeChat group. Generally speaking, however, there is no WeChat group set up for each course. To improve such a situation, teachers may divide the students from different classes into several English study groups and assign learning or communication tasks in group. In a mutually-familiar environment, students generally are unwilling to participate in communications. Hence a strange environment may enhance students' enthusiasm towards participation. In addition, the learning tasks not confined to certain time and space will create more independent space to students. It is not only favorable for students' thinking and innovations, but also contributes to the interactions and communications with teachers through online teaching.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The ecological teaching of college English in We Media is the development direction for English teaching of private universities in the new era. As a university English teacher, one needs to find the motivational factors for each student's English learning. It is necessary to encourage college students to pay attention to English learning, grasp their advantages and enhance the cooperation and communications between teachers and students, trying to accelerate the ecological pace of English learning through the effective mode of We Media and thus lay a solid English foundation for future employment.

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