

Study on the Cultivation of English Autonomous Learning Ability of Non-English Majors in College

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Abstract—The foreign language educators have placed more and more attention on the ability of non-English majors to learn English independently. Under the current situation of the lack of independent learning ability of non-English majors in China, and the establishment of the learner-centered teaching view, this paper declared the importance of promoting independent English learning, illustrated the connotation of autonomous learning and its related theories, analyzed the necessity of cultivating non-English majors' self-learning ability and explored the strategies to improve students' self-learning ability. With all these efforts, it aimed to cultivate non-English majors' self-learning ability so as to improve English learning efficiency.

keywords— *Non-English Majors, English Autonomous Learning, capability, strategy*

I. INTRODUCTION

With the advance of college expansion, a large number of students are admitted into the colleges and universities with insufficient English teachers to teach them. Therefore, it is prevalent to deliver college English course in large class, which generates many problems. With the reform on college English course, much of the scholars' attention is on cultivating students' independent learning ability. The independent learning, as a new teaching concept, has been included in College English Curriculum Requirements formulated by Ministry of Education. In the Requirements, it is defined that The goal of college English teaching is to develop students' comprehensive English application ability, especially listening and speaking, so that they can use English to effectively communicate with others and write accurately in the future work and social interaction, and enhance their self-learning ability and improve their comprehensive cultural literacy to meet the needs of China's economic and social development and international exchanges. It can be seen that College English teaching should aim at cultivating students' ability to use English language and to learn English independently. This is the goal of modern higher education and the necessity of students' development, and it has become the long-term goal of English teaching. To this end, this article briefly introduces the connotation and theoretical basis of independent learning, the status quo of non-English majors' self-directed learning in China. It also discusses the necessity of promoting independent learning in college English teaching in China, and puts forward some training strategies for non-English majors' independent learning ability.

II. THE CONNOTATION AND THEORETICAL BASIS OF INDEPENDENT LEARNING

The independent learning stems from the 1960s western education field contends on how to develop lifelong learning ability and independent thinking ability. In the mid-1980s, the cultivation of autonomous learning has been attached great importance by linguists at home and abroad. In particular, with the establishment of student-centered teaching view, the foreign language education community has kept its goal to cultivate and stimulate learners autonomy for about 20 years. Students' self-learning ability has become the focus of English teachers. Educators and foreign language teaching workers have many different interpretations of autonomous learning. Taking various expressions about autonomous learning into consideration, we conclude that self-directed learning refers to the process where the learners can be responsible for their learning, that is, being responsible for making decisions about all aspects of learning which include determining learning objectives, learning content and progress, selecting learning methods and techniques, monitoring learning processes, and evaluating. In short, self-directed learning is both a learning attitude and an independent learning ability. Promoting self-learning ability in English learning is to encourage students to be responsible for their own learning. Under the guidance of teachers, they can freely choose learning content and methods according to their own conditions and needs, and complete specific learning with self-regulation.

The theoretical basis of autonomous learning contains cognitive psychology, humanistic psychology and constructivist theory. Cognitive psychologists believe that the learners should actively engage in learning and discriminately absorb information and make assumptions, comparisons and explanations for re-constructing the meaning of information. Integrate the new information into the current the knowledge for future use. Humanistic psychologists emphasize the importance of self-concepts and emotional factors in adult learning. Learner should be the subject of information processing, the active constructor of meaning, rather than the passive information receiver. With regards to constructivist theory, it holds that teachers not only need to impart knowledge, but more importantly, instruct students to self-study and cultivate their self-learning ability, so as to give full play to students' autonomy, initiative and creativity. This theory has important significance for the cultivation of non-English majors' independent learning ability.

III. THE STATUS QUO OF SELF-LEARNING OF NON-ENGLISH MAJORS

With the popularization of higher education and the expansion of enrollment in colleges and universities, there emerges a dilemma between more and more college students and the insufficient English teachers. However, the increasing number of students is the result of the popularization of higher education and the requirement of national economic development. According to the National Public English Teaching Steering Committee, the ratio of English teachers to students has reached 1:130. In this condition, some teachers have to undertake dozens of hours of lectures every week. Facing with such a serious

imbalanced teaching state, some education experts believe that it is an effective method to make full use of resources and cultivate college students' English self-learning ability. It can address the current shortage of teachers and help students in lifelong learning.

In order to get a detailed understanding of non-English majors self-directed learning, the author made a questionnaire for his own students who are major in ideological and political education, financial management and tourism management. A total of 255 questionnaires are distributed with 252 recollected. The investigation mainly focuses on students' autonomous learning. The questionnaire adopt objective choices covering the importance of self-directed learning, independent learning time spent every week, the independent learning strategy, and the biggest obstacle in independent learning and the way to deal with it. The result showed that 54.5% of the interviewees considered they have realized the importance to learn independently. Quite a number of students are learning English for career and only attach importance to College English Test. 14.7% of the students learn English without goal, and only 9% are out of love and want to communicate. 5% students can make short and medium term plans for themselves in learning, and 3% students evaluate their learning performance. 90% students said that the biggest challenge for them is word memorizing, and 87% students indicated it was the improvement of listening and speaking. Only 4% students have asked teachers for help. In a word, the overall learning situation of non-English majors is not good. Teachers' guidance and supervision are of great importance to cultivate students' self-learning ability. Therefore, teachers need to instruct students in learning strategy, in a bid to cultivate non-English majors independent learning capability.

IV. THE NECESSITY OF CULTIVATING INDEPENDENT LEARNING ABILITY OF NON-ENGLISH MAJORS

1. Autonomous learning is the goal and requirement of language teaching

The purpose of language learning is not only to master linguistic knowledge, but to be able to use the language to express your own ideas and communicate. The knowledge and skills that teachers present in the English class cannot be immediately mastered by the students. Generally, students need an extracurricular learning process to digest the content. For non-English majors, self-study is especially important because the large amount of contents are delivered in few English courses, and they need to practice after class to gain more knowledge. As the learner is the subject of learning, the success of learning depends largely on the effort of the learner. In the light of the individual differences, students also need to carry out targeted skills training according to their own situation. If they rely too much on the guidance of teachers, they cannot acquire the learning strategies that suit them, and it is difficult to achieve the ideal learning goals. Therefore, students must learn to drive themselves, choose appropriate methods to improve the quality of learning, and develop the habit of self-learning.

2. The present situation of college English teaching in China requires the cultivation of students' independent learning ability

As present, the most urgent problems for college English teaching are the contradiction between limited class hour and the high curriculum requirements and the imbalance between the large number of students and the insufficient teachers. Most universities allocate less than 200 class hours for English teaching but set requirements for listening, speaking, reading, writing, translating. It is hard for students to attain the certain level for each item within the limited time. Therefore, they need to spare time after class to study independently. There are also many universities that organize lots of students in a large class to deal with the insufficient English teachers. Under this circumstances, students have little time and few opportunities to communicate with the teacher and get enough language practice.

Due to the examination-oriented education, we haven't given full play to students' subjective status, the initiative and creativity in English course. Students don't have the study plan or the self-learning habit. Given this, we must pay attention to the cultivation of non-English majors' English self-learning ability, so as to fundamentally alleviate the contradiction faced by college English teaching and improve students' ability to acquire knowledge independently.

3. Cultivating students' self-learning ability is the way to realize the quality education and the lifelong education.

The modern education is inclined to give priority to the cultivation of people's comprehensive quality. It is one of the important contents of quality education for college students to cultivate non-English majors' self-learning ability through college English courses. With the rapid development of information and technology, people need to learn and constantly update their knowledge after graduating from college, and to improve themselves in order to adapt to the society. To learn lifelong, learners should have the methods and skills needed to continue their studies, and to be able to appropriately arrange the learning based on specific learning tasks. Language learning and teaching are part of the educational process and should be addressed to this educational goal. Therefore, for the sustainable development of students, school should focus on cultivating students' self-learning ability.

V. TRAINING STRATEGY OF LEARNING CAPACITY FOR NON-ENGLISH MAJORS

A Traditional Concept Change and Roles Transformation between Teachers and Students

Training non-English majors' autonomy in learning means study administration shifting from teachers to students, so that students can determine what, when and how to learn. Without authority and domination of the class, teachers are required with higher standards. To cultivate students' autonomous learning ability, the critical point lies in teachers' concept change and role relocation. Teachers are centered in the traditional college English class where they play an important role in knowledge and information supplying, while in the students-centered class, teachers should serve as mentors, facilitators, coordinators and helpers. It is necessary for teachers to clarify that learning to learn is the right way of lifelong benefit for students so that education should aim at teaching students to learn and manage their own study with teachers' guidance. Freshmen should be

provided with the consciousness and concept of autonomous learning in their first English class, understanding teachers' role and their own responsibility. Other than most subjects, language study asks for continuous training, in which students improve themselves in massive exercises. With knowing that themselves are the key to success in English studying, students should take the initiative to assume responsibility for learning and grow to be lifelong learners with independent learning skills.

B Arousing Autonomous Learning Consciousness and Intrinsic Motivation

It is of significant importance to arouse non-English majors' autonomous consciousness in English learning. Centering on this, teaching approaches applied should help students gradually replace their reliance with sense of duty in study. Since English is acquired by learning rather than teaching, students should take responsibility for themselves. Meanwhile, effective and reasonable learning goals and plans must be made with teachers' help based on their comprehensive understanding of students. Students are encouraged to implement self-assessment on their study performance at regular intervals. Combining teacher's assistance and their own endeavor, students will gradually establish methods suitable for themselves and self-regulated learning mode. Inspiring, sustaining, and driving their activities, students' internal impetus is learning motivation, which includes intrinsic motivation, their interest for study, and extrinsic motivation, the effect of external factors. Closely related with one's interest and attitude, explicit learning motivation, which will leads to better achievement, comes after English learners' initiative, optimism, enthusiasm and voluntary, so that teacher's positive guiding will not only make students be aware of the international and informational society, in which English is an significant learning instrument of various science and culture, but also arouse their interest in English language and foreign culture, changing their learning from passive to active. Only in this way can students' intrinsic learning motivation be stimulated with effect.

C Effective Utilization of Learning Resource, Especially the Network

Following the principle of integrating information and entertainment, college English teacher should arouse enthusiasm and interest of students by, for instance, recommending applicable supplementary materials, including English novels, movies, songs and magazines. At the same time, students need teachers' guide in full use of network resources, downloading of up-to-date materials, train in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating skills, to develop their autonomous learning ability. Basing on extremely abundant online resources, English learning websites are too numerous to mention. For instance, student-friendly websites like <http://www.listeningexpress.com> and <http://www.tingroom.com/flash/> can be provided for students' extracurricular learning to greatly initiate their active roles in learning, since songs, movies, listening materials and original work reading there are all of their interest. By browsing these websites outside class, appreciating original English text while listening, students will improve listening competence and broaden their horizon unwittingly. Additionally, QQ Group Chat can be properly applied, with teachers' sporadic supervision, in English communication according to students' appetites. Furthermore, intra-curricular reports and short-story telling from students on duty can be arranged to assisting online learning, advancing their autonomous learning ability all around.

D Cultivate Learning Habits and Practice Listening and Speaking

Students are supposed to be supported in their exploration of the most suitable learning method and their comprehension of British and American culture in college English education. Preview, listening to lectures and review are three important segments in English learning. Sufficient preview can enable students' all-round and thorough understanding during teachers' explanation of key points and difficulties in class, while in-time review, making new knowledge permanent, can help students achieve mastery through a comprehensive study after class and improve their integrated learning ability. Students immersing in English-speaking environment can enjoy the best learning condition so that teachers should lead students to actively create the circumstances on their own, especially in the extra-curricular life. English conversation, discussion and communication are strongly encouraged, as well as broadcast listening and extensive reading, to enrich students' thinking in daily life. Additionally, it is a perfect opportunity for non-English majors to proactively communicate with foreign teachers from English-speaking countries, who are equipped with pure accent, fluent speaking and authentic expression, to practice oral English. Foreign teachers can be invited for meals with students, during which they can introduce and know about each other, to train listening and speaking skills and develop autonomous learning ability with the utmost out of foreign teacher resources.

VI. CONCLUSION

With the rapid development of society, English has become an important tool for acquiring various scientific and cultural knowledge. However, non-English majors have limited time to study English during college. As a new type of teaching concept, autonomous learning has been valued by many foreign language educators. College English teachers should also recognize the importance of autonomous learning ability in learning. They can consciously cultivate students' ability to learn independently through various strategies, instruct how to learn by students themselves and lay the foundation for lifelong learning, which is conducive to the development of students. As a result, they can truly apply what they have learned. In this way, we are expected to develop students into excellent talents that meet the needs of social development and the times.

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