

## College English Courses: Problems and Solutions

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### Abstract

**The present paper is a detailed study of the problems and solutions of college English courses. The major problems, teaching content, teaching conditions, and teachers' teaching abilities, are analyzed in detail and corresponding solutions are offered respectively.**

### Keywords

**College English courses, Problems, Solutions.**

### 1. Introduction

College English courses, mostly compulsory, are set up for non-English majors in most universities across China. The majority of colleges and universities have been reforming these courses to produce qualified students that meet the needs of an ever-changing society. Great progress has been made because of these reforms, but there remain some problems along the way as some college students get more and more dissatisfied with the current college English courses. The present paper is a summary and analysis of the problems in college English courses. Suggestions are given accordingly in a bid to solve these problems.

### 2. Body

#### 2.1 Teaching Content Problem and its Solutions

The first major problem is about the teaching content in class. In other words, what should be taught in class? That is a question really worth serious consideration. Many college English teachers still hold the traditional way of teaching. Some teachers focus all their attention in class on vocabulary and the exercises that follow in each unit. They make sentences for the key words showing up in the texts and conduct various activities based on the new words. Still, some teachers concentrate on the "thoughts" or "ideas" of the texts. They begin with giving the background information, proceed with the detailed analysis of the text, mostly sentence by sentence analysis, and end up with a summary. Other teachers may elaborate on a certain skill such as writing skill, fast reading skill, introduction of a rhetorical device etc. To tell the truth, students benefit little from these ways of teaching. For the vocabulary, most students can always learn by themselves. For the analysis of "thoughts" or "ideas" of the texts, many students have difficulty comprehending teachers' expressions in English and still have difficulty expressing orally or in written form themselves. For the teaching of a certain skill, the truth is that it is the language used by the teacher when explaining that makes the whole matter difficult, never the ideas themselves because students were taught how to use a certain skill such as "thesis statement supported by details" writing pattern even in primary school. So it is total nonsense to teach university students these skills in English as they are easy ideas with difficult language crusts.

What is the solution to the problem? The answer is to reform CET4, CET6 and the finals. There are just too many objective question types in the three tests, which heavily hinders students from cultivating their English abilities. Hughes believes that one of the disadvantages of multiple choice questions is that they can only check out the examinees' recognition abilities, not their language proficiency. In the current test modes, students may well pass the tests without truly understanding the information and connotations. General listening, general reading comprehension and writing actually do students little good. In essence language learning in the advanced stage in university is all about translation in the written form or interpretation in the oral form. A college student's task is to constantly better his or her version of translation or interpretation. Therefore, students must be given

the chance and stimulus to practice almost every day. Autonomous learning is the best solution to the problem. Autonomous learning can well replace CET4, CET4 and the finals to grade students. For example, students may be required to practice translating and interpreting over, say, 100,000 passages all by themselves throughout the four years. Then 1,000 sentences will be randomly picked from the 100,000 to test their daily performance and dedication. And another 100 sentences based on the context will be given to test students' abilities. In this way, students' language abilities are sure to get improved greatly. Teachers can also play valuable roles in the above assumed condition by discussing the ways of effective learning with students, teaching weak students basic language components such as vocabulary and grammar and setting up advanced English courses such as cross-cultural interaction, academic English etc.

## **2.2 Problems of Teachers' Teaching Conditions and Abilities and their Solutions**

### **2.2.1 Problems of Teachers' Teaching Conditions and its Solutions**

Another major problem is about teachers' teaching conditions and abilities. First, teaching conditions. Although the majority of teachers in China do not have to hold office hours, they do have to bear the overwhelmingly heavy load of work imposed on them. Take my school for instance, most English teachers have to take an average of 18 classes per week in the past decade. The heavy load of work each week renders college English teachers exhausted. They cannot prepare their lessons fully, let alone doing research for their teaching. Most teachers feel exhausted both physically and psychologically. Teaching for many teachers has become a burden rather than a fulfilling task. Besides, in most universities the class size for the Reading, Writing and Translation Course is too large, usually holding over 50 students. The large class size deprives teachers their opportunities to communicate with students effectively both in and after class. Teachers would have more chances to guide students in person if they were teaching a small number of students in each class. Third, technology for self-learning and testing is yet to be modernized to meet the needs of the college English educational reform. The out-dated computers and technology have become barriers to effective teaching and learning. Students are in urgent need of good video clips, lectures from first-class universities home and abroad, and effective testing hardware and software. The solution to the above problems is self-evident. Traditional classes should be cut down to make way for students' autonomous learning. Teachers may start their advanced courses and make the classes smaller, say, 15 to 20 students for each class. Fund should be raised nationwide and within schools to invent the most effective self-study platform and testing systems.

### **2.2.2 Problems of Teachers' Teaching Abilities and its Solutions**

As to college English teachers' teaching abilities, there are a lot of problems needing to be solved. Firstly, many teachers ignore the importance of integrating moral education into their teaching practice. They seem to be politically and morally neutral, focusing on language skills and language abilities only. In the modern society and as a humanity course, college English courses should involve not only language improvement but cultural and moral cultivation as well. Secondly, there is still much room for improvement of some college English teachers' language abilities. Language is really something that is learned, not taught, so we can see the unique phenomena that a few students can write and speak even better than their teachers or teachers from other schools. The reason is that some teachers fail to practice English on a regular basis. Some teachers write and speak even less English than their students do in their daily life. Professor Wang Shouren points out that "If a teacher's language ability is inferior to his or her students, is he or she still qualified for the teaching job?" Thirdly, the majority of the teaching staff does not have a wide range of knowledge which is a necessity if one wants to excel in language teaching. Most teachers graduated as students of liberal arts, so they generally do not show interest in science. Even within the humanity field, some teachers are confined to the limited knowledge, and they show their reluctance to keep learning.

The following are the corresponding ways to enhance English teachers' teaching abilities. Firstly, teachers should raise their awareness of integrating moral education into their teaching practice. They may achieve this goal by conducting discussions within groups, especially within party members and

together coming up with super integrating ideas. The integration can naturally occur when teachers consciously share with students encouraging stories or inspiring experiences. One of the good ways to morally educate students is to communicate in written form with students after class. By sharing ideas with students, teachers will walk into the minds of students, nourishing the students spiritually. Secondly, English teachers should also be required to do autonomous learning and their language abilities should also be checked by taking CET4, CET6 and the finals. Those who fail to pass should be retrained. And those who do well in the tests should be financially awarded and publicized. In this way, teachers will be stimulated and pressured to keeping learning and making progress with students, forming the new teacher-student relationship. Thirdly, to make college English teachers more learned and knowledgeable, various conferences should be held and more scholarly exchange opportunities should be provided for them.

### 3. Conclusion

Despite the great progress made in our reform of college English courses, there remain a lot of problems. The most striking problems are about teaching content, teachers' teaching conditions and teachers' teaching abilities. The teaching content problem refers to the language-centered teaching, idea-centered teaching in English and comprehensive skill teaching. These teaching practices often result in students' ineffective learning. These teaching ways should be replaced by autonomous learning under the teachers' guidance in the initial stage of college English courses. The problem of teaching conditions refers to teachers' heavy load of work, large class size and unqualified technology in learning and testing. These problems can be solved by implementing the autonomous learning and advanced courses program and modernizing school hardware and software. The problem of teachers' learning abilities refers to teachers' inability to integrate moral education, teachers' relative language deficiency and teachers' narrow knowledge range. These problems can be solved by raising teachers' moral integration awareness, carrying out teachers' autonomous learning and testing program and offering teachers opportunities to widen their knowledge. By solving the problems brought up in the paper, college English courses are sure to flourish in the long run.

### References

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