

On Postgraduates' English Teaching Status Quo and its Corresponding Strategies

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Abstract: With the globalization, postgraduates are confronted with much severe challenges than ever before. But for some of them, their low English proficiency is the very crucial factor which deteriorates the situation. How to cultivate highly-qualified postgraduates in an effort to make them more competent in the future employment market and how to transform their English teaching become particularly urgent to us scholars and teachers. This paper chiefly explores the status quo of the postgraduate English teaching. Based on the analysis of the existing problems, the paper casts light on the reasons why these problems come into being. According to the experiment and the interview conducted among the students, some feasible suggestions to tackle these problems are put forward.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development in science and technology, English has become increasingly significant in a wide range of areas. Not only can it bridge the gap between two different cultures, but it can help acquire large quantities of invaluable information as well. With the further globalization, China's higher education meets various severe challenges. There is a growing consensus that China's future, to a certain extent, is decided by postgraduates. However, how to cultivate highly qualified postgraduates in an effort to make them more competent in the future employment market is a hot topic among the scholars and teachers. According to the Outline of China's National medium-and-long-term Plan for Education Reform and Development(2015) ,it stated that postgraduate enrollment has reached 1.7 million in 2015 and by 2020 it will have amounted to 2 million. Meanwhile, according to the Syllabus for Postgraduates issued by China's Ministry of Education(1992), postgraduates should have mastery of the skills as follows: reading, listening, speaking ,writing and translating so that they can be capable of conducting researches with the help of English. In 2009, China's Ministry of Education added that more practical postgraduates should be cultivated than theoretical ones. Confronted with such a serious situation, it is imperative that much more attention should be paid to the quality of postgraduates and therefore reforming the postgraduate education becomes an inevitable trend.

2. The Status Quo of Postgraduate English Teaching

For postgraduates, English bridges the west and the east, serving as the access to the advanced international information that is very conducive to their professional development. However, there is an increasing concern about how to foster well-qualified postgraduates in the face of the fact that the status quo of current postgraduate English teaching is far from satisfactory, which can be included as the following aspects.

2.1 Learners' Diversity in English Proficiency.

The first and most important aspect is that learners are diversified in English proficiency. The enrolled postgraduates are distinct from one another and their majors. When they were admitted to

the university, different majors have different admission scores: some are higher while others lower, which resulted in the diversity in English proficiency. Different language proficiency may lead to different learning preference and style. When they get together in the same class, if they are taught in the same pedagogy, weak students may find it difficult to follow the teaching flow, and they may not obtain the same expectant outcome as those with high language proficiency.

2.2 Defective Curriculum.

Apart from learners' diversity in language proficiency, poorly-designed curriculum is another key factor which affect the situation. Since 2009, in response to the reform advocated by China's Ministry of Education, a vast majority of universities have begun to reform their curriculum. For example, they've made the size of each class much smaller, which do contribute to improving teaching. However, in terms of time allocated to English teaching, the teaching time has been cut down to 100 teaching periods as a whole with only three courses left, including writing and translation, oral English and intensive reading. With much less teaching time, it turns out that the teachers have to accomplish the scheduled task in less teaching periods, as the result of which makes it almost impossible for the teachers to achieve their teaching goal, let alone improve the students' English proficiency.

2.3 Outdated Teaching Pedagogy.

Outdated teaching pedagogy is the third respect that cannot be ignored. According to the survey conducted among the universities in Hubei province in 2017, nearly half of the universities still continued to employ the traditional teaching method, with the teacher playing a leading role in the classroom activities. With heavy teaching loads in such a short teaching time, teachers had to reduce the classroom activities and the student- teacher interaction to ensure the fulfillment of the task. Consequently, students were partially neglected in the classroom and some of them gradually lost their interest in learning, doing badly in their learning.

3. Corresponding Strategies to Tackle These Problems

Constructivism argues that learning is a process where learners should actively construct what they are going to learn based on their prior knowledge and experience rather than passive reception from their teacher. accordingly, curriculum design is the first priority. With above-mentioned three courses for postgraduates to learn, it is necessary to design a feasible curriculum. Also, it is desirable that more time should be allocated, from 100 teaching periods to 200, which can make it possible for the teacher to accomplish the teaching goal.

When it comes to language diversity among the students, it is best to put hierarchical teaching into practice, that is, students with similar scores can be taught in the same class. Weak students can be taught some basic knowledge. For example, let them know how to pronounce well, how to express oneself, how to write an abstract in simple English and how to translate a paragraph appropriately. Only in this way can it boost the learners confidence, and stimulate their enthusiasm for learning. For better students, they can learn and practice so much that their needs can be satisfied. As a consequent, their competence in writing, speaking and translation can be dramatically promoted.

In terms of pedagogy, as is known to us all, it makes a big difference to the students. A good pedagogy can exerted considerable influence on the learning effect. Nevertheless, all these should be based on a good curriculum design. Given more teaching time, teachers can design a variety of classroom activities so that students can be motivated. With multimedia, teaching flow can be faster than ever before and there is much possibility for learners to possess more chances to participate in activities and interacting with the teacher and other students. They can express themselves far more fluently; In addition, practice makes perfect. Self-learning is recommended to be introduced to facilitate the postgraduates' learning. After school, they have free access to the self-learning center, gaining more practice. By doing so, their writing and translation competence will surely be improved.

Assessment system should also be reformed. Assessment system plays a major role in classroom

teaching. Nowadays, quite a few universities still adopt the traditional summative assessment to evaluate learners' learning effect. In this case, learners, more often than not, lay too much emphasis on scores or even care about scores only, resulting in their lack of motivation, creativity and interest in learning. Compared with summative assessment, authentic assessment, serving as a scientific and rational evaluation means, highlights the process of the assessment, which takes the elements such as knowledge, skills, emotions and attitude into account. Authentic assessment is regarded as the very one deserving popularizing.

4. Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Objective.

With the above-mentioned strategies, the writer conducted an experiment among the postgraduates, endeavoring to find out a good way to promote their English learning effect.

4.2 Subjects.

As it is no easy job for the author alone to make the curriculum redesigned, the author conducted an experiment in the two classes (one has 28 students, the other has 23 students). After 8-week traditional teaching (students were not graded), the author began to divide her students in each class into two big groups according to their English proficiency. One group with better English proficiency and the other with poor English proficiency. This experiment lasted for 8 weeks, in the hope of achieving the desirable effect.

As scheduled, Class I was divided into two groups: one with 10, the other one with 18. Class II was also divided into two groups: one with 7, the other one with 16.

In the first 8 weeks, the two classes are not graded: all the students are taught under the same curriculum, and the same teaching method. In the second 8 weeks, the better groups were taught more knowledge, with more complicated classroom activities, more difficult homework, more time for self-learning while the poor groups are only taught basic knowledge, with less complicated classroom activities, less difficult homework, but more time for self-learning. What's more, they are all evaluated by means of authentic assessment. After 8 weeks, an interview was conducted.

4.3 Instrument Interview.

To assess the learners' learning interest, participation, self-learning, an interview was conducted in a very comfortable and relaxing environment. The author and the interviewees have a conversation face to face. The interviewees were mainly asked about how they felt about the experiment.

4.4 Results of the Interview.

According to the interview mentioned above, a vast array of students hold a positive attitude towards this graded teaching method because they can learn more effectively. With more learning time after class and more instructional resources available, they can learn better and faster. Furthermore, with more in-class interaction, their interest in English can be aroused and their confidence in learning can be enhanced. More importantly, under the authentic assessment, all the students, whether they are good at English learning or not, are, to a large extent, engaged in the whole process of the learning. It benefits almost all of them.

Table 1 Participants' views about the experiment

Participant s views about the graded teaching concepts	1. For us students who are poor in English, we think we've benefited a lot from this amazing and creative teaching method. In the past, we seldom had chances to express ourselves because we always felt inferior, but now, we are confident enough to make a speech in front of them. We do like this teaching method and we think we become interested in English. We are very grateful to our teacher.
	2. Though we were weak in English, our teacher was very patient with us: she always explained difficult points for several times, which she wouldn't do this before because other good students might feel bored. We feel very delighted that we can write English abstract and translate some short passages, which we couldn't have done that before. We do make some progress.
	3. We like this graded teaching method. We can learn more and faster. With more after-class online learning under the teachers' instruction, not only can it cultivate our self-learning ability, but also can broaden our horizon. To our excitement, we can learn better and effectively.
	4. There are more in-class interaction than ever before, which can arouse our interest in learning and gradually we become more active than before.
	5. Maybe some of the students don't like online self-learning. They feel they are compelled to learn more. But we think differently because it is good for us to do so. So we spare no effort to learn hard, reaping a lot of benefits from it. Right now, we can read faster, and translate and write longer passages much better. It's amazing.
	6. Speaking of the new assessment system—authentic assessment, we can't agree more. It makes us get involved into the learning process from the very beginning, and keep improving in the process of learning. In addition to that, there is no need for us to worry about our learning effect, because if we do as we are told to, we'll surely learn better.

5. Summary

The reform of the postgraduate English teaching should be put high on the agenda. We should attach more importance to the graded teaching, more teaching time, more classroom activities, better assessment system. Authentic assessment is especially conducive to students, which can involve all the students into the learning process effectively. However, this method still has a lot to improve. We still have a long way to go.

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