

Study on the Integration of Western Classic Literature into College English Teaching

Xiaojing Chen¹

¹ School of Foreign Language, Huaiyin Institute of Technology, Huaian, Jiangsu, China

¹ Corresponding author. Email: chenxiaojing@hyit.edu.cn

ABSTRACT

Literary classics in the "instrumentalization-oriented" College English teaching have been largely marginalized. The new guide points out that college English curriculum should focus on strengthening students' communicative competence and improving students' personal quality and humanistic quality as well. In view of the lack of literary literacy of college students, this paper analyzes the current situation of classic reading education, points out the role of classic reading in college English teaching, and puts forward the ways to integrate western literary classic reading into college English classroom: recommending classic reading materials that meet the students' language level, organically combining college English materials and literary elements, and designing teaching activities related to western classics.

Keywords: Index terms-literary classics, College English teaching, Humanistic quality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Different countries have different languages and cultures, they depend on and influence each other. On the one hand, language is rooted in the fertile soil of culture and reflects culture in its unique way; On the other hand, culture also restricts language, it has a great influence on second language acquisition. The lack of language and cultural background knowledge will inevitably lead to communication barriers.

Literary classics, as the most important cultural database of a nation, contain extensive and rich cultural content (Wang Qin, etc. 2018) [4]. Through reading western classics, students can directly understand the historical geography, political economy, social life, local conditions and customs of western countries. And, in the process of reading and studying, they can learn to tell good and evil, right and wrong, understand human nature and thus shape their views on life.

Reading is the most basic, direct and effective way to master a language and improve language ability. Therefore, reading western classics can effectively help college students learn to know another culture, master a new way of thinking pattern, so as to expand their horizons, deepen

positive values, understand themselves and the world, and have more advantageous in the fierce social competition.

2. THE NECESSITY AND URGENCY OF INTRODUCING BRITISH AND AMERICAN LITERARY CLASSICS INTO COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING

"College English Teaching Guideline"(2020 Edition) issued by Steering Committee for college foreign language teaching of the Ministry of Education clearly puts forward that college English course should embrace the characteristics of both instrumentality and humanism, which are the main teaching goals of general education in college. The guide points out that "The core of humanism is individual-oriented, carrying forward individual's value, and paying attention to the cultivation and all-round development of individual's comprehensive quality. The instrumentality of College English curriculum is the basis and carrier of humanism, and the humanism is the sublimation of instrumentality (2020:3)[3]. At present, there is a serious shortage of talented graduates with high English proficiency. A large number of college graduates are not qualified as required with limited

English and insufficient humanistic quality, lack of critical thinking and professional knowledge and they don't possess basic cultural awareness as needed in the new era. Experts and scholars are crying for the returning to "humanism" in English teaching. By listening, reading and inputting great works, students can continuously improve their ability of critical and independent thinking, so as to grow their personality and improve their humanistic quality. College English, as an important part of college language and culture teaching, undoubtedly plays an important role in humanistic education. However, for a long time, the teaching concept of "instrumental goal" regards classical reading as difficult and "useless", which has been excluded from the main teaching content and almost completely faded out of college English teaching. Harry Lewis, former dean of Harvard College of Harvard University (2012), criticized the problems of Harvard education in humanistic care, social responsibility and the cultivation of innovation ability, and pointed out that Harvard University pursues excellence in the academic field and forgets the spirit of cultivating socially responsible citizens[2]. It can be seen that emphasizing a high sense of social responsibility based on humanistic care and human emotion has gradually become a new trend of thought in higher education all over the world. Therefore, foreign language teaching should change the mode of "training skill only" and increase the proportion of classical reading to cultivating humanism (Zha Jianming 2018)[5].

As one of the important objectives of talent training, fostering students' humanistic quality should be one of the priorities in higher education. However, most college English teaching in China have obvious utilitarian and practical characteristic, taking helping students past CET4 and CET6 as their main task. Under such circumstance, most college teachers focus on the explanation of vocabulary and syntax in English teaching to improve students' language skills, ignoring the importance of humanistic cultivation. When it comes to reading, they prefer to tell students how to deal with the reading questions in CET-4 and CET-6 and other English application ability test, which of course will not sparkle students' enthusiasm on reading, let alone the form of the habit of life long reading. And students are also satisfied with it. Because, for quite a lot students, as long as they can deal with the reading materials in various examinations, it is enough.

As a college graduate, the ability required by the society such as critical thinking, decision-

making, cultural temperament and sense of social responsibility cannot be acquired only by practicing the language itself. Students need to use the language, experience the language, internalize the language and sublimate the language so as to innate it as their capacity. To be able to communicate with English speakers is just a skill, and to understand the essence of language is a real thing. Only when students have a deeper understanding of a nation's culture can they really master the language. By reading a large number of original great works, students can really know the language and its culture and improve their literary accomplishment and humanistic quality.

3. CURRENT SITUATION OF COLLEGE ENGLISH READING TEACHING

With further reform on education, as well as the implementation of one belt, one road policy, English teachers have a deeper understanding of the importance of western classic reading, which has an great impact on the increasing of students' cultural background knowledge, improving students' comprehensive cultural literacy, cultivating students' speculative ability and improving students' cross-cultural communication ability that no other course can compared with. More and more universities have introduced western classical reading into their curriculum. However, there are still some problems in the integrating of western classical reading into College English teaching, which are mainly reflected in the following aspects.

One problem is that students' reading materials are random chosen, lack of reading purpose and systematic guidance, students don't know what they should read and why they should read. In fact, a considerable number of students have passion on reading, but due to the lack of reasonable guidance from English teachers, they often choose reading materials at will without considering their real needs, language level or even the difficulty of the reading materials, which will inevitably lead to the failure of effective reading. Even if some students can insist on finishing it, most probably, they cannot fully understand what they read, and the selected reading materials cannot be the complementary of their classroom learning. The expectation of connecting and expanding knowledge inside and outside class cannot realize. As a result, some students directly give up this behavior that might be benefit for the rest of their life.

In current digital age, students can easily and quickly obtain information through blog, video and other new media on the network. Increasingly numbers of college students get used to read online and gradually be away from paper books reading. Reading online is fast and convenient, but it's just extensive reading which is not good to form the habit of lifelong reading habit. Because in the process of extensive reading, it's difficult for students to leave reading traces such as taking notes, questions or writing down some reflections which can help them to think about the reading material and have a thorough understanding of it, let alone to show them out and discuss with their partners and teachers in class as traditional reading does. In the process of reading, without timely guidance, feedback and communication from teachers or students, students might misunderstand the reading materials, or it will be difficult for them to continue. Students can't get fun and sense of achievement in reading. In the long run, they will gradually lose interest in reading and it is difficult for them to form the habit of long-term reading.

4. THE WAY OF INTRODUCING WESTERN CLASSICS INTO COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING

Most universities in China offer only two-year college English courses. College English classroom in China is characterized by short time and many students. Therefore, it's an urgent task for College English teachers to figure out how to organically combine classic reading with college English teaching to stimulate students' interest in reading, show them reading methods and guide them to expand classic reading outside the classroom, so as to build a trinity talent training model of classroom teaching, campus culture and social practice.

4.1 Proper Selection on Reading Materials

Due to the limited time in English class, extracurricular reading is particularly important in foreign language learning. Choosing proper material is the first step of effective reading. Harmer (2000) once pointed out that "good reading materials can provide learners with various examples", which is conducive to the improvement of their writing ability [1]. Moreover, reading also provides opportunities to learn vocabulary, grammar, choice of words and sentences, and promotes language acquisition." When reading materials meet learners' learning objectives,

learning expectations, learning background, language level, hobbies, personality traits and other factors, reading will bring them a strong sense of satisfaction; On the contrary, when the materials are incompatible with learners in all aspects, effective reading will not appear. And things would become even worse, they might get bored with reading or lose interest in it, giving up reading is mostly possible for students. Therefore, teachers should guide students to choose reading materials with high universality, which is suitable for most students' reading interest and knowledge level.

Difficulty of reading materials is the first thing teachers should consider when recommending western classics to students. The reading materials should not be too easy nor too difficult to students. They should meet students' language level. For most English learners, especially the junior non-English majors, they have a strong fear of reading western classics due to their English proficiency. If the reading materials are too easy or too difficult, students are most likely giving up reading easily. The genre should not be limited to novels, but can cover all sorts of writing styles such as poetry, prose, drama fragments, literature, speeches, argumentation and others. It would be better if the classic works can reflect the important historical and cultural development stages of Britain and the United States, such as the Renaissance, the enlightenment, the American War of independence, the American Civil War, the African American people's rights movement, etc. When students read these classic works, they can appreciate the language characteristics of different stage and writing techniques of different genres. The time span of these classic works can be appropriately increased, so that students can understand the basic characteristics of English language in different periods. For freshmen, the purpose of reading is to cultivate interest in western culture and develop good reading habits. Classic works like "Robinson Crusoe" and "Roses for Emily" are suitable for them, because most students have heard or read Chinese versions of these books, they are comparably easy for students to read. After one year's reading practice, most students have learned how to read a good book and teachers can recommend works with certain difficulties in the second academic year and encourage students to read and write reading reports with the help of dictionaries. By doing this, it can help students sublimate the understanding of works and cultivate humanistic quality.

4.2 The Improvement of Teaching Mode

The forming of English reading habit and reading ability is also a kind of cultivation of cultural thinking ability, which cannot be realized only on classroom teaching. With the development of science and technology, traditional teaching mode cannot meet teaching requirements due to limited class hours. Therefore, making full use of extracurricular time, combining with modern teaching methods such as micro class, flip class and cloud class are good ways to integrate classic reading into College English teaching. In micro class, flip class or cloud class, teachers can design classroom activities according to discipline characteristics and learner characteristics with advanced teaching ideas to create a personalized and collaborative learning environment for students to integrate classic reading into College English teaching online and offline.

Flipped classroom is a new teaching method with its advantages that teachers can arrange reading tasks and provide learning videos (MOOC and micro class) before class, so that students can use fragmented time to read independently, teachers can observe and supervise students' reading progress through cloud class and adjust the teaching progress accordingly. All these can be done in their free time; In class, students can summarize, retell what they read and share their reading experience, discussing a certain environmental description, a psychological description, or even an incisive discourse in the works. All these classroom activities can promote students' further understanding of the works; After class, teachers can use cloud class to let students to write reading reports. This teaching method virtually saves more time and improves learning efficiency and it helps students turn passive learning into active learning mode and build their own learning system. Through the cycle of reading, sharing, discussion, evaluation and feedback, teachers can finally help students deepen their understanding of western culture, experience the beauty of English language, and cultivate their awareness of cross-cultural communication and artistic appreciation.

Micro classroom does not have complex teaching process and huge construction system as flipped class. It can be used as a supplementary teaching method of flipped classroom. Because each micro class lasts not long, only 15 minutes at most, focusing on explaining one or two knowledge points. Through micro classroom, teachers can introduce the background knowledge related to the

reading materials, explain the difficult parts or language phenomena, such as slang, dialect, etc. All these contribute to students' understanding of reading materials.

In the era of information explosion, education methods are gradually becoming open, and the combination of online and offline teaching is the trend of College English Teaching in the future. New teaching methods such as flipped classroom, micro classroom and cloud classroom can not only effectively improve students' interest in English learning and enhance the interaction of the classroom, but also improve students' autonomous learning ability and learning effect.

4.3 The Improvement of Ecological Curriculum Based on Needs

Curriculum is important for a school to organize and implement education and teaching activities in a planned and purposeful way. It offers a specific description of teaching objectives and an arrangement and regulation of curriculum. "College English Teaching Guideline" defines College English as "public basic course and core general course"[3] which further enriches the content of College English curriculum, improves the status of College English curriculum as a whole, and responds to the concept of new liberal arts as well, reflecting the humanism of College English curriculum. New liberal arts demands that, by complying with the new situation of "recognizing, responding and seeking change"; adapting to the overall requirements and ideas of reform and development such as "new mission, new blueprint, new liberal arts and "big" foreign language", college foreign language courses should encourage teachers to explore and practice to enrich the course content, and help students enhance their innovative spirit, entrepreneurial consciousness, willing of devotion to family and country and their ability to integrate China and foreign countries so as to improve ideological and moral cultivation, humanistic quality, scientific spirit, constitutional and legal awareness, national security awareness and cognitive ability. Therefore, when setting up College English courses, teachers should not only focus on cultivating students' language skills and knowledge but also on improving their comprehensive cultural literacy, and forming a correct philosophy, values and world view as well as increase students' knowledge in social, cultural and scientific fields (University Foreign Language Teaching Steering Committee of the Ministry of

education 2020: 10) [3]. Under such circumstance, we try to start with classic reading and cultivate students' humanistic quality by guiding them read western classics in college English teaching.

4.3.1 To Implement Graded Teaching

Graded teaching means to classify students into different classes according to their English proficiency which fully implements the principle of "classified guidance and teaching students according to their aptitude", and meets the actual needs of personalized teaching, which can fully mobilize students' enthusiasm and initiative in English learning. The guide makes it clear that college English teaching has three objectives: basic objectives, improvement objectives and development objectives. Graded teaching can meet these teaching objectives by reasonably arranging the curriculum modules of general English, special purpose English and cross-cultural communication.

Basic English course aims to impart students basic English knowledge, cultivate their language skills, increase students' basic humanistic knowledge, broaden their international vision and improve comprehensive cultural literacy. General academic English belongs to the category of academic English. It mainly trains students' ability in verbal and written communication in all kinds of academic occasions. Intercultural communication helps students understand the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures, analyze the root causes of cultural differences, and help students deepen their understanding of foreign cultures as well as cultivating students' critical thinking, increasing their awareness of cross-cultural communication, and improving their cross-cultural communication ability. Students can choose any course according to their English proficiency.

In freshman year, English teaching is mainly general English, which can be divided into three levels: basic level, general level and improved level. In terms of classic reading, the basic level mainly meet the need of students with lower English proficiency who are in urgent need of improving language skills. English teaching aims at training students basic language skills and teachers can appropriately add some classic reading materials easy to read. In class of general level, teachers can add classical reading materials with certain difficulties, and in class of improvement level, teachers' teaching objectives focus mainly on classic reading to improve their reading ability. In

the second academic year, after one year's training in language skills and classical reading practice, most students upgrade their English proficiency more or less, at this time, special purpose English and cross-cultural communication course modules can be added into English teaching to further develop students' language capability. In order to ensure the continuous personalized learning line of students who are willing to continue language study, the above courses can be offered as public elective courses in 5-7 semesters continually.

4.3.2 To Set Modular Courses

Modular courses can be set to meet students' diversified needs for cultivating language ability, social talents and their career needs. Different modules focus on different requirements. For example, for the needs of career quantification, business English, scientific English, etc. can be offered; Practical English writing, academic English audio-visual speaking, translation, etc. can be set up according to the needs of improving language skills; For the needs of increasing language and cultural knowledge, colleges can set up western culture, western classic reading, film and television works appreciation, etc. Students can choose any modular courses according to their interests and needs to better guide their study and work. In the process of course setting and language teaching, teachers can help students choose courses according to their needs and requirements, and perfect the course module accordingly so as to help students improve their English ability and humanistic value.

To build a multi-level and diversified curriculum, colleges should take the guide's requirements as a reference, organically combine compulsory and elective courses into curriculum and fully take students' English proficiency into consideration, giving more autonomy to students to ensure students with different language levels are fully trained and improved in English ability as well as the development of their humanistic quality. Meanwhile, high tech teaching methods should be integrated into traditional teaching and effectively explore the construction of teaching and research resources such as formative learning evaluation and corpus, etc.. In this way, effective teaching can be achieved.

5. CONCLUSION

Literature is an important carrier of culture and an important form of expression of national personality. It is an effective teaching way for students to understand western culture through reading western classics and then develop cross-cultural communicative competence. As a product of the highly developed human civilization, classical works play an inestimable role in cultivating college students' divergent, critical and innovative independent thinking. With the development of human society and economy and increasingly close international exchanges, colleges and universities shoulder the responsibility of "educating people" and the fundamental task of "building morality and cultivating people". To introduce classic reading into College English classroom, teachers must select appropriate reading materials, use various teaching methods, guide students to read actively and creatively, and help them learn to think critically, enrich their spiritual world and make them talents with high humanistic and comprehensive quality.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Xiaojing Chen.

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