Study on the English Language Education in China

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**Abstract.** The study picturized the English language education in China, especially in the mainland. After briefly tracing the history of ELE in China, the overview of the China’s ELE present situation is generalized and the possible outlook of China’s ELE future is depicted. Finally, it states that the study is helpful and significant for English language education practitioners, especially for English major college students and teachers.

**Introduction**

According to the history books, English language education in China started from late Qing Dynasty. Up to now, it should have a history of 150 years. This paper is a brief outline by tracing the history, overviewing the present situation, and outlook the future of ELE (abbreviation of English language education) in China.

**Tracing the History of ELE in China**

English language education has a long history in China. ELE in China could be traced back to the late Qing Dynasty. In 1902, Tongwen College was established, which was the first foreign language school in China. Previously, English teaching was only limited to missionary schools in the coastal cities such as Shanghai, Ningbo, Fuzhou, Xiamen, Guangzhou, etc. Tongwen College incorporated English into the school education for 40 years from 1862 to 1902 [1]. During that period, the Qing government sent students to study abroad; there was Westernization Movement in China. However, the early English education scale was limited among a certain small group of people. In 1902, Jingshi Da Xuetang was officially founded, which was regarded as the starting point of China’s higher public foreign language teaching. In 1912, the Xinhai Revolution overthrew the feudal monarchy and established the Republic of China. The new government began to reform and popularize English. From then on, English has become one of the most important subjects in both colleges and middle schools. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, English education continued but the number of students was reduced due to the influence of Russian fashion until the late 1960s. In 1966-1977, English education was destroyed and paused for several years. From 1966 to 1970, college entrance examination was stopped. There was no need for students to learn English. In 1970s, some colleges and universities started to resume the enrollment and English education has become necessary again [2]. In 1980s, English education began to flourish with the implementation of the reform and opening up policy. English was required as one of the important subjects in College entrance examination. The basic four skills were treated equally important although people put priority to reading and writing directed by social examinations. From 1990s, English education began to combine traditional teaching with communicative approach. Students and society are paying more and more attention to listening and speaking capacity. In the history, ELE had experienced many ups and downs, it fortunately developed better finally.

**Overviewing the Present Situation of ELE in China**

With the development of world globalization, the connection between the countries is becoming more and more closely. As a bridge of communication, English is becoming more and more important. Around new millennium, English language education has formulated the following traits:
Firstly, Chinese people are attaching more and more importance to ELE because of the international affairs happened daily around them. According to statistics, the international conferences hosted in China are increasing. The number goes up from 83 in the year 2000 to 245 in the year 2009. In 2001, China has officially become a member of WTO. In 2002, the American president Bush visited China. In 2008, the 29th Olympic Games hosted in Beijing. Other international affairs such as World Economic Forum, Boao Forum, BRICKS, Shanghai World Expo, Xi’an International Horticultural Exposition, and Asian Cultural Exchange Conference was held in China one after another, which made the common Chinese attach more and more attention to English learning. For the modern Chinese, English has been involved into their everyday life.

Secondly, there is a younger-age trend of learning English in China. In 1980s, Chinese began learning English from senior middle school. In 1990s, Chinese began learning English from junior middle school. From 2000, Chinese began learning English from primary school. Around 2001, Chinese began learning English before schooling. At present, children start learning English at the age of 2-4 years old. Along with the globalizing society, many parents are considering to make their children in the early exposure to English. At present, the phenomenon of preschool children learning English is common, many families do not hesitate to spend nearly 10000 yuan per year for preschool children English training.

Thirdly, English education has adopted the diversified teaching methodology. In order to improve the quality of English education, cultivating students’ independent consciousness, and innovation consciousness are both emphasized. English learning and teaching will be of interest instead of a burden. Creative thinking and communicative skills are well developed [3]. Quality education emphasizes the cultivation of students’ learning interest, so that students can experience the fun of learning. They may put the whole body into the language learning activities. It is essential to create the proper language environment because a certain teaching situation can arouse students’ learning interest and learning motivation. Students will be encouraged to participate in English language communication activities to cultivate their language use ability and improve their learning efficiency.

Fourthly, English teaching is becoming more standardized. At present, the English teachers from Kindergarten to college must be qualified according to the national standards. The use of teaching materials must be subject to the corresponding level of national English syllabus. In order to realize the teaching objectives and ensure the quality of English teaching in different levels, the whole terrain must be standardized in English teaching [4]. What’s more, the English testing system in China is becoming standardized. The testing system of CYLE is popular for Chinese Children English testing. Among college students, CET 4 and CET 6 are nation-widely used. TEM 4 and TEM 8 are required for English major students. Other globally applied testing systems such as IELTS, TOEFL, GRE, and MSE are also popular in Chinese English education field.

Outlook of the Future of ELE in China

Firstly, distance English education will become popular. With the popularization of computer, the majority of urban and rural households have Internet computers, iPad, laptops, which provide the material basis for the majority of people learning English online almost all ages. There will be more and more excellent MOOC, SPOCs, and Gold course possible online. Some might be free, some cost less. Anyhow, people will feel easier to choose when and where to learn, and how. Students in the virtual classrooms may vary in ages, sexes, races, and nationalities.

Secondly, new technology will be put into use in English language education. With the development of society, the new and advanced information technology, the new and advanced network technology, the new and advanced multimedia technology will be integrated into English Language education. Network distance education can overcome the traditional education in time and space obstacles, so that any person can learn at any time, any place, choose any teaching content, to their favorite learning style and learning progress. The new information technology and multimedia technology enable English learning in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in full organic integration. The network may narrow the distance between the English communication sides. Multimedia network teaching with a broad, rich and diverse equipment can make students with a full
range of sensory stimulation so as to improve their learning efficiency. In the process of learning, students can read, listen, speak, and write. Other aspects of the problem in the network platform are free, interactive. Other students can discuss, help each other for mutual inspiration, mutual assessment and open thinking and stimulate learning interest, to improve English communicative ability.

Thirdly, the materials and resources of ELE will become richer in variety and smaller in size. Multimedia computer network has a strong presentation ability. It can put the text, sound, graphics, video, animation set in one, so that the network teaching has a large amount of information. The disk, chip, bar code and two-dimension code will be much lighter than printed books, even become invisible. Sometimes a USB flash disk will contain the information as much as a library. The information updates faster. A number of demonstrations and vivid features can be very good to create a vivid image of the external environment, so that students have a sense of immersive, fully integrated into the learning atmosphere [5]. Thus, with the lighter and smaller materials and resources, the teaching mode based on multimedia network can be built up with the modern advanced multimedia network technology, and the English teaching methods like situational method and communicative teaching method are combined together to provide a good English learning environment for students.

Fourthly, English Language education will be socialized. English is the most popularized world language. In today's world, the era of global integration has come. Refusing to learn English means to cut off many links with the outside world. ELE will not be ignored. However, the way to learn and use English will become different. The teaching methodology, the learning materials, the study time and location, the testing systems, etc. will become socialized as well. The traditions will be yesterday. English language education is not judged only by diploma or certificate. The actual ability should be the destination. The language capacity judgement is not from one-time paper test but from some more realistic and objective devices. By and large, the future of English language education will become brighter and easier.

Conclusion

In China, English language education has a history of more than 150 years. Although ELE in China had experienced ups and downs, it finally develops quite well. History can help penetrate the judgment sensibly, can help recognize the present clearly, and can help infer the future logically. For the English language education practitioners, especially English major college students and teachers, the study of ELE is helpful for the doing work and necessary for the further major-related research.

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References