

The English Language Education in Chinese Colleges and Universities of Science and Technology

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With China's ever-deepening reform and opening to the outside world, English proficiency has come to be regarded as being of great importance for technical personnel in the country, and English language education experienced an unprecedented emphasis and strengthening in Chinese colleges and universities of science and technology (abbreviated to CCUST thereafter) in the past fifteen or so years. Now, English language courses are offered in all CCUST in a compulsory way. Although Japanese, German, French, Russian are also taught, English is absolutely the mainstream of CCUST foreign language education and has the overwhelming majority of the students. College English Tests (CET) are the only required nationally unified college examination in China.

Generally speaking, English is taught in Chinese technical institutions of higher learning in two ways: one is a required basic course called College English or Public English, which is intended for students specializing in all fields except English, and the other is an English specialty referred to as English for Science and Technology (called EST for short).

College English (CE) course is the largest-scale form of English teaching in CCUST, and it is the most stressed basic subject. The teaching purpose of the course, according to the CE Teaching Syllabus promulgated by the State Education Commission is to train the prospective engineers to read in English perfectly, to listen, write and translate with ease, and to speak expressively. CE course is divided into six phasic bands, Band One through Four being the basic stage and Band Five through Six the advanced one. According to its students' English level upon their enrollment, each CCUST can decide with which band it starts its CE course. (Of course most CCUST start with Band One) CE course starts at the very beginning of the first term and stops at the end of the fourth term in all CCUST, comprising no less than 280 class hours. (usually 4 hours a week). Now, all four-year programmes in CCUST are required to finish Band 4 and all the two-year programme Band 3.

CE curriculum is mainly composed of intensive reading, extensive reading and listening, with intensive reading being the major one. Textbooks are in practice prescribed, and the two major choices are the one compiled by Shanghai Fudan University and the one by Shanghai Communication University. The units of the textbooks mainly consist of two major parts: 2 or 3 reading passages and a list of reading comprehension and grammatical exercises. The texts are rewritten and abridged articles from western publications and their topics include popular science, Western culture, biography, philosophy etc. with science articles like "The Artificial Intelligence" making up the bulk. There is a test (CET) at the



end of each CE band. CET Band 1,2, 5 are prepared by CCUST themselves, while Band 3 is set up by provincial higher education administrations and Band 4 and 6 are organized by the State Education Commission twice a year. (January and June) Now most CCUST stipulate that a passing grade of CET Band 4 is a prerequisite for a bachelor's degree and in fact certificates for the passing of CET Band 4 and 6 are considered almost as important as college diplomas.

On the whole CE teaching have been quite successful in CCUST. The English level of CCUST students have been greatly raised. In the past, with the aid of dictionaries, most CCUST graduates had great difficulties in reading English articles, and their other English skills were even worse, Now, the majority of CCUST students can acquire a satisfactory reading ability and some of them can also write and speak quite well. The best of them even have a English proficiency better than that of the average English majors. For example, two of mechanics graduates taught by me have become English interpreters by profession and dozens of my other students have got more than 600 in TOEFL.

Anyway CE teaching in CCUST still leaves something to be desired. Its most obvious problem is that too much attention are paid to the receptive skill and productive skills are more or less overlooked. Now, a considerable portion of CCUST students' writing, speaking and translation abilities are below the mark. Moreover, there is no denying the fact that with a view to obtaining better CET results, some of CCUST go all out to train students' techniques of answering CET questions and neglect the laying of their English foundation and the cultivating of their practical communicative abilities. As a result, some of the successful candidates of CET Band 4 are very poor at using the language. Fortunately this phenomenon has already been noticed by CE teaching circle and now it is in the process of being redressed. A call was issued last year by the State Education Commission to pay more attention to the cultivation of the students' productive skills in English and from 1996 on subjective questions such as writing and translation will take up larger percentage in CET. Furthermore, new regulation provides that if an examinee fail in writing, even if he does well in other parts, he still can not pass the test.

In the late 70s, a new branch of learning came into being in CCUST- English for. Science and Technology.(called EST for short) Our college, TianJin Institute of Technology, is one of the first CCUST. establishing this new specialty (1979). In its early days, EST. was cold-shouldered by both the foreign languages teaching circle and science and technology teaching circle. Some people even dismissed it as nondescript. Despite this, in the year that followed, more and more impetus was given to the study of EST and gradually EST gained acceptance and popularity. Now, EST has grown greatly in strength and quality and it has been established in more than 50 CCUST, including the most venerable ones like QingHua University, Tianj ing University, and The University of Science and Technology of china.

EST aims at producing translators in scientific and technological fields and some foreign trade personnel. Generally speaking, EST curriculum include three major parts: language classes, scientific and technical courses, and subjects introducing foreign trade knowledge, with the first part accounting for 60--70 percent of the total class hours, the second, 15--20, and the third, 10-15.(The total class hours for EST number 3000) The framework of EST 5 language courses is similar to those of traditional English majors, comprising reading, writing, listening, speaking, translation literature etc., and usually



using the textbooks compiled and used in foreign language institutes, whose contents range from short stories to a variety of nonfiction passages. EST's science and technology courses in most cases are composed of math, computer, electrical engineering, mechanics etc. The courses on foreign trade was added to EST curriculums in much later years, around late 80s, in most CCUST. They usually offer subjects like the principles of the international trade, business correspondence, marketing and so on.

With English, science and technology and foreign trade rolled into one, EST is better-suited for China's new economic situation and its graduate have advantage of traditional English majors as translators in export-oriented domestic enterprises and joint-ventures. Beyond doubt, with more skills than English, EST graduates can also be put to many more other uses in the present-day China than their foreign languages institutes counterparts do. EST graduates can also be put to many more other uses in the present-day China than their foreign languages institutes counterpart do. Ever since their appearance, EST has made remarkable contribution to China's modernization drive and it is no exaggeration to say that the establishment of EST is no less than a significant revolution in China's English language education.

Yet, still being young, EST is by no mean free from problems. The most serious weakness of EST is that except those from the key universities, its students' English proficiency is on the whole not as good as that of the English majors in Foreign languages institutes, especially in listening and speaking. On the other hand, comparatively speaking, in the respects of the faculty members' qualifications and the teaching facilities like libraries and audio-visual equipment, EST also falls behind. Anyway the parties concerned have taken note of these problems and measures have been taken to solve them. Having attached more importance to language teaching, EST in most CCUST have given more class hours to language classes. Moreover, in order to stimulate their students enthusiasm to learn English, EST in most CCUST have taken part in the nationally unified Test for English Majors Grade 4 (TEM 4), and some of them have participated in Test for English Majors Grade 8 (TEM 8), which are optional in nature. Now, more strict requirements are imposed on the recruitment of EST teachers, with a M.A in English as a prerequisite. All these efforts have yielded encouraging results: the score of EST candidates of TEM4 keep going up and in recent years, the average score of EST is higher than the mean score of TEM4 (TEM4 are attended by foreign languages institutes, teacher's colleges, foreign trade schools, and comprehensive universities).

in conclusion, China has successfully worked out two roughly complete and noticeably efficient English language education systems in CCUST, which can satisfactorily meet the country's needs for both technical personnel with a command of workable English and English language professionals with an intimate knowledge of technology. Although both of the two systems are far from being perfect, they have shown gratifying promise of improvement. It is sure that foreign colleagues can benefit from drawing on China's experiences in this connection.