

A Research Report on College English Teaching and Learning Reform Project In China's Private Higher Institutions From the Perspective of the International Talent Cultivation

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Abstract

College English is a basic course in colleges and universities in China. However, both teachers and students, especially in private higher institutions, have been confronted with the issue of time-consumption and low-efficiency in language learning. Thus, the reform on language teaching and learning has been implemented. The research report focuses on the description and analysis of the goal of the reform, the curriculum and course design, implementing process, and assessment of the teaching and learning. Through the analysis of the proficiency assessment College English Test (CET) among 2012 students for one year, the report discusses the pros and cons of the reform. Finally, the report presents the main findings of the reform and throws light on future research in College English teaching and learning.

Keywords: College English Teaching and Learning, Curriculum, Course Modules, Assessment

Introduction

This is a research report about the pilot reform of College English Teaching and Learning (CETL) for the first year students in School of Business in Shanghai Jianqiao University in the academic year 2012-2013. CETL focuses on non-English major students in higher education institutions in China (Department of Higher Education of Ministry of Education of P.R. China, 2004 &2007).

According to the applied linguist Jack C. Richards (2001), English is increasingly important in international trade and commerce. With the mobility of people for international

tourism and business, communicative competence is greatly laid stress on. In 2007, the government of China renewed the College English Curriculum Requirements which highlight the communicative competence, especially listening and speaking.

However, in the process of implementing the CE requirements, there is still an issue confusing the teachers and students, i.e., how to meet the requirements effectively. CETL in Shanghai Jianqiao University (SJU), one of the private universities in China, is faced with the challenge of innovation to meet the needs of China's social and economic development. Although there have been some changes in the process of CETL in SJU in recent years, the time-consuming and low-effective status (Jing Shenghua, 1999) hasn't been altered essentially, which is mainly reflected in the proficiency assessment of College English Test Band 4 (CET4) launched by Ministry of Education of China from 1987. CET is a proficiency assessment which aims to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher's teaching and student's learning. CET consists of two bands from lower to higher one: Band 4 and Band 6. For most higher education institutions, CET 4 is highlighted as the most crucial one of the objectives of English curriculum for two reasons. One reason is CET 4 has been identified as the level of English both in teaching and learning for the universities (Yang Huizhong & Jin Yan, 2001), and the other reason is CET 4 has the backwash effect to CE teaching and learning to some extent (Huang Dayong & Yang Bingjun, 2002).

To solve the problem of time-consumption and low-effectiveness in CETL(Cai Jigang, 2010; Jing Shenghua, 1999) in SJU, the pilot reform had been worked out and then implemented, especially in courses design for freshmen in the academic year 2012-2013 in School of Business. The focuses of the report are to see (1) how effective the reformed curriculum is with regard to syllabus, teachers, learners, teaching materials and related resources, and (2) what the pros and cons of the reformed curriculum and the significance are on future English teaching and learning in higher education.

The methods of the research report are literature survey, analyses of the process of implementation and data of formative and summative assessments of the pilot reform. The subjects of the pilot reform research are about 978 who are in 7 different majors of the School of Business in the first academic year 2012-2013. All of them are non-English major students.

The pilot reform aims to find the access to optimal College English teaching and learning for non-stated higher education institutions like Shanghai Jianqiao University. The subjects are the stakeholders because they are the participants of the test and the certificate for CET 4 will have important influence on their achievement in learning and employment in the future (Wang Yinyin, 2006). Furthermore, the significance of the reform will underlie the development of teachers and administrations for teaching methodology and curriculum design in the future. Finally, the findings of the pilot reform will be the reference to the further innovation of the English language learning in the university.

This research report includes five parts. The beginning is an introduction which is a general description about the pilot reform. Part I reviews the background of College English teaching and learning in China, the situations of English learning in Shanghai Jianqiao University, the objectives and significance of the reform, and the methods of the research report. Part II elaborates the process of the implementation of the reform project. Part III analyses the findings, gives general summary about the pros and cons of the reform, and puts up proposals for next research. Part IV Conclusion.

Review of the history and development of College English teaching and learning

Background of the College English in China

College English (CE) is the basic required course for college and university students in our country. It can be tracked from three stages of the time. The first period CE development is from 1987 to 1999. With the initial stipulated CE Syllabus issued by the State Education Commission of China in 1987, the criterion-related norm-referenced assessment of CET was only implemented in universities which had the facilities and conditions to carry out the test. The test focused on reading, vocabulary and grammar of the English language, i.e., knowledge of English. The second period is from 1999 to 2005, during which the number of students in colleges and universities increased dramatically with the education policy launched by the government from 1999. On the other hand, English became more and more important in the society because of the expanding communication of open policy to foreign countries by the

Chinese government. In 1999, the original Syllabus was amended. The features of the amendment made the great demands to the students on integrated competence in English, especially on speaking and writing abilities (Ministry of Education, 2004). Speaking test called *CET Spoken English Test* started to be implemented in some higher institutions. The third period is from 2005 up to now, the period of which takes on constant reform about CE Curriculum. With the issues on *College English Curriculum Requirements* in 2004(trial) and 2007 by China's Ministry of Education, the reform has reinforced to establish a system of teaching and teaching administration documentation, making efforts to form a system of faculty management and development. The instructional requirements also have given the freedom to the individual higher institutions in designing courses based on their objectives. CET 4 as an instrument promotes the CE Curriculum to be implemented, measures the CE teaching and learning objectively and effectively and provides the backwash to teachers and students to adjust their teaching and learning accordingly (Cai Jigang,2011; Wang Shouren, 2011).

Situations of College English in Shanghai Jianqiao University

College English teaching and learning in Shanghai Jianqiao University has also undergone the innovation since the issue of *CE Curriculum Requirements* in 2007. However, compared with the results of CET 4 among four grades undergraduates from 2006 to 2009, the accumulated pass rates at the end of four years learning in the university are 87.76%, 83.17%, 83.17%, and 77.92% respectively (Jianqiao University Teaching Affairs office 2013, Figure 1). The declined trend has attracted much attention to English language teaching and learning in Shanghai Jianqiao University because the unsatisfactory results of CET 4 have influenced the reputation and even recruitment of the university in some way. To prevent the continuous declination of the results in CET4, to make the situation improved and to find the solution to manipulating English language teaching and learning, it is necessary for teachers to carry out the reform in courses design, modules set, teaching methodology application and assessment implementation.

Figure 1. Non-English Major Students CET 4 Accumulated Pass Rates (2010-2013), source from Jianqiao University Teaching Affairs office 2013

Non-English Major Students CET 4 Accumulated Pass Rates (2010-2013)					
Sessions	First Year	Second Year	Third Year	Fourth Year	Total
2006	4.48%	81.79%	85.37%	87.76%	87.76%
2007	12.69%	71.97%	81.07%	83.17%	83.17%
2008	17.24%	71.14%	79.24%	83.10%	83.17%
2009	10.91%	62.28%	75.16%	77.92%	77.92%
2010	16.37%	63.71%	70.42%		70.42%
2011	16.43%	56.63%			56.63%
2012	34.25%				34.25%

Objectives and significance of the pilot reform

The objective of College English is to develop students' ability to use English in a well-rounded way, especially in listening and speaking, so that in their future studies and careers as well as social interactions they will be able to communicate effectively, and at the same time enhance their ability to study independently and improve their general cultural awareness so as to meet the needs of China's social development and international exchanges. (Department of Higher Education, 2007)

As a compulsory course for college and university students in China, College English is one of the fundamental courses. The credits for CE account for around 16 of all credits. Based on CE Curriculum Requirements, Jianqiao University manipulated the reform to improve the level of English of non-English major students. The pilot reform is expected to have the significance of demonstration effect for other schools in the university.

On the other hand, the motivation of the reform is derived from the demands of the students. English is completely different from Chinese in language systems, and the cultural ideologies reflected by the two languages are far more incomprehensible between the West and East (Liu Qingxue, 2003). To understand and use English is based on both input and output abilities in the process of teaching and learning. In addition, the level of students are different due to the limitation of facilities and environment of English language learning. When they entered Shanghai Jianqiao University, they are afflicted with the anxiety of English language learning, especially with listening and speaking. Located in East China, the stronger economic

development zone, Shanghai Jianqiao University is confronted with the competition and challenge with other higher institutions and society in employment. How to help students to enhance their competence in communication in English has become crucial to the university administration and teachers.

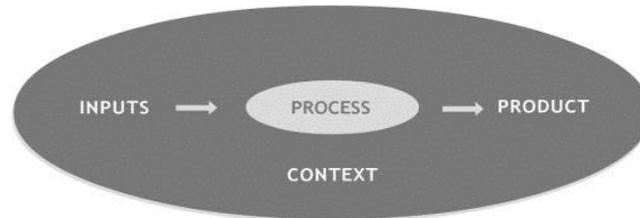
Methods of the research report

The methods of the research report are literature survey, analyses of the process of implementation and data of formative and summative assessments of the pilot reform.

From literature survey, as mentioned in the introduction of the report, from the history of College English development in China from 1987, especially *College English Curriculum Requirements* issued in 2004(trial) and 2007 by Ministry of Education, the reform has become the constant status with the expanding communication in economy and tourism. Based on the researches of the linguists, English learning should rely on the learner's existing level, motivation and environment around him (Ellis, 2003). Quite a few scholars, for example, Ellis (2000), Freeman (2000), Krashen(1982) and Liu Runqing (1999) pointed out that adults could acquire and learn second language in his input hypothesis. Merrill Swain and S. Lapkin (1995) developed the output hypothesis which presented that the learner could generated something new in learning a second language. Therefore, input would be enhanced through the mental process by modified output.

Another method will demonstrate a description objectively about the process of implementation of the pilot reform. According to Educational Evaluation theory by Daniel L. Stufflebeam (1983), Context, Input, Process, Product can be evaluated scientifically. The approach is known as the CIPP (see Figure 2). Based on the CIPP evaluation model checklist by Stufflebeam , the research report will analyses the project planning, curriculum and courses design, class learning procedure and assessment.

Figure 2. CIPP Educational Evaluation Model, Source from Daniel L. Stufflebeam(1983).



The third method is the data of assessment including quizzes, mid-term and Final examination, and CET 4 proficiency examination. Although CIPP model includes product, the formative step of the evaluation, the data will be compared in details to backwash the project of the reform.

Description of the Implementation of the reform project

In 2003, the China's Ministry of Education launched the courses assessment for teaching and learning efficiency among undergraduates in colleges and universities. The purpose is to promote the quality of course learning. English course as one of the compulsory courses is highlighted by all the higher institutions. Shanghai Jianqiao University carried out the pilot reform to explore the new approach to improve English level to meet the assessment requirements. This reform report will present six aspects related to the reform project: the subjects chosen, curriculum design, course modules, teaching strategies, testing and assessment and administration.

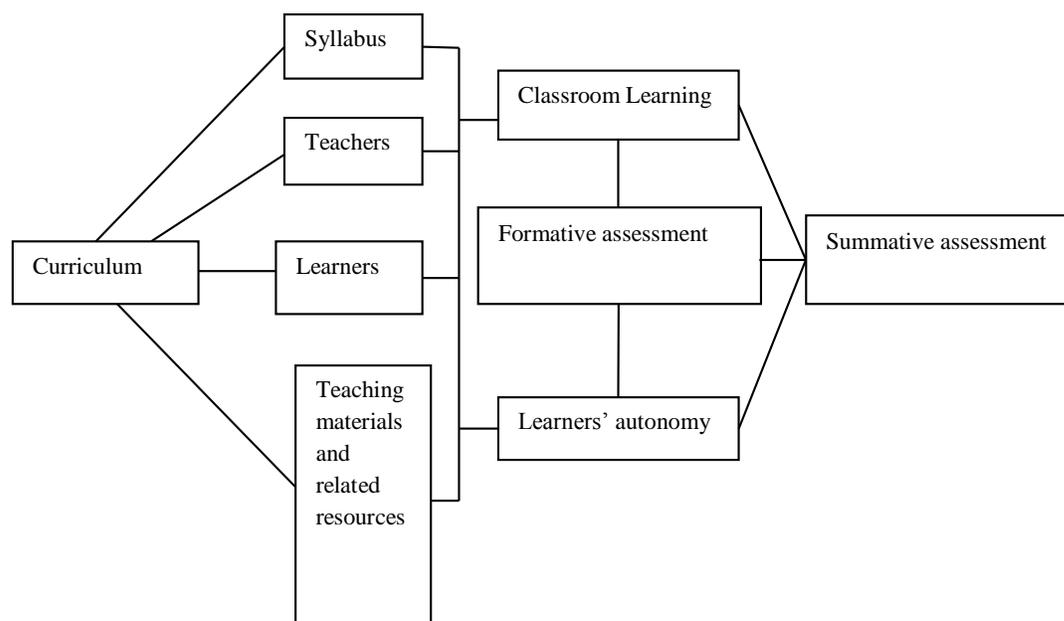
The Subjects

School of Business in Jianqiao University has 7 majors (See figure 3) since 2012 which are all related to business in their future employment. Possible communication with the foreign companies is demanded for the students, especially in the city of Shanghai; about 978 freshmen students starting their College English at the same time are the ideal subjects to see what the project obtains at the end of the project for one academic year.

Curriculum design

The course of College English is a required basic one for undergraduate students (College English Curriculum Requirement (2004) by Ministry of Education). It aims to build the relationships with practical skills of the English language with language teaching by different teaching models and approaches. The curriculum involves syllabus, teachers, learners, teaching materials and other resources (Dubin & Olshtain, 2002). There are two approaches to learners in learning language: classroom learning and autonomy learning. The assessment consists of formative and summative examinations through the whole year (See figure 4).

Figure 4. Curriculum Design



Conventionally, the basic course will be completed within two academic years (See figure 5). In the pilot reform, the time for classroom-based learning was adjusted to one academic year (See figure 6). However, the class hours per week for English learning were increased to 12 hours. Therefore, the input of reading in stipulated time was strengthened. The more the learners input the language materials, the stronger their abilities of English will be (Krashen, 1982). Apart from the adjusting of time for learning, the students of the class are from the same major for effective administration for the class teacher and students.

Figure 5. Curriculum and Course Design Before the Reform 2012

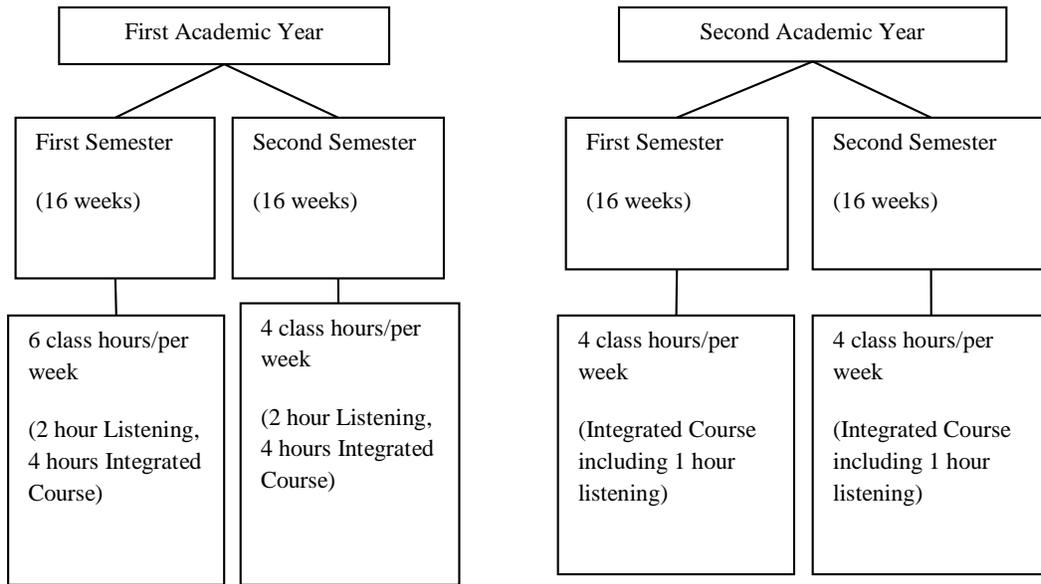
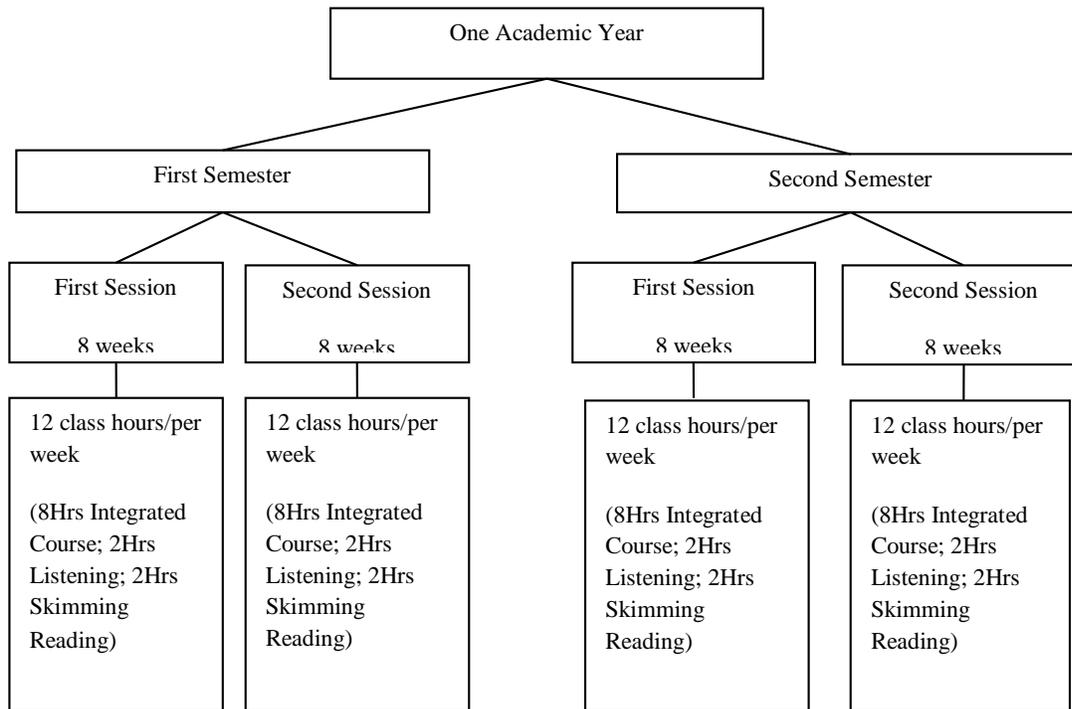


Figure 6. Curriculum and Course Design for the Reform 2012-2013



Compared with the two systems, the class hours were incremental by 64 in the reformed curriculum design. The implication of the plused hours is that the input of language materials has been achieved.

Course modules

College English Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2004 trial & 2007) by Ministry of Education is comparatively more democratic. Individual colleges and universities have more freedom to design the course in order to increase the interests and practical application in classroom learning and also encourage teachers to adopt flexible teaching strategies to their teaching procedures (Mei Zhixin, 2012). Under these circumstances, in the pilot reform project, the course of College English was divided into three modules per week: Integrated Course module for 8 class hours, Skimming Reading Skill module for 2 hours and Listening with Speaking module for 2 class hours (See figure 6).

The module of Integrated course focuses on comprehensive learning of English grammar, vocabulary and writing after reading the material in the textbook. Usually the reading material would be finished learning in two weeks, but in the reform project students must complete it in one week including vocabulary, comprehension reading and writing related to the topic of the material. The timed writing is required to write at least 120 words in 30 minutes.

The module of Skimming Reading Skill develops the students' competence to search for the information needed fast and accurately. The aim is to read a long article with 800-1000 words and answer 10 items to the reading material in 15 minutes.

The module of Listening with Speaking enhances the input and output abilities, especially the reaction to distinguish the pronunciation, sentences and the meaning of the speakers. The module highlights the situational communication and practical use of the language.

Teaching materials and methods

Learning materials Because the course is divided into three modules, different module needs different instructional materials to match (Richards, 2001). Learning materials include textbooks, teacher's manuals, Teaching aids and CD-ROMs.

For Integrated course module, it combines grammar, vocabulary with reading and writing. The textbook *New College English (Second Edition)* published by Shanghai Foreign language Education Press was chosen as the classroom teaching material because it reflects the aims and approaches of the curriculum. Its design and organization complys with the communicative language teaching method and the task-based language learning can create an environment to immerse the learners to practice language.

Listening course module adopted the textbook *New Horizon College English Audio-visual Course(Second Edition)* published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (Beijing). The textbook uses the authentic materials to make the students to develop all-round abilities to utilize all available resources to improve their communicative competence. The features of the textbook is the combination of CD-ROMs and internet.

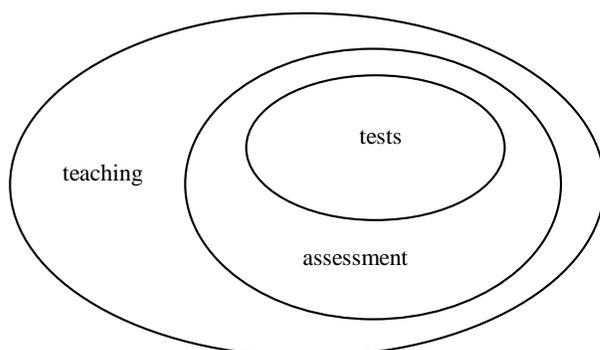
Skimming Reading Course module focuses on the skills of timed reading and information searching. The instructional material is the textbook *New Horizon College English Speed Reading Course* also published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (Beijing). It designs different items to make the input converted into output in searching for the information in target language with clear topics and aims within the required time.

In the reform project, the input of the language was more intensive. For example, the textbook for Integrated Course consists of *College English Book1 to Book 4*. It was completed during the whole year which usually took two years before the reform. The strenghtened input made the students to immerse the target language and have more opportunity to practise authentic language.

Testing and assessment

The process of language teaching consists of teaching, tests and assessment according to Brown (2004), see figure 7. Testing can promote teaching in four aspects: estimating the teacher's teaching from the information resulted from the test, giving the students motivation to make progress, reviewing the materials covered by the course and further understanding their knowledge from the feedback of the test(Richard, 2004).

Figure 7. Testing, Assessment and Teaching, source from Brown(2004).



In the project of the reform, assessment was completed by regularly complying with the teaching planning. Take Integrated Course module for example. The types of tests were unit testing, i.e. the outcome after completed 2 or three texts within 40-50 minutes in class. The tests covered vocabulary, grammar, reading and sentence translation. The aim was to examine what the students had reached and what problems teachers and students must deal with. The teachers also got the information whether it was effective or not in their classroom teaching. The other two modules also operated the same rules with different focuses on courses.

Besides unit testing, mid-term and final tests were concentrated on comprehensive master of the course in accordance with *College English Curriculum Requirements(2007)*. What needs to be more stressed is two mock examinations about CET 4 in second semester (see figure 8). The items were elaborately designed in the test paper such as listening, reading and cloze so that the students could notice what they needed to make up or review in learning.

Figure 8. Pass Rate of two Mock Examinations and CET 4, source from Shanghai Jianqiao University Academic Affairs (2003).

Test Types	Mock 1	Mock 2	CET 4 (end of one year)
Pass rate	55.76%	54.32%	62.58%
Student numbers	929	869	978

From the above table, the results of two Mock examinations were 55.76% and 54.32%, It showed the stability of the students' learning over one semester. The pass rate 62.58% of CET

4 at the end of one year demonstrated the backwash of testing , especially the two Mock Examinations.

Compared with the different sessions of the students in School of Business from 2006 to 2012, the pass rate of CET 4 in the first year dramatically changed (see Figure 9). The causes might be various. And different students might have different levels of English. Environment of learning and motivation of the students were also the factors which influenced the results year by year.

Figure 9. The pass rate of CET 4 of the students in School of Business in the first academic year, source from Shanghai Jianqiao University Teaching Affairs 2013.

Sessions	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Student Numbers	155	398	512	558	733	713	978
First Year Pass rate	94.9%	64.07%	63.09%	63.08%	54.57%	53.58%	62.58%

However, Richards(2001) pointed out that testing shouldn't be the only way to assessment the effect of teaching and learning, especially the latter. Self-assessment and peer assessment are both effective methods to promote students to arouse their motivation in learning language. The teachers adopted grading and marking methods to give the students opportunity and encouragement to improve themselves. So Brown (2004) concluded that teachers shouldn't teach to test, that is, ethical potential will be more powerful in promoting students self-development.

Factors from internal and external environment

This part of the research report discusses the features of or impact on the cooperation among School of Foreign Languages, School of Business and Office of Academic Affairs. The staff of English teachers and educational administrators are all responsible for the implmentation of the all the activities in the teaching process because they play different parts in practice(Wang Zhizhen, 2012). John Dewey stated that three features of educational educators are reflected in educational management: instruction, coordination, and routine affairs.

In the beginning of the pilot reform, educators in Shanghai Jianqiao University proposed the idea for the innovation about College English Course. Meetings and discussions had been held among staff related to the reform project. These activities were helpful for the staff to understand the goal of the project and carry out the plan. With the support of the class teachers and educators in the two Schools, classroom teaching had been carried on smoothly. In the two mock examinations, students were organized successfully.

Findings and significance for the further research

The key components of the research report is to objectively present a descriptive illustration to elaborate the effectiveness of the reform project, to give analysis and assessment on the merits and imperfection of the procedures. What's more, the problems generated from the process will be explored in the future research for constant innovation.

From the perspective of practical application, the subjects who were the stakeholders, participated in the process and got the different results in CET 4 which was the vital performance factor to assess the pilot reform. From the perspective of research report, the objective assessment will serve as the most important goal for the description of the findings.

Main findings of the reform

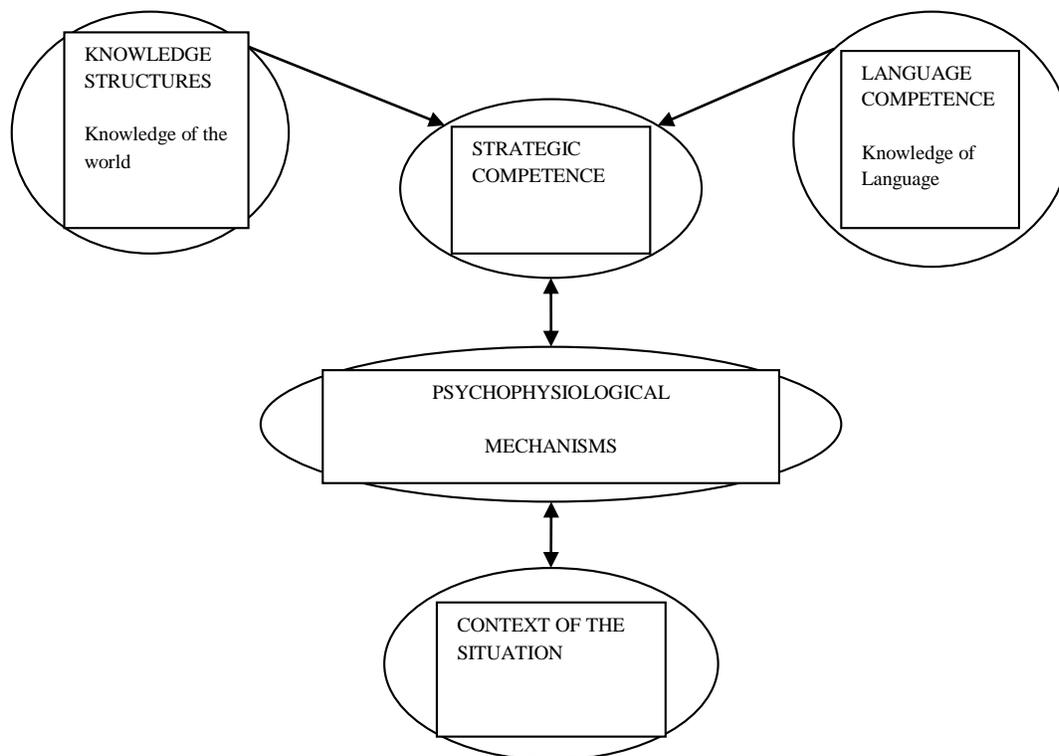
In the pilot reform, at the end of the first academic year 2012-2013 in School of Business, the pass rate of CET 4, which is the proficiency examination to estimate the effect of College English teaching and learning in China, has reached 60.86%. Compared with the academic year 2011-2012, the pass rate is 25.37%, and till the end of the second academic year, the pass rate accumulated to 60.66%. The data present the effectiveness of the pilot reform. However, the question is which variable really has the impact on learner's language learning. Is it the duration of learning, the intensive input of materials, the division of the course modules, the subjects' motivation or the teachers' innovation of teaching methods? This is an issue for further exploration.

College English has been stipulated as the basic compulsory course from the *College English Curriculum Requirements (2007)*. According to the pilot reform project in Shanghai Jianqiao University, the basic English course should be completed in one year. But the weak students in CET 4 or in English learning still need the instruction from the teachers after that. How is the sustainable learning system set up for them?

As a pilot reform, the project covers a set of feasible classroom teaching and learning measures: curriculum design, course module design, teaching methods and testing and assessment. However, extracurriculum learning system such as computer-based teaching mode is still insufficient in school-based environment which will be beneficial to all students.

The communication mechanism between different faculties was formed, especially between the English teachers and class teachers. The system generated not only explicit influence on educational management but also the implicit impact on the reform result.

Figure 8 Components of communicative language ability in communicative language use, source from *Bachman(1990)*.



The significance of the pilot reform for College English Teaching and Learning

The pilot reform was involved with about 978 students. The communicative competence is related to the context including teachers, students, education administrators, facilities, psychology, physiology, etc. Batchman (1990) pointed out that the construction of learner's stratege competence is involved in some factors (see Figure 8).

The elaborate planning of the project was guarantee for the implementation, the devotion of staff in the process of reform played the implicit influence on the result, and the investment of the finance and resources greatly support the reform. The significance or the implication of the pilot reform lies in its duplicability in application. But considering more about the weak students, it may be adjusted to some extent to make the optimal project for innovation in the future. To be supported by the administration department can also become the key factor in the whole project.

Conclusion

The reseach report retrospected the process of the pilot reform about College English Course in 2012-2013. From the perspective of international talent cultivation, the reform complys with the requirements of innovation in CE Course. The result of CET 4 in the end of the year measured the extent of the procedures, assessed the effectiveness of the teachers' teaching and the subjects's learning.

However, what we may ignore is that the language learning is a kind of long-time and constant practice. How do the teachers or society creat the authentic environment to immerse the learners in the use of English? What strateges or policies should the euducators or administrators take in school-based English learning ? Cai Jigang (2010) stated that the purpose of mastering English is to develop communicative competence; it is the time to convert the focus on language knowledge into the orientation of language use, especially the abilities of listening and speaking for their own academic purpose.

The changes of focus and direction for College English Course may trigger the innovation of new curriculum, teacher training, testing system and teaching materials. The possible more important factor will be the teaching concept in language learning.

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