

A Critique of Large Class Size and Excessive Teaching Hours for College English Teachers in College English Courses

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Abstract: The paper analyzes two major problems that may contribute to the ineffectiveness of college English teaching: large class size for non-English majors and excessive teaching hours for college English teachers. By discussing the two external problems and offering corresponding suggestions, the paper intends to attract relevant authority's attention so that due attention can be paid to the two problems and immediate measures can be taken.

1. Introduction

Many college English teachers focus on the reform of teaching methodology to improve their college English teaching. For example, they study systematically flipped class, Communicative Approach, CBI, TBL, PAD and so on. While it is of vital importance to study and put into practice these teaching philosophies so as to enhance college English teachers' language teaching abilities, it is equally important to pay attention to such external conditions as large class size for students of non-English majors and excessive teaching hours for college English teachers. In my opinion, two widespread contributors to the ineffectiveness or even failure of college English teaching are the large size of English classes for students and tight weekly teaching schedule or excessive teaching hours for college English teachers. The two prevalent problems have become huge obstacles on the way to college English teachers' effective teaching and their personal growth, and thus immediate solutions to them have become critical to the rapid improvement of college English teaching.

2. Body

2.1 Problems of Large Class Size

Class size of college English courses for non-English majors, especially the reading writing and translating course in most universities across China is large. It is widely acknowledged home and abroad that if there are more than 50 students in a single class, then this class can be considered as a large one. [1] There are usually over 50 or even 60 students in a typical college English class for the reading writing and translating course. This large class size is not in line with the law of language learning. Students' learning effectiveness cannot be expected to improve until this very problem is attached great importance to and properly resolved.

Too large a class produces many problems for a college English teacher. In some universities, a typical college English teacher for the college English reading writing and translating course has to be in charge of two or three large-size classes, amounting to at least 150 student for the teacher within a single semester. A teacher has to get to know and handle so many students once at a time that many teachers even cannot recognize some of the students after the semester. Instead of grasping the attendance rate by sight, many teachers have to take a roll call in each class to ensure students' attendance.

English language learning, which is generally practice-based, requires a lot of interaction in class. But the presence of so many students in one single class fails to offer an acceptable learning environment for interaction. For lack of interaction, it is not uncommon for students to manage their own business other than learning English. Compared with the college English viewing listening and speaking class which is usually small-sized in most universities, students in a typical college English reading writing and translating class are generally less motivating and less attentive, which verifies the link between class size and students' learning effectiveness. Students have great difficulty communicating with teachers for the large class size. The large number of students reduces their chances of standing up and speaking, which will ultimately negatively affect their confidence and initiative. In a typical college English reading writing and translating class, most students have to keep silent during the whole class. Lack of interaction between teachers and students and lack of interaction among students make the class rather boring for most students. Some students become absent-minded all the time, play with their phones, talk with their partners, or even fall asleep. Students' passivity in class in turn affects teachers' enthusiasm in teaching. In addition, it is practically impossible for most college English teachers to check the students' homework assignments exhaustively for the extremely heavy load of work they have to endure. For example, a teacher has to correct over 150 essays weekly. The heavy load of work may force the teacher to just grade the essays rather than give specific suggestions, let alone communicate with all the students in private in his or her non-working hours.

Gibbs believes that teachers in charge of large size classes are not able to pay enough attention to the individual development of each student due to the heavy work load. [2] Large class size also makes it difficult for college English teachers to implement the integration of moral and ideological education into their teaching which is presently thought to be of vital importance to students' mental integrity. Moral and ideological education is a chain of actions that are supposed to keep exerting influences upon students on the part of teachers, so it should not be limited to the class periods. Moral and ideological education can not be well achieved without person-to-person interaction between teachers and students after class. The overwhelming number of students makes it rather difficult for college English teachers to sustain their contact with all the students after class, while even small talks with students are vital to their academic and mental growth.

2.2 Problems of Excessive Teaching Hours

Although in most universities college English teachers do not have to hold office hours, they do have to play several roles simultaneously. Apart from teaching, they have to do scientific research, apply funding programs, attend conferences and seminars and possibly fulfill domestic duties. While some universities, especially first-tier ones, are undergoing reform that results in the sharp decrease of teachers' teaching hours, college English teachers in most universities still have to endure an extremely tight teaching schedule. Take a surveyed university for example, teachers there have to endure 18 sessions (45 minutes per session) a week several years ago, and some teachers even have to take over 20 sessions a week. The teaching hours have been reduced to approximately 14 sessions per week now, but it is still too heavy a burden for most college English teachers there

if taken into consideration their other responsibilities. It is a real ridicule and shock to many outsiders that an average college English teacher has to take so many teaching hours weekly which are even far more than most primary, junior middle and high school English teachers.

The drawbacks of the implementation of excessive teaching hours are obvious. On the one hand, excessive teaching hours may affect teachers' teaching effectiveness in their teaching practice. On the other hand, it may hinder college English teachers' professional development and career prospect. Under the guidance of such an administrative philosophy, teaching quantity is substituted for teaching quality. Some teachers are so busy with their class teaching that they do not even have time enough to fully prepare for their lessons, let alone do educational research and conduct discussions with colleagues. Teachers may muddle through classes, which leads to possible relatively ineffective teaching and occasional complains from students. To some extent, for most teachers, especially female teachers, this type of teaching has become manual labor rather than intellectual work. Many teachers get exhausted and even fall ill due to the inhuman teaching schedule. The overwhelming teaching burden greatly reduces college English teachers' sense of professional achievement and self-esteem.

2.3 Solutions to the Problems of Large Class Size and Excessive Teaching Hours

The solutions to the problems of large-size classes for students and excessive teaching hours for college English teachers seem obvious. There is no doubt that these two problems can be well resolved by making class size smaller and by reducing teaching hours. However, these two problems are interrelated, and the resolution of one problem may increase the difficulty in resolving the other. For example, if we reduce class size for the college English reading writing and translating course, there will be more classes available, leading to the inevitable sharp increase in college English teachers' teaching hours. So the proper resolution of the two problems together seems complicated in practice. I would like to offer my comprehensive solutions here. For most universities across China, the college English courses consist of reading writing and translating course and viewing listening and speaking course. My suggestion here is that we should turn the latter course into an autonomous learning one [3], and reduce the former class size by half. At the same time, we should develop ESP and other general courses of liberal arts. It is worth mentioning that the cancellation of college English viewing listening and speaking course does not necessarily mean the total abandonment of it. College English teachers as a whole still have to come up with strategies to inspire and supervise students to learn all by themselves. It is feasible to cancel the viewing listening and speaking course because college students, most of whom have solid language foundations, can handle the listening materials all by themselves and practicing speaking out by using various apps with the development of high technology. The assumed radical reform on the viewing listening and speaking course actually shows the very respect for language learning. That is, language acquisition is about "learning" rather than "teaching". For the viewing listening and speaking course, what students truly need is motivation, supervision and moderate guidance from their teachers rather than taking traditional classes.

3. Conclusion

The paper analyzes two important external factors that may hinder students' effective learning of the English language and college English teachers' professional development, one being the large size class for students and the other being excessive teaching hours for teachers. All in all, the large class size makes it difficult for college English teachers to interact with students both in and after class and to implement moral and ideological education to their teaching practice. The excessive teaching hours tend to exhaust teachers so that they will not have enough time to achieve effective

teaching and to plan and develop their teaching career. These two problems should and can be solved together by reducing the class size and the teaching hours. Specifically, we should turn the viewing listening and speaking course into self-study programs under college English teachers' guidance and supervision and meanwhile reduce teachers' teaching hours for the reading writing translating course by half. By adopting these strategies, the two major external problems can be well resolved, and the solutions to the two problems will definitely pave way for students' learning effectiveness and college English teachers' decent professional development.

References

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