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## Peculiarities of learning English in China

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### Abstract

China is known to have a vast and varied school system. Education is important all over the world. In China education looks like a power, which can make the country thrive. Nowadays English has been playing an important role of education. A series of government education documents concerning learning and teaching English have been established and put into practice in China. This education policy is in conformity with its national conditions and has been proved to be workable. English education in China has still many problems to be solved. Thus, the progress of teaching skills and reforms of teaching methods are necessary.

*Keywords:* English, education, development, methods, experience;

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### 1. Introduction

It is known that under today's situation marked with a technological revolution, development of knowledge economy and economic globalization, China is opening up the market of service and trade and create many spheres for foreign investment. Chinese people begin to work at it. English learners in China are beginning to realize that the ability to communicate should be emphasized, that is speaking should be stressed in learning and teaching English as a foreign language.

Why do people learn English? Firstly, English is like an instrument for everybody. It is important to get a job. If you want to work with giant companies, the English language should be learned. English seems to be a medium to communicate among others. If a person has some skills of speaking English fluently, the company will not hesitate to hire him as one of their employee. English is the dominant business language and it has become almost a necessity for people if they are to enter a global workforce. Research from all over the world shows that cross-border business communication is most often conducted in English. Its importance in the global market place therefore cannot be underestimated, learning English really can change people's life.

Secondly, English is an international language. Every airport has indexes in English. If you know English, you will never get lost. Moreover, most of the information produced in the Internet (50%) is in English. Thus, knowledge of English will allow you to access to an incredible amount of information which may not be otherwise available. Many of the world's top films, books and music are published and produced in English. Therefore, by learning English you will have access to a great wealth of entertainment and will be able to have a greater cultural understanding. It is very useful for Chinese people [2].

## 2. Discussion

### *The situation of English study in China*

It was as recently as 30 years ago a general and large-scaled English education brought benefits to Chinese primary and secondary schools and universities. Recently the overwhelming majority of Chinese students in schools and universities are studying English. Courses of foreign languages occupy a very important place on all levels of education in China.

The reason why Chinese government pays a great attention to English education and puts forward the relevant policy to establish its position, has a close relation to a short English education history in China, a poor English level of common people and many shortcomings of English teaching in schools [1].

### *The history of English education*

For special historical reasons, from the very foundation of New China in 1949 to the early 1980s, it is Russian that occupied the central position in a foreign language class in most schools and on all levels. Due to a short English education history, its level still lags behind. Because of small number of the teacher's personnel and unsystematic teaching methods, there is still no efficient English teaching theory suiting the conditions of China. Of late, the number of schools with English courses has been increasing until English took the central position.

China was isolated from the outside world from 1949 to 1978. In this period there was little communication between this nation and the western countries and only a few foreigners used to come to China. Common Chinese people had no chance to meet them and as a result they went abroad for study, business or sightseeing. Thus, there was no necessity to learn English as there was no chance to hear or use it.

After 1978 China has implemented the policy of reform and opening to the outside world and its gate has been opened wider and wider. More and more foreigners are coming to China and the number of Chinese people going abroad is increasing. Objectively with the rising of dealings with other countries, the need for learning English is increasing and using English ability is improving as well [3].

### *The place of basic education*

China started to set English classes in primary schools in 1990s. In 1992 State Education Commission issued the Curriculum Regulation for whole-day primary junior high schools of nine-year compulsory education, according to which qualified primary schools can have English courses as an addition to other courses. In 2001 the Education Ministry issued the Experimental Plan on curriculum of compulsory education, which formally put the English courses into the curriculum of primary schools and stipulated that from the 3<sup>d</sup> grade the students should take English courses.

Recently in some provinces and cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, from the very 1<sup>st</sup> grade in the primary schools students began to take English classes. According to the curriculum, the time of English classes from the 3<sup>d</sup> grade in primary schools to the last year of junior high schools should be 6-8% of all the classes. The total time of English classes is only less than that of Science including biology, physics and chemistry for junior high level, which start from the 3<sup>d</sup> grade and the time proportion between English and all the classes should be 7-9%. English weighs heavily in the entrance examinations for senior high schools. For the past few years in China reforms have been made in subjects of entrance examination for higher education and in some provinces there are different subjects.

### *The place in higher education*

In order to objectively and accurately test the college students' actual ability of using English and serve English teaching in universities, the Education ministry of China established the College English Test Band 4 and Band 6. Most of the universities in China do the opposite and demand that their students' English using ability should reach the level of Band 4 before they receive the bachelor's degree and band 6 before the master's degree. If the College English Test is failed, the degrees will be unavailable for them regardless the excellent marks in other subjects. Since the

level of English using is set to be the most important mark in judging students' academic performance, they spend half or more of their valuable time in campus on learning English and ignore more or less the study of their professional courses and the improvement of their comprehensive quality. English level has also been set as one of the key indicators important for the ranking of Chinese universities. An important one is the passing rate of Band 4 and Band 6, which causes a blind competition among students.

#### *The position in the society*

English proficiency has a close link to the employment of students. Many employers regard English as the most important thing at the recruitment regardless its actual use in the jobs. For those with excellent professional knowledge and working ability but a poor English level below Band 4 or Band 6, the employers always refuse to accept them. Teachers in universities and researchers in scientific institutes must pass the English exams before they acquire another higher academic title. There are many regular qualification tests, among those the English exams are an integral part [4].

### **3. Methods**

There are some shortcomings in the English teaching in China. From the beginning of learning English students are required to learn the words by heart, the grammar and reading without speaking training. The entrance examination for higher education puts quite heavy pressure on Chinese students. In order to pass the exams many of them spend a large amount of time and energy on listening to the teachers' explanation, memorizing and writing practice but with little improvement of their actual English using ability. With a dozen of years' hard working, most of the students only learned mute English. Most of Chinese students can easily get high marks in TOEFL or GRE, but they find it hard to communicate in English when going abroad. Many students having passed Band 4 or Band 6 cannot say simple English sentences. The language environment of learning English for Chinese students is rather poor.

Chinese English education policy, though having some problems, are in conformity with the actual conditions in China and workable through the test of practice. So Chinese government should stick to and further improve the current English education policies and maintain the central position of English education. In the primary and secondary schools the class time proportion between English and that of all the courses should remain unchanged. For some qualified schools in some big cities the English classes can begin from the first grade of primary school. The position and required marks of English should be maintained in various entrance examinations and qualification tests. So for the government it is necessary to make full use of examinations as a method to attract people's attention to English education and proficiency.

It should be noted that the last 30 years a significant progress has been witnessed in English teaching, the quality of which has been increased. This is because the place of English education is ensured by the policies adopted by the Chinese government.

In order to raise the English proficiency of common people, the priority is to improve English teaching in schools, which requires a lot of skilled teachers. Recently training English teachers in universities and in primary or secondary schools especially in the rural areas is not up to the requirement of teaching reform. So the Chinese government must work hard and put in more energy and money to strengthen the teachers' training. The responsibility for such work should be taken by the state, provinces, municipalities and counties respectively. The priority of training should go to the establishment of a new English teaching philosophy, familiarity with teaching method and the improvement of teacher's English proficiency. It is necessary to create more chances to send teachers to English-speaking countries or universities or primary and secondary schools from some developed areas for a long or short-term training [5].

### **4. Conclusion**

Learning English is vital nowadays in China. A significant progress has been witnessed in English teaching, the quality of which has been increased and quite an improvement of English popularization has been made among the common people. But still there are some problems in both learning and teaching. Therefore English teaching methods need amending. The Chinese government pays a great attention to English education in all levels and ensures the central place in the curriculum, class time, examinations, etc. But it must work hard and put in more energy and money to strengthen the teachers' training.

The important points of English education involve developing communicative and listening skills. The course of English needs diligent preparation, which requires much hard practice in speaking and writing. To improve students' specialized English abilities, English bilingual teaching should be encouraged in universities. Some foreign scholars, specialists and international students should be invited for the specialized courses and exchange programs.

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