

An Investigation of College English Teaching in Four Universities in China

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The author joined an investigation of College English teaching organised by the Education Department of a province in southern China. Using questionnaires and interviews with College English teachers and students in the four universities in the capital city of that province, the author finds that among the problems existing in College English teaching, teachers' workload is the key issue. In the light of the analysis of this finding and discussion of language classroom teaching, suggestions are given for the improvement of College English teaching in China.

College English in China, workload, language teaching, preparation for teaching, class size

INTRODUCTION

College English in China refers to a compulsory English course for non-English majors in universities. To discuss College English teaching, we might first consider two basic issues: What is language? and, What is language teaching?

Crystal (1971) views language as human vocal noise (or the graphic representation of this noise in writing) used systematically by a community for purposes of communication. Emmitt and Pollock (1997) define language as a system of arbitrary signs agreed to by a community of users, transmitted and received for a specific purpose in relation to the shared world of users. Although there are differences in its definition, language as a system of linguistic symbols for communication is commonly accepted (Sapir 1921; Finocchiaro 1964; Wood 1964; Gimson 1970; Wardhaugh 1972; Mussen, Conger and Kagan 1979; Robins 1990).

When talking about language teaching, Brown (1994) argues that it is guiding and facilitating learning, enabling the learners to learn and setting the conditions for learning. Language teaching means that language is both what is being taught and the means by which it is being taught (Allwright and Bailey 1991; Cook 1991; Ellis 1992). In the classroom, almost the whole teaching effort should be directed towards creating contexts for language use, by such means as listening and reading activities, discussion, communication tasks and role playing (Littlewood 1984). Ur (1996) compares the lesson time available for the activity to a container, suggesting that this container should be filled with as much 'volume' of language as possible and time during which learners are not engaging with the language being practiced for whatever reason is time wasted as far as the practice activity is concerned. This is because 'the language of the language classroom is distinctive because it is designed for language learning to take place' (Cook 1991). According to Harmer (2000), a good language teacher maximises Student Talking Time and minimises Teacher Talking Time.

It can be seen from the above that, since language is for communication, practice should be a key feature of language teaching.

College English has been taught in China for nearly 23 years, during which time great changes have taken place: there have appeared three College English Syllabi and dozens of College English textbooks. The first generation of teachers of College English have all retired from their schools and most of the second generation likewise. College English teaching has been a career for several generations of teachers. Since 1998, given the fact that most parents spend as much as they can on their only-one-child's higher education, most colleges and universities in China have increased their enrolment to promote economic development. As far as College English teaching is concerned, if teaching resources have been increased to match the increased enrolment, there will not be much difference in the situation. Otherwise, the increased enrolment will lead to changes in many aspects of classroom teaching, including teachers' workloads, teacher-student ratios, and class sizes, which may finally affect the quality of teaching.

What is College English teaching like? Are there any influences of the increased enrolment on College English teaching and, if so, what are they? In May and June 2001, the Education Department of a province in southern China organised a wide-ranging investigation, including a review of College English teaching, in which the author participated as a researcher. The following study reviews College English teaching after increases in enrolment in the four universities which the author investigated in the capital city of that province.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

"Language is central to learning and learning is central to teaching" (Emmitt and Pollock 1997: 206). In discussion of teaching, teachers and learners are inseparable. Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) point out that learners are not only the focus of the curriculum, but also full participants in its development. With regard to teachers' work, Connell (1985) argues that it is governed by such constraints as the nature of classroom and other settings, class sizes and the timetable, which embody particular social relations and politics, and that it is divided in ways reflecting experiences, sex, administrative involvement, and the histories of particular schools. Nunan (1989) also believes teachers' training and personal characteristics influence their thoughts, judgements and decisions, which in turn guide what they actually do in class. However, education is greatly influenced by ICT (Information and Communication Technologies), just as Head and Merttens put it in the preface to Abbot's book:

It is now abundantly clear that the development of information and communication technologies is very different. Schooling and teaching will be forced to change in a variety of ways...(Abbott 2001: xiii)

The above studies throw some light on the research questions by focusing on the following six aspects:

1. College English teachers' workloads;
2. Class sizes;
3. Teacher-student ratios;
4. Data on College English teachers, including age, gender, degree and academic rank;
5. Computers used for College English teaching; and
6. Students' ideas and suggestions on College English teaching.

The research questions asked are listed below:

- a) How many College English teachers are there in your university?
- b) How many students are learning College English at present?

- c) How many class periods does one College English teacher teach each week?
- d) What are the class sizes?
- e) What are the teacher-students ratios?
- f) What degrees do College English teachers hold?
- g) How many teachers are professors, associate professors, lecturers and assistants?
- h) What is the situation of College English teachers with respect to age?
- i) What is the situation of College English teachers with respect to gender?
- j) How many computers do you have for College English teaching?
- k) What is the feedback from the students on College English teaching?

ABOUT THE FOUR UNIVERSITIES

In terms of academic features and enrolment, two universities were at a national level. However, in terms of leadership there was a shift for one of the universities only nearly two years ago: from being directly under one ministry of the Central Government of China to being under one province in southern China. Such a shift resulted from the reform in higher education that except for the Ministry of Education, other ministries, generally speaking, should not have their own universities. Of the other two universities at provincial level, one had become a university as the result of the combination of three three-year-colleges just one year before the investigation.

METHODOLOGY

From 20 May to 1 June 2001, we made an investigation on College English teaching in four universities (U1, U2, U3 and U4) in the capital city of a province in southern China. The Education Department of that province designed the questionnaires and distributed them in mid-April. In each of the four universities investigated, we first collected the questionnaires conducted by the College English Teaching Department and listened to the Vice Chancellor's report on College English teaching. Then we held interviews with College English teachers and students respectively. Of the 102 College English teachers in the four universities we interviewed 42, the remainder either being too busy teaching or on leave. Of the 17153 students learning College English as a compulsory course, we randomly selected 54 for interview. In each interview, we were sitting in a circle with the students and the atmosphere was very friendly and conducive to frank talk.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The results of the investigation can be classified into four aspects:

1. the situation of College English teaching (shown in Tables 1-3);
2. the situation of College English teachers (shown in Tables 4-7);
3. computers available to College English teachers (shown in Table 8); and
4. students' feedback on College English teaching.

The situation of College English teaching

Table 1 shows College English teachers' workload, which is divided into two parts: the rated workload and the actual workload. The rated workload refers to how many class periods one teacher should teach each week. Without finishing the rated workload, a teacher cannot be expected to get his/her full salary. The actual workload is how many class periods one teacher

does teach each week. Theoretically, once teachers finish their rated workload, they have completed their work. However, nobody stops at his/her rated workload. As the College English teachers' rated workload varies with each of those four universities, their actual workload also varies.

Table 1: Teachers' Rated and Actual Workload

University	Teachers	Rated	Actual
		Periods/Week	Periods/Week
U1	9	10	12
U2	34	10	12
U3	18	9	16
U4	41	8	15
Total	102	920	1419
Average	25.5	9	14

From this table, we can see that each teacher actually overworked on average by 55 per cent each week. Such a situation shows that these four universities are lacking in College English teachers, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Staffing Levels

University	Teachers		Understaffed Number	Understaffed Percentage
	Actual	Required*		
U1	9	11	2	18
U2	34	41	7	17
U3	18	32	14	44
U4	41	77	36	47
Total	102	161	59	37

* i.e. number of teachers required in terms of rated workload

It can be seen from Table 2 that College English teachers have fallen far behind the demand of College English teaching in number in those four universities.

Table 3: Teacher- Student Ratio and Class Size

University	Students	Teachers	Teacher-student Ratio	Class Size
U1	818	9	1:90	40-60
U2	5903	34	1:173	39-53
U3	3492	18	1:194	45-65
U4	6940	41	1:169	55-69
Total	17153	102	1:168	45-62

The average class sizes in these four universities show that, in a class period of 50 minutes, each student at most could have only about one minute to speak. Among other things, teacher-student ratio involves a teacher's workload of correcting students' homework. According to our interviews with teachers and students, College English teachers in these four universities usually assign homework to their students every other 1.5 weeks. The usual homework includes translation, sentence making, reading, cloze and so on. With the average ratio of 1:168, a teacher has to spend 336 minutes even if he/she spends only two minutes on each student's homework. Besides, each College English teacher has to correct his/her students' compositions at least once each semester, which is the most time-consuming job. According to National Council of Teachers of English (1998), 'A teacher with 125 students who spends only 20 minutes per paper must have at least

2,500 minutes, or a total of nearly 42 hours'. If so, a teacher with 168 students has to spend 3,360 minutes, namely, 56 hours on his/her students' compositions.

Tables 1 to 3 reflect the situation of College English teaching in those four universities, in which it can be seen that College English teachers' workload is heavy.

Why is College English teachers' workload so heavy? If we look at the College English teachers' workload from a historical perspective, we might have a better understanding of this issue.

Foreign language teaching in China was greatly influenced by the government's political agenda. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), foreign language teaching was more absent than present because of the participation of both teachers and students in that political movement. Before the Cultural Revolution, Russian was taught in China due to the brotherhood relationship between China and the former USSR and most teachers of foreign languages therefore taught Russian rather than English. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, given the fact that English was becoming an international language, the Chinese Government decided to teach English as a major foreign language all over the country.

However, where could China find so many teachers of English to meet the needs of English teaching in colleges and universities? From the very start, China was facing a serious situation: the lack of teachers of English. It goes without saying that the workload of College English teaching was heavy from the very beginning: while teachers of mathematics, physics and chemistry had three or four class periods each week, teachers of College English had eight class periods per week. The increased enrolment has never been accompanied by a large enough increase of College English teachers to meet the demand for English teaching. Thus, the only way to match the enlarged enrolment is to increase College English teachers' workload, making the original heavy workload even heavier.

The situation of College English teachers

Teachers in colleges and universities in China consist of professors, associate professors, lecturers and assistants. Of the 102 College English teachers in these four universities there was no professor. Of the 14 associate professors, according to our interviews, ten were 50 or more years old. This means that 71 per cent of the associate professors were coming near to their retirement ages: fifty-five for women and sixty for men. Table 4 shows the imbalance of College English teachers in academic ranks.

Table 4: College English Teachers in Academic Ranks

University	Professor	Associate Professor	Lecturer	Assistant	Total
U1	0	3	3	3	9
U2	0	5	19	10	34
U3	0	2	9	7	18
U4	0	4	13	24	41
Total	0	14	44	44	102

College English teachers' academic qualifications are low in all four universities, which can be seen from Table 5. Table 6 shows that College English teaching was mainly carried out by younger teachers in their thirties and twenties. From Table 7, we can see that women teachers predominated in College English teaching in those four universities.

Tables 4 to 7 show the situation of College English teachers in their academic rank, qualification, age and gender. That women constitute the majority of College English teachers (as shown in

Table 7) is quite common in China. Such an imbalance, with women being in the majority, also exists in English major students in English Departments in almost every college and university in China. The imbalance in age in College English teachers (as shown in Table 6) might be explained historically. During the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, few English majors graduated from colleges and universities.

Table 5: Academic qualifications of College English teachers

University	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Ph.D	Total
U1	9	0	0	9
U2	31	3	0	34
U3	17	1	0	18
U4	41	0	0	41
Total	98	4	0	102

Table 6: College English teachers by age

University	50 & over	40-49	30-39	Under 30	Teachers
U1	3	0	2	4	9
U2	3	8	8	15	34
U3	1	2	7	8	18
U4	3	3	8	27	41
Total	10	13	25	54	102

Table 7: College English teachers by gender

University	Men	Women	Teachers
U1	3	6	9
U2	14	20	34
U3	5	13	18
U4	14	27	41
Total	36	66	102

During our interviews, the College English teachers complained of one 'heavy' and two 'lows': heavy workload (as shown in Tables 1-3), low academic ranks (as shown in Table 4) and low degrees (as shown in Table 5). The teachers complained that their heavy workload actually prevented them from having enough time and energy to prepare for the Postgraduate Entrance Examination as well as having enough publications for their promotion. Table 4 shows the imbalance of College English teachers in their academic ranks. The higher the rank, the more difficult it is for College English teachers to achieve promotion. Thus, it can be seen that there is a relationship of cause and effect between Tables 1-3 and Tables 4-5, and that teachers' workload is the key issue.

As a rule, each student could at most have a little over 20 classes per week. As shown in Table 3, however, each College English teacher has an average of 14 class periods to teach every week, and therefore is likely to have class periods every day. Writing academic papers usually takes quiet hours without disturbance. Having classes every day means not only spending hours in the classroom, but also writing lesson plans and correcting students' homework and so on. With such a heavy workload, it seems impossible for College English teachers to do research and prepare enough publications. According to our interviews with College English teachers, it is College English teachers who teach the most but are the lowest in rank in their universities. However, when it comes to teachers' promotion, it is not how many class periods a teacher teaches but how many publications a teacher has that really counts.

When we were interviewing the College English teachers, academic rank was the issue they were most strongly dissatisfied with. Almost all teachers had the same complaint: 'If teaching is the centre of a university, why is it that those who teach the most get the least promotion?'

In addition to workload, we can consider the issue of the College English teachers' lack of publications from other two perspectives:

1. Fewer journals for College English teachers

English learners in colleges and universities in China fall into two sections: those who study English as their major are called English majors; and those who study English only as one of their compulsory courses are called non-English majors. Therefore, teachers of English in higher learning are also divided into English major teachers and non-English major teachers now commonly called College English teachers. In almost every college and university, College English teachers are the largest subject group. But it does not necessarily follow that they have the most professional journals. It is estimated that there are about 50,000 College English teachers in China. According to the *Newsletter of College Foreign Languages Teaching* in 1999 No. 1, there are thirty-one journals for English teachers. However, journals focusing on College English teaching number less than ten. As far as the ratio of teachers to academic journals is concerned, College English teachers appear significantly disadvantaged in terms of opportunities to publish.

2. Negative influence of the second foreign language test on English teachers

In China, anyone who wants to be promoted in his/her professional title has to pass a certain level of foreign language test. Non-foreign-language majors usually have to pass English test, while English majors have to pass their second foreign language test.

Passing the second foreign language test as the precondition for promotion takes much from the very limited time and energy of College English teachers and is actually meaningless in terms of improvement of their English. Given the fact that teachers of other courses have to pass their English test as the precondition for promotion, it seems fair. However, if we consider the difference between English majors in learning their second foreign language usually for 1.5 years in schools and non-foreign-language majors in learning English for 10 years, we may see that the second foreign language test for College English teachers is more of a burden that makes them suffer rather than providing anything beneficial.

It is commonly accepted that one cannot learn a language well without knowing its culture. Emmitt and Pollock (1997) argue that language is rooted in culture. While culture influences the way in which language is used, language influences the ways in which the individual perceives, thinks and acts. Crystal (2000) also points out that there is considerable identity between language and the culture of which it is a part. Yet, the majority of College English teachers in China learn English in China, teach English in China and finish their postgraduate studies in China. In other words, most College English teachers have not had any experience or exposure to real culture in English speaking countries. By this, the author does not mean that their English is poor, but they can never stop their English learning. Improving their English is a lifelong career for these teachers. They should be encouraged to make full use of their very limited valuable time and energy under the pressure of their heavy workload to do research on English teaching and learning, which would be helpful both in their English improvement and in their publications. From the interviews with College English teachers, all of them complain about the so-called second foreign language test. To emancipate College English teachers from the disturbance of their second foreign language test, it seems to be reasonable that the second foreign language test for College English teachers should be cancelled.

Computers available to College English teachers

In all four universities, we found that computers used for College English teaching are scarce, as seen from Table 8.

Table 8: Availability of Computers for College English Teaching

University	Teachers	Computers	Teachers : Computers
U1	9	1	9:1
U2	34	8	4 :1
U3	18	4	5 :1
U4	41	3	14 :1
Total	102	16	6 :1

In the age of information technology, each teacher should have one computer. Inadequate computer facilities reflect the low status of College English teaching and difficult financial situation in the four universities, leading to unsatisfactory teaching conditions.

Students' feedback

When we interviewed students, we sought comments on the teaching of their teachers and their ideas and suggestions for the improvement of College English teaching. According to the author's notes during each interview, students' comments on teaching were positive. Instead of criticising their teachers, they appreciated their teachers' hard work, responsibility and patience in teaching and coaching them. However, they provided the ideas and suggestions, that:

- a) they wished their teachers could add more English speaking exercises or activities to classroom teaching;
- b) the English language environment on campus should be enriched with various kinds of English activities after class, such as English corners, English speaking contests, English short plays, English evenings and so on; and
- c) more students should be allowed to participate in the College English Test (CET) Spoken English Test.

Emmitt and Pollock (1997) argue that the factors influencing the learning of a second language can be categorised as those centred around the learner and those that are centred around the environment. Students' ideas and suggestions reflect not only their desire to improve their speaking ability in English but also the failure of College English teaching to meet the students' needs in those four universities. However, given the class size of 45 to 62 in the four universities, it seems difficult for teachers to meet their needs in class. To enrich the English language environment on the campus involves the school's financial support and their teachers' active work. Judging from the computers used by College English teachers (as shown in Table 8), it seems that the financial situation in those four universities was not satisfactory. Besides, the fact that each teacher has 14 class periods to teach might prevent them from having enough time and energy to plan extra-curricular activities. CET Spoken English Test is a kind of College English Test (CET). At present, College English Test consists of three kinds of test: CET Band 4; CET Band 6; and CET Spoken English Test. While CET Band 4 and 6 mainly test students' abilities in listening, reading and writing, CET Spoken English Test focuses on testing students' English speaking ability. CET Spoken English Test started in 1999. It is organised by a CET Committee. Because such a test is time-consuming and involves a lot of teachers, it cannot be done on a large scale. Therefore, the CET Committee decides that in order to guarantee the test quality, at present, only those whose scores in CET Band 4 are above 85 are entitled to participate in the CET Spoken English Test. Just like CET Band 4 and 6, CET Spoken English Test is also a national

test. It is not the university that has the right to decide who will take part in the CET Spoken English Test.

DISCUSSION

In the light of the analysis of the investigation results, of the problems existing in College English teaching in the four universities, the key issue is the College English teachers' workload, which, according to our interviews with College English teachers in those four universities, was usually calculated only on the basis of their actual class periods. How should we look at language teachers' workload? This part will discuss the problem from a theoretical perspective in terms of: preparing for language teaching; and language classroom teaching and class size.

Preparing for language teaching

On the surface, we may say that language teaching is a process involving the hours a teacher usually spends in a classroom with his or her students for the sake of implementing certain language teaching tasks. However, when we think of this issue a little more deeply, we may see that teaching involves much more than the hours spent in a classroom, for: (a) academic qualification is the precondition for those who want to be teachers; (b) once people become teachers, it does not follow that they can start their teaching for any students, on anything, in any classroom, or at any time, because teaching is scheduled. Before teachers start their teaching, they should know whom, what, how, where and when to teach. In other words, teachers have to do preparation beforehand, which mainly focuses on lesson planning and a lesson plan is usually produced as a result.

Ur (1996) argues that lesson planning is an important component in foreign language teaching. Whether a lesson went according to its lesson plan, in Ur's opinion (1996), can be viewed as one of the criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of the lesson. Ellis (1999) suggests that teachers plan their lessons by making selections about what to teach, how to teach, and the nature of social relationships they want to encourage. Allwright and Bailey (1991) argue that, when teachers plan a lesson, they should decide especially what they hope to accomplish in terms of the input, the practice opportunities, and the atmosphere of the classroom. Hadley gives six guidelines on how to plan lessons:

1. Consider the content that is to be taught for a given class day.
2. Prepare an outline of what you intend to do during the lesson period.
3. Check for flow and integration of classroom activities.
4. Provide variety in classroom tasks.
5. Evaluate your plan after class is over (Hadley 1993: 488).

Du (1995) suggests three-dimensional lesson plans, which reflect: (a) a lesson plan on the basis of teacher-students-material before class; (b) the class on the basis of teacher-plan-students, and (c) the evaluation on the basis of feedback-class-plan after class. While Ho (1995) regards the use of lesson planning as a means of reflection, Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) point out that by critically examining their own lesson plans, teachers may improve themselves in their professional development. Ur (1996) mentions that most experienced teachers actually prepare lessons twice: they have ready in advance a general syllabus of what they want to do in class; and then they plan the actual sequence of components and prepare supplementary materials a day or two before.

It can be seen from the above that lesson planning is a precondition of teaching. Although it does not happen in a classroom, it involves the classroom, teaching materials, learners, activities and

their integration, varieties, sequences, atmospheres and so on. As lesson planning involves so many factors, it is usually time-consuming. To some extent, when other things are equal, the quality of a lesson is decided by the quality of a lesson plan. Wajnryb (1992) believes the function of a lesson plan is to bridge the gap between the ideal and the real and a teacher uses a lesson plan before the lesson for planning, during the lesson for checking /consulting and after the lesson for evaluating. Being a teacher does not mean teaching only at one time. After class, a teacher has to think of some questions about the class(es) he/she has just finished:

- a) Did the lesson go according to the plan?
- b) Why was the lesson a success or a failure? and
- c) What should I do when I teach next time?

Thus, we can see that the end of one teaching cycle also means the beginning of the next one. It seems that teaching actually consists of three stages: before-class stage, in-class stage, and after-class stage. The combination of these three stages constitutes the cycle of teaching at one time. The fact that a lesson plan goes through each of these stages shows its importance. Without a lesson plan, teaching cannot occur. Therefore, language teachers usually have to spend much time and energy on a lesson plan. Everett-Ross (1986) says that developing lesson plans requires a substantial investment of time, but it is an investment that will prepare the teacher to succeed in the classroom.

According to what has been discussed above, lesson planning is indispensable to teaching. Therefore, when we consider College English teachers' workload in the four universities the author investigated, we should include not only their class periods, but also their lesson planning. If so, College English teachers' workload in those four universities was far more than 14 class periods per week.

Language classroom teaching and class size

Table 3 shows that the average class sizes in the four universities the author investigated were 45-62. Are such class sizes all right for College English teaching?

Class size varies with different situations and is often controversial. It seems that class size involves two aspects: the financial situation; and the quality of teaching. It is easy to understand the first aspect: the smaller the class size is, the more investment is involved. By quality of teaching, the author means that class size depends upon the nature of the lecture. On the one hand, class size can be as large as possible as long as students can see and hear clearly, if a teacher's lecture is like a report and students come to the lecture only to listen to what the teacher is talking about, with little or no interaction between the teacher and students. On the other hand, class size has to be small, if a teacher's lecture involves a lot of practice, say, interactions.

Ellis (1992) believes that language classroom teaching consists of two stages: presentation and practice. While presentation is to help the learner acquire new linguistic knowledge or to restructure knowledge that has been wrongly represented, practice is to activate the new knowledge to the point where it can be used automatically and correctly in normal communication. Broughton, et al (1980) suggest that the language student is best motivated by practice in which he/she senses that the language is truly communicative, that it is appropriate to its context, that the teacher's skills are moving him/her forward to a fuller competence in the foreign language. Allwright and Bailey (1991) believe that interaction has to be managed by everyone taking part, not just by the teacher, because interaction is not something a teacher just does to learners, but something people do together, collectively. Ur (1996) argues that activities in class should be varied, for if a lesson is entirely taken up with one kind of activity, interest is likely to flag, but a

varied lesson is likely to cater for a wide range of learning styles and strategies, and may delay onset of fatigue by providing regular refreshing changes in the type of mental or physical activity demanded. The importance of practice is also emphasised by Kimble and Garmezy (1963), Gaies (1980), Littlewood (1981), and Hadley (1993).

From the above arguments, we can see that the key feature of language classroom teaching is *interaction, activity, communication, or practice* and that 'language lessons are co-productions' (Allwright and Bailey 1991: 29). Therefore, effective language teaching is responsive to the needs and interests of the individual learner (Mitchell 1994), for 'ultimately language is not learnt by groups, but by individuals' (Cook 1991: 72). When explaining the alternative view (there are many ways to achieve success and it is not possible to draw up a single profile of the successful learner), Ellis (1999) argues that this view of individual learner differences has important implications for language instruction because it recognises that different learners can achieve the same level of success if the instruction matches their own preferred approach to learning. Hadley (1993) also believes the importance of paying attention to individual learner differences and says that instruction should be responsive to the affective as well as the cognitive needs of students, and their different personalities, preferences, and learning styles should be taken into account.

From the above discussion, we might be able to draw a conclusion that language teaching is not like a report; it needs not only interaction but also attention to individual learner differences. Therefore, language class size has to be small.

Goettler-Sopko (1990) believes that small classes are superior to large classes in producing more desirable teaching practices and has come to the following conclusion.

1. Smaller class size seems to result in higher achievement among students who are academically disadvantaged.
2. Students with lower academic ability seem to do better in smaller classes.
3. It may be that class size affects student attitudes more significantly than it affects achievement.
4. A direct effect of large class size is to lower the morale and increase the stress of teachers.
5. There is typically little to be gained from reductions in class size that do not bring class size below 30.

According to National Council of Teachers of English (1998), reduced class size provides students with many benefits: greater opportunities for participation, greater individual attention and improved instruction. Student achievement increases significantly in classes of fewer than 20. Smaller class size, complemented by diverse teaching methods, creates better student performance, more positive attitudes, and fewer discipline problems.

In his research, Ciscell (1991) presented with the junior and senior education majors (N = 218) a list of issues, such as large class size, low salary, lack of parent support, and too much paperwork, and asked them to rank the problems in terms of which were most likely to interfere with their teaching performance. He found what the students were most concerned about was class size. The idea that small class size is beneficial for learning and teaching are also expressed by Connell (1985), Hantrais (1989), Biggs and Moore (1993), Rothkrug and McGhee (1996), Hickey (1998), Cunningham and Allington (1999).

Chaudron (1988) cites figures from various sources about teacher talk: teacher talk takes up 77 per cent of the time in bilingual classrooms in Canada, 69 per cent in immersion classes, and 61 per

cent in foreign language classrooms. Hullen (1989) found 75 per cent of the utterances in German classrooms came from the teacher. In terms of time allocation, the more time teacher talk takes up, the less time students will have; but the less time teacher talk takes up, the more time students will have. Therefore, teacher talk is inversely proportional to the time students have in class period. From the above we can see that the minimum of teacher talk is 61 per cent. For the sake of easy calculation, if we suppose that teacher talk takes up 60 per cent (compared with Chaudron's and Hullen's data, this is the maximum of time we can give to our students) in a class period of 50 minutes, then 30 minutes is taken up by a teacher and 20 minutes is left for students. If we consider giving each student only one minute for interaction in class, the maximum of class size should be no more than 20. In the four universities the author investigated, if teacher talk takes up 60 per cent, only 20 minutes is left for students and each student in the class size of 45 or 62 has only 27 seconds or 19.4 seconds for interaction! Obviously, such class sizes are far too large for what language teaching should be.

It can be seen from the above that language classroom teaching, is taught through language, needs a lot of practice; and language teachers should pay attention to individual learner differences. Therefore, language class size needs to be small. As mentioned before, there were 102 College English teachers in those four universities. But, on the basis of the average rated workload of nine class periods per week and the average class sizes of 45 to 62, there should be 161 College English teachers. However, when class size becomes small, even 161 teachers cannot meet the need.

CONCLUSION

'Can language be taught?' Cook (1991) thinks that asking such a question is like asking a doctor whether medical treatment benefits patients. Cook argues that in places where L2 has no function in the society, teaching is the chief or only source of L2, for whatever learners know, whatever learners can say or understand, is the effect of teaching. Language instruction does make a difference (Long, 1983; Ellis, 1999). It is true of China. The result of the investigation in those four universities in the capital city of the province in southern China can be used as a sample to consider College English teaching all over the country.

Of all the resources of College English teaching, teachers are the most important. Their improvement in English might have positive impact on the improvement of the quality of College English teaching. Yet, in the four universities, heavy workload prevented College English teachers from having further improvement by either postgraduate studies or doing researches. The investigation shows that teaching resources fail to meet the needs of College English teaching after increases in enrolment in those four universities. Of all the problems existing in College English teaching, the key issue is teachers' workload, which means not only what teachers do in class, but also before and after class in relation to their classroom teaching. Since a lesson plan goes through all three stages of a teaching cycle, lesson planning should be regarded as a very important integrated part of teachers' workload. This means that College English teachers' workload in those four universities was even heavier than expected, because it was far more than 14 class periods each week. Due to the uniqueness of language classroom teaching, class size needs to be small. In the four universities investigated, the actual College English teachers were 102, but the required teachers should be 161. Small class size means that even if there were 161 College English teachers in those four universities, it is still far from being enough.

In the situation where College English teachers are in great shortage, it cannot be expected that the quality of teaching can be guaranteed. At present, to solve the issue of heavy workload is to solve the shortage of College English teachers. On the one hand, the Chinese government should take more efforts in training of College English teachers to meet the social needs, while colleges and

universities should take effective measures to attract more talents to be College English teachers; on the other hand, enrolment should not be increased at the cost of quality of teaching and therefore should be controlled to match the teaching resources. However, while enough teachers might solve the issue of heavy workload and make it theoretically possible to guarantee the quality of teaching, in the long run, the situation should be created where there are more people who are competent and wish to be College English teachers than are necessary. Only in this way, there will be competition, by which those who are more competent can teach College English, which may finally in turn fundamentally improve the quality of College English teaching in China.

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