

# Reform in College English Viewing Listening and Speaking Courses for Province-level and State-level Universities

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## Abstract

The present paper is a detailed analysis of the reform in college English Viewing Listening and Speaking courses for province-level and state-level universities. The reasons for reforming the courses and the solutions to the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the courses are analyzed respectively in detail. Through the analysis, the urgency and need for the reform is exposed to readers.

## Keywords

reform, college English Viewing Listening and Speaking courses, province-level and state-level universities.

## 1. Introduction

Most of the universities across China have been offering two types of courses for non-English majors in their first two years in college. One is Reading Writing and Translating courses and the other is Viewing Listening and Speaking courses. There is no doubt that the latter courses have played a significant role in improving college students' English language abilities, especially their listening and speaking abilities required in interactive real-life situations. However, with the change of the situation over time, there is a particular urgency and need to reform the current college English Viewing Listening and Speaking courses for province-level and state-level universities.

## 2. Body

### 2.1. Reasons for the Reform in College English Viewing Listening and Speaking Courses for Province-level and State-level Universities

A conventional college English Viewing Listening and Speaking class may go as follows. A teacher may warm up by asking students questions or inviting them to give oral presentation on a topic relevant to the unit students are about to learn with the help of PowerPoint. Then the teacher may arrange students to listen to certain materials in the textbooks. After the listening, the teacher, as a rule, will check the answers with students and end up this period of teaching by giving them the correct ones. As for the speaking part, the teacher tend to encourage students to give presentation, make dialogues with their partners, conduct group discussions or simply give responses to the teacher's questions in class. As for the viewing part, an increasing number of video clip materials appear with the reform of the textbooks, but listening in a traditional class remains the focus and viewing which is not closely related to CET testing or final exams merely serves as relaxation for students.

The problem with the current arrangement for the college English Viewing Listening and Speaking course is that the course has unfortunately hampered students from absorbing and pouring out language efficiently and effectively. The majority of province-level and state-level college students have no difficulty learning the language all by themselves. So apart from the relevant vocabulary offered in students' textbooks, the script and the key to the questions are

all what students need for their self-learning. The teacher may just assist in advance by offering translations or video clips to illustrate language and cultural points for weak students.

In a small-sized survey I conducted, 27 of the 34 surveyed students say they can practice listening all by themselves with no need to formally attend such classes, accounting for an approximately 80 percent. And out of the 27 students who are showing a willingness to study autonomously, 23 complain that what they are truly in want of is consecutive and authoritative supervision. That is, students do not lack the ability to study alone, but they do lack a sense of self-discipline and long-term commitment.

Students' abilities to study alone originate from two facts. On the one hand, students who have been admitted into province-level universities or above and have been studying English for over ten years have solid language foundations. With the help of dictionaries, illustrations from video clips, scripts, references, students can well achieve the language learning goals set by the college English Viewing Listening and Speaking courses. On the other hand, language acquisition in the senior stage is almost all about practice. Instead of receiving language input passively in a college English Viewing Listening and Speaking class, students need to keep in touch with English language on a daily basis, which is even more important for enhancing and sustaining their language abilities.

For a typical college English Viewing Listening and Speaking class, there is always the conflict between time spent on listening and time spent on speaking. For most teachers, listening is usually the focus, so much of the time is spent on listening in class. The time spent on listening to the textbook materials may make up almost half of the whole class, which is a great waste of time for the students and can well be replaced by after-class self-learning as I have mentioned. A small proportion of college English teachers aim to improve students' oral English proficiency. Obviously, the teachers in class cannot keep talking. There will be various oral activities assigned to students who may be required to either make dialogues or conduct discussions in class. Students may easily loaf on the job when the whole class may become a market of hustle and bustle. Also, some students become aware of the fact that they are not likely to be chosen to show for the large number of students present. In addition, as no real-life situations are provided, some students are not quite stimulated. And as rarely a proper version of English language is offered, students tend to create their own language which often proves too Chinglish to be acceptable.

## **2.2. Solutions for the Reform in College English Viewing Listening and Speaking Courses for Province-level and State-level Universities**

What is the solution to the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of college English Viewing Listening and Speaking courses? First and foremost, such courses should be replaced by students' autonomous learning and teacher's supervision and assistance during students' self-learning. Henri Holec defines autonomous learning as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning". [1] The cruel reality is that most students lack this very ability, which calls for teachers' effective supervision. Luckily, teachers' supervision can be better achieved by the use of computers. With the development of technology, it is highly possible to invent software that can monitor students' amount of time spent online, frequency, studying quality etc. In the future, software that can enable students to talk to computers and grade students' performance should and will be developed. With such software, students will probably enjoy better chances of watching more video clips in real-life situations and be required to do certain tasks in English based on the materials. As for teachers, instead of having to attend regular classes, they may offer their help by answering students' questions online or face to face in private. Zhang Kun and Chen Guoliang suggests, "We must keep pace with the times, striving to integrate computer and Internet technology into our foreign language teaching so that we can come up with proper

English teaching modes that meet the needs required by new situations, and establish the autonomous- learning-centered learning modes for students.”[2]

In addition, the Reading Writing and Translating courses should be retained and liberal and ESP courses should be provided to students. By retaining the Reading Writing and Translating courses which are good platforms to cultivate students' morality, students moral education can be carried out and the humanity goal of whole-person education can be achieved. By eliminating the college English Viewing Listening and Speaking courses and focusing on the College English Reading Writing and Translating courses, schools can make better use of all resources at hand and save costs. What is more important, college English teachers' working hours in class will be greatly reduced so that they will have more time to study how to teach effectively and communicate with their students. With more free time available for the teachers, they may be required to pick a day from the five weekdays to hold office hours during which they can have private conversations with a single student or talk about things with several students within a group. In reality, the class hours of the college English courses as a whole have already been cut considerably. It is better to focus on the Reading Writing and Translating courses than cutting down on both as the former are obviously more difficult and comprehensive. The weeks of the teaching schedule for the current College English Reading Writing and Translating courses are too short to sustain and develop students' English proficiency and the class size in most universities are too large to effectively carry out whole-person education. Therefore, on the one hand, the teaching weeks should be prolonged. In some universities, college English classes for the Reading Writing and Translating courses last only for twelve weeks. It is highly suggested that such classes do not come to an end until the 18th week or even 20th if possible, accompanied with students' self-learning for the college English Viewing Listening and Speaking courses. On the other, the class size should be reduced to the number of students no more than 30.

### 3. Conclusion

It is time to reform the current college English Viewing Listening and Speaking courses for province-level and state-level universities. The conventional teaching in college English Viewing Listening and Speaking classes tends to prevent students from improving their English abilities efficiently and effectively, because, to some extent, students can achieve the language goal set by the course all by themselves with teachers' off-class assistance. Their self-learning abilities originate from their solid language foundation on the one hand and the law of second language acquisition on the other. Both listening-oriented classes and speaking-oriented classes fail to help students learn efficiently and effectively. To improve their own listening and speaking abilities, what Students really need is self-discipline and long-term commitment. The solutions to the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of college English Viewing Listening and Speaking courses are as follows. On the one hand, such courses should be replaced by students' self-learning and teacher's supervision and assistance during students' self-learning. On the other, the Reading Writing and Translating courses should be retained, with their teaching weeks prolonged and class sized minimized. By reforming the current college English Viewing Listening and Speaking courses for province-level and state-level universities, both teachers and students can benefit a lot, and the college English courses as a whole will make even greater progress.

### References

- [1] Henri Holec. *Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning* [M]. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981.
- [2] Zhang Kun, Chen Guoliang. The Probe of New Model on English Viewing, Listening and Speaking Based on Computer Network [J]. *Journal of Qiqihar University*,2008(7):126.