

TEACHING COLLEGE ENGLISH IN CHINA:
THE IMPORTANCE OF CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Guanyuan Hu". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'G'.

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Abstract

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China's college English curriculum requirements issued by the Ministry of Education (2004) present new challenges to college English teachers. Given the challenges, this paper aims to draw the attention of college English teachers in China to the importance of classroom management. The paper reviews the relationship between classroom management and teaching effectiveness, challenges and issues in teaching college English in China, and strategies for effective classroom management. It recommends college English teachers in China to employ appropriate classroom management to improve their teaching effectiveness.

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Chapter One: Introduction

According to the college English curriculum requirements (for trial implementation) issued by China's Ministry of Education (2004), college English teaching should shift from the teacher-centered approach that simply focuses on language knowledge and skills to the students-centered approach that focuses on cultivating students' language competence and self-learning ability in addition to language knowledge and skills. The students-centered approach requires a teacher to be capable of managing the class effectively.

Classroom management does not equal to students discipline; the former is broader in its scope than the latter (Sanford, Emmer, & Clements, 1983). One of the primary responsibilities of a teacher is to help students learn. It is difficult for learning to take place if students are in a chaotic learning environment. Classroom management involves a wide range of teaching strategies that can contribute to a favorable learning environment and teaching effectiveness. It requires teachers to "create and maintain a positive, productive classroom atmosphere conducive to learning" (Barbetta, Norona, & Bicard, 2005).

This paper explores the importance of classroom management to college English instruction in China. It recommends that college English teachers in China employ effective strategies to enhance their classroom management, which can accordingly help them improve their teaching. Factors that affect classroom management will also be discussed.

Statement of the Problem

The question to be explored in this paper is as follows: What classroom management strategies may college English teachers in China employ to enhance their teaching effectiveness?

Definitions of Terms

College English in China. According to the college English curriculum requirements (for trial implementation) issued by China's Ministry of Education (2004), the overall goal of college English teaching is to develop students' comprehensive English language proficiency, especially their listening and speaking abilities, so that they can use English effectively in oral and written communication. Meanwhile, college English teaching should enhance students' self-learning ability and improve their cultural awareness to meet the needs of China's economic development and international communication.

Classroom Management. Classroom management (CRM) is very important for the success of a class. CRM "involves not merely responding effectively when problems occur, but also preventing problems from occurring by creating environments that encourage learning and appropriate behavior" (Sanford, Emmer, & Clements, 1983).

ESL. Abbreviation for the term English as a Second Language

Delimitations of Research

This research has been conducted in and through the Karrmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville over eighty-eight days. Primary searches have been conducted via the Internet through EBSCO host with ERIC, Academic Search Elite and Google/Google Scholar as the primary sources. Key search topics included "college English in China," "classroom management," and "ESL."

Method of Approach

A brief review of the literature on the relationship between classroom management and teaching effectiveness was conducted. A second review of the literature on related topics, including challenges and issues in college English instruction in China and strategies for

classroom management, was also conducted. The findings were summarized and recommendations were made.

Summary of Results

Through the literature review, it is obvious that classroom management plays a significant role in ESL classes. Effective classroom management strategies significantly contribute to teaching effectiveness and enhance student learning. In China, college students are required to take English classes. Since English teachers often teach large classes consisting of students coming from different places of the country with different levels of English proficiency, it is really a tough task to address every student's needs and teach effectively. Faced with challenges, college English teachers should realize the importance of classroom management and adopt appropriate classroom management strategies according to their own teaching contexts.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

This chapter examines the relationship between classroom management and teaching effectiveness, challenges and issues in teaching college English in China, and strategies for effective classroom management.

Classroom Management and Teaching Effectiveness

Classroom management (CRM) does not equal to students discipline; the former is broader in its scope than the latter (Barbetta, Norona, & Bocard, 2005) in that the former involves a wide range of teaching strategies that can contribute to teaching effectiveness and a favorable learning environment. Classroom management is very important to the success of a class. It “involves not merely responding effectively when problems occur, but also preventing problems from occurring by creating environments that encourage learning and appropriate behavior” (Sanford, Emmer, & Clements, 1983).

According to Froyen and Iverson (1999), classroom management consists of three major components: content management, conduct management, and covenant management. Content management deals with the content of a lesson, curriculum, or program; conduct management focuses on student discipline and behavior; and covenant management highlights the importance of the relationship among members of a class (Froyen and Iverson, 1999).

There is a strong correlation between classroom management and teaching effectiveness. Effective classroom management allows teachers to establish clear expectations of students, maximize the amount of learning time, and present lessons in a systematic manner (Jere, 1986). Effective classroom management should be one of the primary goals of a classroom teacher aiming to provide students with high quality instruction.

Teaching College English in China: Challenges and Issues

According to the college English curriculum requirements (for trial implementation) issued by China's Ministry of Education (2004), the overall goal of college English teaching is to develop students' comprehensive English language proficiency, especially their competence in listening and speaking, so that they can use English effectively in oral and written communication, and to enhance their self-learning ability as well as cultural awareness to meet the needs of China's economic development and international communication. However, there are challenges and issues in implementing the curriculum.

Big class vs. Small class. The ideal class size for foreign language teaching is 20 students per class. However, it is quite common in China that there are more than 60 students in a college English class. College English teachers in China teaching big classes may encounter various difficulties (Zhao, 2009). For one thing, teachers have to take on much heavier teaching load; for another, they are less likely to give individual attention to each student. As a result, their students may not learn as effectively as those in small classes. Wu, Du, and Zhang (2008) point out that students tend to be silent in big classes, and they have fewer opportunities to practice oral English. Chen (2005) states that students and their teacher could not communicate effectively in big classes, which to some extent, reduces the opportunities for students to practice English.

Traditional teaching approach vs. Communicative language teaching approach. In the field of English language teaching in China, there has been heated discussion about conflicts between the traditional teacher-centered approach and the communicative language teaching approach. With the traditional teaching approach, teachers lecture, and students just listen and take notes. There is little chance for students to interact with their teachers and classmates. As a

result, students may be able to achieve high scores on written tests, while they may not be able to communicate in English effectively, including comprehending oral English. Despite the disadvantages of the teacher-centered approach, it is still commonly adopted by college English teachers because it is deeply-rooted and less demanding (Wu, Du, & Zhang., 2008).

The communicative language teaching approach emphasizes student-centeredness. Teachers play different roles such as classroom organizer, director, advisor, facilitator, etc. (Chen, 2005). Teachers should create classroom activities for students to participate in so that they have more chances of improving their language proficiency. With the communicative language teaching approach, teachers create a much more relaxed and happy learning environment to enhance students' learning. Despite the advantages of the communicative language teaching approach, many college English teachers find it difficult to implement this approach in their classroom.

Other challenges and issues. In the past, teachers stood on the platform, lectured, and wrote notes on the blackboard. Students learned passively with low motivation, simply finishing what their teachers assigned them to do. The 2007 version of the College English Curriculum emphasizes the importance of student learning autonomy and requires that college English teachers improve student autonomy in learning the English language. This is a new challenge to teachers. Another issue is teaching facilities. The teaching facilities in some colleges are old and out of date. English teachers in these colleges are faced with more challenges due to the lack of modern facilities.

Strategies for Classroom Management

Effective classroom management does not simply mean a list of rules and procedures. For example, classroom seating arrangement is a basic component of classroom management.

Sanford, Emmer, and Clements (1983) summarize the characteristics of a well-managed class:

First, there are high levels of student involvement with work, especially with academic, teacher-led instruction; Second, students know what is expected of them and are generally pretty successful; Third, there is relatively little wasted time, confusion, and disruption; Fourth, the climate of the room is work-oriented but relaxed and pleasant.(56)

These characteristics can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of classroom management.

Many strategies can be adopted for classroom management. First, a strong teacher-student relationship can be conducive to classroom management and student learning. The teacher-student relationship can influence the dynamics of a classroom. As Robert and Marzano's study (2003) shows, "31 percent less discipline problems, rule violations, and related problems" are found among teachers with a good teacher-student relationship in comparison with their counterparts over a year's time.

What kind of teacher-student relationship can help classroom management? Marzano (2003) argues that in a favorable teacher-student relationship, teachers have appropriate level of control over their students, are aware of students' needs, and gain student cooperation whenever necessary. Wubbels, Brekelmans, van Tartwijk, and Admiral (1999) highlight the role of appropriate dominance in building a good teacher-student relationship. As they explain, dominance refers to a teacher's ability to provide overall direction and guidance to students; it does not have a negative connotation. Chiu & Tulley's (1997) study shows that student

participants hold a positive view of appropriate dominance. They recommend that “teachers can exhibit appropriate dominance by establishing clear behavior expectations and learning goals and by exhibiting assertive behavior.” McCombs and Whisler (1997) believe that students accept appropriate dominance because they need guidance and attention from teachers. To build a good relationship with students, teachers can also find out students’ interests and needs (McCombs and Whisler, 1997). If students’ needs and interests are addressed, they are likely to be interested and cooperative.

Second, establishing clear rules and procedures can help classroom management. According to the seminal research of the 1980s (Emmer, 1984; Emmer, Sanford, Evertson, Clements, & Martin, 1981; Evertson & Emmer, 1982), it is important to establish “rules and procedures for general classroom behavior, group work, seat work, transitions and interruptions, use of materials and equipment, and beginning and ending the period or the day.” Glasser (1990) points out that to establish rules and procedures, teachers should collaborate with students, in other words, take into account students’ voices.

Barbette (2005) provides specific suggestions for setting rules. According to Barbette, an appropriate number of rules (e.g., 4-6 rules) should be defined; rules should be simple, straightforward, and practical; and rules should be stated positively. Rules established following these suggestions are likely to be feasible and help create a favorable language learning environment.

Third, it is necessary to establish clear expectations of students’ classroom behavior. Teachers should clarify what is acceptable classroom behavior and what penalty is for unacceptable classroom behavior. Stage and Quiroz (1997) recommend the following strategies for regulating students’ classroom behavior: 1) adopting a variety of techniques to remind

misbehaved students; 2) sending the class messages about expected behaviors; 3) employing rules to regulate group behavior; and 4) using the same rules for classroom behavior and behavior at home.

Fourth, another strategy is to collaborate with others. Many teachers are reluctant to solicit help from others because they think collaborating with others may be time-consuming. However, this is not true. If teachers want to establish a well-managed classroom, they should involve parents and teachers of other subjects and draw on expertise from school counselors, psychologists, and other professionals, who may provide support, guidance, and additional strategies.

Last but not least, multimedia can be employed to assist classroom management. Multimedia, when used effectively, can enhance student interest in the target language and improve speaking and listening skills.

Chapter Three: Conclusion and Recommendations

As discussed in Chapter Two, effective classroom management can be achieved through a variety of strategies, including a good teacher-students relationship, clearly stated classroom rules and procedures, clear expectations of students and so on. College English teachers in China may encounter a lot of challenges in their teaching practice, such as big class sizes and the deeply-rooted traditional teaching approach, which may prevent them from managing their classroom effectively. Given the challenges, college English teachers have to make great efforts to achieve teaching effectiveness. Whether they can succeed or not to a large extent depends on their classroom management.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In order to teach more effectively, college English teachers in China should pay more attention to classroom management. The following strategies can help teachers improve their classroom management:

Firstly, teachers should form a good relationship with students. The relationship between students and a teacher is critical to teaching including classroom management. On the first day of school, a teacher can give students a questionnaire survey, including questions about hobbies, likes, dislikes, how they would like to be addressed, class schedule, academic achievements, learning style, and concerns. The more a teacher knows about his or her student, the better relationships he or she is likely to form with students. With a good teacher-student relationship, students are more likely to be willing to communicate with their teacher, which can allow the teacher to manage the classroom well and improve students' learning.

Secondly, teachers should give students clear information regarding their expectations and deadlines. If teachers cannot make these fully understood by students, students may feel lost,

or they may not know what to do, which may be a barrier to students' achievement. If students fully understand what their teachers expect them to achieve, they may have an explicit goal for their study.

Thirdly, teachers should create a positive and harmonious learning environment through employing a variety of effective classroom activities. Learning English as a foreign language can be more difficult than other subjects. Students tend to lose interest in English if they find the learning process boring. Teachers thus should try their best to keep students' interest. For example, teachers can divide the whole class into several groups and assign each group or each group member a specific task; Group work allows students to work collaboratively, have opportunities to interact with each other, and learn more effectively during the process.

Fourthly, in order to keep students engaged and interested in class, teachers can use multimedia to assist their teaching. With the traditional teaching approach, teachers lecture only and dominate the whole class; students may easily feel bored as a result. If teachers have access to multimedia facilities, they can make use of audio-visual materials, which can allow them to teach a class more lively.

Fifthly, teachers should give students prompt feedback and even give them timely praise if necessary. In English class, many students are afraid of making mistakes and not as active as they are in other classes. If teachers give them timely feedback, they will know where their problems lie; when teachers praise them in class, they may feel proud and be motivated to work harder.

Last but not least, teachers should make good use of any resources available. There are abundant English language learning materials online. Teachers can choose useful resources to

arouse students' interest in English and recommend students to use the resources as well to improve their learning. Teachers can also provide students with more information about the cultures of English-speaking countries, which may motivate them to learn English.

Faced with new challenges, college English teachers in China can employ classroom management strategies to improve teaching effectiveness. For effective classroom management, teachers can take a variety of factors into account, such as teacher-student relationship and students' expectations. Above all, effective classroom management can contribute to teaching effectiveness; classroom management is challenging but worthwhile.

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