

RESEARCH ARTICLE



ENGLISH LEARNING SITUATION AND COUNTERMEASURES OF ART MAJOR STUDENTS IN COLLEGES

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays Chinese Colleges art major students English learning have a worrying situation, because learning foundation in low-level, Linguistic thinking features do not adapt the English learning, and students lack of interesting in English learning. English is not only a language taught to the student, but also a new mode of thinking and cultural perception ability. English teaching for the art major students must be valued, and it is very demanding for the improvement of their English learning level. In order to improve English learning of art major students in Colleges, we can educate students with modern digital media, and promote Colleges students' study-abroad programs. Hence the English learning situation of art major students can be improved.

Key Words: art major students; motivation; Education for International Understanding; digitalized teaching; study-abroad



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Art major students refer to the students whose major is drawing, music, dance, photography, design, broadcasting or hosting, etc. Chinese colleges are expanding enrollment year after year, and art major students have formed an important and unique group in all comprehensive colleges. Statistically, up to 2012, the number of art colleges

and specialized colleges has reached 800, all of which have art majors. In total there are 1,500,000 students, with 300,000 to 400,000 graduates every year. As China grows stronger, China has more opportunities to talk to the world. Extensive and profound Chinese arts are tightly related to the world arts. However, the cultivation of international

artistic talents with good English proficiency seems to be feeble, and the English learning situation of art major students in colleges is worrisome.

1. English Learning Features and Situation of Art Major Students

1.1 Low English Entrance Exam Scores and low-level learning foundation

Since the professional achievement is the main reference of the art major students when they are enrolled, the entry score of cultural courses like English is significantly lower than other majors. To a certain extent, it causes that most students put more effort and energy to their majors learning, and less effort and energy to cultural courses, especially English. After entering colleges, they still pay more attentions to their majors, and pay less attention to the cultural courses. Above all, they put less and less effort to English learning. Therefore, in the general case, art major students have poor English basis, poor English listening ability, and poor speaking ability. It is hard for them to improve their English performance.

1.2 Linguistic thinking features do not adapt the English learning

According the investigation, the thinking abilities of art major students in all aspects are different. From advantage to disadvantage, it follows the order: imagine thinking, divergent thinking, intuitive thinking, dialectical thinking, and logical thinking¹(Zhou Qinyou, 2007). Most art major students use image and body to express ideas, lay emphasis on the cultivation of practical ability, and their thought do not get bogged down in convention. They have special learning style, abundant creativity, imagination, and sharp observation. They quest for free and unfettered study atmosphere. Nevertheless, as a tool to form and express ideas, language needs relatively strong logical thinking and stable emotion, and it need to be learned and used in a progressive way. Hence when they learn English, they cannot play out their characteristics and advantages. During learning process, they may run

into many difficulties. When their capacity is not sure, they will not have learning efficiency.

1.3 No Interest in English Learning and Insufficient Motivation

Motivation falls into intrinsic motivation and external motivation according to the cause of learning motivation. According to Edward Deci (1975), intrinsic motivation refers to the intrinsic motivation activities that do not have obvious rewards except activity itself. One takes part in some activities according to ones interest rather than extrinsic rewards. So when foreign language learners keep this kind of motivation, they will not disturbed by others and the outside world. They can keep high enthusiasm and motivation for a long time. However, external motivation means that learning activities are for rewards or are to avoid criticism.² Intrinsic motivations promote students to study actively, and its promoting effect is stable and durable, while external motivation's promoting effect is temporary and unstable. Learning motivation can also be divided into integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. The instrumental motivation is that learners take learning foreign languages as a way to achieve instrumental goals, like promotion, reading scientific and technological materials, translation, etc. The integrative motivation is that learners hope to involve themselves into the culture of the second language, and hope to involve or integrate the social exchange of this culture. Gardner and Lamber (1972) believe that if the goal is integration, the initiative and consciousness of foreign languages learning will be high. The comprehensive cultivation of the listening, speaking, reading and writing ability can be stressed, and the momentum of hard working can be kept for a long time, so as to improve the foreign language's performance quickly. If the goal is instrument, the foreign language learning will be in a passive state, because different goals stress some different aspects, resulting in imperfect development. This impetus is temporary. When the goal is achieved, students' learning momentum will disappear.³

At present, English is just a compulsory course for the public foundation at college. For students, it is not as important as professional courses, especially for the art major students. According to surveys, most art major students learn English impelled by external motivation and instrumental motivation. In most cases, they are forced to learn English for exams, postgraduate entrance exams and job searching. They do not think learning English has any point in their improvement and their professional development. Therefore, the art major students widely believe learning English is too boring, considering it as a burden, so their learning initiative is not high.

II. The importance of improving the standard of English learning of art students

The reason why taking English as a compulsory course of all majors is that English is not only a language taught to the student, but also a new mode of thinking and cultural perception ability. With the continuous extension of people's activities and thinking space, the distance of comprehension and communication is shortened. Today, ideology and value collide fiercely and become diversified. It is more and more difficult to distinguish nationalization and internationalization, and the world actually become a "global village". In this high interdependency age, it is more demanding for every country and every nation to strengthen international understanding, so as to keep the stable situation of world peace and development. It is just under this background, UNESCO first proposed Education for International Understanding in the second half of last century, which means taking the promotion of international understanding as the goal, cultivating talents with international understanding by various educational ways and measures, promoting mutual respect, mutual understanding and mutual development of all national cultures. Languages and cultures are closely connected. Culture includes language, which is a member of this big family. Meanwhile, language is the carrier of culture, and all the cultural phenomenon can be reflected on language. The ultimate purpose of English teaching is not only to train the students to

master knowledge, but also to cultivate their ability of cross-culture understanding and communication. Obviously, in this globalization era, citizen's ability of international understanding awareness, knowledge, skills and attitude has become an important indicator to measure a nation's comprehensive national strength, and English teaching is an effective way to achieve education for international understanding.

In the cultural communication of countries and nations, art always plays an important and popular role. From the artistic work, people begin to be curious and feel good about foreign countries and nations. In artistic creation, the artist inevitably absorbs the nutrition of the art all around the world and introduces his own work to the whole world, so as to be the pioneer and envoy of cultural communication. In this process, English is an indispensable instrument for the artist. For the application of what has been learned of the art major student in their future career, English teaching for the art major students must be valued, and it is very demanding for the improvement of their English learning level.

III. Strategies to Improve Art Major Students' English Level

In addition to the traditional classroom teaching, there are many channels which can improve the English level of the art major students.

III.1. Applying the Modern Digital Instructional Media

The studies have shown that 80% of the information is passed to humans from the images visually⁴ (Dai Shan, 1996). Treicher, a psychologist, has also proved that humans obtain 94% of the information from the vision and auditory sense. The modern digital instructional media focusing on computer (mainly refers to the multimedia computer, teaching network, campus network and the Internet) has the characteristics which the traditional teaching media do not have. In the process of classroom teaching, one of the features is to present the teaching content spatially through information technology integrating voice, text, graphics, images, and animation⁵ (Zhuang Zhixiang, Huang Wei, Wang Le,

2007). Thus it can be seen the high integration of multimedia technology builds up the digital learning environment which fully mobilizes the students visual and senses etc. expands the teaching means, enriches the teaching contents, becomes a powerful cognitive tool to support and expand students thinking process and provides students with an excellent cognitive context. There is no doubt that the characteristic of digital learning environment drastically caters to the cognitive characteristics of art major students, mobilizes their imaginable thinking, divergent thinking and intuition thinking, and improves their interest in learning English. The theory of multiple intelligences points out that every student has his or her unique cognitive style corresponding to his or her major. Through the use of modern digital teaching media, the arts students can fully display their intelligence advantages in the process of English learning. Then the intelligence advantage can be transferred into the disadvantage intelligence⁶ (Yang, 2002). The combination of both can optimize the teaching effect.

III.2. Promoting College Students' Overseas Study Plan

There is an effective English teaching mode "immersion" bilingual teaching. The so-called "immersion" bilingual teaching refers to a bilingual teaching mode using a foreign language (second language) as a teaching language in subject teaching. That is to say, during all or part of the learning time, the students are completely "soaked" in the second language environment. Facing the students, the teachers speak second language not only in the second language teaching but also in other courses⁷ (Francois Grosjean, 1992). In other words, the second language is not only the content of learning, but also a tool for learning. If the teachers could try to create interactive and participatory teaching atmosphere and let the students "soak" in English-Chinese bilingual environment, which subtly improve students' English application ability. It can make the students' ability, including the general knowledge, bilingual ability and cultures of the two languages, get a comprehensive and harmonious development.

China has always attached great importance to implementing plan for study abroad in recent years. Taking Jiangsu province as an example, the government clearly puts forward: we will try our best to construct our province into advanced province with education opening to the outside world, focusing on training a large number of well-qualified talents who know about the international rules, participate in international affairs and have international vision in international competitions. By implementing plan for studying abroad, in 2020, undergraduate students of high-level universities with overseas study experience will reach more than 5% and other institutions will reach more than 3%.⁸ Through direct overseas exchange, the students' ability of English can be exercised comprehensively and truly achieve "immersion" bilingual teaching. Art major students' overseas study plan can be combined with art galleries, museums and creative industry which can mobilize students' learning enthusiasm, let them realize the role and meaning of English, feel the impact of different cultures and develop their ability of international comprehensive ability.

The author believes that, through effective education means and strategies, the status quo of art major students in institution of higher education will be improved. mastering the important means of international communication -- English, Chinese young generation artists will go abroad more quickly for the world art fusion to communicate with the people of the world and make their own contributions to human civilization and development.

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