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THE SWOT ANALYSIS OF GRADED COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING AND THE STRATEGIES

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Abstract: In order to improve the efficiency of college English teaching for non-English majors, more and more universities are employing Graded College English Teaching, which is based on the theory of Krashen's $i+1$ theory and the idea of teaching students according to their different levels. Though graded teaching plays a positive role in improving the efficiency, there still exist some problems. By SWOT analysis, the paper detects the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Graded College English Teaching. Consequently, we try to build the SWOT model of Graded College English Teaching, and practice the strategies of SO, ST, WO and WT in Graded College English Teaching. By adopting appropriate strategies, the majority of students' individuality development will be enhanced, and the efficiency of Graded College English Teaching will be improved.

Keywords: SWOT Analysis, Graded College English Teaching, Strategies

1. THE GRADED COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING AND SWOT ANALYSIS

1.1. Graded College English Teaching

How to improve the efficiency of college English teaching and enhance the students' comprehensive language competence? One of the most heated topics is how to meet the students' need of language input, aiming at making them satisfied with the teaching materials in class. We can perceive the direction from Krashen's " $i+1$ " input hypothesis: i represents the learners' current stage of knowledge, and 1 is the knowledge slightly higher than their present level. As the language input is comprehensible or reaches the level of $i+1$, the language learners will acquire the new language knowledge while taking in the comprehensible language input. The learners will not efficiently acquire the new language knowledge if the input is $i+0$, which means the language input is close to or lower than their current level of language knowledge; or if the input is $i+2$, which means the input material is much higher than their current stage of language. Therefore, it is inevitable for the traditional way of separating students into different classes according to their different majors to confront such a problem: students with different starting points will have to face the same language input and the teaching requirement alike. That also explains the reason why in the same class, as to the same teaching material, some students think it too difficult to understand while others regard it too simple and boring. On the contrary, graded or level-based college English teaching will to a greatest extent practice the so called "teaching students in accordance with their aptitude and learning of individuation", in which the students are divided into elementary class (class C), regular class (class B) and advanced class (class A) according to their present language level. In this way, we try to maximize the possibilities of making the language teaching material the comprehensible input, which is $i+1$.

In September, 2007, China's Ministry of Education issued "the College English Curriculum Requirements", which indicated explicitly that college English teaching should implement the

principle of classified guidance and teaching students according to their aptitude. In addition, college English teaching requirements were defined as general requirements, intermediate requirements and advanced requirements. A year later, in August, 2008, our Academy set up the curriculum standards of college English teaching for undergraduates, accordingly proposing the general requirements and the intermediate requirements. Meanwhile, the curriculum standards pointed out that English teaching would put graded teaching into practice in the future if the conditions were mature, and the students would be divided into different classes according to their test performance held after the registration. Students in the regular classes were demanded to meet the general requirements while students in the advanced classes should reach the intermediate requirements. All those had prepared our university for the Graded College English Teaching, which was launched in the academic year of 2011. Compared with other universities which commenced Graded College English Teaching around the year of 2004 or even earlier, our academy' graded English teaching started a little late.

1.2. SWOT Analysis

SWOT Analysis was first proposed by Kenneth R. Andrews in his book *The Concept of Corporate Strategy* in 1971. It was developed by the middle of the 1960s for large organizations to determine the strategic fit between an organization's internal, distinctive capabilities and external possibilities and to prioritize actions. SWOT analysis (alternatively SWOT Matrix) is a structured planning method used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats involved in a project or in a business venture. A SWOT analysis can be carried out for a product, place, industry or person. It involves specifying the objective of the business venture or project and identifying the internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieving that objective. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SWOT_analysis)

By utilizing SWOT analysis and constructing the SWOT matrix model, we try to explore the inherent strengths, weaknesses, external opportunities and risks or threats of College English Teaching for the purpose of improving teaching efficiency.

2. GRADED COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING UNDER PERSPECTIVE OF SWOT ANALYSIS

2.1. The Strengths of Graded College English Teaching

Teaching students in accordance with their aptitude plays a positive role in improving the efficiency. It will be convenient for the teachers to practice individualized teaching and boost efficiency when the students have similar language level. Directing students of different language levels, teachers will adopt different teaching objectives and requirements, and work out instruction designs, lecture plans and teaching scripts to target at different students. In addition to arouse the students' interest and strengthen their confidence, a series of tasks in class and after class will be designed for them according to their current language level. Every student has the desire and ability to participate in the teaching activities both in class and after class. Generally speaking, the language input of graded English teaching is comprehensible and helpful in avoiding the phenomena of two extremities that some students think the teaching material too difficult while others regard it meaningless.

Graded College English Teaching will benefit the task-based language teaching activities. Before graded teaching, the students in the same class have uneven language levels and abilities. As a result, whenever the teacher carries out such in-class activities as report or group study, it is often the case that the more capable students are very active and tend to grasp every chance to practice their communication abilities. On the contrary, those students who do not have a solid language base will find it hard to participate in the classroom activities. In graded teaching, students in the same class have similar language level, which helps the teacher develop task-based teaching activities.

Graded College English Teaching will benefit the combination of English learning activities in-class and after class. Since teaching hours are limited, students have to carry out a great number of

learning activities after class. Under graded teaching, the teacher can direct the students to accomplish certain extra-curriculum English learning activities according to the students' language level. For example, as to A-level students, the teacher can lead them to practice listening by listening to BBC or VOA program; as to C-level students, their main task is to grasp the teaching content and the text book.

2.2. The Weaknesses of Graded College English Teaching

To divide students into different classes according to their different English levels will probably lead to negative emotions to the students especially those who are assigned to class C. On entering the university, all freshmen are confident for their study and future. To their surprise, as soon as they come to the college, they are given a test of English to decide which class they can take, much more to some students' disappointment, they are assigned to C-level class, which is the lowest grade. Undoubtedly, it is a big strike to those students' self-confidence, which will influence their enthusiasm and lead to negative emotions in language learning.

Although graded into 3 levels as class A, B and C, students are using the same textbooks in our academy and many other universities. It's not only against the primary purpose of Graded College English Teaching, but also contrary to Krashen's input hypothesis. As a result, the teaching effect will be discounted. However, the decision of using what kind of textbooks is made by administrative department of the university. Even if textbooks of different levels are selected, there also appears another tough problem of how to compare the students' academic achievement.

The administration of graded teaching is a tough job because the management of graded classes is a dynamic process. Therefore, by the end of each semester, there will be an adjustment to the students in different classes. How should we adjust the classes? Is the final examination the only reason? Or should we listen to the students' opinions? In practice, the adjustment will also lead to a kind of negative emotional influence to those students who are assigned to classes of lower level. Some students are not accustomed to the teaching method of the new class. After taking a few lectures, they ask to move back to their former class.

2.3. The Opportunities of Graded College English Teaching

The quality of college students is increasing continuously because of the development of education. Some students excel in English study while others regard English their poorest subject due to the unbalanced development of china's education.

In 2008, our Academy set up the curriculum standards of college English teaching for undergraduates according to "the College English Curriculum Requirements", issued by the Ministry of Education in 2007. Time for Graded College English Teaching has gradually become ripen after the revise of the curriculum standards in the following years, in addition to the fact that more emphasis has been given to the importance of teaching in accordance with the students' respective aptitude.

2.4. The Threats of Graded College English Teaching

The first threat comes from the basis of grading. Is it reasonable, scientific or reliable? Just take our academy as an example. From September, 2011, our university started to divide the freshmen into such 3 grades as A, B and C according to the test held after the students' registration. Grade A belonged to the highest level, which was made up by class A1, A2 and A3. There were 5 classes in grade B from classB1 to classB5. The lowest grade was C which was composed of 4 classes from classC1 to classC4. Besides, there was an honored class named after a famous alumnus "Luo Jianfu". Therefore, there were altogether 13 English classes, and the students' number of each class was within 40, basically small class teaching was implemented. All the students would attend their English classes according to the assignment of their classes no matter what majors they were taking. From the teaching practice of the first semester, most students approved the division of English teaching grades except that several students demanded to transfer from a class of higher

level to a lower level class. But, because of the absence of oral test in the grading examination, students in the same class still have different speaking ability.

The second threat lies in the choice of textbooks to meet the needs of students who have various language competences. Theoretically, textbooks of different levels should be employed to adjust to various classes of different levels. In fact, all the students are using the same textbook-NEW HERISON COLLEGE ENGLISH. There emerge the problem inevitably that students in grade A think the textbook too easy while those in grade C think it too difficult. As to teachers, there also exists a challenge of how to reflect the characteristics of graded teaching, especially to those who undertake the teaching task of different levels such as grade A and B or C.

The third threat is the negative emotional influence to the students in grade B or C. Before graded teaching, all the students are divided into different classes according to their majors. However, after graded teaching, students of the same major are classified into different teaching classes from A to C. It is natural for those who are in lower-level classes to feel humiliated and even lose confidence in English learning.

3. SWOT MATRIX MODEL AND TEACHING STRATEGIES OF GRADED COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING

The Matrix Model can be set up through the SWOT Analysis of Graded College English Teaching.

Table 1. SWOT Matrix Model

	Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)
Internal Conditions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stronger pertinence 2. Higher efficiency 3. Easier for the students taking different majors to form knowledge complementation in English classes 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Whether the grading basis (test) scientific and appropriate 2. The influence of negative emotional factors 3. Grading the teaching classes without rating the textbooks 4. How to adjust the students' classes after one semester's teaching
External Environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Education Ministry's Requirements for college English teaching 2. Our Academy set up and refined the curriculum standards of college English teaching 3. Some experience and lessons of graded English teaching from other universities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Difficulties in administration, such as the arrangement of courses, examinations and the assignment of teaching facilities 2. Teachers will confront more challenge of class management 3. Difficult for the students from different majors to from a sense of identity and belonging to the class, which is unfavorable for classroom activities

Only analyzing the internal conditions and the external environment of Graded College English Teaching is far beyond enough, we should select relevant strategies and measures to take advantage of external opportunities and avoid threats and risks. Hence, we can adopt strategies of SO, ST, WO and WT.

SO Strategies: Teachers try to make full use of the experience of graded teaching from other universities to enhance the classroom teaching efficiency. Students in graded classes have comparatively similar language ability, which is convenient for teachers to carry out various classroom activities.

ST strategies: Only by reinforcing management and encouraging innovation, avoiding the threats and risks of graded teaching, can we give a full play to the strengths and advantages of graded teaching. After the implementation of graded teaching, the Education Administration Department of the university has to carry more workload in the arrangement of courses. Furthermore, it also adds much more pressure to each department's administration of the students. For example, in our academy, some students have to go out to do specialty practice under the arrangement of their departments. As a result, the students in English classes from this department are absent during this period. The example shows that graded teaching brings new challenge to the administration of the university as well as to the department and the cooperation of them.

WO Strategies: The weaknesses of graded teaching will be conquered if we try to draw the experiences and lessons from other colleges. Then, in order to teach students according to their

aptitude, both the teachers and the administration department of the university should explore the grading of different textbooks so as to meet the needs of students with different language levels. Meanwhile, teachers should also pay close attention to students' emotions especially those ones in class C, and encourage their students to establish self-confidence.

WT strategies: Teachers, the English teaching and research section and the administrative departments of the university must keep the communication channels open. Both the teachers and the teaching section should report the new problems and situations to the administrative departments, which should also adopt new management notions and measures to deal with those problems. By that way, we can overcome the weaknesses of graded teaching, and reduce the negative influence due to the difficulties of administration.

4. SUMMARY

Although there still exist some challenges and difficulties in Graded College English Teaching, we will achieve the purpose of graded teaching, enhance teaching efficiency and benefit most students as long as we resort to appropriate strategies.

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ANNALS of Faculty Engineering Hunedoara – International Journal of Engineering

