On the Construction of Integrated English Course with the Purpose of Eliminating “Water Course” and Creating “Gold Course”

Xiaoli Yu
The English Department, Zhejiang Yuxiu University of Foreign Languages, China

Abstract—Since it was proposed to eliminate the "water course" and create the "golden course" at the 2018 Education Conference held in Chengdu, the Ministry of Education have issued a series of notification and plan, and various universities have responded with corresponding measures and actions. Under such an educational background, this paper, based on the English teaching base of Zhejiang Yuxiu University of Foreign Languages, considers the construction of the Integrated English course. Based on the discussion of the definition of "gold lesson" and "water lesson", this paper explores the "gold lesson" and "water lesson" in integrated English course, and considers the ways to eliminate "water lessons" and build up "gold lessons" from the different perspectives of teachers and students at multiple levels. Finally, it comes to the conclusion that the construction of integrated English course is a huge and complicated process, which requires the concerted efforts of various parties. However, we will eliminate "water course" and create "gold course" by continuous research, practice, summary and improvement, which will win the battle of course construction.

Index Terms—Integrated English course, water course, gold course, course construction

I. INTRODUCTION

In the “new era of national institutions of higher learning and undergraduate education work conference” held in Chengdu in June 2018, secretary Baosheng Chen put forward the “four regressions”, one of which is “going back to common sense”, namely calling for students to study hard, and it pointed out that it’s reasonable for college students to be “loaded”, turning “water course” into “gold course” with depth, degree of difficulty and challenge. Since then, “adding load”, “water course” and “gold course” have become three hot words. The Ministry of Education has successively issued the Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of High-level Undergraduate Education and Comprehensively Improving talent Cultivation Ability (No.2 [2018] of The Ministry of Education) and the Notice on Implementing the Spirit of The National Conference on Undergraduate Education of Higher Education in a New Era (No.8 [2018] of the Ministry of Education) which pointed out that colleges and universities should comprehensively sort out the teaching content of each course and eliminate “water courses” and create “gold courses”. You Xiangcheng (2017) pointed out that they should reasonably improve the academic challenge, increase the difficulty of courses, expand the depth of courses, and improve the teaching quality of courses (P. 2). Since then, the administrative departments of education all over the country have issued work plans, putting forward the guidance opinions of “adding burden” to college students to eliminate “water courses” and create “gold courses”, and the colleges and universities have issued specific measures to implement these guidance opinions. Zhejiang Yuxiu University of Foreign Languages, as a private foreign language college, should also keep up with the development needs of the time, actively respond to the call of the Ministry of Education, and think about the way to eliminate “water courses” and create “gold courses”. This paper is based on Integrated English Course and think about the way to eliminate “water course” in the course construction, the way to improve the course quality and create a “gold course” in order to meet the requirements of the curriculum outline and cultivate high-quality, high-level professional talents.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. The Definition of “Gold Course” and “Water Course”

The study uses definition method and literature research method to make an exploration of “water course” and “gold course”. So what is a “water course” and what is a "gold course"? According to MENG Jun-yi (2014), Wu Yan, director of the Higher education Department of the Ministry of Education gave the answer for the first time recently: “Two qualities and one degree”, which is the quality of higher rank and the quality of innovation and challenge degree is the standard of “gold course”, whereas “water course” is the course of lower rank, obsolescence and mindlessness(P. 5). In this regard, we can make a basic definition of “water course” and “gold course” in our teaching of Integrated English Course with a combination of the content of teaching quality evaluation. Lessens of Integrated English Course which can reflect teachers' high academic and professional levels, teachers' scientific, innovative, and appropriate teaching methods, and teachers' professional, responsible, innovative and progressive teaching attitude are the "gold lessons" and
the course consists of such lessons is the “gold course”. But on the contrary, if in the teaching of Integrated English course, teachers have no certain teaching abilities, and their old teaching methods are lack of innovation, and their teaching is not based on students’ demand and aptitude, and they are not earnestly preparing for their lessons, not strictly carrying out the teaching plan, not updating teaching contents continuously to achieve the goal of both teaching and educating people, then the lessons given by them may probably be “water lessons” and the course based on these lessons is a “water course”.

B. “Gold lesson” and “Water Lesson” in the Integrated English Course

Now let’s take a closer look at the ”gold lesson” and ”water lesson” in the Integrated English Course. The purpose of the compilation of the Integrated English Course is to train students’ English basic knowledge and skills comprehensively and strictly, developing students’ comprehensive skills in using English, cultivating and improving students’ comprehensive ability of listening, speaking, and reading, writing and translating and strengthening their cultural capacity. Thus it can help students lay a solid foundation to study advanced professional courses in the next phase of their study. Therefore, we should promote the teaching of the Integrated English course in a systematic, comprehensive, and planned way and gradually cultivate students’ English professional ability and accomplishment.

1. From teachers’ perspective

In this process, we should consider what kind of course is ”gold course” and what kind of course is ”water course” from both the perspectives of teachers and students. First of all, from the perspective of teachers, it can be divided into three aspects: teachers’ teaching professional level, teaching methods and teaching attitude.

a. From the perspective of professional level

From the perspective of professional level, teachers engaged in the teaching of the Integrated English Course should have excellent English knowledge and skills and on this basis, it is more important for them to acquire professional teaching ability and level, and have the consciousness of constantly learning and updating their English knowledge and professional level. English teaching is no longer a matter of standing on the three feet of platform, doing the simple teaching only with a piece of chalk and a textbook, or just reading from a PPT slide. In the information age, new knowledge is emerging unceasingly, and the constant updating of learning media and means also puts forward new demands and challenges to our teaching. Therefore, CHEN Ting (2016) explained that we should change our role in a timely manner, from an imparter of English knowledge to a guider of English learning, from a leader of English teaching to an organizer of English teaching and also someone who participates in and makes evaluations and gives feedback on English teaching and who directs and escorts students’ English learning (P. 4). If meeting the above requirements, the lessons we give are called “gold lessons”, but in opposite, they should be “water lessons”.

b. From the perspective of teaching method

As to the teaching method, it is the general name of the ways and means used by teachers and students in the teaching process in order to achieve the common teaching objectives and accomplish the common teaching tasks. We should teach students in accordance with the needs of social development and students’ aptitudes with the targeted design and scientific teaching methods according to the syllabus. And in the specific teaching practice, we should make timely adjustment and improvement according to students’ performance, grades and feedback etc so that the teaching method may effectively improve students’ learning result and efficiency. Here lie the criteria for “gold lesson” and “water lesson”. Determining what “gold lesson” is and what “water lesson” is is from English teaching method should comply with the following requirements: Teachers should develop targeted teaching methods by analyzing students’ learning situation and coordinating with the content of textbooks based on the syllabus and the teaching plan. Teaching methods should serve the realization of teaching objectives. Teachers should prepare carefully before classes and design appropriate teaching processes. The success of a class is directly related to the good or bad preparation before the class. Teachers should make full preparations, such as consulting various kinds of information and abundant knowledge, choosing appropriate teaching methods and elaborately designing teaching steps, and preparing appropriate teaching means and tools, which are conducive to the scientific display of good teaching methods. The design of the teaching method of the Integrated English Course should be done according to the syllabus and should be arranged scientifically and implemented reasonably so as to effectively stimulate students’ learning initiative and cultivate their rational thinking and analytical ability, it includes but not limited to a fascinating lead-in, a learning and discussion of cultural background, an analysis of the structural framework, a speculation of the central theme and the author’s purpose of writing, an overall understanding and detailed analysis of the text, an analysis and teaching of language points and structures of long and difficult sentences, a practice of Listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating skills, a Learning and application of grammar points, an organization of oral activities, and teaching, practicing and demonstration of writing methods, etc.

c. From the perspective of teaching attitude

In addition, we can judge whether a lesson is a “gold lesson” or a “water lesson” from a teacher’s teaching attitude. And according to YANG Yan- xuan (2006), a teacher’ teaching attitude refers to the teacher’ evaluation and behavior tendency of teaching on the basis of his own morality and values in teaching activities, which is manifested in the cognition, emotion and consciousness of teaching (P. 6). A teacher’ teaching attitude directly affects students’ learning activities and thus becomes an important factor influencing the teaching effect. Teachers’ positive teaching attitudes and personalized behaviors for promoting students’ learning include awakening and appreciating students, improving
students’ learning ability, enhancing their self-esteem and self-confidence, alleviating their anxiety, and forming and consolidating their positive attitudes towards others and dealing with the world, etc. In the teaching of the comprehensive English course, we should actively cultivate advanced outstanding students with better basis and all-round development according to the specific situations of the students to enable them to lead to a good style of study and play leading role models in the class which can help drive the other students of the class to actively get close to them, and thus fully optimize the class style of study and students’ learning performance. As to the other middle-level students and students with relatively poor academic performance, we should treat them equally, and especially need to encourage them to help them correct their learning attitudes, cultivate good learning habits, and truly improve their learning levels. In the teaching process, we should not only impart knowledge and guide students to learn, but also teach and educate people, adhering to the attitude of humanism and cooperative education. In the same process, students’ learning motivation and success motivation should also be properly stimulated according to their psychological needs so that external teaching requirements can be internalized into students’ self-needs so as to stimulate the self-creativity of both teaching and learning. Based on the self-actualization theory, According to Qifang (2000), Maslow advocates that what is important in teaching is to make every student feel that he is the master of study, and that the teacher's duty is only to promote learning, not to cause learning, and to provide learning opportunities for students to engage in real learning (P. 5). Teachers’ teaching attitude has a vital impact on students, especially on the cultivation of their learning interest, the display of their learning creativity, the cultivation of their initiative, the formation of their ideological character and even the establishment their correct outlook on life. In the teaching process of the comprehensive English course, teachers’ teaching attitude is reflected in and out of the classroom. Only positive guidance, good advice, continuous encouragement, correct tips and help in class can make students more confident, more capable of participating in the class so as to improve the teaching and learning effect. Outside the classroom, only when teachers care for students, actively answer their questions, treat them with enthusiastic help and selfless dedication can students be influenced, moved and inspired to love learning more, and to actively explore the unknown so as to expand the latitude and depth of learning. And the personality characteristics and personality charm of teachers constitute another factor affecting students. Teachers’ being gentle, patient, tolerant, confident, positive, hard-working, diligent, careful, free and easy-going, optimistic, determined and other excellent qualities and personality charm have a subtle influence on students, especially when teachers are often regarded as role models for students to learn from. They are willing to trust and respect teachers and learn from them some qualities and behaviors that they think are worth learning. Therefore, teachers should be good at building their own personality charm to positively influence students and properly use their influence in the eyes of students to actively and effectively guide students into learning so as to create good-quality “gold classes”.

2. From the perspective of students

From the perspective of students, if the enthusiasm of students is fully developed and they can do well both before the class and after the class, then it will contribute to the emergence of golden lessons. The necessary way to improve the quality of classroom teaching is to take an active part in pre-class preview, in thinking and improvement during class, and in on-time review after class. If students perseveringly and orderly do the above three links in their study, there will be a strong guarantee for the production of “gold lessons”. Pre-class preparation for the comprehensive English course includes completing pre-class assignments, searching for information and materials related to the subject, understanding background information, previewing texts, searching for new words and phrases, understanding long and difficult sentences, thinking about pre-reading questions and so on. In the class, students should devote themselves to the lesson by listening carefully, taking notes frequently, actively participating in the discussion, thinking constantly, asking and answering questions actively, and resonating with the thoughts of teachers and the other students at any time. In this way, the classroom atmosphere will get better and better, and everyone's thinking and enthusiasm will be stimulated, including the teachers'. Such lessons are unquestionably “golden lessons”. And the review after class is also crucial and essential. Only through timely review can we strike while the iron is still hot and consolidate the knowledge and skills we have newly obtained. And for some doubts or some problems to which not a full understanding is achieved, we may have a sudden realization, a different innovative discovery, or a more profound understanding through review. In addition, timely review also lays a foundation for further study and makes the acquisition of knowledge more coherent. In addition, the cultivation of students’ autonomous learning ability is also very important for the generation of “golden lessons”. With the innovation of teaching methods, more work is now being done outside the classroom. Instead, classroom teaching becomes a part of presenting what students have learned, testing and giving feedback. Therefore, if students do not have certain consciousness and ability of self-learning and only rely on teachers' imparting of knowledge, then such a lesson is bound to be an inefficient and low-level “water lesson”.

III. DISCUSSION

After knowing the “gold lesson” and “water lesson” in the comprehensive English course, we can work out the way to eliminate the water course and create the gold course in the course construction. On this issue, we can also consider from three aspects according to the above analysis.

A. From the Perspective of Management
First of all, we should find out the existing problems and weak points at the management level, strictly pushing and exerting teaching orders on students and teachers, and formulate corrective measures to them if necessary. Effective management is the premise of orderly and effective classroom teaching and effective teaching depends on the effective management of learning in classroom. Classroom teaching quality will be seriously affected if there is no management or improper classroom teaching management.

According to Nina Vevere and Vulfs Kozlinskis (2011), the quality of classroom teaching will directly influence the completion of school teaching tasks, the realization of teaching objectives and the improvement of teaching quality (p. 12). The comprehensive English course group finds that some discipline problems are common in all classes. For example, some students cannot get up early to read in the morning, or even have no time to have breakfast. They go to class hungry, which leads to poor energy and drowsiness in class. Moreover, eating breakfast between classes will not only affect the classroom hygiene, but also affect the learning atmosphere in the classroom. This is of course harmful and not beneficial to classroom teaching, and there must be a certain degree of management deficiency that needs to be corrected. In addition, a small number of students ask for leave quite often, and some students are engaged in other associations, departments, and organizations or go for teachers’ requirements during classes, which on one side violates the classroom discipline, and on the other hand brings challenges to the cohesion of the learning of the course and the increasing of the difficulty of the course, which needs to be rectified. In addition, some students are slack in their study, inactive in class participation and often absent from classes. However, at the end of the semester, considering the regulation of the pass rate, teachers in the course group may ease conditions to allow them pass which is not practical and contrary to professional ethics and needs to be rectified. If learning is compared to war, then discipline is the guarantee. If there is no certain discipline, teaching cannot be carried out normally, and lax discipline will certainly affect the quality of teaching. Hereto, we should cooperate in many ways and manage education together. Through the establishment of a certain punishment system and assessment system, the existing problems are bound to be improved combined with the united efforts of the head teacher, class cadres, discipline inspection department as well as the other course teachers, coupled with strict supervision and a certain ideological work and education. In addition, we should strengthen the assessment of learning process and strengthen the implementation of responsibilities, including the responsibilities of management, teachers and students. Only in this way can we improve the quality of teaching, eliminate water lessons and create more gold lessons.

B. From the Teachers’ Perspective

Secondly, from the teachers’ perspective, to eliminate “water lessons” and create “gold lessons”, we need to make breakthroughs in the following aspects.

1. In the term of business level

In the term of business level, we first need to raise consciousness and change concepts. It is necessary to change the traditional thinking mode and the programmed teaching mode. Students should be the main body and the teacher should be the organizer, guide, participant and promoter of the class. In terms of the application of teaching methods, students should be given priority to, and the teaching methods of independent cooperative inquiry should be highlighted. And the change of thoughts needs to be built on the basis of constant comprehension, adjustment and adaptation in teaching practice. In order to achieve this goal, we can organize teachers to go out for study and training or invite experts and excellent teachers to give lectures and mock classes. And teaching competition, teaching display and other activities can be organized to deepen teachers’ understanding and application of new curriculum and new ideas. In addition, party organizations can be involved to strengthen teachers’ moral education and improve teachers’ level of understanding and consciousness in order to make teachers set their mind on education, serve education, and focus more on improving their professional skills. Furthermore, teachers should strengthen the study of theoretical knowledge and enhance professional accomplishment. Business level is built on the basis of theory, and to improve teachers’ level of business, teachers can never relax their theoretical learning. Teachers usually have heavy workload and tend to ignore theoretical study, while without theoretical guidance in teaching practice, its quality of being scientific and systematic and its comprehensiveness cannot be fully guaranteed. But the theory study can’t just be regarded as a form, but must be put into practice. For example, the comprehensive English course group can recommend a good theoretical instruction to teachers each semester, requiring teachers to complete one to two books each semester, which can be presented in the form of learning experience report or paper. In addition, it is necessary for teachers to read more comprehensive books related or unrelated to their business so as to increase teachers’ knowledge content and improve their cultural connotation. In this way, there will be a qualitative improvement in their English teaching. Besides, teaching practices can be carried out to practically raise teachers’ educational abilities. Colleges or departments can carry out sharing or competition activities related to professional teaching and education, such as demonstration class, report class, speech contest, theme lecture, etc., so that more teachers can participate in the activities to strengthen communication, share experience and improve their teaching skills together. Finally, teachers need to strengthen cooperation to improve the class quality. The cooperation here can be teacher-teacher cooperation, teacher-department cooperation, and teacher-outreach cooperation and so on. For examples, a project team can be invited to share with the class its research results which are related to the teaching theme of the class; the school librarian can be relied on to make an overall introduction of library resources to help improve students’ resource utilization ability; through outreach, relevant professionals can enter the classroom to share experience and knowledge, etc.
2. In the term of improving teachers’ teaching methods

In terms of improving teachers’ teaching methods, we should bear one thing in mind: teaching method improvement is the means, while learning method improvement is the end. To this end, we should do a few points in teaching: first, we should make full use of modern and diversified teaching methods to serve classes. With the advance of educational reform, the use of modern educational technology has become an irresistible trend, but many become formalistic and being technical for technique’s sake, resulting in grandstanding. We should really combine teaching media with teaching ideas and teaching content to make teaching activities better, faster, more effective and more interesting. Only in this way can we catch students’ interest and enable them to master more knowledge and skills in a relatively short time. Secondly we should give full play to students’ enthusiasm and initiative. It is the best teaching method to stimulate students’ interest and motivation in learning and make them take the initiative to learn with great interest. Therefore, the teaching method should be designed as much as possible to combine teaching with fun and arouse students’ interest in learning. To reach this level, teachers need to make full preparations before classes, in which teachers should not only thoroughly read the textbook and dig deeply into the textbook, but also timely and appropriately supplement some relevant extracurricular knowledge to expand the students’ scope of knowledge and stimulate their interest in continuing learning. In addition, teachers’ body language, humorous words, enthusiasm and so on are also the elements that motivate students’ learning enthusiasm and initiative. Thirdly, the design of learning methods should pay more attention to the change of students’ learning styles. Due to the information explosion and the rapid update and development of science and technology, human beings have entered the era of lifelong learning. That is to say, the traditional education based on imparting information can no longer meet the requirements of students to go to society. With the improvement of information conditions and easy access to information, self-learning skills and theory and methodology become very important. In the process of education, the new teaching method should emphasize the cultivation of problem-solving ability, students’ independent ability, and the cultivation of team spirit of active participation in division of labor and cooperation, all of which are carried out under specific learning scenes closely related to reality. Therefore, students should break through the traditional way of learning and change to the track of independent learning and cooperative learning. First of all, we should change students’ ideas, not passively accepting knowledge, but actively devoting to learning. Secondly, in the specific operation, teachers should also put forward corresponding requirements for students’ learning mode when changing the teaching mode, and make students familiar with the corresponding learning mode under the new teaching mode through practical teaching and simulated real scene teaching. Fourthly, the design of learning methods should pay attention to the cultivation of students’ innovative ability. With the development of modern science and technology, the real wealth of civilization will show more and more human creativity. The explosion of knowledge requires the new generation to learn to study and the scientific and technological revolution requires a new generation of innovation and creation to forge ahead to revitalize China. We can say that innovation is the demand of The Times, the hope of the nation and the driving force of human progress. So it is very important to cultivate students’ innovative thinking in the teaching of the integrated English course. So how can we cultivate it? First of all, teachers should improve our comprehensive quality and only in this way can we give full play to our imagination, thinking ability, organization ability, comprehension ability and other abilities to use the mastered knowledge, combined with the textbook knowledge, to design scientific and flexible classroom processes and activities with thinking space to cultivate students’ innovative thinking ability. In addition, the cultivation of innovative thinking ability should be put into all aspects of teaching, including teaching methods, teaching means, teaching process, teaching evaluation and teaching reflection. Finally, by brainstorming and specialization and cooperation, we need to make use of the role of the teaching and research team to come up with more innovative, vivid, scientific and reasonable teaching programs and activities.

3. In the term of teachers’ teaching attitude

From the perspective of teachers’ teaching attitude, Charanjit Kaur Dhillon (2018) explained that, teachers with good teaching attitude and are serious, responsible and meticulous in teaching, and who are positive and have pursuit and ideals are bound to affect their students’ attitudes towards learning in and out of the classroom(P. 21)). Therefore, if we want to change students’ learning attitude and make them develop towards a positive and healthy direction, we must first work on teachers. Then how to maintain a good teaching attitude among teachers? First of all, teachers should have the correct thought guidance so that we have a sense of pride and sense of achievement in our own profession. Secondly, there should be a correct assessment mechanism. Teachers’ teaching performance cannot be judged by unilateral evaluation and recognition of students or leaders. HUANG Jun-guan and HE Fang-qing (2007) ever pointed that the assessment system should be open and fair, objective and comprehensive and can evaluate teachers’ teaching performance truly and democratically (P. 2). Only in this way can teachers’ work enthusiasm be improved and teachers’ spirit of loving for teaching, rooted in teaching and dedication in teaching be carried forward. Finally, the teacher’s own good state of mind is also crucial. Only teachers who are both physically and mentally healthy can put more energy into teaching in a better state and influence students with a positive mental outlook. Then what should we do to maintain a good state of mind and body? First, we can find happiness through communication with others. Secondly, we can relieve the pressure of work by cultivating hobbies. At ordinary times, we should maintain a normal heart, learning to be content. There is a saying that the one with content is often happy. So, with content, we tend to find more balance and happiness in the teaching career. Still, we should always maintain an optimistic life confidence, love work, and treat life and work with a relaxed attitude.
C. From the Students' Perspective

Finally, at the student level, the key to eliminating “water lessons” and create “gold lessons” lies in the change of learning attitude, the cultivation of learning autonomy and the formation of good learning habits. Learning attitude is the most important thing. Attitude is everything. Students’ learning attitude regulates their learning behavior, which is reflected in their response to learning content and learning environment. Learning attitude also affects students' learning effect and their tolerance so if we want to change some students’ passive and slack learning attitude, teachers need to mobilize students’ thoughts and guide them with true feelings in which teachers should set an example. With practical actions, teachers influence students and with specific methods, teachers guide students, making them first to realize the importance of learning attitude, and then master the way to change their learning attitude by plunging into specific methods and steps to do. Only in this way can students really experience a full range of possible changes both from consciousness and actions. In addition, the system and management is the guarantee, which should be specific and in place. The cultivation of students’ learning autonomy first needs teachers' correct guidance. Secondly, it is also a good way for colleges to task-drive students through some autonomous learning tasks. In addition, teachers can guide students to make plans for independent learning and teach them methods of independent learning. Then, through constant practice and adjustment, a set of self-fit methods of independent learning can be formed. The next is to rely on good study habits of continuous, scientific and reasonable arrangement of learning. The formation of good study habits cannot be completed overnight, but it needs years of accumulation and summary, continuous improvement and perfection, and finally gets fixed within a certain time. As teachers, we need to guide students to first determine the general direction and goals, and then make the goals specific, the more specific the better. For example, make your ideal goal specific to your annual goal, your annual goal specific to your semester goal, your semester goal specific to your monthly goal, your monthly goal specific to your weekly goal, and your daily goal specific to what you should do in each period of time. And then, by taking appropriate notes and then ranking them according to their importance and urgency, students’ actions are materialized and their actions become more directed and motivated. A good habit of study is thus formed at this point. In a word, “water lessons” can be eliminated and “golden classes” can be created if students achieve the above three points and fully cooperate with teachers, mutually enhancing each other.

IV. Conclusion

The construction of the integrated English course affects all aspects and the project is huge and complex, requiring the joint cooperation of the management team, teachers and students. But as long as we study carefully, keep practicing, summarize in time and improve at any time, we believe that the construction of the integrated English course can be done well. The course construction is the inevitable way to eliminate “water lessons” and create more “gold lessons”. We have the confidence and ability to fight this battle well.

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Xiaoli Yu was born in Zhejiang, China in 1982. She received her master’s degree in linguistics from CISISU in 2013. She is currently a lecturer in Zhejiang Yuxiu University of Foreign Languages, Shaoxing, China. Her research interests include translation and English language education.

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