

Chapter 10

English Teaching and Andragogy in Transitioning Students from Secondary to Higher Education in China

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the potentiality for Western andragogy as a teaching method in China's high schools, particularly in teaching English as a foreign language (ESOL). A well-accepted instrument was modified and utilized for this study. Chinese teachers of English taught andragogically to some extent such as personalizing instruction, relating to experience, assessing student needs and climate building. The findings showed these teachers taught the lower levels of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy, which are characterized by rote learning, memorization, knowledge transmission, lecturing, and focusing on exams (Li & Cutting, 2011). These teaching methods run contrary to Western democratic approaches characterized by negotiating curricular priorities with students, giving out learning contracts and using learning portfolios instead of exams and involving students when planning lessons. The Western style of teaching is believed to contribute to the communicative/collaborative learning process when it comes to learning as a foreign language such as English.

INTRODUCTION

Nothing has amazed Westerners more than the fact that there has been growing interest in learning English well for the past few decades in China. The Chinese who have a good command of English quickly became the so-called “new middle class” comparable to that in the United States. These people hold positions in foreign enterprises located in China and in joint ventures. They receive a salary similar

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to their colleagues in the developed countries. Naturally, these adult learners serve as role models for millions of Chinese young people. Parents encourage their children to learn English to improve their employment prospects by emulating this group of people. Further, English has become one of the designated subjects that high school students must take an exam on in order to be admitted into universities or colleges in China. As China gradually becomes more open to the outside world, China has learned to do business with its capitalist neighbors. Of course, English has become a tool in negotiating business with foreigners as most foreigners view learning the Chinese language as one of the most difficult languages in the world.

China has always been wary of the West because of old memories of foreign invasions such as the Opium Wars with Britain, the Japanese occupation and more recent memories of the bombing of its embassy in Belgrade by the United States. Despite these bitter memories, trade with foreigners, especially with capitalist neighbors such as the United States has brought unprecedented profits to China. For example, China's real Gross Domestic Product has grown 9.7% a year in previous decades (Vachhani, 2005). More recent data from China's top economist showed China's economic growth was at 7.3% in 2014, the GDP was 6.45 trillion USD, and the percentage of the tertiary industry in GDP grew from 43% in 2014 to 47% in 2015, one year ahead of schedule. In 2014, the domestic fixed asset investments reached as high as 51.8 trillion yuan, with retail sales reaching as much as 26.6 trillion yuan (Yang, Ping, Xuedong & Ping, 2016).

As a result of China's consistent economic growth, economists posited that in 2015 China deposited well over \$ 4,648 billion US dollars (Yang, et., al, 2016), surpassing the United States and Japan for the first time in history. On the other hand, the Chinese people have demonstrated a willingness to become part of the global community.

According to statistics, China is ranked number one in the world in sending its scholars and researchers to Western universities (Institute of International Education, 2014). In recent years, China has had waves of immigrants to Western countries such as the U.S., Australia, England, Germany and Canada. The number of Chinese who travel around the world has been on the increase on a yearly basis. Although the Chinese government has tried to limit young people from accessing the Internet and Western media, this effort seems to be futile. All these factors contribute to the huge interest in learning the four components of the English language (reading, writing, speaking and listening) well in China.

Towards this end, eight universities of foreign languages were established right after China was taken over by the communists in 1949. During those initial years, learning Russian was popular throughout China, but after China dissolved its political ties with Russia in the 1950's, scholars and students quickly turned to English. In the 1980's, learning English became mandatory in China's schools and universities. Still today, there is no question that there is a high level of motivation to learn English well on the part of students. Teachers, of course take pride in teaching English. Although teaching English is the job of Chinese teachers trained in China, the country also encourages English speaking teachers to come to China to teach English. However, a high level of motivation in students does not equal effective learning. Instead, a high level of motivation plus andragogic instruction could result in more effective learning (Liao, 2004; Paine, 1992; Ross, 1992).

There have long been differences between Western approaches and Eastern approaches to teaching. Research indicates that Chinese instruction of ESOL (English Speakers of Other Language) tends to emphasize English grammar, memorization of a plethora of English vocabulary words (mostly out of their cultural context), teacher-centred classroom instruction and exam results, while Western ESOL pedagogy and andragogy favours critical thinking skills, analysis, use of learning contracts between

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