

Causes and Countermeasures Against the Silence Phenomenon in English Classrooms at Applied Undergraduate Colleges and Universities

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Abstract: In applied undergraduate colleges and universities, the silence phenomenon in English classrooms is common. However, many English teachers are troubled by this phenomenon. The teaching focus of English, as a language subject, is on basic skills such as listening and speaking. Therefore, the silence phenomenon will not only affect students' communication skills, but also bring various negative implications. By analyzing the causes of this phenomenon in English classrooms at applied undergraduate colleges and universities, this paper proposes three solutions to solve this issue and enhance the pertinence and effectiveness of English teaching in applied colleges and universities: attaching importance to thinking, adhering to correct teaching concepts, and teaching students in accordance with their aptitude and to apply what they have learned.

Keywords: Applied undergraduate; College English; Silence phenomenon; Classroom teaching

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1. Introduction

With the continuous and in-depth reform of English teaching in colleges and universities, applied undergraduate English teaching has seen a complete transformation from the teacher-centered teaching mode to a cooperative inquiry learning mode. The student-student cooperation approach has become a commonly applied teaching mode. In English teaching, teachers are responsible for encouraging students to participate in the cooperative teaching mode and guiding students in various manners to improve their listening and speaking skills so that students would boldly speak out in this setting and communicate with each other in English. In this way, the students' comprehensive ability to use English can be enhanced^[1], and compound language talents who can adapt to the development of the times can be cultivated. However, there are many issues in the current applied undergraduate English classroom, such as the obstacles in mutual communication when carrying out cooperative teaching and the silence phenomenon among students when questions are posed. Keeping quiet or looking around, which reflects passive participation in class, has become a relatively common phenomenon, and not knowing how to answer questions is the fundamental reason. This phenomenon has also led to a very dull atmosphere during classes, many of which have become a "one-man show" by teachers, thus troubling many college English teachers^[2]. Mobilizing the enthusiasm of students to participate in interactions during English lessons and breaking the silence in classroom so that students can learn the language to achieve the teaching purpose of combining listening and speaking as well as applying what they have learned are urgent tasks for English teachers in applied

undergraduate colleges and universities.

2. The silence phenomenon in English classrooms at applied undergraduate colleges and universities

The silence phenomenon in classrooms is a relatively common teaching problem. It refers to silent non-verbal communication between objects that should communicate with each other. However, English teaching in colleges and universities is mainly for students to practice listening and speaking. Therefore, teacher-student and student-student interactions are indispensable classroom communication methods and links. However, the silence phenomenon often occurs in this link, thus students are unable to achieve the teaching purpose, which is communication training. Surveys and studies have shown that many applied undergraduate colleges and universities have experienced this phenomenon to a certain extent. This phenomenon commonly occurs during cooperative teaching, communication, or questioning in English classrooms. The main reason students choose to disregard this interactive link is that they do not know how to answer the questions posed or have not mastered the existing knowledge. Therefore, there are topics that they cannot understand and thus naturally cannot speak out^[3]. There are times when students are called to answer specific questions, but they naturally chose to remain silent or refuse to answer. This creates an “awkward” classroom atmosphere and also lowers the teaching efficiency. Over time, this silent phenomenon among students will affect the enthusiasm of teachers. There have been cases where the teacher sings a “one-man show,” which challenges the interaction between teachers and students in the classroom. Experiencing the silence phenomenon, teachers tend to report that the teaching progress has been delayed, the classroom atmosphere has become extremely dull, and the rhythm of teaching has been disrupted. In response to this phenomenon, many scholars in the education field have conducted research, and the results revealed that in English classrooms, the silence phenomenon is more common among senior grades. Looking at the root of the problem, the emphasis on English is weaker in higher grades, as observed by some schools, whereby the class hours for English lessons are shorter and the status of college English is degrading, thus objectively creating a mentality that English learning is not that important to students^[4]. Hence, it can be said that the silence phenomenon in English classrooms among higher grades is more dire and evident.

3. Analysis of the causes of the silence phenomenon in English classrooms at applied undergraduate colleges and universities

The development of things is often the final result of two factors, both, internal and external. With regard to the silence phenomenon in applied undergraduate English classrooms, the internal factors include individual student factors, whereas the external factors are external environmental factors. In examining the internal factors and external environmental factors to determine the cause, it is possible to hit the crux of this phenomenon.

3.1. Individual student factors

There are three individual student factors. The first is the weak learning motivation among students. Learners must have a certain learning motivation, and the expanse of this motivation directly affects the quality of the learning effect^[5]. In English learning, learning motivation is reflected as the internal driving force of learners to learn English, which is also the impetus for their learning. There is a very close relationship between this motivation, the learning level, and academic performance. In applied undergraduate English teaching, the biggest motivation for students to learn is to pass the College English Test (CET)-4 and CET-6, so as to qualify for a degree certificate. This kind of learning motivation makes students accustomed to this passive state of coping with exams; hence, they are clearly unmotivated in terms of active communication and participation^[6]. In addition, there are some students who are more

resistant to the learning methods of listening, speaking, and communicating in English. Some mistakenly believe that speaking in English is a waste of time, while others are not interested in communicating or interacting in English. Therefore, they tend to keep quiet in classrooms. Second, there are differences in students' language ability. Students who attend applied undergraduate colleges and universities have varying abilities in their use of the language. Some do not perform well academically, and their learning ability is also weak ^[7]. English is a cumulative subject that requires a substantial amount of English vocabulary and grammar as the basis of language learning. With a weak foundation in the English language, there will be obstacles in language learning, thus yielding to the silence phenomenon in classrooms ^[8]. The third is internal factors. A positive attitude is mandatory in English learning. According to a study, students who are positive, cheerful, optimistic, and confident have certain advantages in language learning. Being introverted, shy, nervous, and passive are not conducive to language learning. Taking all of these into consideration, some students are unwilling to answer questions in class due to their introverted nature, and some choose to remain silent because they are nervous or shy ^[9].

3.2. External environmental factors

There are also three external environmental factors. First, there is less emphasis on ideological factors. Applied undergraduate colleges and universities tend to focus more on professional courses; thus, the insufficient emphasis on English as a basic subject still exists, as seen in the imbalance arrangement of class hours, where English subjects tend to have lesser class hours ^[10], and the relatively few English activities; additionally, the majority of competitions and activities tend to give more weight to professional education. The situation causes students to lose interest in learning English. The second is the pressure from graded examinations. Although the cooperative teaching mode is now widely recognized for college English learning, due to the pressure brought about by graded examinations, most of the time spent in classroom teaching is centered around basic English knowledge and teaching. Due to limited class hours for explanation on exam questions, there are very few opportunities for English communication practice. Therefore, the teacher-centered phenomenon is still relatively common in applied undergraduate English teaching, where students do not have much opportunities to speak English. This, in turn, leads to poor English communication skills and interaction ability among students, resulting in the choice to remain silent or passive in classrooms ^[11]. Third, the contents of the teaching materials are not closely integrated with majors. Applied undergraduate students have their own majors, but many undergraduate colleges now adopt a unified model of teaching materials, in which their contents are not attractive enough to students taking professional courses; furthermore, students of different majors are learning the same contents. The incongruous teaching materials with students' language foundation may also pose a challenge in controlling the contents in textbooks and affect the interest of students, especially those with weak foundation in English ^[12].

4. Countermeasures for the silence phenomenon in English classrooms at applied undergraduate colleges and universities

4.1. Attaching importance to ideology and increasing investment in English teaching

Applied undergraduate colleges and universities should attach importance to English teaching ideologically, set up English listening and speaking classrooms, equipment, and facilities, as well as organize drama performances, host competitions, speech competitions, English corners, and other English activities, which would involve students. Recruit more members and organize activities for the English Club, so that students are still largely exposed to an English environment outside the classroom ^[13]. Through these beneficial activities, students can improve their comprehensive ability in using English, enhance their English language and social skills, as well as enrich their leisure time. Moreover, students would come to realize

the practicality of English in life and work, and thus stimulate their interest and enthusiasm in learning English ^[14].

4.2. Adhering to the correct concept and mobilizing the enthusiasm of students

It is necessary for English teaching in applied undergraduate colleges and universities to keep up with the pace of teaching reform in colleges and universities. The focus of teaching should be placed on students in classroom teaching, and teachers must make effort to change the way students learn, from passive learning into active learning ^[14]. In the teaching process, teachers should pay attention to the initiative and enthusiasm of students in learning as well as use reasonable methods to stimulate students' enthusiasm and interest in learning English. It is also necessary to create more opportunities for exchanges and communication with students in and out of class in order to identify their feelings and the actual reasons for the silence phenomenon in classrooms, so as to establish a good, healthy, and upward teacher-student relationship. By applying subtle teaching methods to help students, especially those with learning disabilities, may encourage them to loosen themselves, let go of their burdens, and thus devote themselves to learning English ^[15].

4.3. Teaching students in accordance with their aptitude and to apply what they have learned

The relevant contents in new applied undergraduate English textbooks should be integrated based on the characteristics and differences of each student, and an English teaching plan that is suitable for students undertaking professional courses should be designed, so that each student can learn English under the differentiated teaching mode. They would be able to learn English according to their own pace and English level ^[16]. Teachers should also take into consideration of the characteristics of professional disciplines and consciously integrate English teaching contents with professional subject knowledge, so that students can build on their professional knowledge while learning English, thus killing two birds with one stone. This enables and encourages students to learn English. For students to apply what they have learned in English classroom, theory should be combined with practice.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the silence phenomenon in English classrooms at applied undergraduate colleges and universities is caused by various factors. Students must correct their own learning attitude, overcome anxiety and impatience, cultivate their due learning motivation, and work hard. Improve their English language level and actively participating in English classroom teaching and activities organized by their schools would be conducive to their learning. Teachers, on the other hand, should actively pay attention to each student, effectively nurture students' interest in learning, establish a good teacher-student relationship, and create a healthy English learning environment.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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