



信息技术提升外语教学： 策略与路径

Ways Forward with ICT-Assisted EFL Pedagogy in China:
Theories into Practice

赵宏琴 / Zhao Hongqin 著



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· 北京 ·

内 容 简 介

本书分析现代信息科技有效提升语言教学的方式和学生学习成效,探索最大限度用现代信息科技辅助和提升语言教学的条件与路径,有助于学校和教师更有效地发挥现代信息科技的功能与作用。

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Preface

Dedicated teachers of English as a foreign and/or second language (EFL/ESL) are constantly on the lookout for quality authentic teaching materials, tools, and opportunities to engage their students in thinking in, and using, the target language correctly, in constructive ways. They are no longer able to simply read a book or magazine, listen to a song or watch a film, or a television program, without considering the materials' possible value for exploitation in the classroom. Through new technologies, in particular, computer-based Information and Communications Technology (ICT), for example, on the Internet, all these materials are quick, cheap (compared to traveling to purchase books) and readily available from the comfort of our desks and homes, or public Internet Cafes. The content and the forms can be infinite. The possibility to use the ICT-based resources and tools and to integrate projects, tasks, and real life uses, is endless. ICT-enhanced language teaching and learning, one of the most significant areas of innovation in education, has become a buzzword and ICT a common tool in schools and EFL classrooms. No doubt, new technologies are transforming educational practice and reforming educational identities. Under such an era of transformation, people in modern society are compelled to consider such ontological and epistemological questions such as:

IV

- What does it mean to be a teacher of English in the Information Society?
- How can ICT be best used in assisting teaching and learning EFL in China?

These are challenging questions to ask people involved in English language teaching, teacher education, and teacher leadership. They lead us to examine our values, beliefs and purposes of English education, the context in which people learn, and the roles that teachers and schools play. They also highlight the effect of information communications technology has on the ways in which we relate to society and evolve our culture.

In order for technologies to contribute to the process of teaching and learning, teachers and schools need an understanding of the ways in which they can use ICT to best support and enhance their teaching and student learning toward achieving new skills in the information society. So that teaching can thoroughly implement the New Curriculum, and teachers transform their practice from chalk-and-talk to student-centered, there is ICT-assisted learning. However, ICT does not automatically improve students learning attainments, information does not equal knowledge, searching is not learning, and hyperlinking is not good instruction on its own. The effective technology-induced pedagogy is not only about whether or not technologies are implemented but also depends much on how technologies are used, which is a matter of change in pedagogy, curriculum and above all, teachers themselves.

This book is, then, designed to achieve a better understanding

of the capacity of ICT and the contributions that ICT can best make to English learning and teaching within and across an EFL curriculum, to encourage change in teachers through reflecting on their practice and learning to teach with ICT, involving both theoretical debates and practical demonstrations.

With special effort, it aims to enable stakeholders, such as policy-makers, teacher educators, and practicing teachers in China, to understand the rationale behind the use of ICT in EFL teaching and learning, and the conditions under which ICT can be used to its full potential. Therefore, better-informed decisions can be made when planning and integrating ICT to address the EFL challenges faced in the information society. In particular, this book is interested in the aspects, in terms of the genuine educational benefits of ICT tailored to Chinese EFL education; conditions or factors that facilitate effective ICT implementation in classrooms; Chinese EFL teachers' views of, and attitudes towards, ICT in classrooms, and appropriate preparation for EFL teachers to make better use of ICT in their practice.

The knowledge in this book synthesizes my interest in, and experience of, the journey of teaching and learning English with ICT, which fundamentally takes me to a stage where I can share this journey with people who are still struggling with questions such as: Why bother to use ICT at all, would it make a difference in student learning; How can I use ICT in a way that the computer screen is different from the blackboard and the mouse is different from chalks? This book explores and answers these questions so that teachers and students will understand the benefits while being aware of and avoiding the pitfalls of

ICT in and outside of the classroom. New technologies change the way we live and work, and consequently the outlook and professional identities of institutions and people in education. This book will ultimately lead teachers to think about what it means to be a teacher of English in the information society.

I have organized this book into six chapters. Chapter One will introduce the context of EFL education and ICT implementation in schools in China and beyond. Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature. It starts with the educational use of ICT in EFL education, addressing two of the most important benefits that ICT holds for EFL teaching and learning, i. e. authenticity and interaction. In contrast to the benefits and capacities that ICT holds for teaching and learning EFL, Chapter Three draws attention to the potential pitfalls of ICT in the educational context. Taking full advantage of the benefits from ICT involves a range of interrelated factors and conditions, among which, teachers' role and attitudes are central. Chapter Four then gives an example of a case study in researching teachers' views on and attitude toward ICT in classrooms. It contains detailed information on the case study method, including sample and population of the study, as well as the data collection and data analysis procedures. Chapter Five explores solutions to the ways forward with ICT in teaching and learning, and chapter Six draws a conclusion and looks ahead.

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July, 2008

Contents

Chapter One	Introduction: Teaching and Learning EFL in China and in the Information Society	1
Chapter Two	The Capacity and Use of ICT in Teaching and Learning	19
Chapter Three	Current Issues with and Conditions for the Fulfillment of ICT Potentials	48
Chapter Four	A Case Study of Teachers' Attitude Toward ICT in Classrooms	71
Chapter Five	Strategies for Ways Forward with ICT	106
Chapter Six	Looking Forward	139
References		153

Chapter One

Introduction: Teaching and Learning EFL in China and in the Information Society

This chapter presents an overview of English language teaching and learning in primary and secondary schools in China, centering on the progress, policies and problems. It provides the contextual introduction to using ICT in classrooms.

The school population of the People's Republic of China is one of the largest in the world. The number of school students, at the year 2007 was recorded as over 300 million. It is a challenge to provide quality foreign language education to such a huge population.

In China, sustained, economic development has increased the demand for personnel with competent use of foreign language, and technological literacy, skills. Responding to the ever-increasing demand for English generated by the radical development of the economy, of industry, and the establishment of the nation-state in the context of globalization, education in general, English teaching and learning in particular in this country has undergone profound and nation-wide reforms, as Y. Hu

(2007, p.361) sees:

Facing a new century when technology is developing rapidly and English has become an important tool in international interactions as a result of informationization and globalization, learning and mastering a foreign language has become a basic requirement that citizens of the 21st century should fulfill. . . .

Part of the large-scale reforms in recent years include the expansion of English language education into the primary curriculum, for example, exemplified by the publication of the policy entitled: *The Ministry of Education Guidelines for Vigorously Promoting the Teaching of English in Primary Schools*, mandating that students start to learn English from grade three in primary schools. In fact, many schools go beyond this limit and provide English lessons from primary one.

The introduction of National Curriculum Standards (Ministry of Education 2001ab; Y. Hu, 2007); accompanied with these reforms advocates the implementation of new information communications technology (ICT), such as computer-based multimedia facilities, into classrooms (Zhao, 2008).

Because of these educational acts and external socio-economic prompts, English language has been a subject of paramount importance, and proficiency in English has been widely regarded as a national as well as a personal asset (G. Hu, 2005b). English language education has therefore been viewed by the Chinese

leadership as having a vital role to play in national modernization and development (G. Hu, 2005b). As a result, English has been given much prominence, because of the perceived importance of the role that English can play in the development of both the individual and the nation, by the educational sector, students, parents, and society (G. Hu, 2004; Zhao, 2007).

The current state of English as a foreign language is now characterized as English being one of the compulsory subjects in the national curriculum, enjoying high status as one of the three core subjects — the other two are Chinese and Mathematics — required to be taught in primary schools, which can provide English lessons from primary 3 (some even earlier, as early as kindergarten), all secondary schools, through to University entrance examinations (Zhao, 2007). In addition to the three core subjects, only two others are chosen by the student for the University selection examinations. Most university students have general English as a compulsory subject in the first two years, and then have English for special purposes after that, even through to their final year. Nationally, English is an integral part of the three compulsory graduation examinations needed for any student to progress, first from junior secondary to senior secondary school, then from senior secondary to tertiary education, and then from university first degree to postgraduate study. It is also compulsory for professional promotion in the system (G. Hu, 2002, 2005a; Y. Hu 2007; Ministry of Education, PRC 2001).

English education has made observable progress in recognizing

the role that English plays on both personal and national levels, and in system-wide provision. However, despite the importance and high status that the English subject has within the educational system, English provision has been constantly in tension with efforts to improve the quality of instruction. There are a host of constraints, the most intractable ones being the quality of provision in terms of poor coordination between primary and secondary courses, and the severe shortages of well-trained teachers and resources (G. Hu, 2005b). For instance, the teaching and learning materials in schools are uni-dimensionally based on widely used national or regional textbooks in classrooms. With the same textbook, students face predictable teaching contents and assignments that do not engage students to “think” in English. Supplementary materials are exercises for examination preparation. In many schools, the teaching approaches largely remain a curious combination of the grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods with an emphasis on accuracy of grammar to be addressed in examinations of differently levels. Many primary and secondary English teachers in classrooms today still use the same methods by which they were taught English. Memorization of words and rules plays a large role in EFL education in China. Teachers focus the majority of their efforts on English grammar and vocabulary, which are key components of crucial English tests that play a prominent role in deciding which schools students will enter and whether they will earn a degree. With limited interaction in the teacher-textbook-centered and test-driven EFL classroom, the majority of students do not learn the language for authentic, communicative purposes, and thus many students do not approach automaticity

or fluency in using the target language. These problems are particularly serious in the rural areas (G. Hu, 2005b).

As a result, many Chinese students spend years studying English (as many as 10 years for some high school graduates and 12 years for most college students), particularly reading and grammar exercising and test-guided writing, and yet they find it difficult to use it competently and appropriately (Zhao, 2008). Many students are educated in such a classroom environment are more likely to hold a somewhat passive attitude, and low motivation, towards what is being learnt, which will, consequently, produce low proficiency and pose some degree of disadvantage when they are exposed to the real target language community or environment.

In China, there is an increasing recognition of the inadequacy of the ability to use the language due to over-obsession with the traditional EFL teaching, and a strong demand for learning to use the language. Effort is being made to improve the situation from different aspects in the teaching community. However, the change is not sufficient to develop an adequate level of communicative competence, i. e. the ability to use the target language, for millions of Chinese learners of English (G. Hu, 2002a; 2005b).

Part of the reason lies in the context of teacher-and-textbook-centered, classroom-based foreign language learning with large class sizes (Zhao and Grimshaw, 2005; Zhao, 2008), which affords limited exposure time and availability of opportunity,

lack of diversity of materials, and varied approaches to providing the necessary conditions for learning to reach higher language achievement. A secure bridge that leads the learners to the actual world of language, and language use, in the target culture, by enriching learning opportunities, is widely needed. Theories of teaching using communication and interaction have been introduced to the Chinese EFL community (e. g. Ellis, 2005), however, it takes time for the majority of teachers to make them their own. In addition, EFL education development varies between rural and urban areas — the major cities and coastal areas are generally perceived to be better resourced, and so can make better-informed decisions on policy and practice.

The Chinese government has also attempted to aid efforts to teach English by allowing native English speakers to come to China and teach English. However, the results have been inconsistent (Zhao, 2008). Native speaking English teachers are not always well-trained; they are from a Western culture educational background; and they face pressure to “teach to the exam” to help students pass the English exams they will face before graduation from high school and college.

Current approaches to EFL in China reflect traditional and cultural approaches to language learning, where English education has been merely dealt with from a linguistic and functional perspective. There is a serious lack of higher levels of transferable skills and ability in learning and approaching languages in relation to cultures. This is slowly changing to reflect the changing philosophy in language learning theory, though the process is

slow and difficult.

The increasing demand and perceived importance of English, coupled with the relatively input-poor EFL environment, however, has inevitably generated conflicts and tensions (see also Grimshaw, 2002). This situation is perceived to be a “discursive struggle” by Grimshaw (2002) in his ethnographical study concerning the response of Chinese people, and some institutions, in regard to the state of English as a foreign language in China.

English is taught mostly by Chinese teachers, many of whom, generally, have learned their English within the Chinese educational system, graduated from teacher colleges, or from English degree courses at universities. Teacher education, in general, has made much headway in recovering from the damage resulting from the chaotic Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), having resumed from the 1980s. However, the standards and regulations in teacher qualification and continuing professional development are still developing. The distinct characteristics of EFL education needs further addressing in educational policies and teacher education. A majority of teachers find it necessary to improve their English proficiency to teach this subject effectively. Carter and Nunan (2001) observe, in EFL contexts, as in Brazil, Japan, and Vietnam, where English is not widely used for everyday communication, there is limited exposure to the language outside the classroom, and limited opportunities to use it for communication as well. Hence, English learning is largely dependant on classroom instruction, in contrast to the situation where second language acquisition can naturally take

place, when learners are immersed in the target language, for instance, immigrants into English speaking countries (e. g. Krashen, 1981). Borg (2006:5) also specifies that foreign language teaching “is the only subject where effective instruction requires the teacher to use a medium the students do not yet understand”. This, therefore, places particular demands on EFL teachers, because their working language is not supposed to be their native language, as Carter and Nunan (2001, p.2) identified:

The burden for providing the cultural dimension to the curriculum very much rests on the teacher. Teaching is also complicated by the fact that teachers are usually non-native English speakers who may lack opportunities to use the language, or lack confidence in using it. In such a situation, it is important for the materials to provide the sort of rich and diverse linguistic input that ESL (English as a Second Language) learners encounter in the world beyond the classroom.

The recent radical educational changes in China, such as the introduction of the New Curriculum Standards, the policy of decentralization and the marketization of education, have introduced concepts such as performativity, competition and effectiveness to the education sector (Wong and Tsui, 2007). On the one hand, these new developments promote professional development in teaching, though this professional adaptation takes place under strenuous challenges, for instance, the frequent change of textbooks, the need of catering for the new curriculum, new ways and updated knowledge of teaching the one-

child generation, and publicly participating in teaching competitions, to name but a few. But, on the other hand, these changes produce negative effects manifested as occupational and psychological problems in society at large, and among teachers, such as teacher stagnation, low level of emotional wellbeing and motivation (Zhao, 2007), due to the lack of good preservice teacher education and timely continuing professional development at a time of radical change in China. These problems are identified by G. Hu (2005b, p.19):

With a few exceptions, preservice teacher education programs suffer from outdated curriculums and teaching content, a narrow focus on language proficiency at the expense of educational work, a marginalization of school-based work, an inadequately defined knowledge base for teaching, and a teacher-dominated, text-book-based and transmission-oriented pedagogy. . . . The situation of in-service education is equally problematic.

This is still reflected in recent practice, some teachers, including many in colleges still think and teach with old tricks, as Fang and Warschauer (2004, pp.302-303) describe:

Comprehensive English is taught through a combination of traditional grammar-translation methods . . . , involving teachers' detailed explanations of word meaning and usage, sentence formation, and English grammar, with a scattering of audio-lingual method, featuring pseudo-communication activities such as memorization and role-