



北京市高等教育精品教材立项项目

*English Teacher Education Series*

英语教师教育丛书

# English Learning Psychology: A Practical Course

## 英语学习心理 ——实用教程

□ 邱耀德 主编



高等教育出版社  
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### ——实用教程

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藏书章

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## 丛书前言

为了指导高等师范院校英语专业学生及具有一定基础的广大英语学习者有效地学习英语,为了向社会输送大批优秀的英语师资及英语人才,为了参与并鼓励全国更多的大中小学教师投身教师教育改革,提升自身专业素质及英语水平,首都师范大学外语学院英语教育系部分教师在多年教学科研的基础上编写了《教师教育系列丛书》。此套丛书的出版填补了高师院校学法教法类系列教材的空白,具有一定的理论意义和较强的实用价值。

此套丛书从内容到编排上有几个值得关注的特色。

### 1. 贯穿大学四年,各有侧重

此套丛书由四本分册组成,每一分册针对某一年级学生特点侧重一个主题。目前图书市场上这种一条龙式贯穿高校四年的学法教法教材并不多见。丛书各本侧重如下:

- 1) 一年级新生刚入学绝大多数学生对中学到大学的转变准备不足。为了帮助学生尽快顺利完成这一过渡,尽早步入高校自主学习、能力培养的学习轨道,我们为一年级学生撰写了《英语学习策略:成功之路》,从语音语调到听说读写,从篇章结构到考试技巧,从课堂笔记到记忆改善,以及如何使用图书馆资源等都提供了详尽的指导与范例。
- 2) 学生升入二年级后,面临着夯实专业基础、通过专四考试、拓宽视野、提高能力的一系列任务。经过一年的大学学习生活后,许多学生少了刚入学的兴奋与热情,多了一些冷静与思索。这一阶段学生的心理及情绪会因种种压力波动起伏,也有的学生会因处理不当退步落后。因此,我们有所侧重地向二年级学生推出《英语学习心理:实用教程》,从心理学起源、理论基础知识、学生学习心态实例分析及解决问题的建议和途径等各个层面折射反映大学生的心理特点,提供如何调控心理的策略及指导。
- 3) 大三意味着学生四年本科学习高级阶段的开始。教学主要应从语言技能教学转向内容教学。除专业必修课外,学生应根据自己的兴趣及能力加大专业选修课的学习力度,并在专业上向纵深发展,学习相关的理论知识,加强专业素养。针对这一阶段的学生,我们编写了《第二语言习得:理论与实践》,主要内容是第二语言习得研究的基本介绍,包括语言学习的外部因素、内部因素、学习者因素等等,并结合中国学生语言学习的实际举出实例。本书主要是从学的角度帮助学生认识语言学习规律,全面认识语言教学。
- 4) 四年级的学生要经过教育实习、论文撰写及毕业分配等几个主要关口,其中教

育实习对其他几个环节起着至关重要的作用。许多学生对教育实习这个从学到教的转变没有底,无所适从。为了帮助学生为教育实习及今后的工作提前做好理论、技能、心理等各项准备,我们推出系列丛书之四《英语教学法:课堂教学技能与技巧》,对听说读写及教案设计、课堂管理等诸项教学技能与技巧进行了深入浅出的阐述。本书主要从教的角度入手,其编写不仅渗透了先进的教学理念,而且提供了大量的范例供学生参考。学生通过本书的阅读及自身的思索实践不仅能学到教的技巧方法,而且能在了解运用这些技巧的同时大大提高自身听说读写及语言综合运用能力。

## 2. 理论联系实际, 针对性强

此套丛书的编写教师均为高校一线教师,在多年的教书育人及教学科研实践中与大学生朝夕相处,对不同年级学生的学习习惯、心理特点、年龄特征、情绪变化、专业弱项、问题症结等了解得比较透彻,因而编出的教材理论联系实际,符合大学生的年龄特点及接受能力,针对性强,指导性强,有助于学生在学习思考的基础上取得事半功倍的效果。

## 3. 语言简明精练, 通俗易懂

由于本套丛书的编写对象主要定位在师范大学英语专业本科生及具有相应能力和基础的广大读者,因此语言应该通俗易懂、简明精练。在编写中,尤其是涉及理论知识、专业术语的阐述时我们都力争做到深入浅出,多举实例、图文并茂、适于学生理解吸纳,并在实践中演练运用。

## 4. 体例设计新颖, 特色鲜明

作为贯穿高校四年的系列丛书,四本教材的体例设计既有共性又有个性。共性在于每一分册的体例都有共同的形式,比如每本的各个章节都会有综述或背景介绍,理解、思考或讨论等练习题以及本章总结等。个性体现在各册均有不同于其他的内容和特色,比如名句名言、重点词汇、自测列表、强化练习、提示建议、推荐书目等。

总之,此套丛书的出版是集体智慧的结晶,是教师们多年来理论研究及教学成果的总结与升华。但由于编写教师教学科研任务繁重,时间精力受到制约,加之理论水平、专业素质的提高永无止境,编写中难免有疏漏。不当之处恳请广大读者批评指正。

杨 阳

2007年1月

# PREFACE

The writing of this book has sparked an enormous amount of thinking and reflecting on the part of the authors in the first place, especially in consideration of the fact that language learning implies, first and foremost, an enormous amount of time and money input on the part of individual language learners. On the other hand, language learning, if properly handled and managed, can not only greatly enhance and expedite the nation's reform and opening up but also signify a substantial thriftiness in terms of human and capital resources on the part of the state.

Therefore, in the process of writing, the authors have taken particular care to the "practical" side of a psychological approach, to be both holistic and dynamic in vision. Topics discussed range from the status quo of English learning in China to possibly more efficient learning and assessment strategies, from cognitive to functional approaches, from various types of personal, economical, emotional factors of memory to effective strategies for overall progress, from classroom instruction to random grouping practice. The authors have tried to delineate a fairly complete picture of the various schools of psychological thinking for normal college English majors or future English teachers. In a word, it's both practical and future-oriented in approach. It aims to survey as well as to anticipate. It's a gift from the present to the future.

The Preface and first seven chapters are written by Associate Professor Qiu Yaode, and chapters 8 to 10 by Sun Yue, faculty staff member of the English Education Department, Capital Normal University.

Dr. Sun Yanjun was especially helpful in revising the questionnaires used in this book, and Dr. Liao Fenglin also offered valuable feedback to the general format and structure of the book.

Of course, as always happens with book-writing, inadequacies or even inconsistencies of various kinds surely exist, even in its finished form. Therefore, the authors are fully responsible for all possible mistakes in the book, and are quite willing to accept valuable comments and criticisms from our kind readers.

Qiu Yaode  
January 2007

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# Psychology and Learning English

*Be curious always! For knowledge will not acquire you; you must acquire it.*

— Sudie Back

*Real knowledge, like everything else of value, is not to be obtained easily, it must be worked for, studied for, and thought for, and more than all, must be prayed for.*

— Thomas Arnold

*Isn't it a pleasure to study and practice what you have learned? Isn't it also great when friends visit from distant places? If people do not recognize me and it doesn't bother me, am I not a Superior Man?*

— Confucius

## Overview

- ✦ The common truth of learning English
- ✦ How do students feel about learning English?
  - Feeling excited
  - Cooling down
  - Feeling bored
  - Pulling up together again
  - Feeling excited again
- ✦ Summary



### Learning objectives

In this chapter, you are going to

- know more clearly why psychology is closely related with our English learning and find out their relationships.
- be exposed to different periods of learning stages and recall these fixed feelings of learning English.
- relive your years of learning English and identify some similar experiences.

## OVERVIEW

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For a long time in China, English learning has been considered a powerful tool — a tool designed to help its user to master a foreign language. The purpose of this mastery has been to fight against imperialism and become much more familiar with people from all over the world so we can understand them and communicate with them more effectively. This pathway demands that learning activity becomes a daily task. We do not always learn to enjoy and educate ourselves, but to do what is right by helping to liberate those who labor in unfair conditions in many parts of the world. However, twenty or thirty years later, English learning is being paid more and more attention. Educators have begun to realize something — the importance of being aware of the individual's psychological state while learning English. A common understanding has been reached, i.e. that English learning involves a series of shifting mental states. Learners commonly move from being curious, then excited, then perhaps to feeling nothing special, and then boredom; bored; and then perhaps through coming to know something they commonly move to steering themselves back in the direction of feeling excited again. In this chapter you'll be taken on a journey through these processes and *pre-experience some of the campus English-learning activities*. You'll also be asked to reflect your own inner thoughts on learning English. You'll be exposed to some of the common behaviors which can be observed of those learning English and presented with a wide range of English learning reflections.

## THE COMMON TRUTH OF LEARNING ENGLISH

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Learning English is a transcultural process. Many people start to learn a foreign language when they are quite young. They are fascinated by the sounds, the way it is spoken, and the way it is taught. Most of them are not very sure what they are going to do with the language, how they are going to use it and where they can use it. When they grow older, they begin to realize the importance of learning English. They become more rational about the language. If they like to learn it, they devote more time to it. If not, they simply give up learning it. But whether learning a language is easy or not, everyone can decide by himself or herself.

However, we have no choices any more. Because China has joined the WTO, because Beijing will hold the 2008 Olympics and because we want to develop our economy and we want more people to understand English, to speak it and to use it. So the Chinese education authorities have made a decision that students begin to learn English when they are in the third grade of the elementary schools. Some of the school children in city can even start learning English in their first grade. The English course is learned as one of the key subjects in both elementary schools and junior and senior high schools. As a requirement, everybody's English will be tested before entering college and university. Furthermore, future promotions, hunting for jobs, going abroad for study, will require an English test. In many cases, English is no longer only a tool; it becomes so important for our whole life. All these obviously encourage learning English or a foreign language.

Meanwhile, many other advantages that have been brought about by learning English cannot be ignored.

- Surfing on the Internet can be a very exciting thing in our daily life since we are presented with thousands and thousands of pieces of information without leaving our homes. A recent study shows that the Internet has become the third major source of people learning things, following books, newspapers and magazines. And more than two thirds of the information transmitted on the Internet uses English. With the Internet we can have quick and easy access to any information in the world, ranging from Business and Economy, Entertainment, Recreation and Sports, Health



and Government to Society and Culture, Education, Arts and Humanities, Science, Social Science and References.

- Appreciating the cultures of English-speaking countries is the English learners' greatest desire. In the world are many countries where English is spoken as their first language. These countries are UK, USA, Singapore, Ireland, Iceland, New Zealand, Australia and Canada. Each country has some unique cultures, their history, people's life styles or their recreational activities and artistic products. Understanding these people may help us know the people of the countries and be aware of the differences in each country.
- Reading and enjoying great literature is another great advantage for English learners. British literature has a long history. There are many great writers and playwrights in Britain, including William Shakespeare, Geoffrey Chaucer, John Milton, Daniel Defoe, Thomas Hardy, Jonathan Swift, Charles Dickens and George Bernard Shaw. In American literature, there are also many great writers, such as Mark Twain, O. Henry, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner. Their great works have been passed on for generations. With better English, we can probe inside the inner thoughts of these great writers and trace the history and further understand the development of any historical period.
- Being able to communicate freely with English speakers is also one of our learners' dreams. Many English learners are not satisfied with talking about daily greetings with English speakers only. They wish to exchange further ideas and opinions; discuss political and economic issues; work together; share common interests and practices; and even more, to be real close friends.

Then we know that learning English is necessary and important. To our English-Education major students, it is especially so because we have the responsibility of teaching the students well and guaranteeing the quality of children's English learning and enhancing their learning interests. In order to reach this goal, we have to be fully prepared, both with a good command of the English language and better teaching strategies.

However, after the students have entered the universities, they come up with many problems. Some are learning methods problems, some are connected

with the learning motivations and found to be psychological burdens. If we say society is more advanced with better education, students' minds should be stronger and stronger. On the contrary their mentality is very weak. They cannot be responsible for what they have done. Once they have made a mistake, they cannot accept the responsibility and stand the criticism. The same mistakes may be repeated again and again until they fail their studies.

Why do they have so many problems?

Why can't they study properly?

Why can't they concentrate themselves on learning English?

Why aren't they motivated to master the skills of learning English?

What other subjects are they interested in besides English?

Why can't they deal with their emotional problems by themselves?

Why can't they stick to their major and be qualified English teachers?

Why do many of them lose interests in becoming teachers in the future?

What career choices would they like to take after graduation?

We'll look into these one by one in the later chapters, but first let's look at their emotional feelings towards learning English.

## HOW DO STUDENTS FEEL ABOUT LEARNING ENGLISH?

Before entering university, every student who studies English as his major feels very excited. Since they were taught for the first time, they like to learn English. Their English teachers' effort, and their interesting teaching styles and methods left them with a very good impression. In secondary schools they spent more time on English than on any other courses. In their spare time, they attended various English classes in order to be good at English. Now they passed the college entrance exam and finally are able to fulfill their dreams. After all, not many people can speak English in this country and not many students can study English as their majors, because our universities cannot hold so many students and there is not enough space for the majority of students. So there is a certain pride if they can learn English and study it as their major. After they enter the universities, most of them undergo a series of emotional feelings, from feeling excited → cooling down → feeling bored → pulling up together again → feeling excited again.

## Feeling excited

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**Excitement is an inner feeling, which arouses the individual to an emotional response. It is a state of mental response that is higher than the normal state of mind.** Coming to study English in the English Department for the first time is really exciting. For many years, the English Department has been considered as special as the Music and Arts departments in many people's eyes. Generally, the students' entrance examination scores are much higher than those of many departments. On the other hand, students graduating from the English Department can easily find jobs, no matter whether they are outstanding or not. Furthermore, the activities and campus life for English majors are diverse and interesting, from English corners to Thanksgiving day, from Christmas Eve to English performances. Students have more chances to meet and talk to foreign teachers and foreign friends. Finally, students can always be exposed to a totally new foreign culture, and can always learn something useful and seldom feel bored. We should admit the fact that after learning English, we have shortened the distance between foreigners and Chinese, and have come to understand each other better. With all these characteristics in mind, many students feel that the future ahead of them is very bright. They enter the university with excitement, and they study in the English Department with joy. The first few weeks are very exciting, because everything is new to them. The teachers, the classrooms, the building and even the ways the teachers talk in English fascinate them. But quite soon, this kind of excitement is gone. They begin to cool down themselves.

## Cooling down

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Usually after one or two months of study, many students begin to realize that learning English is just the same as learning any subject. There is nothing special and exciting in it. They have to attend the classes on time; they have to memorize new words; they have to finish after-class assignments. They gradually cool themselves down, which is to be free from agitation or excitement. **Cooling down implies calmness, deliberateness or dispassionateness, i.e. students need to be calm with their studies and resume their normal state of mind and**

**keep a cool head.** They begin to think about what they should do in the university and what they can accomplish in the next few years. Some students even set up new goals for themselves and want to go on with their graduate studies. We often notice some of the students get up early and read English texts loudly in order to practice their pronunciation. Some students often ask questions in class and become active learners. Some students voluntarily find partners to practice their spoken English. However, these students are still in their late adolescent period. They cannot control themselves emotionally and make the best use of their time. It is said that the top 10 percent of the students are very good while the bottom 5 percent are not good, always with poor motivation. But, the majority are in the middle of the road. This is quite true with the students, too. Many students after studying for half a year or a year, begin to feel bored with learning English.

## Feeling bored

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**Feeling bored means that students begin to get fed up with the monotonous ways of learning and quickly become weary and restless through lack of interest.** Generally speaking, people get bored with almost anything — food, clothes, people, jobs, eating, sleeping, working, talking, resting and even playing and traveling. Some things maintain interest for a longer period, while some things no longer interest people the moment they get hold of it. For example, clothes. Before we buy a certain dress, we want to wear it desperately. After we buy the dress and see somebody unattractive wearing it, we lose interest immediately. As to the English classes, the same thing happens. Before students come to take the class, students have many wonderful ideas and fantasies. But after they attend the class, they begin to lose interest because of the teacher's poor pronunciation, dull ways of teaching or unfriendly comments about the students. They find many courses boring after they take the courses for a time. For example, English phonetics. They cannot understand why they have to go over again and again with the same sounds even after they learned them in the secondary schools years ago. They cannot see the reason why teachers ask them to make sentences in each intensive class and listen to the tapes every day. Some



students even feel that learning English as their major is a wrong choice. In one questionnaire we asked the students from six universities in the country about their feelings towards learning English. The answers were a bit surprising to us.

**The following questions were asked:**

- 1. Your feeling towards English learning is**
  - A getting on well, full of confidence.
  - B nothing is special, just like any other major.
  - C the job opportunities are not as many as imagined.
  - D the more I learn, the less confident I feel.
- 2. Before entering the university, you think learning English as your major**
  - A is very interesting.
  - B could be the means to make a living.
  - C is just a hot subject.
  - D is nothing. In fact, I have never thought about it carefully.
- 3. After several years of English learning, you**
  - A still feel very much interested.
  - B think it is boring and uninteresting and don't want to go on learning it.
  - C become less interested.
  - D think it's not a matter of interests. Just do what has to be done.
- 4. If you had a chance to rechoose your major, would you still want to choose English as your major?**
  - A Yes
  - B No

For the first question, among 912 students in six universities, 266 are full of confidence; 233 feel nothing special; 214 feel less confident as the English learning goes on. As to the second question, 36% of the students feel learning English interesting; 31% consider English could be the means to make a living and 33% consider learning English a hot subject. For the third question, 40% of the students still feel it interesting; but 39% become less interested in learning English. However, when we asked them the fourth question, 67% still want to choose English as their major, but 33% would not choose English. From the statistics, we can see that after entering universities, students begin to lose interest. English is not what they expect it to be. However, they don't want to give up English learning easily. This may be due to the limited subjects for them to choose from

and also may be due to the thorough comparison with other majors. The encouraging part is that we still have many students who want to go on learning English.

### **Pulling up together again**

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Once students enter their junior year, they seem to understand quite a lot of things. Their ways of looking at the world have changed dramatically. In self-reflection, they begin to realize some of their behaviors are not good. They gradually know that their knowledge about English is very limited. They begin to improve themselves, that is, to check themselves again whether they did the right thing; whether they studied hard enough; or whether their learning methods were efficient or not. Many students feel regret about their first two years. They think that they have wasted a lot of time. After finding their problems and making up their own minds, they want to learn more. Many students start the preparation for the entrance examination for graduate courses. It seems that they have developed a better attitude towards learning. They turn to teachers for advice and talk about their own thoughts and ideas. They take more elective courses. They go to the libraries for reference materials and go to the bookstores to buy related books. Time is very precious to them. Once they are on the right track again, they feel very content about their decisions and choices. As the old saying goes, "Better late than never." It is not too late for them to catch up. Realizing something about the past two years now is better than not realizing anything at all, because they still have two years' time in the university and many, many years on the future path. This is only a small setback, everything can be started all over again.

### **Feeling excited again**

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Once students have carefully analyzed themselves and have received a careful study, they feel excited again. They realize their future is still very bright. There is a possibility that they can exert their potential abilities and talents and



work in ideal positions.

Having gone through this period of feeling excited→cooling down→feeling bored → pulling up together again → feeling excited again, students seem to mature a lot. But, to freshmen it is still a problem. They cannot realize anything if they have never gone through this process. After learning the cycle, some students may shorten their time to make these transitions, and some may still take a long or even longer time to go through every transition until they graduate. But this truth continues, "The early bird catches the worm."

## Summary

English learning can be a lot of fun once we devote ourselves to it. English learning involves a long process during which happiness and sadness, success and failure, easiness and difficulties, pitfalls and surprises combine to provide us with a journey to a very worthwhile goal . From unknown to the known, from known to the unknown , the journey continues. English learning is a journey which has been a deep concern for many of us. We may feel excited about it when we first get down to it. We may feel happy about learning English when we first get the teacher's praise. We may feel successful when we get good scores. The journey can be very enjoyable but we can never reach our chosen destination unless we embrace and make a friend of hard work. Through our personal efforts, we can master English or any other languages.

In the past we might have said that English was not important, but those days are gone. English is now becoming the focus of our daily life. English learning is no longer one purpose for all. Indeed, it may serve many different and complementary purposes. We can read and enjoy great literature. We can appreciate the cultures of English-speaking countries. We can surf on the Internet and communicate freely with English speakers.

English learning is like any other kind of learning activity. Before we know it, we are curious about it. After we know it, we may get fed up with it or even tired of it. But once we get ourselves involved in it, we may feel it is stimulating and rewarding. Therefore, we may identify a somewhat predictable series of phases which learners may pass through as they proceed