

PROMOTING COLLEGE ENGLISH LEARNER AUTONOMY IN A BIG CLASS

促进学习者自主探索

王艳萍 著



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· 沈 阳 ·

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前 言

近年来，随着改革开放的逐渐深入，与国际社会的不断接轨，我国对专业加外语的复合型人才的需求日益增加。外语教育工作者为使外语教育事业更上一层楼在辛勤地耕耘着，但大多数语言教师都经历过类似的挫折：在学生身上投入了大量的精力，学生却没有什麼回应。这样的行为通常缘于一个原因，那就是学生对教师的过分依赖（Scharle and Szabo, 2000）。为了适应经济迅速发展的需要，我们有必要而且必须改革中国的英语教学方法，即以教师为中心的教学方法。不论是在课内还是在课外，都应该让学生成为学习的主人，是他们对自己的学习负责任的时候了。

最近，“学习者自主”成为中国外语界的研究焦点。除了不断完善学习者自主的理论，越来越多的教育者积极探索促进学习者自主的方法。他们提倡的教学模式的确促进了学习者自主，但是他们的实验班里只有 20 ~ 30 名学生。随着高等学校不断扩招，在许多大学里，一个英语班里有 40 ~ 50 名学生，甚至 80 ~ 90 名学生。在这样的大课堂里，如何促进学习者自主？本书的目的在于在某种程度上寻找合适的方法解决这一问题。作者建议采用一种新的教学方法：在大班教学环境下，借助多媒体和因特网资源，结合其他课堂教学活动，促进大学英语学习者自主。

本书与传统教学法类专著的最大不同在于强调理论与实践

相结合，尤其是以实践为主。书中介绍了从 2004 年 9 月到 12 月在一所普通医学院校内进行的为期一个学期的大班教学环境下学习者自主的培训项目。通过问卷调查、课堂观察和访谈的形式收集数据，并用 SPSS 软件分析，分别在实验前、后收集了英语应用能力 A 级考试成绩和大学英语四级考试成绩，比较实验组与对比组的差异。

分析实验前的调查问卷收集到的实验组和对比组学生的英语应用能力 A 级考试成绩，作者得出结论：两个组成绩大致相同，背景相同，包括高中的英语学习经历以及他们对学习和学习英语的态度。

观察实验组学生的课堂表现，检查他们的周记及分析实验后进行的学生访谈，作者发现，和实验前收集的数据相比，实验组的学生在学习态度上的确有所改变，英语学习的弱项得到改善，如听说能力。学生在课堂上的角色也有所改变，即以学生为中心的课堂，他们开始管理自己的学习。毫无疑问，通过利用多媒体语音室并结合其他课堂教学活动，本实验确实促进了大班教学环境下的学习者自主。和对比组取得的大学英语四级考试成绩相比，实验组的学生成绩在某种程度上的确有所提高。

作者希望本书能为相关研究提供一些借鉴，但由于作者水平有限，书中疏漏之处还请同行学者和读者批评指正。

王艳萍

2011 年 10 月

Abstract

Most language teachers have experienced the frustration of investing endless amounts of energy in their students and getting very little response. Such behavior very often stems from one common cause: the learners' over-reliance on the teacher (Scharle and Szabo, 2000). It is necessary and inevitable to reform the method of English teaching in China in order to meet the needs of the rapidly developing economy. And it is time to let our students be the master of their learning inside and outside the classroom. They should take responsibility for their study.

Recently Learner Autonomy (LA) has been the focus of the foreign languages world in China. In addition to the improvement of the theory of LA, more and more educators are eager to promote LA by doing all sorts of research and experiments. The teaching model they advocated did foster LA, but there were only 20 or 30 students learning English in previous experimental classes, while in a lot of universities and colleges each English class has more than 40 or 50 students, even 80 or 90 students because college enrollment enlarges steadily. How to promote LA in such a big class? This book aims at finding some appropriate methods to solve this problem in some degree by making an experiment. It suggests a new teaching method involving making use of multimedia and resources on the Internet and integrating

some other activities in a big class in order to promote learners' autonomy in college English learning.

This study presents a one-semester LA training program in a big class conducted in an ordinary medical college from September 2004 to December 2004. A questionnaire was utilized, classroom observation was conducted, and interviews were conducted to collect data, which was analyzed by means of SPSS. Two tests (PET Level A and CET Band 4) were also utilized to compare the achievement difference between the Experimental Group (EG) and the Control Group (CG) before and after the experiment.

This study selected two intact classes of non-English major sophomores for comparative experiment, one as the EG (64 subjects), the other as the CG (62 subjects). Both were under the cooperative program, and shared the same background. During this program the experimental group received special training in LA, while the control group just went on with the routine classroom instruction.

The study has integrated quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis methods to analyze the data collected. The results of the questionnaires and the achievement of the subjects were analyzed using SPSS (10.0) software. Several sets of statistics, i. e. chi-square test, means, standard deviation and T-test statistics were obtained.

By analyzing the subjects' achievement of PET Level A in the EG and CG and the data collected by questionnaires before the experiment, the author knew that the two groups shared the same background, which includes the subjects' past experience in high school, as well as their attitudes towards learning and learning a

foreign language.

Through observing the students' performance in the EG in class, examining their journals during the experiment and interviewing them after the experiment, the author found that compared with the data collected before the experiment, the students in the EG did change their attitudes towards learning English and improved their weaknesses in English, such as listening and speaking. The students also transferred their roles in class; that is student-centered class. The students take charge of their learning. The experiment did promote learner autonomy in a big class, mainly by utilizing multimedia lab and integrating other activities in class.

Compared with the subjects' achievement of the CG in CET Band 4, the subjects' achievement of the EG was really better to some extent.

There are, however, some limitations to the study and to further studies of this sort. The sample size may be too small and the sample is not randomly selected. Furthermore, such a study will be restricted if there is no multimedia lab in the school.

CONTENTS

| | | |
|-------|--|----|
| 1 | INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.1 | Background of promoting learner autonomy in China | 1 |
| 1.2 | Research questions on promoting learner autonomy in a big class | 4 |
| 2 | LITERATURE REVIEW | 6 |
| 2.1 | Definition of LA and its complexity | 6 |
| 2.1.1 | Foreign scholars' definition of LA | 9 |
| 2.1.2 | Chinese scholars' definition of LA | 11 |
| 2.1.3 | The author's definition of LA | 12 |
| 2.2 | The importance of LA (Why LA) | 12 |
| 2.3 | Researches into the influence on LA | 16 |
| 2.3.1 | Attitude and belief | 17 |
| 2.3.2 | Motivation | 20 |
| 2.4 | Approaches to promoting LA (How LA) | 22 |
| 2.4.1 | Self-Access Center (SAC) | 24 |
| 2.4.2 | Multimedia and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (MCALL) | 25 |
| 2.5 | The characteristics of an autonomous learner | 27 |

| | | |
|-------|---|----|
| 3 | METHODOLOGY | 29 |
| 3.1 | Introduction | 29 |
| 3.2 | General and specific research questions/hypotheses | 30 |
| 3.3 | Subjects | 31 |
| 3.4 | Instruments | 32 |
| 3.5 | Data-Collection | 32 |
| 3.6 | Data-Analysis | 32 |
| 3.6.1 | Questionnaire before the experiment | 33 |
| 3.6.2 | The questionnaire data analysis before the experiment | 35 |
| 3.6.3 | The procedures of the experiment | 50 |
| 3.6.4 | After the experiment | 65 |
| 3.7 | Results and discussion | 69 |
| 4 | IMPLICATION | 73 |
| 4.1 | Implication on English teaching and learning in a big class | 73 |
| 4.1.1 | Teachers' attitudes to language teaching and learning changed | 74 |
| 4.1.2 | Teachers' roles in language teaching and learning transferred | 75 |
| 4.1.3 | Students' attitudes towards language learning changed | 77 |
| 4.1.4 | Students' roles in learning transferred | 78 |
| 4.2 | Measures taken in English teaching and learning in a big class | 79 |

| | | |
|-------|--|-----|
| 4.2.1 | Making full use of Multimedia and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (MCALL) system | 79 |
| 4.2.2 | Combining teachers' presentation and students' engagement in class activities | 81 |
| 4.2.3 | Requiring students to write a journal every week | 81 |
| 5 | CONCLUSIONS | 82 |
| 5.1 | Major findings | 82 |
| 5.2 | Limitations | 84 |
| 5.3 | Recommendations for further research | 85 |
| | REFERENCES | 86 |
| | APPENDIXES | 92 |
| | ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | 101 |

1 INTRODUCTION

Scholars in the west have been researching learner autonomy since the 1970s. It has attracted considerable attention from educational researchers in China ever since the late 1980s. Learner autonomy is now commonly accepted as a desirable goal of education. The author's intention in this section is to provide an overview of the background concerning why we should promote learner autonomy and undertake research on how to promote learner autonomy in Chinese EFL contexts.

1.1 Background of promoting learner autonomy in China

Most language teachers have experienced the frustration of investing endless amounts of energy in their students and getting very little response. We have all had groups who never did their homework, who were reluctant to use the target language in pair or group work, who did not learn from their mistakes, who did

not listen to each other, who did not use opportunities to learn outside the classroom, and so on.

Such behavior very often stems from one common cause; the learners' over-reliance on the teacher. Even otherwise motivated students may assume a passive role if they feel the teacher should be in charge of everything that happens in the classroom (Scharle and Szabo, 2000). The teacher-centered classroom teaching has been the major position in China throughout the 20th century. Our students have become accustomed to this traditional teaching method. In their minds, teachers are the masters of the class, the transmitters of knowledge. They just receive what the teacher tells them passively. Maybe that is the reason why foreign teachers complain of the boring atmosphere of the Chinese class. Even if they repeated the lecture presented last time, there would be no response from the students. Our students will accept everything the teacher teaches them in the classroom.

It is necessary and inevitable to reform the method of English teaching in China in order to meet the needs of the rapidly developing economy. In fact, a lot of teachers of College English are trying their best to find some suitable approaches to improve their teaching quality (Qi, 1998). They are not satisfied with their performance in class because they see the students do not react to their lecture, and often do not even have any expression on their faces although they prepare their speech very carefully and explain every detail to their students. They really want to teach the students all that they know without any reservation. They hope the

students can become interested in English by using some new methods. However, in many college English classrooms, even those equipped with multimedia and Internet facilities, teaching methods remain largely traditional: most of the time teachers give lectures while students just listen; the textbooks are standardized nationwide with very limited content and too much focus on grammar drills and practices (Jiang, 2004). It seems that it's easier for teachers to present lectures in the traditional way. They just need one book, one blackboard and a piece of chalk. And they find it hard to use the modern and advanced equipments. They have no time to be trained to use the machines or no opportunities to be educated further because they have to teach many students. All of these problems have made College English one of the most boring courses for many college students. With this traditional method there is little student autonomy in the learning process, resulting in students' low motivation and passive attitude in English learning.

Therefore, at present it is urgently important to reform the approach to English teaching in order to equip our teachers. We must actively research better modes of English teaching and learning. It is of vital importance that students should be responsible for their learning. And it is time to let our students be the masters of their learning inside and outside the classroom. They should take responsibility for their study.

1.2 Research questions on promoting learner autonomy in a big class

Recently, Learner Autonomy (LA) has been the focus of the foreign languages world in China. In addition to improving the theory of LA, more and more educators are eager to promote LA by doing all sorts of research and experiments. The teaching model they advocated did foster LA, but there were only 20 or 30 students learning English in previous experimental classes, while in a lot of universities and colleges each English class has more than 40 or 50 students, even 80 or 90 students, because college enrollment enlarges steadily. How to promote LA in such a big class? This book aims at finding some appropriate methods to solve this problem in some degree by making an experiment. It suggests a new teaching method involving making use of multimedia and resources on the Internet and integrating some other activities in a big class in order to promote learners' autonomy in college English learning.

Research topic: College English learner autonomy.

Topic focus: College English learner autonomy in a big class.

General research questions and specific hypotheses:

(1) How to promote LA in the experimental group (EG) which includes more than sixty subjects?

Hypothesis 1 :

LA can be fostered by asking the subjects in the EG to do self-access language learning for two periods each week in the newly built multi-media laboratory.

Hypothesis 2 :

LA can be promoted by requiring every subject to do a presentation on any topic he or she likes for about five minutes before each class; by asking the subjects to have debates, group discussions, role plays or other activities according to the texts in the *New Horizon English Book Two* they're using in the other two periods of class every other week; and by requiring the subjects to write a journal about their feelings and an assessment of their performance each week. Meanwhile all these activities can be used to check the subjects' self-access language learning in the multimedia lab.

(2) What is the relationship between LA and their English achievement?

Hypothesis :

The subjects' English achievement can be improved by promoting LA in some degree.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section the author reviewed the literature concerning the definition of learner autonomy and its complexity. She also reviewed the research on the importance of learner autonomy, the influences on promoting learner autonomy (which included attitude, belief and motivation), and how to promote learner autonomy (including SAC and MCALL).

2.1 Definition of LA and its complexity

What is learner autonomy? This is probably the single most difficult question to answer about autonomy in language learning, and any answer to it is likely to be subjective (Benson, 2003). Learner autonomy is a problematic term because it is widely confused with self-instruction. It is also a slippery concept because it is notoriously difficult to define precisely. The rapidly expanding literature has debated, for example, whether learner autonomy should be thought of as capacity or behavior; whether it is charac-