

# The Enlightenment of China's Standards of English Language Ability on Listening and Speaking Teaching of College English in Independent Colleges

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**ABSTRACT.** China's Standards of English Language Ability (CSE) is the first comprehensive evaluation system for English ability. It covers English abilities of domestic learners at all stages and leads a positive way for teaching in listening and speaking courses of college English. Based on the circumstance of Chinese independent colleges, the paper summarizes the content of CSE and puts forward major problems existing in listening and speaking courses. Finally, it discusses enlightenment which CSE brings to listening and speaking courses.

**KEYWORDS:** China's standards of English language ability, Independent college, Listening and speaking course of college English

## 1. Introduction

With the rapid development of globalization, English, as the first foreign language in China, has been inseparable with Chinese. Meanwhile, relevant tests are coming into existence. College English Test (Band 4&6) and Test for English Majors (Band 4&8) offer feedbacks to the performance of college English teaching with a higher reliability. Besides, English tests in college entrance examination and national entrance examination for postgraduate also play a vital role in selection process for talents. Although these tests' difficulties are increasing, they are independent and lack an integrated standard. Thus, a comprehensive evaluation system has not been built up. Because of the situation, domestic English tests have not been widely recognized like IELTS and TOFEL so far by international community.

Under the circumstance, the ministry of education, together with national language commission, released the China's Standards of English Language Ability (CSE) after a series of preparation in February, 2018 and put it into effect in June, 2018. Since CSE provides English learners and users in China with an integrated evaluation system, it has been regarded as a breakthrough and hailed as a milestone in English teaching and tests. Based on the practical situation in independent college, the paper will discuss the enlightenment which CSE brings to listening and speaking courses.

## 2. The Summary of Cse

On the basis of language application, CSE, the first evaluation system for English ability, takes the practical ability and requirement of English learners and users in domestic into consideration. It manages to put English levels of different stages into an integrated evaluation system so that English teaching coherence between compulsory education and higher education can be enhanced. In CSE, the English ability is defined by elementary stage, intermediate stage and advanced stage. And meanwhile, it is further divided into nine levels. Exactly, level 1 and 2 equal pupils' level; level 3 and 4 equal middle school students' level; level 5 and 6 equal undergraduates' level; level 7 stands for English majors' level; level 8 and 9 stand for advanced English talents' level.

Apart from the table of overall language ability, tables regarding overall listening comprehension, overall reading comprehension, overall oral expression, over all written expression, overall organizational competence, overall pragmatic ability, overall interpreting ability and overall translation ability are also involved. Abilities required by each level are given a general description. For example, CSE 6 in overall language ability requires that students understand language materials regarding varieties of topics and take in essential tips as well as logical relationships; can analyze, determine and evaluate ideas, attitudes and implicit meanings in materials.

Besides, CSE matches corresponding descriptive framework for language ability in which language abilities are described respectively. It includes the descriptive framework for language expression, language comprehension,

linguistic knowledge, translation and interpreting, pragmatic ability and language use strategies. Statistic shows that there are more than 3,000 descriptive tips in the framework.

In sum, CSE delivers a systematic description on language abilities by creating multi dimension for assessment. Its content is comprehensive and specific, focusing on relevance, progressiveness and practicality. It facilitates both English teaching and English tests of different stages get involved into an integrated system. With the instruction of CSE, to some degree, the coherence of domestic English teaching is to be updated and the quality and reliability of domestic English tests will be elevated.

### **3. The Situation of Listening and Speaking Courses in Independent Colleges**

#### ***3.1 The Limitation of Teaching Content***

At present, the listening and speaking teaching in independent colleges is still largely limited by the syllabus and serves for helping students pass college English test (Band 4&6).

When it comes to teaching content, objective questions in textbooks, including detail-grasping, implication, judgement and summary, become both teachers' and students' focus of attention. While subjective questions to train critical thinking, such as blank-filling and discussion, are barely involved. As a consequence, teachers subconsciously keep on training students to collect information in the teaching process of listening and speaking courses. Because only by grabbing a specific vocabulary or phrase, or comprehending a specific sentence can students grasp details and make a reasonable choice. Other irrelevant parts are typically overlooked even though necessary linguistic knowledge or cultural knowledge gets involved in.

As for the listening text, on the one hand, it is too outdated to cater to students' interests every now and then. For there is a gap between the current students' environment of growing-up and itself. The latter lags behind the former. On the other hand, general knowledge is still the mainstream. Due to lack of specialization and practicality, it is difficult to meet students' requirement of English application in the professional and vocational field.

#### ***3.2 The Lack of Environment for Oral Expression***

It is commonly believed that splendid oral English is the symbol of having a good command of English. In the light of this statement, the training of oral expression should have been regarded as one of the most important tasks in the process of English teaching. Nevertheless, it turns out to be a routine in the English class of independent colleges. Similar to ordinary universities, college English classes usually hold numerous students with a range from 40 to 100. Due to the shortage of lecture hours, it is a great challenge for teachers to instruct each student in oral expression.

The routine can be shown from two aspects. On the one hand, students are often asked to make a conversation with their neighbors for several minutes and then move on to the next task, which makes teachers fail to get feedbacks. On the other hand, students who are active in class or good at English are usually invited to give a presentation, which indirectly leads teachers to overlook the learning conditions of average students. Thus, teachers have difficulty controlling the training process of oral expression. As time goes by, the gap of oral expression ability will be enlarged among students.

In independent colleges, students have a relatively poor foundation of English learning and part of them even keep mental resistance to English. Facing this normal, more teachers are accustomed to neglecting the difference between reading and speaking and regarding them as the same project to evaluate. In oral quiz, students are usually commanded to read a short passage with 100 to 150 words in a minute one by one. Their marks are given in accordance with fluency, accuracy of pronunciation and grasping of stress. The student who gets a high mark would be roughly considered to have a good oral English.

According to the description of situations above, because of various subjective and objective factors, they fail to create a satisfying atmosphere of conversation or build up the environment to practice oral expression.

#### ***3.3 Troubles from Facilities***

Listening and speaking courses of college English are commonly held in language laboratories. Since independent colleges seldom receive the financial support from the government, neither hardware nor facilities could be updated or changed in time when they are kept in usage for many years and are no longer able to work properly. Such condition does no good for students' initiative and learning efficiency. Besides, many language laboratories have not been equipped with wireless network, which is an obstacle for teachers and students. On the one hand, teachers have

difficulty providing students with current materials easily by the apps on their smartphones or tablets. On the other hand, students are less likely to get close to authentic language environment in the class. Therefore, the active interaction between teachers and students is hard to realize in class.

#### **4. The Enlightenment Cse Bring to Listening and Speaking Courses**

##### ***4.1 To Lay a Solid Foundation of Cultural Knowledge***

In independent colleges, many students are not interested in cultural knowledge and are less likely to acquire it by heart. In order to ensure the teaching efficiency, teachers are used to training students to collect information and get the correct answer while seldom impart necessary cultural knowledge. Under the circumstance, students are able to get a high score in the section of listening comprehension and meanwhile, are more likely to experience the communication obstacles.

However, CSE 6 in overall oral expression asks students to be able to make insightful comments on topics regarding learning and social culture and speak in a fluent and organized manner. Besides, being familiar with the culture and social conventions is also one of standards in the CSE 6 of overall pragmatic ability.

As a result, teachers are supposed to attach great importance to lay a solid foundation of culture knowledge for students in order to meet the need of communication and improve the efficiency of listening comprehension. For any language lies in its culture and develop itself wherein. The language functions as the carrier of the culture and the culture is the soul of the language. They are inseparable and rely on each other. Students are expected to accumulate enough cultural knowledge before they are able to fully take in what they hear and state their opinions with coherence and accuracy. With the condition of following the teaching arrangement, teachers are supposed to impart Chinese culture and the culture of English-speaking countries to students. Meanwhile, teachers should pay attention to explaining the knowledge on culture, history, thinking, concept existing in listening scripts, which enables students to learn the source of knowledge tips and forming the interest in culture gradually. On the basis of cultural knowledge, to some degree, students are able to make progress in listening comprehension and are less likely to misunderstand listening scripts. In the process of communication, they can perform well and deliver a presentation properly.

##### ***4.2 To Construct the Environment for English Communication***

CSE 6 in overall oral expression asks students to be able to participate in discussion on social issues of popularity or familiar themes in his or her professional field and give an appropriate response to others' presentation and interruption. Besides, students are capable of negotiating or communicating effectively when coping with disputes or unexpected situations in daily life.

Therefore, it is a necessity for teachers to clarify the difference between reading and speaking and their boundaries. Only by doing this can the transition of listening and speaking course be realized rapidly. It encourages teachers to create a strong atmosphere for communication actively. At last, students' pragmatic ability will be generally improved. Three suggestions are given in the following paragraphs to help build up good environment for English communication in independent colleges.

###### ***4.2.1 To Reset the Structure of Evaluation***

As a general course, college English courses tend to go for the terminal evaluation. In other words, the score gotten from the final examination occupies the lion's share in the evaluation. Since majorities of students in independent colleges are difficult to develop the habit of self-study in daily life, they usually fulfill the review carefully at the last few days before examination. Despite they may pass the examination or even get an ideal mark, they fail to accumulate enough linguistic knowledge and make little progress in oral expression and communication. By resetting the structure of evaluation, independent colleges are supposed to change the situation that scores of final examination account for large percentage in evaluation.

Exactly speaking, by increasing the weight of achievement of listening and speaking courses, students are encouraged to take part in English communication actively to enhance the ability of oral expression. Meanwhile, teachers are expected to design and mastermind interesting scenes carefully in class to attract more students' attention. Thus, students are more likely to be willing to express what they have heard or thought in records. Teachers can learn the grasping conditions of students in listening comprehension and help students put what they have learnt into practice.

In addition, the formal oral test can be added to the evaluation system. The score of this part, together with the score on the test paper, can be regarded as the achievement in final examinations. As for the structure of oral tests, organizers,

as well as designers of examination are advised to set the oral test of college English test (band 4&6) as an example and work out a similar model. In such model, common sections such as self-introduction, passage reading, brief response, personal statement and group interaction are almost involved. Despite the fact that it may take more time and human resources to hold oral tests, students will benefit from this in the long term. On the one hand, they are getting aware of the importance of oral expression and are more likely to take part in practicing oral English actively. On the other hand, they still have the possibility to pass the examination when they fail to do a good job in listening comprehension, reading comprehension, translation or composition part on paper. In a word, a formal oral test manages to ensure students to keep an positive attitude toward the oral expression and promotes students to form the habit of sustainable learning.

#### ***4.2.2 To Confirm Exact Obstacles in Learning***

Due to poor fundament of English learning, it is tough for students in independent colleges to improve their abilities of listening comprehension and oral expression only by traditional approaches, such as reciting texts and listening VOA or BBC radio. At the beginning of a semester, teachers should investigate the major obstacles in the process of listening comprehension and oral expression with the method of questionnaires in the class and pay more attention to solving them. If students generally suppose that they grasp less vocabularies, teachers will lead them to read aloud words and explain words in detail before playing records and assigning communication tasks. If students generally suppose that they are unfamiliar with the knowledge relating listening materials and communication tasks, teachers will be aware of the introduction of relevant background and professional knowledge. If students generally find it difficult to deliver an organized and coherent presentation, teachers will especially focus on the instruction of logic and hierarchy.

#### ***4.2.3 To Establish the Resource Base for Topics***

English teaching sectors can try to collect topics and hot social issues from text books and media platforms and establish a recourse base for topics, in which topics should be classified in terms of difficulty and be attached the introduction of background, key words and some common viewpoints. Primary topics including campus, consumption, travel, family and dreams could be selected into listening and speaking courses for freshmen to encourage them to participate in oral expression. Intermediate topics, such as to go for further study or job-hunting, live off parents, values of romance, can be involved into listening and speaking course for sophomores to train their critical thinking.

The resource base for topics will play a vital role in English teaching in the future. For starters, it cheapens the energy and time for teachers when preparing for lectures. Furthermore, it promotes students to make progress in the hierarchy, logic and quality of communication. Finally, it provides both teachers and students with resources insurance. After frequent training, students are more likely to be capable of stating their opinions confidently on formal occasions and communicating with others at ease on informal occasions.

#### ***4.3 To Update Facilities and Apply the Modern Teaching Approach***

Since the language laboratory is the teaching environment for listening and speaking courses, the integrity and quality of facilities can make a direct influence on the performance of listening and speaking course. As a consequence, independent colleges are obliged to attach great importance to the maintenance and updating of language laboratories in order to ensure every student has an effective access to modern teaching resources. By setting up the wireless network, teachers are able to bring popular social issues to students and share authentic listening materials with students. Under the conditions of Internet, teachers can control the class effectively with modern teaching approaches.

Kahoot is a game platform which supports interactions among many electronic facilities at the same time, functioning as a tool for class evaluation. When preparing the lecture, teachers can upload the quiz or investigation to the platform and display them to students with the form of game in the language laboratories. After logging in the platform, students cannot take part in quiz or investigation until inputting pin password and picking up nicknames. The score will be given in accordance with accuracy and speed and the result will be announced in terms of rank report. With the assist of the tool, teachers are able to learn students' status of learning and conduct a praise or encouragement.

As a band-new modern teaching approach, kahoot keeps two advantages. On the one hand, it forms evaluation in the process of game. Games are popular with students, for they enable students to get sense of achievement and joy in several minutes. It contributes to promoting students' interest in learning, improving students' concentration and facilitating the interaction between teachers and students. On the other hand, it helps realize a timely feedback. Not only can it relieve students' pressure from assignments and tests, but also it can bring convenient conditions for teachers to conduct a summary or introspection on courses. Therefore, kahoot is desirable when examining the grasping status of cultural knowledge or the comprehending status of listening materials.

## 5. Conclusion

China's standards of English language ability is the first comprehensive evaluation system for English abilities. Its birth accelerates the pace to get close to international standard in the field of English evaluation and helps promote the reliability and validity of domestic English tests. Not only does it put language application on the agenda, but also leads a bright way for the teaching of listening and speaking. Independent colleges are supposed to fully take the quality of students as well as social demands into consideration and follow the instruction of CSE. They can make obvious progress in the teaching of listening and speaking by laying a solid foundation of cultural knowledge, creating the environment for communication and applying the modern approaches of teaching. And then, they are able to cultivate excellent talents who are specialized in their majors and have a good command of English.

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