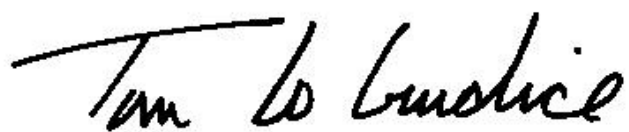


**ENGLISH LEARNING AND QUALITY EDUCATION IN CHINA: RESEARCH AND
COMMENTARY**

Approved:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom W Gutschick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

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Abstract

**ENGLISH LEARNING AND QUALITY EDUCATION IN CHINA:
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To transform from the examination-oriented education to concern with the quality education is one of the most important aspects in basic education reform. The transition of examination-oriented education to quality education is not an easy task, especially in the English Learning field. It depends on the social progress, economic development, and also a country's overall response to the possible future. An analysis of the current situation of English learning under the quality education in China is presented. Both research and commentary are provided. A quality education is viewed as the ultimate liberator for English learning.

Key words: *quality education; colleges and universities; ideological and political quality.*

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Preface

A 2005 UNESCO Report speaks to the importance of quality education. The abstract of the report says in part:

“Quality is at the heart of education. It influences what students learn, how well they learn and what benefits they draw from their education.

The quest to ensure that students achieve decent learning outcomes and acquire values and skills that help them play a positive role in their societies is an issue on the policy agenda of nearly every country” (EFA Global Monitoring Team of UNESCO, 2005).

The following abstract may be useful for the Western reader of this paper (quoted from Zheng Ying & Cheng Living, 2008).

The purpose of the College English Test (CET) is to examine the English proficiency of undergraduate students in China and ensure that Chinese undergraduates reach the required English levels specified in the National College English Teaching Syllabus (NCETS). In accordance with the courses on the syllabus, the CET consists of three tests: Band 4 (CET-4), Band 6 (CET-6), and the CET-Spoken English Test (CET-SET). The test is administered by the National College English Testing Committee on behalf of the Higher Education Department, Ministry of Education, The People's Republic of China (the P. R. China). The CET-4 and the CET-6 are held twice a year at the end of each semester. Each test takes 125 minutes to complete. The CET-SET is also held twice a year, a month before the end of each semester. The test lasts approximately 20 minutes. Four sub scores are reported in the CET report cards in

addition to the total score gained out of 710 points: listening comprehension (249 points, 35%), reading comprehension (249 points, 35%), cloze or error correction (70 points, 10%), and writing and translation (142 points, 20%).

Chapter One: Introduction

An important subject in the field of education is quality education. One aspect of basic education reform is how to transform from an examination-oriented education to a more dynamic approach those results in communicative competence in the work place and other settings as well as good test scores. The transition of college education to quality education is social progress, indeed a symbol of economic development, and also a reflection of a country's overall strength. China society is competitive. The competition between countries may result in national strength.

It is a popular concept that national strength also relates to the quality of the people. Education helps develop national qualities. The required tests in China are designed in part to accelerate the pace of reform of higher education. Of course, educational outcomes are ultimately tested in the market place and other settings.

Statement of the Problem

The problems to be addressed expressed as questions are the following:

- What is quality education for 21st century especially in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL)?
- To what extent will quality education overcome achievement gap?
- What other skills are needed for 21st century societies?
- What is the role of English as an international language in quality education for China?

Definition of Terms

Quality Education. Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society.

Individual Character Development. Character development refers to qualities of the

individual especially attitudes and values that are consistent with learning and productivity in high education and the workplace (Brown, D, 2002).

Achievement Gap. The achievement gap refers to the differences between current knowledge and skill acquisition and the need for developing globalization and technology abilities (Yong Zhao, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

A brief review of literature related to discussion regarding quality of education in a global context with implications for English learning and teaching is presented. A commentary is provided reflecting the writers' view that traditional Chinese values must be maintained in the context of global developments.

Significance of the Study

There is discussion worldwide about the globalization of the economy, the development of technology and the role of high stakes testing as a part of a nation's education system. The intention of the review and commentary is provoke discussion about quality education in China.

Delimitations of the Research

The research was conducted in and through the Karmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, over ninety (90) days during spring 2012 and 2013. EBSCO host with ERIC, Academic Search Elite and Google/Google Scholar were the primary search engines. Key search topics included "quality education", "gap in quality of education", and "globalization".

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Quality education reflects the essence of basic education; it trains students with ideal, morality, culture and discipline and enriches the student's scientific and cultural knowledge, physical and psychological quality. Strong practice and ability, and health are good for all the students. So it is the purpose to teach all the students to be a "real person", to learn knowledge, to be strong, to have a solid foundation for the future. These are deeply held Chinese values as well as expressed in general terms by UNESCO (see Preface).

Factors of Quality Education

The influence of the traditional is important in China. The traditional Confucian education is a part of the Chinese lineage from generation to generation going back thousands of the years. Confucian thought is deep in the heart and deep rooted in the traditions of China. Traditionally reading is the symbol of the noble and "positions" of all people. Reading means winning promotion and get rich. So it often happens in daily life that in order to read well, anything can be done. And for the Chinese, if you read well, nothing can stop one from obtaining success. Recently great changes have taken place, but the need for reading does not change as the society develops. A concern in China today is that to meet the needs of various tests however, the method of memorizing mechanically as opposed to higher levels of learning is still current. One wonders if students and the society will continue to flourish and indeed flourish more if other teaching and learning methods are not used (Bailey, 2005).

The influence of social consciousness is important. Firstly, the high school graduation rates stand for good schools. It is necessary that it aims at the ideal, morality, culture and discipline and enriches the student's scientific and cultural knowledge. Though the examination process

students worthy of higher education is determined. Secondly, it influences the evaluation of people. If you have high academic qualifications, you will have better jobs. Of course, one needs practical ability as well as good exam performance.

The influence of examination system is of course critical in China. According to China national conditions, a large population range, culture level is uneven. So China wants to choose the talents by examination. The exams are important to all the people in China. Therefore, the educators try their best to let government and society be satisfied by evidence of ability by examination. Exams are seen in China as the key indicator of quality. The overall argument presented in this paper is that exams should be part of the key, not “the key”.

Educational Priorities in the United States and China

If one wants to compare the basic education in China with American education, it is clear that the American system gives more attention to creativity. Said in Chinese terms, the foundation of the education, (Li, 2010), is “learn more but understand less”, but the American education is creative education, i.e. “learn less but understand more”. Said another way, China and the United States have different traditions. The Chinese education focus on accumulating and inculcating the knowledge and the respect of the students to knowledge, In the United States, there is more focus on questioning the knowledge (Song, 2011).

To make a few generalizations in comparing the two countries the following may be said according to Song:

- The comparison of physical quality, American students are better than Chinese students,
- The comparison of capacity for work, American students are better than Chinese students,

- The comparison of basic knowledge, Chinese students are better than American students,
- The comparison of team spirits, Chinese students are less than American students, American students often say the team spirit in their mind,
- The comparison of initiative and pioneering spirits, American students are better than Chinese students. Our country students do the things to observe all the rules and regulations but the American students do as they like,
- The comparison of interpersonal skills, American students are better than Chinese students,
- The comparison of manipulative ability, American students are better. They have more chance to exercise. Go to the museum and exhibition hall to do something by them, and do homework often when they are at home, and
- The comparison of hard working, the American students and Chinese student are the same with each other.

Quality education is a long-term development. Production is stressed to improve students to learn, to service, to develop. In short, the aim is to raise the students' quality of the work (Borg, 1999). Quality education emphasizes students' moral, mental, and physical development education (Cheng, L, 1997).

How to Transform the Examination Education into Quality Education

English teaching is important in China. The performance and the communicative competence in English needed in the workplace and social developments in other areas are critical. First, there must to be a clear the goal about education is to build the quality education. The nation of China must change the ideas about the education, transform the test-based

education to include national goals and inspire students to realize, the importance of English as an international language.

Part of the answer is to move away from traditional rote based teaching and learning to more dynamic approaches. For example, the listening course and talking course need to add modern audio-visual lab and language lab undertake to the students with a purpose of the training in a planned way. The oral language course is especially important. It helps student to speak native English and prevent the phenomenon of “Chinglish” (Deyuan He, 2009).

It is also important to improve the skills of teaching. Quality education is a two-way activity between teachers and students. Students also need a curriculum of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Teachers have the role of guiding and leading, using different measures to teach students. So the teachers should use flexible ways to teach students and well-design all parts of the teaching process. To present the teaching one should care about the ability of the students, let students master the rules of studying, raise a good studying habit, and create a suitable situation for English communicative language. So that it will improve the ability about the comprehensive use of language and put the quality education into practice.

How to Improve the Overall Quality Education through English Teaching

As the society is developing very fast, the systems of education is also having a decisive change. It transforms form examination-oriented education into quality education. What is more, English education is an important part of the basic education system. English studying can help students learn much culture knowledge and gain all the information around the world, an integral tool to communicative with others. That is to say, teachers should put the students in the main parts and teach students in accordance with their aptitude. The education programs help students to have good studying promote the ideological and ethical standards, scientific culture quality

and psychological diathesis. But what can teachers do to improve the overall quality education through the English teaching?

Firstly, cultivate the students' foreign language accomplishment. The teachers in the class should state the ideological content of the teaching material deeply and promote their ideological level. Teachers should contain it with the teaching and tell the students the spirit of perseverance.

Secondly, strengthen the skills of listening, speaking, and reading and writing training; let students to improve their comprehensive capability of using English. (Lee, 1998).English is a language and the tool to communicate. Listening, speaking reading and writing are the four cores in English education. Teachers must focus on listening and speaking, so it can also take the form of the ability of reading and writing. Such practice conforms to good language learning and is the purpose of English learning. The influence of the examination-oriented education must be transformed to reflect what is to be learned.

Thirdly, one must teach students in accordance with their aptitude, and improve ability training. There are different levels about English knowledge and the skill of using the English language. Teachers should use different methods to teach different students. Of course, high expectations should not be compromised but individualization of instruction helps more students achieve. Some students maybe have difficult in learning English language; they need instruction that meets their level. And for some students who have strong foundation there is a need to help them to read more books to expand the capacity of the knowledge, deepen the knowledge of the difficult to meet the requirements of their learning.

Realities of College Quality Education

In an increasingly competitive world quality education is critical. Critical education results in the national strength of a nation in terms of economic development and moral strength

as well (Hara& Kling, 2000). In China there is increasing recognition that performance on school testing must be reflected in national advancement. As well as productivity there must be increased creativity in education and in the workplace so that initial gains achieved since the “opening” are continued and surpassed.

At least one Chinese scholar (Yang,2003) sees the needed change will have to follow the growing recognition of western sociologists and psychologists that intelligence takes many forms including “emotional intelligence” Emotional intelligence training abroad has been adopted in formal education content, and opened the course to intellectual and affective learning (Yang,2003). In China more people are starting to accept and approved its theory, and think that the best way to improve students’ emotional intelligence should be combined with other aspects of teaching.

The Problems of Quality Education in Implementation

Although quality education can be achieved, one cannot ignore problems. The problems are in the areas of understanding and practice. Quality education is a comprehensive effort to improve all the students’ basic quality for the fundamental purpose of the education (Edmonson, H & Sailor, W, 2000). In the context of Chinese values quality education asks for a full development of students’ culture quality, physical quality and psychological quality.

In one sense quality education is simple as selecting the superior and eliminating the inferior. Another view is that quality education is the education for all the students; it claims that every student will receive full development of talents and skills. Quality education is not contradictory with “talent education”. It emphasis on improving and investigate points each person’s potential, so that everyone can become useful in the society. So the equal treatment and respect each student quality education is one of the important principles. (Yung , 1997)

Of course, quality education in China, in part, will continue to be measured by examination. College English Test Band 4 and Band 6 are measures and also impulses to English learning in China. But now some Chinese are critical of tests only as the sole measure of quality. They argue that CET-4 and CET-6 are simply exam-oriented. They argue that the certificate of CET has completely no relationship with learner's English competence.

A contrary and more widely prevailing view is that the CET is positive to a great extent and it is helpful for many English learners. It is ordinary that when people acquire something or accomplish something, they need to evaluate themselves or seek confirmation. So does English learning. The exam is the best and fairest way to measure the achievements for Chinese. So CET should not be blamed. Second, majority of Chinese know English to some different degree. If there are no criteria for the CET, it is really hard for Chinese to show English competence directly, convincible and efficiently to others. It is impossible for everyone to go to the employers' office and speak with them or read something for them when seeking employment. However, it is convenient to show the score of CET. What's more, no matter if CET could prove one's English competence, it is sure to prove one's learning ability, especially for the college students. Many teachers say something along the lines of, "I used to tell my students that perhaps the certificate of CET cannot unfold your English competence completely. However, the fact is that you are an unqualified graduate if you failed in CET because you are inability in some required and important area." It is hard to believe an unsuccessful learner could make great success in his career. CET increases the opportunities for jobs in China.

But there is also an increasing concern with how students perform in the workplace, which is what they are able to apply from, what they learned in higher education. Quality education pays attention to develop people's wisdom potential, to form student independent personality and

spirit, pay attention to the cultivation of the students' modern consciousness and the way of thinking. As a means of education and examination neither can abuse, inspection results and quality education it is not contradictory. Indeed, there may be exam-oriented education, and the measures must be standard and recognized by society. It shows that the examination is very necessary, but the exam linkage to workplace success is the challenge.

The mistakes of method and content affect quality education. Firstly, there is a remarkable reversal between the target and effect of the ideological morality quality education. Secondly, the culture quality education needs to be strengthened. Then there are many shortcomings on the science and technology related to quality education. Also the physical and mental quality education should be strengthened. The best traditions of Chinese cultural values are diminished if teaching methodology is reduced to the simply memorizing and being a good test taker. There must be a link between tested material and values in practice.

College and University policy must support quality education. Also, the quality of teachers in colleges and education needs to be improved. Otherwise there is resistance and lack of change. Rote teaching and learning continues even in the context of wash back for CET testing and learning English for communicative competence.

In today's society, China needs people who are innovative and have certain professional skills of high quality talents. While the traditional education system requires the students to pass various routine examinations, there increasing concern by the nation and test makers that communicative competence is measured. At their best the method and content of the exams are a personnel training baton.

Based on international comparisons of investment in education China has not given enough economic and policy to support the college quality education. However, economic

support is not enough. Students have less opportunity to practice good English and good business practices in the colleges and overcome the domination of rote teaching and learning. Society cannot provide more training opportunities for university students. And if students do not have confidence in their abilities the students' innovation spirit and practice ability will be affected.

The Reform and Innovation of Developed Countries: Quality Education in the USA

Quality education should combine with the corresponding teaching system so it can reflect in the cultivation of the students' autonomy. Quality education should combine with the corresponding teaching plan and undergraduate education in the process of implementation. Quality education should combine with guidance students' life and run through the students' activities in the all aspects. Quality education should combine with the school significant activities, and reintegrated into the community of the social and economic development.

The Importance of English as a Foreign Language in China

Firstly, English is world's major international language. For the world, the number of people who speak English is more than the number of any other language. There are at least 10 countries regard English as their mother language, and 45 countries regard it as their official language. More than one third of the population of the world speaks English. Secondly, the use of English range is very wide including 75% of the world's TV shows use English, and three quarters of the mails is written in English,. Note also that computer keyboards use English, and if any meeting called internationally the meeting the language used most is English. Also English is the United Nation official working language. Thirdly, the national development and international cooperation need English. In recent decades, China has developed more quickly,

various aspects have changed, but there is no doubt that China has been using the technology of the western world and now must move ahead to be developer of new technology.

The United States is the first economic power in the world and economics is one of reasons that English becomes a global language. However, one must also recognize that China, which has the biggest population in the world and is a regional and global influence. China plays a unique role in international affairs and has become an indispensable pole among the world multi-polarization. China is one of the fastest-growing economies and has the largest growth potential in the world. Some prophets suggest that China will be the first economic power in the world in the future. However, English has been the most widely and frequently used language in the world. The most important thing is that English has been widely recognized as the global language. On the other hand, Chinese characters are ideographs, and they are difficult for foreigners to learn than English. So this is one reason that can enhance the status of English in the world. In addition, although social media boasts progress and development of Chinese economy, one should realize soberly that in fact there is a wide gap between China and United States not only in economy but in other characteristics. However, the dynamics of quality are changing and both the United States and China must anticipate the future as reforms are put in place. There are significant challenges in a developing global and digital world that must be addressed.

The Achievement Gap in the United States and China

The popular discussion of China and the United States having achievement gaps; the former rural and the latter rural is a current reality but may really misses the point of what the achievement gap may be in both countries in the future. Globalization and technology are dramatically altering the world. Both countries need to ask, "Is education reform headed down the right

path?” “Are schools in the United States emphasizing intercultural communication or are students in the United States too ill informed about the world and China?” “Does China overemphasize high-stakes testing at the level of failing to account for the importance of innovation and creativity in technology?”

These and other questions are at the heart of American Scholar Yong Zhao’s thoughtful and informative book *Catching Up or Leading the Way* (2009). Born and raised in China and now a distinguished professor in the state of Oregon, Yong Zhao bases many of his observations on firsthand experience as a student in China and as a parent of children attending school in the United States. Yong Zhao emphasizes that educators, policymakers, parents, and others interested in preparing students to be productive global citizens will gain a clear understanding of what kinds of knowledge and skills constitute digital competence and global competence, and what schools can--and must--do to meet the challenges and opportunities brought about by globalization and technology (Ch. 7).

The challenges ahead for achieving quality education can be over whelming .In the next chapter a brief summary of the discussion is provided and at least some implications for policy and practice in China are presented.

Chapter Three: Conclusions and Implications

Conclusions

To implement quality education is meritorious to the present age and favorable to the future. Today, the civilization of human has entered into the 21st century; the concept of quality education has become general idea of all humans. Quality education is the hot topic that is attended widely by the education circles all the while since it is been put forward and becomes a main tune of innovation and development of our country's education. To this day, the argumentation, research and practice to quality education in China is continuing. Whether it is a theory research teaching staff or a teacher who works in the front line, they have put forward many constructive measures which tally with education rules and are propitious to the favoring developments of quality education, and have acquired definite effects. At present, "quality education" is called loudly, but the education to take an examination is grasped severely, this is the veritable portraiture that many schools implement quality education. Especially when facing entrance rate, the hard index, quality education looks very frail. This brings many negative influences and frustrations to the continuous and healthy developments of our country's education projector.

Implications

Chinese education has long attached great importance to academic achievements. As a result, Chinese students have gained international fame in various academic contests and most graduate from school with high-tech scores. However, it does not mean that they are winners out of school. Many of them failed, not because of lack of knowledge, but because of quality. The need for quality education cannot be avoided any more.

Examination-oriented education, like a slave owner's whip, drives students crazy. These exams inevitably result in a test-oriented force-feeding teaching method, which seriously hinders the development of students' creativity.

How can there be improved quality education in China? Affected by thousands of years' examination-oriented education, most of our students are high in their scores and poor in their quality. So, what must be done?

- The first thing to do is to cultivate the students' spirit of innovation. One may say that the innovation is the motivation of the development. It is hard to imagine that the advance of the whole society can be realized without constant innovation.
- Secondly, though most of the college students are intelligent and fond of study, some are comparatively less capable of handling their social and living affairs. When they meet the unexpected, they do not know how to solve it. Some even phone home to ask what to do each time they run into any trouble. So schools should develop their ability of self-dependence and enhance their capability to analyze and tackle problems under special circumstance so as to avoid their poor quality.
- Thirdly, Chinese students have strong desire to address challenges and always tend to devote themselves to the advances of the society. In the course of their achieving their goal, good personality makes a big difference. And the personality will give rise to a strong communication skill and thus enabling them to deal with different people from all kinds of the walk effectively. With the capacity to make friends, they can give and take criticism; they will be sensitive to the feeling of others and they become to realize how to work with a team, thus develop their spirits of

teamwork. In short, good personality and strong communication skill can pave the way to their success.

With respect to the “double sword” of exams -excellent if well fitted to societal needs and poorly serving society if the results simply show good test-taking ability- China must aggressively advocate the quality-oriented education to avoid the negative effects brought about by examination-oriented education. In order to become a qualified student, one should bear in mind that education does not merely mean the knowledge from books, but it means the overall improvement of one’s quality of education. China should take measures to encourage students to take initiative and give full play to their talents.

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