

Leading Role of Educators in English Language Teaching for Young Learners

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v9i9.3939>

J.L. Du¹, P.F. Yu¹ and M.L. Li²

¹ Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China

² Griffith University, Australia

Abstract—This paper discusses the leading role of Chinese educators in English Language Teaching (ELT) for young learners. English is a global language. ELT for children becomes especially popular in China when English was officially considered compulsory at primary school in 2001. National identity is the presentation of cultural identity, and alien culture helps children understand native culture from the outside perspective. Culture sensitive applications are required to be made in ELT by teachers. Educators' excellent presentation and students' well-established practice lead to full production, bringing the active intake from the passive input.

Index Terms—Active Intake, Confucianism, English Language Teaching, Passive Input

I. INTRODUCTION

English plays a continued dominant role in language education. It is widely used in primary education throughout the world despite constantly changing between generations. Standard English is a global language, clearly considered the first language of the international education system. Many eager learners' passionate love of the language is absolute and they take efforts to make progress shown by increased fluency. Access to English is considered to meet the educational and economic needs of personal development and preparation for employment.

English Language Teaching (ELT) programmes spread dramatically throughout China. For Chinese pupils, speaking in fluent English is now the weapon enabling them to have a sufficient say in international affairs. The enormous and explosive growth of ELL has been accompanied by the similarly significant expansion of ELT.

Teacher education is one of the key factors of ELT. Teaching for young learners basically depends on cultural expectations about how children adhere to their traditional culture and how they conform to alien culture. ELT is to be done by fostering powerful cultural influence and emphasizing cultural achievements. A separation from exotic culture and native culture is a damaging way forward for both languages since the attainment target is to develop confidence and competence in a wide variety of situations. The educators should provide the ample and suitable opportunities to help children to practice the language both in and outside the classroom, and to learn more about the alien culture.

This paper will, first of all, begin by discussing the relationships between Confucianism and language education. Then, we highlight the discussion of how western culture exerts undue influence on education in Confucianism-

permeated region. Thirdly, we focus on the leading role of educators in English education for young learners. Before coming to the conclusion, we will make a suggestion for an ELT teacher to pose himself during language teaching, and to position himself effectively and efficiently in relation to their young learners.

II. CONFUCIANISM AND LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

Cultural awareness is important in language education. Cultural awareness has emerged over the last few decades as a significant part of conceptualizing the cultural dimension to language teaching [1], and many learning approaches are culturally determined [2]. For example, teachers may recognise that the reasons for their students' inhibitions are cultural in origin [3].

ELT for young learners in China is greatly affected by Confucianism. Confucius idea is closely related to philosophy in which humanism, faithfulness and propriety are the basic concepts. Humanism refers to the idea which is designed to promote understanding of a stable unified self and make something twisted be straightened out. Faithfulness is the positive life-enhancing virtue which refers to carefulness in keeping what we are entrusted with. Propriety means correctness of social or moral behaviour which consists of patience, commitment, enthusiasm, self-control, kindness, goodness, etc. Both humanism and faithfulness underpin the co-operative nature of education and provide important common social relationships. With the development of humanism, faithfulness and propriety, a lot of famous philosophers appear.

Confucius is an influential educator and philosopher. Confucius, whose philosophical thought is called Confucianism and whose aim is to contribute to providing a practical and supportive learning environment for the community, is considered one of the most celebrated thinkers roughly contemporary with Plato and Aristotle. The Confucian doctrines make China stand as a nation with the astonishing cultural achievements, which are essential for the common future of humanity. He has developed some basic educational and cultural conceptions, exerted considerable influence on the course of educational history, and expressed great and particular interest to the educational methods and teaching content. Confucianism having triumphed in the second century B.C. has tremendous impact upon young learners throughout Chinese history.

Confucianism has a long history to bring transition from elite education to public education. Xia dynasty (1523-1027 B.C.) is generally and widely considered the

originality of Chinese achievement of education. During the period, education is the privilege of elites. With the appearance of Confucian beliefs pervasive during Chunqiu periods (770-221 B.C.), the public education system is gradually established in Han dynasty. The basic goals of Confucianism include expanding access to education and ending the bias of the educational system. For example, Confucius puts forward the famous idea of *yǒujiàowúlèi*--from *Lúnyǔ Wèilínggōng*. The essence of education is equality. Everyone, intelligent or backward, young or old, rich or poor, famous or not, should be given an equal chance to fully develop his potential. Both elites from upper class families and common people from low class status have access to educational facilities available.

Confucianism is an important systematic attempt to construct educational system. The Confucian culture is mainly comprised of the *Four Books* (Sishū) and the *Five Classics* (Wǔjīng), all of which are acknowledged as the core of Confucianism system. The *Four Books* is made up of *The Great Learning* (Dàxué), *The Doctrine of the Mean* (Zhōngyōng), *The Analects of Confucius* (Lúnyǔ) and *The Works of Mencius* (Mèngzǐ). The *Five Classics* consists of *The Book of Poetry* (Shījīng), *The Book of History* (Shàngshū), *The Book of Rites* (Lǐjì), *The Book of Changes* (Zhōuyì), and *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (Chūnqiū). All the masters discussed above contribute to the educational construction in China.

National identity is the presentation of cultural identity. Culture is deemed superior to nature, and is considered one of the best mediums to communicate with the native people. Educators have to be the representatives of national culture who lead children to fully understand the Confucianism. *Rǔwéijūnzírú, wúwéixiǎorénrú* --from *Lúnyǔ Yōngyě* shows the idea of devotion to national duty and obligation towards the state. *Ru* is the ultimate aim of a person who has nearly fulfilled the basic drives and desires for social recognition. The educational nature should be realized by the improvement of remarkable creativity. The development of self-confidence and self-realization is regarded as a duty to dramatically increase persons' productivity and competitiveness. Educators should stimulate the mind of students and emphasize the significance of individual participation to the conduct of national politics.

There exist overriding cultural values useful for English education. The cultural values are rooted within a humanitarian philosophy which improves the human rights of young learners, provides the equal opportunities and reflects the universality and diversity of pupils' needs. The expansion of ELT brings the national identity and stimulates the wider dissemination of culture on basis of cultural integration.

III. WESTERN CULTURE AND CHINESE EDUCATION

Western culture becomes popular with the expansion of English education. The invasion of China by western culture shaped by Christianity has had a number of far-reaching effects on Confucianism. The influence of Christian culture over ELT is evergrowing in mainland especially when English was considered one compulsory course in 2001. In the *An Action Plan for Primary English Education* signed by the Ministry of Education of P R China in 2001 (http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2001/content_61196

.htm), English is officially considered the first foreign language and the primary schools are required to provide the English courses from Grade Three. Confucianism not requiring a belief in a 'god' can accept western culture relatively easy and there is little irresolvable conflict between cultures during the process of ELT for young generation.

Christianity is a living faith partly shaped the educational history in China. With the coming of Christianity from Tang Dynasty in 635 A C, Chinese education is considerably influenced by the western culture. The philosophy of Christianity possesses some very remarkable cultural similarities and identities which allow comparative discussion about children's education principles underlying the practice of philosophy. Eastern education may be intuitively and demonstratively perceived by western-oriented educators [4]. Paul Monroe, who introduced practical and constructive methods for democratizing Chinese education, has a far reaching effect on the development of education in China and contributes to educational interaction between Confucianism and Christianity.

Paul Monroe is an experienced tutor whose Chinese students are famous in educational history. He made a dozen trips in China in the 1920s and 1930s, and greatly contributed to educational interaction between China and the United States. Monroe developed "6-3-3" educational program. His impact was considerable on Chinese students who later became leading educators in China, such as Guo Bingwen, Tao Xingzhi, Chen Heqin, Jiang Menglin, Wang Tso-Yan (Zhuoran), Zhang Boling, etc. These students, who enrolled at Teachers College at Columbia, were influenced by the theoretical educational innovations of John Dewey, and western culture exerted a practical influence on their ideas about curricular implementation. Pedagogical principles with solid content and clear instruction were more likely to produce quite startling gains. Creativity and the development of self-confidence were major educational goals for Monroe. As he said: "The essence of democracy is that all people, no matter whether intelligent or backward, should have the equal chance of full development." His idea was similar to Confucius' principle of *yǒujiàowúlèi* discussed above, and each student had the opportunity to be educated, which reflects the increasing concern with educator's importance.

The role of educators is emphasized by western culture. A teacher should maximize the ability to unlock or deploy his particular skills in accordance with students' needs and priorities since he has recognized professional worth and value. A high frequency of exposure is necessary for early ELL. It's necessary to create more chances all the time for children to contact English, and to maximize the exposure to English both in and outside the classroom. Thus children have more supportive environment to experience and use English as a means of communication. An educator may make the knowledge of native culture be an awareness of the uniqueness of his own culture, and help the students accept the alien culture conditionally, and simultaneously make an awareness of a heritage common to all humanity. The socio-cultural approach can help to develop a deeper understanding of language learners and their strategy use [5]. Obviously, the qualified educators have the responsibility to take efforts to make schools more responsive to students, parents, and even society.

IV. LEADING ROLE OF EDUCATORS IN ELT FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

Educators play a leading role in ELT. The efficient English education encourages the emotive, cognitive and socio-affective development of young learners. English education for young learners is a rapidly growing field around the world. Sometimes language limitations may obscure what young learners actually know and can do, and an educator has to use various instructional strategies to direct them. For example, the linguistic strategies and options employed to realize compliments by native Chinese speakers were very different from those used by native speakers of English [6]. It is obvious that the classroom educators may provide object language input and remain facilitator of interaction, bridge the gap between the native culture and alien culture, and occupy a central role in ELT. In short, educators' excellent presentation and students' well-established practice lead to full production, bringing the active intake from the passive input.

A. Educators' Presentation Designed to Convey Message

Educators' presentation is important to convey necessary message and meaning. As shown in old saying, xuéguànzhōngxī, shēntìlixíng, and shīzhě-suǒyǐ chuándào shòuyèjièhuòyě. An educator, who has been keeping purifying his soul and keeping pursuing, has to be keen on learning, good at communicating, courageous in undertaking and brave in innovating. Cultural differences bring the individual differences in the way of presentation [7]. A qualified and effective teacher has to understand the similarity and difference between Eastern and Western cultures, and know how to describe the origins of English words (etymology) and the changing meaning of English words (semantics) firmly rooted in both cultures. Language is connotational rather than denotational [8], and semantic intuitions vary from culture to culture [9].

Premature peculiarities become the concern of effective educators in English education. A few scholars pay attention to the difference between adults and children during the process of language cognition [10]. Young learners have the special flexibility of minds, the malleability of behaviour, short attention spans and a lot of physical energy which are the typical presentation of pupils. According to the statistics, 10 minutes is a long duration for age 7, and 15 minutes is the best for age 10. Having taken full advantage of the characteristics, educators can improve the quality of teaching materials, ensure the competence of management, and enlarge the parental involvement in ELT.

English education should be child-oriented. For Chinese pupils' language philosophy, focus should be given on how language awareness and language learning are effectively combined. The hetero-culture-based methodology should have wide applicability to increase the young learners' proficiency in languages and instill a sense of cultural belonging among pupils. For example, pín'érwúchǎn, fù'érwújiāo--from *Lúnyǔ Xué'ér* means happiness does not consist in how many possessions you own. There is no difference and distinction for the rag of wretchedness and the purple robe of power in the democracy of education. Educators have a leading role in making children share the teaching strategies which should not be simply taught from a given checklist.

Educators are important in the creation of language environment. They may supply coherent and feasible learning strategies, create a non-stressful and effective learning environment, maximize exceptional and much better learning opportunities, and move the Confucianism-influenced young learners from English culture of failure or English culture of resistance to a discernible Anglo-Saxon-friendly culture. The viewpoint is confirmed that it is important to transform the potential benefits of early ELL into real gains during the process of primary English education. It is better for an educator to demonstrate than merely tell what is to be learned, for example, yánchuán shēnjiào, wēngùérzhīxīn, and gāozhūwǎng'érzhīláizhě--from *Lúnyǔ Xué'ér*. A student may be a hopeful man who can obtain new information from old one. Children should be educated to study step by step with substantial improvement, and understand today through yesterday.

The appropriate feedback helps children monitor their progress. It is a considerable challenge for young learners to learn alien culture in an unfamiliar language, and a lingual tutor has to make instructional modifications. Research into effective instruction may accurately reflect the fact that if the immediate feedback is provided, students' confidence or self-esteem is enhanced greatly and positive motivation is satisfied. Various feedbacks are necessary for young learners. The correctly positive feedback offers the encouragement and the constructively negative one provides the chance to identify and repair errors [11]. Mistakes made during the process of language production should be taken up and corrected at the appropriate moment in a positive way by educators. Besides, peer-repair by classmates is another method of learning, tough but very constructive [12]. It is essential for an educator to display and encourage some peculiarities of patience, sympathy, understanding and tolerance, and to provide familiarity with an exotic sense of values for students to practice.

B. Students' Practice Prone to Changes and Continuities

Students' practice is prone to changes in language materials and continuities in pedagogical principles. All the language materials familiar to students can be used to connect English with their background knowledge. The evidence shows that more than 70% young learners have the ability of understanding language materials from familiar fields, identifying materials in relevant context, and recognizing daily routines related to their experience. Reading the familiar material is to the mind what regular and full exercise is to the body. Evidence indicates that young learners can have access to familiar material which is readily, and the learners with wide-ranging background knowledge have better ability of comprehension [13]. Children have limited social and individual experience and if the material is strange for them, their attention spans will be shorter than normal and the effectiveness of learning will be greatly affected. Therefore, ELT focuses on native culture in which pupils are interested, and on traditional stories, poems, songs, etc. with which pupils are familiar.

Continuities in pedagogical principles have a positive effect on pupil performance. Children's competence in ELL is fragile and their limited age and social experience make it difficult to transfer from a familiar environment to a strange one. Therefore, fine-tuning and compatibility of

teaching aims, consistent direction of teaching activity, and steady relationship between an educator and children are necessary for an effective ELT. Continuity is an extraordinary phenomenon which exerts positive influence over curriculum, and has a decisive and profound effect on ELT. For example, a thematic unit can be circled by a series of lessons to create broader contexts with a consistent direction of teaching to consider the effective communication needs without focusing more on complex grammars and structure. This is called *yùjiàoyùlè*, meaning education is for nothing but for fun, and it should motivate children as well as maintain their motivation. They can create a welcoming atmosphere, encourage children to participate in dialogues, set feasible and desirable goals, and consequently ensure everyone is happy and celebrates the achievements. According to the theories of achievement motivation, enjoyment can establish various forms of identity, e.g. global identity, national identity, local identity, ethnic identity, cultural identity, etc. More information about children's motivation for learning and using languages is needed to ensure that this motivation develops and turns to be multifaceted as pupils begin to learn English through their primary school education.

An educator should pay attention to the value of narrative. Taking skills may differ across cultural groups [14]. Detailed and focused narrative can help learners clearly understand the alien structure of discourse, the strange words and peculiar constructions, which can upgrade the capabilities of young learners in guessing and making interferences. Telling stories and reciting poems are valuable in extending the range of enjoyment and experience of the individuals. Young learners are naturally interested in stories and poems which can stimulate their vivid imagination. Stories embody a narrative structure of discourse, and poems describe the poet's feelings in a tone of narration. Grammatical learning for young learners is the basic framework, which belongs to the micro-structural construction. Narrative presentation, including story telling and poem reciting, is the suitably comprehensive framework which belongs to macro-structural construction. Micro-structural construction provides the linguistic knowledge and macro-structural construction gives the knowledge of organizing the various linguistic forms under the influence of social experience, for example, setting the whole scene, linking separate elements together, reaching an exciting climax, achieving the planned closure, etc. Besides the stories and poems, the other linguistic methods are useful for very young learners. For example, language games and songs have been considered to play a demanding role in English education. The valuable narration brings the proficiency with a higher degree of automaticity and lower cognitive effort [15], and paves the way for full production vital to educational success.

V. CONCLUSION

The early start in English education can help pupils to think strategically to monitor and regulate their learning. Both Confucianism and Christianity exert cultural influence on young learners during ELT. A qualified teacher may be generous and benevolent rather than biased and prejudiced. He has to focus on culture deviation, on what is right and proper, and on trust in justice and equality. With the full development of procedure of Presentation–Practice–Production, Passive Input can be converted into

Active Intake. The leading role of educators in ELT for young learners is, in a word, powerful.

REFERENCES

- [1] W. Baker, "From cultural awareness to intercultural awareness: culture in ELT," *ELT J.*, vol. 66, no. 1, pp. 62-70, 2012. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccr017>
- [2] S. Gieve and R. Clark. "The Chinese approach to learning: Cultural trait or situated response? The case of a self-directed learning programme," *System*, vol. 33, no. 2, pp. 261-276, 2005. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2004.09.015>
- [3] J. F. Jones, "From silence to talk: cross-cultural ideas on students participation in academic group discussion," *English for Specific Purposes*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 243-259, 1999. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906\(97\)00059-8](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906(97)00059-8)
- [4] P. Le Ha, "University classrooms in Vietnam: Contesting the stereotypes," *ELT J.*, vol. 58, no. 1, pp. 50-57, 2004. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/58.1.50>
- [5] X. Gao, "Understanding changes in Chinese students' uses of learning strategies in China and Britain: A socio-cultural re-interpretation," *System*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 55-67, 2006. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2005.04.003>
- [6] M. C. Yu, "Learning how to read situations and know what is the right thing to say or do in an L2: A study of socio-cultural competence and language transfer," *J. Pragmatics*, vol. 43, no. 4, pp. 1127-1147, 2011. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2009.09.025>
- [7] R. White, "Adapting Grice's maxims in the teaching of writing," *ELT J.*, vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 62-69, 2001. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/55.1.62>
- [8] A. V. Kravchenko, "Essential properties of language, or, why language is not a code," *Lang. Sci.*, vol. 29, no. 5, pp. 650-671, 2007. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2007.01.004>
- [9] E. Machery, R. Mallon, S. Nichols and S. P. Stich, "Semantics, cross-cultural style," *Cognition*, vol. 92, no. 3, pp. B1-B12, 2004. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2003.10.003>
- [10] S. A. Gelman, E. A. Ware and F. Kleinberg, "Effects of generic language on category content and structure," *Cognitive Psychol.*, vol. 61, no. 3, pp. 273-301, 2010. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cogpsych.2010.06.001>
- [11] J. Dong, "Isn't it enough to be a Chinese speaker?: Language ideology and migrant identity construction in a public primary school in Beijing," *Lang. Commun.*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 115-126, 2009. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2009.01.002>
- [12] L. Flowerdew, "A cultural perspective on group work," *ELT J.*, vol. 52, no. 4, pp. 323-329, 1998. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/52.4.323>
- [13] F. Boers and M. Demecheleer, "Measuring the impact of cross-cultural differences on learners' comprehension of imaginable idioms," *ELT J.*, vol. 55, no. 3, pp. 255-262, 2001. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/55.3.255>
- [14] K. K. Luk, W. S. Xiao and H. Cheung, "Cultural effect on perspective taking in Chinese-English bilinguals," *Cognition*, vol. 124, no. 3, pp. 350-355, 2012. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2012.05.016>
- [15] L. Ghazi Saidi, V. Perlberg, G. Marrelec, M. Péligrini-Issac, H. Benali and A. I. Ansaldo. "Functional connectivity changes in second language vocabulary learning," *Brain Lang.*, vol. 124, no. 1, pp. 56-65, 2013. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bandl.2012.11.008>

AUTHORS

J.L. Du is with Lexicographical Research Center, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China (e-mail: dujiali68@126.com).

P.F. Yu is with Faculty of Chinese Language and Culture, with Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China (e-mail: yupingfang68@126.com).

M.L. Li is with the School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University, Australia (email: min-glin.li@hotmail.com).

This work was supported in part by the Post-Funded National Social Science Foundation under Grants 12FYY019 and 12FYY021. Submitted 06 June 2014. Published as submitted by the authors 25 October 2014.