

## Evaluation System for English Teachers in China

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### Abstract

The thesis is a comprehensive study of teaching evaluation and teacher development. Theoretically the thesis is of benefit to English teachers' development as well as the teaching evaluation theory. Practically it is helpful for English teachers to be the researchers as well, and can form a comfortable teaching environment for all the English teachers. A comprehensive evaluation system is introduced, including the evaluation objectives and principles, the pluralism of the evaluation subjects, the multiplicity of the methods.

**Key words:** Evaluative system; English teachers in China; Development

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### INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of teaching is an integral feature of the enhancement of teaching. Teaching is a complex human activity and its quality is of concern to a variety of stakeholders. It follows that the evaluation of teaching is also a complex process, and fulfills different purposes at different times. Modern pedagogical theory stresses that the process of teaching is a continuous one,

aiming to the improvement of students in all-around. Consequently, teaching has become a job full of creation (Xu, 1998).

At present, English teaching evaluation systems of universities are not perfect yet, with which the evaluating methods and evaluators tend to be simple. In fact English teachers who want to improve their teaching are eager to know whether there are some weaknesses in the teaching procedure and how other teachers and their students view them. Then the question is what kind of evaluation English teachers need. We should try our best to establish a scientific and appropriate evaluation system for English teachers in our country.

## 1. RATIONAL BACKGROUND

### 1.1 Action Research Theory

Action research gives teachers the skills needed to work on problems specific to their classrooms and their schools. By using an actual research procedure, researching teachers can resolve their own teaching challenges (Carol, 2002). Action research is inquiry or research in the context of focused efforts to improve the quality of an organization and its performance. It typically is designed and conducted by practitioners who analyze the data to improve their own practice. We know teachers have the ability of understanding, recognizing and creating as well. So the essence of action research is that it is a revolution, aiming to improve the practice for oneself and it is a dynamic process going forward circularly and spirally.

As Mills put it: Action research "satisfies the desire of all teachers to increase the predictability of what happens in their classrooms, in particular, to increase the likelihood that a given curriculum, instructional strategy or use of technology will positively affect student outcomes" (Mills, 2003).

## 1.2 Reflective Teaching Theory

To move from the older teaching model to the newer one, language teachers need to think about what they do and how and why they do it. Reflective practice allows instructors to consider these questions in a disciplined way. Bartlett (1990) states: Improvement of teaching may be achieved through reflection. Reflection is more than “thinking” and focuses on the day-to-day classroom teaching of the individual teacher as well as the institutional structures in which teacher and students work. Reflection may be seen as an active and deliberative cognitive process, involving sequences of interconnected ideas that take account of underlying beliefs and knowledge.

So reflective teaching is a response to past experience and involves conscious recall and examination of the experience as a basis for evaluation and decision-making and as a source for planning and action. It is an inquiry approach that emphasizes an ethic of caring, a constructivist approach to teaching, and creative problem solving (Henderson, 1996). Richards and Lockhart (1994) stress that by reflective teaching teachers can not only improve their teaching practice but also make self-evaluation and get development continually.

## 1.3 Characteristics of English Teaching

According to Borg (2006) language teaching means much more than teaching the language; it involves teaching “the culture behind the language” and knowledge related to “all spheres of life (education, politics, history, linguistics)”; it is not just about studying topics, but also about developing “communication related skills”; and, it is not solely about teaching facts: “teachers of all languages differ from those of other subjects. So teachers must not only have a sound knowledge of the target language but a set of personal qualities: sensitivity, warmth and tolerance.

There is no suggestion that other teachers do not require such qualities; the argument, though, is that these are almost essential for language teachers compared to perhaps desirable for other teachers. Nowadays more and more researchers would agree “teacher education” rather than “teacher training”. The former emphasizes how to encourage teachers to develop teaching theory and evaluate by themselves. The purpose of these measures is nothing but accelerating teacher development and improving teaching levels.

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## 2. SIGNIFICANCE AND PRESENT SITUATION OF ENGLISH TEACHING EVALUATION IN CHINA

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Although there are lots of researchers focusing on the study of teacher evaluation abroad and at home, little work of this kind, emphasizing specifically of teaching evaluation for English teachers. Nowadays, the creation and development of teaching evaluation specific for English teachers is essential.

## 2.1 Significance

Song (2004) points out “according to the present problems in university English teachers’ evaluation, we should understand the task and situation of university teachers group, find a proper way to evaluate teachers and a good evaluation system”. Such studies have been conducted by many other scholars, for examples, Lowman (1984), Bonwell and Eison (1991) have reviewed many studies on this topic. Wang (2007) points out that teaching evaluation is at the core of the new English pedagogy. Its objectives are: the all-round development of students; the encouragement of teachers to improve their teaching standards; and thus an acceleration of the development of English education in the country.

## 2.2 Present Situation in China

In our country, there are approximately two types of evaluation system, which are widely used and commented—one is Summative/Rewards and Discipline teaching evaluation, and the other one is Formative/Developmental teaching evaluation.

Liu (2002) refers that the main characteristics of rewards and discipline evaluation is that “it emphasizes the reward and discipline, pays attention to teachers’ work and results and compels teachers to be evaluated. Rewards and discipline with its hard aims are the main instruments.” However some researchers have noticed the weaknesses of this kind of evaluation. For example Zhang (2000) says that it is based on a limited teacher conception with rewarding and disciplining as its aims. It has weaknesses. For example it cannot encourage teachers. Because of the lack of money or something else, it can only evaluate some teachers in some aspects. So lots of teachers dislike it. In addition, teachers cannot take part in the evaluation actively. Because teachers worry that the evaluation result may affect their future.

On the contrary, the developmental teaching evaluation is a kind of formative assessment. Evaluation systems designed to support teacher growth and development through an emphasis on formative evaluation techniques produced higher levels of satisfaction and more thoughtful and reflective practice while still being able to satisfy accountability demands. Its purpose is not making rewards and penalties but diagnosing the teaching problems, so that it can help teachers improve their teaching work and gain the opportunities to be trained and develop. In some aspects, the developmental teaching evaluation is a kind of new evaluation pattern facing to the future. However we have to analyze the real situation in China and find the most suitable evaluation method for our English teachers.

Above all teaching evaluation in conception, methods and technique have had great improvement in recent years. All these researches help the teaching activities a lot. But we have to realize that some different evaluation methods are confusedly used, with the evaluation system’s reliability and validity not being studied sufficiently. In

addition, the researches are somewhat unilateral. Take English in university as an example it is a course that is complex and required to be studied in all dimensions. But the current researches only for English teaching evaluation are extremely valuable and rare. Evaluation systems like this will not be specific and objective. Hence it is not suitable for different subjects and the objective of evaluation cannot be reached completely.

### **3. FRAMEWORK OF EVALUATION SYSTEM FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS**

In order to improve English teachers' ability and the whole teaching standard continuously, a tentative evaluation system with guiding principles and methods is constructed.

#### **3.1 Objectives**

A good evaluation system must have explicit objectives. Before evaluators embark on the activity they ought to be quite clear as to the purposes, and that they focus on these principles as evaluators plan it, carry it out and present the results. It also provides feedback to the staff to enable revisions and refinements to be made to the content and presentation of a course. It may also be used to assist in the annual review of staff performance. The teaching evaluation system designed for English teachers should be based on several objectives.

##### **3.1.1 Specific Evaluation for English Teachers**

On the basis of the characteristics of English, which should be stressed on English acquisition and intercultural communication, this evaluation system is trying the best to embody the specialty of English teaching. Hence English teachers' teaching process, teaching methods and the results are all included in this system. By using the system evaluators and English teachers can discover where improvements could be made to design the teaching methods and can also identify good practice and lessons for the future.

##### **3.1.2 Inspiring Effects on English Teachers**

This system aims to help teachers get enough information of their own teaching and are determined to adjust the weaknesses, search for more teaching theories and improve English teaching finally. The teachers who are evaluated can adjust their teaching accordingly, and they are urged to interpret the impersonal evaluation standard into their inherent motivation, thereby to make a further improvement of the quality of teaching radically. This kind of principle embodies humanities concern and makes teachers become teacher-scholar model. English teachers should be scholars who can bring current, innovative and relevant knowledge of the discipline to the instructional setting. They can identify and communicate the objectives and expectations of the course to students and select methods of teaching and learning that are appropriate for certain instructional setting.

#### **3.1.3 Objectivity and Impartiality Throughout the Evaluation**

Evaluation processes shall be fair and transparent, which means the process should be explicit and understood at the outset of the evaluation process. Administrators at all levels (department, school, and institution), in collaboration with teachers, should set clear standards for both outstanding teaching and acceptable teaching, and they should publicize the evaluation criteria so that everyone is clear about institutional expectations. Otherwise it will lead teachers to distrust the evaluation process and to question the validity of the results it produces.

Basing on the opinions of the staff, including leaders, experts, administrators and teachers. Just as Rick Sawa (1995) says the greater the opportunity for participation by parties affected by a decision, the greater the potential for acceptability of the decision. In this way the contents and precautions are clearly constructed and acknowledged, the relationship between teachers and leaders is greatly alleviated. Under this kind of comfortable circumstances, teachers are able to promote the professional skills and study the teaching materials intensively according to the outlines of the course, which is beneficial to English teaching.

#### **3.2 Principles**

##### **3.2.1 Various Evaluation Participants With Self-Evaluation at the Core**

The evaluation system proposed here is a substitute for the traditional one, which means it is a transform from unique evaluation to multi-evaluation. More than one evaluating group is involved for the accuracy and reliability. So evaluation of teaching effectiveness should be multi-faceted.

Among these evaluating participants, self-evaluation should be the core for it allows English teachers to make a regular assessment of what they are doing in the classroom. They can a) check to see to what extent their assumptions about their own teaching are reflected in their actual teaching practices; b) help themselves reflect on the causes and reasoning behind student responses; c) make any similarities and discrepancies between the expectations and the feedback more obvious, thus encouraging further reflection on the feedback. Only in this way will English teachers' self-control, self-perfect, and self-regulation be greatly exerted.

##### **3.2.2 Comprehensive Evaluation Centering on Teaching Ability**

Teaching evaluation must be comprehensive and include all the teaching aspects of English teachers. Because English learning is a continuous and long-term activity hence the teaching achievement cannot be assessed simply and for a short time. Combining with the current evaluation methods a tentative system concerning English teachers' creativity and practical ability is under consideration. Besides teachers' personality and achievement of English are also of great importance.

### **3.2.3 Formative and Summative Evaluation Being Integrated**

As mentioned in part 3, the most commonly used evaluation methods nowadays are summative and formative evaluation. Either of them has advantages and shortcomings as well. According to the current teaching situation, combining these two is necessary for English teaching. In particular, we can make good use of the formative evaluation so as to fulfill teachers' adjustment and development.

### **3.2.4 Evaluating Results Being Fed Back Timely**

Evaluating results are precious for university and teacher development. Evaluators ought to provide teachers with specific feedback regarding their strengths, ways to enhance their performance and/or areas for improvement. This principle emphasizes the attitude exchanging and identification between evaluators and English teachers. It fully embodies respects for individual teacher. At the same time universities can re-examine the results and the principles, which have been used, in order to rearrange some details for the next evaluation.

### **3.2.5 Optimizing the System Constantly**

Evaluation is not only an assessment of teaching but guidance for the next evaluation task. Education is a systematic project and English teaching is dynamic with techniques developing, students changing and contents renewing. Consequently the system for evaluating English teaching must be adjusted regularly. We should hold a reflective attitude toward the evaluation system to make sure that it is scientific and accepted by most teachers needs. In addition continuous adjustment would enrich the system and make it perfect. There is no fixed and invariant evaluation, especially the evaluation for English teaching.

## **3.3 Evaluation Subjects**

### **3.3.1 Students**

Student feedback is one way of gaining recognition of subject and teaching strengths, and provides information on areas that may need further development or change. As the intended beneficiaries of all teaching, students are in a better position than anyone else to judge certain aspects of teaching, such as how clear, interesting, respectful, and fair the English teachers have influenced their attitude toward the course subject, their motivation to learn it, and their self-confidence.

But actually few students are equipped to judge whether a course is adequate, the assignments and tests are appropriately challenging, and the content and learning objectives are consistent with the course's intended role in the department. Hence it is advisable not to use student ratings as the only measure of English teaching effectiveness. Other useful sources for teaching effectiveness measurement could be used.

### **3.3.2 Peers**

For English teaching peer review is important because teaching entails learning from experience, which is difficult to do without colleagues and perhaps most important, peer review puts English teachers in charge of the quality of their work as teachers.

But we must make sure peer evaluation should follow these principles: a) the process should focus on agreed aspects of English teaching, friendly constructive purpose; b) peer evaluation statements will be shared between evaluator and colleague; c) it should be conducted over a period of time like one semester and should be a continuous improvement process; and 4) the evaluating process should be objective with the pre-agreed criteria.

### **3.3.3 Self**

Another important evidence of English teaching effectiveness is evidence that teachers provide by themselves. Although they may not be the best judges of the teaching, the perspective they provide can be extremely important in providing context for other evidence in the evaluation. There are countless approaches to gather formative information such as teaching portfolio, self-reporting, teaching diaries, publications, questionnaire ratings, assessment of tests, and evaluation of syllabi, etc.

Just take portfolio as the example; it is a collection of materials that document the English teacher's teaching goals, strengths, and accomplishments. It would include syllabi, course materials, audiotape and videotape recordings, sample assignments, and an explanation for the rationale behind the assignments, and how teaching methods and course materials help students learn English.

### **3.3.4 Outside Observers**

In addition to the three parties directly involved in a course, the students, the peers and the teacher himself, researchers insist that valuable information can be obtained from the observations of a forth party, someone who brings both an outsider's perspective and professional expertise to the task, usually including experts, chairs, instructional specialist and other constituents. Avoiding mistaken viewpoints, they need to get as many new perspectives on teaching as soon as possible rather than only visiting one or two class sessions which may lead to unilateral judgment and do not know what happens in the rest of the course. Also they should consider what the English teacher is trying to accomplish, the circumstances under which the teacher has to work, the kind of course being taught, the nature of the students, and the many contextual factors that should temper their judgment.

## **3.4 Methods**

All the methods that we have mentioned above, including student-provided data, peers' review, teaching portfolios, and consultants' review, require scientific and suitable methods to make sure the whole evaluation to be reliable and effective. Hence three important methods should be caused attention.



Firstly, the teaching evaluation for English teachers is a circulating and routine process. The end of the first round is also the beginning of the next one. The major procedure of this evaluation system mainly consists of four steps: criteria designing, data collection, conclusion and feedback.

Secondly, we ought to use qualitative analysis together with quantitative analysis. Evaluators should analyze lots of observation and investigation to get part of the conclusion. For one reason English teaching is such a constant and complex work that data that can be collected for evaluation are not comprehensive. For the other, some aspects of English teaching, such as the diversity of teaching contents, the hard work that teachers prepare for the class, and different teaching styles, cannot be evaluated easily only by data. In consequence, by considering these factors, evaluators should try the best to combine these two methods together and make precise decisions.

Thirdly, the evaluating procedure can make full use of the Internet to make the evaluation more easily and time-saving. The whole process of administration, investigation, response and feedback can be handled on-line. So the committee should develop such software, which is available for the evaluators to login at any moment. In this way the purpose of evaluation, its focus, reporting and responsibility for action have been publicized and all involved in the evaluation process will have sight of the outcomes as soon as possible.

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## SUMMARY

An appropriate evaluation can give English teachers the feedback on the previous courses and enhance them to think over their teaching method so as to improve the teaching level of English. Consequently, we can strengthen the construction and management of teaching staff, fulfill and promote teacher evaluation theory to develop.

Evaluation is an on-going process for universities, so researches of English teaching evaluation deserve more attention and further study. Hopefully the thesis will shed some lights on English teaching evaluation.

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