

A Study of English Teaching Differences Between China and The United States

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Abstract. According to the existing literature, the analysis of the teaching content, teaching method and assessment model in China and the United States has the same trend: Scholars generally believe that compared with the English language teaching system in China, the methods of English language education in the United States are more diverse, the educational goals are more realistic to life, and the evaluation criteria are more comprehensive. The factors cause this difference is worth investigating. This paper evaluates the applicability of these views in today's world through a questionnaire survey. Specifically, this paper attempts to assess whether the similarities and differences that scholars have found between the English language teaching systems in China and the United States still exist today or whether the development trends between the English language teaching systems of the two countries are trending in the same direction today. The study surveyed Chinese students in the U.S. - a target group with dual English learning experiences in China and the U.S. The results of the paper show that the effectiveness and applicability of the English teaching systems of the two countries need to be discussed in the cultural environment of the two countries, and there is no one-sided argument that either system is better.

Keywords: English Language Education, Language Education System difference between U.S. and China.

1. Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to review, analyze and discuss the differences in English teaching between China and the United States. As a universal international language, English is used increasingly widely in today's society. Chinese is the most spoken language in the world, and its communication significance is becoming increasingly important on the world stage. The aim and significance of studying this topic is to give enlightening opinions on the development path of English language teaching in different countries' social environments. In the existing literature, the analysis of the teaching content, teaching method and assessment model in China and the United States has the same trend: from the perspective of teaching content, the grammatical translation content of English language teaching in China takes a larger proportion. In terms of teaching methods, Chinese English language teaching has been gradually translated into audio-lingual method and communicative language teaching methods instead of grammatical translation. How English is taught in the United States has been carefully categorized. Among its many categories, bilingual education is widely used. From the assessment and examination system perspective, the assessment scope of the effectiveness of language acquisition in the United States is more comprehensive. Then, the paper evaluates the applicability of these views in today's world through a questionnaire survey.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research on The English Language Teaching System in China

According to Feng (2020), since the first edition of the English textbook was published in 1913, the content and form of English teaching in China have had a tone[1]. From the perspective of the arrangement of English textbooks, the content design strategy of grammatical translation is the main feature[1]. This characteristic indicates that Chinese language teaching does not consider oral communication the main teaching purpose. Most of the content of basic typical English teaching

books transmits English in the Chinese context[1]. This feature indicates that the content of English textbooks does not fully bear the English cultural environment. English teaching content is politicized, and its instrumental value is outstanding[1]. As China has always viewed English teaching as a tool of modernization, the proper organic learning process in the education system is not mature today[1].

Xie (2022) has a similar finding: the prevalent usage of grammatical translation in Chinese English class[2]. In addition, the "teacher-centered" and "teacher-authored" language education models limit the universality of their teaching objectives: taking examinations as the main goal, ignoring the practical goal of improving communicative competence[2]. In the remote areas of China, the content and teaching methods of grammatical translation are still the main situation in English teaching. In the 1960s, the Audio-lingual Method was introduced into the teaching system and became a popular method for college English teaching in the following 10 years[2]. The communicative language teaching method was introduced into the Chinese English education system in the 1980s as it was difficult for learners to apply the skills acquired from this method in practical communication. This approach is a "student-centered" and "contextualized teaching" language teaching approach[2]. However, this approach is still challenged by teachers' authority in Chinese culture these days.

He and Li (2023) put forward constructive suggestions for reforming English language teaching in China from the perspective of workplace application[3]. According to He and Li (2023), the purpose of English teaching in China tends to be more about whether learners follow standard grammar norms rather than improving communication skills[3]. He and Li (2023) mentioned an interesting concept: Indigenized Variants and believed that indigenized variants could help promote language learning[3]. Indigenized language can combine: 1. The learner's interests and the cultural attributes of the target language or 2. The cultural context of the learner and the suitability of the target language in that context. Moreover, from the perspective of evaluation methods, English language education in China is exam-oriented[2].

According to Jin et al. (2017), due to the segmented structure of China's educational management framework, the managers of basic education, nursery education, senior high school education and higher education in China have different regulations and requirements for the implementation of English teaching at this stage, which leads to different learning goals for English learners at different learning stages[4]. Therefore, Chinese English learners are faced with the problem of incoherent learning goals and inconsistent requirements at each stage.

McLeod-Chambless (2021) studied the characteristics of English teaching in China from the perspective of foreign teachers teaching English in China. Their cross-cultural English teaching experience includes the conflict between their original teaching methods and the English teaching system in the Chinese education system[5]. According to this paper, the socio-cultural background of English language teachers and the communication styles between teachers with different cultural backgrounds affect their teaching methods[5]. In China, most English language teachers are committed to academic success and are sensitive to students' emotional development[5]. At the same time, the policies in China's national education system did not make clear requirements and regulations on the qualifications of foreign English teachers[5].

2.2. Research on The English Language Teaching System in the U.S.

There are five ways to teach English to non-English-speaking students in the United States: "English As A Second Language (ESL), Sheltered Instruction/Structured Immersion, Transitional/Early-Exit Bilingual Education, Maintenance/Late-Exit Bilingual Education, and Two-Way Bilingual Education/Dual-Language Immersion"[6]. Moreover, the main goal of language courses for English-language learners is academic success, meaning that university enrolment rates (grades) are more important than measures of quantitative proficiency in English.

The English language teaching system in the United States focuses on English learners within the country - most of whom are diverse immigrants or groups of color. The overall goal of its English language teaching is to help English learners achieve academic or professional success in the United States[7]. More specifically, the American English teaching system is designed to increase the high

school graduation rate or college enrollment rate of English learners within the United States. According to a report published in May 2023 by the National Center for Education Statistics, there will be nearly 5 million English learners in U.S. public schools in 2020, nearly half a million more than a decade earlier. The distribution of English learners differs in different states, among which Texas has the most English learners, accounting for 20.1%; West Virginia has the fewest English learners, at 0.7%[8]. Among them, native Spanish speakers make up 75.5% of the total number of English learners and 7.8% of the total number of public school enrolments, the largest share compared to English learners of other races.

Callahan & Shifrer (2016) mentioned that the education policy for English learners in the United States is committed to addressing their language and academic development[8]. Modern English language teaching in the United States should not only pay attention to the academic achievement of English learners but also avoid social problems such as inequality of educational opportunities and racial segregation[8]. In addition, the article provides a valuable point of view for this paper, which is that the English language education system in the United States is still under great pressure in the process of translating theory into practice. The ultimate proof of the effectiveness of an English learner's participation in a course is the transcript[9]. Ziegenfuss et al. (2014) agrees if students cannot read well in English language, they will not succeed. In this process, literacy skills are an important predictor[10]. The family or cultural background of the English learner is used as the key information to provide the language environment in the classroom. Combined with what He and Li (2023) said, the suggestion of Ziegenfuss et al. (2014) is an embodiment that conforms to the cultural background of learners and the applicability of the target language in this context[3,10]. In the assessment of the effectiveness of English language learning, Ziegenfuss et al. (2014) discussed and advocated the form of "best paper" and "project execution" currently used by most states[10].

Some scholars pointed out in a report published in Education Week 2016 that 80% of American English learners were born in the United States, although most of them have immigrant backgrounds[12]. Although many scholars have made a detailed classification of English teaching methods in the United States according to the situation of English teaching in different states, the main teaching methods include Pullout/push-in Tutoring (which is suitable for learners with some basic English language experience), Sheltered English Instruction (an independent, centralized form of language Instruction for learners with low English proficiency) and Bilingual Instruction (continuous co-instruction in mother tongue and English) are three categories. Among them, most states use Bilingual Instruction in English language teaching courses. Bilingual Instruction teaching is usually progressive. In the beginning, it is based on the native language teaching of English learners and supplemented by English teaching. Gradually, the teaching time of learners' native language and English is evenly distributed, and the two languages are equally proficient[12].

2.3. Summary

Based on the above points of reference in the study of English language teaching systems in China and the United States, this paper summarizes the existing academic conclusions related to the topic as follows:

In terms of teaching content, listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the major language skills emphasized in the language textbooks of both countries. However, English education in China is based on unified teaching materials. The nature of teaching with the Chinese context as the main tenor still exists today. In contrast, the practice of English education in the United States is not uniform: according to different ethnic backgrounds, set the same English learning objectives of the textbook. These differences are mainly reflected in the differences between English learners and the social backgrounds of the two countries. The mother tongue of Chinese English learners is Putonghua, and they are in a non-target language environment in the process of English learning; English learners in the United States hold multiple native languages according to race, are unequally distributed in each state, and are in the target language environment during the process of learning English.

The communicative language teaching method is changing from communicative language to communicative language teaching method in Chinese English language teaching. The communicative language teaching method is a student-centered and context-centered language teaching method introduced into the Chinese English teaching system in the 1980s. American English language teaching methods vary from state to state. The most widely used and widely accepted teaching method is bilingual instruction, which is dedicated to making learners equally proficient in their native language and English. In China, bilingual instruction is also a way of teaching English, but its goal differs from that of the United States.

From the perspective of evaluation methods, exams are the dominant way to evaluate the effectiveness of English teaching in both China and the United States. In other words, English language education in both countries values students' academic achievement. However, the evaluation system of English language education in the United States pays attention to students' communicative ability as well as their academic performance. Therefore, its teaching evaluation methods differ from the more diverse and flexible methods of English language teaching evaluation in the United States, such as thesis writing, project execution and other evaluation methods without standard answers.

At the same time, the above scholars' research has limitations. Its limitations are as follows: First, the United States and China, as one of the largest countries in the world, have different levels of educational development in different regions. The education system in the United States varies from state to state. In this case, although scholars are aware of the differences in this uneven education development, no specific data has been collected in each state to explain the differences. Although China has a consistent education system across the country, English language teaching in some remote areas still lags behind other developed provinces or cities. Previous scholars did not elaborate on this with specific data support. At the same time, although the English scores in China's college entrance examination can uniformly reflect the differences in English language education across the country, Chinese educational institutions have not issued definitive and concrete measures to change this disparity. Secondly, most previous scholars studied the English language teaching system in China or the United States. Few scholars have made a specific analysis of the differences between the English language teaching systems of the two countries. At the same time, the scholars did not give constructive suggestions on the development direction of English language teaching in the two countries. Therefore, this paper attempts to collect and analyze the data through a questionnaire survey with practical significance to provide a reference for the research strategy of the researchers on this topic. At the same time, this paper tries to understand the reasons for the differences in English language teaching between China and the United States and the necessity and feasibility of the existence of education systems in the two countries.

3. Method

3.1. Questionnaire Design

This paper is researched and discussed through a questionnaire survey. The survey targets Chinese students in the United States. The reasons for choosing this group as the target of the investigation are as follows: Firstly, Chinese students have a dual background of receiving English language teaching in China and the United States, and their comparison of the language teaching systems of the two countries is based on their real feelings from personal experience. Therefore, this paper can find information and data with realistic significance from these survey audiences. Secondly, such surveys have a large and easily accessible audience. Thirdly, American English language education runs through the whole process of the K-12 teaching stage, and its teaching strategies and assessment methods have formed a certain basis or inertia in a specific region. This teaching basis will carry over to the language teaching of international students in higher education settings. Therefore, the English language teaching system in the higher education environment is still closely related to the issues concerned by this paper.

The questionnaire mainly includes three aspects: the target's assessment of the effectiveness of English language teaching in China, the assessment of the effectiveness of English language teaching in the United States, and the assessment and feelings of the differences in the content of English language teaching in the two countries. This paper designs 15 questions. For the above three aspects of evaluation, each aspect contains five questions. All the questions are easy to understand, ensuring the investigators can carefully complete them within five minutes. The two countries have elements of English teaching content, teaching methods, and assessment/assessment models in all three aspects. Each question is given as a Likert Scale Questionnaire with five different levels of answers: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Undecided, Agree, and Strongly Agree.

3.2. Sending and Retrieving Questionnaires

The questionnaire survey is sent by E-mail, and the answers are collected through the mail returned by the respondents. The quantity issued is 100 copies. This paper selects 20 answers with strong references according to the effective content recovered. When the questionnaire was issued, the respondents were asked to write at least 100 words about their feelings while completing and replying to the questionnaire. The criteria for selecting the questionnaire responses with research value are as follows: 1. The respondents reply to the survey by e-mail within 2 days with more than 100 words about their feelings on the survey content. 2. When the respondents received the e-mail and decided to accept the survey, they communicated with the questionnaire issuer about the research topic or asked about its purpose. 3. There were no omissions or repeated filling in the answers in the accepted questionnaire. The purpose of using this criterion is to screen out the responses that have research significance. Due to the limited number of target groups (Chinese students studying in the United States) that the survey can reach, the questionnaire needs to ensure that the selected participants are interested in the subject and carefully consider each question in the process of answering it.

4. Results

The statistical results of the questionnaire answers are as follows:

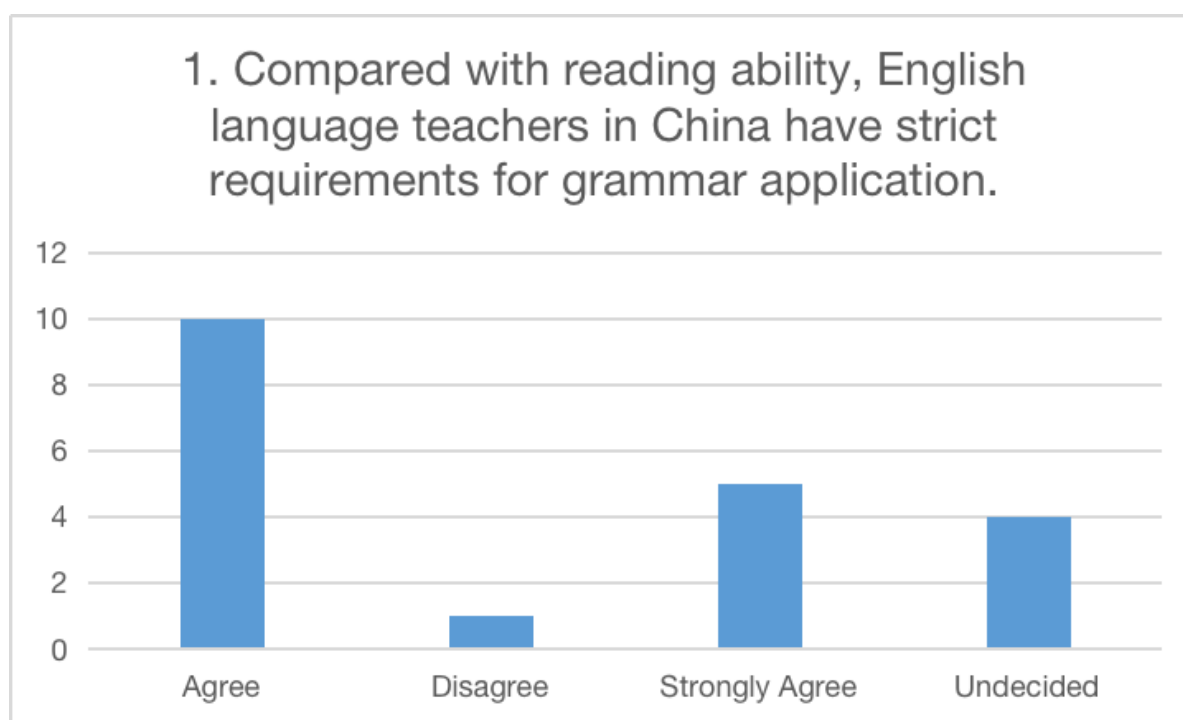


Fig. 1 Results of Question 1.

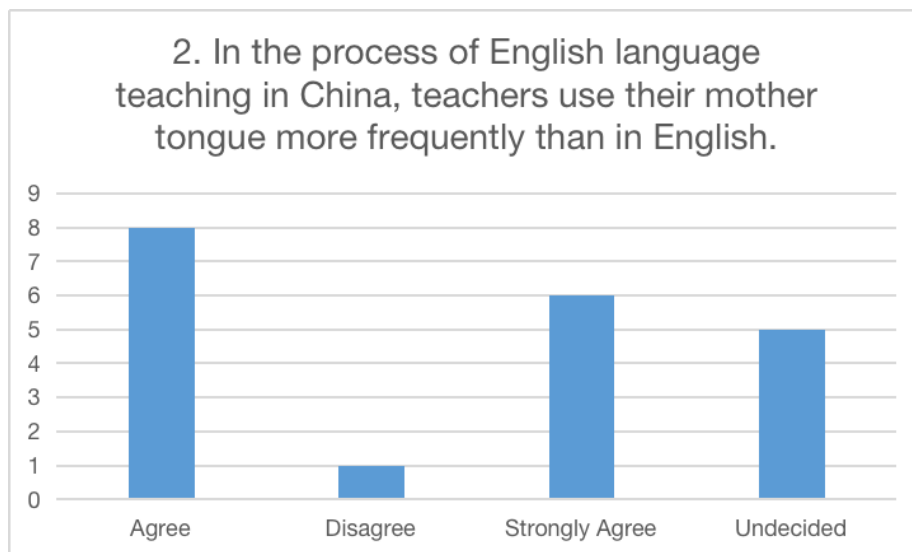


Fig. 2 Results of Question 2.

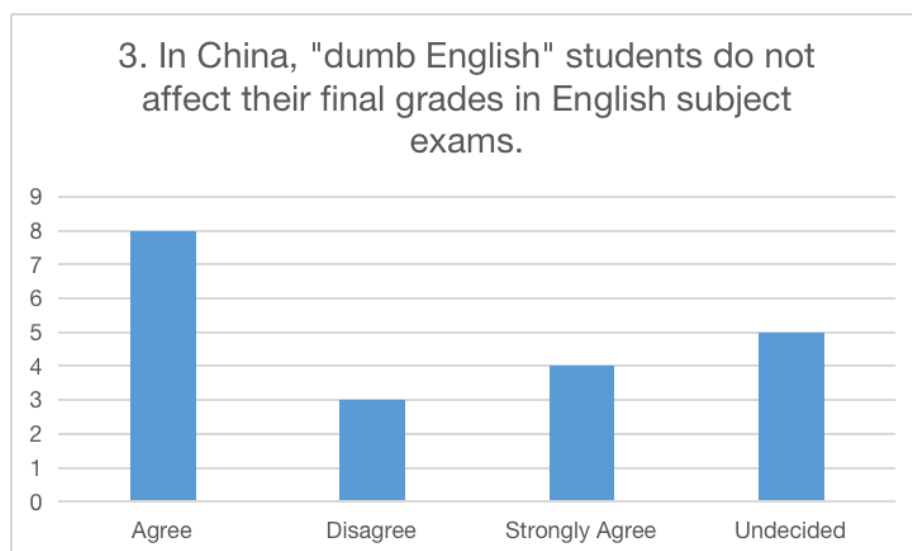


Fig. 3 Results of Question 3.

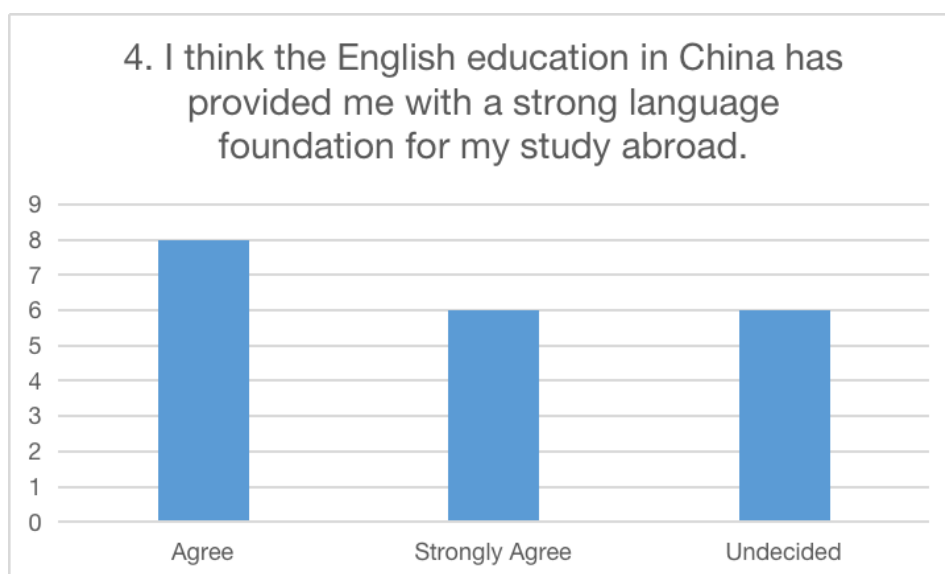


Fig. 4 Results of Question 4.

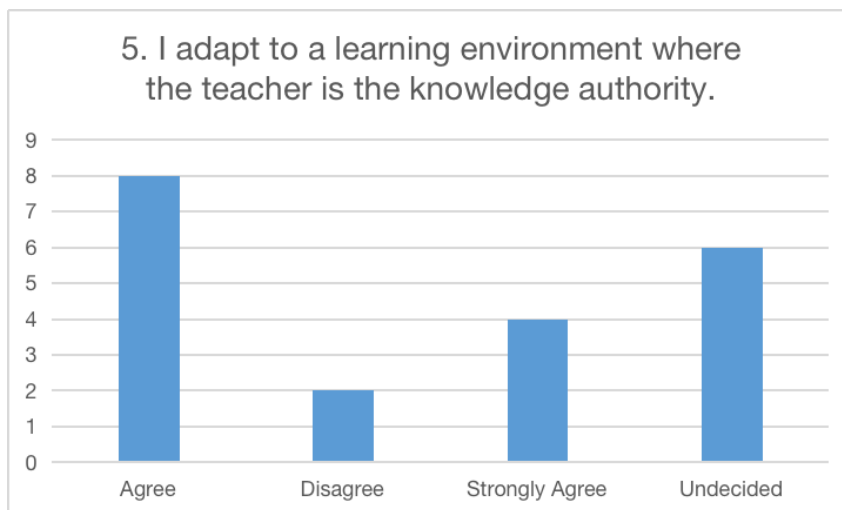


Fig. 5 Results of Question 5.

Figure 1-5 shows respondents' feedback on English education in China. As can be seen from the above survey results, most respondents "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" on these questions. In addition, 3 or fewer students expressed a "Disagree" attitude; the other students chose "Undecided". It is worth noting that in some questions, the number of respondents who expressed "Undecided" was quite large: except for the first question, only 2 respondents expressed "Undecided", and in the remaining four questions, a quarter or more respondents expressed this view.

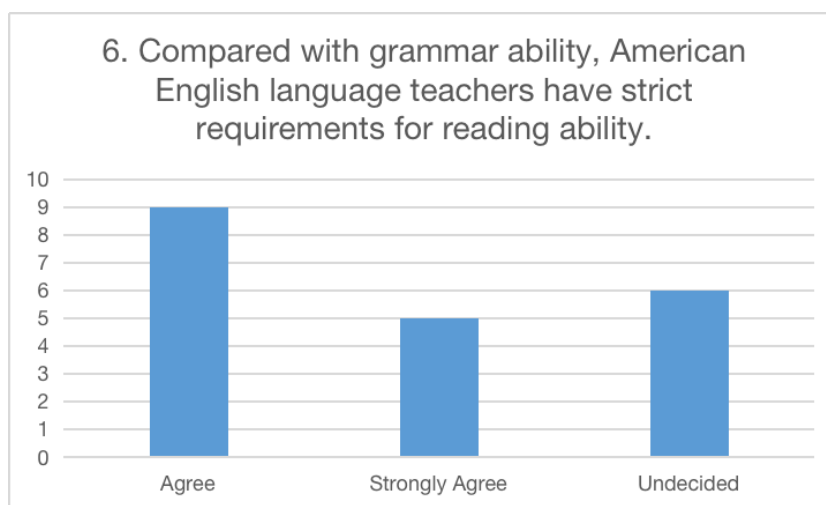


Fig. 6 Results of Question 6.

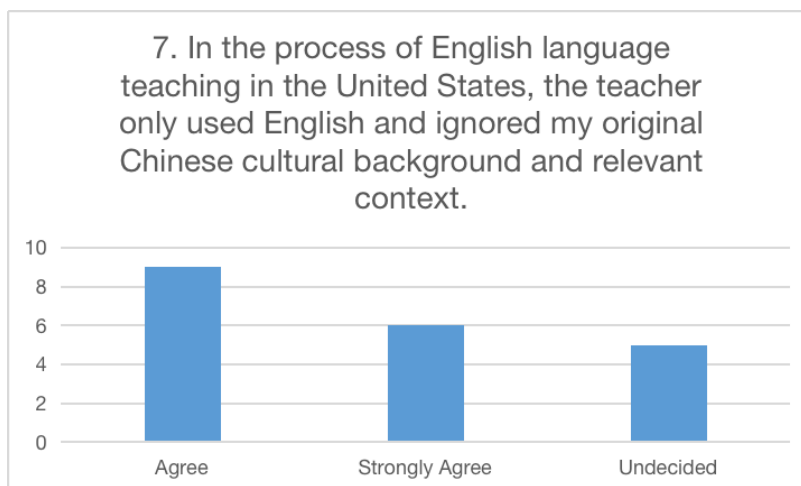


Fig. 7 Results of Question 7.

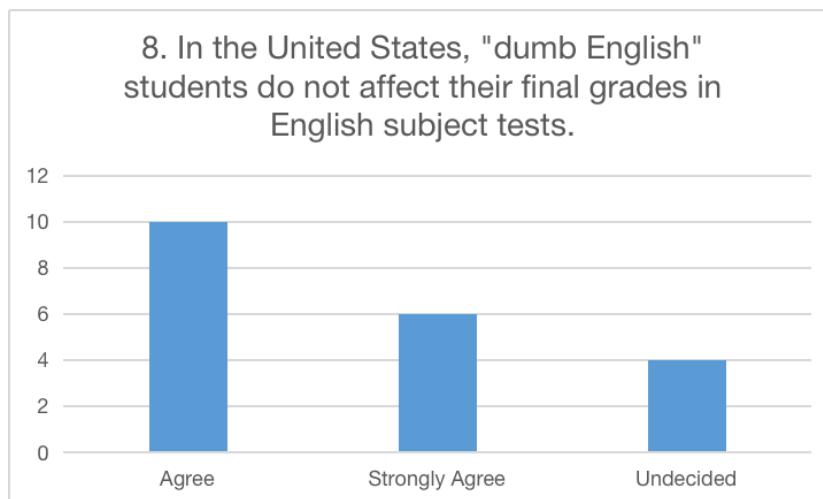


Fig. 8 Results of Question 8.

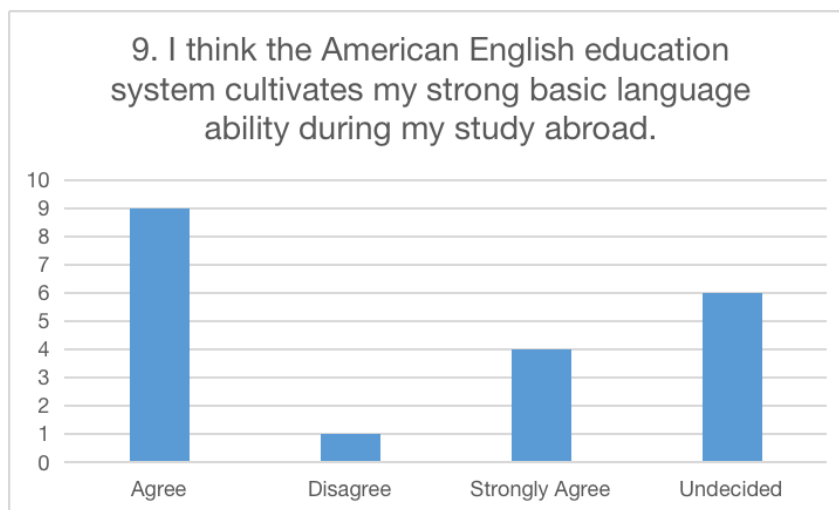


Fig. 9 Results of Question 9.

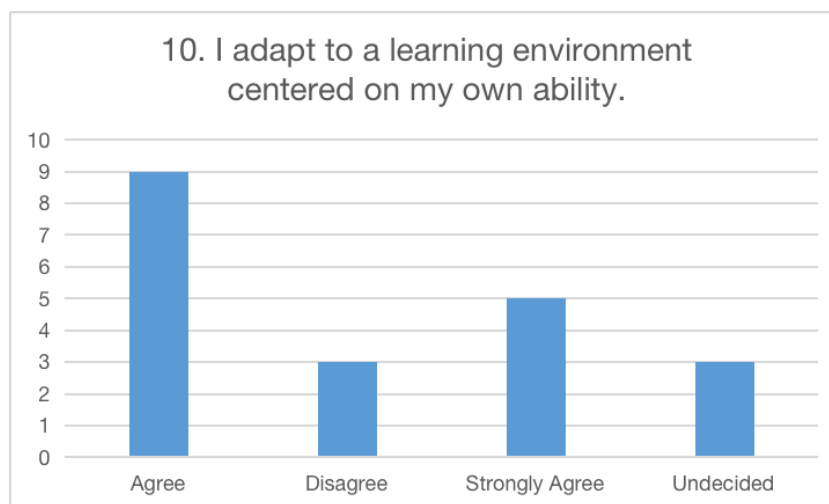


Fig. 10 Results of Question 10.

Figure 9-10 shows respondents' feedback on American English education. As can be seen from the above survey results, most of the respondents expressed "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" on these issues. It is worth noting that different from the conclusions reflected in Figure 1-5, the respondents expressed "Disagree" in Question 9 and Question 10, with 1 and 3 respondents expressing "Disagree," respectively. This shows that compared with Chinese students' evaluation of English language

teaching in China, their evaluation of English language teaching in the United States is more similar to the views expressed by the above scholars.

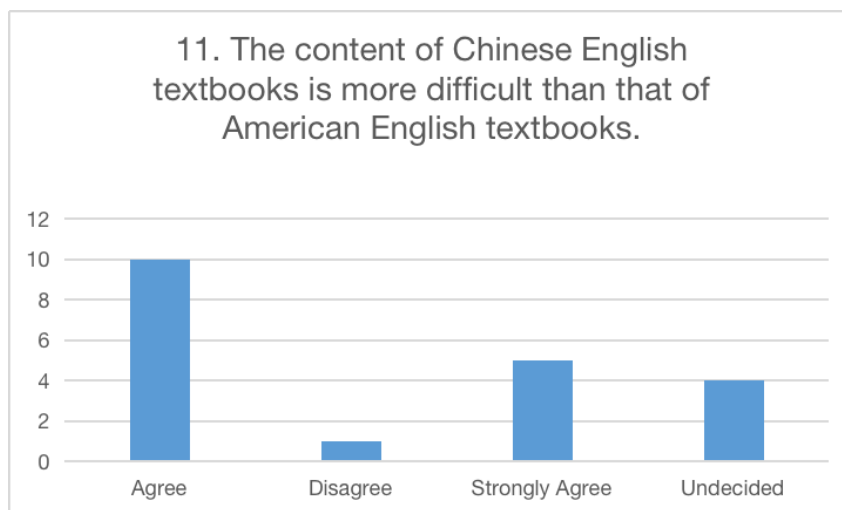


Fig. 11 Results of Question 11.

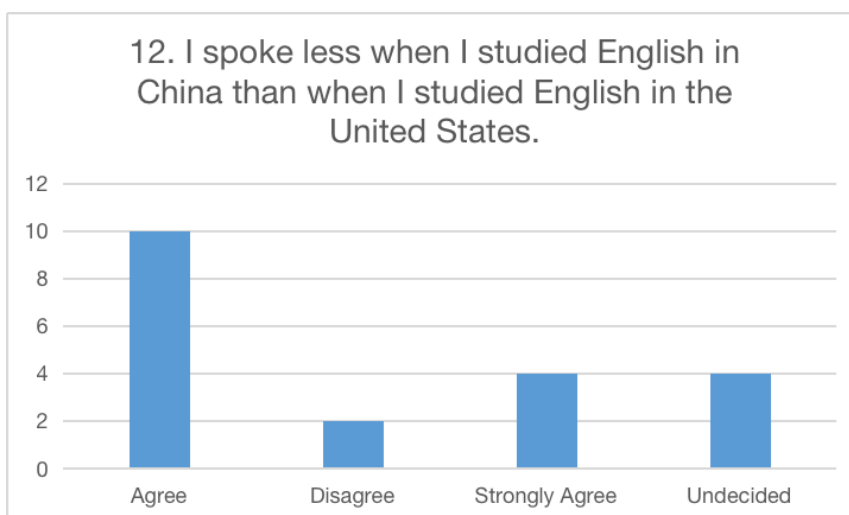


Fig. 12 Results of Question 12.

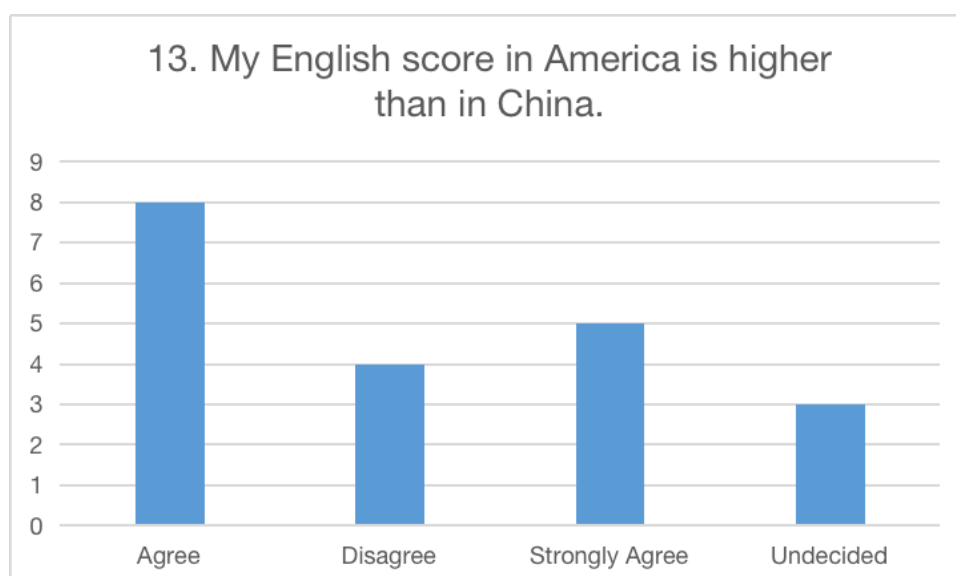


Fig. 13 Results of Question 13.

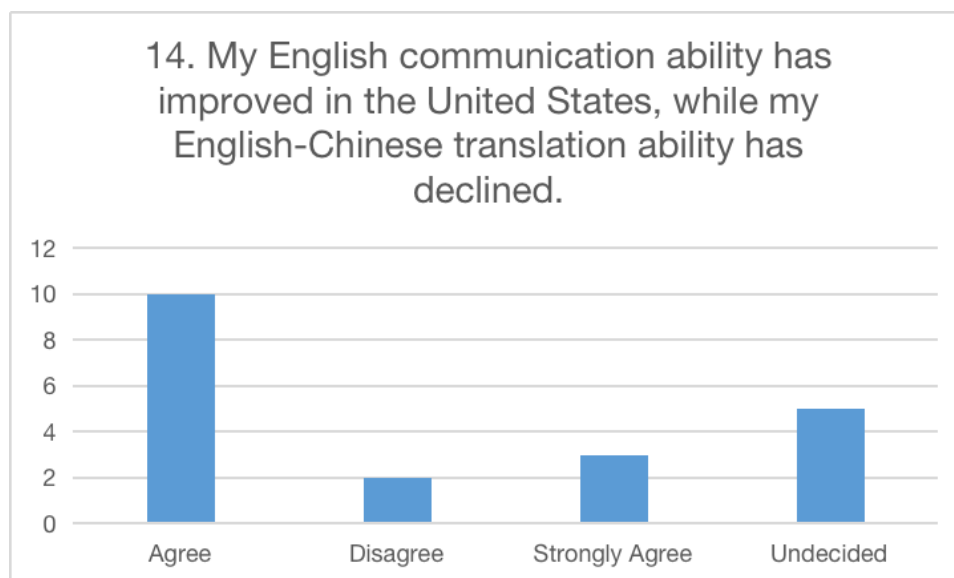


Fig. 14 Results of Question 14.

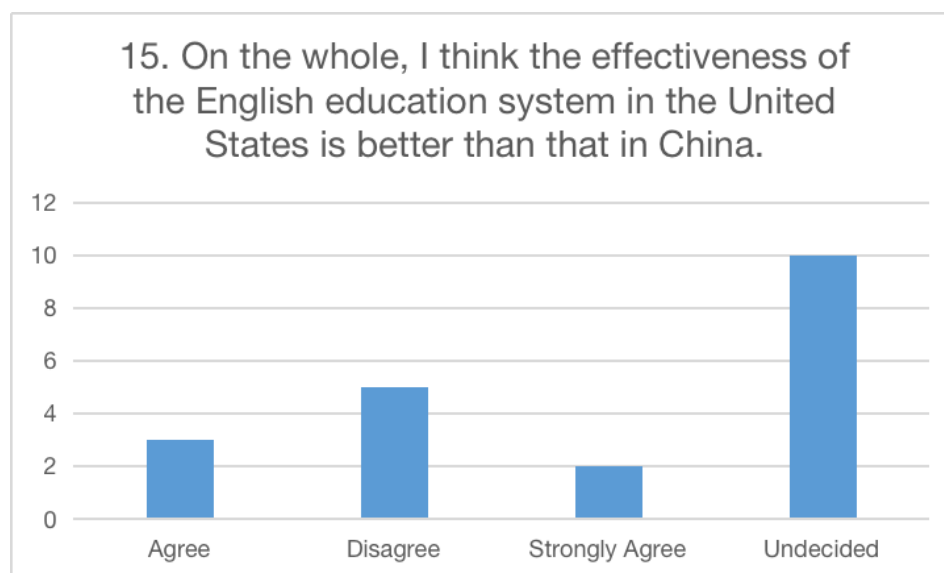


Fig. 15 Results of Question 15.

Figure 11-15 shows respondents' feedback on the comparison of English language education systems in China and the United States. As can be seen from the above survey results, most of the respondents expressed "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" on these statements. It is worth noting that the number of respondents expressing "Disagree" on individual issues is higher. For example, in Question 13, 4 respondents expressed "Disagree"; in Question 15, 5 respondents expressed "Disagree". In addition, the number of respondents who have expressed "Undecided" on these questions is more than the number of respondents with the same attitude reflected in Figure 1-10. For example, in Question 15, half of the respondents have expressed "Undecided". This situation indicates that respondents may be skeptical of some of the views of previous scholars.

5. Discussion

The ideal result of the questionnaire survey is that the respondents Strongly Agree or "Agree" with all the answers. If the ideal result is found, the existing opinions on English language education in China and America are still correct. However, several notable conclusions emerged from the survey results:

To the third question, "In China, "dumb English" students do not affect their final grades in English subject exams." Nearly half of the respondents chose the answer "Undecided" or "Disagree." This indicates that the grammatical translation strategy in Chinese historical English language teaching strategies has less influence on contemporary English teaching strategies in China than before or that the newly introduced communicative language teaching method plays an increasingly important role.

For the answer to question 13, "My English score in America is higher than in China.", nearly one-fifth of the respondents chose "Disagree". This is in contrast to the answer to question 11, "The content of Chinese English textbooks is more difficult than that of American English textbooks." In question 11, more than half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the content of English textbooks in China is more difficult than in the United States. However, some had lower English scores in the United States than in China. This phenomenon shows how closely English language education assessment standards in the United States and China are linked to textbook content. In China, the assessment criteria for the effectiveness of English learning are closely related to textbooks. Although the content in the textbook (according to the literature review, a large part of the content in the Chinese English textbook is related to grammar-translation) is more difficult than that in the American textbook due to the close connection between the test content and the textbook content, learners only need to understand the content of the book to get a good score in the exam. In contrast, while simple, American textbooks have criteria that cover content other than textbooks, such as essays or discussions, with no hard criteria. This shows that although English language teaching in the United States also focuses on improving academic performance, the soft evaluation criteria are higher.

For question 15, "On the whole, I think the effectiveness of the English education system in the United States is better than that in China." The response was also unexpected: Three-quarters of those surveyed answered "Disagree" or "Undecided." Ideally, a majority of respondents should agree with that statement. The reasons for this result are as follows: the effectiveness or usefulness of English language acquisition needs to be placed in a specific social context. In China, the practicability of language is reflected in higher grades with stronger rigid standards. China's large population base affects the educational system's criteria for selecting the best candidates, and exams with strong and rigid standards are more feasible. A similar factor that needs to be considered in selecting top performers in American education is the issue of educational equity due to race. At the same time, compared with the number of English learners in China, the number of English learners in the United States is small, so it is feasible to evaluate them comprehensively.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the similarities and differences between the English teaching systems in China and U.S. today are not completely consistent with the views of previous scholars. Firstly, as for the English language assessment methods of China and the U.S., although the main goal of both countries is to improve students' academic performance, the assessment of English learners' language ability in the United States covers more aspect than that in China. Secondly, although the American English language teaching system pays more attention to the practical ability of English learners than China, this paper argues that the assessment of the "practical ability" of English learners in the two countries should be based on the differences in the cultural and historical development of the two countries. In the United States, the group of English learners is mainly the descendants of immigrant countries; they have lived in an English language environment since childhood, and their English language foundation of "listening and speaking" is more stable than that of Chinese English learners. In addition, the "practicality" of Chinese English learners for the language is mainly reflected in the test - according to the country's language ability screening criteria, the ability to perform well on the test can reflect the practicality of English learning results.

In the future development of English education, language education policymakers, language educators and other relevant professionals and institutions in China and the United States should

strengthen exchanges and learn from each other, and understand the applicability of the characteristics of the English education system in the other country to the cultural and social environment. Therefore, on the basis of improving the completeness of the English language education system in their own country, they can promote English to become a truly universal language.

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