The Influence of Test-oriented Teaching on Chinese Students’ Long-term use of English

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Abstract: With the increasing demand for communication between different parts of the world under globalization, English as a universal language for communication has been gradually attached to importance. However, China's exam-oriented education has a profound impact on students' long-term English use. The overall goal is to explore the negative effects of exam-oriented English education on students’ English use in higher education in China. This study adopts a quantitative method to research 600 university students located in the Yangtze River Delta region of China. The research was conducted in the form of questionnaires. SPSS analysis is adopted as a generic approach to organize and interpret the data. The results show that exam-oriented education has a negative impact on students' later daily use of English. The research findings could have implications for schools, policy, and globalization.

Keywords: Test-oriented, English education, Higher education, China education.

1. Introduction

Education is evolving as a result of globalisation’s influence. As a country profoundly impacted by globalisation, China is also placing a greater emphasis on education. In recent years, China’s government has made great strides in the development of education and is constantly exploring the future direction of education (Guo, et al, 2019). In addition, English is increasingly valued as a global language because of the effects of globalisation and the advancement of global communication (Zhu, 2022). According to research conducted by Xu & Shi (2018) on the development of English education in China, English has been regarded as a compulsory course in higher education. Despite the fact that China places great emphasis on English, the traditional English teaching method focuses more on examinations. According to Zhu et al., 2020, examination-centred, one-size-fits-all teaching methods which were prevalent in more or less all disciplines of higher education and posed obstacles to students’ English learning. Therefore, this study will investigate the effect of test-oriented instruction on Chinese English learners.

2. Literature Review

Now, the contrary perspectives on this issue will be examined.

According to a review of the literature, test-based education is practised globally, especially in countries where English is not the native language (Aleroud, et al, 2020). However, as English is widely used in global communication, some academics have questioned the purpose of learning English.

Various researchers have examined this topic from various angles. Exam-centred English education primarily reflects the average English proficiency of Chinese college students based on their test scores from the perspective of schools (Bing & Su, 2022).

However, Wu & Tarc (2021) noted that test-centred English education had a negative effect on students’ long-term use of English. Exam-centred English education students will struggle with everyday oral communication (Yin, 2022).

Therefore, there is no universal agreement with regards to the effects of test-centred English education on university students’ use of English. This study will examine the impact of exam-centred English education on students’ use of English, as many researchers make evaluation about students’ English language proficiency based on their grades. From the perspective of English language use, this study will look into the relationship between test-centred English language education and students’ long-term English language use.

As exam-centred education has been studied at other stages of education, such as the secondary level, Moodie (2018) has argued that an exam-centred approach to English curriculum education at the secondary school level should receive more attention. Students at the secondary level are primarily motivated by their ability to pass exams, and there is a correlation between their motivation and test-based English language education (Csizér et al, 2021). In light of this fact, it is of utmost concern how exam-focused English education affects secondary students. In recent years, test-centred education at the primary and junior secondary levels has also been a heated research topic. Primary and junior high school education in China that focuses on test-centred education can help students succeed in the next level of education (Hu & West, 2015). Therefore, research on test-centred English education at the primary or junior high level highlights whether it helps students advance to the next level of learning.

The present study is a pertinent investigation of exam-centred English language education at the university that could supplement the impact of exam-centred education on students in higher education and fill this gap.

3. Research Objective and Question

The Chinese university examinations assess all aspects of a student’s English proficiency. For instance, the university CET4 exam is not only a written test but also contains listening and speaking parts, which aid students in applying themselves in real-world situations (Wang & Wagner, 2020). Students are expected to use English more fluently in their daily lives as a result of this test’s standard. However, not all university students are able to use English in their everyday
lives afterwards, and some scholars contend that the University CET4 exam has only improved students’ overall English language skills (Han, F. (2021). Other scholars offer an additional explanation that teaching English purely for the purpose of examinations is restricted and impractical for everyday use of English, and Qingsheng (2019) has states that the traditional university level 4 examinations are insufficient for students to be able to speak or even manage simple everyday communication.

As a result, the test-centred approach to English education in Chinese universities has at least some negative effects on the long-term use of English.

This study enables the researcher to describe the impact of test-centred English education on Chinese university students’ English language proficiency. Second, the researcher examines whether fluency in long-term English language use is associated with a test-centred educational approach. This study has additional objectives. On the one hand, it can be used as a reference for other language subjects to determine whether a test-centred approach to education should be implemented. On the other hand, it can also offer recommendations for curriculum reform in schools in order to meet the needs of students. The future of English language teaching in China holds the promise of greater proficiency in the use of English than ever before (Fang, 2018). Therefore, this study can reflect this deficiency in the use of English from the perspective of university students, and this deficiency can be remedied through future English language teaching. In addition, this study provides a viewpoint from which to consider exam-centred education at the higher education level.

4. Materials or Measures

Questionnaires were used to collect data in that they enable researchers to recruit a large number of respondents and reduce research expenses. There are several ways to administer questionnaires, including self-administered, the Internet, face-to-face interviews, telephone, and postal, according to Nardi (2018), who articulates a survey as a method that focuses on gathering factual data. The survey was administered in preference to the Internet-based questionnaire in this study. This is primarily due to the survey’s suitability for surveying a larger number of participants, making it more appropriate for studies involving a large number of subjects, such as school students. This method can increase response rates at a low overall cost (Braun et al., 2021). The interviewer may then respond more honestly and without feeling uncomfortable if the researcher is excluded. Here, the benefits of Internet surveys are mentioned. In addition, data can be collected more quickly and efficiently through the use of Internet-based questionnaires as opposed to face-to-face or telephone interviews (Naya., & Narayan, (2019). This is due to university students’ extensive Internet usage on account of the extensive use of information technology as a result of globalisation. China’s college students’ Internet utilisation rate is continuously on the rise (Yang, et al.,2019).

The questionnaire contained four sections: a brief explanatory letter, questions and response format, numbers (1, 2, 3, 4..) or codes (a, b, c, d...), and additional resources. Types of questions include closed-ended questions (e.g., “To what extent is a test-centred approach to education felt among English classes?” a. None b. Occasionally c. Less often d. Often; “How much importance is attached to exams in the study of English at university?” a. Not at all b. Somewhat c. Very much d. Particularly; “Is the English you learn at school sufficient for the use of English?” a. Yes b. No) and open-ended questions (e.g., “In the process of speaking English on a daily basis, how does the vocabulary used in school exams get used in everyday English use?”). According to Cohen et al. (2018), open-ended questions can result in an excessive amount of data; as a result, these questions will be avoided. Students may feel that a large number of open-ended questions will require too much time and patience to answer. Therefore, the majority of questions will be simple multiple-choice (Mourtgos & Adams, 2019).

5. Participants

Sampling is an essential component of survey methodology, which consists of a number of components, including the target population, sampling frame, sampling strategy, and sampling error (Kaya & Bilge, 2019). In this study, probability sampling will be used as the results are more general and less subjective when compared to non-probability sampling. It indicates that all participants of the study population have an equal chance of being chosen. In addition, Lobe et al. (2008) stated that non-probability sampling was inappropriate for inferential interpretation. This strategy allows for a large sample size, which contributes to the reliability of the results.

In this case, the concepts of probability sampling and non-probability sampling can be replaced.

The researchers will divide the three regions of China’s Yangtze River Delta based on whether or not they are the students of “211” universities. Then, each district will choose two schools. The researchers will divide the universities in the Yangtze River Delta region of China based on the sampling strategy. Probability sampling is used due to a large number of students in this area and because the probability sampling method mentioned above is more suitable for logical analysis of the relationship between test-centred English education and students’ use of English, as it is more appropriate for logically structured reasoning. And categorise these schools as “211” or not. “211” schools in China refer to the 100 higher education institutions that the Chinese government has proposed for the 21st century (Li, 2020). Each district will then choose two universities: one “211” university and one non-“211” university, with each university selecting two classes from two different grade levels at random. Thus, approximately 600 university students from three districts and six universities will participate in the study. As previously stated, English is both required and universal in university settings. As a result of the proliferation of English language education at universities, the respondents to this survey come from a variety of academic backgrounds and have obtained academic achievements, which can make the survey more scientific and random and increase the reliability and validity of the findings. Before proceeding to complete the online questionnaire, all respondents will be required to sign an informed consent form attesting to their understanding of the survey’s nature. The selection of the sample will be explained in detail in the following procedures.

In addition, the questionnaire will be designed and piloted to test its validity during the preparation phase. In terms of sampling, the researcher will select six universities in three distinct regions, attempt to contact the school headmasters for consent and seek to administer an online questionnaire via the official school websites. Due to the large sample size of the study, this is the circumstance. However, in order to avoid questions with a low response rate, the questionnaire will be
distributed through the official website. Two classes from different grade levels will be selected from each school. It is essential to note that all sample selections are completely random. During the data analysis phase, the data will be entered into the software and analysed by SPSS, and a report will be generated with the results. Details will be provided in the analysis part of the study.

6. Methodology of the Analysis

According to Lobe et al. (2008), the primary objective of data analysis is to identify themes and patterns. Due to the development of statistical analysis techniques, data analysis of the survey has become more scientific and easier to conduct using software such as SPSS (Purwanto, et al., 2021). Gogtay & Thatte. (2017) noted that correlation analysis was frequently used in data analysis to determine how proficiently students used English in their daily lives, including spoken and written English. According to the aforementioned researchers (2017), correlation analysis is frequently used in data analysis to examine the relationship between two or more variables; accordingly, this study employs correlation analysis to examine the relationship between two variables.

Moreover, correlation is the primary method for checking hypotheses (Astivia & Zumbo, 2019). In addition to central tendency, additional measures will be used to describe the situation of a sample of students from the studied universities. Taking into account the type of statistics, both descriptive and inferential statistics will be employed, as the correlation between the two variables is the subject of this research and describing the influence of exam-centred university English education in China on the long-term use of English by Chinese university students is also one of the goals of this study. In most cases, descriptive statistics will come first, followed by inferential statistics. The researchers will test the hypothesis that exam-oriented English education has a negative impact on Chinese college students’ English use through the analysis. The researchers will also investigate the relationship between exam-oriented English education and students’ daily English usage. Since the quantitative data has been analysed, a report will be given to illustrate the study’s findings. Whatever the findings of this study reveal, they will be reported exactly as they are.

7. Potential Methodological Challenges

For the purpose of this research, university students served as the major population and the approach taken was in the form of an online questionnaire. According to the recorded data, the time it took the students to finish the questionnaire was approximately ten to fifteen minutes. There are a number of difficulties that could arise. To begin, there is a possibility that some students will be willing to spend time on the Internet to complete the questionnaire, which may have an effect on the response rate. As a result, the results may be biased if there is a low response rate to the questionnaires (Kato, & Miura, 2021). Secondly, it is possible that some students will feel pressured to respond to the questions on account that they may view this survey as a test. They may even attempt to find the right answer, which will have an impact on the validity and reliability of the analysis. Thirdly, since the researcher is not physically present to directly address the questions and other difficulties faced by the respondents, this may have an effect on the completion rate.

The following is the strategy for dealing with the first challenge. To begin with, make contact with the school and request that a notice be issued. This will elevate the questionnaire’s importance in the eyes of the students. Second, an online prize draw was set up at the end of the online questionnaire. This will increase student participation while also being less expensive (LaRos & Tsai, 2014). The questionnaire was then designed to minimise long, ambiguous sentences and included as many multiple-choice questions as possible, with fewer open-ended questions to answer. As a result, the rate of non-response is expected to drop.

The second issue will be addressed by informing students directly and clearly before they complete the questionnaire that the survey is completely unconnected to their academic performance and will have no bearing on their grades. To alleviate any negative feelings that students may have, they should be assured that their answers will not be revealed to their teachers, peers, or parents, allowing them to feel at ease.

The final challenge is to increase the proportion of respondents who completely fill out and submit the questionnaire so that school administrators can contact them. These will allow students to receive the questionnaire electronically. Send the questionnaire electronically through an official channel, or complete it at the school’s computer lab. The researcher’s presence on-site will enable him or her to provide appropriate direction for some of the questions.

8. Ethical Considerations and the Integrity of Research

Nowakowski defines research ethics as the fundamental ethical conduct or guidelines that should be followed in research activities. The issue of research ethics relates to the principle of respondent and research fairness. In education-related research, ethical issues cannot be ignored because ethical issues have a direct bearing on the validity of the research (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). Several issues will be examined in accordance with the principles of research ethics in the current study.

First, it studies the voluntary nature. All participants will be notified beforehand. In addition, schools and classes can choose whether or not to participate in this study. Students in the sample classes have the option to decline participation and withdraw from the study at any time. Participants should be required to receive an informed consent form and an information sheet, according to Lobe et al. (2008). This is primarily used to present the survey’s key information and how the data will be used, and participants are required to sign it before taking the survey. When students complete the questionnaire online, they will also receive a statement discussing the purpose of the survey, ensuring that each participant comprehends the objective of the study. For confidentiality, participant responses cannot be disclosed and will be appropriately de-identified.

Second, it is the researcher’s responsibility to balance the risks and interests of the participants, the researcher, and the sponsor (British Educational Research Association, 2019). Due to the low health risks and safety implications, the benefits of this research outweighed the potential threats in this study. The study’s findings may be beneficial to schools because they provide recommendations for enhancing the reform of education in university English language courses. The researchers will make every effort to avoid the negative risks. In addition, the research will meet the criteria
for integrity and impartiality.

This study’s purpose is not limited to examining a particular issue, and its impact is multifaceted. For instance, it has repercussions for the research team, as well as for the country, its policies, and its culture. Fisher and Lin (2015) argued that research into why research occurs not only aided in comprehending how research itself occurred but also had a positive effect on future research in related fields. Consequently, a study has an effect on more than one field. This exam-oriented approach to teaching English to university students has significant implications for their use of English for research.

This study’s impact is characterised by its effects on individual students, schools, policies, and culturally significant aspects.

When it comes to the study’s impact, its effects on individual students should be considered. This study could help some university students realise that exam-centred English teaching hinders their future use of English when they encounter difficulties with the language. Consequently, they should improve their daily speaking and listening skills. A significant number of students felt that an exam-oriented curriculum negatively impacted them. This is primarily reflected in their susceptibility to exam-oriented learning’s diminished self-efficacy (Shi, et al., 2018). Therefore, research on exam-centred teaching methods can assist students in recognising the limitations of such methods. This is relevant when considering the students’ emphasis on English language learning. According to Wasserberg (2018), students have negative perceptions of this exam-centred education.

From a school perspective, this study can demonstrate whether the English teaching methods implemented in schools are truly beneficial for students, for instance, whether the current English teaching methods in university English education are conducive to students’ language learning. Specifically, this study can determine whether the English teaching methods implemented in schools are genuinely beneficial to students, whether schools play a central role in the contemporary educational environment, and whether the school curriculum has a direct effect on students’ learning (Ritchie, 2018). Therefore, this study can serve an evaluative function for the school curriculum and assist schools in optimising the English university curriculum. Xiao & Yang (2019) argued that the ELA assessment could be of great function for the school curriculum and assist schools in optimising the English university curriculum. According to Wasserberg (2018), students have negative perceptions of this exam-centred education.

This study can also provide a policy-oriented reflection on China’s examination-oriented teaching policies in that educational research has some influence on the development of educational policy (Bulmer, 2021). In addition, the implications of future educational policies are being considered in the optimisation of government educational research policies (Knox, 2020). This means that relevant policies are also attempting to change, and this study is a good demonstration of the need for relevant policies in the formerly exam-centred English education research.

Taking into account the aforementioned, test-oriented teaching should be gradually replaced with a method that students can actually employ. According to Zhang & Lien (2020), China is gradually shifting the emphasis of English language teaching to actual communication with students. It is helpful for students to recognise the pros and cons of this medium of teaching by analysing its future applications in work and study. In a long run, when students enter their profession, they will be able to recognise the advantages and disadvantages of this teaching strategy.

According to Li (2020), globalisation, which is the exchange of different aspects of the world, is an inevitable phenomenon that facilitates the political and cultural exchange on a global scale. Language development facilitates international communication within the context of globalisation (Coupland, 2010). Therefore, the ability of a language to foster global communication is essential. Iranmehr & Davari (2018) have noted that under the constant influence of globalisation, the significance of languages in global communication has increased, and this is a point that requires attention in the education sector.

9. Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to investigate, among Chinese university students, the connection that exists in English language teaching that is test-centred and the long-term use of the English language. There is an increasing emphasis on exam-oriented English language education in China, particularly at the university level, as stated by Zhang & Peng (2021). As a consequence, numerous changes have been made to the curriculum of English language teaching in order to place more emphasis on students’ futures. 600 students from the Yangtze River Delta region of China comprised the population of this study, which employed a positivist research paradigm and a quantitative research approach. A questionnaire was administered to determine whether university students’ long-term use of English was negatively impacted by exam-oriented education. The conclusion has been drawn that exam-oriented English language education impeded their use of English in everyday workplace conversation.

This study used questionnaire methodology. In order to address ethical issues, the study assessed the willingness of students who were sent an electronic questionnaire to complete the form and comprehend the pertinent questions in the questionnaire. The primary objective was to send an email to a larger number of recipients in order to obtain a larger sample size. Regarding the ethical issue of the participants’ right to be informed, the measure consisted of providing them with advance notice of the study’s purpose and methods. In conclusion, this research may have repercussions for schools, policy, and globalisation, among others.

Reference


