

RETHINKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN CHINA: A HABERMASIAN PERSPECTIVE

XiangQian Che*, Prameswari Anandyatari Afbrina, ZiXuan Qi, Shuang Zhou
School of Foreign Studies, Northwestern Polytechnical University, Xi'an 710129, Shaanxi, China.
*Corresponding Author: XiangQian Che

Abstract: This paper employed Jürgen Habermas's knowledge-constitutive interest theory (KCIT) to philosophically rethink the current foreign language education (FLE) ideas for undergraduates in China. Traditionally and commonly, the nature of FLE for Chinese undergraduates focuses mainly on the instrumental attribute which sets linguistic ability improvement as a goal. Yet with the three distinct knowledge-constitutive interests given by Habermas, namely, instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory, we argued that: (a) a logical extension of instrumental rationality and positivism has long viewed FLE in China as a language skilled craft; (b) the philosophical attribute/nature of FLE is integrating, namely, it is language-based but human-centered; and (c) the FLE related courses are fundamental ones focusing on human potential realizing process and social, cultural, and emancipatory experiencing development.

Keywords: Chinese undergraduates; Foreign language education; Jürgen habermas; Knowledge-constitutive interest theory

1 INTRODUCTION

Language plays an important role at all levels of education along with the continued deepening of economic globalization[1]. To navigate their professional studies and future career, students need vast language and biliteracy skills in the form of a highly developed technological literacy[2]. The components of this literacy such as spoken language[3], writing[4], academic literacy conventions[5] have gained popularity among educational scholars. Meanwhile, as an international and global language, English is now used almost exclusively as the language of science[6]. Thus, the study of English for specific purposes (ESP) in tertiary education have long been focused by a variety of researchers. These included the subject-specific approach[7], effects of ability grouping[8], vocabulary study[9], critical thinking and metacognitive strategies[10]. Diversified and thought-provoking as they are, few of them have explained *what is the nature* and *what are the fundamental purposes* of foreign language education (FLE, especially English) for the undergraduate students.

Foreign Language education (FLE), as the most important part of foreign language education in China, long in history, indispensable in higher technology education system, has been training a large quantity of talents who have greatly contributed to the development of the nation. It has grown exponentially in recent years, especially at the higher education level[11]. However, in the past at least 30 years since college foreign language teaching reform, FLE has been encountering many bottlenecks such as ineffectiveness in teaching, students' lack of interests and *dumb English* (or *mute English*, a phenomenon that people can read and understand English as a second language but cannot speak it well)[12]. Today, with the continuous deepening of the "New Liberal-arts Construction" Project (NLCP) in China, educators and researchers are urgently facing a hitherto overlooked pivotal challenge of how to truly rethink and reevaluate the essential meaning and purposes of Foreign Language teaching for undergraduates, as it is vital to the ideas of NLCP such as building highly interdisciplinary learning and trans-cultural studies programs, cultivating students' critical thinking ability and foster their understanding of the importance of the humanities in a global context. This research focuses on the philosophical, epistemological in particular, justification of FLE for undergraduate students in China. To address this, the study introduces Jürgen Habermas's Knowledge-Constitutive Interest Theory (KCIT) as a philosophical lens to reevaluate the essential purposes of FLE, shifting the focus from mere linguistic skills to student growth. In the following sections we will first introduce the theoretical base from Jürgen Habermas and briefly trace back the FLE developments and evaluate the longstanding shortcomings formed historically in China, then reevaluate the nature of FLE for undergraduates from a Habermasian perspective in detail.

2 KNOWLEDGE-CONSTITUTIVE INTEREST THEORY(KCIT)

Habermas initially theorizes his understanding of knowledge-constitutive interests (also named cognitive interests) in his book *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Starting from the position that knowledge is historically and socially rooted and interest bound, he views knowledge as originating in human interests and means of social organization. In order to explain the relationship between knowledge and human activity, Habermas explains the cognitive interests—as the means through which we organize our daily experience. Interest is generally a pleasure that we connect with the idea of existence of an object or of an action[13]. Our perception and knowledge of reality is organized in a structured manner by our interests. He elucidates human interests in terms of technical control, communication, and emancipation

in relation to the respective social media of work, language, and power. Our discrete cognitive interests in controlling nature, social harmony, and individual growth each respond to a different problem in human experience but also lead to different forms of knowledge and knowing. The respective coupling of human interests and social media leads to a specific type of knowledge and a specific means of scientific methodology:

The human species has three cognitive interests: the technical, the practical and the emancipatory. These develop in three social media: labor, interaction and power. They are the conditions for the possibility of three sciences: the empirical-analytic, the hermeneutic and the critical. The role of these three sciences is to systematize and formalize the procedures required for basic human activities (controlling external conditions, communicating and reflecting) necessary for the functioning of the human species ...[14].

The following table presents these relationships in summary.

Table 1 Interest, Knowledge, Power and Science Linkages

Interest	Knowledge	Medium	Science
Technical	Instrumental (causal explanation)	Work	Empirical-analytic or natural science
Practical	Practical (understanding)	Language	Hermeneutic or interpretive science
Emancipatory	Emancipatory (reflection)	Power	Critical science

To be specific, purported to be used in the natural sciences, the technical interest is “based on empirical knowledge, and is governed by technical rules”[15]. Technical rationality is concerned with the discovery of expected and generalizable relationships of cause and effect, with cost-benefit ratios, and with the efficiency and effectiveness of the means used to attain ends[16]. The paradigm that integrates into technical interests, labor, and other empirical-analytic science is *instrumental rationality*. It refers to the exploitation and power of the environment; prediction about corporeal or societal events; reality which is built on empirical understanding and directed by technical regulations; and the principles of efficient control of reality, decided on the rightness of act.

Another way to construct knowledge is by using what Habermas calls the practical interest. With the aim of constructing of consensus and mutual understanding, practical interest is closely related to human relationships and communication. As is referred to in the table 1, *Hermeneutics* literally means “the art of interpretation” and hermeneutic science is concerned with understanding and constructing natural and social phenomena[17]. This mode of inquiry focuses on the clarification of conditions for communication and inter-subjectivity rather than technical control and manipulation. It is not the methods of the empirical analytic sciences which are appropriate to this task but the systematic inquiry which seeks the understanding of meaning rather than to establish causality[15]. Habermas has regarded the practical interests as the interest of understanding and making sense of the conditions for meaningful channel of communication. The actions based on practical interest, hence, are those which improved construction of shared meanings. Learning to operate practically in discussion, in Habermas’ sense of the word, involves trying to understand what others are saying on their own terms, to give them a voice, and to persuasion rather than coercion.

Emancipatory interest entails self-awareness and reflection on the effects of the individual’s own life, and a commitment to questioning usually uncontested power structures and social beliefs. Habermas ascribes the third kind of interest as the emancipatory interest which refers to a basic human interest in rational autonomy, freedom from constraints, and removal of distortions. This is an approach related to the empowering of human beings through the critique of ideologies. Gore and Zeichner use the term “critical” rather than “emancipatory”[16], but they share a similar definition: “...critical reflection incorporates moral and ethical criteria into the discourse about practical action. Here the major concern is with whether educational goals, activities and experiences lead toward forms of life that are characterized by justice, equity, caring and compassion”. It is crucial to understand that Habermas does not denigrate any one form of knowledge, but criticizes the universalistic claims of any single interest, particularly the dominance of the technical interest in modern society.

3 THE NATURE OF FLT BASED ON KCIT: LANGUAGE-BASED & HUMAN CENTERED

3.1 Positivism, Instrumental Rationality and their Influences on Foreign Language Education

Traditionally, in the technology education in China, the pedagogy paradigm of college English has been scientific since the industrialization of the society and the expansion of the theory of positivism in philosophy, resulting in the loss of “human” in the education.

Positivism, according to *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, is a philosophy of science “that ...metaphysics (is) earlier imperfect modes of knowledge and that *positive knowledge* is based on natural phenomena and their properties... as verified by the empirical sciences”. Positivists believe that philosophy paradigm should confine itself to logical and mathematical treatments and attainments of science, and that the truth only lies in scientific knowledge. Consequently, any metaphysical speculations are ruled out. These ideas had a profound impact on the development of natural and social science. Just as Aber stated, “we live in a culture that worships the technical interest, placing it in a position that used to be reserved for God and religion”[18]. At the early period of the twentieth century, as a zeitgeist, the positivism infiltrated into education, and deeply affected the evaluation, teaching methodology and people’s understanding of the meaning of education. Consequently, it contributed to the formation of the scientism-valued orientation in educational theory and practice. Positivism adopts the basic role of the empiricist schools that all knowledge has to be based on the

sense of certainty of systematic observations and only perception can claim evidence with regard to reality. The certainty of knowledge demanded by this theory means the empirical certainty of sensory evidence and the methodical certainty of obligatory unitary of procedure. Even though much progress has been made in schools and workplaces around the world in theorizing alternatives to positivist research, schools are still overwhelmingly directed by its assumptions. To put this inclination in another way, education is governed by the *instrumental rationality*. Positivism so lastingly and effectively monopolized the understanding of education that it regards education as the means to a prearranged realistic end. Within this approach, teaching and learning behaviors are elements in a system that can, in principle, be controlled. A prevailing logical extension of such structure of rationality is to treat FLT as a language skilled *workmanship* based on technical and professional knowledge. A typical application of instrumental rationality in language study is demonstrated by highlighting on control, orthodoxy, and uniform program of study, and the identical test scores as the evidence of educational success or failure. This way, the subjectivity of human being has long been heavily obscured.

It is obvious that FLE in China, especially and specifically, is dominated by these ideas for a long time. In the past at least 100 years the trajectory of language teaching was dominated by the practical needs of government and social environment, controlled by instrumental rationality and lacking respect to human beings themselves, i.e., the “spirit of human care”. Historically our English teaching was mainly specialized in training interpreters and cadres in English for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As a result, English was usually regarded as a vehicle for technology transfer, for diplomatic and military interaction, or for studying abroad. This *technization* of FLE is still none the less influential. Such concerns include unfocused teaching objectives; examination-oriented teaching; overplaying the knowledge teaching and desert the cultivation of students’ ability; etc. the root cause of these problems, being the overemphasis of instrumental nature of language. Another instance of this is that the course design of various tertiary institutions, even key universities, are still concentrating on motivating students to continue to learn English in the future and providing them with the relevant knowledge, skills, and techniques. Also, traditional focus is on the students’ external environment. It is believed then that this external environment served as a stimulus for the processes of learning, or to put it more explicitly, language training. FLE was regarded as a habit formation, the processes as word-memory, reading, writing are just making a link between stimuli from teacher and other circumstance and responses on the part of students. This link, viewed as being instrumental for learning, has to be reinforced, observed, corrected, and practiced again and again. In these English learning approaches, the students’ mental processes are largely disregarded because they are not accessible to external observation and teachers are largely subjected to positivist empirical expectations. Scores on standards tests whose typical measurement is College English Test (CET) are used to measure the performances of both teachers and students. Also, this bigotry leads to the idea that FLE can be increased by gaining a more complete mapping of the cause-and-effect relationships.

3.2 Habermas’ Repudiation of Positivism and Reconstruction of the Epistemic Subject And Interest

Habermas repudiates positivism and indeed the entire predisposition of scientism[13]. Firstly, he criticizes the application of the scientific and technological criteria as the exclusive principle for establishing the validity of all types of knowledge. The overgeneralization of positivism gets on his nerves. He believes that positivists’ ideas devalued philosophical reflection by *ignoring the condition and meaning of knowledge*. These philosophers tried to use modern scientific truth to replace the epistemology itself, and use doctrine of knowledge to replace cognitive and critical thinking. Secondly, because positivism “marks the end of theory of knowledge, ...in its place emerges the philosophy of science”, this substitution of epistemology is presented in that the knowledge subject is “no longer the system of reference”. Here the subject of cognition in Kantian and Marxian tradition was consciousness, ego, and mind—in a word, human being. The efforts of philosophy of science, or the positivism, effectively and exclusively are more targeted at sciences which are given as a “system of proposition and procedure and *renounces inquiring into knowing subject*”, which leads to science knows nothing about what one experiences, as facts of existence, that he/she must interpret, and thus evaluate, such as “inclination, love, pleasure, pain, exaltation, exhaustion”. As a result, the subjects lost their significance, whose value factors in knowledge of philosophy are excluded to the hilt, which means the self-reflection study of social-scientific phenomenon is excluded as well. This inappropriate way in knowledge philosophy can easily spawn the generalization of scientism and instrumentalism and bring catastrophic consequences to the society. Their biggest problem, as Habermas notes, is reflecting the genesis of the sciences from the perspective of an objective life structure and abandoned the experience of reflection. The (self-) reflection here is “the subject experience in itself to the extent that it becomes transparent to the history of genesis (of human being)”, and “in self-reflection, knowledge for the sake of knowledge comes to coincide with the *interest* in autonomy and responsibility”. So far he discovers the key -the “rational will”—*interest*. He demonstrates that “*Interest aims at existence*, because it expresses a relation of object of our interests to our faculty of desire... I term interests the basic orientations rooted in specific foundation conditions...of human species, namely work and interaction”[13].

3.3 KCIT-Based Nature of FLE

Habermas provides the most complete articulation of a framework that deals with different types of relationships between theory and practice. This theory should have a place in both liberal art and engineering education, as education is a typical human activity, a cognitive-ability-developing process, a perfect connection between knowledge and

interests. Or simply, to a large extent, education is the art of helping learners discover the finest ways to constitute knowledge, after all. Revolved around the explanation of Habermas' theories, in philosophy of education (or FLE specifically), we can find that the *being*, or human centered attribute lies at least in: 1) *the rediscovery of subject of cognition—human beings rather than techniques in FLE*; 2) *communicative practice where human being is rendered as the logic core of understanding*; 3) *engagement with the socio-cultural and environmental circumstances* and 4) *emancipatory interest with critical consciousness*.

3.3.1 Instructional-knowledge-based

In modern education practice and pedagogy research, due to various reasons, the majority of educators and education experts recognized the human beings' "survival" problem, and instrument-centered teaching has accumulated lots of experience in education system, teaching methods, curriculum design, textbooks, examinations, etc. In FLE for undergraduates, this is the base of its property, as "only if man in his instrumental action constitutes his natural environment from his point of view and projects himself as the opponent of an acting nature can hope for success with his method"[13]. This instrumental approach often manifests as teacher-centered pedagogy, emphasizing the transmission of knowledge and drilling of discrete language skills. Through the instrumental knowledge transfer and training, it definitely gives students survival consciousness, basic foreign language skills and disciplinary knowledge in English. In traditional *College English* and ESP classes, the focuses are these general language skills which are either transferable across disciplines or are appropriate to a particular discipline. By equipping students with such language skills as listening to lectures, read literature, write abstracts and papers in English, they will lay a solid foundation for students' success in their academic studies, scientific research and future career development.

3.3.2 Human-being-centred

Yet so far it is far from enough. Repetition and memorization do not allow students to understand the challenges of this century. Consequently, it is advisable to teach with learning *experiences* that stimulate them in developing the skills demanded by the industrial markets and modern society[19]. That is to say, it can by no means offer people enough reasons to exist as an integrated being, and it hampers to realize their being human, which leads to a situation that in modern times we have strongest survival ability, but always doubt the necessity of survival itself. The plight of the "instrumental human beings" in education field is the result of the flow of instrumental rationality, because supposedly, most of the restrictions of learners' studying can be coped with by the application of the proper techniques rather than addressing the causes of inadequacy which located in physical, psychological, and socioeconomic factors. Depressed by the way of indoctrination, undergraduates who participate in the instrumental program will experience an enduring loss of interest and motivation in learning for its own sake. In the time-consuming technical language stimulation like tedious memorization and grammatical accuracy practice, they are bound to get drab and sullen. Such process is so unvarying and monotonous that it sooner or later ceases to make any sense. Even for those who are immersed in the dull language practices where the only excitement they know is to get higher scores, they will hardly get great fulfillment, especially given the future development and real value of this process.

So positively, it is necessary to rediscover the subject of cognition in FLE which can never be regarded as single natural science. In *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Habermas agrees with Marx's meta-critique of Hegel and believes that the subject of cognition is neither "transcendental ego" (Kant), nor "absolute spirit" (Hegel), but the laboring human beings with driving force[13]. The cognitive competence embodied by subject during cognition and reformation of the world of this subject is formed and accumulated in the process of constantly changed interacting and associating with nature and other people. Accordingly, contrary to the instrumental centered, English education dominated by *human being* means that individual in class is more than just a consciousness, but also a physical body and social entity perceiving the feelings and will, and that those aspects of existent individual result in a life of aspiration and struggle, marked by joy, suffering, thinking, attaching with society and different culture, and fearing emptiness and emotionless in language learning, which constantly threatens to render that struggle meaningless. In Habermas' words, it should give students "commands, inclination, love, pleasure, pain, exaltation" through knowledge sharing, organizational performance and communication[13]. This is what Horn and Kincheloe[20] illustrate: "the process of self-discovery, emancipation, creative consciousness, nuanced scholarship can no more be objectively measured than can a (college) students' curiosity". Human-centered English education calls for the teacher who understands the learning process, the life field being taught, the students energetically involved. It is not addressed to the severe language exercises or tests, but to the life, the soul. It needs to slide into student's life earnestly, and find him with his guard down, his doors open, his attitude disinterested.

Secondly, the human-centered spirit lies in communicative practice and communicative reason, which can give us better justification of the attribute of FLE. It is obvious that English communication ability is an essential skill for undergraduates, as English is indispensable for participating in international academic conferences and international cooperation with foreign experts. Philosophically, in essence, "what raises us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we can know: language"[13]. Practical interest focuses on understanding and making meaningful sense in communication. During the process of interpretive understanding, knowledge is engendered and judgment conducted. In the educational context this orientation is manifested in the knowledge construction. It is demonstrated by sharing understanding and positive socialization. The core of this, in the education domain, is to mobilize learners to "be receptive to alternative perspectives, negotiate points of view", and more importantly, "care for both the individuals and the group as a whole"[21]. For college English environment, this practical domain means to concentrate on foreign language communication that involves students' understanding, describing, and explaining not only their ideas, but intentions, values, beliefs, feelings, and attitudes. Such communication is presumably shaped by classroom and school

norms, culture, social expectations, and most of all, linguistic codes and performance. More important than practicing the language that they are learning and feel less stressed about language, through this consensus-building process, is their personal sense of self and value of being.

3.3.3 Social interaction and cultural awareness

The driving force of innovation is social demand, and corresponding solutions have always had a major impact on society. Meanwhile, for the undergraduates, the finest way to develop their societal perspective is for them to spend time in both domestic and foreign cultures. As many researchers illustrated, a more substantive technological curriculum engages with the socio-cultural and environmental circumstances that shape, constrain, and are in fragile co-existence with the paradigms that govern human society and education. The educating of any individual, even the most intelligent, cannot fail to be powerfully influenced by the cultural, social and moral surroundings. Therefore, attentions should be drawn to the social and culture elements of FLE, as a comprehensive course. In order to truly understand and reflect the life of education, philosophy of education must extend its view from the field of education to the field of individual life, cultural life and social life, and explore their relationships.

But *what* exactly are the concepts of “social interaction” and “cultural awareness” for the undergraduates, and, more importantly, *why* so?

Habermas’ KCIT, as an epistemology for human sciences offers the philosophical basis to understanding the meaning of these two terms and its necessity in FLE. Fundamentally, what Habermas tries to rebuild “is a kind of strong social, critical epistemology”. He hopes that his epistemology can benefit the improvement of people’s social relations. Epistemology is the manifestation or critical study about the possibilities of knowledge, whose radicalization lies in elucidating the cultural, social and historical conditions of knowledge. It is hard to imagine the consequence if the connections between society, history and whether the subject or the object are cut off. As individuals, each of us is both a product and a transformer of the culture and society in which we live. In its very structure hermeneutic understanding is designed to guarantee, within cultural traditions, the possible action-orientating self-understanding of individuals and groups as well as reciprocal understanding between different individuals and groups[13]. So it involves society and culture perspectives results in learners motivated to take collective social actions and examine cultural forms. These social and cultural actions may consist of working in tune with individuals that think similarly or, collectively, of making either cultural or social changes in interpersonal relationships, organizations, or communities[22]. For another, similarly, instead of taking place in a vacuum or in an imaginary societal background foreign language use reflected in a genuine and actual collective context. Cultural and social contexts construct languages, and language creates cultural and social contexts: ones constitute the others. They are so intricately interwoven that one cannot separate them without losing the significance. These contexts are in fact highly localized, and therefore language ability is also locally bound: it reveals the features of distinct sociocultural and institutional situations in different language use communities. Being bilingual is a way of life. One can be affected as he/she struggles to reach beyond the confines of first language and into a new language, a new culture, a new way of thinking, feeling, and acting. Rather than see a university as a collection of disparate departments, faculties, schools and centers there is a unifying theme and Habermas suggests we call it a *life-world*. Consequently, FLE is not a neutral vehicle but a social practice, and foreign language ability must be understood within specific sociocultural and institutional settings, and FL ability should lay stress on the sociocultural and institutional settings and in a variety of practices. Hence it would seem that the interpretation of the social interaction and cultural awareness “must be authentic for the individuals involved and communicable within the group”, and “social interaction” and “cultural awareness”, in all probability, mean 1) illuminating the relative social structures and assumptions that underlie their actions; 2) discovering the social norms and potentials bounding the adequate policy actions; and 3) revealing how their actions are, or will be, perceived by other participants and observers in the educational course of action.

Central to understanding the relationship between Habermas’ interest-knowledge-science categorization is his theory of communicative reason[13,23,24], with a “goal of reaching an understanding about something in the world with at least one other participant in communication”[23]. It is the major component of Habermas’ late theory of comprehensive rationality and is just closely related to his revolutionary extrication for instrumental predicament. Within communicative action and with the ability to articulate and spin off new ideas, implicitly or explicitly, members of dialogue may make the authentic and valid claims which are followed the requirements of truth, correctness or rightness, thus emphasizing the orientation of reaching understanding-or in other words, participants *orient* themselves to each other. Going after the wisdom from his idea, we can see that Habermas is concerned strongly that *being* of subject in communicative actions are embodied in an intersubjective orientation and social ground rules. As he contends, “in contexts of communicative action, we call someone rational not only if he is able to put forward an assertion..., but also if he is following an established norm and is able, when criticized, to justify his action by explicating the given situation in the light of legitimate expectations...”[23]. This theory is, of course, central to any discussion of education as a communicative and rational activity. Here in this model we find a “rational person” in learning. Habermas in his *Theory of Communicative Action* asserts, the concept of *grounding* is interwoven with that of *learning*[23]. Argumentation plays an important role in learning processes as well. Thus we call a *person rational*.

And more exactly, earners in FLE can be thus more adept at implicitly or explicitly assess and critique each other through their speech acts. An aspiration for such learners, therefore, is to identify and expose both the cultural and societal conditions, rather than to excel in tests. In any discussion of FLE, therefore, students must be inducted to take part in such dialogical actions and search social environments to bear dialogical reason, in which the transformations of the learners’ world views are ultimately ensued, and the apprehension of conditions and standards of rationality within

different communities of language formed. By defining this we can more easily discern what the foreign language teaching really is: language is not a tool or craftsmanship acquired by simple stimulation and passive reinforcement, but “a medium in which the meanings are shared, not only in the cognitive sense but in a comprehensive sense of significance that encompasses affective...”[13]. Foreign language is applied in the connection of world and life, including subjects’ mind and their social existence; the instrumental rationality offers a stage and is resolved into the consensus-reaching process and all-round development of human beings.

3.3.4 Emancipatory interest

The emancipation orientation reflects the desire to be liberated from unwarranted constraints. In the educational context, this interest is manifested through personal transformation or change as a result of overcoming internal and external constraints. In FLE, the knowledge and skills (not only of language, but through language) gained through critical reflection helps student to understand what his or her state. This process encourages students, as individuals, to challenge his or her assumptions taken for granted, to engage themselves in an open discourse of accepted values and practices, to seek out new perspectives. FLE offers a platform for reflecting, through reading, communicating, or writing, in and after class, as skills that “enhances intellectual and affective processes, including reasoning, inferences, empathy, and critical thinking” [25]. The final change in beliefs, interpretations and concepts illustrate students’ feeling: be important, respected, and accepted, and endowed with a sense of our being-together, of our community.

Emancipatory education is different from the scientific and humanistic education. Its final purpose is not to transfer some factual knowledge or cultivate the humanistic spirit, but to promote critical thinking ability, and “political socialization”, or “to activate students’ natural urge for autonomy, for responsibility consciousness, and for self-renewing and continued progress”[26]. As Aber sums up, “If the technical interest asks *how*, and the practical interest asks *what*, the emancipatory interest asks *why*” (128). The implications of this idea into FLE are appealing. To begin with, the mission of foreign language education is not to find out the key answer to solve all problems, but to guide the youth to reflect and think critically. English learning in class is seen as a process of mutual interaction, but without a critical component this form of learning corresponds only to a form of normative instrumental action. With critical consciousness the students can explain the dependence of the education system to the existing social structure and reveal the education ruled by social interests of existing ideology. Both Habermas and Grundy view the emancipatory interest as the highest form of knowledge and the goal towards which educational efforts should be directed. For example, in Habermas’ words, “in self-reflection knowledge for the sake of knowledge attains congruence with the interest in autonomy and responsibility. The emancipatory cognitive interest aims at the pursuit of reflection as such” (182). This is all about personal and collective change, but greatly ignored in college English education. It thrusts upon critical reflection on the way in which social, cultural, historic and economic forces and impetus shape meaning and how learners can examine and act to change these forces.

Furthermore, emancipatory English teaching means that it is very important to lead students not only to acquire the basic language skills at the same time, but to explore the judgment, discuss and distinguish what is allowed in the *political and scientific development*. We learn from Habermas that there is a rational justification for seeking the means for reaching decisions in a genuinely participatory democratic manner. Thus, consider some of these possible areas:

(1) *Political educating*. The content of political education is usually systematically planned to teach information, attitudes and values, so is FLE. This includes the basic knowledge of history and governmental structure, which college students generally barely know enough to. In order that they understand what freedom, equality, and fraternity are, their sense of democracy should be developed and their ability to query different cultures should be cultivated. Also, the English education will not be possible in the foreign language class if the entire school does not provide teachers with the space to do this. As Deakin Crick et al argued, enhancing learning power into classroom requires the school itself to foster articulations of professional visions and values commensurate with this, namely, a commitment to schooling which focuses on learning itself rather than on outcomes alone[27,28].

(2) *Concerning citizenship and life-long learning*. Students see good citizens as good persons and learn from those elites both at home and in English speaking communities, those who make contribution to the community, obey laws, vote, and carry out other obligations. Foreign language teachers will be able to develop the power needed for civic communication. Regardless of the learning content, these learning abilities have different degrees of relevance. This does not mean that the focus of teaching is only on the process and at the cost of the content of learning. Instead, the focus will also be on combining the knowledge, skills and understanding of the course with the values, personality, attitudes, and qualities necessary for effective lifelong learning. This aims at a meaningful learning which considers the worldview, values, personal experience, and aspirations brought by the learner. These factors are at the center of the teaching relationship, together with mutual-trust, affirmation, and challenge, which are crucial for fostering active citizenship in society.

In a nutshell, it is evident that the current educated idea in the curriculum agrees with the Habermas’ KCIT theory to a certain extent: intercultural communication is certainly necessary because it fits one of the human cognitive interests. But more broadly and significantly, we find that philosophical attribute of FLE under KCIT is integrating: it is a basic course with a human potential realizing process, a social potential and emancipatory potential experiencing development. This is the reason why we regard college English as an educating process rather than solely language teaching; this is why we cannot satisfy ourselves with the simple explanation of college English as “basic” course and argue it should be an integral course endowed with the function of general education; and this is also why we say the KCIT can unite divergent views—to put in the instrumentalism vs. humanism controversy, Constructivism and cognitive-computational tradition in KCIT ground, they are just incomplete aspects of the whole story. From all the

above, it opens an alternative for an education aimed at the critical insertion of the language education into society, incorporating the socio-economical, cultural, and critical dimensions into the education and learning processes.

4 CONCLUSION

Habermas's KCIT reveals that a comprehensive view of FLE must integrate the technical, practical, and emancipatory cognitive interests. It appears that all three cognitive interests—technical interest, practical interest, and emancipatory interest—provide us with effective ways to construct the truly FLE in technology education. A logical extension of instrumental rationality and positivism has long viewed FLE as a language skilled craft. The constraints to students' learning supposedly can be dealt with by the application of the appropriate technique. With the guidance of KCIT and Habermas' scrupulously objection we have found that such a view of FLE is too parochial. Instead of only focusing on language training, the English education for undergraduates in college should value the *being* of the students, attach importance of the social value, and care for the emancipatory dimension. Although our work does not address all the questions and gaps identified on studies related to FLE, we expect it has instigated further research on benefits and limitations of this theory and its contribution to English learning and education in tertiary education in China.

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