

Exploration of Current Situation and Strategies of English Education in Higher Vocational Colleges

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Keywords: Higher vocational colleges; English education; Reform schemes

Abstract: This paper analyses the current situation of English education in higher vocational colleges from the aspects of the curriculum system, the teaching methods, the assessment system, the textbooks and the characteristics of the students' English learning. It also finds out the causes of the existing problems, and puts forward some constructive suggestions and reform schemes based on the above situation, which are of great significance to the sound development of English education in higher vocational colleges.

1. Introduction

As one of the most important types of higher education in China, higher vocational education has developed rapidly in recent years. English education, an integral part of the whole higher vocational education in China, is a very important branch of subject. However, at present, many vocational college graduates reflect that they could not be competent to handle the practical problems in the workplace and meet the requirements of their job due to their poor English, which seriously restricts their further career development. In order to improve the quality of education in higher vocational colleges and improve the vocational ability of the students, it is necessary to understand the situation of English education in higher vocational colleges, find out the key problems and put forward pertinent reform suggestions, which will certainly play a vitally important role in promoting the current English education in higher vocational colleges [1].

In this paper, the author finds that there are many problems to be solved urgently, such as the defective English curriculum system, the obsolete teaching methods, the outdated assessment system, lack of appropriate textbooks and teaching materials, insufficient double-qualified teaching staff and so on. According to the current situations, the author puts forward some constructive suggestions and reform schemes to improve the education quality and enhance the students' integrated English language skills and the use of the target language.

2. Analysis of the Current Situation of English Education

2.1 Defective English Curriculum System.

There are serious problems in the current English curriculum system of higher vocational education. For example, the English curriculum system in some vocational colleges basically follows the teaching mode of undergraduate education, not only in the selection of teaching materials, teaching process, but also the teaching methods. The single teaching mode cannot meet the needs of talent cultivation in the modern society with rapid development. The development of the students' initiatives and creativity are limited, and their enthusiasm for learning is frustrated. Therefore, a

sound and mature curriculum system in accordance with higher vocational education characteristics is urgently needed to satisfy the needs of students' career development.

2.2 Single and Obsolete Teaching Methods.

Some English teachers in higher vocational colleges still adopt the traditional teaching mode like irrigating knowledge and explaining theories to students. They spend too much time on explaining words, phrases, grammar, analyzing sentence structures, etc, neglecting the cultivation of their ability and their inner feelings. Classroom teaching is so dull and tedious that there is always an embarrassing phenomenon—teacher is talking alone on the platform and students have fallen asleep in their seats. There is little interaction and communication between teacher and students in the class, with the teacher as the main role and the students as the supporting role. This backward teacher-centered knowledge-feeding pattern tends to treat students as machines, which is not conducive to the cultivation of students' English application ability. It is the requirement and tendency of language teaching in the new century to put the learner in the center of communication, turning the spoon feeding education into an active and creative education, which focuses on fostering the learner's intelligence and ability [2].

As vocational English is more difficult than general English, if teachers do not take appropriate measures, students will lose interest in learning. Vocational English and general English have different teaching aims and emphasize different teaching content. Unlike general English, vocational English pays more attention to cultivating students' ability to use English as a language tool to solve problems in the professional field instead of daily life. Teachers should not duplicate the teaching model of general English, but should constantly explore and carry out new teaching methods.

2.3 Outdated Assessment System.

By analysis, the author finds that there are many problems in the assessment system of English education in higher vocational colleges. (1) Single Evaluation Subject. At present, the only subject of English curriculum evaluation is teachers. However, the outdated assessment system that treats the students as the objects of assessment makes the students always in a passive situation and neglects the students' subjectivity, initiative and creativity in learning. (2) One-sided Evaluation Object. Current English curriculum evaluation regards students as the object of evaluation and only focus on learning outcomes. However, the object of evaluation should also include evaluation of students' learning activities, learning attitudes and learning methods. Therefore, we should also emphasize whether the evaluation activities can meet the needs of students. (3) Unclear Evaluation Aim. Currently, the evaluation of English course only intends to assess the students' learning outcomes or to feedback the quality of English teaching, and seldom to further analyze the evaluation results. However, the real goal of evaluation should be to improve teachers' teaching methods, stimulate students' learning motivation, promote teaching quality and improve students' learning efficiency through the analysis of evaluation results. If the purpose of evaluation is only to get simple results, but not to analyze and feedback the results, then the evaluation will be meaningless and worthless. (4) Unitary Evaluation Method. In the practice of English teaching, many teachers rely too much on summative assessment and neglect formative assessment. They often use term examinations as the sole means of assessment and pay little attention to students' learning process and daily behavior. This evaluation system, which is characterized by summative evaluation and passive acceptance of students, only emphasizes results instead of processes, and deprives the students of self-evaluation opportunities. (5) Narrow Exam Content. The exam content is outmoded, which inhibits students' creativity. And the exam content is too narrow, only focusing on textbooks and classroom notes to test the students' memory of the knowledge they have learned, which may cause students to memorize by rote and do crazy all-night cramming before the exam. This will lead to the students' mastery of limited knowledge and lower interest in learning. In brief, the traditional outdated assessment method is impeding the development of English education in higher vocational colleges.

2.4 Lack of Excellent English Textbooks and Materials.

At present, there are few professional English textbooks for higher vocational students in the market, especially lack of authoritative and standard textbooks. Some higher vocational colleges have to use undergraduate textbooks of more difficult content for higher vocational students. Therefore, there is an urgent need for well-received professional English textbooks to adapt to the vocational characteristics and English proficiency of higher vocational students. For example, the health vocational colleges are confronted with the embarrassing fact that their professional English education is short of excellent medical English or pharmaceutical English textbooks. It's also disappointing to find that almost all the textbooks short of relevant teachers' books and counseling materials. The limited texts and some monotonous exercises in the textbooks cannot fully meet the needs of students' professional English learning. Moreover, the content of the textbook is boring and divorced from reality.

2.5 Problems in Students' English Learning.

(1) Vocational college students generally reflect that they have poor English communicative ability, because they, like most Chinese English learners, pay too much attention to the reading ability and vocabulary memorization, neglecting listening and speaking abilities. It's understood that most Chinses English learners lack English language environment in their daily life, which requires the English teachers in higher vocational college to try more efforts in creating a good language learning environment in the class. (2) In English writing, higher vocational students' written ability needs to be improved. According to a recent survey, nearly half of the college students are unable to translate simple materials into English, and have difficulty in writing some simple daily practical articles. Practical writing requires students to grasp the basic formats of practical writing. However, in their writing, the standard English sentence patterns are less used, often with poor English expressions and short sentences. From the perspective of structure, the students prefer to use Chinese sentence patterns due to the different thinking modes between the two culture backgrounds.

3. The Coping Strategies of College English Education Problems

3.1 Select Appropriate Teaching Content Based on Students' Learning Needs.

For teachers, a good textbook to a teacher is like a sword to a swordsman. If used properly, it can achieve twice the results with half the effort, while a poor textbook can be an obstacle in the teaching process. For this reason, the choice of teaching materials is critically important for both teachers and students. Since there is no authoritative and standard professional English textbook for vocational college students in the market at present, we can simply get rid of the restraints of textbooks and carefully select the appropriate teaching content through the collective lesson preparation by teachers. It's of great practical significance for the English teachers in the higher vocational colleges to research and develop the school-based textbooks or materials. But this does not mean simply compressing the content of textbooks for undergraduates or postgraduate students, nor simply intercepting several passages of textbooks because of the students' different learning demands. For example, in medical English teaching, graduate students need to read a large number of frontier literature, while vocational students only need to memorize some basic and useful English medical terms and master simple dialogues in outpatient and inpatient department [3].

3.2 Combine Various Teaching Methods.

At present, many colleges generally have lagging teaching methods, single teaching means, dull classroom atmosphere, which makes the students unwilling to listen to English classes, have difficulty in expressing themselves fluently in English and have no confidence in studying English. Their mere purpose of studying English is to pass the examination and graduate smoothly. The students trained in this educational context can only know a little grammar and remember a few simple words, basically cannot and dare not speak English in their future life and career.

A variety of brand new teaching methods have sprung up in today's English teaching with the development of information technology. We witness the advent of mobile learning, blended learning, micro-lectures with digital books and materials. With the fast development of mobile phone technologies, AR, VR, 4G, etc, we have entered "Internet Plus" era, which brings opportunities and problems to English education in higher vocational colleges in China. How to effectively and efficiently utilize these methods raises a big challenge for all the English teachers and those in the higher vocational colleges are no exception [4]. Different from the old traditional teaching method, these new methods in the information era can arouse the students' interest and attract their concentration. For example, they can easily find the information they want by the search engine online and get the meanings of a new word by the apps in the smartphone. In order to give full play to their respective advantages, the English teachers should combine these advanced teaching modes, such as multimedia teaching and microteaching of wide popularity among young college students nowadays. As a result, it will enrich classroom teaching content by various means and fully mobilize students' enthusiasm in learning English. It's also believed that students' English level will be significantly improved, and the quality of teaching will also be guaranteed[5].

3.3 Establish an Assessment System with Professional Characteristics.

At present, the main body of professional English assessment is teachers, and students are not included in the assessment body. Teachers generally adopt a simple assessment method which combines the formative assessment of students' daily performance with the final assessment of English test. In addition, many teachers only pay attention to learning outcomes, but the object of assessment should also include evaluation of students' learning activities, learning attitudes and methods. In order to save time in the process of assessment, some teachers often neglect the evaluation quality, and even follow the evaluation criteria of general English without considering the professional characteristics of professional English. It is suggested that English teachers in higher vocational colleges should adopt a combined assessment system of formative assessment and summative assessment. Formative assessment includes not only teachers' evaluation of students' classroom performance (participation in classroom activities, learning attitudes, attendance), but also the students' evaluation among members of study groups and completion of extracurricular learning tasks; and summative assessment includes not only mid-term, final and classroom tests, but also some nationwide professional English tests. For instance, summative assessment in health vocational colleges can include National Medical English Test (METS). The form of the examination is not only written examination, but also oral test based on workplace dialogue. Moreover, for teachers, the ultimate goal of evaluation is to reflect on teaching methods, through the analysis and feedback of evaluation results to further improve teaching methods and improve teaching quality.

3.4 Create Workplace Language Situations.

English situational teaching refers to activating classroom teaching by creating various situations, which guides and encourages the students to play roles freely in the specific situations to complete communicative tasks in English. Situation is an important factor affecting the learning process. The construction of knowledge is always related to the specific social and cultural background, that is, context. Therefore, creation of specific English situations plays an important role in language teaching design. Using situational teaching method to actively create vivid and specific learning scenarios and promote students to more actively and effectively construct their knowledge in classroom learning can achieve good learning results. Only in the real mimetic learning situation, with the help of certain interactive means and necessary learning resources, can students restructure their own knowledge structure. Therefore, in the professional English teaching, the teachers should make every effort to design various workplace situations according to the students' different majors backgrounds so that students can have a sense of immersion, mobilized interest and enthusiasm in learning, so as to improve their English learning ability. For example, it's a simple and easy way to create situations in class using music, pictures or videos. Music is not only a psychological relaxation, if related to the content of the text, but also a means of introducing new lessons.

4. Conclusion

This paper analyses some problems existing in English teaching in higher vocational colleges and puts forward some reform schemes. The author believes that the reform of English education in higher vocational colleges should proceed from its own actual situation, innovate the suitable teaching methods, teaching materials, curriculum systems and assessment systems for its own colleges, create good language environment and workplace situations, and find a way of reform in English education that meets their actual needs.

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