

Research on Problems of English Classroom Teaching in Higher Vocational Colleges and Its Countermeasures

Taking the Textbook of *21st Century Practical College English* as an Example

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Abstract—Higher vocational students' English leaning is conducted in English classroom. English classroom teaching plays a key role in ensuring the good quality of English teaching in higher vocational colleges. Taking the textbook of "21st Century Practical College English" as an example, this paper puts forward corresponding countermeasures after reflecting on the problems of the classroom teaching, which contributes to the improvement of students' English learning enthusiasm and teaching effect.

Keywords—higher vocational English; classroom teaching; teaching problems and countermeasures

I. INTRODUCTION

With the development of economic globalization, international cooperation work more closely than ever. The market's needs for talents have changed from simplex theory-guide to application-oriented and international-type, which offers many opportunities and challenges for higher vocational colleges' students. English learning becomes more and more important and would be a necessary part in employment and career development. Higher vocational students' English leaning is carried out in English classroom. The quality of English teaching depends a lot on English classroom teaching. A large number of related papers and theses can be found when the key words of higher vocational English and classroom teaching are searched at www.cnki.net. The findings are mainly concerned with studies on current teaching condition of higher vocational college English or teaching strategies or teaching methods, among which, teaching method research is the most common one, including situational teaching, task-based teaching, hierarchical teaching, question teaching and group discussion teaching, etc. These kinds of papers and theses elaborate and demonstrate the changes in English classroom teaching in higher vocational colleges by adopting different teaching methods. Based on the previous research results, this paper focuses on the process of English classroom teaching. And in the paper, positive countermeasures are put forwarded against the specific problems in teaching the textbook of *21st Century Practical College English*. Its value lies in solving

the difficulties teachers met in a timely manner, guiding the teaching practice, optimizing the English course design in higher vocational colleges, and improving the English teaching effect. In addition, it is of great significance to enhance the English ability of higher vocational college students.

II. PROBLEMS IN TEACHING THE TEXTBOOK OF THE 21ST CENTURY PRACTICAL COLLEGE ENGLISH

The series of textbooks of *21st Century Practical College English* are compiled on basis of the Requirements of Higher Vocational English Course Teaching issued by the Ministry of Education and the talent cultivation as well as the latest achievements of teaching reform in higher vocational colleges in China. These teaching materials' content highlights the practicality and pertinence, combines the training of basic language ability with the training of communicative ability in business, and caters for 21st century's students in higher vocational colleges.

The sources of students in higher vocational colleges are diversified and complicated. Generally, they have a poor command of English and their English learning periods are limited. Moreover, they show little interest in English with low English learning motivation and initiative. In the process of teaching the textbook of the *21st Century Practical College English*, teachers encounter such problems as the following ones. Considering students' relatively short attention span, teachers intend to lengthen it by posing questions. Posing question can also be used to test whether students are listening closely in class. However, students are too worried about being asked to raise their hands. Teachers often feel embarrassed in class; Students are tired of traditional English homework, for example, doing exercises relevant to text and thus teachers' expectations to consolidate what they taught by doing homework cannot be fulfilled. What is more, the progress of the students' language knowledge does not match with the teaching materials' increasing content. Especially, when the Book Three is taught, students feel frustrated not to master more and more vocabulary, much longer listening materials and not to

complete the exercises such as blank filling and translation. Classroom interaction, under this circumstance, is time-consuming and effort-consuming. These teaching problems seriously exert a bad influence on the teaching progress and teaching effect. Students acquire little language knowledge in classroom and gradually lose their interest and enthusiasm in English learning. As a result, students' English ability cannot be increased.

III. COUNTERMEASURES IN TEACHING THE TEXTBOOK OF THE 21ST CENTURY PRACTICAL COLLEGE ENGLISH

Constructivism holds that students are subjects of information processing and active constructors of meaning rather than passive recipients of external stimuli and objects of indoctrination. Learners' autonomy and initiative should be encouraged and accepted. In terms of the role of teachers, constructivism believes that teachers should not be regarded as the givers of knowledge but the promoters of students' learning activities. Likewise, teachers are the supporters of students' meaning construction and problem-solving coach and strategy analysts. With the theoretical foundation of constructivism, the teaching countermeasures are proposed in the paper and applied in the teaching practice.

A. *Exploring the Ways of Posing Questions to Ease Students' Learning Anxiety*

During the classroom teaching, the heuristic teaching method used by teachers is to ask students questions, which has become an indispensable part of classroom teaching. The questioning process is actually a process of constant asking and solving questions. The five-type questioning is made up of rhetorical questions, follow-up question, mutual question, direct question and rhetorical question. Teachers can choose some from these types to apply to their own class. Before asking questions, teachers may pay attention to the scientific nature of the questions and assist students to develop the lines of thinking. The questioning principles concerning integrity, student subjectivity and briefness should be obeyed. In the meantime, teachers are required to take students' capability and interest into consideration. While posing question, the equal opportunities are available for all the students in the classroom to answer questions, even though some of them don't excel in English. After the student replies to the question, he or she deserves to receive positive praise from teachers for his or her performance. It is beneficial for classroom teaching to explore the ways of posing question in class.

As for the classroom teaching about the textbook of the *21st Century Practical College English*, teachers are advised to enliven the learning atmosphere and build a pleasant environment before asking questions. The voice software of name-rolling can be employed to make students relaxed. The designing of raised questions correspond with students' current leaning condition. In other words, students of different levels are asked different questions. For example, with teachers analyzing the text, students who are good at English are asked to read out any paragraph fluently or translate it. Those who are weak in English can answer some questions related to the content of the text or reference

questions regarding students' life and interests and hobbies. Students' answers end up winning teachers' encouragement and compliment. Only in this way can students find their own sense of existence and belonging in English class. And asking questions in classroom can result in accomplishing of the objectives to inspire students to understand the teaching content, checking the knowledge of students and cultivating students' creative thinking, and mobilizing students' enthusiasm. Students' learning anxiety caused by being asked is relieved.

B. *Adjusting Teaching Content to Rebuild Students' Learning Confidence*

Constructivists think that students learn new knowledge by active constructing instead of passive accepting or copying the knowledge obtained from teachers or textbooks. Therefore, teachers should stimulate students' passion, give play to their initiative and push them to engage in learning. Teachers can promote students to learn by adjusting teaching content to fit for students' cognitive development level and ability. What are taught is in accordance with students' knowledge background, understanding level and acceptance ability. The teaching content, in this way, can be absorbed and understood by students.

When learning the textbook of *21st Century Practical College English*, even if teachers clearly explain and analyze the language points in class, students still have difficulty in doing the exercises to select the right words to fill in the blanks and to translate sentences in English for they lack sufficient language knowledge, although the exercises can be completed if students keep careful track of text content. In order to rebuild students' learning confidence, teachers are suggested to instruct the students to look up the text word list before explaining questions about word selection, and to remind students to mark the part of speech and Chinese meaning of each word in the book and to review the words with special usages together. Then teachers adjust the original question direction, saying, choose one among 12 words and reclassify the words in pairs. Students can merely choose one from two words. The difficulty of the questions is cleared away and students firmly grasp and thoroughly understand the questions. For more difficult translation questions, students are reluctant to do them due to their fear of difficulties and fear of making mistakes. It is very crucial for teachers to support students to get rid of difficulties and take the first step in translation. Before teaching the specific translation exercises, the teacher may illustrate what the difference between Chinese and English are by some typical translated sentences so that the students are aware of changing the word order in translation. With the assistance of teachers, students try to understand the Chinese sentence, transforming Chinese sentence with English word order, and turn to the dictionary to eliminate the word barriers and eventually organize the English sentence. The above every single step cannot be performed without teachers' follow-up guidance. Students meet another trouble when the Book three of *21st Century Practical College English* are taught. They find it difficult to adapt themselves to the sudden increase of vocabulary and the length of listening materials.

In this case, the goal of word teaching is adjusted to learn other words after mastering key words. Driven by the sense of achievement in mastering key words, students will go ahead to learn others. When the listening materials are too long and students' listening efficiency is affected, selecting appropriate listening content in the text seems reasonable. Teachers can pick up an intensive listening project and design a variety of examination content in the project, which can not only rebuild the students' learning confidence, but also fill the students' learning needs.

C. Innovating Homework Forms to Stimulate Students' Learning Enthusiasm

Homework, a continuation and effective supplement of classroom teaching, is to help students review and consolidate what they learn in the classroom. Students' knowledge is converted into skills by doing homework. Thus homework is an essential part in teaching activities.

Traditional written homework, mainly after-text exercises, takes up a high proportion of the current English homework in higher vocational colleges. The kind of homework is relatively dull in form and repeated practice gets students fed up with them. And its structure is not reasonable enough, for it overemphasizes memory, lacks application and exploration, and ignores the cultivation of comprehensive pragmatic ability. Furthermore, without consideration of the differences in students' abilities, students are assigned the same learning task. Under such conditions, teachers are encouraged to create new homework forms by combining students' learning content with their real life closely. Students at different levels are assigned homework of different difficulty levels to enable students at different levels to finish their homework on their own. This allows students to experience the fun of success in study and stimulates students' learning enthusiasm. Taking the text entitled *Magellan's Madness* in Book one of *21st Century Practical College English* as example, the text's main idea is the Magellan's circumnavigation. As for the homework of the text, teachers might arrange that student adapt the text into a play and perform it in classroom. Two study groups are selected to complete the homework. One group is responsible to adapt it into a Chinese drama and the other one is to adapt it into an English drama. Students cooperate with each other to have the homework done in a team. They, with the sense of security, even are willing to take their initiative. This homework is in line with the psychological characteristics of students. The theme of the text in unit 1 of Book two is time management. The text quotes some words from a national youth speaker Grant Baldwin, who has some advice for starting to manage your time. Baldwin suggests choosing three overall priorities that are most important to you. The author also mentions the fact that there are a lot of distractions out there, and they can undermine even the best organizational system if you let them. Both of the two questions are associated with students' lives and study. Teachers can set two questions as follows: one is to list three overall priorities that are most important to you this term; the one is to list the distractions in class. Students can decide one of them to write down on their wish. The sort of homework

strengthens the knowledge taught by teachers in class and follows the cognitive rules of students and conforms to the knowledge level of students. As regards the innovation of oral homework, students who do not have good pronunciation can hand in the pronunciation homework about reading the words in the textbook. Students with good oral English can dub their favorite video clips with the help of mobile phone dubbing software.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the English class of higher vocational colleges, teachers teach in a serious and effective way and students actively learn and acquire knowledge, forming a benign interaction with each other, so as to maximize and optimize the effectiveness of English classroom teaching. Based on the actual classroom teaching, it is a solid guarantee for the efficient implementation of classroom teaching to find problems in teaching, explore, and put forward appropriate and reasonable countermeasures.

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