

Assignment and Practice of College English Homework in Higher Vocational Colleges

Taking the *21st Century Practical College English: Book II* as an Example

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Abstract—Homework is the extension and beneficial supplement of college English classroom teaching in higher vocational colleges. Based on the analysis of the current situation of assigning college English homework in higher vocational colleges, the principles of assigning homework are put forward in this paper. And under the guidance of those principles, taking the *21st Century Practical College English: Book II* as an example, the practice of assigning homework is carried out in order to improve students' English application ability and teachers' teaching effect.

Keywords—higher vocational colleges; college English homework; assigning and practice

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Gu Mingyuan's *Education Dictionary* [1], homework refers to all exercises that are assigned for the purpose of completing some kind of learning task. It is used to judge whether learners learn or not and what learners learned. It is also a significant channel for teachers to get teaching feedback. As far as students are concerned, specifically, homework is an important means for them to digest, absorb and consolidate what they learned in class. As for teachers, homework is necessary to timely understand students' learning, collect feedback and then guide the future teaching activities.

As an indispensable part of college English teaching, homework plays a crucial role in college English learning in higher vocational colleges. In their work entitled *The Theory, Practice and Methodology of Modern Foreign Language Teaching*, Shu Dingfang and Zhuang Zhixiang [2] points out that language is the product of needs and practices of social communication. It is only in the process of using it can people really acquire language. Homework enables teachers in higher vocational colleges to arrange some effective language practice activities for students, which is conducive to students' acquisition of language, since classroom teaching time is very limited. In addition, due to the weak learning foundation and poor learning consciousness and habits of the students from higher vocational colleges, teachers can stimulate students' interest in language learning by assigning scientific and reasonable homework with interest, diversity and practicability. Eventually, it will be of great benefit to

enhance students' independent learning ability and the effect of language learning.

II. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF ASSIGNING COLLEGE ENGLISH HOMEWORK IN HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGES

At present, college English teaching in higher vocational colleges still faces many difficulties. For example, teachers devote a lot of efforts to teaching, but students' problems in language application and communication are seriously inconsistent with teaching input. And with the introducing of various enrollment policies, the diverse sources of students brings new teaching challenges. To some degree, assigning high-quality homework in higher vocational colleges can solve such teaching problems. However, the assigning of college English homework is far from satisfactory.

A. Arbitrary Amount and Frequency of Homework

In terms of the amount and frequency of assignments, many college English teachers are quite casual. They assign homework as much as they want and even ask their students to do whatever they want when they want. Moreover, there is no homework in the early stage of every term and a large amount of homework is assigned in the later stage to fulfill the requirements of colleges. The little consistency in the amount and frequency of such homework cannot create a continuous language learning atmosphere for students. It is difficult for students to realize the importance of homework for English learning and they often do homework perfunctorily.

B. Dull Type of Homework

Priority is usually given to written homework when assigning college English homework in higher vocational colleges. There are little such types of comprehensive homework as independent study, language practice and cooperative study. The dull type of homework not only fails to provide good feedback, but also makes students lose interest in learning English after class. Students are reluctant to do the current English homework and their innovative spirit and practical ability cannot be cultivated.

C. Boring Content of Homework

The college English homework assigned by teachers in higher vocational colleges is mainly after-class exercises. Of

course, after-class exercises are carefully written by experts, which is also an important component of language learning. With the continuous improvement of textbook compilation, the interesting question design affords no substitution for exercises. But when there are many versions of reference books available, the exercises attached to textbooks cannot achieve the purpose of homework.

D. Lack of Hierarchy in Homework

The different knowledge foundation of students from higher vocational colleges results in the sharp difference in English level. It is impossible to adapt the content of homework to the actual needs of all kinds of students if students at different levels are required to complete the same homework. Good students find it so easy when the homework does not get students to have a deep exploration. Students with low English level are not able to finish it and get bored with their studies. Without considering the initiative of students' learning, the homework cannot mobilize their enthusiasm for learning.

III. THE PRINCIPLES OF ASSIGNING COLLEGE ENGLISH HOMEWORK

The method of assigning English homework means optimizing the English homework design, reducing students' homework burden and improving students' ability. English teachers are required to change the traditional way of assigning homework, carefully study the rules of students' homework and assign homework in a targeted and efficient way. In view of the current situation of college English homework in higher vocational colleges, English teachers should follow the principles as below when assigning homework.

A. Coexistence of Innovation and Diversity

Innovation is the fact that English teachers make breakthroughs in all aspects of teaching activities and do not adhere to the old rules. When assigning homework, teachers can design their own homework according to the teaching needs. Topic speech, dubbing, scenario role playing and other diverse homework can be chosen rather than the single and dull type of homework so as to develop students' multiple intelligence, enhance students' comprehensive language application ability and truly promote personal all-round development. Moreover, the full use of rich network resources contributes to achieve the innovation and diversity of homework. Through such network platforms as "Moodle" and "Blue Moyun Class", teachers can assign listening, speaking, reading, and writing homework under specific teaching situation and the types of homework like painting, audio, video and text can be adopted. Students can also submit different types of homework, either online or offline. Homework can be completed individually or in groups.

B. Equal Attention to Hierarchy and Pertinence

Hierarchy here is to assign the stratified homework. Li Xiaohong [3] states that the stratified homework is an optimized flexible homework. This homework is handed out to students who are divided into groups with similar levels in light of their different English knowledge levels and development potential. The homework differs if groups'

English levels are not same. Its purpose lies in making students with different levels get the maximum of improvement, meeting the academic needs of each group and consolidating what are learned. What is more, supplementing and improving the classroom teaching, the stratified homework can maximize the utilization of English learning resources in order to effectively assist English learning.

The students of higher vocational colleges have different personalities. The same is true for their intelligence level and cognitive structure. Teachers should attach importance to students' personality development to design different levels of homework. The students with strong learning ability are demanded to complete all the homework so that they can try their best to expand their knowledge. The homework the students with weak learning ability need to complete is some basic homework relevant to what they have learned. In this way, students with different levels can benefit a lot in their foundation and ability. And it helps to arouse students' enthusiasm and focus on the growth and progress of each student.

Pertinence and hierarchy complement each other. The pertinence is achieved by teachers who ought to make clear what the purpose of homework is and which ability is improved before assigning homework. Students have access to be aware of the practicality of homework. Furthermore, the proper amount of homework is considered. Too little amount of homework cannot bring about good learning effect. Students will suffer from excessive study pressure if the amount of homework is too large.

C. Stimulation of Interest and Award

The learning motivation originates from the intrinsic interest in the learning materials. The common approaches to draw students' interest include transferring students' interest to stimulate students' thirst for knowledge, exciting the passion for learning English by memorizing of pithy formula, encouraging students to make teaching AIDS and putting on a short drama on one's own and organizing competitions to mobilize learning interests. Teachers had better concentrate on students' life experience and interest to design homework from the perspective of students' enjoyment of learning with the intention of providing a stage for students to demonstrate their comprehensive ability. The fun of homework can be reflected by creative content, diverse forms and novel way. Students do not feel excited are willing to join and think unless the homework is interesting.

When students' curiosity is awakened by funny homework, the introduction of stimulation mechanism will promote students to keep "fresh" in learning. The appropriate praise and reward are given to the students who have good completion and progress of homework. The prize can be daily performance points and learning materials.

IV. THE PRACTICE OF ASSIGNING COLLEGE ENGLISH HOMEWORK IN HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGES: TAKING THE 21ST CENTURY PRACTICAL COLLEGE ENGLISH: BOOK II AS AN EXAMPLE

Cheng Jiangnan [4] observed the characteristics of college students' English learning and the growth rules of

students and made innovations about the assigning of college English homework. He sorted the homework into individual homework, group homework, class homework and cross-class homework based on the subject and the learning process of the subject. Under the principles of practicality, stratification and fun and multi-evaluation, Yu Hanyan [5] designed a variety of homework such as cooperation and exchange, production and practice, skills and methods, reading and writing accumulation and pre-class preview. Receiving some ideas from the above forms of homework and the posed principles of assigning homework, the author takes the *21st Century Practical College English: Book II* as an example to carry out the practice of assigning college English homework in higher vocational colleges. The whole practice process is in accordance with the teaching process, including assigning presentation homework, vocabulary dictation, establishing the workbooks synchronized with the teaching content, personalized homework and novel phonetic homework.

A. Presentation Homework

Presentation is an extremely important teaching method for college English classroom teaching in higher vocational colleges. Students can be given full play to the main role, show their learning enthusiasm and initiative and improve their comprehensive ability through the presentation activities. The presentation can be conducted in two ways during teaching. One way to present is to firstly divide the class into groups and the group members discuss together. Then a speaker or several speakers in turn will be selected to present. After the presentation, other students and teachers raised questions to discuss with the group members. The other way of presentation is that each student in the class will take turns to present instead of group and interact with other students and teachers. The topic of presentation can be offered by the teacher. And students also have the option of their topic freely. The detailed implementation procedures of presentation are accepting topic, preparation, class presentation and feedback. Among them, the topic acceptance and preparation are the process of assigning presentation homework that calls for teachers to participate in and think about. The selected topic of presentation needs to cater for students' English levels and psychological characteristics. The course of college English lasts for four terms in the higher vocational college where the author teaches. Having performed continuous teaching experiments, four topics of presentation in the four terms presented respectively are "Self-introduction", "Group Dubbing", "My Favorite English Sentence" and "Daily Oral English Practice". The topic of "Self-introduction" is presented for students will introduce themselves in the Oral English Test of National College English Test Band 4 and the future job interview. "Group Dubbing" and "My Favorite Sentence" are very popular with students. "Daily Oral English Practice" allow students to communicate easily in work after graduation. Furthermore, many students have never made presentation and they have no idea of the process and requirements of the activity. Therefore, teachers should give careful guidance to the students when assigning such homework. If multi-media presentation materials are used, PPT production should be guided to ensure that the student's

links work well and pictures and text layout are reasonable. The individual show with originality should be encouraged and some explicit advices are offered in advance.

B. Vocabulary Dictation

The acquisition of English actually is a process of reciting and memorizing. Only when reciting and memorizing a lot of English materials can students be confident in the application of English. The periodical dictation can make up the lack of vocabulary of students from higher vocational colleges and is of great help to their college English learning. The dictated words is not only limited to the key words of every unit but also can cover the unit topic vocabulary, the commonly-used vocabulary of the Practical English Test for Colleges and the high-frequency vocabulary of the National College English Test Band 4 and Band 6. The dictation in class is to check the students' preparation for dictation after class. That's why the author classifies dictation into homework. Students' increasingly solid command of English is gained by adequate and careful preparation for dictation after class. During the operation of vocabulary dictation, attention should be paid to the coordination with the innovative dictation methods in class. Students usually dislike the traditional written dictation methods. Some dictation games like selecting words by lucky number and guessing words by performing can be designed. The winner is awarded when the game is over. Students will actively do their dictation homework after they are attracted by these interesting ways of dictation.

C. Establishing the Workbooks Synchronized with the Teaching Content

Homework is intended for deepening the understanding of the knowledge and skills obtained in class and evaluating students' mastery of the knowledge. Therefore, the content of homework should be synchronized with classroom teaching content in order that teaching effect is heightened.

The synchronization with teaching content does not mean that the content of homework can merely be after-class exercises but integrates the principle of assigning homework, explores the combination of teaching content with students' cognitive law and learning needs to establish the synchronized workbooks. The workbooks are distributed to students at the beginning of the term, and the content of homework has been printed on it. Students can learn the teaching content of this unit beforehand through the homework. In the *21st Century Practical College English: Book II*, the topic of the first unit is time management. The homework set for this unit in the workbook is an either/or essay question. The first question asks students to list three overall priorities that are most important to them in this term. The Second one is addressed in the following way. There are a lot of distractions out there, and they can undermine even the best organizational system if you let them. What are the distractions while you are doing your homework? Students are conscious of the importance of time management. The text of Unit 2 is about *A Teacher's Story*. So the homework of this unit is to share the story with a teacher. Students hand in their workbooks after each unit comes to an end. To some extent, the establishment of workbook prevents the

arbitrariness of homework. And at the end of the term, students will have a complete set of study materials. Workbooks can reflect students' efforts in the learning process and learning effect and help students to accumulate plenty of language materials to meet the needs of learning.

D. Personalized Homework

The theory of multiple intelligences holds that human's intelligence types are varied and everyone has his or her own fields of intelligence that he or she is good at and not good at. However, as long as the appropriate environment and conditions are provided, supplemented by scientific guidance and individual efforts and persistence, each individual can develop and strengthen a certain kind of intelligence or several kinds of intelligence. Personalized homework is an upgraded form of layered homework. Namely, students' language foundation and learning ability are taken into account when assigning homework as well as their personal characteristics and interests. For instance, there is a student with weak English foundation who does not have any sense of achievement and existence in the author's college English class. The author notices that the student is fond of music. When learning Unit 4 of the *21st Century Practical College English: Book II*, the student is arranged to share his favorite singer and music. He is glad to do such personalized homework and later finds the motivation to attend English classes. The personalized homework also implies that the students of different majors should be assigned college English homework related to their majors.

E. Novel Phonetic Homework

There is no audio about the pronunciation of words in the *21st Century Practical College English: Book II*. Some students from higher vocational colleges are not familiar with the stressed syllables and phonetic symbols of words. The classroom teaching time is too short to correct the pronunciation of students. The task of pronunciation enhancement can only be completed after class. The words of every unit will be pronounced by teachers in the QQ class zone and then students who have difficulty in pronunciation will be assigned to imitate and clock in the zone to complete the pronunciation homework.

V. CONCLUSION

Assigning homework elaborately enables students to study in an active manner and explore with interest and confidence and responsibility, and cultivate critical thinking, the ability to find and solve problems, knowledge, emotion and personality. Teachers can get a good grasp of the teaching effect and students' learning situation by assigning homework. And the organic link of in-class and after-class can be formed.

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