



Research on the Reform of Vocational English Curriculum Based on Core Competencies of Higher Vocational English

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Abstract. This paper summarizes the research on the core competencies in domestic and foreign literature, and proposes to build and cultivate six essential characters and six key abilities of higher vocational students based on the investigation of the core competencies of the public English courses in higher vocational education. Educators should follow the principle of education and teaching of higher vocational English courses and the talent training requirements for modern vocational education. Guided by cultivating the key abilities of higher vocational students, educators aims to reconstruct the competencies-based curriculum teaching system, integrate the education mechanism of moral and technical skills, and combine language knowledge and skills training with soul-building education. In combination, the public English courses of vocational colleges and universities will be turned into soft-power courses, providing strong education guarantee and skill support for the cultivation of high-quality technical and skilled personnel, and achieving the goal of cultivating socialist builders and successors in the new era.

Keywords: Higher Vocational English · Core Competencies · Essential Characters · Key Abilities · Curriculum Reform

1 Introduction

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has repeatedly emphasized the strengthening of the Party's overall leadership of education, further pointed out that the fundamental task of school education is to cultivate morality and cultivate people, clarify the direction of running a school, and unify thinking and understanding. To run a satisfactory education for the people and cultivate socialist builders and successors, Teachers must work hard on morality education. How they will implement the fundamental task of morality education in the reform of public English courses in higher vocational schools is the major issue that higher vocational English teachers need to study further. The essential connotation of morality education is to cultivate students' necessary character, key abilities and moral sentiment. Not only should teachers pay attention to cultivating students' ability to become talents, but also the character and moral cultivation of students'

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talents, so as to cultivate students to possess the core socialist values and enable students to complete the important task of building socialism with Chinese characteristics and the great cause of national rejuvenation in the future. In view of this, this article supposes that it is student-oriented, returning to the essence and original intention of education according to the development characteristics of modern vocational education and the law of English language teaching, centering on the cultivation of the core competencies of higher vocational students, and carrying out curriculum reform and construction based on competencies' standards. To realize the integration of the sustainable development of students' personal careers with the needs of national construction and development, this English course aims at providing strong education guarantee and skill support for building a highland for training technical and skilled talents.

2 Research on Core Competencies at Home and Abroad

The essence of core competencies lies in stimulating the internal driving force of students to learn through a variety of educational methods, helping students build lifelong learning awareness and cultivating lifelong learning capabilities, and adapt to future changes in social life. In 1997, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) put forward the concept of core competencies (EeSeCo, version 1.0 of core literacy) in response to the complex challenges of talent training in the 21st century. In 2005, The core competencies of a three-dimensional framework composed of "being able to use tools interactively" [1], "being able to coordinate and communicate in heterogeneous communities" [1] and "being able to act in an autonomous and self-disciplined way" [1] is in line with UNESCO's (1997) advocacy of five pillars of core competencies consisting of "learning to seek knowledge", "learning to change", "learning to do things", "learning to live together" and "learning to survive". In 2018, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) launched a learning framework for 2030, namely EeSeCo, core competencies version 2.0, including social organization, assuming responsibility, and coordinating conflicting dilemmas. Therefore, It can be seen that the core competencies of students to cope with future challenges has changed from originality to maturity, and the core competencies are guided, cultivated and acquired through education, which fully reflect the educational purpose and requirements of "student development-oriented" in China.

Chinese scholar Lin Chongde [3] (2017) pointed out that the overall framework of students' core competencies consists of three aspects: cultural foundation, independent development and social participation; Cheng Xiaotang [2] (2016), Ren Meiqin, Wu Chaolin [6] (2020) explained the core competencies of senior high school English subjects including language ability, cultural character, thinking quality and learning ability, and pointed out that English teaching not only reflects its language value, but also highlights the unique intrinsic value of educating people in the discipline. This educating value is from studying the educating thought carried behind the language and culture, which has an important impact on the improvement of students' competencies; Cai Qingtian (2019) [4] proposed that the key to cultivating students' core competencies lies in teachers' curriculum design; Han Tianle and Zhang Xuelong [5] (2019) put forward the framework of core competencies and a training path of higher vocational

students in China. Moreover, On March 23, 2021, the Ministry of Education promulgated [7] the “English Curriculum Standards for Higher Vocational Education Colleges (2021 Edition)”, emphasizing the further development of the core competencies of higher vocational students in English subjects. Accordingly, China proposes the development of core competencies of students in different stages from basic education to higher vocational education. However, at present, there are relatively few studies on curriculum reform around the cultivation of English core competencies in higher vocational education. Therefore, the research in this paper has important practical significance.

3 The Investigation and Connotation of the Framework of Core Competencies of Public English Courses in Higher Vocational Colleges

3.1 A Survey on the Core Competencies of Higher Vocational Public English Courses

Based on the definition of the concept of core competencies in “Chinese Students’ Development of Core competencies” and the framework of core competencies of English subject proposed by Cheng Xiaotang for ordinary high school students, and combined with the current needs of China’s vocational higher education personnel training requirements, this paper formulates “Questionnaire on Core Competencies of Public English Courses for Higher Vocational Education”. Through questionnaires, This paper aims to gain insight into the impact of public English courses in higher vocational education on students’ educative effect and students’ cognition of the necessary characters and key abilities of this course. On December 12, 2019, a questionnaire survey was distributed to some students in grades 17, 18 and 19 through the questionnaire Star, and 253 questionnaires were retrieved, and the following statistical analysis was made as follows:

3.1.1 A Survey on the Impact and Role of Higher Vocational Public English Course Teaching on Higher Vocational Students’ Outlook on Life, Values, and World Outlook

It was found that 52.57% of students believed that higher vocational public English courses had a relatively large or large impact on students’ three views. 30.83% of the students thought that the public English course teaching in higher vocational colleges had a moderate impact on the three views of higher vocational students; 16.6% of the students thought that the teaching of higher vocational public English courses had little influence on the three views of higher vocational students.

3.1.2 A Survey on the Teaching of Public English Courses in Higher Vocational Colleges to Cultivate the Necessary Characters of Higher Vocational Students

It was found that the students surveyed believed that the teaching of public English courses in higher vocational colleges was responsible for cultivating the necessary characters of students. The order of the number of voters was as follows: Professional quality,

professional ethics, ideals and beliefs, physical and mental health, family and country feelings, craftsman spirit, humanistic care, and ecological awareness.

3.1.3 A Survey on the Teaching of Public English Courses in Higher Vocational Colleges to Cultivate the Key Abilities of Higher Vocational Students

It was found that the students surveyed believed that the teaching of public English courses in higher vocational colleges was responsible for cultivating the key abilities of students in higher vocational colleges. The order of the number of voters was as follows: English language ability, learning ability, professional English ability, adaptability, teamwork ability, information processing ability, cross-cultural ability and critical thinking and innovation ability.

3.1.4 A Survey on the Influence and Role of Higher Vocational Public English Course Teaching on Improving the Core Literacy of Higher Vocational Students

It was found that 58.9% of the students believed that the impact and role of higher vocational public English course teaching on improving vocational core competencies of higher vocational students were comparatively large; 29.25% of the students believed that the public English course teaching in higher vocational colleges had a moderate influence on improving the vocational core competencies of higher vocational students; 11.86% of the students believed that the public English course teaching in higher vocational colleges had little or relatively little effect on improving the core competencies of higher vocational students.

According to the analysis of the above survey results, 52.57% of the students believed that the higher vocational public English courses had a relatively large or great influence on students' outlook on life, values and world outlook. This fully shows that more than half of the students realize that the higher vocational public English course plays an important role in educating people and has the irreplaceable characteristics of other courses. However, 47.43% of the students believed that the public English courses in higher vocational schools had a very small or relatively small impact on students' three views. This also shows that the role of higher vocational public English courses in educating students has not been fully played, and there is still the problem of "water flow is not enough". 58.9% of students believed that the public English courses in higher vocational colleges had a relatively large or great influence on the core competencies of students, which shows that most students realize that public English courses in higher vocational colleges play an important role in the quality of talent training in higher vocational colleges and understand that the cultivation of core competencies is one of the important criteria for the quality of personnel training. In view of the above survey results, this paper believes that cultivating the core competencies of English courses for higher vocational students is the key to guiding the curriculum reform, and is an important training path for educating students to become useful talents for social development with excellent character and high skills. It is also an important breakthrough in the implementation of the fundamental task of "cultivating morality and cultivating people" proposed by the party's educational policy.

3.2 The Framework of the Core Competencies Connotation of Higher Vocational Public English Courses

Einstein once said, “Education is nothing more than what remains after all that has been learned has been forgotten.” The knowledge that teachers teach to students can be forgotten, but teachers condense the courses taught to students into core competencies passed onto students, which will never be forgotten by students. These competencies are integrated into students’ hearts and externalized in students’ action, which becomes a powerful weapon for students to face future social challenges. Therefore, on the basis of fully referring to the survey results of the core competencies of public English courses in higher vocational colleges and the law of development of English discipline’s own education and teaching, this paper proposes to construct the core competencies of public English courses in higher vocational colleges to meet the development requirements of cultivating high-quality technical and skilled talents.

The core competencies of higher vocational English courses refer to the six essential qualities and the six key abilities that students should possess to meet the needs of lifelong development and social development. These six essential qualities include ideals and beliefs, family and country feelings, professional ethics, professional quality, craftsman spirit and physical and mental health. Ideals and beliefs focus on cultivating students’ character elements such as faith, belief, confidence, self-esteem, ambition, responsibility and struggle; Professional ethics includes cultivating the moral principles, sentiments and qualities that students must possess to grow into professionals; Professional quality emphasizes cultivating students’ behavioral qualities such as devotion, honesty and trustworthiness, initiative, strict self-discipline, hard work and dedication in the workplace; The spirit of craftsmanship includes focusing on cultivating students with special craftsman qualities such as refinements, rigorous focus, pursuit of excellence, and skillful use of wisdom; Physical and mental health emphasizes that students not only have a healthy body, but also a healthy mind, especially a positive and optimistic attitude and an open-minded attitude towards study, work and life.

The six key competencies mentioned in the core competencies of the course include English language ability, professional English ability, teamwork cooperation ability, autonomous learning ability, cross-cultural ability and critical thinking and innovation ability.

3.2.1 English Language Ability

It is to cultivate students’ ability of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating in language situations. Students can use the vocabulary, grammar, syntax and other language knowledge they have learned to comprehensively express the ability of language thinking.

3.2.2 Professional English Ability

It refers to the relevant ability requirements of the “Occupational English Skills Level Test”, which mainly include training students’ ability to acquire information (search, extract and record information), the ability to process information (instructions, contract agreements and data reports, preparation of conferences or exhibitions, classification

and classification of information materials, etc.), written communication including writing various application papers with the help of templates, preparing meeting agendas, writing event arrangements, oral communication with international customers over the telephone.

3.2.3 Team Cooperation Ability

For a situational task for a certain workplace set by teachers in classroom teaching, students learn through group cooperation, negotiate and discuss task completion plans within the group; in the process of collaborative learning, students are trained to adapt themselves to teamwork learning atmosphere. At the same time, it also gradually cultivates students' leadership, execution and collaboration skills to take on different roles in teamwork.

3.2.4 Autonomous Learning Ability

It refers to cultivating students' autonomous learning ability, namely, maximizing their subjective initiative, being able to consciously use metacognitive strategies, planning learning plans, actively implementing effective learning, and improving lifelong learning awareness and ability; With the help of Internet + and other learning means to acquire more knowledge, students have achieved intelligent self-learning, and gradually enhanced students' knowledge transfer ability and the sustainable development ability to adapt to social changes in the future.

3.2.5 Cross-Cultural Communication Skills

It aims to strengthen students' learning and reserve of cross-cultural knowledge, enhance students' understanding of cross-cultural differences, uphold the attitude of seeking common ground while reserving differences, and inspire students to actively communicate in foreign cultures. Students are encouraged to tell a lot about Chinese stories, spread Chinese voices, and become cross-cultural friendly messenger of cultural exchange.

3.2.6 Thinking and Innovation Ability

It aims to cultivate students' spirit of pursuing truth, encourage students to constantly question and challenge authoritative viewpoints in the learning process, and follow the process of scientific argumentation (for example: problem understanding, clear concepts, specific arguments, relevant reasoning, reasonable assumptions, and comprehensive dialectics), have constantly self-reflection and adjustment, develop the awareness of innovative thinking, and enhance the practical ability of pioneering and innovative.

The core competencies of higher vocational public English courses are the key elements of curriculum reform and construction. It is necessary to integrate the core competencies of the curriculum into the whole process of curriculum construction, and truly undertake the important mission of "establishing morality" and "cultivating people", so that the higher vocational public English courses undertake the important tasks of imparting knowledge, cultivating abilities, and educating people.

4 Reform and Construction Ideas of Higher Vocational Public English Curriculum Based on Quality-Oriented Standard

Higher vocational public English courses must be based on morality and cultivating people, with the ultimate teaching goal of cultivating the core competencies of higher vocational students. Focusing on the core competencies of higher vocational English courses, Teachers should reshape higher vocational English curriculum standards, curriculum content, curriculum organization and curriculum evaluation to adapt to the development of vocational higher education in the new era and achieve the goals of talent training, and gradually form an exemplary higher vocational English curriculum teaching construction and dynamics. The development system provides a strong education guarantee and technical support for cultivating the necessary characters and key abilities of high-quality technical and technical talents in the middle and high industry chains, and meets the needs of the construction and development of the great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The specific construction paths are offered as follows:

4.1 Clarify the Fundamental Tasks of Curriculum Construction

Higher vocational public English courses should take moral cultivation as the fundamental task and develop the core competencies of vocational English of higher vocational students as the teaching goal, so as to provide education guarantee and skill support for cultivating high-quality technical and technical talents in the middle and high industry chains. Curriculum construction should more highlight the function of educating people, and undertake the historical mission of cultivating professionals with all-round development required by the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

4.2 Clarify the Direction of English Course

In the past, we had some cognitive biases on the function and role of higher vocational public English courses, and the course orientation was not completely unified to the cognitive level consistent with the instrumental and humanistic nature of language. For a long time, higher vocational English teaching has attached great importance to the tool attributes of English language, focusing on practicality and sufficient use, but neglected the educative value of English education and teaching. English course teaching pays attention to the process of acquiring language knowledge, ignoring the cultural thoughts and ways of thinking behind language knowledge, as well as the unique educational value of language thinking and cultural character. Therefore, we need to rethink and re-understand the students' educational concept of "whole person development". Higher vocational public English course is not only a tool course to promote the sustainable development of vocational students' professional ability, but also a humanistic quality education course that builds ideas and beliefs, cultivates morality, arouses family and country feelings, increases knowledge, broadens horizons, and expands thinking.

4.3 Design Curriculum Standards Based on Curriculum Core Competencies

Considering the necessary characters and key competencies that students should possess in two or three semesters of higher vocational English courses as the teaching goal,

teachers reversely design the curriculum. The indicators of the essential characters and key abilities are refined, and they are organically integrated into the formulation of higher vocational public English curriculum standards for professional groups. The core competencies of the curriculum should be integrated into the education and teaching objectives, teaching content, and teaching activity design of this course, so that curriculum teaching not only attaches great importance to the teaching of English knowledge and the cultivation of professional skills, but also integrates ideological guidance and value shaping into all aspects of English education and teaching, consolidating the cornerstone of talent training standards for various professional groups.

4.4 Adjust the Overall Structure of the Course

In accordance with the principles of the first foundation, the second improvement, and the third integration, the higher vocational public English curriculum will moderately connect and integrate the higher vocational public basic English and professional English, and adjust the overall structure of the current higher vocational English curriculum. The so-called “one foundation” means that in the first semester, students must consolidate their English language foundation, including basic English grammar knowledge, vocabulary, syntax and text knowledge, etc. The focus is on cultivating students’ English language comprehension ability; The so-called “second promotion” means that the second semester focuses on the cultivation of students’ language communication skills, especially the general oral expression skills, including oral description, oral narration, oral explanation, oral instruction, oral discussion and oral interaction, etc.; The so-called “third integrations” refers to the moderate integration of public English basic course teaching into vocational English in the third semester and the design of classroom teaching activities and tasks, which are close to the major professional fields of students, and cultivate students’ ability to use English to do things.

4.5 Construct a Classroom Teaching Design Based on the Teaching Concept of Production-Oriented Approach to Maximize the Effectiveness of Classroom Teaching

The core of the output-oriented classroom teaching theory is to focus on motivating enabling, and assessing. Motivating is “what to do”, and it is also a process of helping students build awareness of problems, motivating students to think deeply, and stimulating their interest in learning; Enabling is “how to do it”, aiming at completing output tasks. From the aspects of language, content, structure, etc., teachers selectively use input or output materials. The whole process of enabling organically combines output activities with input activities so as to guide students to combine the form and meaning of language, and achieve the purpose of solving practical problems with the language learned in real scenes; Assessing is to “how to do it well”, whose purpose is to promote learning through evaluation including teacher-student cooperative evaluation, student self-evaluation, student mutual evaluation, after-class teacher random inspection, and machine evaluation, etc. Therefore, the classroom teaching design based on the production-oriented approach always integrates the cultivation of students’ core

competencies into the whole process of teaching and learning, so that students can use language in real scenarios, and put what they have learned in class into practice.

4.6 Constructing a Multimodal Blended Teaching Model in the Internet Environment

Guided by the constructivist learning theory, the modern network information technology is deeply integrated with the curriculum. Teachers should make full use of multi-modal teaching texts such as written materials, digital text materials, images, photos, tables, audio streams, video streams and animations to construct digital environment and teaching environment for multimodal transformation environment. On the one hand, using a blended teaching and learning model that combines offline teaching for teachers and online learning for students can stimulate the participatory and interactive communication between teachers and students, and between students and students, to achieve the purpose of constructing knowledge, and on the other hand, teachers can change the traditional classroom teaching mode and explore the effective methods and approaches of the new classroom teaching revolution.

4.7 Improve the Whole-Process Teaching Evaluation Mechanism Centered on the Inspection of Core Competencies

In the whole process of course evaluation, Teachers should focus on the inspection of students' core competencies, integrate them into the whole process of teaching assessment, appropriately expand the proportion of process assessment, reasonably set the proportion of summative assessment, and guide students to pay attention to the whole process of course assessment. The process assessment includes the assessment of students' oral expression ability, listening comprehension ability, language knowledge application ability, classroom inquiry ability and autonomous learning ability, and the process assessment extends from classroom teaching to the skill competition in the second classroom. The summative assessment requires students to participate in the unified test of the whole school at the end of the semester, and the assessment at each stage must implicitly involve the examination of the students' core competencies.

4.8 Strengthen the Capacity Building of English Teachers and Improve the Comprehensive Quality of Teachers

The improvement of teachers' comprehensive quality is one of the key factors in curriculum reform and construction. Teachers should cultivate themselves and strive to become good teachers with "ideal beliefs, moral sentiments, solid knowledge, and benevolent hearts". Teachers can improve their comprehensive literacy by participating in various trainings at home and abroad mainly including education and teaching research literacy, innovative practice literacy, inter-professional literacy, information technology literacy and learning new knowledge literacy. In teaching practice, Teachers constantly enhance their own moral ability, and truly take the responsibility for the important mission of shaping students' essential character and improving students' key abilities.

4.9 Conclusion

Cultivating the core competencies of higher vocational students is the starting point to improve the teaching quality of public English courses in higher vocational colleges. The training of the six necessary characters and the six key abilities of the core competencies of higher vocational students is integrated into the whole process of high-quality personnel training. Teachers should pay attention to the cultivation of students' competencies, improve students' core competitiveness, internalize and externalize the core competencies training of higher vocational English in the heart, which become a sharp tool to guide the reform of higher vocational English courses so as to turn higher vocational public English courses into soft power courses. Thus, cultivating students' true ability to do things and having excellent character of being a person [8] are the final goals of the curriculum reform so that students can live a better and more valuable life in the process of coping with future social challenges and personal life-long development.

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