Exploring the Employment-Oriented Reform of Public English Teaching in Higher Vocational Colleges

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Abstract. Employment pressure on higher vocational graduates continues to increase, while public English teaching still places emphasis on basic knowledge such as vocabulary and grammar, resulting in a disconnect from occupational position requirements and insufficient students' ability to apply English in the workplace. Based on constructivist learning theory, this paper analyzes the major problems in current public English teaching in higher vocational colleges and proposes reform paths: adhere to the integration of industry and education in developing school-based teaching materials and highlight vocational characteristics; promote task-based teaching and situational simulation teaching to strengthen students' language practice; construct an employment-oriented diversified evaluation system, with attention to process performance and feedback on job-related competencies; and strengthen the development of a "dual-qualification" teaching team to enhance teachers' industry practice and interdisciplinary collaboration capabilities. By promoting the alignment of course content with occupational standards, public English teaching in higher vocational colleges can better serve students' career development, and improve the quality of talent cultivation and employment competitiveness.

Keywords: employment-oriented; constructivist learning theory; public English

1 Introduction

Against the backdrop of the continuous expansion of higher education enrollment and the rapid growth in the number of graduates, coupled with economic transformation and upgrading and the accelerating iteration of new technologies such as artificial intelligence, the employment of higher vocational graduates is confronted with enormous pressure and challenges. As an important public foundational course in higher vocational colleges, public English is still taught under traditional teaching models in the majority of these institutions. Public English teaching in higher vocational colleges still suffers from problems such as insufficient alignment between teaching content and the demands of occupational positions, as well as inadequate cultivation of vocational competence [7]. Therefore, the reform of public English teaching in higher vocational colleges needs to further strengthen its employment orientation, attaching importance to the development of students' English application ability and vocational adaptability while consolidating their language foundation.

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M. B. Badzis et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2026 2nd International Conference on Education Research and Training Technologies (ERTT 2026)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 1042,
https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-628-4_19

2 Constructivist Learning Theory and Employment-Oriented Reform of Public English Teaching in Higher Vocational Colleges

Constructivism, as a cognitive learning theory, traces its intellectual origins to the theory of children's cognitive development advanced by Swiss psychologist J. Piaget in the 1960s. Piaget posited that, through interaction with the surrounding environment, children gradually construct their cognition of the external world via the two fundamental processes of assimilation and accommodation, and continuously enrich and develop their cognitive structures within a cycle of "equilibrium—disequilibrium—new equilibrium."[1]

Constructivism maintains that learning is not a unidirectional input of information from the outside in, but rather a process in which learners, drawing upon their prior knowledge and experience, actively construct meaning through the bidirectional interaction between new information and their existing cognitive structures. On the basis of this understanding, constructivism highlights the active, situated, and social nature of learning, and identifies "situation", "collaboration", "conversation", and "meaning construction" as the four core elements of the learning environment[2]. Specifically, "situation" emphasizes that learning should take place in authentic or near-authentic sociocultural contexts; "collaboration" and "conversation" underscore the critical role of interaction and communication among learners, teachers, and peers in the process of knowledge construction; and "meaning construction" constitutes the ultimate goal of the entire learning process, pointing toward a profound understanding of the nature, underlying laws, and internal relationships of things.

Constructivist learning theory provides strong guidance for the employment-oriented English teaching reform in higher vocational colleges, and the two share a high degree of compatibility. On the one hand, the student-centered teaching philosophy advocated by constructivism is inherently consistent with the competency-based training objective of higher vocational education. English teaching in higher vocational colleges should not be merely the instruction and memorization of discrete knowledge points such as vocabulary and grammar, it should be a process in which students, under the guidance of teachers, actively construct their language application ability. On the other hand, the constructivist emphasis on "situation" points directly to the very problem that public English teaching in higher vocational colleges has long been detached from authentic workplace scenarios. Furthermore, the constructivist learning philosophy that values "collaboration" and "conversation" also aligns with the demands of the modern workplace for teamwork and communication skills, thereby enabling higher vocational English teaching to cultivate students' professional qualities beyond language skills training.

3 Major Problems in Public English Teaching in Higher Vocational Colleges

3.1 Weak Connection Between Teaching Content and Workplace Scenarios

For a long time, the English textbooks adopted by higher vocational colleges have primarily focused on literary appreciation, popular science introductions, and daily communication topics, lacking practical materials that align with real professional work scenarios. The teaching content has placed excessive emphasis on basic knowledge such as English grammar and vocabulary while neglecting practical training, which makes it difficult for students to apply what they have learned to communication in occupational contexts. From the perspective of actual teaching practice, high-frequency workplace tasks such as resume writing, business correspondence, customer reception, product promotion, and interpretation of equipment operation instructions still lack relatively systematic arrangements in some courses. Such content design tends to create a disconnect between classroom learning and future work situations. Even if students have acquired a certain amount of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, they may not necessarily be able to transfer these skills smoothly to language use in real workplace contexts.[6]

3.2 Traditional Teaching Approaches and Insufficient Opportunities for Students' Language Practice

Teacher-centered lecturing dominates the teaching of public English in higher vocational colleges. Restricted by large class sizes, limited class hours and teachers' entrenched teaching routines, classroom activities mainly consist of vocabulary explanation, grammatical analysis and text translation, leaving students in a passive receptive position. Interactive pedagogies that encourage students to use language proactively, such as situational simulation, role-playing, task-based learning and project collaboration, are rarely adopted in practice.

Listening and speaking drills remain simplistic, confined to audio repetition and recitation of preset dialogues, with few practical exercises tailored to real workplace communication scenarios. Reading and writing instruction also lacks career relevance, with minimal training centered on the workflows of drafting and processing workplace documents. Without consistent opportunities for language production and authentic communicative contexts, students cannot receive systematic training in oral expression, workplace English communication, and language interaction during group collaboration. Consequently, knowledge acquired in class fails to be converted into practical language competence.

3.3 Mismatch Between Assessment Criteria and Employment Requirements

The assessment system of public English courses in higher vocational colleges lays excessive emphasis on theoretical knowledge, which cannot effectively measure students' practical English application ability. Dominated by closed-book summative written examinations, current assessments mainly adopt traditional question types such as vocabulary discrimination, grammar blank filling, reading comprehension and paragraph translation. These evaluation methods focus on examining students' knowledge memory and examination skills while neglecting practical assessment based on real workplace scenarios, resulting in a systematic deficiency in the evaluation of post-adaptive English competence.

Although formative assessment is stipulated in the curriculum framework, its practical implementation is merely superficial. Existing evaluation indicators are limited to basic quantitative records including student attendance and homework completion. By contrast, process-based performances that truly reflect students' language application ability, such as in-class task completion, group project outcomes and oral presentations, lack standardized recording, scientific evaluation and targeted feedback.

3.4 Insufficient Teachers' Industrial Practical Experience

Teachers of public English courses in higher vocational colleges generally lack frontline industrial experience, limiting the effective integration of employment-oriented professional elements into classroom teaching. Most teachers possess solid theoretical expertise in linguistics and literature but are confined to educational contexts with little enterprise practical experience. Their cognition of industrial operation mechanisms, job duties and authentic business scenarios remains superficial, creating noticeable barriers to vocational teaching.

The extent to which public English teachers in higher vocational colleges understand students' majors, industry knowledge, and specific work situations will affect the implementation of vocationalized teaching, and there is still room for further strengthening in teachers' enterprise practice and the development of "dual-qualification" capabilities [5]. Although most teachers acknowledge the importance of employment-oriented English teaching and strive to align instruction with workplace requirements, their inadequate industrial practice constitutes a major constraint. Insufficient accumulation of authentic workplace cases lead to formulaic situational teaching. Classroom scenarios consequently fail to reflect the real workplace communication, reducing the vocational adaptability of teaching content.

4 Employment-Oriented Reform Paths for Public English Teaching in Higher Vocational Colleges

4.1 Developing Teaching Materials Through Industry-Education Integration to Enhance Vocational Characteristics

Within the employment-oriented reform system, the development of school-based textbooks provides a viable solution to optimize teaching content. Embedding vocational competency training throughout the textbook compilation process strengthens the vocational orientation of curriculum content and better accommodates students' workplace application and career development needs.

Scientific and standardized teaching objectives are fundamental to high-quality textbook development. Textbook compilation should adhere to disciplinary core literacy and language acquisition principles, with targeted design of vocational contexts and workplace tasks to infiltrate employability cultivation into textbook systems[3]. The integration of authentic workplace scenarios grounds employment-oriented teaching in practical instructional design and avoids the superficial formalism of teaching reform.

School-enterprise collaboration in textbook compilation is essential for enhancing vocational characteristics. Cooperative development incorporates enterprises' frontline operational experience and real business cases, remedying the one-sided limitations of academic-oriented compilation. Such collaborative mechanisms substantially promote the implementation of industry-education integration in textbook construction and teaching practice.

4.2 Reforming Teaching Methods to Implement Task-based Teaching and Situational Simulation Teaching

Higher vocational English teachers should reform traditional teacher-dominated teaching modes and shift instructional emphasis from knowledge transmission to student-oriented language practice through the integration of task-based teaching and situational simulation teaching. Aligned with constructivist learning theories, these instructional methods highlight students' principal learning status, with teachers functioning as classroom organizers and instructional guides. By completing targeted learning tasks and conducting collaborative and independent inquiry, students shift from passive knowledge reception to active knowledge construction. Sustained situational practice progressively enhances students' comprehensive English proficiency and cultivates their occupational communication competencies and teamwork awareness.

In practical instruction, teachers can design authentic workplace scenarios in accordance with standard occupational workflows and adopt diversified instructional approaches, including role-playing, group discussion and project demonstration, to facilitate immersive role engagement and simulated professional communication. Such training enables students to integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing competencies, which substantially enhances the capacity of vocational English courses to support students' employability development.

4.3 Reforming Evaluation Methods to Construct an Employment-Oriented Diversified Evaluation System

Teaching evaluation acts as a critical guideline for optimizing classroom teaching. Higher vocational English teaching reform demands innovative evaluation logic grounded in vocational competency development. By integrating formative assessment with summative assessment, colleges can establish a holistic, whole-process evaluation system that adapts to employment-oriented teaching goals.

In specific teaching practice, higher vocational colleges shall raise the proportion of formative evaluation to focus on students' ongoing learning performance. Evaluation coverage extends beyond conventional written examinations, incorporating multiple dimensional indicators such as classroom task completion, group collaboration participation and contribution, and practical English proficiency demonstrated in project outputs. This dynamic whole-process evaluation framework accurately reflects students' language development and applied competence, remedying the traditional deficiency of prioritizing final examination results over learning processes.

Sustained optimization of teaching reform relies on systematic long-term feedback data. Vocational colleges can build dedicated databases to track graduates' employment development. With questionnaires, telephone interviews and other empirical methods, colleges can continuously collect data concerning graduates' job adaptation and practical workplace English application[4]. Empowered by real employment feedback, institutions can revise talent cultivation objectives and teaching implementation schemes, dynamically optimize curriculum content and reform strategies, and align instructional design with industrial and occupational requirements, thereby improving graduates' vocational adaptability and core employability.

4.4 Strengthening Teacher Team Construction and Cultivating Dual-qualified Teachers

Constructivist learning theory emphasizes student-centered learning under systematic teacher guidance. Teachers serve as classroom organizers, learning and thinking facilitators, and key practitioners of teaching reform. Accordingly, the cultivation of dual-qualified English teachers constitutes an essential foundation for advancing employment-oriented teaching reform in higher vocational English education.

Higher vocational colleges should continuously optimize teacher team construction to develop high-quality dual-qualified teaching staff. Institutions can regularly arrange English teachers to conduct field investigations and on-site observations in cooperative enterprises. This enables teachers to acquire a comprehensive understanding of corporate operational mechanisms and accumulate authentic workplace English cases, so as to improve the authenticity and targeted design of vocational English teaching scenarios.

Furthermore, interdisciplinary teaching collaboration should be vigorously promoted. Public English teachers are encouraged to carry out joint teaching research and curriculum development with professional course teachers, and design comprehensive teaching tasks that integrate language training with vocational skill cultivation. Such

collaborative mechanisms facilitate knowledge complementation and professional improvement, thereby continuously enhancing teachers' overall teaching competencies.

A well-constructed dual-qualified teacher team effectively guarantees the teaching quality of higher vocational English courses. It provides solid educational support for improving students' practical English application abilities and strengthening their core competitiveness in future employment.

5 Conclusion

Implementing employment-oriented reform of Public English teaching in higher vocational colleges and aligning English course content with occupational standards can effectively stimulate students' learning motivation, substantially enhance their English application ability and core employability, and enable Public English instruction to genuinely serve students' career development, thereby providing support for the improvement of talent cultivation quality in higher vocational education.

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