

Research on Problems in English Teaching and Learning in Private Higher Vocational Colleges

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Abstract—In order to keep abreast with the times, college and university students should be equipped with higher personal abilities not only in English but also in communication and cooperation. Therefore, we did a close investigation into the abilities of Private Higher Vocational Colleges students in the aspects mentioned above and found some problems in English teaching and learning. These findings which we hope will provide important guidance for the following English teaching in Private Higher Vocational Colleges.

Keywords—problems; English learning; English teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the reform and opening-up and especially after entering into WTO, China has been having more international contacts with other countries in economics, education, agriculture, politics, etc. In these globalized contacts, English, which is usually used as an international language, plays an increasingly vital role. To achieve effective and high-quality contacts, people should possess good practical ability of English. Therefore, in college English teaching, students should be cultivated to be capable in practical communication in English. The Ministry of Education formulated Basic Requirements (2000) for English teaching in Higher Vocational College, which mainly emphasized on cultivating students' practical ability of communication in English.

On the other hand, with the development of economy, culture, science and technology, different countries and people have become more closely related with each other. On many problems such as economy, education, environmental protection and so on, understanding and coordination between each other are in greater need more than ever. In order to adjust to the development of modern society, students should be equipped with higher personal comprehensive quality, especially interpersonal ability during the process of higher education. Therefore, in English teaching process, the students should be cultivated in all-round way.

As part of higher education, Private Higher Vocational Colleges (hereinafter PHVC for short) play an essential role in China. We did a close investigation into the abilities of PHVC students in the aspects mentioned above and found some problems in English teaching and learning. We found that higher demands for college and university students have been

made, yet PHVC students' abilities in these aspects are far away from the demands and thus need to be improved. These findings which we hope will provide important guidance for the following English teaching in PHVC.

II. RESEARCH INSTRUMENT AND RESULTS

A. Research Instrument

In this research, a questionnaire was conducted to see the students' English learning, English practicing, comprehensive interpersonal ability and the atmosphere of English teaching and learning in Huanghe Science & Technology (S&T) College, which is a private college. The questionnaire consisted of 4 sections with 32 items all together. There were four sections with eight items in each section in the questionnaire. All the items were expected to be answered carefully and anonymously so that more straight and reliable understanding could be collected. The questionnaire paper was designed in Chinese version because the participants had different English language proficiency. In this way, possible misunderstanding could be avoided. 265 students were chosen to do the questionnaire, in which 263 copies of the questionnaire were valid.

Meanwhile, as an English teacher in the PHVC, the author also did both classroom observation and interview to get better and more comprehensive information.

B. Research Result

A five-point Likert-type scale 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 is used in the questionnaire. All the items are designed in positive direction and all orders of the answers are put in one direction. The answers are "strongly agree" (5 points), "agree" (4 points), "not sure" (3 points), "disagree" (2 points), and "strongly disagree" (1 point). Therefore, the full score for each section is 40 in average. The scores of every item for every student were analyzed with SPSS 17.0.

"Table I" is the first section of the questionnaire, which is used to investigate the students' English learning ability. Through analyzing, the final result of section one is 14.58, which is far away from the full score.

TABLE I. THE FIRST SECTION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

1	I spend as least 30 minutes in learning English out of class everyday.
2	I always do preview and review in English learning.
3	I always read or recite English articles in the morning.
4	I always memorize new words actively.
5	I don't just count on my English teachers in learning English.
6	I always read English newspapers and magazines.
7	I have my own proper English learning methods.
8	I always do reflection on my English study.

“Table II” is the second section of the questionnaire, which is a survey on students’ communicative ability in English. The mean score for this section is 19.57.

TABLE II. THE SECOND SECTION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

1	I always take part in some extracurricular activities, such as English speech contest, and get improvement.
2	I can understand my teacher’s complete English teaching.
3	I always positively communicate with others in English.
4	I can easily express my ideas with simple word or sentences in English.
5	I can answer my teacher’s questions in English.
6	In public places, I can help foreigners who have difficulties in communication.
7	I can understand articles at a medium level of difficulty.
8	My ability of communicating with others in English has been improved.

“Table III” is the contents of the third section, in which eight items are used to test students’ comprehensive interpersonal ability. The mean score for this section is 19.42.

TABLE III. THE CONTENTS OF THE THIRD SECTION

1	I consider it important to solve problems together with others.
2	I’m glad to share my good recourses.
3	When conflict happens between my friends and I, I can positively communicate with him/ her.
4	I would like spend a long time to answer my classmates’ questions.
5	When others provide better idea, I always accept with an open mind.
6	I have responsibility to make contribution to my team.
7	When I have different ideas with my teacher, I would choose proper time to communicate with him/her.
8	When others don’t agree with me, I would communicate with them and then make the final decision.

“Table IV” is the eight items of section four, which is an investigation on the English learning atmosphere. Compared with the full score of 40 points, the mean score of the questionnaire in this section is only 13.77.

All the data from the questionnaire reflect the real present state of English leaning. Besides, classroom observations and interview also proved the result of the questionnaire. Through interview different English teachers in PHVC, the author also found some problems in English teaching which will be further analyzed in the next part.

TABLE IV. THE EIGHT ITEMS OF SECTION FOUR

1	I think that the atmosphere of my class is positive.
2	The atmosphere of our English class is friendly, free, and active.
3	The present English learning atmosphere is good for my study.
4	I always stimulate my classmates to study hard with my diligent work.
5	I have never been absent for my English classes.
6	I’ve always take part in different activities in English classes.
7	I go to the library or the classroom everyday.
8	I think it’s interesting to learn English.

III. PROBLEMS IN ENGLISH TEACHING AND LEARNING IN PHVC

Through the investigation, we found that higher demands for college and university students have been made, yet PHVC students’ abilities in these aspects are far away from the demands and thus need to be improved. Various problems about the students, teachers and the total learning atmosphere in the process of English teaching and learning restrict the improvement of English teaching.

A. Problems About PHVC Students in English Learning

1) Students of PHVC have weak English learning ability.

a) *They have poorer academic background:* As it is known to all, students of private-run higher vocational colleges usually have poorer academic background in comparison with those of state-run colleges in China. In the comparison, most students of PHVC are even lower achievers in the College Entrance Examination. According to a survey carried out among 119 students majoring in computer software, architecture, accounting and auditing at higher vocational level in Huanghe Science and Technology College (hereinafter Huanghe S&T College for short), only 3.36% of them got the score over 90 in the English College Entrance Examination, and even 51.26% got lower than 60 (The full scores are 150 points.). That is to say, most PHVC students are low achievers in English. After entering into college, they meet more difficulties and problems even with the easiest vocabulary and grammar, which diminishes their interest and motivation in English learning. Consequently, they passively attend English classes but without listening carefully and participating in class activities positively. They just learn English at the end of each semester only for passing examinations but without any interest.

b) *They don’t have good or regular learning habits.* Most students don’t do reading or reciting but just sleeping in the morning. They seldom or never preview and review the classes. New words and expressions are left for the teachers’ explanation. After classes, no efforts are made to consolidate what they have learnt. Their extracurricular hours are usually occupied by playing computer games, surfing the internet or playing with their smartphones. Besides the four classes each week, most of them are not willing to spend any time more in learning English outside classes.

c) *They lack proper English learning methods or strategies.* Learning methods or strategies should play an important role in learning, but most students in PHVC don’t have or just few students have proper learning methods or strategies. Little attention has been paid to mastering the skills

of memorizing vocabulary and grammar, improving their abilities in English listening, speaking, and reading etc. Few students consider conducting effective learning strategies to improve their English proficiency

2) Students of PHVC have weak communicative ability in English.

Most PHVC students' command of English knowledge is at a low level when entering college. In their college English study, without good learning habits, beneficial learning methods, enough interest and motivation, they usually continue the low achievement in learning English. In other words, they don't have enough input of English knowledge. As it is known to all, the effects of output are closely related with and greatly influenced by that of input. With poorer basic English knowledge, most PHVC students find difficulties in following the teachers in all-English classes, understanding articles with medium difficulty in English newspapers or magazines, expressing their own opinions in English, conducting basic communication with others in English, etc. That is to say, their abilities of putting English into practical use are poor and need to be developed.

In addition, after examination-oriented education in elementary and middle schools, most PHVC students who are usually low academic achievers, are usually neglected by teachers. They usually received more criticism than encouragement, and finally form negative and passive attitudes toward English. Consequently, without confidence and in order to avoid being laughed at by others, they are reluctant to use English in giving active responses to teachers' questions, sharing their opinions, and participating in any English activities, etc. Few participating further diminishes PHVC students' communicative ability in English.

3) PHVC students should improve their interpersonal abilities.

In the examination-oriented educational process, PHVC students have been accustomed to individual and separate study, and the competition between each other. They seldom concern and cooperate with each other to finish one task. After entering college, when it comes for them to work together, they usually find it hard to improve their work with efficient cooperation. In the process of competition, when disagreement and contradiction happens, they usually follow their own interest and unique personality to solve problems. So PHVC students should improve their ability of coordination. What's more, they usually have no sense of responsibility when they should have. For example, everyone should be responsible for his/her own education to learn enough academic knowledge. But being absent from classes and failing in the examinations are commonly found among PHVC students and draw little attention from them. Meanwhile, most PHVC students are easier to pay attention to their individual goals but without collective consciousness and spirit, which should also be cultivated.

B. Problems About PHVC English Teachers

1) Most English teachers in PHVC still conduct traditional teaching method.

With traditional teaching method, Most English teachers in PHVC just convey knowledge on the textbook such as vocabulary, sentence structures, grammars and the meaning of each sentence in the passage etc. to the students in English classes, which reduces the students' opportunities to practice. The students just passively listen to the teachers, and few take notes. Finally they become passive receivers in teacher-centered classes. In other words, in English classes, teachers play the first important role, but the students just play the role of audience, watching the performance on the stage given by the teachers. Practical communication with target language is so limited in this process. Consequently, English classes become less interesting and attractive for the students. Therefore, new and more effective English teaching methods are needed for PHVC English teachers.

2) PHVC English teachers' command of English teaching theories and practical teaching abilities need to be improved.

For most Private Higher Vocational Colleges, the shortage of well-educated and well-experienced English teachers commonly exists. Most PHVC English teachers working at the first teaching line are bachelors without further study in English language and relative knowledge on scientific research. They only need to finish the teaching tasks. Few of them further study teaching pedagogies combined with their daily teaching reflections, which eventually hinder the improvement of their teaching skills. What's more, the quantity of English teachers in PHVC is usually far away from that of needed and required, so every teacher in PHVC has more teaching tasks and thus has to spend much time in preparing for and giving lectures everyday. They are busy with these heavy workloads, which usually transform into unconquerable heavy burden. Eventually, the time and energy left for them to do teaching reflection and research is pretty limited.

3) Passive feedbacks from the students hinder the enthusiasm of PHVC English teachers to improve their teaching quality.

The attendance rate of PHVC has been proved much lower than that of state-run colleges. Of all those who attend English classes, several passively listen to the teachers, some play with their cellphones, some are busy with homework of other subjects, some chat, and some sleep. In one class, just few students follow the teachers' teaching procedure and give active response. Totally speaking, from the low attendance and low participation of the students, PHVC English teachers usually get far more passive feedbacks than active encouragement. Consequently, most English teachers in PHVC have no interest and enthusiasm to improve their teaching, but just transmitting required knowledge to the students, trying to neglect the students' passive participation.

C. Problems About the General Learning Atmosphere in PHVC

The lack of dense learning atmosphere in PHVC widely exists, which has passive influence on English learning and

teaching in return. In order to guarantee the quantity of enrolled students, PHVC usually conduct more flexible policies on teaching management, such as on the management of diploma. The easiest examinations before the graduation are usually provided for those students who have failed to pass. So no matter how many subjects and how many times they have failed in the examinations, they usually would be able to get the diploma at last. The diploma of PHVC is widely considered as much easier to get. Thus a prevailing concept, study is not the most important work in college, has formed, been accepted and even spreaded among PHVC students. Consequently, on campus of PHVC, taking part-time jobs, surfing on the internet, and playing smartphones etc. seem to be more important than study. Few students would go to the study room or the library to get more knowledge which can fulfill their need of positive interest or will be needed in their future work. Libraries and study rooms of PHVC are mostly not put into good use, and most seats there are left vacant. Without positive learning atmosphere, to teach and learn English would become much tougher. Generally speaking, the lack of dense and positive learning atmosphere produces negative influence on English teaching and learning.

IV. CONCLUSION

All the problems in English teaching and learning which were mentioned above hinder the improvement of English teaching in PHVC. These findings which we hope will provide important guidance for the following English teaching in Private Higher Vocational Colleges. In order to solve these problems, the English teachers, the students and the college itself should work cooperatively.

Firstly, the English teachers of PHVC should improve their abilities related with English teaching. Old teaching methods should be refreshed. Updated English teaching theories will do great contribution to solving problems in the teaching process. It's also effective to design more activities which can cultivate the students' sense of cooperation. Too much energy have been put in students' passive listening, therefore, the teachers should slow down and lead the students to take part in class activities. They should also be aware of the importance of English listening and speaking. What's more, they ought to give the students more instrutive suggestion and enough encouragement.

Secondly, the students of PHVC should build up the sense of responsibility in their own study and realize the importance of their study in the college for their future life. They should make good use of the valuable studying resources and spend more time in English learning. Students who have better academic performance should help others and try to influence others with their own diligent work, which can also improve their comprehensive ability in return.

Thirdly, Private Higher Vocationnal College itself should take the responsibility of serving for the teaching and lisenning. The administrative department of the PHVC shouldn't excessively interfere the teaching and learning. Stricter rules should be set up for study and all the rules should be really Carrie out into practice. More loose environment should be

provided to English teachers to improve their teaching skills and study on how to solve problrms in English teaching.

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