Corresponding author: kanxiangyu86@163.com

The Path of Cultivating English Core Literacy in Higher Vocational Education in the Context of New Curriculum Standard

Kan Xiangyu *
Basic Courses Department of Tianjin Vocational Institute, Tianjin, China

Abstract: Higher vocational students have problems such as weak English language foundation, poor independent learning, weak awareness of multicultural communication, and insufficient communication skills in the foreign-related workplace. In view of these problems, according to the requirements of English Curriculum Standard for Higher Vocational Education (2021 Edition) for cultivating English core literacy in higher vocational education, this paper has proposed the strategies of reforming the curriculum, implementing mixed teaching, constructing typical foreign-related workplace scenarios and strengthening off-campus internship practice to integrate the concept of cultivating English core literacy into the whole process of curriculum teaching, in which way the humanity and instrumentality of vocational English curriculum can be achieved.

1. Introduction

According to the statistics of the Ministry of Education, 5.57 million students were enrolled in higher vocational schools in China in 2021, which is 1.8 times of the number 10 years ago. Apparently, China has established the largest vocational education system in the world. It is one of the development goals of China’s 14th Five-Year Plan to improve the number and proportion of skilled talents and build a large-scaled, well-structured, skilful and well-qualified team of skilled talents. It is of great significance to study how the English subject in higher vocational education can help cultivate high-level vocational and technical talents that meet the needs of social development and meet the trend of the times. Therefore, this paper will review the development of core literacy concept at home and abroad as well as the cultivation objectives of vocational education in China, and analyze the connotation of English core literacy in higher vocational education with the guidance of English Curriculum Standard for Higher Vocational Education (2021 Edition), and further explore the cultivation paths of the four core literacies.

2. The Connotation of English Core Literacy in Higher Vocational Education

According to the English Curriculum Standard for Higher Vocational Education (2021 Edition), subject literacy is the correct values, necessary character and key abilities that students develop through course learning. Taking into account the characteristics of vocational education, the 2021 edition of the Curriculum Standard decomposes the English core literacy in higher vocational education into four dimensions: communication in the foreign-related workplace, multicultural communication, language thinking improvement, and independent learning improvement. The overall goal of the vocational English course is to improve the core literacy and to cultivate highly qualified technical and skilled talents who can communicate effectively in English in daily lives and in the workplace. In order to ensure the effective realization of the overall goal, the 2021 edition of the Curriculum Standard has formulated corresponding sub-goals for each core literacy, taking into account the teaching characteristics of higher vocational colleges.

2.1. the goal of communication in the foreign-related workplace.

The ability of communication in the foreign-related workplace is the ability to understand, communicate and express in English in the workplace context. The solid English listening, speaking, reading and writing ability are the basic skills that should be possessed by high-end foreign-related technical talents in a global perspective, which reflects the communicative function of English language and the instrumentality of higher vocational English courses, and should be the necessary quality that distinguishes vocational college students from ordinary college students.

2.2. the goal of multicultural communication.

This goal reflects the humanity of the English courses. Technical talents who have socialist core values, love Chinese culture and can properly handle the task of
multicultural communication are the core strength of socialist construction, which determines the realization of the cultivation goal and the reform of higher vocational education.

2.3. the goal of language thinking improvement.

This goal is the basic ability of comprehension, reasoning and judgment necessary for students in the process of language learning and use, reflecting the intrinsic connection between language and thinking.

2.4. the goal of independent learning improvement.

Independent learning ability refers to students’ ability and strategies for independent learning, which is the basic condition and guarantee for the realization of the other three core literacies in the process of English literacy cultivation, as well as the guarantee for students’ sustainable future career development.

3. The Cultivation Path of English Core Literacy in Higher Vocational Education

The New Curriculum Standard is a programmatic document guiding the reform and construction of public English courses in higher vocational education. As the centralized embodiment of the discipline’s nurturing value, the English core literacy in higher vocational education is the correct values, necessary character and key abilities that students gradually form through English course learning and practice, and its cultivation status directly affects the success or failure of higher vocational English teaching reform. Research has found that students in higher vocational colleges have weak English language foundation, poor independent learning, weak awareness of multicultural communication, and insufficient communication skills in the foreign-related workplace. In order to implement the spirit of the New Curriculum Standard and promote the reform of higher vocational English teaching, the author has proposed four specific strategies: reforming the curriculum, implementing mixed teaching, constructing typical foreign-related workplace scenarios and strengthening off-campus internship practice.

3.1. Reforming the curriculum and building a “compulsory + optional + practical” curriculum system

The English curriculum system in higher vocational education under the background of the new curriculum standard needs to solve the following two core problems: firstly, how to take into account the humanity and instrumentality of language learning in the higher vocational education curriculum system; secondly, what kind of English curriculum system is needed in higher vocational colleges. Based on this, the “compulsory + optional + practical” curriculum system can be adopted so that the English curriculum system of higher vocational colleges can show multi-level and three-dimensional characteristics. Firstly, in the compulsory module, General English and the English for Special Purposes (ESP) can be introduced. The purpose of General English is to solve the problem of weak English language foundation of vocational college students so as to make students have the necessary comprehensive language skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating. The English for Special Purposes (ESP) is designed to serve students’ professional learning, to develop students’ language application skills and job skills in accordance with the requirements of the new curriculum standard for the vocational attributes of English core literacy. Secondly, in the optional module, the cross-cultural communication and oral communication courses are set up to enhance students’ awareness and ability of diversified communication and take up the mission of being ambassadors of Chinese culture to the outside world. Finally, the practical module can be combined with the second classroom to hold school-level subject competitions such as English songs and cross-cultural communication, and actively organize students to participate in the English-speaking competition of the National Vocational College Skills Competition, so as to effectively improve the comprehensive ability of vocational college students. In this way, the aim of promoting learning and practice through the competition can be realized.

3.2. Implementing mixed teaching and consolidating the foundation of independent development

In view of the poor effect of students’ independent learning, mixed teaching can be introduced to deeply integrate course teaching with information technology and build an authentic, open, interactive and cooperative teaching environment. With the help of online teaching platform, the teaching supervision and assessment can be better implemented and the students’ learning initiative can be stimulated, which can help lay a good foundation for students’ future continuous learning and lifelong development. Mixed teaching is an organic whole of teaching contents, methods, means and resources. So mixed teaching in higher vocational English courses should be designed in a sequential manner according to the process of pre-class, mid-class and post-class, with task-driven and quantitative data supervision to promote students’ active learning, independent learning and cooperative learning. Before class, teachers can categorize the English teaching contents and distinguish the learning contents of MOOC, Rain Classroom and other platforms from the lecture contents in class, so as to mobilize students’ interest in learning; during class, teachers can focus on solving the difficult and doubtful points in the learning contents, internalize the knowledge through group discussion and scenario simulation, and gradually
enhance students’ self-learning confidence and motivation; after class, teachers can use the teaching platform to further collect, integrate and analyze data, provide feedback and evaluation of students’ stage learning, which can help students better understand their learning status, learning strengths and weaknesses, and enhance their sense of purpose and internal driving force. At the same time, teachers can further analyze students’ confusion and needs, optimize personalized tutoring programs, and enhance students’ independent learning effect. The evaluation of higher vocational English mixed teaching should incorporate students’ vocational and subject core literacies into the evaluation system, adopt multiple, multi-dimensional and multi-subject evaluation methods such as formative and summative evaluation, in-class learning evaluation and off-class practical evaluation, teacher-student & student-student mutual evaluation and individual self-evaluation, and realize digital accurate management with the help of online teaching platform, so as to effectively play the prominent role of mixed teaching mode in improving students’ independent learning ability and the talent cultivation function in promoting, guiding and evaluating learning.

3.3. Constructing typical workplace contexts and strengthening workplace language application

As the foundation of the core literacy, communication literacy in the foreign-related workplace reflects the special characteristics of the higher vocational English and the vocational nature of the English-using field, and becomes the basis for the development of the other three core literacies. The teaching of higher vocational English courses should actively create typical foreign-related workplace scenarios in classroom teaching and reflect the professional competence requirements of major job groups and typical work tasks, so that students can learn and use English in completing the tasks of workplace communication activities. At the same time, actively creating typical foreign-related workplace scenarios in higher vocational English classroom teaching can also help students develop the necessary character and correct values, develop a good listening and negotiation behavior, have empathy and compassion, and be honest and friendly.

3.4. Strengthening off-campus internship practice and highlighting vocational characteristics

Practical teaching is an important way to realize the education goal of higher vocational English courses and cultivate students’ core literacy. According to the requirements of the new curriculum standard, the practical teaching of higher vocational English needs to connect with the new demands of industries and positions, make full use of off-campus training bases to carry out internship practice, and strengthen the practical teaching assessment at the same time. The reconstruction of practical teaching content of higher vocational English under the background of the new curriculum standard must focus on the cultivation of professionalism, that is, higher vocational English teaching needs to match the new standards, technologies, norms and requirements of industries and enterprises, so that students’ English learning and application can match the development needs of society, market and enterprises. Schools should seek support from local governments and establish more stable off-campus training bases with relevant industries and enterprises to provide opportunities for students’ English application, so that higher vocational English education can have more practical and vocational characteristics. At the same time, the assessment and evaluation of practical teaching should be strengthened by adopting a three-dimensional evaluation system of “process evaluation of instructors + reflective evaluation of students’ internship process + result evaluation of completing job tasks in English”. The result evaluation of completing job tasks in English only examines students’ mastery of English knowledge and skills, but not their necessary character and values in the process of off-campus internship practice. The evaluation system combining three dimensions, which assesses both English knowledge and skills as well as students’ change of mind, can largely make up for this deficiency and help to comprehensively evaluate the effectiveness of English practice teaching in higher education.

4. Conclusion

The promulgation of English Curriculum Standard for Higher Vocational Education (2021 Edition) puts forward specific requirements on the implementation of curriculum, teaching content, academic quality and teaching assessment for higher vocational English courses, and also provides guidelines for higher vocational English courses to promote teaching reform. Under the guidance of the new curriculum standard, researching and updating the teaching concept and teaching system of higher vocational English courses is the focus of English teaching reform in higher vocational education at present and in the future. Besides, the teaching reform of higher vocational English courses should conduct a comprehensive research and evaluation of the current higher vocational English courses in a wider scope, reconstruct the English course system and evaluation mode of higher vocational education, deeply integrate the concept of cultivating English core literacy into the course teaching in order to realize the unity of the humanity and instrumentality of higher vocational English courses and cultivate more internationalized and high-quality skilled talents for the construction of a modern and powerful country in China.

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