

# A Study on Classroom Teaching Strategies of English Vocabulary and Grammar in Chinese Higher Vocational Colleges

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**Abstract:** Nowadays, under the background of economic globalization, English, as a global universal language, is becoming more and more prominent in higher vocational education. In order to successfully achieve the expected teaching goals and cultivate students' comprehensive abilities in using English, it is especially crucial to innovate teaching strategies based on many deficiencies in the previous English courses. From this, the paper analyzes the teaching status quo of English courses in China's higher vocational colleges, and lists a few more scientific and efficient teaching strategies from the two levels of English vocabulary and English grammar respectively, hoping to provide useful theoretical support for the teaching practice of English courses in higher vocational colleges. This exploration not only has far-reaching inspiration for educators, but also provides a new thinking direction for students to build a solid foundation in English.

**Keywords:** higher vocational colleges; vocabulary teaching; grammar teaching; teaching strategies

## 1. Introduction

Higher vocational colleges, as vocational education with Chinese characteristics, undertake the great responsibility of cultivating application-oriented talents for national construction. Under the guidance of this teaching goal, English learning is not only a mechanical memorization of vocabulary or grammar, but also a way for students to apply what they have learned in practical communication, so as to lay a solid foundation for their future career development. But at present, English teaching in higher vocational colleges is still facing many challenges, such as the limitation of course content, single teaching method, etc. English educators in the front line of teaching should comprehensively summarize the past teaching experience, follow the principle of student-centered teaching, and explore more effective English teaching strategies to create a more practical and scientific English teaching program.

## 2. The teaching status quo of English classroom in higher vocational colleges

As an international common language, English has always occupied a place in China's vocational education system. In comparison, students in higher vocational colleges have a relatively weak foundation in English, so a lot of problems have been shown in the actual learning process.

### 2.1. Limitations of Curriculum Content

Through in-depth understanding, it can be seen that the English teaching materials in higher vocational colleges focus on traditional vocabulary and grammar knowledge teaching, which lacks cutting-edge teaching content and is out of touch with the future career development and application scenarios of students in higher vocational colleges. More importantly, the limitation of the teaching content affects students' learning interest to a great extent. Due to the constraints of the concept of exam-oriented education, teachers are forced to spend a large amount of time on mechanized word memorization and grammar practice, ignoring the cultivation of students' situational communication and cross-cultural communication skills.

In addition, over-emphasis on the theoretical teaching of vocabulary and grammar knowledge puts students in a state of passive acceptance of knowledge instillation for a long period of time, and lacks the opportunity for active exploration and creative expression. It seriously restricts the formation of

critical thinking ability of student in higher vocational colleges, and over time, they will become bored with English learning, which directly affects the learning efficiency.

## **2.2. Weak teacher-student interaction**

Under the contemporary education model, teacher-student interaction is regarded as a key factor in promoting learning effectiveness. However, in the teaching practice of English courses in higher vocational colleges, the phenomenon of teacher-student interaction is particularly weak.

First of all, the traditional teaching mode still dominates in higher vocational colleges. In the classroom, teachers prioritize the use of theoretical teaching to complete the teaching task, leaving very little time for students to give free play. Due to the lack of English learning environment and opportunities for expression, students' understanding of what they have learned is very one-sided, and it is difficult for them to internalize and absorb the content. Then, in order to efficiently utilize the classroom time, some higher vocational English teachers repeatedly emphasize the basic knowledge points such as vocabulary and grammar in the classroom and ask students to reinforce their memory by rote memorization. This kind of teaching method deprives students of the opportunity to question and limits their participation in the classroom, which is very likely to antagonize them.

More critically, the evaluation system of English courses in higher vocational colleges does not really encourage teacher-student interaction. When evaluating students, many teachers only pay attention to their vocabulary test scores or their mastery of vocabulary and grammar, while ignoring the students' learning status in the classroom and their communication with teachers.

## **2.3. Single teaching method**

Up to now, there are still quite a lot of higher vocational colleges following the single-line teaching mode of "teachers teach, students listen", with teachers occupying an absolutely dominant position in the classroom. Especially when teaching basic tasks such as English vocabulary and grammar, teachers arrange intensive memorization, repetition and copying tasks for students in order to focus their attention on the classroom for a long time. As a matter of fact, this kind of uninspired teaching method not only contradicts the current educational environment of the new curriculum, but also easily triggers students' rebelliousness and leads them to develop psychological barriers to the English course.

From another point of view, with the widespread popularization of new ideas and technologies, a large number of English teachers have already realized the importance of "diversified teaching strategies". However, in the specific teaching practice, modern educational theories in the English classroom of higher vocational colleges have shown an obvious "incompatibility" phenomenon. Why does this happen? The root of the problem is related to the specific background of English courses in higher vocational colleges and the individual differences of students in higher vocational colleges. As mentioned in the previous article, compared with ordinary colleges and universities, the English foundation of students in higher vocational colleges is relatively weak, and the English level of students in the class is also different. If teachers don't do a comprehensive investigation when starting some new methods, there will be an embarrassing situation that some students can't learn and some don't have to learn, which inadvertently wastes a lot of teaching resources.<sup>[1]</sup>

## **3. Effective teaching of English courses in higher vocational colleges**

### **3.1. Teaching strategies for English vocabulary**

#### **3.1.1. Exploring the rules and mastering word-formation**

At present, traditional vocabulary teaching methods are gradually being replaced by innovative theories, especially in the English courses of higher vocational colleges. Exploring the rules of the formation of English vocabulary not only helps students to improve their ability to memorize vocabulary, but also develops their linguistic reasoning and creative ability. Word formation patterns, especially the use of prefixes and suffixes, are crucial to the judgment of lexical properties of words and the speculation of word meanings. After students understand and master these word-building elements, it will be easier for them to form a systematic vocabulary network, thus improving the efficiency of English application.

For example, in an experimental course on English vocabulary teaching, the teacher conducted a

comparative study between the traditional vocabulary teaching method and the word formation method. In the experimental group, the teacher emphasized the importance of affixes and instructed students to classify and analyze the prefixes, roots and suffixes of words. For example, "-ful" is usually associated with things of a certain nature, and "graceful" refers to "moving in a controlled, attractive way or having a smooth, attractive form". Similarly, "-ment" usually denotes a thing or a state, and "development" refers to "the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advanced, stronger, etc." Through the study of these affixes, the students gradually developed their word analysis and construction skills. The results showed that the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group in the vocabulary test. Through further observation, the students demonstrated stronger lexical reasoning ability and stronger self-confidence in the subsequent vocabulary application sessions.

This research provides English educators with valuable teaching strategies that emphasize the importance of in-depth exploration and systematic learning. With the continuous innovation of English teaching methods, vocabulary teaching based on word formation is expected to become the mainstream direction of English teaching in higher vocational colleges in the future.

### ***3.1.2. Innovating learning methods to promote vocabulary accumulation***

In studying and teaching English vocabulary, the traditional vocabulary memorization method gradually exposes its limitations, and innovating learning methods are imminent. Research shows that combining vocabulary teaching with the regularity of roots, prefixes and suffixes can significantly improve students' vocabulary learning efficiency. This method not only helps students to increase their vocabulary rapidly, but also helps them to deeply understand the internal logic of the words they learn, so as to pave the way for the subsequent learning of more difficult English courses.<sup>[2]</sup>

For example, in the English practical curriculum, the teacher shows students a series of words with "un" and "in", emphasizes their negative nature, and then guides students to discover the pattern of the words, such as "unlike" and "incorrect". The purpose of this teaching link is to make students understand the generality of prefixes and suffixes and to use them flexibly. The teacher then leads the students to further explore the root word "not" and introduces the following vocabulary words: "denote" and "notion". The class time is given over to the students to summarize the main features of this root word by themselves, taking into account the vocabulary learning methods they have mastered before. In the specific learning situation, students can not only understand what they have learned more intuitively and comprehensively, but they also create a good atmosphere for vocabulary learning in the class and further cultivate students' divergent thinking ability.

After a period of teaching practice, students' vocabulary has grown significantly, and more importantly, they have shown higher sensitivity in word derivation, deformation and application.

### ***3.1.3. Incorporating culture to enhance sensitivity***

In the field of vocabulary teaching, the understanding of English cultural background is a teaching task that cannot be ignored. English vocabulary is not only a tool for expressing meaning, it is a carrier of culture and history. Therefore, the real meaning of vocabulary is often ignored or misunderstood when it is detached from the cultural context. In order to avoid this situation, educators should fully realize that integrating cultural elements into vocabulary teaching is the key to improving students' language ability.

The core role of vocabulary teaching in higher vocational English is to provide students with efficient language tools so that they can be more comfortable with various challenges in their later careers. Therefore, from the students' point of view, understanding the cultural background of English is not only conducive to their understanding and using vocabulary more accurately, but also cultivates their cultural sensitivity.

Take the word "red" as an example, in Chinese culture, the color red is mostly associated with enthusiasm and positive emotions. However, in western culture, the color red has a different symbolic meaning. For example, bullfighters used red cloth to enrage bulls, making the color red often associated with danger and ominousness in western culture. Therefore, when students use color vocabulary in communication, they must be clear about the imagery and emotional coloring of these words in different cultural contexts. From the perspective of teaching strategies, teachers can design the following activities to help students understand the symbolism of colors in different cultures: first, let students independently complete the research work to describe the symbolism of the color red in different cultural systems; second, the teacher makes the color red as the theme in the classroom, lead

students to explore the use of the color red in different contexts, and guide students to carry out further comparisons and discussions, so as to strengthen their intercultural communication skills.<sup>[3]</sup>

### **3.2. Teaching strategies for English grammar**

#### **3.2.1. Combining online and offline based on the content of teaching materials**

Incorporating the blended teaching method of combining online and offline into the English grammar course can not only make the teaching content of the grammar course richer, but also effectively strengthen the students' language adaptability, so that they can have a balanced development in different environments. Therefore, teachers can start from the content of the textbook, understand the individual differences of the students in the class, collect teaching resources from various sources according to their learning abilities and preferences, and enhance the extensibility of the English course, and stimulate the students' interest in learning.

The textbook provides the basic framework for the blended teaching mode, while the combination of online and offline energizes the textbook. Among them, the online environment provides students with rich auxiliary resources, such as audio, video and interactive exercises; while the offline environment provides students with an authentic English communicative atmosphere.

Subjunctive mood is a major difficult point in English grammar, which involves many complex tense changes. For example, when learning the sentence pattern "It is high time that...", after leading the students to understand the content of the textbook, the teacher can use multimedia teaching tools to show the students videos or interactive software, so as to let the students understand what they have learned in a specific context. In addition, in order to achieve more ideal teaching effect, teachers can also divide students into several activity groups, arrange different learning tasks for each group, and let them try to construct the sentence pattern "It is high time that..." through group discussion. For example, "It is high time that you should finish the task." and "It is high time that you finished the task." In this link, the teacher should be involved in students' group discussions to help them solve many problems in learning and improve their learning efficiency.

#### **3.2.2. Creating teaching contexts to improve teaching effectiveness**

In the field of English education in higher vocational colleges, exploring quality teaching methods has become the common pursuit of many educators. Among them, creating teaching situations not only can stimulate students' learning interests, but it can also transform abstract grammar concepts into real communicative scenes, so that students can immerse themselves wholeheartedly in them and deepen their understanding of grammatical rules.<sup>[4]</sup>

In the past, grammar has always been a teaching difficult point in the English course, and its own abstract and rule-based characteristics make it daunting for many students. By creating a real language environment, students can experience and use grammar in concrete communication situations, breaking through psychological barriers and mastering grammatical rules easily. Taking the relevant lesson of "subjunctive mood" as an example, the teacher selects one male student and one female student, and assigns them specific roles: male and female exchange their gender. The students were asked what occupations they would choose in this hypothetical gender. Both students asked questions based on their own understanding, using subjunctive mood. However, a very common mistake occurs: "If you are a man/woman, what job will you choose?" The teacher then asked, "Are you really a lady?" The boy answered shyly, "No, I'm not." At this point, the teacher pointed out the error in the above question and suggested the use of subjunctive mood in hypothetical situations along the way. It is further emphasized that "were" should be used for "be" verbs no matter what the subject is.

Through this teaching method, students can feel and correct their mistakes in real communication, which greatly improves the effectiveness of learning.

#### **3.3.3. Strengthening English-Chinese comparison to intensify grammar application skills**

Among the diverse language teaching strategies, the English-Chinese contrastive method is gradually favored by educators. The logic behind this teaching method is not complicated: when students have already established the knowledge system of the first language (L1), then why not use the first language to assist the learning of the second language (L2)? The English-Chinese comparative approach provides students with a concrete framework for learning, so that they can have clearer learning goals and experience the nuances of grammatical rules in their English courses.

The core of this method is to explore and compare the similarities and differences between the two

languages, and guide students to transfer and apply them effectively on this basis. Compared with traditional grammar teaching, it pays more attention to students' practical application ability, aiming to help students truly understand and master English grammatical rules and get rid of the elementary mechanical memorization state.

For example, in the teaching practice of the grammar course, the teacher chooses the verb "be" as the teaching object. First of all, he pointed out that, "be" is affected by the subject and other grammatical structures in the English context, and its form will change; however, in the Chinese context, "be" is only used in one form. Then, several Chinese sentences were listed: "I am a student"" She is a doctor"" They are my friends", and students were invited to try to translate the above sentences into English. After completing the above learning tasks, students realized that in English, the form "am" is corresponded to "I"; the form "is" is corresponded to "she"; the form "is" is corresponded to "he"; and the form "are" is corresponded to "they".

Through this teaching activity, students will clearly recognize the differences in expression between English and Chinese. Obviously, the English-Chinese comparative teaching method provides students with a more intuitive learning experience and allows them to understand the complexity of English grammar smoothly.

#### 4. Conclusion and reflection

In the current educational environment, the rapid development of the Internet and multimedia technology has made the "global village" a reality. However, how to ensure high-quality educational output in such a context is a matter of concern for every educator.

From an academic point of view, choosing appropriate teaching strategies for English courses in higher vocational colleges is not only related to the overall teaching quality of vocational education in China, but also involves the long-term academic and professional development of students. In the in-depth teaching of grammar and vocabulary, traditional teaching methods have been difficult to meet the learning needs of modern students. Therefore, the application of diversified teaching strategies provides us with a new perspective, aiming to create a learning environment with both depth and breadth. In addition, the cultural intermingling in the context of globalization is taken into account, English courses colleges in higher vocational should also focus on cultivating students' cross-cultural communication skills. For example, students need to understand the contexts, language habits and cultural differences in different cultural contexts. It should not be overlooked that while the combination of technology and education brings convenience, over-reliance on technology may cause students to lose the opportunity to actually communicate, thus weakening their communicative competence. The future of English education in higher vocational colleges needs to find a balance between technology and practical application.

To sum up, it is a long way to innovate in English teaching in higher vocational colleges. And in the future, educators should not only focus on academic depth but also cultivate students' practical application ability. Keeping up with the pace of development of the times, the educators should maintain a high degree of sensitivity all the time, and make progress with students, ensuring that teaching strategies keep pace with the times.

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