

# Research on the Optimization Strategies of Higher Vocational English Stratification Teaching Mode Based on the Promotion of Students' Professional Competence and Quality

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**Abstract:** Under the background of diversified enrollment structure in higher vocational colleges, the traditional level-based English teaching system cannot meet the needs of language ability development and professional quality improvement. In the past two years, we have built a dynamic assessment system based on ITEST platform. Based on a survey of the English proficiency needs of students with different majors, we have reconstructed the overall design of college English curriculum from the following key aspects: the refinement of the graduates' qualification standards, the reconstruction of the whole college English curriculum system, the refinement of the English teaching and mentoring modes for different level college students, the optimization and adjustment of the level-by-level assessment system, the reconstruction of the teaching and learning quality evaluation and diagnosis system etc. This paper sums up a set of learner centered strategies to optimize the reform of stratification English teaching mode by taking Qingdao Technical College as an example. The reform aims at the improvement of students' professional ability and quality by optimizing the stratification teaching mode of English in higher vocational colleges. It helps students with different enrollment backgrounds achieve individuation development and comprehensive accomplishment not only in English language skills but also professional qualities.

**Keywords:** the Optimization Strategies, English Stratification Teaching Mode, Professional Ability and Quality

## 1. Introduction

With China's participation in the global market competition and the steady implementation of the "One Belt, One Road" strategy, China's foreign exchanges and communications have become increasingly frequent. The level of English language application ability has become one of the indicators to measure the quality of talent training and cultivation in higher vocational and technical education field. Since 2013, the Ministry of Education of Chinese government has issued a series of documents and taken measures to encourage higher vocational colleges to recruit students from the whole country, taking into account the advantages of their own strong specialties and characteristics. All these measures have expanded the students' enrollment resources, thus the structure of enrolled students for colleges has change a lot, which brings great challenges to our traditional and usual way of English teaching curriculum and teaching. We have to evaluate the whole English curriculum and teaching and study how to reconstruct a more effective、 more learner-centered higher vocational English curriculum, and study how to improve the English teaching mode in a systematic way, in order to better promote the skill training and professional quality cultivation for vocational talents with different enrollment backgrounds.

## 2. Changes in the structure and quality of enrollment in higher vocational colleges

### 2.1 In terms of the admission score

The scores of many majors of higher vocational colleges has declined at a different proportions. The number of supplementary enrollments is increasing gradually. The overall admission course scores showed a downward trend.

## ***2.2 In terms of the enrollment structure***

Besides the two channels which includes college entrance examination and independent enrollment, the five-year program through the pilot undergraduate has also been expanded. With the integrated development of secondary and higher vocational education, veterans, migrant workers, exchanged students and so on, has also enriched the enrollment structure of higher vocational colleges.

## ***2.3 In terms of the places of admission***

Most of higher vocational college students come from their own provinces, some from provinces with high quality education, such as Jiangxi Province and Zhejiang Province, some from Guizhou and Inner Mongolia Province, where the education is not so developed. Thus, the proportion of students in the same major varies a lot.

## ***2.4 From the perspective of career development demands***

Higher vocational students with different English language levels have different career planning and education expectations. Their language learning motivations also vary a lot.

## **3. The disadvantages of the traditional higher vocational college English stratification teaching model**

English language teaching has its own special rules and characteristics. The changes of the enrollment structure of higher vocational colleges have called for innovative and systematic reform of English curriculum and teaching modes. After a survey we made among 3453 college language learners and 87 higher vocational English teachers, we concluded the following disadvantages of the traditional higher vocational college English stratification teaching model

First, the levels of higher vocational English curriculum are too broad to meet the variety individual needs of the students with different enrollment places;

Second, the standards of different levels of higher vocational English curriculum are out of connection, or not connected closely enough to the whole graduate qualifications of related majors. There is a big gap between the English curriculum goals and the overall specialty curriculum goals.

Third, the language learning mentoring mode is not flexible enough in terms of learners' different competence levels and demands. Many teaching activities are separated from each other, not embedded close enough in terms of the same goal to help students to achieve optimized competence development and quality enhancement.

Fourth, the stratification teaching of higher vocational English course is only limited to different classes. Actually, students in the same class also differs a lot in English language application competence and learning needs. The effectiveness of "distinct stratification" and "unnoticeable stratification" teaching and mentoring activities both in the same class and different classes needs to be reflected and improved.

Fifth, the assessment criteria is not unified. The lack of unified assessment standards makes it difficult to evaluate the competence development and quality promotion for those higher vocational English learners with different levels.

Sixth, The traditional stratification teaching quality of higher vocational English lack of dynamic adjustability. Dynamic adjustability calls for a scientific and strict circulation mechanism to continuously evaluate the efficiency of teaching and reform of higher vocational English.

## **4. Theories for the Higher Vocational English Stratification Teaching Mode Reform**

### ***4.1 As early as the Spring and Autumn Period, Confucius, one of our Chinese greatest educator, put forward the idea of "teaching students according to their aptitude"***

This idea has been widely adopted by many followers and been applied into many reform measures in all schools and educational institutions and has become one of the leading trends of "student-centered" education reform. The idea holds that teachers should make different teaching programs and adjust these

teaching programs flexibly in order to meet the individual development demands. Due to different factors in individual life and education environment, students have many differences in their abilities, interests, learning characteristics, knowledge levels and so on. As teachers, we should take all these differences into account when we design teaching, provide guidance and take targeted measures to help students grow up successfully to the greatest extent.

#### ***4.2 The theory of “Zone of Proximal Development” was put forward by Lev Vygotsky, a famous educational psychologist in the former Soviet Union***

The “Zone of Proximal Development” is often referred to as the “potential development zone.” It describes the gap between the actual level of development for children to solve problems independently and their potential level of development to solve problems under the guidance and mentoring of adults or by peer cooperation. According to Lev Vygotsky, individual student differs in many aspects. Teachers and educators must take these differences into account when design and organize their teaching activities, choose proper learning content, take appropriate measures to guide students, help students, and guide students to reach their potential “best development zone” successfully.

#### ***4.3 A group of scholars, Jerome Bruner was of the representatives, inherited and developed the theory of “Zone of Proximal Development.”***

They put forward the famous “Scaffolding Theory” based on a lot of research practice. The Scaffolding theory holds that any teaching activity design and reform should be learner-centered. The differences among learners should be fully respected and taken into consideration for all teachers and educators. Learners’ ability development and quality improvement are all based on the original structure of their knowledge and ability. Through the combination of explicit and implicit learning support services, learners can independently explore or collaboratively complete the knowledge construction, competence improvement and quality promotion, thus, to realize the minimum development level.

### **5. The Optimization Strategies of Higher Vocational English Stratification Teaching Mode**

Based on nearly 2 years of research and teaching practice, this paper sums up a set of optimization strategies of higher vocational English stratification teaching mode taking the author’s college as an example. Main measures taken include English curriculum reconstruction, language practice workshop and platform construction, learning resource database construction and application, competence-based assessment system reconstruction, teaching and reform evaluation and reflection system construction and application and so on.

#### ***5.1 The English curriculum has been reconstructed systematically, an innovative “3+4” explicit and implicit stratification model has been formed based on the concept of taking learners as the center, developing students’ professional ability and improving their quality.***

The explicit higher vocational English stratification refers that all the freshmen are divided into three categories according to their enrollment sources: students from national entrance examination, students from secondary school, pilot undergraduates, namely the first “3” in the “3+4” explicit and implicit stratification teaching model. By dividing the higher vocational students into three levels, we can keep the integrity and relative independence of each administrative class, and also fully respect students’ differing characteristics of language learning. It also avoids severely eliminating the learners’ enthusiasm and reduces the difficulties to coordinate different teaching and management departments.

The “4” in the “3+4” explicit and implicit stratification teaching model means that the combination of the off-class language practice、the national-provincial-college-departmental English professional skills competitions, English clubs and English elective courses into the higher vocational English curriculum and teaching. Through in-depth curriculum reconstruction, we successfully implemented implicit English teaching to students with different enrollment backgrounds and language learning styles.

***5.2 A dynamic assessment system consisting of “online self-assessment (questionnaire) + online formative and summative tests + offline interview” based on the internet teaching platforms has been designed and applied into teaching practice, which aims to measure the English learning levels and progress of students with different enrollment backgrounds.***

This set of assessment tools is applied to test the higher vocational students' English levels and individual learning preferences in the beginning of the school year, which can tell us accurately the students' learning interests, career development needs related to their majors and their English basic levels. This set of assessment tools can also be used to test the students' progress and learning needs in the process of school year, which will provide details evidence and proof for us to take more targeted measures to adjust our language curriculum and teaching reform to provide better supporting service and guidance to higher vocational college students with different enrollment backgrounds.

***5.3 On the basis of investigating the learners' individual needs of learning English and the demands of enterprises on talents' qualifications, a dynamic mechanism has been established to ensure the revision of higher vocational English curriculum standards, expected learning outcomes, teaching content, language learning supporting resource construction, assessment program, all these are completed to meet the explicit three levels of higher vocational students' needs. The mechanism is dynamic and adjustable.***

Each semester, we will organize all quality stake-holders, including English teachers, academic experts, experts from industries and students to carry out detailed discussion and make revision on the higher vocational English curriculum standards, learning outcomes, teaching contents, assessment standards and so on, so as to make sure all these teaching factors are fit well and scientific for talents' and industry's needs.

***5.4 Based on surveys on the limits of the traditional assessment system of English courses from different stakeholders' perspectives, we have compiled a school-based and competence-oriented assessment tools which includes competence rubrics, language examination database and reflection forms. The assessment based on the unified competence evaluation index system is helpful to make it possible for the mutual certification of English learning achievements of higher vocational college students at different levels and enrollment backgrounds.***

The school-based higher vocational English competence assessment scale includes three dimensions: teachers' assessment, students' self-assessment, peer assessment. With the help of the ITEST assessment platform, we have developed a multiple dynamic assessment and evaluation system for students of different majors. The competence assessment scale has three different levels of indicators for students with different enrollment backgrounds. They are basic level, general level and skilled level.

In the meantime, we take measures to incorporate all the teaching and learning activities under the “3+4” explicit and implicit teaching model into the overall assessment and evaluation system of higher vocational English curriculum. Students will receive the corresponding English competence certification or achievement certification by participating in language practice activities through the second-classroom of practical English learning platform, or the national-provincial-college-school level vocational skills competition platform, or the English clubs, or the elective English courses. These strict and dynamic assessment reformations not only respects the individual needs of the students with different enrollment backgrounds, but also strengthens the students' sense of responsibility and enhance the teachers' sense of responsibility to provide better learning-support service.

***5.5 With the help of the Max Teaching Quality Management Platform introduced by our college, we have constructed an internal and external evaluation and diagnosis system of English curriculum quality and established a strict reward and punishment mechanism accordingly***

The higher vocational English quality evaluation and diagnosis system includes four main stakeholders' perspectives: learners, English teachers, management experts, and experts from industries. During the semesters, we use the tools to investigate the following key aspects of the English competence cultivation: the qualification standard of higher vocational English curriculum, the expected learning outcomes for students with different levels, the selection of teaching contents, the reform of teaching model, the implementation of competence-based assessment. After each investigation and data collection, we will hold several discussions and consultative meetings to analyze what's going on in our English

curriculum teaching, and what problems we need to focus on and what best measures we should take to solve these problems etc.. On one hand, The running of the evaluation and diagnosis system helps to promote students' language learning enthusiasm, improve their sense of responsibility of language competence development. On the other hand, this system helps higher vocational teachers and managements continuously reflect on the quality of English curriculum teaching and reform and take targeted measures timely to solve problems arising during the learners' learning process, and thus to optimize the learning outcomes of the learners' competence development and quality promotion.

## 6. Conclusion

The multi-source enrollment structure of higher vocational colleges has become an unavoidable trend nowadays. Under this pressure, we need to reflect on the traditional English stratification teaching model and take effective reform measures systematically to ensure our college students achieve minimized and optimized language competence development and quality improvement.

The student-centered redesign and reconstruction of the higher vocational English stratification teaching mode based on the promotion of students' professional competence and quality

On the Optimization Strategies of Higher Vocational English Stratification Teaching Mode Based on the Promotion of Students' Professional Competence and Quality not only solves the bottleneck disadvantages of traditional English stratification teaching, but also conforms to the actual characteristics of higher vocational college students' learning at different levels. The reform helps to promote the innovative development of English teachers' comprehensive teaching ability and enhance their teaching design ability. Meanwhile, it also promotes the high-efficient connection and deep integration of English teaching and professional curriculum system, in-class teaching and off-class language practice, English assessment and learning achievement evaluation, teaching reform and quality assurance mechanism construction, etc.. It is helpful for students with different enrollment backgrounds and language levels to integrate their language knowledge learning and application ability practice. Under these optimization teaching strategies, students' learning motivation and lifelong learning ability are enhanced continuously.

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