

Research on the Application of Project-Based Teaching of Public English Course in Art Higher Vocational Colleges

Lianhua Mo*, Juan Chen

Department of Public Courses, Guangxi Vocational College of Performing Arts, Nanning, China
289720814@qq.com

*Corresponding author

Abstract: Public English course plays a significant role in art higher vocational college education, but there exist certain problems in this course, which is seriously disjointed from the goal of cultivating applied technical talents in higher vocational education. Project-based teaching emphasizes students' acquiring knowledge and applying it into the real situation to solve problems through accomplishing various project tasks. Students can enhance their overall abilities through the way of "learning by doing". On the basis of project teaching method, teachers integrate English language knowledge with students' professional knowledge so that students' English language skills as well as professional knowledge can be improved, hence the English teaching is greatly upgraded. This research provides some reference for English teaching in art higher vocational colleges in the future.

Keywords: application; project-based teaching; art higher vocational college; public English Course

1. Introduction

As an important part of higher education in China, higher vocational education aims to cultivate high-end applied talents for the development of the society. According to *The Basic Requirements for English Courses Teaching in higher Vocational Education*, it is pointed that the aim of the higher vocational education is to train special talents in the fields of technology, production and management for the whole society. The teaching of higher vocational English courses should not only focus on the language skills, but also attach close attention to the improvement of students' competence to use the language in real life and workplace^[1]. Therefore, on the basis of students' interest, English teaching is supposed to develop students' comprehensive language competence and promote their ability to use the language to solve problems which will be encountered in the future careers by the ways of experience, participation, cooperation and communication. Public English is a compulsory basic course in higher vocational colleges. All students except English majors must take this course in the first and the second academic years. There is no doubt that public English course plays a crucial part in the entire college education. Nevertheless, due to various reasons, the contradiction between language knowledge learning and the improvement of the application ability has been plaguing teachers for many years. The traditional teaching mode failed to achieve the expected goals of English teaching. Therefore, teachers in higher vocational colleges ought to adopt more effective methods to improve English teaching.

2. The Predicament of Public English Teaching in Art Higher Vocational Colleges

Over the years, the teaching of public English in art higher vocational colleges has faced various difficulties: students' being poor in English, teachers' out-dated teaching concepts, and the simplex evaluation method.

In general, the admission scores of students in art vocational colleges are much lower than those of other colleges and universities, with the particularly low score of English. Their English is relatively poor and they lack the interest in English learning. They are not very motivated to learn English and even afraid of English. In addition, the source of students in art higher vocational colleges is rather complex. Some of them graduate from high schools, but others may come from secondary schools and technical schools. Students' English competence varies greatly. Many of the students do not master the basic skills of English listening, speaking, reading and writing.

In the English teaching of art higher vocational colleges, many teachers fail to keep up with the pace of the reform of vocational education. They still adhere to the concept of general higher vocational teaching. Teachers have not put the current concept of art higher vocational education into practice, which have exerted a negative influence on the quality of English teaching. For many years, teachers have been accustomed to the traditional teaching method, focusing on the teaching of grammar, vocabulary and sentences patterns in the textbook. During the whole class, it seems that students are listening to the teacher carefully, but there is little communication between the teacher and students, let alone cultivating students' independent thinking. Students don't realize the purpose and fun of learning English, so students' interest in English is not be stimulated.

The author has learned that many art vocational colleges adopt the assessment methods of summative evaluation+formative evaluation. The formative evaluation just involves three or four assignments throughout the semester while the summative evaluation is just the final paper examination. As the final examination is all about the basic English knowledge, students can easily deal with it just by memorizing the learning materials at the end of the term. Because the items in the examination has little to do with students' future careers, students learn English just for the purpose of passing the test and getting the credits, which is completely inconsistent with the goals of talents training of higher vocational colleges and cannot really help students improve their professional competitiveness. This situation has led to students' lacking of interest in English learning. They didn't experience the fun of English learning. The whole English teaching stays in a vicious circle.

Considering the actual situation of the public English teaching in Guangxi Vocational College of Performing Arts and its aim of cultivating applied talents with international vision to prosper China's cultural undertakings, project-based teaching should be used to effectively combine the language learning and students' major as well as their future careers so that students can master English language knowledge and put it into practice in the process of completing the projects. This teaching mode will enable students to truly appreciate the "usefulness" of English and stimulate their interest in English learning, and eventually the quality of teaching is advanced.

3. Project-based Teaching Method

3.1 Concept of Project-based Teaching

Project-based teaching is quite different from other traditional teaching methods, and it emphasizes that students acquire English knowledge and apply knowledge into real work to solve practical problems through completing relevant project tasks. It focuses on creating the needed learning situation and the principle of "learning by doing" on the basis of students-oriented educational philosophy so that students' enthusiasm and initiative of learning can be fully mobilized. With this method, teachers combine English knowledge with practical application skills to enable students acquire professional knowledge and competence under the real work background and atmosphere through the way of "learning and doing". Project-based teaching has gradually become one of the new modes in higher vocational English teaching^[2].

3.2 Theoretical Basis of Project-based Teaching

The theoretical basis of project-based teaching mainly includes Constructive Learning Theory, Pragmatic Educational Theory and Cognitive Theory.

Constructive Learning Theory is a student-centered teaching strategy and the teacher works as the organizer, the mentor, the helper and the facilitator throughout the teaching process. The teacher makes full use of the situation, collaboration, conversation, etc. to give full play of students' initiative and enthusiasm, and finally achieve the meaningful construction of the current knowledge. This theory coincides with the concept of project teaching, viewing that students are the active constructors of knowledge instead of passive recipients. Teachers are the organizers, guides, helpers and facilitators of meaning construction rather than knowledge instillers^[3].

Dewey is the representative of Pragmatic Educational Theory. In the book *Experience and Education*, he points out that "school is society; education is life". He advocates the mode of "learning by doing". The essence of Dewey's theory lies in cultivating students' ability from practice. Project-based teaching method embodies Dewey's idea that teaching is an activity on the basis of "practice" and it aims to solve problems and acquire knowledge as well as skills through "practice" with the

concept of “learning by doing”^[4].

As the representative of Cognitive Theory, Bruner believes that people actively participate in the process of acquiring knowledge and select, transform, store and apply the information that enters the senses. Project teaching is to change the traditional teaching mode in which teachers work as the subject and fill students with knowledge. With rich-contented projects, interesting circumstances, and the real working world, students’ interest and initiative in learning can be stimulated. Students actively participate in acquiring knowledge and carry out the knowledge transformation, storage, and application so that the learning efficiency is improved^[5].

3.3 Previous Studies on Project-based Teaching in Higher Vocational Colleges

Many domestic college teachers and scholars have conducted researches on the application of project teaching method in Higher vocational English teaching. The author searched on CNKI with the keywords of “project-based teaching” and “higher vocational English”, and found that those researches are mainly divided into three categories.

The first category is about the application of project teaching in higher vocational public English course teaching. Fan Xuanxuan proposes the design of English project teaching in higher vocational colleges in a blended teaching environment from the six aspects of pre-class project experience, in-class knowledge foreshadowing, projects plan, project tasks implementation, project evaluation, and after-class competence development. Combining with her own teaching, she analyzes the practical application of this method in English teaching^[6]. In the view of Cao Luxi, there are four procedures in project-based teaching, including project introduction, task implementation, assessment and evaluation, and project summary. He emphasizes that equal attention must be paid to the systematicness of project design as well as English language knowledge and application^[7]. Wang Yong conducts a research on higher vocational public English teaching for students of biochemical and pharmaceutical majors. He proposes the principles of project-based teaching design. He holds the view that this teaching mode improves students’ English knowledge and application competence in the workplace and cultivates their humanistic quality^[8].

The second category is about the practical research of project teaching in higher vocational professional English. Ding Yanqiong believes that teachers should make teaching plans from the perspective of teaching procedures, project implementation and the evaluation under the background of occupation ability training. Students’ occupation competence can be promoted through the combination of theory and practice^[9]. Fan Xin expounds and analyzes the specific application of project teaching method in the translation course of English majors in higher vocational colleges. It enriches the classroom teaching and cultivate students’ interest in English and creativity, which is of great significance^[10]. Kong Yanan discusses the project-based teaching reform of English for special purposes in higher vocational colleges. After her research on industries, she designs in-course projects of *Civil Aviation Service English* on the basis of typical job workflow. Students’ English customer service competence and professional ability will be improved in the project practice when she integrates and optimizes course objectives, the teaching process, teaching environment, and evaluation methods^[11].

The third category is the study of the ideological and political teaching of higher vocational English courses from the perspective of project teaching. Zhong Ling designs a series of projects that integrate ideological and political elements into English application scenarios. While completing relevant project tasks, students improve their language skills and interpreting ability of China’s culture, effectively realizing the aim that English courses and ideological and political education go in the same direction^[12]. Wang Qing reconstructs the teaching materials and contents. He formulates teaching projects on the basis of the teaching content of ideological and political teaching, which provides new ideas for the reform of “ideological and political education” in higher vocational English^[13].

From the above literature analysis, it comes to the conclusion that the application of project teaching has obtained certain achievements in higher vocational English teaching, but there is no research on the application of project teaching in the public English course teaching of art higher vocational education. This study will have certain significance and provide a meaningful reference for the improvement of public English teaching in art higher vocational colleges.

4. The Teaching Design of Public English Course on the Basis of Project Teaching in Art Higher Vocational Colleges

4.1. The Overall Course Design

According to the different majors of students and their future occupations, with the combination of the language and the project teaching method, tasks that meet the characteristics of students are carefully designed, so that students can really improve the basic knowledge and application skills of English language through project tasks. Taking the public English textbook *New Comprehensive Practical English Course 1* used by Guangxi Vocational College of Performing Arts as a example, the project teaching plan of the higher vocational public English course is designed, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Project instructional design

Project tasks	Majors	Training methods	Teaching objectives
Making an object by using some recycled materials	Art Design	Make full use of wastes in life, such as packaging boxes, cans, etc. to make new objects and introduce their composition, shape and use.	Students master expressions related to product technology, shape,color and properties, and introduce their objects fluently.
Making a weather forecast	Broadcasting and Hosting	Report the weather forecast for the coming week in major cities in Guangxi	Students learn the vocabulary and sentences of weather; Learn about the format of weather forecast and the basic etiquette and literacy of hosting.
The charm of Zhuang People's folk songs	Music and Performance	Sing and record a Zhuang folk song, and compare the similarities and differences between Zhuang folk songs and American country music	Students master music-related vocabulary and culture-loaded words translation in Zhuang folk songs; students' ability to appreciate music is improved.
The characteristics of Zhuang People's clothing	Fashion Design	Investigate the festival clothing worn by Zhuang people of different ages and genders to celebrate "March 3 rd ", and introduce craftsmanship, colors and symbolic meaning of festival clothing	Students master the words and expressions of clothing, and appreciate the craftsmanship and the unique beauty of Zhuang festival clothing from their professional perspective.
The recruitment for the Dance Club	Advertising Design	Design a advertisement for the Dance Club to recruit new members, including the slogan and related graphic design	Students learn vocabulary and expressions about advertising and make the best of their advertising knowledge in new advertisements.

The English knowledge goals and ability objectives are clarified in the above design of the five project tasks. While completing these project tasks, students can take full advantage of their comprehensive English skills and their professional abilities will also be enhanced, which will achieve the goal of talents training in higher vocational English course.

4.2. Unit Teaching Design

Taking the project "Making a weather forecast" as an example, the author introduces the application of project teaching in the public English course in art higher vocational colleges.

Step one: the introduction of the project

Weather is a familiar topic in people's life and a lot of outdoor activities depend on the weather. This project comes from unit 1 "Our Weather and Climate" of the textbook. At the beginning of the class, the teacher plays a video about waterlogging in Nanning, guiding students on the importance of weather forecasting in life and eliciting the project task. This project requires each group to broadcast the weather forecast for the coming week in major cities in Guangxi. The teacher provides some relevant videos and language materials so that students can learn about weather-related vocabulary and expressions through self-learning, such as today's Graphic, Centigrade, clear to overcast, turning out cloudy, foggy, drizzle, thundershower, isolated shower, light northwest wind, etc. They master the common sentence patterns of English weather forecast and the precautions for weather forecast

broadcast, which provides language guarantee for the completion of this project task.

Step two: the assignment of the project task

The task is specially designed for the students from Class 2101 of broadcasting and hosting major. There are 28 students in this class and they are divided into 6 groups in total, with 4 or 5 students in each group. The teacher learns about students' English proficiency and comprehensive ability through investigation and balance the quality of personnel in each group, which will help each group to finish the project successfully. The group members discuss how to introduce the weather condition of the selected cities for the coming week, and make relevant plans to ensure the smooth progress of the entire project. The teacher reminds students to make the best of their spare time and they should focus on cooperative learning so that they can develop teamwork spirit to solve all the problems encountered.

Step three: the implementation of the project

Group members work together to check the needed requirements for the writing format and the sentence patterns of the English weather forecast manuscript. The teacher makes appropriate language modifications to the English manuscript of each group to minimize grammar and spelling errors after they finish the writing. Then students look through the English forecast websites and watch the English weather forecast broadcast videos. They should pay certain attention to the basic dress and etiquette of the weather forecaster. They should also notice the speed and intonation of the whole report. Each group records the broadcasting video of his group after they are familiar with the relevant broadcasting knowledge and occupation requirements.

Step four: the presentation and evaluation of the project

The videos recorded by each group are played in turn in the classroom. Students and the teacher evaluate the videos, including self-evaluation within the group, mutual evaluation of groups and the teacher's evaluation. The evaluation adopts the hundred-point system, and it includes: 30 points for the content (whether the content meets the requirements of the task and whether it has clear logic.), 30 points for the oral expression (standardization of the pronunciation, intonation and speed of the speech; accuracy of information transmission; clarity of organization), 20 points for technical content (the integration degree of English knowledge with professional knowledge; whether the interface style is consistent with the theme; whether the dress and etiquette meet the standard of the weather forecaster); 20 points for group cooperation (whether the task is completed together and whether the project is finished on time). Monitor collects and counts up the scores of self-evaluation, mutual evaluation and the teacher's evaluation. The average score of these three points serves as the final score of the project and is also an important part of the formative evaluation. After watching all the videos, the teacher makes a summary and gives some assessment about this project task, pointing out the strengths and weakness.

In order to complete this project, students learn to search for information through the Internet. They not only master the relevant vocabulary and sentence patterns about weather forecast but also acquire the professional qualities and basic etiquette that a host should have. The broadcast of the weather forecast is closely related to students' major. The project combining the professional skills and English knowledge stimulates students' interest in learning English. The completion of the project task cultivates students' team spirit, which lays a foundation for the cooperation in the future careers and at the same time cultivates their interest in loving life.

5. Conclusions

Being different from other traditional teaching methods, project-based teaching mode emphasizes the subjectivity of students in the whole learning and focuses on "learning by doing". However, both the teacher and students face various challenges when this method is adopted in English teaching in art higher vocational colleges. There exist several issues that need to pay attention to in the implementation of project teaching. First, project tasks assigned by the teacher must be clear enough so that students understand what they need to do and make the rational plan to finish the task on time, through which students' autonomous learning and team spirit are promoted. Second, the teacher should control the difficulty of the project. If it is too difficult, it will dampen the enthusiasm of students and the task cannot be completed as expected. On the contrary, if it is too simple, the teaching will be meaningless. Due to the fact that students in art vocational colleges are generally poor in English, teachers should offer certain guidance and help in the process of the project implementation to ease the difficulty. Third, the teacher should not be hesitate to give encouragement and praise to students.

Students from arts majors are lively, strong with hands and good at expressing themselves. Teachers' encouraging words can help them realize their own advantages and experience the sense of achievement, which is beneficial for improving students' self confidence.

By applying the project teaching method to the public English teaching of art higher vocational education, students not only learn relevant language knowledge but also get the opportunities for English learning practice. In addition, students feel the fun of learning English, and their interest and enthusiasm in English learning are mobilized. Project teaching method is conducive to improving students' language knowledge application competence and professional skills, which is in line with the goal of cultivating applied talents of China' higher vocational education and the requirements of the current higher educational teaching reform.

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