

Research on Questioning Strategies in Higher Vocational College English Class

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Abstract: In higher vocational English class, classroom questioning is an important way to arouse students' thinking, stimulate their interest and activate the classroom atmosphere. It is also an effective measure to improve the quality of teaching. This paper introduces several strategies to improve questioning skills in higher vocational English class and illustrates them with examples.

Keywords: Questioning strategy; English class; Higher Vocational College

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The purpose of English teaching in higher vocational colleges is to impart knowledge, cultivate cross-cultural awareness and improve communicative competence. Effective questioning can stimulate students' interest, generate learning motivation and develop students' habits of thinking from multiple angles. The process of answering a well-designed question provides students with opportunities to participate in classroom activities, promotes communications and exchanges between teachers and students, creates a harmonious teaching atmosphere, and improve students' creative thinking. In short, questioning is an important part of teaching. Here are some strategies to improve the effectiveness of questioning.^[1]

1. More open-ended questions should be designed to inspire students to think.

English teachers should raise more questions without standard answers and allow students to come up with their own ideas, which is easier for more students to participate regardless of their grades. The questions should not only focus on the key points of knowledge, but also be connected with real life. Especially for the course of English, the lack of language environment in the learning process is a big defect, so teachers should try to find examples related to the knowledge in life. Only questions with certain difficulties and practical significance can let students have the motivation to think, broaden students' horizons, expand their knowledge, and improve their awareness of contrast as well. Different levels of students should also be taken into account. Questions should be aimed at students of different abilities and levels, which can attract more students to participate in the discussion. For example, when learning about the topic of greetings, questions can be raised such as "What are the ways foreigners greet each other when they meet for the first time?", "What are the differences of greeting ways between the first and the second time?" and "What topics do foreigners usually start with when they meet?" The above questions can not only relate to the content of the lecture, but also make the students think about the differences between Chinese and Western greetings.

2. An emotional atmosphere of equality and tolerance should be created.

Students in higher vocational colleges are not active enough in answering questions because of the poor foundation. Students are also afraid of making mistakes and losing face. Therefore, it is particularly important to create a relaxing classroom atmosphere. Firstly, teachers' gentle and encouraging words can reduce students' tension. Proper evaluations, which are based on the participation rate instead of the accuracy rate, can encourage reticent students to speak. Secondly, students should be given enough time to think or be organized into groups to discuss questions. 3 to 6 students consist of a group and express different opinions. Then a representative from each group presents the result of the discussion. At the same time, groups evaluate and rate each other. When groups are divided, members in the same group should have as much diversity as possible, such as different genders, high and low grades, active and inactive characters, etc. By dividing groups in this way, it is more conducive to cultivating students' spirit of cooperation. Students with strong learning ability can further improve their mastery of knowledge by helping students with weak learning ability. At the same time, students with poor grades can get more help to improve their confidence.^[2] Some other advantages of group discussion are that a variety of different ideas can be demonstrated and students' sense of tension and inferiority can be greatly reduced. Questions that are a little difficult for students, such as text translation, can be arranged in the way of group discussion.

3. More fun should be added to the period of questioning.

As the saying goes, "Interest is the best teacher." When preparing lessons, English teachers should pay more attention to the accumulation of materials, understand the interests of contemporary college students, and achieve a perfect combination with the content of the teaching materials. For example, nowadays there are many abbreviations in English communication. When prepare this part of the content before class, teachers can design the following questions as "Can you list some common English abbreviations in everyday

life? What are their English full names and Chinese meanings?” Almost all the students are familiar with KFC and NBA, but few of them can tell exactly the English words, not to mention the historical backgrounds. When explaining this part of knowledge, teachers add the introduction of history of the restaurant as well as the story of the founder himself, or introduce some of the most popular foods, which will bring different feelings to students and greatly attract students’ attention. Questions like these are easy to arouse students’ interest, and the learning effect will be twice the result with half the effort. Examination results are no longer the most important purpose of English teaching in higher vocational colleges. It is more necessary to improve the ability of cross-cultural consciousness and oral communication. Therefore, teachers should focus on the development of cross-cultural content, and take multicultural communication ability as the starting point of the problem.

4. Possible answers of students should be anticipated and students’ doubts should be responded flexibly.

While designing the questions before class, teachers should predict different answers that students are likely to give. An effective design of questioning and answering can not only arouse students’ interest and thinking but also include corresponding analysis and evaluation to various answers given by students. Teachers should not only delve into the contents of the textbook, but study and understand the students as well. The process of asking and answering questions is also the process of communications between teachers and students. For example, although students have learned the use of tenses from middle school, they are still confused about some similar tenses. The most confusing point is the present perfect tense and the present perfect continuous tense, and the difference between the two is very small. Whenever either tense is involved, full preparations should be made to contrast and compare two tenses. When it comes to the content of cultural differences of festivals, in addition to listing the different dates and customs, students are bound to have doubts about the origin and background of festivals, so teachers need to prepare relevant content in advance to solve students’ confusion. Therefore, a well-designed question-and-answer session includes both teachers’ own preparations and predictions of students.

5. Modern teaching tools should be fully used.

The development of modern science and technology brings new opportunities and challenges to teaching. Both teachers and students should improve their information abilities. Teachers should master the skills of uploading teaching resources, guiding students to complete online tasks, and evaluating students’ online learning. Students should be able to learn by themselves, complete online tasks, and be proficient in operating the learning platform.^[3]The way of asking questions can be carried out both online and offline and in class students can answer the questions designed before class by teachers. There are many ways to answer questions online, like quick responses and voting, which are more acceptable than standing up in front of the classmates. The contents and results can be directly displayed on the projection, so that teachers can carry out specific teaching activities according to the responses of all students. Teachers can also upload the questions to be asked in class to the learning platform before class, so that students can find the answers in advance. In this way, classroom efficiency can be improved and more students can have the opportunities to participate in the classroom activities.

In conclusion, questioning in class plays a very important role in the process of higher vocational English teaching. Teachers should grasp a variety of questioning strategies to design effective questions. Both the characteristics of students and the objectives of English teaching should be taken into account so as to arouse students’ enthusiasm and stimulate students’ creativity. Effective questioning can cultivate students’ abilities of independent thinking and autonomous learning.

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