

A Study on English Course Connection in Secondary and Higher Vocational Schools Based on English Curriculum Standards

Lei Tian

Shandong Labor Vocational and Technical College, Jinan, Shandong, 250000, China

Abstract: In this paper, the author firstly analyzes English Curriculum Standards for Higher Vocational Education (2021 Edition) and the English Curriculum Standards for Secondary Vocational Education (2020 Edition) from different aspects. And then the problems which hinder the connection of English teaching between secondary and higher vocational schools are discussed. By analyzing the new curriculum standards and the existing problems, the author aims to provide some practical suggestions about how to promote English course connection of the two stages.

Keywords: New English curriculum standards; English course connection; Higher vocational education; Secondary vocational education

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Nowadays, vocational education is becoming more and more crucial for cultivating technical talents. And with the intensity of economic globalization, companies are in great need of staff having both specialized knowledge and cross-cultural communicative competences in English. Therefore, making sure that more secondary vocational school students receive higher education and improving English teaching in vocational schools are necessary for both our society and students. However, poor English course connection between secondary and higher vocational education is one of the biggest problems which hinders effective English teaching.

1. Background Information

Responding to The Implementation Plan of National Vocational Education Reform published in January 2019 and promoting the high-quality development of higher vocational education, Ministry of Education issued English Curriculum Standards for Higher Vocational Education (2021 Edition). Previously, there were three curriculum standards for public English in higher vocational colleges published in 1993, 2000 and 2009 respectively. However, a defect common to the earlier three curriculum standards is the insufficient attention to the humanity, which is not compatible with the fundamental task of education.

By comparing English Curriculum Standards for Secondary Vocational Education (2020 Edition) with English Curriculum Standards for Higher Vocational Education (2021 Edition), we can find they have similar curriculum objectives. The two new curriculum standards both aim to promote whole-person development through English language teaching, which makes it possible to better connect English course teaching in Secondary and Higher Vocational Schools.

2. Analysis of Two New English Curriculum Standards

2.1 The Emphasis of Key Competencies

The concept of key competencies of public English in vocational schools is based on the fundamental requirements for vocational education. The key competencies of two new curriculum standards both focus on four aspects: language as a communication tool, language as a media of thinking, language as a carrier of culture and cultivation of self-learning ability. The new curriculum standards

request teachers should no longer merely pay attention to the input of language, which is a more prominent problem in secondary vocational school, but also the four aspects of key competencies. Without the training of key competencies, students cannot really master English and will lose their learning motivation eventually.

Besides, compared with the key competencies during secondary vocational period, the key competencies suggested in English curriculum standards of higher vocational education set higher demands and are more focused on the applied and professional characteristics of English. For instance, students in secondary vocational school are required to understand different types of discourse and diversified cultures. However, higher vocational college students need to communicate effectively in both oral and written English contexts, and achieve cross-cultural communication in daily life and workplace.

2.2 Modular Design of the Curricular Structure

Modular design is adopted in both of the new curriculum standards. According to curriculum standards, the curricular structure of secondary vocational English is divided into three modules which are basic module, professional module and expanded module. Similarly, two modules, namely basic module and expanded module which covers the career advancement category, are included in curricular structure of higher vocational English. The two basic modules both contain three similar kinds of learning subjects which related to people, society and nature. Each subject contains various learning situations.

The main difference is that the learning tasks for higher vocational college students are more complex and tremendously biased toward workplace situations. For example, in terms of vocabulary, students are required to master 1800 to 1900 words when they finish their secondary vocational education. And on this basis, the new curriculum standards require students to learn 2700 to 3000 words when they graduate from higher vocational college. Accordingly, to meet the required level, the new curriculum standards demand the course hours should be at least 144 hours during secondary vocational stage, and 128 to 144 hours for basic module teaching during higher vocational period.

3. The Obstacles to English Course Connection

Although the new curriculum standards illustrate the curriculum implementation from six aspects including teaching requirements, academic achievement evaluation, textbook compilation requirements, curriculum resource development and utilization and so forth, there are some barriers to English course connection.

3.1 English Learners with Various Levels

Students are enrolled in higher vocational college through different ways including national college entrance examination and independent enrollment, etc. Therefore, they have different English levels. Students from high school usually have a better command of English than students from secondary vocational schools. Some of them, especially retired soldiers and farmers have given up learning English and even know nothing about it. Without basic knowledge, the teaching materials is too much difficult for them to understand. And it is almost impossible to meet the requirements of the new curriculum standards. However, many higher vocational colleges do not divide students into different classes and implement level-based teaching because of the practical difficulties of implementation or insufficient fund. What's more, many students do not pay enough attention to the importance of learning English and even think that learning English is useless.

3.2 Inappropriate Teaching materials

On the one hand, there is usually a weak association between secondary vocational and higher vocational English teaching materials for lack of communication between textbook editors. For example, some teaching contents are repeated and some are too much difficult for students as we have mentioned above, which may lower students' learning motivations. On the other hand, some teaching materials are outdated. With the career environments changing fast and industries developing as well, the teaching materials should also be updated. And it is impractical for all students of different majors to use the same English textbook.

4. Suggestions about Promoting English Course Connection

In this part, some suggestions about how to promote English course connection based on the new curriculum standards are provided mainly from four aspects related to teachers, students, teaching materials and teaching methods.

4.1 Strengthening Communication between Teachers and Enhancing their All-around Capabilities

Since teachers from secondary vocational schools and higher vocational colleges belong to different management departments, there is usually little communication between them. To strength the communication, and plan course objectives and teaching contents as a whole, a special department responsible for co-ordination between English teaching during the two stages is needed. With unified

management, teachers can prepare lessons together and it will be easier for them to have chances to discuss and solve problems of poor connection.

Besides, the new curriculum standards propose higher demands for teachers. Teachers not only play the role of imparting knowledge and educating people, but also the roles of researcher and instructional designer. Therefore, on the one hand, teachers should be selected on a fairly strict set of criteria such as professional ability, humanistic quality, scientific research capacity, etc.

4.2 Stimulating Student's Learning Interests and Cultivating Self-learning Ability

With the academic pressure, students have to study hard at English in middle and high schools. However, most students in vocational schools usually do not realize the importance of learning public English. Teachers can help students motivate their learning interests by using real-life examples and make them realize that acquiring cross-cultural communicative competence is necessary for high-quality workers.

4.3 Compiling and Selecting High-quality Curriculum Resources

The success of English course connection highly depends on the quality of English curriculum resources including textbooks, digital resources such as micro-course online video, movie clips, online pictures, etc. According to the new curriculum standards, the editors should follow the principles of consistency and hierarchy when they compile textbooks. And the teaching materials need to include cutting edge information and reflect vocational characteristics. Besides, teachers should further select materials which are accord with students' English levels and interests.

4.4 Applying Various Kinds of Teaching Methods

First, teachers should use different kinds of teaching methods in class according to the teaching contents and students. Some methods are particularly effective and profound, such as task-driven method, situational teaching method, communicative methodology, listening and speaking approach, etc. The purpose is to improve students' language performance in real professional situations by imitating and practicing. Besides, teachers should teach students how to learn by using learning strategies.

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About the author:

Lei Tian (1991.12-) , female, Han nationality, born in Binzhou, Shandong Province, junior professional title, postgraduate student, research direction is linguistics.