

Original Paper

How to Enhance the Enthusiasm of Vocational College Students for Learning English Under the “Double High” Plan

Zhang Mi¹

张咪

¹ Anhui Water Conservancy Technical College, Anhui, China

Received: November 22, 2023 Accepted: January 11, 2024 Online Published: February 19, 2024

doi:10.22158/eltls.v6n1p143

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/eltls.v6n1p143>

Abstract

English courses in vocational colleges are an integral part of higher vocational education and serve the goal of cultivating high-quality skilled talents for production, construction, service, and management. Currently, many vocational college students show low enthusiasm for learning English. This paper analyzes the current situation of English learning among vocational college students and deeply examines how to motivate students' enthusiasm for English learning in a multi-dimensional and multi-channel way under the “Double High” background.

Keywords

“Double High”, Vocational Colleges, English Learning, Enthusiasm

1. Introduction

With the development of the economy and the increasing trend of globalization, English teaching in vocational colleges has become increasingly important. If vocational colleges intend to develop and lead in the education industry, international exchanges are essential. English plays a crucial role in communication and cooperation. The ultimate goal of English teaching in vocational colleges is to improve teaching quality and cultivate well-rounded talents proficient in English for communication in their working business. In teaching activities, students are the main subjects. Only by fully mobilizing their interest and enhancing their enthusiasm can effective teaching be ensured.

2. The Current State of English Learning in Vocational Colleges

2.1 Poor English Foundation Among Students

As a compulsory course in vocational education, English course exists as an essential. However, non-English majors in higher vocational colleges generally have a weak foundation in English and

show little interest in learning English. Students get enrolled by vocational colleges either after completing high school through college entrance exams or from secondary vocational or technical schools. The latter group tends to have a weaker foundation in English, showing less interest in learning English and lower receptivity in teachers' lectures. In a survey conducted in two classes, with 41 valid responses from 55 questionnaires, 70.73% of the students entered the school through college entrance exams, with their highest English score being 124 and the lowest 49, most not exceeding 90. Only 50% of the students felt their English level met the current course requirements, and 31.7% considered their English very poor.

2.2 Insufficient Emphasis from Schools

The "College English Course Teaching Requirements" suggests that higher vocational education should actively incorporate modern teaching methods like computers and the internet to develop personalized and self-directed learning models. However, most vocational colleges do not prioritize English learning for non-English majors, lacking infrastructure like multimedia classrooms and language labs, which hinders students' learning enthusiasm. The quality of English teachers varies, and due to resource shortages, combined big-class teaching is common, making it difficult to teach according to students' various abilities. To a large extent, classroom behaviors like sleeping, using phones, and chatting impact the teaching effectiveness.

2.3 Monotonous Teaching Model, Lack of Innovation

Classroom teaching in China is predominantly teacher-centered, focusing on knowledge delivery according to the semester teaching plan, leaving students passive and mainly responsible for note-taking and memorization. This does not stimulate students' enthusiasm or foster autonomous learning abilities. The examination-oriented system requires the focus on exam results and knowledge acquisition in English teaching. With the general lack of enthusiasm among vocational college students, the mutual nature of teaching and learning means that poor student enthusiasm also affects teachers' willingness to innovate, leading to traditional and uninspired teaching methods which neglect classroom engagement and student feedback.

2.4 Insufficient Integration of Practical Training

The vocational college English teaching syllabus emphasizes students' practical application abilities after graduation. (Wang, 2015) It suggests reducing the emphasis on "academic reading" and enhancing "practical reading" training. Most vocational college students prioritize practical skills, as they typically spend two years in theoretical study followed by a year of practical training before entering the workforce. Current English textbooks are outdated and not closely related to students' daily lives or future work. The lack of English practice opportunities in many colleges also poses a challenge.

3. The Theoretical Basis and Content of the “Double High Plan”

In June 2014, President Xi Jinping stated that vocational education is a crucial pathway for youth to achieve success and carries the responsibility of cultivating diverse talents and promoting employment and entrepreneurship. (Yuan, 2022) Premier Li Keqiang also emphasized attracting more youth to get vocational education and strengthening teachers’ training and educational conditions in vocational schools.

The “Action Plan for Improving the Quality of Vocational Education (2020-2023)” issued in September 2020 by the Ministry of Education and other departments underlines the advancement of the “Double High Plan” to build high-quality talent training bases and technological innovation platforms.

The first National Vocational Education Conference in April 2021, addressed by President Xi, highlighted the importance of building high-level vocational colleges and specialties to train high-quality technical talents. The “Opinions on Promoting High-Quality Development of Modern Vocational Education” issued in October 2021 by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council, aims to establish a modern vocational education system by 2025, with vocational undergraduate education comprising no less than 10% of higher vocational education enrollment.

The “Double High Plan” is a manifestation of implementing the spirit of the National Vocational Education Conference and the “National Vocational Education Reform Implementation Plan,” aiming to build high-level vocational colleges and specialties with international influence and enhance schools’ technical service capabilities and internationalization to achieve high-quality talent training.

4. The Necessity of Enhancing English Learning Interest among Non-English Majors in Vocational Colleges

The implementation of English teaching activities in higher education institutions aligns with societal development trends, providing a solid foundation for improving students’ English communication skills for future employment. There is a positive correlation between students’ enthusiasm for English learning and their learning outcomes. Students with higher enthusiasm and motivation naturally achieve better results, while those lacking interest struggle to ensure effective learning. Many vocational college students have a weak foundation in English, with some even developing aversion to this subject. The key challenge for English teachers in vocational colleges is how to effectively stimulate students’ enthusiasm for learning English. Only when students genuinely find interest in English can they excel in the language.

5. Measures to Enhance the English Learning Enthusiasm of Non-English Majors in Vocational Colleges

Based on personal teaching experience and observation of veteran English teachers' classroom teaching, the author discusses several measures to enhance the enthusiasm of non-English majors in vocational colleges for learning English.

5.1 Improve Teacher Quality, Intensify the Training of "Dual-Competency" Teachers

Teachers are the guides and organizers of educational activities. It's essential to encourage vocational English teachers to continually enhance their learning, improve teaching capabilities, and expand their knowledge base to become "dual-competency" talents, who possess both teaching abilities and extensive practical skills. (Huang, 2021) Their teaching, research, and resource integration capabilities significantly enrich classroom instruction, fostering student engagement and building application-oriented talents. Elevating the quality and teaching level of English teachers enables more innovative and life-relevant lesson planning, stimulating student interest and thereby their learning enthusiasm. Increased student enthusiasm will, in turn, enhance their autonomous learning abilities, ultimately achieving the long-term goals of education. Teachers should be encouraged to engage in educational research, continually elevate their academic level, master scientific teaching and research methods, and explore effective public English teaching in vocational colleges by linking theory with practice.

Outstanding teaching skills not only impart theoretical and cultural knowledge to students but also offer foresight and guidance on potential future work challenges. Dual-competency teachers will inevitably bring more innovation to classroom design, creating a conducive English learning environment and further stimulating students' enthusiasm for learning English. Therefore, the construction and management of teaching staff should not be overlooked. The development of talent training programs, construction of educational resource libraries, reform of teaching models, and innovation in teaching content all have influence on students' enthusiasm for learning English. Vocational colleges can only continuously reform and progress by improving teacher quality.

5.2 Uphold Fundamental Principles and Break New Ground, Continuously Enrich Teaching Methods

In traditional teaching methods, teachers are the primary focus, with students often passively receiving information. To enhance students' enthusiasm for learning English, this situation must be changed, with teachers guiding and students becoming the true subjects. English classroom teaching should transition from merely conveying knowledge to cultivating students' practical abilities, dedicating most class time to student participation. At the beginning of the semester, teachers can use baseline tests to assess students' English abilities. This not only helps understand the current English level of students for future teaching but also motivates their enthusiasm for learning English. Layered teaching significantly improves teaching efficiency, allowing teachers to tailor their preparation, instruction, and classroom organization according to the actual English level of their students. Additionally, it enhances

classroom participation, ensuring students of different levels benefit and receive personalized education.

Promoting teaching and learning through competition, students are encouraged to participate in class and school-level English contests. (Guo, 2016) Competitions help students identify areas for improvement and set directions for further learning. Moreover, achieving good results in contests further enhances students' interest in learning English. Continuous innovation and introducing new forms of teaching methods, such as utilizing app-based study check-ins and combining online and offline learning, fully engages students in English educational activities. Teachers can also organize activities that attract students, such as three-minute speeches before class, video learning, classroom discussions, and role-playing, which are highly participative. Additionally, extracurricular activities are crucial. It is recommended to hold a diverse English evening each semester, including activities like film dubbing, singing contests, drama performances, and poetry recitation, allowing students to showcase their talents while improving their English proficiency and stimulating their enthusiasm for learning English.

5.3 Rational Planning, Optimizing the English Course Evaluation System

English course evaluations not only effectively reflect the overall level of students' English learning but also prompt teachers and students to recognize issues, thus creating a virtuous cycle. Firstly, the evaluation subjects should be diversified. Vocational college education is career-oriented, aiming to cultivate well-rounded socialist builders and successors adaptable to contemporary changes and industry requirements. Hence, the English teaching evaluation in vocational schools should include third-party representatives from industries and sectors. In course evaluation, besides student self-assessment and teacher evaluation, third-party evaluation can more objectively judge the effectiveness of English teaching, helping teachers and students identify learning shortcomings and problems for adjustments and optimization in future teaching activities. Secondly, evaluation forms should also be diversified. Traditional vocational college English teaching evaluation often relies on students' final exam scores, unable to assess their comprehensive abilities. The final English grade for the term could be set as 50% continuous assessment and 50% final exam. Teachers should record students' daily learning activities, such as classroom attendance, pre-class preparation, class notes, participation in answering questions, homework, and involvement in activities or competitions, assigning a specific score ratio for each as part of the continuous assessment, thereby stimulating students' interest in participating in English learning.

5.4 Integrating Industry and Education, Increasing English Practical Activities

The true essence of perfect teaching lies in the combination of theory and practice. Vocational college students generally have weaker speaking and listening abilities, with many struggling significantly with listening comprehension during classes and only able to speak simple sentences and common dialogues. These students urgently need a "strong linguistic environment" for practice. Vocational colleges train application-oriented talents, requiring English learning to focus on practical speaking and writing skills.

(Wei, 2023) Accordingly, vocational colleges can regularly contact social enterprises and organizations according to the actual needs of English practical courses, arranging student visits or internships at various enterprises and institutions.

For vocational college students, English is a tool. Therefore, the teaching process should connect with real-life situations, making students perceive the practicality of English, not just learning for exams, but applying it in everyday life. Utilizing real-life teaching content can make English classes more relatable and immersive, significantly boosting student enthusiasm. Furthermore, there is a considerable disconnect between the content of public English teaching and professional practice in vocational colleges. In the context of contemporary society, the work factor in tool-type learning motivation is most prominent. Therefore, schools must teach English vocational skills related to students' future work and employment. By highlighting professional features in vocational English classes, student learning enthusiasm can be genuinely promoted.

5. Conclusion

In summary, under the “Double High” initiative, vocational colleges must not only focus on building high-level institutions and specialties but also consider the necessity of English learning for students in an increasingly globalized world. Higher vocational education English courses, aimed at serving and employment-oriented, require slightly different English application abilities for various professions. To enhance students' employability, vocational colleges need to keep pace with the times, further strengthen international exchanges and cooperation, and make breakthroughs in areas such as teacher training, collaborative education, resource sharing, and student exchanges with overseas institutions, industry enterprises, or organizations. This will enhance the international reputation and influence of the schools and strive to increase the enthusiasm of vocational college students in learning English. Interest is the best teacher, and enthusiasm plays a crucial role in learning English. Vocational college teachers must combine practical teaching methods with the diverse characteristics of students, create engaging and interesting classes, strive to enhance students' enthusiasm for learning English, and enable them to grasp foundational language knowledge and practical application skills, thereby improving the effectiveness of English teaching and achieving success in English education.

Reference

- Guo, X. B. (20196). How to Arouse the Enthusiasm of Vocational College Students in Learning English. *Shanxi Youth*, 2016(22), 175. (in Chinese)
- Huang, M. (2021). A Study on the Promotion Strategies of English Learning Enthusiasm of Vocational College Student. *Journal of Jiangxi Vocational and Technical College of Electricity*, 34(8), 120-121. (in Chinese) <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1673-0097.2021.08.055>

- Wang, B. (2015). How to stimulate students' enthusiasm in public English teaching in vocational colleges. *Journal of Anhui Vocational College of Electronics and Information Technology*, 2015(2), 63-65. (in Chinese) <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1671-802X.2015.02.018>
- Wei, H. X. (2023). A Practical Study on Improving the Participation and Enthusiasm of Vocational College Students in English Course. *Journal of Jiangxi Vocational and Technical College of Electricity*, 36(6), 119-121. (in Chinese) <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1673-0097.2023.06.042>
- Yuan, T. H. (2022). How to improve students' English learning enthusiasm in vocational colleges Under the background of "Double-high". *English Square*, 2022(3), 95-99. (in Chinese) <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1009-6167.2022.03.027>

Author information

Zhang Mi (张咪), Anhui Water Conservancy Technical College (安徽水利水电职业技术学院), Anhui, China