Discussion on the Application of Blended Learning Approach in English Teaching in Higher Vocational and Technical Colleges

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Abstract. With the development of educational informationization, the traditional English teaching model is faced with severe challenges in cultivating students' English communicative ability. This paper analyzes the current situation of English learning approach in Higher Vocational and Technical Colleges by exploring the intention and the application of Blended English Learning Approach, to achieve the combination of traditional classroom teaching and online teaching, and furthermore to effectively improve the English teaching quality in higher vocational and technical colleges.

Introduction

According to Ten-year Development Plan for Technical Information (2011-2020) issued by the Ministry of Education, "By 2020, teachers in schools of all kinds and at all levels will basically meet the prescribed standards of education technology capabilities. Various methods and means will be adopted to help teachers to effectively apply information technology, update teaching concepts, and improve teaching methods and teaching quality. "However, in the practice of English teaching, only PPT courseware has been used by many teachers as the educational information technology, the other multimedia tools have not been used as much as they should be. Blended learning is an improvement in the learning philosophy that changes the way students perceive and the teaching models, teaching strategies and roles of teachers. "The role of teachers must be deconstructed and reconstructed in the computer network teaching"

Profile of "Blended" English Learning Approach

The focus of English teaching is to train students' basic abilities of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating, and to improve their intercultural communication skills. Although the improvement of English teaching quality is restricted by many factors, it is crucial to choose the appropriate teaching content and teaching approach. "There is a teaching method, but there is no definite method." Blended learning refers to a strategy to implement teaching by integrating different learning theories, techniques, methods and applications. It has become a major trend in "Blended" teaching applications through integrating two typical teaching approaches of face-to-face classroom learning (face-to-face) and digital online learning (On-learning or E-learning).

"Blended learning" can be divided into four dimensions of "learning object", "learning environment", "learning method" and "learning evaluation".

Increasingly, the "blended" learning has become a new study direction, which emphasizes the "blending" of various elements, focuses on "case-by-case analysis ", and pursues the optimal learning. To realize the complementary advantages and achieve better effect of teaching and learning mode is in line with the requirements of English teaching reform and development in Higher Vocational and Technical Colleges in the new era and plays a positive role in English teaching reform.
Current Situation of English Learning in Vocational Colleges

At present, the students of Higher Vocational and Technical Colleges in China have a complex source, including ordinary high schools (Pu Gao), secondary vocational schools (Zhong Zhi), secondary specialized schools (Zhong Zhuan) and technical schools (Ji Xiao). The diversity of student source has led to great differences in English learning among vocational college students. In the same way, their language basis in English learning is more different when they enter the school due to the obvious differences in the content and difficulty level of pre-English learning. Students are less confident in learning, less focused and less persistent. It is more obvious that students in different English level have different understanding when teaching in same materials and methods.

Secondly, students have different needs in English learning. Not only students of other majors but also students of English majors have great differences in the teaching content and English learning due to their professional planning and career development. In addition, compared with students in ordinary colleges, students in vocational colleges generally have poor learning habits and learning abilities, so it is often very difficult for them to focus on English learning for a long time.

The above features of student source and English learning determine that the basic concept of “Individualized instructions; Individualized materials; Individualized needs” must be implemented in English teaching in Higher Vocational and Technical Colleges. Only by applying this concept in practice can we achieve better results, and "blended" English teaching is a helpful attempt.

Promote English Classroom Teaching with "Blended" Learning as the Leading Method

"Blended" teaching aims to improve the teaching quality and promote students to learn English better. To optimize the design of the classroom teaching is the key to "blended" English teaching for vocational college. The teachers should focus on the concept of "blended" teaching; arrange specific teaching steps to display the content to the students in a comprehensive and vivid way. So far, "blended learning" is being adopted in some courses in Beijing Information Technology College. The existing resources include "Wenhua Online" and "Stanford English", which provide blended learning services of interactive teaching materials, teaching cloud platform, integration of teaching and service. The teaching mode is based on student-oriented self-learning, supplemented by teachers' guidance and evaluation. For some courses focusing on listening and speaking, the teaching design mainly include course introduction, task assignment, and activity organizing, as well as online learning support and teaching evaluation.

The combination of online and offline teaching developed an integrity system of "online-offline-online"(or network-classroom-network) in teaching process. Classroom teaching mainly includes online learning, individualized learning and group learning, "routine" learning in school and "practice" learning outside school, theory teaching learning and skill practice learning. As a result of the “blended” learning method, it shows a diverse achievement and more flexible evaluation method. This is just the very beginning of the teaching model and is still on the way to explore in practice. Blended learning is an improvement of learning concept, which has changed the students' cognitive way as well as the teachers' teaching role, model and strategy change.

Therefore, online teaching breaks through the limit of space and time for learning, no matter in terms of language grasping, or professional knowledge accumulation or work skills improvement. However, English is a practical language subject, the communicative ability of students need to be trained through more practice between teachers and students and between students themselves under the guidance of teachers. The objective learning achievement shall be evaluated by means of "student self-evaluation", "student mutual evaluation", "teacher evaluation" and other means. Meanwhile the teachers shall effectively link the language ability, professional knowledge and work skills together to help the student with their weakness and grasp their online learning.

Micro-course and WeChat Informatization

As matters stand, it is common that the students are addicted to the mobile phone and they swipe
the screen all day long. What the teachers ponder over and over every day are the problems of how to arouse students' interest in learning, how to adopt appropriate teaching methods, and how to achieve “Individualized instructions; Individualized materials; Individualized needs”. How to make the student learn by swiping cellphone? Micro-course is a good choice, which refers to a teaching method aiming at online learning on mobile phone. The focus of teaching course will be presented to the students in a popular and acceptable. It is of great help to further improve their learning ability and achievement.

The micro-course features short and concise content while the topics cover independent and integrative content. A video of 5 to 10 minutes, or the longest not more than 20 minutes will effectively solve the main and difficult problems relating to English teaching by interpreting and training the key grammar and knowledge points, easier for students to understand and grasp. They will be more confident and achievable in learning, and get rid of their negative psychological factors in learning.

The micro-course is also a scenario teaching, especially in listening, oral and professional courses. Generally, the topics with highlight theme, clear direction and relatively complete teaching situation are good materials for scenario teaching. To create a real, exact and typical learning situation is helpful for student to practice their language skills. Through learning and imitating the content of micro-class video, students can transfer and improve their language knowledge and ability, so as to improve their learning effect and finally realize the learning goal of putting what they have learned into practice.

With the rapid development of network and multimedia technology, students are often easy to accept the teaching methods with certain information technology content. The video resources usually are stream media file in RM, WMV, FLV format in a size a dozen to several tens megabytes, so it is convenient for students to watch online, or download to other terminals such as laptop, mobile phones and MP4 for learning repeatedly. Similarly, video teaching method, in line with the characteristics of students in vocational and technical colleges, is more conducive to attracting their attention and interesting in English learning.

In addition, with the emergence of new media, WeChat has gradually played a prominent role in the field of education and teaching. How to use WeChat group and WeChat public platform to build "WeChat English learning" interactive classroom and realize the mobile “blended” English learning model needs more English teachers to participate in the implementation.

Conclusions

At present, English teaching in Higher Vocational and Technical Colleges is faced with many pressures and challenges, and it is urgent to seek a way out of reform.

Traditional classroom teaching and single network teaching, due to their respective limitations, do not satisfy the needs of English teaching in Higher Vocational and Technical Colleges. The blended teaching in the new era, marks by E-Learning, combines the advantages of traditional teaching. It advocates unifying the leading role of teachers with the dominant position of students, and proposes a multiple methods to evaluate students. This teaching method will not only improve the quality of English teaching in Higher Vocational and Technical Colleges, but also effectively improve students' ability of independent learning, problem solving, cooperation and leadership, with the development of the times. It is the inevitable trend of English teaching reform and development in Higher Vocational and Technical Colleges. At the same time, the blended learning model puts forward higher requirements on the quality and ability of teachers, and "the role of teachers should be deconstructed and reconstructed in the computer teaching", while the concept and application of information-based teaching of English teachers are lower than those of teachers of other majors, so it is urgent to cultivate their design, implementation and evaluation ability in information-based English teaching.
More opportunities should be provided to teachers for learning from and communicating with the outside to expand their views. However English teachers should actively study related software applications, improve their design and developing ability of teaching resources, to integrate information technology and English courses.

References


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