Reform and Practice of the English Curriculum in Higher Vocational Colleges in Guangxi—Taking Guangxi Vocational College of Water Resources and Electric Power as an Example

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Abstract: Since the promulgation of the national "English Curriculum Standards for Higher Vocational Education (2021 Edition)", the English curriculum reform in higher vocational colleges has been advancing steadily. What are the effects of the reform? New policies of "unified examination" for upgrading from junior college to undergraduate college will be implemented in Guangxi in 2025, and English is one of the designated test subjects. This has raised new requirements for the construction of English curriculum in higher vocational colleges in Guangxi and brought new opportunities for its reform. This paper studies the national English curriculum standards, conducts analysis of the new examination policies, and obtains information about the effect of the current implementation of higher vocational college English curriculum in Guangxi through a questionnaire survey. In view of the real demands of students, four suggestions for the reform of the English curriculum are put forward to clarify the direction for improving the construction of the higher vocational English curriculum.

1. Introduction

In July 2023, the Department of Education of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region issued an important document, hereinafter referred to as the "Measures for the Examination and Enrollment for Upgrading from Junior College to Undergraduate College in Guangxi"[1], stipulating that since 2025, all the junior college students will have to take a "unified examination" to gain the opportunity to study at an undergraduate school. English will be one of the required test subjects in the examination. In January 2024, Examinations and Admissions Authority of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region issued another crucial document, hereinafter referred to as the "Outline and Explanation of the English "unified examination" in Guangxi (2025 Edition)[2], clarifying the examination contents of English subjects. And compared with the requirements of "English Curriculum Standards for Higher Vocational Education (2021 Edition)" [3]published by the Ministry of Education, the higher vocational English curriculum still needs to be improved. It cannot adapt to the new trend of the "unified examination" policy. English curriculum reform is of

great urgency.

In recent years, studies on the reform of the English curriculum in higher vocational colleges have focused on the following aspects.

"Three Education" model. Xiao et al.(2024) built up a "Three Education" Reform model with "teacher competence + textbook content + teaching method innovation" as the main line of information technology empowerment[4]. Information technology factors. Yu (2024) proposed that 5G technology had improved the English classroom experience and provided innovation for modern teaching. It obviously enhanced the two-way communication between students and professors[5]. Wang et al.(2024) used artificial intelligence technology for student data analysis to achieve personalized customization of teaching content[6]. Liu et al.(2024) focused on the organic integration of online teaching resources and offline course teaching, and discussed the reform of blended teaching, hoping to promote the innovation and reconstruction of English teaching in the information age[7]. Multicultural factors. Zhang (2023) aimed to analyze the existing problems in current college English teaching from a multicultural perspective and explored strategies for the reform of college English teaching[8]. Curriculum ideological and political reform. Zhou (2024) proposed to explore the reform strategies of college English teaching under the guidance of curriculum-based ideological and political education, and assisted in cultivating outstanding talents with an international perspective and sound ideological and political accomplishment[9].

2. The Current Implementation of Higher Vocational English Curriculum in Guangxi

To understand the real needs of higher vocational students for the current English curriculum and its implementation effect, a questionnaire survey was conducted among college students. It is hoped that on the basis of analyzing and evaluating the results of the questionnaire survey, more objective suggestions can be put forward for the next step of reform in higher vocational English curriculum.

2.1. Objects of the Questionnaire Survey

This questionnaire survey was conducted in the School of Water Conservancy Engineering, which had the largest enrollment scale in our college. Our school is a national model higher vocational college, the objects of the survey are some students from ten classes of five majors in grade 2022 and grade 2023 (a total of 2535 students), so they are representative.

(At the confidence level of 95 %, 0.05 population variable)

$$n = N/(1+Ne^2)$$

n: Size of sample group, N: Total number of students enrolled in 2022 and 2023 of the School of Water Conservancy Engineering, e: Inexactness from sampling at confidence level at 95 %.

$$n = N/(1+Ne^2) = 2535/(1+2535 \times 0.05^2) \approx 345.49$$

Thus the sample size was 346. The questionnaire was answered completely without interference, and the survey results were objective and true.

2.2. Contents of the Questionnaire Survey

There are 19 questions in this questionnaire (including an open question), which is divided into three parts: the first part is about the students' self-assessment of the comprehensive English ability (questions 1-6), the second part is about the students' views on the compulsory English course in the "Basic Module" stage/ in grade 1 (questions 7-10), the third part is about the implementation the optional English courses in the "Expansion Module" stage/ in grade 2 and 3 (questions 11-19).

2.3. Analysis of Questionnaire Survey Data

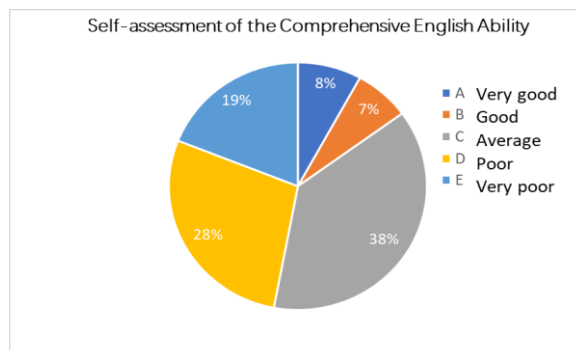## 2.3.1. Self-assessment of the Comprehensive English Ability

Figure 1: Self-assessment of the Comprehensive English Ability.

Figure 1 indicates that students' self-evaluation of their comprehensive English ability is low; only 15% of them consider their English ability to be good or very good, while 47% consider it to be poor or very poor. Among the assessment value of the five basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating), listening is of the highest value, while writing is of the lowest.

The diversity of students may be one of the reasons for the low self-evaluation. Students are respectively enrolled from senior high schools, junior technical secondary schools and society. Some of them from the latter two places haven't studied English for a long time before enrollment. Teachers need to take these differences into consideration when designing English curriculum in higher vocational colleges, so as to improve the overall teaching quality of English.

2.3.2. Views on the Compulsory English Course in the "Basic Module" Stage

Table 1: General Cognition of the Current English Curriculum.

Learning purposes	One or more answer choices	Difficulty of learning contents	Only one answer choice	Total class hours	Only one answer choice
A.Workplace communication	42%	A.Too difficult	14%	A.Reasonable	79%
B.Coping with exams	47%	B.Difficult	30%		
C.Studying abroad	7%	C.General	46%		
D.Others	51%	D.Easy	7%	B.Unreasonable	21%
		E.Too easy	3%		

(1) On the purpose of English learning. Some students have multiple learning purposes (Table 1), and nearly half of them regard "workplace communication" and "coping with exams" as their preferred goals. Secondly, about half of the students also hold "other" learning purposes, for example, some want to learn the skills of the "intercultural communication", "English speech", "English film appreciation" and so on. Therefore, the above contents should be all included as important components in the higher vocational English curriculum.

(2) On the difficulty of English curriculum contents (Table 1). 44 % of the students think that the current English teaching contents are "difficult" or "too difficult" (the textbook used is "Progressive English for Vocational Colleges"), which requires teachers to make reasonable

adjustments to the curriculum resources such as textbooks and courseware when preparing lessons, so as to adapt to the existing cognitive level of students.

(3) On the total class hours of English course (Table 1). 79 % of them think that the total class hours are reasonable (72 lessons in "Basic Module" stage/ in grade 1), which should be continued.

2.3.3. The Implementation of the Optional English Courses in the "Expansion Module" Stage

(1) On its total class hours. 62 % of the objects think it is necessary to continue to have optional English courses in grade 2 and grade 3 (the "Expansion Module" stage). Among them, 33 % expect 1-20 class hours, 27 % expect 21-40, 21 % support 41-60, 8 % support 61-80, while 11 % support more than 80 class hours. Different students have different needs for the total class hours of English courses, which further verifies the rationality of setting up English courses in the form of optional courses rather than compulsory courses in the "Expansion Module" stage, giving students the freedom to decide how long they should study and what contents they should learn.

(2) On its learning effect. Among the students who has taken the optional English courses, nearly 80% believe that their English ability has improved. 58 % take the optional course targeting the "unified examination". There are two main reasons for those who not choosing this course: about 60 % do not intend to participate in the "unified examination", and about another 30 % is due to the time conflicts (the optional courses and other compulsory courses are at the same time).

2.4. Conclusion of the Questionnaire Survey

Survey Findings: The analysis of the questionnaire data indicates that the total class hours and the contents arrangement of the current higher vocational English courses meet the basic needs of most students at our school. "Workplace communication skills" and "exam-oriented skills" should be the first choices contents of the English curriculum. Besides, cultural factors play an important role in communication. Intercultural communication should be integrated into the whole process of higher vocational English learning.

3. Suggestions on Higher Vocational English Curriculum Reform

Based on the students' learning demands reflected in the questionnaire survey, this research adjusts the curriculum framework in "English Curriculum Standards for Higher Vocational Education (2021 Edition)", so as to formulate our school-based higher vocational English curriculum framework (Table 2), and put forward the following suggestions for the English curriculum reform:

Table 2: School-based Higher Vocational English Curriculum Framework.

Modules	Courses	Number of semesters	Class hours	Course form
Basic module	General English for Workplace	2	72 - 112	Compulsory course
Expansion module	1.<English for Water Conservancy>, <English for Electric Power>, etc. 2.<English for the unified examination< 3.<Intercultural Communication>, etc.	3	60 or more	Optional courses

3.1. In Combination with Its Own Characteristics and Objective Conditions, Formulating a School-based English Curriculum Framework

Extend class hours in the "Basic Module" stage through multiple means. Table 2 shows that the "class hours" in the basic module stage fails to reach 128 - 144 class hours that required by the national curriculum standards. Therefore, teachers can extend English learning by using the online platform to create second classroom learning. Cao et al. (2022) proposed a "Three Modules" school-based curriculum framework. In addition to the "Basic Module" and the "Expansion Module", the "Practice Module" is added to improve English proficiency through forms such as club cultural activities and English skills competition [10]. Master knowledge and skills in the process of preparing for these activities and competitions. Secondly, real-time interaction with students through the online platform after class is achieved to make up for the insufficiency of the total class hours of the course.

Characterize and specify the teaching contents in the "Expansion Module" stage. Table 2 shows that the design of "English for Career Enhancement" should highlight the professional characteristics of each college, setting courses as "English for Water Conservancy", "English for Electric Power", and "English for Architecture". In these kind of courses, English ability is improved by simulating and completing specific job tasks. For example, in "English for Water Conservancy" course, teachers create working scenarios, and invite students to be engineering project managers to communicate with the construction company about the project, so as to achieve the dual goals of improving English + professional qualities.

3.2. Accelerating the Development of the Online Resource Database

Chang (2021) pointed out that curriculum resources should include text and digital resources that assist teaching, equipment resources, and characteristic resources for implementing the second classroom teaching practice[11]. Review the existing teaching resources, introduce interactive virtual simulation experiment and training equipment, and hire professional teams to collaborate with English teachers to produce online curriculum resources, so as to enhance the efficiency and quality of online resources development and make them better serve the English teaching.

3.3. Strengthening the Construction of the Teaching Staff

In the construction of the curriculum resource database, teachers are no longer just guides for English learning, they also need to have other working capabilities such as writing scripts and recording videos in person, and be able to assist professional production teams in completing tasks such as shooting, post-production, and uploading resources to the learning platform. This places higher requirements on the comprehensive professional ability of every English teacher. Therefore, in order to enhance the overall quality of the teaching team, teachers should be encouraged to participate in seminars regularly and the learning of relevant professional knowledge, and improve their informatization proficiency.

3.4. Arranging English Optional Courses Scientifically and Reasonably

According to the questionnaire feedback, more than 60% of the students hope to learn English in grade 2 and grade 3(in the "Expansion Module" stage), but some of them are unable to take the courses due to factors such as going out for their internships or the time conflicts. This requires the overall coordination of the Academic Affairs Office to stagger the English optional courses. In order to stagger with the daily compulsory classes, these optional courses can be arranged in the 7th

to 10th periods in the evening to meet the students' course selection needs.

4. Conclusions

The implementation of the new policies of the "uniform examination" for upgrading from junior college to undergraduate has forced higher vocational colleges in Guangxi to reform their English curriculum, and the " English Curriculum Standards for Higher Vocational Education (2021 Edition)" is the theoretical basis for the reform. Combining English courses with professions and strengthening the construction of the teaching staff are the important parts of the reform. In addition, the development of artificial intelligence is deeply affecting all aspects of education, which is worthy of further study.

Acknowledgment

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