Dilemma and Breakthrough of Vocational English Evaluation System: Current Situation Analysis and Optimization Direction Guided by Core Literacy

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Abstract: With the continuous deepening of vocational education reform, core literacy, as an important concept of educational reform, has gradually been introduced into English teaching. The cultivation of core literacy requires students not only to master basic language knowledge but also to flexibly use cross-cultural communication skills, innovative thinking, and professional literacy to solve problems in actual work situations. In this context, constructing a vocational English evaluation system based on core literacy has become an urgent need to improve the quality of vocational English teaching and cultivate high-quality applied talents. Therefore, the following will focus on exploring the relevant content of the vocational English evaluation system in order to provide some help.

Keywords: Vocational English; Evaluation system; Core literacy; Breakthrough

1. Introduction

This article analyzes the existing evaluation system in our school's vocational English teaching and explores how to redesign the evaluation system based on the core literacy theory to enhance students' comprehensive English application skills and professional literacy. This provides theoretical support and practical reference for the reform of vocational English teaching.

2. Current situation and dilemma of vocational English evaluation system

To more accurately understand students' and teachers' expectations of vocational English teaching and evaluation methods, we designed questionnaires for students and teachers and collected 405 valid

questionnaires. The survey covers various aspects such as students' English learning attitude, learning experience, learning time, learning motivation, classroom activity participation, and views on the teaching evaluation system.

2.1. Current situation of students' English learning

The survey results show that most students face the following problems in English learning:

Weak foundation and insufficient learning motivation: About 70% of students stated that their English foundation is weak, especially in vocabulary, grammar, and listening comprehension. Students generally believe that English classes are difficult, and they lack sufficient learning motivation.

Overemphasis on examination orientation: Approximately 65% of students believe that the existing evaluation system focuses too much on examination results and ignores the cultivation of practical application abilities. Students generally believe that they mainly learn through rote memorization and test-taking skills, which slows down the improvement of their actual English proficiency.

Low classroom participation: About 50% of students indicated low classroom participation and hoped to increase classroom interaction and practical operation through more group discussions, role-playing, and other methods.

Dissatisfaction with evaluation methods: Most students (about 60%) stated that written test scores do not truly reflect their ability to use English in practical work.

2.2. Teachers' views on the evaluation system

From the perspective of teachers, the existing evaluation system also faces some challenges. Survey results indicate that teachers generally believe:

Limitations of the evaluation system: Most teachers suggest that traditional written examination methods cannot comprehensively evaluate students' overall qualities, especially critical skills like cross-cultural communication and innovative thinking.

Disconnection between classroom teaching and evaluation: Teachers commonly perceive a disconnect between teaching practices and evaluations. Although classroom instruction emphasizes developing students' language application abilities, this emphasis is not adequately reflected in the actual evaluation system.

Teachers' own confusion about evaluation: Despite widely acknowledging the necessity of reform, teachers encounter confusion when implementing new evaluation systems. For instance, they struggle with how to specifically measure abstract qualities like students' innovation and cross-cultural communication skills, or how to reflect students' language abilities in real-world contexts within scoring criteria.

3. Requirements of core competencies for the evaluation system

3.1. Specific connotations of core competencies

Core competencies refer to the comprehensive abilities and qualities students possess beyond basic knowledge acquisition, particularly their abilities to innovate, solve problems, communicate across cultures, and work in teams within complex scenarios. In the context of higher vocational English education, the connotations of core competencies primarily include the following aspects:

Language application ability: This refers to students' ability to use English fluently and accurately for communication in practical professional settings, encompassing integrated listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

Cross-cultural communication skill: This involves cultivating students' understanding of communication styles across different cultural backgrounds and enabling them to engage in effective exchanges within multicultural environments.

Innovative thinking and problem-solving ability: This encourages students to propose innovative solutions in their work and equips them with the flexibility to tackle complex tasks.

Professionalism: This includes professional ethics, teamwork spirit, and communication skills, helping students exhibit a strong overall quality in the workplace.

These core competencies offer a new perspective and direction for the higher vocational English evaluation system. When assessing students' comprehensive abilities, the focus should not be limited to their mastery of language knowledge but should also emphasize the enhancement of their practical workplace application skills.

3.2. Shifting from "knowledge-based assessment" to "ability + competency" comprehensive evaluation

The traditional higher vocational English evaluation system primarily focuses on assessing language knowledge, such as grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. While these components reflect students' grasp of the language, they fail to fully evaluate their language application abilities in real-world work scenarios and overlook the cultivation of their innovative thinking and cross-cultural communication skills [1].

In a core-competency-based evaluation system, the assessment content should expand from a sole focus on language knowledge to evaluating comprehensive abilities [2]. Specifically, this involves considering:

Whether students can use English fluently and confidently for effective communication in practical work settings, particularly focusing on language application in the workplace [3].

Whether students can adapt to multicultural work environments and communicate effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Whether, when faced with complex work tasks, students can propose innovative solutions, demonstrating strong thinking and problem-solving abilities [4].

Whether students possess the professional qualities required for entering the workplace, including professional ethics, teamwork spirit, and communication skills [5].

3.3. Diversification of evaluation subjects, contents, and methods

Diversification of evaluation subjects: Besides teachers, enterprises, student self-evaluation, and peer evaluation should also be included as evaluation subjects [6]. The participation of enterprises can ensure that evaluations are aligned with workplace demands, helping students understand actual workplace needs. Student self-evaluation and peer evaluation can stimulate students' self-reflection and teamwork spirit [7].

Diversification of evaluation contents: Apart from language knowledge, evaluation contents should cover multiple dimensions such as cross-cultural communication skills, innovation abilities, and professional qualities [8]. Such content settings are conducive to comprehensively evaluating students' English abilities and professional qualities, especially their performance in real work environments [9].

Diversification of evaluation methods: Traditional written tests cannot fully reflect students' comprehensive abilities. Therefore, process evaluation, project-based evaluation, and informatization evaluation should be introduced. Process evaluation focuses on students' daily performance, project-based evaluation simulates actual professional scenarios, and informatization evaluation utilizes big data and artificial intelligence to provide personalized feedback [10].

4. Improvement directions for the core competency-oriented evaluation system

4.1. Optimization principles

Based on questionnaire surveys and analysis, the following principles are suggested for improving the current evaluation system in our school:

Diversified evaluation methods: Combine traditional exams with innovative assessment approaches to encourage students to demonstrate their English abilities in practical applications.

Emphasis on process evaluation: Increase the proportion of process assessment, focusing on students' daily performance and learning attitudes to help them make continuous progress in their studies.

Enhanced classroom interaction: Utilize group discussions, role-playing, and other formats to enhance students' engagement and learning motivation, creating a positive and proactive learning environment.

Focus on student needs: Regularly collect student feedback on the curriculum and evaluation system, and adjust teaching strategies accordingly to better meet students' learning needs and interests.

4.2. Design of a diversified evaluation system

The current evaluation system for higher vocational English in our school mainly consists of two aspects: process evaluation (40%) and final examination (60%). This evaluation system, which is primarily based on summative examinations, cannot adequately evaluate students' English application skills, cross-cultural communication abilities, problem-solving capabilities, and overall professional qualities. It is difficult to fully reflect students' comprehensive English abilities, and it tends to lead students to focus more on exams and less on actual skills, which is not conducive to evaluating students' English application abilities in professional environments.

Therefore, it is urgent to construct an evaluation system oriented towards core competencies, incorporating students' comprehensive qualities into the assessment scope and striving to enhance their English application abilities in real professional situations. This will better align with the demand for practical operation skills in vocational education and achieve integration between general basic courses and professional careers.

Based on preliminary questionnaire survey analysis, we have improved the quantitative indicators for process evaluation in the current evaluation system. Simultaneously, we have introduced evaluations for innovative activities and the "certificate-for-exam" substitution for the National English Proficiency Test for Colleges and Universities (hereinafter referred to as the English AB-level exam). By adjusting the proportional allocation of various components in the evaluation system, we have formed a diversified evaluation index system for higher vocational English under the guidance of core competencies. This system consists of four aspects: process evaluation, innovative activity evaluation, final examination, and "certificate-for-exam" substitution.

Self-evaluation and group peer evaluation are introduced as evaluation methods, aiming to stimulate students' learning autonomy and sense of responsibility through peer pressure and self-feedback. See **Table 1** for the quantitative table of the diversified evaluation index system.

Table 1. Quantitative table of diversified evaluation index system

Evaluation indicator	Total weight	Evaluation content	Sub-weight	Evaluation level				Evaluation method		
				A	B	C	D	Self-eval	Peer eval	Teacher eval
Process evaluation (regular performance)	30%	Class attendance	5%	Excellent (28~30)	Good (24~27)	Average (19~23)	Below average (<18)	√	√	√
		Class participation	10%					√	√	√
		Homework completion	15%					√	√	√
Innovative activities (vocational projects)	20%	Language application skills	15%	Excellent (18~20)	Good (15~17)	Average (12~14)	Below average (<12)	/	√	√
		Professional competence	5%					/	√	√
Final exam / certification replacement	50%	Closed-book exam	50%	Excellent (43~50)	Good (30~43)	Average (23~29)	Below average (<23)	/	/	√
				Excellent (≥85)	Good (60~85)	/	/	/	/	√

Among them, innovative activity indicators account for 20% (**Table 2**). Their introduction aims to integrate ideological and political elements, improve students' English application skills, and combine English teaching with students' majors to reflect professionalism and adapt to the connotative development needs of vocational students' professional ability training, targeting their future development and career needs. Innovative activities mainly refer to the application of English learning in professional scenes related to students' majors; at the same time, they can also be set based on the thematic units of textbooks.

Table 2. Detailed evaluation of innovative activities

Evaluation criteria	Total weight	Evaluation content	Sub-weight	A	B	C	D
Language proficiency	15%	English listening & speaking	10%	Fluent, natural, and accurate expression with coherent sentences and good pronunciation	Fairly accurate and natural expression with mostly coherent sentences, occasional hesitations	Basic accuracy but less coherent, frequent hesitations	Unable to form complete sentences, inaccurate expression
		Professional scenario application	5%	Proficient in professional scenarios, familiar with terminology	Fairly proficient, generally familiar with terminology	Limited proficiency in professional scenarios	Unable to apply in professional scenarios
Professional competency	5%	Teamwork	3%	Strong team awareness and responsibility, actively completes tasks	Good team awareness, completes assigned tasks	Some team awareness, needs assistance to complete tasks	Weak team awareness, fails to complete tasks
		Professional ethics	2%	Actively participates, follows arrangements, strong responsibility, efficient task completion	Shows some responsibility, follows arrangements, completes tasks as required	Relatively passive, low participation, weak responsibility	Negative attitude, unwilling to participate

4.3. Evaluation methods

4.3.1. Combination of student self-evaluation and peer evaluation

Student self-evaluation and peer evaluation are mainly applied in process evaluation and innovative activity evaluation. Before evaluation, teachers provide necessary evaluation criteria and demonstrate the evaluation process. Student self-evaluation helps them develop the habit of reflection and summation, while peer evaluation encourages mutual supervision and common progress. Students are not only the objects of evaluation but also the judges of the process, which can enhance their sense of participation and learning enthusiasm, and initiative.

4.3.2. Teacher evaluation

Teacher evaluation is not just a final assessment of student performance but rather an evaluation that runs through the entire process. It is reflected in various aspects of teaching, including preview before class, classroom participation, group discussion, project presentation, and homework after class. In process evaluation and innovative activity evaluation, teachers explain the evaluation details, complete the evaluation with students, provide periodic feedback on evaluation results, and control the student learning process.

In summary, the higher vocational English evaluation system guided by core literacy is designed based on previous questionnaire surveys and five years of teaching practice. It better meets the requirements of cultivating students' professional abilities and improves English teaching effectiveness. The construction of the evaluation system focuses on cultivating students' abilities, paying attention to the entire learning process, and comprehensively cultivating students' comprehensive abilities, innovation abilities, and professional qualities, enabling students to truly become talents needed by society.

5. Conclusion and outlook

Through an analysis of the existing higher vocational English evaluation system, we found that traditional evaluation methods cannot meet the needs of students' career development and core literacy cultivation. To adapt to the requirements of modern vocational education, we designed a core literacy-oriented higher vocational English evaluation system. We proposed diversified evaluation subjects, contents, and methods to fully reflect students' English application abilities and professional qualities. Through continuous optimization, we hope this evaluation system can cover all majors across the school, helping students better apply English in real professional environments, improving their cross-cultural communication skills, innovative thinking, and professional qualities, thereby cultivating more high-quality applied talents for society.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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