Research on Practical Approaches to Enhance the Effectiveness of Etiquette Classroom Instruction in Secondary Vocational Schools from the Perspective of "Alignment Among Teaching, Learning, and Assessment"

Lihua Yang

Sichuan Southwest Vocational College of Civil Aviation, Chengdu 610499, Sichuan, China

Abstract: In response to prevalent issues in current etiquette classroom instruction in secondary vocational schools, such as vague teaching objectives, a singular evaluation approach, and low student engagement, this study employs the concept of "alignment among teaching, learning, and assessment" as its theoretical foundation. It thoroughly integrates the cognitive characteristics of secondary vocational students with the inherent practical demands of etiquette courses to systematically explore practical pathways for enhancing teaching effectiveness. The study constructed a trinity strategy framework of "precise goal positioning, matching activity design, and diversified dynamic evaluation." Through key measures such as the meticulous breakdown of vocational scenario-based goals, the innovative creation of real-world situational activities, and the establishment of a multi-subject process evaluation system, it effectively promotes the deep integration and organic unity of the teaching, learning, and evaluation processes. Teaching practice has fully demonstrated that this approach can significantly stimulate students' intrinsic motivation for learning, effectively enhance their etiquette literacy and situational practical abilities, and provide solid teaching support for cultivating high-quality skilled talents that meet the demands of modern industries.

Keywords: Alignment among teaching, learning, and evaluation; Secondary vocational etiquette; Classroom teaching; Effectiveness; Practical path

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

Etiquette literacy, as an essential "soft skill" for modern professionals, is a core element in shaping a professional image, establishing good interpersonal relationships, and enhancing workplace competitiveness. Secondary vocational education aims to cultivate high-quality technical and skilled talents for the frontline of

production and service, and its etiquette courses play an irreplaceable role in shaping students' professional qualities. However, when examining the current state of etiquette classes in secondary vocational schools, several persistent issues are prevalent: the stated teaching objectives are often vague and difficult to observe and evaluate (objectives are illusory); the design of teaching activities is loosely connected to the preset objectives, becoming mere formalities (activities are disconnected); and teaching evaluations are lagging and one-dimensional, failing to effectively diagnose the learning process and promote improvement (evaluation is ineffective). The result is often a situation where "what is taught does not align with what is learned, and what is learned does not align with what is evaluated," significantly diminishing teaching effectiveness. The core tenet of the "Teaching-Learning-Assessment Alignment (TLA)" theory emphasizes the necessity of maintaining a clear, close, and internally logical connection and a high degree of unity among teaching objectives, learning activities, and assessment methods. This provides a highly targeted theoretical framework and practical guide for addressing the existing challenges in etiquette classes in secondary vocational schools [1].

1.2. Research significance

The practical significance of this study is profound: Firstly, it aims to explore a universal and actionable approach and operational model for implementing "Teaching-Learning-Assessment Alignment" in etiquette classes in secondary vocational schools, providing frontline teachers with a clear blueprint for teaching improvement. Secondly, by enhancing teachers' professional abilities in instructional design, implementation, and evaluation based on the alignment concept, it seeks to drive in-depth classroom teaching reforms. Thirdly, by stimulating students' active participation and practical initiative in real or simulated professional contexts, it aims to effectively enhance their etiquette application skills and professional adaptability, ultimately translating into stronger employability and sustainable development potential.

2. Current situation of etiquette teaching in secondary vocational schools and the focus on the issue of "inconsistency between teaching, learning, and assessment"

2.1. Student level: Dual deficiencies in learning motivation and practical ability

Secondary vocational students generally hold cognitive biases towards etiquette courses, perceiving them as "formalistic" and "insincere," which results in a lack of interest in learning and insufficient intrinsic motivation. During practical sessions, students often demonstrate weak initiative and low participation: some are shy about displaying etiquette movements in public, while others exhibit distorted movements and disorganized procedures due to a lack of effective guidance and repeated training. More critically, students struggle to transfer the standardized etiquette knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom to complex, highly contextualized real-world professional scenarios, highlighting a significant gap between learning and application [2].

2.2. Classroom level: Severe disconnection between activity design and goal achievement

There are notable issues in the design of current classroom teaching activities: On one hand, there is an excessive reliance on one-way instruction and knowledge imposition by teachers, with students passively receiving information, which contradicts the inherently practical nature of etiquette courses. On the other hand, limited practical activities (such as simple imitation and group rehearsals) often remain superficial, lacking carefully designed task chains and scenario chains that can deeply support goal achievement. Particularly prominent is the fact that activity design fails to fully consider the uniqueness of future professional scenarios and the differences in etiquette requirements across various majors (such as hotel services, automotive

marketing, information technology, and early childhood care), resulting in low relevance between teaching content and students' future professional needs, and fostering a sense of "learning without applying."

2.3. Evaluation level: Single and outdated approaches, severely weakened functions

The evaluation stage is currently the weakest link in the chain: Evaluation methods are highly uniform, often relying primarily on final paper-and-pencil tests (assessing knowledge point memorization), while severely neglecting the evaluation of core etiquette competencies—practical performance, situational adaptability, and service awareness. The evaluation subjects are singular, mainly conducted by teachers, lacking student self-assessment (reflective learning), peer evaluation (mutual learning), and critical evaluations from the perspectives of enterprises/clients (authentic feedback). The evaluation process is deficient, lacking systematic recording and formative feedback on students' learning processes (such as participation, progress points, and problem areas). The "diagnostic" and "promotive" functions of evaluation are nearly lost, reduced to mere "grading" tools.

3. Enhancement pathways based on "alignment among teaching, learning, and evaluation": Core strategies and practical points

Achieving "alignment among teaching, learning, and evaluation" hinges on constructing a closed-loop system that is clearly goal-oriented, precisely supported by activities, and effectively validated and promoted through evaluation.

3.1. Precise positioning: Refining and contextualizing teaching objectives with "measurability and evaluability" as the core

Align closely with the profession and deeply contextualize: Teaching objectives must originate from and point towards specific occupational scenarios. Abandon vague statements like "master basic etiquette." For example, hospitality services: "Be capable of independently, accurately, and fluently completing the task of answering room reservation calls in accordance with the hotel's standard service procedures (including key steps such as greetings, information confirmation, and closing remarks), demonstrating professionalism and approachability throughout the call." Automotive marketing: "Be able to standardly perform a complete set of customer vehicle handover etiquette in simulated customer reception scenarios, including greeting and guiding, vehicle introduction (with standardized gestures), test drive handover (key delivery, explanation of precautions), and farewell (expressing gratitude and using farewell remarks)."

Specify and make observable action verbs: Strictly use action verbs from Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (such as "demonstrate," "operate," "solve," and "evaluate") to clearly define the expected student performance. For example, "Be able to standardly demonstrate business etiquette steps such as handshaking, business card exchange, and guiding to seats in a simulated 'product promotion event' project completed through group collaboration, with accurate, coherent, and natural movements."

Hierarchical design and systematic construction: Scientifically break down the overall course objectives into module objectives, unit objectives, and lesson objectives to form a clear path for skill progression. For example, the "Job Interview Etiquette" module can be broken down as follows: Lesson 1 (Basic): Be able to correctly wear interview attire that meets industry requirements and maintain appropriate grooming and appearance. Lesson 2 (Intermediate): Be able to standardly demonstrate etiquette in steps such as entering the interview room, greeting, taking a seat, and submitting a resume. Lesson 3 (Comprehensive): Be able to comprehensively apply elements such as verbal expression (clear and concise), non-verbal communication

(eye contact, posture), and response techniques (positive and honest) in a simulated interview scenario to demonstrate good professional qualities.

3.2. Optimization activities: Designing in-depth contextualized and practical learning guided by "goal achievement"

Context-driven and task-oriented approach: Design challenging core tasks rooted in authentic or highly simulated professional contexts. For example, in the scenario of "dealing with an irate customer due to a delayed dish in a restaurant," students are grouped to role-play as waiters, supervisors, and customers, with the task of "using effective communication etiquette (listening, apologizing, explaining, resolving) to pacify the customer's dissatisfaction and gain their understanding." The task sheet should clearly outline the key etiquette behaviors to be demonstrated (such as maintaining calmness, using polite language, actively listening, and providing solutions).

Integration of diverse teaching methods: Flexibly combine and utilize various teaching methods based on objectives, such as Microteaching + Video Playback Analysis: Students engage in short-term, focused etiquette drills (e.g., self-introductions) in groups, record videos, and then play them back for precise analysis and feedback improvement by teachers and peers based on rubrics. Role-Playing + Immediate Feedback: Conduct role-playing in simulated scenarios (e.g., front desk reception, handling customer complaints), with teachers or peers providing immediate feedback using observation checklists. Project Tasks + Achievement Presentation: Assign comprehensive projects (e.g., planning and executing a reception plan for a small company's annual meeting), where students are required to complete project design, role assignment, on-site execution, achievement presentation, and defense.

Providing realistic resources and environmental support: Make full use of on-campus training bases (such as simulated hotel front desks, simulated 4S store showrooms, tea art rooms, and body shaping rooms); introduce real-world corporate case videos and service process manuals; invite industry experts and outstanding graduates to conduct demonstration teaching or serve as simulated clients/examiners to enhance the authenticity and authority of the activities.

3.3. Improving evaluation: Implement diversified, process-oriented, and dynamic feedback with the goal of "promoting learning"

3.3.1. Diversification of evaluation subjects

Student self-assessment: Utilize learning logs and reflection sheets to guide students in reviewing their learning process, evaluating their own performance, and identifying strengths and weaknesses (e.g., "Was my greeting clear and natural during today's telephone etiquette practice? Was the information recorded completely?").

Peer assessment: Conduct observations and feedback within or between groups based on clear, shared evaluation rubrics (e.g., "According to the rubric, you scored 4 points for the standardization of your guiding gestures, but it is recommended that you strengthen sustained eye contact").

Teacher evaluation: Conduct professional and comprehensive process and summative evaluations through classroom observations, checklist recordings, in-depth interviews, and portfolio reviews.

Enterprise/customer evaluation: Invite enterprise personnel to participate in the practical assessment and scoring process; design a "Simulated Customer Satisfaction Feedback Form"; and utilize internship opportunities to collect evaluations from enterprises regarding the etiquette performance of interns. This serves as a crucial bridge connecting the classroom to the workplace [3].

3.3.2. Diversified evaluation methods with a focus on the process

Classroom observation checklist: Design a checklist focusing on specific etiquette behavior indicators to record student performance in real-time (e.g., "Smiles naturally: Yes/No; Stands in accordance with standards: Yes/No; Uses honorifics: Yes/No").

Performance task rubrics: Develop detailed rubrics for each core task (e.g., simulated reception, situational response) to clearly describe behavioral performance standards at different levels (excellent, good, satisfactory, needs improvement).

Learning portfolios: Systematically collect evidence reflecting students' learning processes and progress (e.g., task sheets, practice videos, reflection logs, improvement plans, peer evaluation records, outstanding works, teacher comments).

Final practical assessment: At the end of a module or course, set up comprehensive tasks in simulated or real-world scenarios to assess students' ability to integrate and apply etiquette knowledge and skills.

3.3.3. Timely feedback drives continuous improvement

The core value of evaluation lies in promoting learning. Teachers should provide students with specific, descriptive, and actionable feedback in a timely manner based on observations and evaluation data (e.g., "When handing out your business card, your thumb covered the company logo. Next time, try presenting the front of the card to the other party and holding it by the edges with both thumbs and index fingers."). This feedback guides students in identifying areas for improvement. Meanwhile, teachers themselves should also reflect on and adjust subsequent teaching strategies, activity designs, or resource support based on evaluation results (e.g., rubric data analysis, common student errors).

4. Practical cases and effect verification

4.1. Case background

Taking the etiquette course in the tourism service major at a certain secondary vocational school as an example, before implementing teaching-evaluation alignment reforms, students showed low interest in learning etiquette courses, had low classroom participation, and the teaching effectiveness was unsatisfactory. To improve this situation, the etiquette teachers at the school, guided by the theory of teaching-evaluation alignment, carried out reform practices in etiquette classroom teaching [4].

4.2. Reform measures

Clarify teaching objectives: Specific and actionable teaching objectives were formulated based on the future occupational requirements of students in the tourism service major. For instance, in the "Tour Guide Service Etiquette" teaching unit, it was clearly stated that students should be able to proficiently apply tour guide explanation etiquette to provide standardized explanations of scenic spots and attractions, and be able to use reception etiquette to warmly and thoughtfully receive tourists, among other objectives.

Optimize the design of teaching activities: Adopt the situational teaching method by creating simulated scenarios, such as tourist attraction guide explanations and tourist reception, enabling students to engage in practical operations within these contexts. Organize students to participate in collaborative group learning, where they complete tasks such as writing tour guide scripts and demonstrating guide etiquette in groups. Meanwhile, leverage multimedia teaching tools to showcase exemplary service cases of outstanding tour guides, allowing students to intuitively grasp the importance of guide etiquette.

Improve the teaching evaluation system: Introduce student self-assessment, peer assessment, and enterprise evaluation to evaluate students' learning performance from multiple perspectives. The evaluation method combines formative assessment with summative assessment. In formative assessment, attention is paid to students' participation and performance in classroom activities and group work; in summative assessment, students' learning outcomes are evaluated through tour guide skill assessments and theoretical knowledge examinations.

4.3. Reform effects

After a semester of teaching reform practice, students' interest in etiquette courses has significantly increased, and their classroom participation has substantially improved. In the final skill assessments and theoretical exams, students' average scores have notably improved compared to before the reform. Through questionnaires and interviews, it was found that students generally believed that their etiquette knowledge and skills had been effectively enhanced, and their teamwork and communication abilities had also made significant progress. Enterprises have given high evaluations to the etiquette literacy and practical abilities of intern students, believing that they can better meet job requirements.

5. Conclusion and reflection

Through systematic exploration and practice, this study has validated the strong vitality of the concept of "alignment among teaching, learning, and assessment" in enhancing the effectiveness of etiquette classroom instruction in secondary vocational schools. By taking precise and scenario-based teaching objectives as the core, target-oriented real-world scenario activities as the engine, and diversified, process-oriented, and facilitative assessment as the guarantee and driving force, a trinity-based practical pathway has been constructed. This pathway effectively addresses core issues such as vague objectives, a disconnect between learning and application, and ineffective assessment, achieving a deep alignment and virtuous cycle among teaching, learning, and assessment. Practice has demonstrated that this pathway significantly stimulates students' subjectivity, transforming them from passive recipients to active participants engaged in meaningful construction. It effectively enhances students' etiquette literacy and contextualized practical abilities, enabling what they have learned to truly serve their future career development. Ultimately, it lays a solid foundation of professional qualities for the cultivation of high-quality skilled talents.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

[1] Zhang H, 2016, On Core Competencies and Teaching Transformation. Research in Educational Development, 36(24): 1–9.

[2] Cui Y, 2022, Designing Teaching Plans Focused on Core Competencies: A Perspective of Big Ideas. Global Education Outlook, 51(01): 3–21.

[3] Li C, 2021, Transformation of Classroom Teaching Evaluation: From Evaluating Teaching to Evaluating Learning. Educational Science Research, (02): 78–82.

[4] Zhang L, 2023, Research on the Application of an Integrated Teaching-Evaluation Model in Hotel Service Etiquette Teaching in Secondary Vocational Schools. China Vocational and Technical Education, (14): 65–69.