

# A Case Study on the Effectiveness of Pre-Class Activities in Higher Vocational English Classes: Taking Pingliang Vocational and Technical College as an Example

Liuna Yang\*

Pingliang Vocational and Technical College, Pingliang 744000, Gansu Province, China

\*Corresponding author: Liuna Yang, 2689991327@qq.com

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**Abstract:** Based on Bloom’s “effective teaching theory,” this paper proposes pre-class activities to improve students’ enthusiasm and autonomy in English learning. These include sentence construction, situational dubbing, famous quotes, English songs, English games, Chinese stories, regional cultures, and theme debates, which combine life, interest, and inspiration as the main characteristics. The activities can enhance the sense of participation and achievement of all students to achieve the purpose of effective teaching.

**Keywords:** Higher vocational college English class; Pre-class activity; Effectiveness

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## 1. Introduction

As a public basic course in vocational colleges, the English course in higher vocational colleges has fewer class hours and heavy teaching tasks. Therefore, most English teachers take the completion of the teaching plan as their primary task in class. There are very few teachers who put efforts into improving students’ interest in English learning and ensuring the participation of all students during limited pre-class activities.

## 2. Theoretical connotation of “effective teaching”

The concept of effective teaching originated from the Western “scientific teaching” movement in the first half of the 20th century. This approach involves teachers adhering to the objective laws of teaching activities, aiming to achieve educational objectives, foster students’ personality development, and promote holistic growth with minimal time, energy, and material investment. The effectiveness of teaching encompasses the following three implications:

- (1) Effective refers to the evaluation of the degree of conformity between the results of teaching activities and

the expected teaching objectives.

- (2) Efficiency, that is, a small amount of investment for more return. Teaching efficiency = effective teaching time/actual teaching time.
- (3) Effectiveness refers to the income from teaching activities and the embodiment of the value of teaching activities. Specifically, it refers to whether the teaching objectives are consistent with the educational needs of specific societies and individuals and the degree of consistency <sup>[1]</sup>.

### 3. Effective pre-class activities

#### 3.1. Sentence construction

Pingliang Vocational and Technical College's "New Era of Vocational English (Basic Module 1) Unit 1 Part 3 Reading: 'Trace Back To' from 'Phrase and Expressions'" was taken as an example <sup>[2]</sup>. Students with learning difficulties were shown the origin of the phrase during pre-class activities. Chinese culture, one of the oldest cultures in the world, can be traced back to thousands of years ago. The synonyms of the phrase and its extended sentence patterns were also demonstrated. In the three minutes of effective activities before class, the underachieving students put phrases into specific contexts for learning and used reference books to expand and transfer knowledge, which stimulated their enthusiasm and initiative to learn English.

#### 3.2. "One Piece a Day" situational dubbing

Taking the English Fun Dubbing app as an example, middle school students played a video "Minority English Poetry—Looking Forward" in the pre-class activity: Yesterday is a history, tomorrow is a mystery, only today is a gift, that is why we call it "present." The students played it twice, then dubbed it with emotion, and finally recited it perfectly; they also expanded and explained the relevant grammatical predicate clauses. Students consciously used online resources for the "second classroom" supplementary learning, cultivating strong independent learning skills.

#### 3.3. Famous quotes

Taking Chinese traditional culture as the background, the students collected a wide range of famous sayings in both Chinese and English in small groups. Each group shared their work on the blackboard in advance during the interclass activity time before class.

- (1) Food culture: Food is of overarching importance for the people.
- (2) Places of interest: He who does not reach the Great Wall is not a true man.
- (3) Traditional festivals: May we all be blessed with longevity. Though far apart, we are still able to share the beauty of the moon <sup>[3]</sup>.

The group representatives gave bilingual explanations in both Chinese and English, which trained their oral expression skills.

#### 3.4. Bilingual songs in Chinese and English

The world-famous song *Mo Li Hua (Jasmine Flower)* in both Chinese and English was used to improve students' ability of art appreciation and intercultural communication.

*Jasmine Flower* <sup>[4]</sup>

*What a beautiful jasmine flower*

*What a beautiful jasmine flower*

*Your fragrance and beauty fill the branches*

*Your sweet smell and whiteness earn everyone's praise  
Let me pick you as a gift to others  
Jasmine flower, jasmine flower*

### 3.5. English games

Interspersed with English games, pre-class activities can activate the classroom atmosphere, improve students' interest in English learning, solve the bottleneck of teaching, and improve teaching efficiency.

#### (1) Stand Up and Sit Down

Activity process: The teacher pre-selects specific words (focusing on B-level test vocabulary) and instructs students to stand up and sit down when they hear these words during the listening exercise. Different groups can be assigned different words to stand for, adding variety and engagement to the activity.

#### (2) Pirated Disks

We all know that pirated CDs can suddenly jam, causing a sentence to repeat multiple times. During teaching, teachers sometimes encounter words that are very long or difficult to pronounce. To help students remember these words, teachers use a technique where they repeat the challenging word as if the CD is stuck. For example, in the sentence, "No one admitted responsibility for the attacks," the word "responsibility" can be tricky to pronounce. Students can read this sentence like a jammed CD:

"No one admitted responsibility, responsibility, responsibility, responsibility, responsibility, responsibility, responsibility, responsibility, responsibility... for the attacks."

The teacher can adjust the number of repetitions based on the situation. This game is highly visual and engaging, making the teaching effect very effective <sup>[5]</sup>.

### 3.6. Chinese stories

Taking the "Eight Cuisines in Proper Names (Eight Cuisines) in Unit 1 Part 3: Reading of the New Era Vocational English" in Pingliang Vocational and Technical College as an example, in the pre-class activities, the excellent students presented a self-made PowerPoint presentation on delicious food and gave a speech on the Chinese story themed around the Eight Cuisines of China, expanding the relevant vocabulary list.

China covers a large territory and has many Ethnic groups, hence a variety of Chinese food with different but fantastic and mouthwatering flavor. Eight Cuisines are the most influential and typical Cuisines. Chinese cuisine is characterized by its special seasoning featured cooking methods, diversified cooking material and distinctive flavor, also can be roughly divided into eight regional cuisines, which have been widely accepted around <sup>[6]</sup>.

### 3.7. Regional cultures

As a subsystem of the Chinese cultural system, regional culture is an indispensable driving force for the prosperity and development of regional society and an inexhaustible driving force for the Chinese nation. The contemporary value of regional culture is a concentrated representation of the diversity within advanced socialist culture. It is the result of the interconnected development of material culture and spiritual civilization. Therefore, in Part 3 Reading, we can add extensive reading materials about Pingliang's regional cultural story—Kongtong Mountain.

Extensive reading: Kongtong Mountain

Emperor Xuanyuan, the father of Chinese culture, once visited Kongtong Mountain to seek advice from the wise Guangchengzi on governing the country and maintaining health. From then on, Kongtong Mountain quickly gained fame. Later, King Mu of the Western Zhou Dynasty (11th century–771 BC), Emperor Qin Shi Huang of the Qin Dynasty, and Emperor Wu of the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC–24 AD) also visited Kongtong Mountain,

further increasing its renown.

Kongtong Mountain is a sacred site for Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. It is said that as early as the Wei (220–265) and Jin (265–420) dynasties, Taoist temples were built on Kongtong Mountain. During the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), the construction of the Taoist Palace and other affiliated Taoist buildings began, ensuring the continued transmission of Taoism through generations.

Buddhism also flourished on Kongtong Mountain, as evidenced by Buddhist rituals from the Tang Dynasty (618–907). There were 19 Buddhist temples during the early Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). Today, Buddhism and Taoism coexist harmoniously on Kongtong Mountain, a unique situation in China. Additionally, Kongtong Mountain has cultivated many Confucian scholars, such as Huang Fumi, the founder of Chinese acupuncture genius <sup>[7]</sup>.

### 3.8. Theme debates

Inspired by “Unit 1 Colorful Cultures Part 2: Listening and Speaking Dialogue 1 and Dialogue 2” in Pingliang Vocational and Technical College, the students were led to hold a three-minute theme debate before class on “Western fast food is a junk food” or “Western fast food is not a junk food.”

Proposition: Western fast food is a junk food

“I believe a balanced diet is essential for good health. However, nowadays, more and more people, especially children, are flocking to Western fast-food restaurants like KFC and McDonald’s to buy hamburgers and French fries. In my opinion, Western fast food is just a type of junk food that can gradually lead to food safety issues. Many people in Western countries are increasingly concerned that a fast-food diet contributes significantly to serious health problems such as obesity and heart disease. Consequently, Westerners are starting to change their eating habits.”

Opposition: Western fast food is not a junk food

Everything has two sides, and Western fast food is no exception. Just as Chinese fast food includes many fried dishes, Western fast food also offers some low-calorie, nutritious options, such as vegetable soup and salads. Furthermore, Western fast-food restaurants like KFC and McDonald’s have strict quality control measures to ensure the safety and healthiness of their food. Therefore, we cannot simply label Western fast food as junk food <sup>[8]</sup>.

## 4. Conclusion

Effective teaching pays great attention to all students and teaching efficiency, teaching art, teaching methods, emotions, attitudes, and values, as well as implementing innovative education goals. The pre-class activity design is student-oriented, improves students’ interest and enthusiasm in learning English, enhances their sense of participation and self-confidence in class, well mobilizes the best state and mood of all students in learning English, gives full play to the subjective initiative of all students in the shortest time, and creates a positive and pleasant classroom atmosphere. It promotes students’ knowledge accumulation and learning before and after class, which is conducive to cultivating their discipline literacy in a relaxed and interesting classroom atmosphere, improving their independent learning ability, realizing hierarchical teaching objectives, and maximizing teaching benefits, which is worthy of exploration, research, and application by English teachers in higher vocational colleges.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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