

Enlightenment of the “Erasmus+” Programme on Improving the International Competence of Higher Vocational English Teachers

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Abstract: In the context of globalization, higher vocational English teachers play a vanguard role in the internationalization process of vocational education, contributing a unique perspective to foreign exchanges and cooperation and laying a solid foundation for accelerating the internationalization process of schools and promoting high-quality development. Inspired by the educational internationalization practice of the EU’s “Erasmus+” Programme, higher vocational English teachers can improve their international competence through ways such as enhancing international awareness, optimizing the international curriculum system, strengthening international cooperation and academic research capabilities, cultivating the awareness and ability of lifelong learning, improving teaching innovation capabilities, enhancing cross-cultural communication capabilities, and boosting national cultural confidence, injecting new vitality and inexhaustible impetus into the international transformation and development of China’s vocational education.

Keywords: “Erasmus+” programme; Higher vocational English teachers; International competence

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1. Introduction

The level of internationalization of higher education is an important indicator for measuring the running level of universities and a powerful measure to boost the connotative development of higher education^[1]. As bridges of culture and communication, higher vocational English teachers face unprecedented development opportunities and challenges. They should enhance their international competence to actively embrace the educational needs of the new era. The “Erasmus+” Programme has expanded the breadth and depth of European higher education in international cooperation and exchanges and achieved remarkable results in innovating the model of higher education internationalization. Therefore, exploring the ideas and concepts of higher education internationalization of the “Erasmus+” Programme has important enlightenment for improving the international competence of higher vocational English teachers.

2. Introduction to the “Erasmus+” programme

2.1. The formation and development of the “Erasmus+” programme

Historically, there have been numerous ethnic groups in Europe, living and intermingling with each other. Thus, European countries have always attached great importance to the education and inheritance of various languages^[2]. With the consolidation of the European economic integration pattern, promoting the integration of education and strengthening international educational cooperation have become important goals of the EU^[3]. To improve the quality of higher education and promote exchanges and cooperation among countries in the field of higher education, Europe has continuously introduced important measures, gradually forming an interrelated education and language policy system, which finally emerged on the stage of higher education internationalization in the form of the “Erasmus+” Programme^[4].

The educational internationalization of the EU has gone through several development stages, including the “Erasmus” Programme, the Lifelong Learning Programme, and the “Erasmus+” Programme. Each stage has advanced transnational cooperation projects by setting different goals, enhancing the EU’s international influence in education and other fields^[5]. The “Erasmus+” Programme emphasizes the importance of transnational learning and exchanges for teachers and students, aiming to promote cooperation among transnational universities through international exchanges^[6].

2.2. The main content of the “Erasmus+” programme

The “Erasmus+” Programme emphasizes three Key Actions (KA)^[7], covering students, educators, trainers, researchers, and others. The specific content is as follows:

- (1) Key Action 1 (KA1): Mobility for individual learning, aiming to support students, teachers, educators, and youth workers in carrying out transnational learning, teaching, training, or work-experience exchanges.
- (2) Key Action 2 (KA2): Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices, emphasizing the establishment of partnerships with various organizations, alliances, teacher training centers, and vocational skills centers in different countries.
- (3) Key Action 3 (KA3): Support for policy reform, providing support for policy cooperation at the EU level by implementing existing policies and formulating new policies, thereby promoting modernization reforms in the fields of education, youth training, and sports.

Key Action 1 particularly emphasizes the importance of teacher exchange programs abroad. It points out that the teacher training plan is flexibly adjusted and optimized every year according to actual needs, and new courses are continuously integrated to ensure that teachers can make the most of the program courses for personal growth and professional development. For example, in the 2024-2025 teacher training plan^[8], 40 diverse courses are provided for teachers to choose from freely, aiming to comprehensively improve teachers’ teaching abilities and cross-cultural literacy.

3. Enlightenment of the “Erasmus+” programme on improving the international competence of higher vocational English teachers

In 2022, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council issued the “Opinions on Deepening the Reform of the Modern Vocational Education System Construction” (hereinafter referred to as the “Opinions”), proposing to “innovate the mechanism for international

exchanges and cooperation, and build a platform for international cooperation in vocational education based on regional advantages, development strategies, pillar industries, and talent demands”^[9].

From 2015 to 2020, more than 40 universities in China participated in the “Erasmus+” Programme. 2024 is the second implementation period (2021-2027) of the “Erasmus+” Programme. According to statistics, currently, many universities in Hunan Province, such as Central South University and Hunan University, have signed cooperation agreements on “Erasmus+” projects with European universities. This practice has not only improved teachers’ international teaching abilities but also greatly expanded the breadth and depth of schools’ foreign exchanges and cooperation.

Wu Yan, the vice-minister of the Ministry of Education, pointed out that it is necessary to build the “Five Treasures” of the new infrastructure for vocational education, making vocational education the backbone of China’s education. The “Golden Teachers” are required to have a broad international perspective, keep up with the development trends of global vocational education, draw on advanced foreign experience in a timely manner, and drive the vigorous development of China’s vocational education through innovation^[10]. Therefore, as the core engine for promoting education internationalization, the improvement of the international competence of English teachers is the key to achieving education internationalization.

3.1. Enhancing the awareness of education internationalization

The “Erasmus+” Programme has introduced and exported advanced educational concepts and school-running ideas, making the international influence of European higher education rank among the top in the world^[11]. With their profound language learning background and cross-cultural adaptation ability, higher vocational English teachers can widely access and deeply understand advanced Western educational concepts, thus fostering the awareness of internationalization. Therefore, under the guidance of China’s “Belt and Road” Initiative, higher vocational English teachers should consciously enhance their international awareness, actively promote international exchanges and cooperation, expand more and deeper-level teacher-student exchange programs, cultivate international-oriented talents, and coordinate the two major tasks of “bringing in” and “going global”^[12] to enhance the international competitiveness of China’s education.

3.2. Optimizing the international curriculum system

The “Opinions” point out that it is necessary to “launch several professional and curriculum standards with international influence.” However, the current international curriculum system in China’s higher vocational colleges still has defects. The main problems include the inability to exchange course credits, poor curriculum articulation, and issues such as mismatched course difficulty or low relevance of the learned content to the major, making it difficult to effectively improve professional skills.

The “Erasmus+” Programme attaches great importance to the development of joint courses across countries and schools. It adopts a credit system of “compulsory + elective,” giving students diverse autonomous choices and encouraging liberal arts students to choose science courses and science students to choose liberal arts courses to cultivate compound talents. This provides the following enlightenment for China’s international curriculum system: First, curriculum design needs to fully consider the educational systems, cultural backgrounds, and student characteristics of different countries for targeted design to achieve the best learning results. Second, a more flexible and open credit recognition system should be established to ensure the smooth connection of students’ learning experiences at home and abroad. Third, it is necessary to create “Golden Courses” that are closely integrated with industrial development, establish internal connections among disciplines such as

humanities and science, break away from the “isolated islands” of single-discipline development, and promote the integrated development of science and technology and humanities.

3.3. Strengthening international cooperation and academic research capabilities

Through the “Erasmus+” Programme, teachers who go abroad for exchanges can participate in local academic seminars and meet outstanding educational peers, which provides valuable opportunities for teachers’ professional development and the expansion of their international perspectives.

China’s higher vocational colleges should actively participate in “Erasmus+” projects, select English teachers to experience foreign cultures first, deeply understand the teaching systems of partner institutions, examine their own construction and management from a broad perspective, and play a bridging role in promoting international cooperation. Higher vocational English teachers should also take the initiative, make rational use of resources, and establish close connections with overseas peers through forms such as signing agreements, joint scientific research, and mutual exchange of visiting scholars to share teaching resources and academic achievements.

3.4. Cultivating the awareness and ability of lifelong learning

In 2020, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning released the report “Embracing a Culture of Lifelong Learning: Contribution to the Futures of Education Initiative”, calling for a significant shift towards a culture of lifelong learning by 2050 to meet future challenges^[13].

The “Erasmus+” Programme aims to support the development of education and training in Europe and further promote the practice of the concept of lifelong learning. The programme provides strong support and guarantee for the lifelong learning of English teachers by offering exchange opportunities, promoting professional development, encouraging academic research, and driving educational innovation.

Higher vocational English teachers should cultivate the awareness and ability of lifelong learning. They should start from aspects such as deepening professional knowledge, learning a second foreign language, improving teaching skills, paying attention to educational technology, strengthening academic research, and enhancing cross-cultural communication abilities, and keep learning and progressing to adapt to the constantly changing educational environment and students’ needs.

3.5. Improving teaching innovation capabilities

The “Erasmus+” Programme emphasizes the importance of teachers mastering information and communication technologies and new technologies. Teachers need to continuously understand and learn new technologies that are evolving rapidly, access and use teaching-suitable application software, online platforms, and digital tools to make English teaching more efficient. They can learn advanced foreign teaching tools and methods and use tools such as Genially and Kahoot to improve teaching methods, making English teaching more efficient and interesting.

3.6. Enhancing cross-cultural communication capabilities and national cultural confidence

The teacher training courses of the “Erasmus+” Programme pay special attention to the issue of cultural diversity in the classroom. They emphasize that teachers must abandon prejudice and discrimination, uphold an inclusive and tolerant attitude, respect and understand different cultures and concepts to promote a harmonious and inclusive learning environment when facing students from different countries, with different religious beliefs and

historical and cultural backgrounds.

Higher vocational English teachers should enhance their cross-cultural communication capabilities based on a keen perception of cultural differences. Research shows that rich language-learning experiences make teachers more empathetic and able to put themselves in others' shoes^[14]. Higher vocational English teachers should take advantage of this to consciously improve their cross-cultural communication skills and better guide students to understand and respect diverse cultures in teaching.

In addition to improving cross-cultural communication capabilities, maintaining cultural confidence in their own nation is also an important cornerstone for higher vocational English teachers to enhance their international competence. Through contact with different national cultures, teachers can not only deepen their understanding of the uniqueness and advantages of their own culture but also transform from cultural self-awareness to cultural confidence in international exchanges. In this process, the identities presented by teachers go beyond their individual identities and become representatives of a collective and a nation^[15]. Thus, higher vocational English teachers can more naturally infiltrate the concept of ideological and political education in courses during teaching, cultivate students' values and cultural identity, which is highly consistent with the current goal of "cultivating people with moral integrity" in China's higher education.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, higher vocational English teachers in China should actively participate in "Erasmus+" Programme projects, deeply study the internal logic of international exchanges and cooperation, and use this platform to enhance their international competence. This measure is not only an effective expansion and deepening of the existing international cooperation framework but also can open up new paths for the internationalization of vocational education and create more opportunities for improving teachers' international competence.

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