Strategies to Cultivate Key Competencies in the English Subject Among Secondary Vocational School Students in the Context of Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education

Chen Peng*

Xingshan County Vocational Education Center, Yichang 443799, Hubei, China

*Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.

Abstract: By using the teaching cases of the new edition English Basic Module 1 and 2, this paper illustrates, how to cultivate key competencies in the English subject among secondary vocational school students in the context of ideological education. Those strategies emphasizes a student-centered teaching approaches, language-output-oriented methodologies, the effective use of new technologies such as VR and AI to optimize the English learning experience and assess the educational effectiveness of secondary vocational English courses quantitatively with the help of big data and other technology. The teaching practice guides students to use new media to tell Chinese stories and let Chinese voice be heard.

Keywords: Curriculum-based ideological and political education; Key competencies in the English subject; Secondary vocational school English; Strategies

1. Introduction

In the latter half of the last century, English, as China's first foreign language, initially had its textbooks written by native English speakers, often showcasing Western countries' cultures and advanced achievements. The teaching process emphasized the cultural input one-sidedly [1]. With the advancement of curriculum reforms, English educators recognized that "the study of foreign cultures and values is an inseparable part of foreign language teaching [2]."

The 2020 new curriculum standards for English in secondary vocational schools clearly state that the core competencies of the English subject are composed of workplace language communication, perception of thinking differences, cross-cultural understanding, and autonomous learning. These aspects are both independent and interwoven, forming an organic whole [3].

After nearly three years of teaching practice with the new Basic Module 1 and 2 of secondary vocational school English in the context of ideological education, the author summarizes the strategies for cultivating core competencies in the secondary vocational English subject as follows.

2. Optimizing the learning experience and shaping humanistic qualities

2.1. Enjoying a cultural feast and fostering a sense of patriotism

English teachers should pay attention to the ideological implications of language and enhance the humanistic connotations of foreign language learning [4]. Based on the unit themes of the textbook, they should increase learning materials and incorporate popular Chinese cultural works into teaching. This allows students to gain insights into inheriting and promoting local cultures from cultural phenomena, fostering a sense of patriotism.

In the unit of "Ancient Civilization," teachers encourage students to go to cinemas and theaters to appreciate the dance poem drama "Only This Green". Through experiencing cultural innovation works firsthand, students deepen their humanistic foundation and cultivate a consciousness of cultural inheritance.

English teachers should fully utilize new media and technologies, enhancing the experiential aspect of language learning. For the warm-up in the unit of "Ancient Civilization," the use of the Digital Dunhuang VR website breaks through time and space constraints, allowing students to closely appreciate the sculptures and paintings of the Dunhuang Grottoes in the classroom. This wonderful experience generates a strong desire to share and communicate, providing material for speaking practice.

In the introduction section, video clips of the opening ceremonies of the two Olympic Games hosted by China were added. The 2008 Beijing Olympics showcased China's five-thousand-year splendid history, while the 2022 Winter Olympics opening ceremony demonstrated an attitude of openness, sharing, and building a community with a shared future for mankind, reflecting a high degree of cultural confidence. Students can compare and appreciate the significant progress in concepts and technological levels between the two Olympic opening ceremonies visually, feeling the rapid development of the country and developing a spontaneous sense of national pride.

3. Forging the quality of thinking and enhancing cross-cultural understanding

Good thinking quality refers to the ability and level of thinking in terms of logic, criticality, and innovation [5]. Each country and nation has its unique culture. Only through perceiving the world through the perspectives of authors from different cultural backgrounds, to respect different cultures, only in collision and in-depth comparison with different cultures and continuous innovation to enrich Chinese culture, can secondary vocational school students build up cultural confidence.

"Each to their beauty, appreciating others' beauty, beauty in unity, the world is one" [6]. English teachers need to creatively use all human spiritual wealth for education. They should guide students to learn from the strengths of others, widely draw on the excellent achievements of foreign civilizations. In the unit of "Ancient Civilization," the study integrates top-tier Chinese and foreign cultural works from various fields such as opera, painting, dance, music, cultural relics, and sports into the teaching process, guiding students to appreciate the treasures of Chinese and Western art, enhancing aesthetic taste, enjoying the cultural feasts of both Chinese and Western cultures, and promoting international understanding.

In the reading part of the first unit of the Basic Module 1, "Personal and Family Life", there are two short

passages describing families from the perspectives of Chinese student Zhang Yuchen and English-speaking student Anna Smith. By viewing family interactions from the perspectives of authors from different cultural backgrounds, students summarize and conclude the different family concepts between Chinese and Western cultures. They identify Chinese family values such as filial piety, valuing family relationships and placing emphasis on children's education, as a contrast, Western family values individual independence. This leads to an understanding of the differences in ideologies between Chinese filial piety culture and Western individualism, enhancing cross-cultural understanding.

4. Adhering to output, cultivate key competencies

4.1. School-based expansion connects language study with real life

Teachers should expand language practice to school-based activities to consolidate and enhance students' language application abilities, implementing ideological and political concepts into specific actions close to students' real lives. Through classroom teaching, ideological and political education is permeated into the construction of students' knowledge and experience and the practical process [7]. School-based language practices allow students to turn language knowledge and patriotic feelings effectively into language competence and patriotic behaviors on the broad stage of real life.

For example, in the unit of "Ancient Culture", one of the listening and speaking tasks is introducing traditional Chinese art works. The group activity task is "making slides to introduce the Mogao Caves. Based on students' real-life experience, the textbook tasks are extended to three additional teaching tasks: introducing local specialties and intangible cultural heritage Caitang Opera (a local opera), writing an English introduction to the local Han Dynasty historical and cultural landscape, Zhaojun Village, and publishing it on social platforms. These tasks not only enhance language application abilities but also provide opportunities to let students identify local cultural characteristics, helping to establish a sense of cultural identity [8]. The participants of the school-based language activities translate their cultural self-confidence into concrete actions and become participants in the rural revitalization of their hometown.

4.2. Telling Chinese stories creates a new motivation in English learning

The popularity of self-media platforms such as microblog and TikTok has made international communication faster and broader. The success of short video creator Li Ziqi, who blends traditional Chinese culture and local customs, showcases rural life in China, and has over 20 million followers on the YouTube platform, with single video views even surpassing influential foreign media such as BBC and CNN. Li Ziqi's significant impact overseas demonstrates the important role of self-media in showcasing national cultural characteristics and values, expressing opinions, and shaping an international image.

Most secondary vocational student groups are not only spectators of self-media platforms but are also the main or reserve anchors. Their works will naturally and widely spread among the youth, forming a vibrant cultural confidence and shaping a positive international image. Therefore, cultivating foreign language talents with cross-cultural awareness and communication skills, who can consciously and confidently use English to promote Chinese culture, tell Chinese stories well, and spread the Chinese voice in a certain context, should become one of the purposes of English education in the era of self-media [9].

English teachers can recommend cross-border English-speaking exchange APPs to secondary vocational students, encouraging them to engage in non-governmental communication and cultural exchanges with native

English speakers, guiding secondary vocational students to tell Chinese stories properly in English through self-media platforms, showcasing the excellent traditional Chinese culture and eliminating misunderstandings and building a community with a shared future for mankind.

When using the output of English to spread Chinese culture and voice to the world, secondary vocational students become representatives of Chinese culture naturally, creating a new motivation to their English learning.

5. Aligning with job positions to enhance professional literacy

"Virtue, skill, morality integrate as one, learning and teaching as one" to achieve the unity of knowledge and action, is the distinctive feature of talent cultivation in vocational education [10]. Secondary vocational English teaching should highlight professional characteristics, focus on the application of language skills, align with professional capabilities, and create typical professional situations for students based on unit themes, cultivating students' professional ethics, labor spirit, model worker spirit, and craftsmanship. Every English class should include not only the training of language skills but also philosophy and values for students to benefit throughout their whole career.

5.1. Strengthening school-enterprise cooperation for professional preparation

Unit 3 of the Basic Module 2, for example, the unit theme is internship. Based on the major, the teacher can add unit-theme-related workplace content and excellent Chinese corporate culture content [11]. The target audience is second-grade students majoring in chemical technology, according to the talent cultivation plan, in the third year, students will enter the leading chemical enterprise Xingfa Group for on-the-job internship training, therefore, in the listening and speaking part of the unit, the teaching activities of "watching the English enterprise introduction video of Xingfa Group, naming the company's main business and summarizing corporate spirit" are added. Through these learning activities, students not only have a concrete understanding of the main business and industry status of the company they are about to join, but also understand the company's corporate spirit, generate their professional expectations, correct their professional attitude, and get psychologically prepared for internship and employment in advance.

5.2. Customizing professional contexts to enhance professional skills

Language learning can only be activated when it is contextualized; only then can language knowledge be transformed into students' literacy [12]. Before listening and speaking training, student groups cooperate to use AI technology to customize professional context maps or generate background videos, as an important part of the context, making the language context presented in teaching more in line with the actual target job positions. Let students immerse themselves there, in a good teaching context quickly [13].

School-based learning tasks, such as helping local enterprises design an English poster or video to recruit overseas interns are created. Through this task, students review the main components of the internship project description and apply them to practice. While completing professional tasks, English speaking and writing skills are improved, language skills are consolidated and sublimated, becoming part of professional skills. Before the end of the unit learning, an English resume writing micro-course is added, broadening students' internship and employment channels and making overseas job seeking possible.

6. Adhering to student-centered, new evaluation standards

The evaluation of secondary vocational English learning in the context of curriculum-based ideological and political education should break the single-dimensional "English language ability" evaluation standard, and the design of English learning evaluation should aim at the development requirements of the four key competencies in the English subject, evaluating the English subject key competencies involved in the entire process of language learning comprehensively.

With "language communication + professional literacy + cross-cultural understanding + autonomous learning ability + ideological sublimation" as the evaluation indicators, the explicit indicators of language evaluation are combined with implicit indicators such as "Whether the excellent traditional Chinese culture, core socialist values, and the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind are deeply demonstrated, patriotic feelings are included", "Did you promoting China abroad actively, and shaping a positive international image successfully?" "Whether the language task process shows professional qualities such as teamwork, communication skills, innovation ability, and craftsman spirit"; "Did you actively participate and complete self-learning and cooperative learning tasks, actively discover the ideological and political education content involved in English subject teaching [14]" are combined to jointly evaluate the results of English learning activities.

In addition to students themselves, peers, and teachers, enterprise human resources specialists can also be invited as the main body of the learning evaluation. Industry evaluation standards can be used to evaluate students' work. The communication power data, including platform viewing volume, likes, and comments, can also be used as important indicators of external publicity works. English teachers should pay attention to the individual student's diachronic development and progress [15], use big data and other technologies to compare students' ideological tendencies and behavior patterns before and after teaching, conduct value-added evaluations, and quantify the effectiveness of the English subject key competence cultivation.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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