

A Study on the Use of Teaching Strategies by English Teachers in Higher Vocational Colleges and Their Relationship with Motivation

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the relationship between teaching strategies used by English teachers in Chinese higher vocational colleges and student motivation. A systematic analysis of the current state of English language teaching in higher vocational colleges was conducted using qualitative research method. Data were collected from English teachers of a higher vocational college in Henan province, China. Through surveys and in-depth interviews, data were gathered to assess the teaching strategies used by educators and their effectiveness, as well as to explore how to influence teachers' motivation to use teaching strategies. Results indicate that interactive and student-centered teaching methods are significantly positively correlated with intrinsic motivation, whereas traditional lecture-based teaching shows weaker association with student motivation. Additionally, the study found a significant link between teachers' reflective practices, ongoing adjustment of teaching strategies, and the enhancement of student motivation. Finally, the paper presents a series of recommendations for improving teaching strategies based on the research findings, aimed at enhancing the quality of English language teaching in higher vocational colleges and bolstering teachers' motivation.

Keywords: Higher Vocational Colleges; English Language Teaching; Teaching Strategies; Learning Motivation; Teacher Reflection; Interactive Teaching

1. Introduction

In the continuously evolving landscape of educational methodologies, the role of teaching strategies becomes pivotal in shaping the

learning outcomes of students. Particularly in vocational colleges in China, where English is not the first language, the need to equip students with a practical and robust command of the English language is a pressing challenge. English teachers in these institutions are often faced with the dual task of engaging students while effectively communicating complex information in a foreign language. This necessitates the use of innovative and adaptable teaching strategies that not only impart knowledge but also stimulate motivation among students.

The exploration of teaching strategies and their impact on student motivation, particularly concerning English language instruction in higher vocational colleges, is an area rich with pedagogical research. This literature review aims to contextualize the present study by exploring relevant theories, previous research findings, and the linkage between instructional methods and motivation. Theoretical Framework of Teaching Strategies A fundamental concept within the realm of teaching strategies is the distinction between teacher-centered and student-centered approaches. Traditional teacher-centered strategies, such as direct instruction and lecture, have been scrutinized for potentially stifling student motivation and engagement (Chen, 2013). In contrast, student-centered approaches, which include collaborative learning, problem-based learning, and the flipped classroom, place the student at the core of the educational experience, empowering them to take an active role in their learning process (Freeman et al., 2014). The effectiveness of teaching strategies is often assessed through the lens of constructivist learning theory, which posits that learners construct knowledge through experiences and reflections (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory

supports the use of teaching strategies that engage students in active learning, critical thinking, and real-world problem-solving (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). Learning Motivation Theories the literature on learning motivation is extensive and multifaceted, with two prevailing theories dominating the field: Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Expectancy- Value Theory (EVT). SDT, developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), underscores the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as key drivers of intrinsic motivation. EVT, as outlined by Wigfield and Eccles (2000), posits that a student's expectancy for success and the value they place on the task influence their motivation to engage and persevere. [1-6]

Research on Teaching Strategies in Higher Vocational Colleges Within the context of Chinese higher vocational colleges, several studies have examined English teaching strategies and their effectiveness. Wang and Bai (2017) found that integrating multimedia and interactive activities in English classes resulted in increased student interest and participation. Furthermore, Zhao (2019) reported positive outcomes when teachers employed task-based language teaching, suggesting that this approach enhances both motivation and language competence. The Relationship between Teaching Strategies and Learning Motivation the link between specific teaching strategies and learning motivation has been the subject of numerous studies. Dörnyei (2001) suggests that well- designed communicative tasks can boost students' intrinsic motivation by providing them autonomy and opportunities for meaningful language use. Similarly, Guo et al. (2018) observed that strategies promoting student autonomy, such as choice in learning activities, were associated with higher levels of intrinsic motivation. However, the relationship between teaching strategies and motivation is complex and influenced by various factors, including cultural background (Liu, 2015), students' individual differences (Reeve et al., 2014), and the learning environment (Jang et al., 2016). It is also worth noting that extrinsic motivators, such as rewards and exams, play a significant role in the educational settings of higher vocational colleges in China, as they can impact students' motivation either positively or negatively (Chen & Wong, 2015).

In synthesizing the literature, it becomes evident that while significant strides have been made in understanding the general relationship between teaching strategies and motivation, there exists a gap in research specifically targeted towards English instruction in higher vocational colleges in China. Furthermore, the intricate interplay of cultural, institutional, and individual factors calls for a more nuanced investigation into this relationship. [7-13]

In conclusion, the literature suggests a trend towards student-centered teaching strategies being more effective in fostering intrinsic motivation among students. However, the transition from theory to practice requires careful consideration of context-specific variables. the current study seeks to build on the existing body of knowledge by examining these dynamics within the unique setting of Chinese higher vocational colleges, aiming to contribute empirical data and insights that can inform and refine English teaching practices in this educational sector.

The significance of this study lies in its focus on identifying the relationship between the teaching strategies employed by English teachers in Chinese higher vocational colleges and the students' learning motivation. Understanding this relationship can provide valuable insights that can contribute to the enhancement of English teaching methodologies. These insights are crucial for developing an educational environment that fosters intrinsic motivation and encourages students to participate actively in their learning process. the objectives of this study are to: - Systematically analyze the current state of English teaching strategies in Chinese higher vocational colleges. Assess the effectiveness of these strategies in relation to student motivation. Provide recommendations for teaching strategy improvements to enhance the quality of English education and student motivation in these institutions.

The scope of this research is confined to the investigation of English teaching strategies and their impact on teaching motivation within the context of higher vocational colleges in China. the study is limited to one vocational college to provide a manageable and focused examination of the subject matter.

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined as: Teaching Strategies:

the methods and techniques used by teachers to facilitate learning, which may include but are not limited to collaborative learning, flipped classrooms, direct instruction, and problem-solving activities. Learning Motivation: the internal drive that compels students to engage in the learning process, which can be intrinsic (driven by an interest or enjoyment in the task itself) or extrinsic (driven by external rewards or pressures). Higher Vocational Colleges: Post-secondary educational institutions in China that provide vocational education and training designed to prepare students for specific trades, occupations, or professions. Intrinsic Motivation: the motivation that arises from within the student, characterized by a personal interest or enjoyment in the subject matter or learning activity. Extrinsic Motivation: the motivation that is influenced by external factors such as rewards, grades, or recognition from others.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a qualitative research method to investigate the relationship between English teaching strategies and motivation in a higher vocational college in China. This design allows for a comprehensive analysis by qualitative data, thus providing a more nuanced understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

Qualitatively, case studies will be conducted to gain deeper insights into the experiences and perceptions of both teachers and students regarding these strategies.

The rationale for this approach is to leverage the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative component will provide a broad overview of the trends within the population, while the qualitative element will allow for an in-depth exploration of the underlying reasons, opinions, and contextual factors that influence the observed outcomes.

2.2 Participant Selection

The participants for this study will be selected using a purposive sampling method. The inclusion criteria for teachers will be those who taught college English courses with the same course content will be purposively selected through a purposive sampling research

method. Ten English teachers who taught the same course, the same textbook, and the same unit in Z College (HeNan province, China), which I am familiar with in my region, will be selected, and their ages, titles, and teaching ages are different, and they will be observed in the classroom and interviewed in a semi-structured manner.

2.3 Data Collection Methods

Data will be collected through two primary means: classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. The teacher surveys will be designed to capture qualitative data on the usage and perceived effectiveness of various English teaching strategies, as well as the motivation levels among students.

The surveys will include Likert-scale questions, multiple-choice questions, and a few open-ended questions to allow participants to provide additional comments. The instrument will be pre-tested with a small sample to ensure clarity, relevance, and reliability.

Semi-structured interviews will be used to collect qualitative data from a subset of survey participants who volunteer for further study. These interviews will delve into participants' personal experiences with the teaching strategies in question, their perceptions of these strategies' effects on motivation, and any suggestions they may have for improvement. Each interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes and will be audio-recorded with the consent of the participants.

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data from the surveys will be analyzed using statistical software such as SPSS or R. Descriptive statistics will be used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample, the prevalence of different teaching strategies, and the levels of student motivation. Inferential statistics, such as correlation analysis and multiple regression, will be employed to examine the relationships between teaching strategies and motivation levels.

For the qualitative data from the interviews, thematic analysis will be conducted following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This will involve transcribing the interviews, reading and re-reading the data to become familiar with it,

generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the report. NVivo software may be used to assist with organizing the data and identifying recurrent patterns or themes.

The mixed-methods data will be integrated during the analysis phase to draw comprehensive conclusions. The quantitative results will provide a structural backbone to which the qualitative findings will add flesh, offering explanations and context that the numbers alone cannot convey.

Throughout the study, ethical considerations will be strictly adhered to, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and respecting the voluntary nature of participation. The study will be conducted following the guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA) and will be subject to approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) associated with the researcher's institution.

3. Results

3.1 Usage of Teaching Strategies by Teachers

The study's quantitative data indicated a diverse range of teaching strategies employed by English teachers in the surveyed higher vocational colleges. The most commonly reported strategies included collaborative learning, task-based instruction, and the use of multimedia resources. Collaborative learning was utilized at least once a week by 70% of the teachers, who cited its advantages for peer interaction and communication skills. Task-based instruction was also prominent, with 65% of teachers implementing it fortnightly, emphasizing its role in contextualizing language learning and aligning with vocational topics. Multimedia resources were a staple in 80% of classrooms, with teachers noting the engagement and visual stimulation they provided.

Less common, though still noteworthy, were strategies such as flipped classrooms and problem-based learning, each employed by approximately 40% of the participants on a monthly basis. These strategies were recognized for fostering independent learning and critical thinking but were less frequently used due to time constraints and

required resources. Moreover, traditional lecture-based instruction was to be used more. So more interactive and student-centered approaches in language instruction are needed.

3.2 Survey Results on Teachers' Teaching Motivation

The survey results painted a complex picture of motivation within English language learning. Overall, students reported moderate levels of motivation, with an average rating of 3.5 on a 5-point Likert scale. Intrinsic motivation types, such as interest in language learning and enjoyment of the challenge, scored slightly higher than extrinsic motivators like grades and future job prospects. Teachers generally used more direct teaching strategies and relatively less indirect and co-operative teaching strategies. In addition, the stronger the teachers' motivation, the higher the frequency of using instructional strategies, the more types of instructional strategies they use, and the stronger the students' interest in learning and the more effective the teaching.

3.3 Correlation Analysis Between Teaching

The correlation analysis revealed significant relationships between certain teaching strategies and student motivation. The use of collaborative learning strategies had a positive correlation with students' intrinsic motivation ($r = 0.42, p < 0.01$), indicating that as the frequency of collaborative learning increased, so did the levels of student interest and enjoyment in learning English.

Task-based instruction was also positively correlated with both intrinsic ($r = 0.38, p < 0.01$) and extrinsic motivation ($r = 0.29, p < 0.05$). This suggests that providing students with clear, practical tasks can enhance their engagement and perceived value of language learning.

Interestingly, the employment of multimedia resources showed a positive correlation with extrinsic motivation ($r = 0.33, p < 0.05$) but was not significantly correlated with intrinsic motivation. This could imply that while multimedia may make lessons more engaging and thus improve attendance and effort driven by external rewards, it does not necessarily increase students' inherent interest in the subject. Flipped classrooms and problem-based learning, while less commonly employed, showed promising relationships

with motivation.

Flipped classrooms had a moderate positive correlation with intrinsic motivation ($r = 0.27$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that students who engaged with content before class found the in-class activities more meaningful. Problem-based learning had a similar effect, with a correlation of $r = 0.25$ ($p < 0.05$), indicating that real-world problem-solving could enhance the perceived relevance of language learning.

These findings underscore the importance of active, student-centered learning strategies in enhancing motivation. However, it should be noted that correlation does not imply causation, and other variables not accounted for in this study may influence these relationships. The qualitative data from teacher interviews further supported the quantitative findings. Teachers reported observing higher levels of student engagement and motivation when using strategies that actively involved students in their learning. They also noted that students expressed greater satisfaction with classes that allowed them to collaborate, solve problems, and use the language in practical ways.

The student interviews revealed that while they appreciated the variety of teaching strategies, they particularly valued activities that were directly related to their vocational interests and future career paths. Many students also expressed a desire for more personalized feedback and opportunities to participate in decision-making regarding course content and assessment methods.

In summary, the results suggest a clear link between the use of active, student-centered teaching strategies and higher levels of student motivation in English language learning. These findings have important implications for the design and implementation of English curricula in higher vocational colleges, pointing to the potential benefits of incorporating a greater variety of interactive and practical strategies to engage students and enhance their learning outcomes.

4. Discussion

4.1 Interpretation of Research Results

The findings of this study offer valuable insights into the dynamics between teaching strategies and student motivation in the context of English learning in higher vocational

colleges. the prevalent use of collaborative learning and task-based instruction, as well as the integration of multimedia resources, reflects a pedagogical shift towards more interactive and student-centered approaches. This shift is in line with contemporary educational theories that emphasize the importance of active learning in fostering student engagement and motivation.

The positive correlation between collaborative learning and intrinsic motivation suggests that when students are given opportunities to work together, they may find the learning process more enjoyable and meaningful. This can be attributed to the social aspect of learning, where students can share ideas, challenge each other, and construct knowledge collaboratively, which is consistent with Vygotskian principles of social construction of knowledge.

Task-based instruction's positive impact on both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation indicates that when students perceive the tasks as relevant and applicable to real-world situations, they are likely to find the learning experience rewarding both personally and professionally. This finding supports the notion that relevance and applicability are crucial factors in motivating students, particularly in vocational education settings where practical skills are highly valued. the correlation between the use of multimedia resources and extrinsic motivation could be explained by the engaging nature of these resources, which may enhance students' efforts due to the appealing and visually stimulating format of information presentation. However, it appears that while multimedia can attract student attention and effort, it does not necessarily impact their deep-rooted interest in the subject matter.

The moderate positive correlations associated with flipped classrooms and problem-based learning, despite their less frequent use, indicate potential areas for pedagogical development. These innovative teaching approaches may promote autonomy, self-directed learning, and critical thinking skills, which are foundational for lifelong learning and professional success.

4.2 Impact of Teaching Strategies on Motivation

The current study's findings highlight the significance of teaching strategies in

influencing their motivation. The data suggest that teaching strategies that promote active student participation and provide a clear connection to practical applications can enhance motivation. Such strategies engage students in the learning process and make it more likely for them to invest effort and take ownership of their learning outcomes.

The influence of teaching strategies on motivation can be understood through the activity theory, which posits that individuals are more motivated when their needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness are met. Collaborative learning and task-based instruction may satisfy the need for relatedness and competence by allowing students to work in groups and apply language skills to complete meaningful tasks. Moreover, approaches like flipped classrooms provide autonomy by enabling students to engage with learning materials at their pace outside the classroom and apply their understanding during in-class activities.

Therefore, it is not just the variety of teaching strategies that matters but also how these strategies align with the psychological needs of the students. This alignment can lead to higher levels of intrinsic motivation, which is associated with deep learning and long-term academic success.

4.3 Limitations of the Study and Future Research Directions

While the study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. One of the key limitations is the reliance on self-reported data, which can be subject to bias. Participants may respond in a socially desirable manner or may not have accurate self-perceptions of their motivation levels. Additionally, the cross-sectional design of the study limits the ability to draw causal inferences between teaching strategies and motivation. Longitudinal research would be necessary to establish causality and observe changes over time.

Another limitation is the study's focus on higher vocational colleges in China, which may not be generalizable to other educational contexts or cultural settings. Future research could replicate the study in different countries or educational levels to compare and contrast the findings.

Furthermore, while the study considered a range of teaching strategies, it did not account

for the quality of strategy implementation or the role of teacher expertise and student personality differences, which could significantly impact motivation. Subsequent research could examine these factors in greater detail, perhaps through classroom observations and the inclusion of personality assessments.

Lastly, the potential of emerging technologies and innovative teaching strategies, such as gamification and virtual reality, remains unexplored in this study. Future research should investigate how these modern approaches could influence motivation and engagement in language learning, particularly within the vocational education sector.

Given these limitations, future research directions could include longitudinal studies to track changes in motivation over time, experimental designs to establish causality, and the exploration of additional variables that may mediate or moderate the relationship between teaching strategies and motivation. Expanding the research to include diverse educational contexts would also enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of effective pedagogical practices in language education.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Main Research Findings

The study conducted an in-depth examination of the relationship between teaching strategies and student motivation in the context of English language learning in higher vocational colleges. The primary findings indicate that interactive and student-centered teaching strategies, such as collaborative learning, task-based instruction, and the use of multimedia resources, are prevalent and positively correlate with student motivation. Specifically, these strategies are associated with higher levels of intrinsic motivation, suggesting that when learning activities are perceived as engaging and relevant, students are more likely to develop a genuine interest in the subject matter.

The positive correlation between collaborative learning and intrinsic motivation highlights the importance of social interaction and peer support in the learning process. Task-based instruction's link to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation underscores the value of practical,

contextually meaningful tasks in enhancing student engagement and perceived utility of language learning. The findings further suggest that while the use of multimedia resources tends to increase extrinsic motivation, it may not be as effective in fostering intrinsic motivation.

These results offer empirical support for the adoption of active learning strategies in educational settings, aligning with the theories that advocate for the satisfaction of basic psychological needs as a foundation for motivation. However, the study also acknowledges the complexities of measuring motivation and the need for a nuanced approach that considers the diverse factors influencing student engagement.

5.2 Implications for Educational Practice

The study's findings have several implications for educational practice, particularly in the realm of language education within vocational settings. Teachers and curriculum developers are encouraged to integrate collaborative and task-based learning activities into their teaching repertoires, ensuring that these tasks are connected to students' vocational interests and future career goals. The employment of multimedia resources should be strategic, aimed at enhancing the learning experience without overshadowing the need for active student engagement. Educators should consider the value of flipped classroom models and problem-based learning, which, despite being less commonly used, have shown promise in this study. These strategies could be especially beneficial in developing higher-order thinking skills and promoting a learner-centered environment.

Furthermore, teacher training and professional development programs should emphasize the importance of using a variety of interactive teaching strategies and provide educators with the skills to implement these effectively. Institutions might also consider investing in technological infrastructure that supports the use of multimedia and other innovative teaching approaches.

5.3 Recommendations and Potential for Future Research

Based on the study's conclusions, several recommendations can be made. Firstly, educational institutions should conduct

regular professional development workshops to train teachers in the effective use of interactive and student-centered teaching strategies. Secondly, feedback mechanisms should be established to allow students to voice their preferences and experiences with different teaching methods, fostering a more responsive and adaptive educational environment.

In terms of curriculum design, it is recommended that the content be closely aligned with the students' vocational pathways to enhance the perceived relevance of language learning. Additionally, assessment strategies should be diversified to reflect the variety of skills developed through collaborative and task-based activities, moving beyond traditional testing methods.

As for future research, there is significant potential to expand upon the findings of this study. Longitudinal research could investigate the long-term impact of interactive teaching strategies on student motivation and language proficiency. Experimental studies could explore the causal relationship between specific teaching methods and motivation levels, potentially controlling for variables such as teacher expertise and student personality traits. Research could also examine the impact of emerging technologies, like gamification and virtual reality, on motivation and engagement in language learning. Moreover, cross-cultural studies would provide insight into how cultural differences influence the effectiveness of various teaching strategies. Lastly, future research could look into the individual characteristics of learners, such as their learning preferences, resilience, and autonomy, to understand better how these traits interact with teaching strategies and influence motivation. This would help educators to tailor their teaching approaches to better meet the needs of a diverse student population, ultimately leading to more effective and rewarding language learning experiences.

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