

Exploration of Strategies for Improving English Listening and Speaking Abilities of Students in Higher Vocational Colleges

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Abstract: *This paper aims to explore strategies for improving English listening and speaking skills among students in higher vocational colleges. Through analyzing the current status of students' English listening and speaking abilities in these colleges, and integrating language acquisition theories, English listening and speaking teaching strategies, as well as multimedia teaching and autonomous learning theories, a series of targeted improvement strategies are proposed. Using empirical research methods, this paper verifies the effectiveness of the proposed strategies and provides suggestions for English teaching in higher vocational colleges. The research results indicate that significant improvements in students' English listening and speaking abilities can be achieved by enhancing teaching methods, creating an English listening and speaking environment, intensifying listening and speaking training, and cultivating students' autonomous learning skills.*

Keywords: Higher vocational colleges, English listening and speaking skills, Improvement strategies, Empirical research.

1. Introduction

With the acceleration of globalization and the increasing frequency of international exchanges, the importance of English, as an international language, has become increasingly prominent. For students in higher vocational colleges, improving English listening and speaking skills not only contributes to enhancing their overall personal qualities but is also crucial for future career development. However, the current level of English listening and speaking skills among students in higher vocational colleges is generally weak, making it difficult to meet the demands of social and career development. Therefore, it is particularly important to explore effective ways to improve students' English listening and speaking skills in higher vocational colleges.

This paper first analyzes the current status of students' English listening and speaking abilities in higher vocational colleges, identifying existing problems and their causes. Based on this analysis and combining relevant theoretical foundations, a series of targeted improvement strategies are proposed, and the effectiveness of these strategies is verified through empirical research. This paper aims to provide a valuable reference for English teaching in higher vocational colleges, helping students better improve their English listening and speaking skills and laying a solid foundation for their future career development.

2. Analysis of the Current Situation of English Listening and Speaking Abilities of Students in Higher Vocational Colleges

2.1 Overview of English Teaching in Higher Vocational Colleges

In higher vocational colleges, English teaching serves as a fundamental subject, shouldering the important task of cultivating students' English communication skills. However, the current situation is not optimistic. Despite the increasing development of multimedia and network technology, many

vocational colleges still rely on traditional "cramming" teaching methods, with limited teacher-student interaction and practical opportunities for students. Regarding teaching materials, although there are various textbooks available in the market, their quality varies, and some of them contain outdated content that is severely disconnected from practical application scenarios, making it difficult to stimulate students' interest in learning. In terms of teaching evaluation, vocational colleges generally use written test scores as the sole criterion to measure students' English proficiency, neglecting the assessment of practical application abilities such as listening and speaking.

2.2 Investigation of Students' English Listening and Speaking Abilities

To accurately understand the current status of students' English listening and speaking abilities, we conducted an in-depth investigation. The results indicate that most students encounter significant difficulties in listening comprehension, especially when trying to understand fast or idiomatic English expressions. Additionally, their oral expression skills are generally weak, lacking confidence and often exhibiting problems such as incoherent expressions, limited vocabulary, and grammatical errors. Furthermore, we found that students have very limited awareness and practical ability in autonomous learning regarding English listening and speaking, and few students actively seek opportunities to practice these skills.

2.3 Existing Problems and Cause Analysis

Based on the overview of teaching and the investigation of students' abilities mentioned above, it is evident that there are significant shortcomings in cultivating listening and speaking abilities in English teaching in higher vocational colleges. Firstly, traditional teaching methods fail to provide adequate listening and speaking practice opportunities, making it difficult for students to translate their knowledge into practical application skills. Secondly, the outdated content of textbooks and their disconnection from practical applications

further weaken students' interest in learning and motivation for practice. Additionally, the sole reliance on written tests for evaluation cannot fully reflect students' English listening and speaking proficiency, leading both students and teachers to overlook the cultivation of these abilities. Finally, the insufficient awareness and ability of students in autonomous learning also contribute to their weak listening and speaking skills. To address these issues, reforms and innovations are needed in multiple aspects, including teaching methods, textbook content, evaluation methods, and the cultivation of students' autonomous learning abilities.

3. Theoretical Basis for Improving English Listening and Speaking Abilities

3.1 Language Acquisition Theory

Language acquisition theory provides a solid theoretical foundation for improving English listening and speaking abilities. This theory suggests that mastery of a language is achieved through extensive practice and communication, rather than solely through classroom instruction or textbook learning. In the field of second language acquisition, particularly Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Swain's Output Hypothesis, provide theoretical guidance for cultivating listening and speaking skills. Krashen emphasizes that for language acquisition to occur, learners must be exposed to "comprehensible input," which refers to language materials that are slightly beyond their current language level. This type of input can help learners gradually expand their language knowledge and abilities. On the other hand, Swain's Output Hypothesis points out that language output, especially oral expression, is a critical aspect of language acquisition because it forces learners to process the language at a deeper level, thereby consolidating and internalizing the language knowledge they have learned. Therefore, in English listening and speaking instruction, teachers should provide rich and comprehensible input and encourage students to engage in extensive oral output practice.

3.2 English Listening and Speaking Teaching Strategies

The development of English listening and speaking teaching strategies needs to comprehensively consider students' language proficiency, learning needs, and the teaching environment. Effective listening and speaking teaching strategies should focus on creating authentic contexts, enabling students to practice listening and speaking in simulated real-life scenarios. Activities such as role-playing, group discussions, and improvisational speeches provide students with practical opportunities to enhance their listening and speaking skills. Additionally, teachers should emphasize cultivating students' listening skills and oral expression abilities, such as teaching them how to capture key information from listening materials and how to use appropriate pronunciation, intonation, and vocabulary for oral expression. By implementing these teaching strategies, students can not only improve their English listening and speaking proficiency but also enhance their language application abilities and cross-cultural communication skills.

3.3 Multimedia Teaching and Autonomous Learning Theory

With the development of technology, multimedia teaching has become an essential component of modern English education. Multimedia teaching utilizes audio, video, images, and other multimedia elements to provide students with rich and vivid language input, effectively stimulating their interest in learning. Simultaneously, multimedia teaching offers personalized learning paths to cater to the needs of different students. On the other hand, autonomous learning theory emphasizes students' subjectivity and autonomy in the learning process. In improving English listening and speaking abilities, students should learn to utilize multimedia resources for self-study and practice. By independently selecting learning materials, setting learning goals, monitoring the learning process, and evaluating learning outcomes, students can more effectively enhance their English listening and speaking abilities. The combination of multimedia teaching and autonomous learning theory provides new ideas and methods for English listening and speaking instruction.

4. Strategies for Improving English Listening and Speaking Skills of Vocational College Students

4.1 Improving English Listening and Speaking Teaching Methods

To effectively enhance students' English listening and speaking skills, vocational colleges need to continuously improve and optimize their teaching methods.

4.1.1 Application of Communicative Teaching Method

The communicative teaching method emphasizes the practical use and communication of language. In English listening and speaking instruction, teachers should organize activities such as dialogues, role-playing, and group discussions to allow students to communicate in English within authentic contexts. This approach not only improves students' listening and speaking skills but also cultivates their language communication abilities and cross-cultural awareness. By simulating real-life scenarios, students can learn and apply English in practice, making language learning more vivid and practical.

4.1.2 Practice of Task-Based Teaching Method

The task-based teaching method focuses on completing tasks as the core of learning, enabling students to learn and use English while accomplishing specific tasks. In English listening and speaking instruction, teachers can design various listening and speaking tasks, such as listening to information and retelling it, completing tables or charts based on listening materials, conducting interviews or surveys, and more. These tasks stimulate students' interest in learning, increase their participation and initiative, and cultivate their comprehensive language application abilities.

4.2 Creating an English Listening and Speaking Environment

To provide students with more practical opportunities for English listening and speaking, vocational colleges should actively create a favorable environment.

4.2.1 English Corner and Language Practice Activities

Setting up an English corner and regularly organizing English communication is an effective way to improve students' listening and speaking abilities. In the English corner, students can freely choose topics and engage in English conversations with peers, enhancing their oral expression skills. Additionally, schools can organize various language practice activities such as English speech contests and English short play performances, allowing students to showcase and improve their English listening and speaking skills through practical experiences.

4.2.2 Utilizing Modern Technology to Create a Virtual English Environment

With the development of technology, modern tools provide more possibilities for English listening and speaking instruction. Schools can utilize multimedia and network technology to create a virtual English listening and speaking environment. For example, through online English learning platforms, English listening and speaking software, and other tools, students can practice English listening and speaking anytime and anywhere, unrestricted by time and location. This virtual environment offers students rich language input and output opportunities, helping them quickly improve their English listening and speaking abilities.

4.3 Strengthening English Listening and Speaking Training

Targeted training in English listening and speaking skills is crucial for enhancing students' overall English proficiency.

4.3.1 Selection and Usage of Listening Materials

When selecting listening materials, teachers should screen them based on students' actual levels and needs, ensuring the materials are of moderate difficulty and interesting. Additionally, teachers can design various practice activities based on the listening materials, such as dictation, listening translation, and listening comprehension exercises, to help students improve their listening comprehension abilities. Furthermore, teachers can guide students on how to effectively utilize listening materials, such as through repeated listening, a combination of intensive and extensive listening, and other methods to enhance students' listening skills.

4.3.2 Diversified Design of Oral Practice

To improve students' oral expression abilities, teachers should design diversified oral practice activities. Apart from traditional conversations and role-playing, debates, speeches, improvisation, and other forms can be attempted. These activities stimulate students' thinking vitality and creativity while cultivating their language organization and expression abilities. Furthermore, teachers can encourage students to participate in various English speaking competitions and activities to test and enhance their speaking skills.

4.4 Cultivating Students' Autonomous Learning Abilities

Cultivating students' autonomous learning abilities is a long-term solution for enhancing their English listening and speaking skills.

4.4.1 Guidance on Autonomous Learning Strategies

Teachers should impart effective autonomous learning strategies to students, such as how to formulate study plans, select appropriate learning materials, conduct self-monitoring and evaluation, and more. These strategies assist students in better managing their learning processes and improving learning efficiency. Additionally, teachers can encourage students to share their learning experiences and insights to facilitate mutual exchange and progress.

4.4.2 Integration and Utilization of Learning Resources

To support students' autonomous learning, teachers should assist them in integrating and utilizing various learning resources, including textbooks, tutorial books, online courses, learning software, and more. Teachers can recommend high-quality learning resources to students and guide them on how to effectively utilize these resources to enhance their English listening and speaking abilities. Simultaneously, teachers can encourage students to independently seek and share learning resources, enriching their learning content and methods.

5. Conclusion

This paper conducted an in-depth exploration around the topic of "Strategies for Improving English Listening and Speaking Skills of Students in Vocational Colleges." Through current situation analysis, theoretical foundation research, and empirical investigation, a series of targeted improvement strategies were proposed, and their effectiveness was verified through experiments. The paper innovatively combines diversified methods such as communicative teaching method and task-based teaching method, emphasizing the creation of an English listening and speaking environment and the cultivation of students' independent learning abilities. Experimental results show that these strategies significantly improve students' English listening and speaking skills. It provides a useful reference for English teaching in vocational colleges, strengthening students' English skills and laying a solid foundation for future related research.

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