

ENHANCING FULL-ENGLISH TEACHING QUALITY IN SINO-FOREIGN COOPERATIVE PROGRAMS IN HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGES

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Abstract: The globalization of education has led to the expansion of Sino-foreign cooperative programs in higher vocational colleges, offering students the opportunity to receive internationalized training. However, the effectiveness of full-English teaching in these programs remains a critical challenge. This paper explores the primary obstacles facing English-medium instruction (EMI) in Sino-foreign cooperative education, including the mismatch between students' English proficiency and the requirements of all-English teaching, the limited time available for language development, and the divergence in educational philosophies between Chinese and foreign teachers. It proposes several optimization strategies in the areas of teacher development, curriculum reform, teaching methods, and assessment mechanisms. The aim is to provide practical insights and recommendations to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in these programs.

Keywords: Vocational education; Sino-foreign cooperation; Curriculum reform; Teacher development; EMI

1 THE PARTICULARITY AND CHALLENGES OF ALL-ENGLISH TEACHING IN SINO-FOREIGN COOPERATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGES

1.1 The Mismatch between Students' English Foundation and Teaching Objectives

In many Sino-foreign cooperative education programs, there is a significant gap between the students' English proficiency and the demands of full-English instruction. Higher vocational students generally have lower levels of English competency, as their performance in the college entrance examination often falls below the threshold required for admission to undergraduate programs. This linguistic gap becomes particularly problematic in an EMI environment where specialized English vocabulary is integral to the curriculum. Foreign teachers, who often use original English textbooks containing industry-specific terminology, may inadvertently alienate students who lack the vocabulary to fully engage with the material. This mismatch hinders classroom interactions and results in a reduced learning experience. Research has shown that students often struggle to apply their theoretical language skills to professional settings, leading to frustration and a lack of confidence in their English language abilities [1].

1.2 The Contradiction between Short Teaching Time and Heavy Tasks

The limited academic duration of higher vocational programs—typically three years—further exacerbates this issue. With only 1 to 1.5 years allocated to English instruction, the time available for students to master both general and professional English is far shorter than in traditional undergraduate programs. As a result, students face immense pressure to quickly improve their language skills while simultaneously gaining specialized knowledge. This time constraint often leads to an overload of expectations and unrealistic outcomes, as students must simultaneously develop their basic language skills, acquire technical vocabulary, and cultivate the ability to communicate in cross-cultural contexts [2]. The challenge, therefore, lies in balancing the demands of language acquisition with professional training within such a short period.

1.3 The Conflict between Chinese and Foreign Educational Concepts and Methods

Sino-foreign cooperative education programs are often marked by a clash of pedagogical approaches between Chinese and foreign teachers. Chinese teaching methods are typically exam-oriented, with a strong focus on knowledge transfer, rote memorization, and test preparation. In contrast, many foreign educators prioritize student-centered, active learning techniques, such as case studies, project-based learning, and interactive discussions. While these methods may be effective in fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills in students with advanced language proficiency, they are often less successful in a bilingual classroom where students are still developing their English language skills. The struggle to adapt to these new pedagogical techniques, combined with language barriers, leads to a fragmented learning experience, where students are unable to fully engage with the material or participate in discussions [3].

2 CORE ISSUES IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF ALL-ENGLISH TEACHING

2.1 Structural Shortcomings in Teaching Staff - Inadequate Adaptability of Foreign Teachers

The issue of teacher preparedness is a central concern in Sino-foreign cooperative programs. Many foreign teachers, although highly qualified in their respective fields, may lack sufficient awareness of the learning needs and cultural context of Chinese students. Their teaching methods, which may work well in their home countries, are not always adaptable to the Chinese context, leading to an ineffective transfer of knowledge. Furthermore, foreign teachers often struggle to adjust the content and teaching strategies to accommodate students with varying levels of English proficiency. This lack of adaptability can lead to confusion and frustration among students, undermining the effectiveness of the program. In addition, while the percentage of bilingual teachers in China is increasing, a significant number of local teachers are still not proficient enough to teach completely in English. This creates an imbalance in the quality of instruction, further complicating the delivery of EMI in vocational education [4].

2.2 Disconnection between Curriculum System and Textbooks - Emphasis on Theory in Textbook Selection

Curriculum design is another area in need of reform. The textbooks used in many Sino-foreign cooperative programs are often too theoretical and do not align well with the practical, hands-on nature of vocational education. While the content may be academically rigorous, it often overlooks the real-world application of knowledge, which is central to vocational training. In addition, many textbooks are not adapted to the specific needs of Chinese students, particularly in terms of language proficiency. This disconnect between the curriculum content and the students' practical needs limits the effectiveness of the instruction and hinders students' ability to apply what they have learned in real-world professional settings [5]. Furthermore, the separation of language courses from professional courses exacerbates the problem, as students are unable to apply their language skills directly in vocational contexts, leading to a disjointed learning experience.

2.3 Unscientific Teaching Evaluation Mechanism - Single Evaluation Criterion

Traditional assessment systems in Sino-foreign cooperative programs tend to rely heavily on written exams, which may not accurately reflect students' true language abilities or their capacity to apply knowledge in practical settings. These assessments often emphasize grammar and vocabulary over oral expression, cross-cultural communication, and problem-solving skills. This narrow focus on written testing fails to provide a comprehensive evaluation of students' competencies and does not support the development of practical language skills. Moreover, the absence of dynamic feedback mechanisms, such as continuous assessment or peer evaluations, means that students do not receive timely feedback on their performance, hindering their ability to improve and refine their skills [5].

3 PATHS FOR OPTIMIZING THE QUALITY OF ALL-ENGLISH TEACHING

3.1 Build a "Double-Qualified" International Teaching Team - Strengthen Teacher Training

To improve the quality of teaching, it is essential to cultivate a "double-qualified" international teaching team. This refers to a teaching staff that not only possesses strong academic credentials but also has practical experience in the relevant industries. Regular training programs should be organized for both Chinese and foreign teachers, encouraging cross-cultural exchanges and collaborative teaching methods. Chinese teachers should have opportunities to receive training abroad to learn innovative pedagogical techniques, while foreign teachers should be given cultural orientation and professional development in understanding the unique challenges faced by Chinese students. This integrated approach will help bridge the gap between the two educational systems, promoting a more adaptable and effective teaching environment.

3.2 Develop a "Hierarchical-Integrated" Curriculum System - Hierarchical Teaching

A hierarchical-integrated curriculum system should be developed to accommodate students with varying levels of English proficiency. Students could be divided into basic, intermediate, and advanced classes, with the basic classes focusing on strengthening language skills and the advanced classes emphasizing professional English and specialized vocabulary. Additionally, the curriculum should be designed to integrate language learning with vocational training. For example, students in the tourism management program could participate in scenario-based simulations that incorporate both language learning and real-world applications. This integrated approach ensures that students are able to apply their language skills directly to their professional fields, enhancing both their linguistic and vocational competencies [6].

3.3 Innovate the "Dual-Track Interactive" Teaching Mode - Collaborative Teaching by Chinese and Foreign Teachers

To address the conflict between Chinese and foreign educational approaches, a dual-track interactive teaching mode should be implemented. In this model, foreign teachers would lead case discussions and project-based activities, while Chinese teachers would provide linguistic support and assist with knowledge consolidation. This collaborative teaching structure ensures that both language and content are taught in parallel, allowing students to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The use of digital technologies, such as virtual reality (VR) or online learning

platforms, can also enhance this interactive teaching model by providing immersive learning experiences that simulate real-world professional environments [7].

3.4 Improve the "Multi-Dynamic" Evaluation System

To ensure a more holistic approach to evaluation, a multi-dynamic assessment system should be introduced. This system should include both process-oriented and outcome-based assessments, such as classroom participation, group projects, oral presentations, and internships. In addition, students should be encouraged to pursue third-party certifications, such as international language proficiency tests (e.g., IELTS or TOEFL), to validate their English language skills. By incorporating a wider range of assessment methods, educators can provide a more accurate picture of students' abilities, while also fostering a more comprehensive learning experience that values both language proficiency and practical competence [8].

4 CASE PRACTICE AND EFFECTS

The Sino-Swiss cooperative education program in Business and Tourism Management at our college serves as a model for successful implementation of these strategies. The program's focus on collaborative teaching, with Swiss and Chinese teachers working together in a "1+1" teaching team, has resulted in improved student outcomes. The curriculum has been reformed to include more English-language courses taught by foreign instructors, and an English corner has been established to provide students with more opportunities to practice their language skills in real-world contexts. As a result, students have shown notable improvements in both language proficiency and professional competencies.

4.1 Teacher Collaboration

A key feature of the Sino-Swiss cooperative program is the collaboration between Swiss and Chinese instructors, forming a "1+1" teaching team. This model has proved highly effective in bridging the gap between differing educational philosophies and enhancing the quality of teaching. The Swiss instructors, with their rich international experience, bring innovative teaching methods, such as project-based learning, case studies, and real-world industry examples, while the Chinese teachers provide linguistic support and contextualize the content for the students, ensuring that the students can follow the lessons despite any language barriers.

Through regular joint teaching sessions, the Chinese and Swiss teachers have created a cohesive and dynamic classroom environment. Chinese teachers assist with vocabulary building and explaining culturally specific terms, while foreign teachers focus on enhancing students' critical thinking and practical problem-solving abilities. This collaborative approach has allowed students to better engage with complex professional content and gain confidence in both their English language skills and their ability to apply those skills in real-world contexts.

Moreover, the collaboration between the two groups of teachers has fostered mutual respect and professional growth. Chinese teachers have had the opportunity to observe and learn from the innovative, student-centered teaching methods used by their foreign counterparts. In turn, Swiss teachers have gained a deeper understanding of Chinese students' learning needs, enabling them to adjust their teaching methods for better effectiveness. This reciprocal learning process has contributed significantly to improving the overall teaching quality in the program.

4.2 Curriculum Reform

The curriculum of the Sino-Swiss program has undergone significant reform to better integrate English language training with vocational education. One of the key changes has been the increase in English-language courses taught by foreign instructors. These courses focus not only on improving students' general English proficiency but also on providing specialized language skills related to business and tourism management. The use of professional English terminology, case studies, and discussions on international trends in the industry allows students to acquire the vocabulary and skills necessary to succeed in their future careers.

In addition to enhancing the language content of the curriculum, the program has introduced several other initiatives to further support language acquisition. For example, an English corner has been established, providing students with regular opportunities to practice speaking English in informal settings. The English corner hosts various activities, such as debates, group discussions, and guest lectures by native speakers, all designed to encourage students to use English in real-life situations and improve their fluency. These activities not only offer additional language practice but also create a sense of community among students, helping to reduce the anxiety that often accompanies speaking a foreign language.

Furthermore, the curriculum has been structured to emphasize the integration of language and professional skills. For instance, courses in tourism management include simulations and role-playing exercises that require students to use English while addressing real-world business scenarios. This approach helps students see the direct application of their language skills in a vocational context, enhancing both their language proficiency and their understanding of the business and tourism industries.

The reform of the curriculum has also addressed the need for more practical and immersive learning experiences. Field

trips, internships, and cooperative projects with local and international businesses have been incorporated into the program to provide students with hands-on experience in their chosen fields. These opportunities allow students to practice their English in real-world settings, further reinforcing the connection between language and professional skills.

5 CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

The future of Sino-foreign cooperative education programs in higher vocational colleges depends on systematic reforms aimed at improving the quality of full-English teaching. These reforms must address the challenges of mismatched language proficiency, insufficient teaching time, and the divergence in educational philosophies between Chinese and foreign educators. By implementing strategies such as building a “double-qualified” teaching team, developing an integrated curriculum, and adopting innovative teaching and evaluation methods, the quality of EMI in vocational education can be significantly improved. Moreover, emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and big data analytics, hold great potential for further enhancing the learning experience. Ultimately, continuous innovation and collaboration will be key to cultivating high-quality vocational talents capable of succeeding in an increasingly globalized job market.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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