

An Empirical Study on Higher Vocational English Reading Teaching Based on Core Competence

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Abstract

In the context of mounting global and national emphasis on competence-based education, there is an urgent need to explore how core competencies can be effectively integrated into vocational English instruction. The impetus for this study stems from the discernible discrepancy between the extant theoretical frameworks and the prevailing practical teaching strategies within the domain of higher vocational English reading. This research adopts an empirical approach, using Quanzhou Ocean Vocational College in China as a case study to investigate the cultivation of core competencies in English reading instruction. The present study utilises a questionnaire survey as a methodological instrument. This enables the examination of the importance of core competence, the evaluation of the current implementation status, and the identification of key challenges. The identified challenges include a disconnect between theory and practice, reliance on single-type teaching materials, outdated instructional methods, and lack of real-world relevance in teaching content. In order to address these issues, the study proposes a number of practical strategies, including the optimisation of teaching methods, the enrichment of instructional content, and the improvement of assessment approaches. These include the adoption of diversified models such as cooperative and project-based learning, the incorporation of cross-cultural elements tailored to students' professional backgrounds, and the establishment of a more comprehensive evaluation system. The present study makes a contribution to the field by offering data-driven insights and feasible pedagogical solutions that align with China's vocational curriculum standards. The overarching objective of these strategies is to nurture students' holistic development, enhancing their adaptability and competitiveness in the workplace.

Keywords: Core Competence, Higher Vocational English, Reading Teaching, Empirical Research

Introduction

With the advancement of education reform, the cultivation of core competence has become an important goal of education and teaching. As an important part of China's higher education, higher vocational education should also actively explore how to cultivate students' core competence in teaching. English reading teaching, as the core module of higher

vocational English teaching, plays an important role in cultivating students' core competence. However, at present, the cultivation of core competence still faces many challenges in higher vocational English reading teaching. This study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the actual situation of core competence cultivation in higher vocational English reading teaching through empirical research, and to explore effective teaching methods and paths.

Core Competence and Higher Vocational English Reading Teaching

Connotation of Core Competence

Core competence refers to the necessary character and key abilities that students should have and can adapt to the needs of lifelong development and social development (Lin Chongde, 2017). It covers multiple dimensions, including cultural foundation, autonomous development and social participation. In the subject of English, core competence is mainly reflected in the four dimensions of language proficiency, cultural character, thinking quality and learning ability (Cheng Xian, 2023; Deng Xiaoyan, 2019; Guo Jiling, 2020). This echoes the disciplinary core competence in the four dimensions of Workplace Foreign Communication, Multicultural Communication, Linguistic Thinking Enhancement and Independent Learning Perfection that students should have according to the English Curriculum Standards for Specialised Higher Vocational Education. In higher vocational education, the cultivation of core qualities is of great significance to students' career development and personal growth.

Objectives and Current Situation of English Reading Teaching in Higher Vocational Education

Reading teaching is the core part of English teaching, and it also occupies an important position in higher vocational English teaching. Through reading teaching, students can improve their language ability, expand their knowledge, cultivate thinking ability and cultural awareness, etc. (Yang Lin, Li Dan, 2018). At the same time, reading teaching is also an important way to cultivate students' core competence, which can help students gradually form the competence needed to adapt to social and professional development in the process of language learning. However, at present, there are some problems in higher vocational English reading teaching. For example, some teachers pay excessive attention to the explanation of knowledge points and neglect the in-depth interpretation of the text (Wang Yanli, 2023); reading teaching is fragmented and lacks systematicity (Wang Yanli, 2023); and the teaching method is single, which makes it difficult to stimulate the students' interest in learning and cultivate their core competence (Zhang Lirong, 2023).

The Importance of Core Competence in Higher Vocational English Reading Teaching

It is of great significance to integrate the cultivation of core competence in higher vocational English reading teaching. Firstly, the cultivation of core competence helps to improve students' comprehensive literacy and equip them with the ability to adapt to the development of society. Secondly, the cultivation of core competence can stimulate students' interest in learning and improve their learning enthusiasm and initiative. Finally, the cultivation of core competence is conducive to improving the quality of higher vocational English reading teaching and promoting the in-depth development of teaching reform.

Empirical Research

Design of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire aims to understand the respondents' knowledge and experience of the English subject in higher vocational education, as well as their views on the teaching content,

teaching methods and future development direction. By analysing the results of the questionnaire, we can provide certain references and suggestions for improvement of English teaching in higher vocational education. In the questionnaire, we cover the survey questions about the respondents' gender, professional background, preference for English, and their views on the core competence of English in higher vocational education, the teaching content, the teaching method and the direction of development.

Subjects: 600 students in class 24 of Quanzhou Ocean Vocational College of China for sampling questionnaire survey

Survey time: 2025

Tool used: QuestionStar (www.wjx.cn) is a professional online platform for surveys, assessments, voting, and online exams, dedicated to providing users with powerful and user-friendly services for designing online questionnaires, collecting data, conducting online exams, and analysing results.

Questionnaire statistics

The QuestionStar software is used to analyse and process the data, and the final results will be displayed in the form of tables, pies, rings, bar charts, etc., and finally qualitative and quantitative analyses will be taken.

Rationality analysis

The composition of the questionnaire object includes: this questionnaire survey was issued a total of 600 copies to retrieve 588 copies, the recovery rate of 98%. Among them, 274 are male, accounting for 46.53%, and 314 are female, accounting for 53.47%; 185 people majoring in big data and financial management, accounting for 31.46%; 109 people majoring in big data and accounting, accounting for 18.54%; 101 people majoring in nursing, accounting for 17.18%; 54 people majoring in business data analysis and application, accounting for 9.18%; 53 people majoring in leisure service and management, accounting for 9.01%; 1 in e-commerce, 0.17%; and 85 in other majors, 14.46%. Although it cannot represent all students, it is still relatively reasonable and representative in the composition of the object.

Analysis of survey results

According to the analysis of the results of the questionnaire, there are several aspects of understanding:

1) College Students' Knowledge of Core Competence in Higher English Disciplines

According to the survey in Table 1, the proportion of somewhat compliant is the highest (36.73%), and the proportion of very compliant is relatively low (14.8%), and the whole presents a state in which most students have a certain degree of understanding but the degree of understanding is not deep enough. Therefore, it is recommended that more attention be paid to enhancing students' understanding and application of the core competence of the English subject in higher vocational education in teaching and strengthening the depth and practicability of the relevant teaching content in order to improve students' knowledge and mastery of the core competence.

Table 1

You clearly understand the core competence of the English subject in higher vocational education

OPTIONS	NUMBER (PCS)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Very much in line with	87	14.8%
Comparatively compliant	158	26.87%
Somewhat	216	36.73%
Not quite	97	16.5%
Very inconsistent	30	5.1%

Proportions Related to College Students' English Reading Learning Ability

According to Table 2, most students are positive about the extent to which they can accurately find the main idea of a text and make sense of it in English reading related to their majors, with the highest proportion of somewhat conforming at 34.52%. Comparatively speaking, the percentages of relatively not conforming and very not conforming are lower, 16.67% and 5.61% respectively. This shows that there are differences in students' learning ability, which requires students themselves to strengthen their English reading training to improve their reading comprehension ability, and to improve their ability to understand and grasp the English articles related to their majors; it also requires the counselling of teachers, who need to pay attention to the groups of students with learning difficulties and take targeted teaching measures.

Table 2

You can find the main idea of the article accurately and clear the vein in the English reading related to your own major

OPTIONS	NUMBER (PCS)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Very much in line with	103	17.52%
Comparatively compliant	151	25.68%
Somewhat	203	34.52%
Not quite	98	16.67%
Very inconsistent	33	5.61%

3) Proportion of textbooks meeting Core Competence development

According to Table 3, more than 67% of the respondents thought that the teaching materials were within the range of "very much in line" and "quite in line" with the four dimensions of core competence development, namely, "foreign communication in the workplace, multicultural communication, language thinking enhancement, and independent learning and refinement". The four dimensions of core competence development are "very much in line with" and "quite in line with". It shows that the setting of the textbook in the development of core competence is more reasonable and fits in with the teachers' teaching focus.

However, a considerable proportion of people still thought that the textbook was less in line with these dimensions, with a total of 4.93 per cent of the respondents saying that the textbook was not in line with these dimensions, and the proportion of those who said "not in line with it" and "not in line with it at all" together reached 4.93 per cent. In response to this

group's feedback, the content and teaching methods of the textbooks should be adjusted to improve the quality and compliance of the textbooks, so as to better cultivate students' core qualities in the areas of foreign communication in the workplace, multicultural communication, language thinking and independent learning.

Table 3

Your teaching materials are in line with the four dimensions of Core Competence, namely "workplace communication, multicultural communication, language thinking and independent learning"

OPTIONS	NUMBER (PCS)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Very much in line with	215	36.56%
Comparatively compliant	184	31.29%
Somewhat	160	27.21%
Not quite	21	3.57%
Very inconsistent	8	1.36%

Proportion of Teachers' Teaching in Combination with Specialisation

According to Table 4, the proportions of the options are distributed more evenly, and the majority of the students think that the teachers teach in English classes in combination with their majors and future positions very much in line (34.86%) or quite in line (29.25%). Only a few students think that the teacher's teaching style is relatively inconsistent (3.91%) or very inconsistent (1.19%). This reflects that the teachers have implemented a certain degree of teaching in conjunction with their majors, but some students still think that the degree of conjunction is not satisfactory enough, and that there may be differences between different majors, and that there is a need to further optimise the teaching content and methods to better meet the needs of students of various majors.

Table 4

Teachers often combine teaching with your major and future positions in English classes

OPTIONS	NUMBER (PCS)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Very much in line with	205	34.86%
Comparatively compliant	172	29.25%
Somewhat	181	30.78%
Not quite	23	3.91%
Very inconsistent	7	1.19%

Students' Intercultural Communication Skills

According to the data table, most of them have a positive attitude towards the ability of "You can tell Chinese stories and spread Chinese culture in English", with a high proportion of 17.86% and 29.08% of them being relatively and somewhat compliant respectively. However, there are still 25.34 per cent who think they are relatively unqualified for this competence, and even 13.27 per cent who think they are very unqualified. This shows that students' ability in this area is relatively weak, and that there is a need to strengthen education and training in the communication of Chinese culture, and to improve people's understanding of Chinese culture and their ability to communicate it, so as to enhance the overall communication effect.

Table 5

You can tell Chinese stories and spread Chinese culture in English

OPTIONS	NUMBER (PCS)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Very much in line with	85	14.46%
Comparatively compliant	105	17.86%
Somewhat	171	29.08%
Not quite	149	25.34%
Very inconsistent	78	13.27%

The questionnaire report mainly covers students' understanding of core competence, English reading and learning ability, conformity of teaching materials, teachers' teaching situation, and students' intercultural communication ability. It comprehensively analyses the current situation and problems of core competence of college students in higher vocational English subjects, and puts forward targeted suggestions. It is pointed out that the enhancement of the quality of higher vocational English teaching and students' core competence needs to be continuously optimised and improved by starting from multiple aspects, such as teaching materials, teaching content, teaching methods and teachers' strength.

Reading Teaching Strategies for Higher Vocational English Based on Core Competence

Optimising Teaching Methods

Taking *New Era Vocational English General English 1* Unit 8 Volunteering as an example, the teacher can first ask questions in the process of explanation, such as "Why do people volunteer?" "According to these posters, what is the meaning of volunteering?" to guide students to read the article with questions and stimulate students' thinking and desire to explore. After students have read the articles, organise a group discussion for students to share their opinions and answers. Understand the importance of volunteer work and the value of participating in community services. In this way, students can have a deeper understanding of and respect for different cultural values and social responsibilities, and cultivate students' critical and creative thinking (Deng Xiaoyan, 2019).

When explaining the article Unit 2 Job Interviews in *New Era Vocational English General English 2*, the teacher can play the video related to interviews in the workplace for the students based on the content of the article to create a vivid and realistic teaching situation. At the same time, students can perform in small groups, playing the roles of bosses, HR and applicants, and have dialogues in English during the interview process. Through learning and simulating interview scenes in this contextual teaching method, students learn about the preparation before the interview, workplace etiquette during the interview, and develop their problem-solving skills. It comprehensively cultivates students' vocational core qualities, better adapts to the complex environment of the workplace, and lays a solid foundation for their future career in the workplace.

Enrich the Teaching Content

Teachers can choose some literary works for students, such as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, through reading literary works, students can improve their language skills and feel different cultural backgrounds and values. At the same time, teachers can also choose some popular science articles, such as articles about artificial intelligence, so that students can understand

the latest technological developments. In addition, news reports are also a good reading material, such as news reports about international current affairs, which can cultivate students' international vision and cultural awareness (Yang Lin, Li Dan, 2018).

When explaining an article about Western festivals, teachers can introduce the origins, customs and cultural connotations of Western festivals, while comparing them with traditional Chinese festivals. For example, when introducing Christmas, the origin of Christmas can be introduced to commemorate the birth of Jesus, and the customs of Christmas include decorating the Christmas tree, hanging Christmas stockings, and exchanging gifts. At the same time, you can compare the Chinese Spring Festival, which is the most important traditional festival in China, and the customs of the Spring Festival include putting up Spring Festival couplets, setting off firecrackers, and having reunion dinners. In this way, cultural teaching is organically combined with reading teaching to improve students' cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication skills (Cheng Xian, 2023).

Teachers can systematically teach reading skills, such as skimming, sweeping and intensive reading. Taking skimming reading as an example, teachers can choose an article and let students quickly skim the title, subtitle, pictures, charts, etc. of the article in a short time to understand the general content and theme of the article. Then let the students answer some questions about the topic of the article, such as "What is the main topic of this article?" By this way, the students' reading efficiency and ability will be improved.

Improve Teaching Evaluation

Teachers can comprehensively evaluate the development of students' core competence by taking into account students' test scores, classroom performance, homework completion and group cooperation ability. For example, when evaluating students' language ability, in addition to exam results, they can also observe students' oral expression ability and writing ability in class. When evaluating students' thinking quality, they can observe students' performance in group discussions, whether they can put forward their own opinions and insights, whether they can think critically, etc. (Guo Jiling, 2023).

Teachers can provide timely feedback on students' learning progress and problems through classroom observation, homework correction, and after-class instruction. For example, through students' homework, teachers can understand students' learning attitude and enthusiasm and make suggestions for improvement. At the same time, teachers can also learn about students' learning through after-class talks to understand students' learning progress and understanding, and also enhance emotional communication between teachers and students to provide more personalised guidance for teaching (Zhou Yiquan, 2017).

Teachers can guide students to carry out self-evaluation and mutual evaluation. For example, after completing a reading article, teachers can allow students to self-evaluate their reading performance, such as their reading speed, comprehension, and the use of reading skills. At the same time, teachers can also let students evaluate each other, so that students can understand their own reading performance from different perspectives, and cultivate students' independent learning ability and reflection ability.

Conclusion

This study adopts the empirical research method of questionnaire survey to systematically and deeply explore the status quo and challenges of Quanzhou Ocean Vocational College of China for the cultivation of students' core competence in higher vocational English reading teaching. The questionnaire was carefully designed to comprehensively cover the key elements of the teaching process, including teaching methods, content selection, and evaluation system, to ensure the accuracy and representativeness of the data. Through careful analysis of the recovered data, the study reveals a series of problems currently faced by higher vocational English reading teaching at the level of core competence development. Specifically, the study points out that the singularity of teaching methods is a notable problem, with traditional didactic teaching still dominating, lacking sufficient interactivity and practicability, and making it difficult to effectively stimulate students' sense of active learning and critical thinking ability. Meanwhile, the teaching content is not rich enough, focusing too much on the inculcation of language knowledge and neglecting the integration of cultural background, learning strategies, thinking skills and other core qualities, which restricts the enhancement of students' comprehensive qualities. In addition, the imperfection of the teaching evaluation system is also a key factor restricting the effect of core competence development. Existing evaluations mostly focus on test scores, lack a comprehensive consideration of students' comprehensive literacy development, and are unable to accurately reflect students' actual progress and potential in English reading learning.

To address the above problems, this study proposes a series of targeted teaching strategies. Firstly, it is suggested to optimise teaching methods, introduce diversified teaching modes such as cooperative learning and project-based learning, enhance classroom interactivity and student participation, and promote deep learning. Secondly, enrich the teaching content, incorporate cross-cultural communication, critical thinking training and other elements in combination with professional characteristics, so as to broaden students' international vision and thinking ability. Finally, improve the teaching evaluation mechanism and build a diversified evaluation system, including self-evaluation, peer evaluation, teacher evaluation, and project-based evaluation, in order to comprehensively and fairly assess the development of students' core competence.

The expected effect of implementing these strategies is that not only can they significantly enhance students' core competence in the English subject, including language proficiency, cultural awareness, quality of thinking, and learning strategies, but also lay a more solid foundation for students' career development and personal growth, and enhance their competitiveness and adaptability in the workplace.

Despite the results of this study, its limitations still need to be faced up to. The relatively small sample of the study may limit the general applicability of the findings; at the same time, the limited time of the study makes it difficult to fully observe the long-term effects of the teaching strategies after implementation. Therefore, future research can work in two directions: first, to expand the research sample to cover more students with different backgrounds and majors in order to enhance the representativeness and universality of the findings; second, to extend the research cycle, conduct tracking surveys, and explore in depth the sustained impact of the teaching strategies, so as to provide a more comprehensive and

in-depth empirical evidence basis for the cultivation of core competence in English reading teaching in higher vocational education.

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