

EMPOWERING ENGLISH EDUCATORS: ENHANCING TEACHING QUALITY THROUGH COMPETITIONS

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Abstract

The "National Vocational College Teaching Ability Competition" emerged in 2010, an initiative by the Ministry of Education, with the primary objective of advancing information-based teaching in vocational colleges. In 2018, the competition underwent a comprehensive transformation, shifting from an individual-focused event solely dedicated to information-based teaching to a group competition that centers on the development of all-encompassing teaching abilities. This transformation aims to cultivate double-qualified educators with multifaceted qualities encompassing both theory and practice. As part of the National Vocational College Skills Competition system, this competition underscores the application of information technology in practical teaching and adheres to the foundational mission of fostering ethical and capable individuals. Consequently, it has significantly expedited the pace of vocational education reform and played a pivotal role in enhancing the overall quality of educators in vocational colleges.

1. Introduction

Since 2010, the Ministry of Education has set up the "Vocational College Information-based Teaching Competition" to promote the upgrading of information-based teaching in vocational colleges. In 2018, in order to transform the competition from an individual competition focusing solely on informationbased teaching to a group competition focusing on the development of the comprehensive teaching ability and to promote the growth of double-qualified teachers with comprehensive quality who can "talk and do", the competition was comprehensively upgraded and officially incorporated into the National Vocational College Skills Competition system and was renamed "National Vocational College Teaching Ability Competition". The competition pays more attention to the application of information technology in the practical teaching, implements the fundamental task of cultivating morality and educating people, thus greatly accelerating the pace of vocational education reform and playing an important role in promoting the development of the teachers' quality in vocational colleges.

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The Vocational Education Law promulgated on May 1, 2022 puts forward the vision of “building a skills-based society”, which is also an important and logical starting point in the field of vocational education. The new development concept and the new height of the pattern as well as the inherent requirements of high-quality development have pointed out the direction for the construction, reform and development of the modern vocational education system. Therefore, how to improve and develop the teachers’ comprehensive teaching quality and skills has become an important research topic for the sustainable development of the vocational colleges.

The Teaching Ability Competition is not only a platform for the construction and development of the teachers, but also an important part in promoting the reform and development of teaching in vocational colleges. To be more concrete, the competition can promote the reform of the teachers, teaching materials and teaching methods, improve the teachers’ teaching ability, professional level and innovation ability of the teaching team in an all-round way, and then build a high-level and structured teaching team.

2. The Changing Trend of the Teaching Ability Competition

2.1 The Continuous Expansion of the Influence of the Competition

In recent years, the competition system of higher vocational colleges in China is constantly improved and perfected. The attention and reputation of the Teaching Ability Competition have been continuously promoted. With the continuous expansion and radiation of the influence of the teaching ability competition, the effect of the competition continues to extend in breadth and depth. Under the influence of the National Teaching Ability Competition, higher vocational colleges in various provinces attach great importance to it and it has been included in the hard indicators of the teachers’ teaching evaluation and professional title evaluation. The coverage of the competition continues to expand and the participating teams are constantly optimized, so the quality of participating works is gradually improved. It is estimated that more than 200,000 teachers from 34 provinces, municipalities, autonomous regions and municipalities participate in school-level teaching competitions in various higher vocational colleges in 2023. Through these competitions, the direction of the teaching reform in vocational colleges has been guided and the influence of vocational education has been expanded and enhanced.

2.2 Continuous Optimization and Innovation of the Competition

In order to encourage the teachers in vocational colleges to constantly explore new teaching methods, innovate teaching knowledge and skills and cultivate the students’ independent inquiry ability and innovative thinking, the Teaching Ability Competition has been continuously optimized and adjusted. Before 2018, the Information-based Teaching Competition focused on the teachers’ ability to make reasonable and full use of information technology, digital resources and information-based teaching environment. It also highlighted the teachers’ abilities to deal with the key points, solve the teaching difficulties, optimize teaching process systematically and complete the teaching tasks. The teaching design follows the cognitive law of the students, scientifically and reasonably arranges various links and elements and innovates in the assessment of the teachers’ roles, teaching contents, teaching methods and interactive methods.

In the reform of the competition system in 2019, the Teaching Ability Competition has been adjusted from simply examining the teachers’ application ability of information-based teaching to focus on the teaching team’s comprehensive teaching ability in organizing modular courses and implementing project-based teaching. It emphasizes the implementation of the fundamental task of strengthening moral education and cultivating people and building the “three-in-one education”, which refers to all personnel education, whole process education and all-round education. It actively explores the integrated education model of “post-class-competition-certificate” and promotes the teachers’ professional teaching ability and the comprehensive education ability. Besides, it promotes the digital transformation and development of the vocational education, constantly improves the

teachers' ability, continuously promotes the teachers' ethics and improves their professional teaching ability, digital literacy level, comprehensive education ability and self-development ability. It helps to strengthen the ideological and political education, improve the level of curriculum construction, optimize the classroom ecology and deepen the application of information technology. Throughout the teaching ability competition in the past five years, the competition system seeks truth while maintaining stability, the content seeks iterative novelty and the implementation seeks changes.

2.2.1 Competition Length

The duration of the Teaching Ability Competition has been increased from 10-15 minutes of teaching video recorded by each team member in 2019 to 40-45 minutes of teaching video recorded by each team member in 2023.

2.2.2 Competition Content

The Teaching Ability Competition highlights the characteristics of vocational education and further expand the depth and breadth of the teaching content, which should reflect the ideological, scientific, fundamental, professional and contemporary characteristics. In 2022, the National Vocational College Teaching Ability Competition Program suggests the course content should connect with the new industries, new forms of business, new models and new occupations. In 2023, it advocates that the course content should be connected with the new methods, new technologies, new processes and new standards, reflecting teaching upgrading and digital transformation. It encourages the design of modular courses, integrates scientific spirit, innovation consciousness and digital literacy into the actual teaching and focuses on cultivating the spirit of labor, craftsmanship and model workers.

2.2.3 Teaching Implementation

The competition pays attention to the effectiveness, highlights the solutions and strategies for the key and difficult points of teaching, carries out the effective interaction between teachers and students and between students, promotes deep learning, uses the real data of modern information technology in the teaching process and adjusts the teaching strategies appropriately according to the reflected problems. In 2023, the Teaching Ability Competition program requires the implementation of educating people and attaches much importance to the cultivation of the students' ideological and political quality and comprehensive professional quality. The classroom teaching should focus on the key points and break through the difficulties effectively, so the teachers should rationally use the information-based teaching resources and effective teaching methods to promote in-depth learning and improve the students' taskbased analysis and problem-solving abilities.

2.2.4 Teaching Evaluation

The Teaching Ability Competition not only focuses on the realization of the teaching objectives, pays attention to the combination of the process evaluation and the result evaluation, but also continues to carry out teaching diagnosis and improvement, focus on examining students' ability to analyze and solve practical problems and explore value-added evaluation. In order to accurately evaluate the students' learning effectiveness and test the teaching quality, the 2023 competition plan encourages participating teachers to rely on online platforms and software tools and use modern information technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence to carry out accurate analysis of the teaching and learning behaviors.

3. Improvement of Teachers' Quality

The teaching ability competition is a dream journey to improve the comprehensive quality of higher vocational teachers under the background of Internet+ education ecology. Education reform has gradually regarded the teacher development as one of the core elements and the heart of the innovation of school education and teaching. Therefore, the improvement and development of the comprehensive quality of English teachers cannot be ignored.

The purpose of the higher vocational teachers' Teaching Ability Competition not only focuses on the construction of the high-quality teachers and cultivates the ecological basis of education and teaching, but also standardizes the management of the teaching order and the development of the teaching resources, information technology, the integration of production and education and the other policy supports. Besides, it can adjust the micro-education ecology and improve the teachers' professional ability, management ability and team structure ability, thus determining the quality of the development of strengthening moral education and cultivating people. ^[2]

Adrian Underhill, expert from British Teacher Training College, defines the teachers' quality improvement as the following: Teacher development is a process by which the individual who teaches becomes the best teacher possible. It's a process that can start but never end. It is an evolving process. ^[3] This requires the English teachers to have a more open mind and become learning teachers.

3.1 Curriculum Integration Ability

Curriculum quality is the lifeline of higher vocational education. The teachers' teaching integration ability is the most direct and basic factor affecting the teaching effect. Improving the teachers' curriculum integration ability is an effective way to optimize the teaching effect and a positive strategy to improve the teachers' teaching behavior.

The Vocational English teachers should highlight the characteristics of the workplace and the comprehensive teaching design should fully consider the needs of the students for the workplace English. The English teaching should rely on the tasks of the workplace situations, focus on the three major theme categories of career and individual, career and society and career and environment, and then select language activities suitable for these situations from the textbooks. Besides, the teachers should create the communicative situations and highlight the language application in the workplace situations through the situational teaching activities with different themes so as to guide the students to transform their English knowledge into the English application ability and lay a good foundation for their future career needs.

The teaching ability competition has set up an efficient platform for the teaching reform and innovation. The teaching content of the entries should be consistent with the content of the vocational education planning textbooks used in the actual teaching of the course. The competition team must pay more attention to the new processes and new norms and make personalized adjustments to the vocational English courses in order to meet the learning needs of the students and the demand for talents. In the teaching practice, the teachers should select the appropriate teaching materials from a large number of resources, reorganize relevant knowledge to enrich the teaching content so as to conform to the teaching rules and the students' cognitive ability, enhance the attractiveness of language teaching, tap students' ability of independent inquiry and group cooperation and cultivate their team spirit. Only by doing so can the participating teachers' ability in curriculum development and teamwork be significantly improved. ^[4]

3.2 Practicing Ability

Practicality is the natural attribute of vocational college education. However, it can increase the difficulty of vocational teachers to control classroom teaching, requiring them to continuously develop the teachers' teaching ability, adapt to the actual needs of teaching and improve their vocational education teaching ability.

The feature of practicality requires vocational education teachers to take students as the center and make a comprehensive analysis of the students' learning ability, personality characteristics, interests and hobbies. The teachers should design teaching and implementation activities according to the requirements of the students' individuality, autonomy and cooperation and combine with the information teaching technology to create the interactive mechanisms and platforms between teachers and students, students and students. According to the output data of the network platform and intelligent terminal, they can choose the appropriate teaching organization

modes and activity implementation methods to solve the problems and improve the efficiency of the classroom teaching. Under the leadership of the teachers, the right to speak in class is handed to the students, and the teacher-student and student-student interaction is enhanced by being problem-oriented. ^[5]

The English teachers are sure to gain valuable experience from participating in the Teaching Ability Competition. They can promote their teaching and learning from the competition. In the process of preparing for the competition, the English teachers are the practitioners of the new ideas and new methods. The participating teachers continuously optimize their teaching design and practice each teaching link. The team members can help each other to polish their teaching and put forward suggestions for modification so that they can constantly reflect and improve their English teaching ability. Therefore, teachers who participate in the competition can help to understand and learn the new trends, new requirements, new technologies of their profession and learn from the advanced experience of their peers. Participating in the competition can enrich the teachers' teaching experience, improve their professional ability and teaching quality.

3.3 Innovation Ability

Promoting teaching by competition, promoting construction by competition and promoting reform by competition is the original intention of the Teaching Ability Competition. Imitation, application and regeneration are the three necessary stages for higher vocational teachers to participate in the teaching ability competition. In other words, the improvement of the teaching quality of the participating teachers in higher vocational colleges is reflected in "learning", "enlightenment" and "creation" in the competition.

For the teachers participating in the Teaching Ability Competition, the specific performance is reflected in the rethinking of the concept, characteristics, framework and the logical structure of the teaching design in vocational education. In the process of preparing for the competition the participating teachers consult the materials, watch the award-winning videos, discuss a certain topic in-depth, divide the tasks, determine the content, the important points and the difficult points, exchange views, carefully analyze every link of the teaching activities, review and evaluate, revise and modify, improve and innovate, which will undoubtedly improve the teaching energy reserve of the teachers. The teachers' teaching methods are also constantly being perfected in the process of trial and error, revision and reflection. ^[6] Through the free exchange and collision of the different ideas, they can check and revise their way of thinking and constantly understand, regulate and improve themselves, thus entering a realm full of intellectual challenges in order to achieve the purpose of improving their teaching level. To give full play to the advantages of teamwork, they can enlighten each other and learn from each other. Besides, some external factors, such as the expert guidance, teaching experience of the colleagues and the special knowledge and skills from the competition team members continue to overlap so that the teaching design and implementation are constantly spiraling upward in rethinking, perception, experience and innovation. Through the internal learning and external training, the participating teachers can get good guidance and comprehensive promotion.

3.4 Information Ability

With the rapid development and popularization of the information technology in the field of education, it has brought great changes to the way of knowledge acquisition and imparting. The information-based teaching ability of the vocational college teachers is the comprehensive embodiment of the integration and application ability of the professional vocational ability, teaching ability, information technology and vocational education under the information-based teaching environment. ^[7] The ability of the teachers' information literacy refers to the ability of the teachers to form an attitude towards the information activities and solve the problems based on the practice of transmitting information according to the requirements of the social information and development. ^[8]

Based on the teaching ability competition, the teachers integrate their informatization teaching ability, professional ability and excellent teaching ability into the whole teaching process so as to improve the teaching

effect and teaching quality, therefore improving the teaching effect and teaching quality and finally achieving the teaching goal.

In order to meet the requirements of the times, the English teachers should strengthen their information literacy and improve their ability to skillfully use the modern teaching means. In the teaching practice, the English teachers in our college integrate the network platforms such as Xuexitong, Pigai System and Word master as well as some applications such as Tik Tok, Microsoft Xiaoying and iGrammar with the teaching contents. These network terminals can create a simulated English learning environment for the students, improve their interest in learning English and make classroom teaching more vivid. Generally speaking, the students' online learning needs to rely more on the guidance of the teachers, who must carefully design the online learning objectives and tasks. In addition, the teachers should set the interaction between the teachers and students appropriately and strengthen their online supervision. And then make adjustments in time according to the data they monitor.

With the help of these information-based teaching means, the English teachers can better play the role of facilitator, organizer, collaborator, monitor and evaluator in the teaching process. In addition, the English teachers can optimize the teaching contents, teaching methods and teaching means so as to mobilize the students' learning enthusiasm more effectively.

4. Conclusion

The Teaching Ability Competition provides a stage for the English teachers in higher vocational colleges to show themselves and compete together. It plays an important role in connecting the quality and excellence of vocational education in the new era, adding value and integrating production and education. It not only strengthens the education function of the curriculum, optimizes the classroom ecology and enhances the comprehensive teaching ability of the teachers, but also improves the level of curriculum construction and promotes the development and utilization of the high-quality teaching resources. Through various kinds of training and learning, the English teachers can effectively improve their professional level and teaching quality. The improvement of the high-level structured teaching teams can promote the construction of a good ecology for the continuous improvement of vocational education, therefore realizing the goal of cultivating talents with both good morality and technical skills.

In general, the National Vocational Teaching Ability Competition is an intelligent competition for the improvement of English teachers' quality in vocational colleges under the background of the Internet + education. The teaching ability competition is not just an efficient platform for the construction and development of teachers, but an important part in the reform and development of the vocational colleges and universities. It has promoted the all-round improvement of the comprehensive quality, professional level and innovative ability of the teachers' teaching ability.

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