

Research on the Practice of College English Curriculum Reform from the Perspective of Normal Professional Certification

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Abstract

As a compulsory course for non-English major undergraduates, college English course plays a major role in the cultivation of normal students' English proficiency in the context of normal professional certification. Taking the construction of the course named "English for Teaching and Teacher Education" for non-English majors in a local university as an example, this study focuses on the reform of the college English curriculum system from the perspective of normal professional certification project, and studies how to improve the training quality and English ability of non-English major normal talents by clarifying the English classification training objectives, constructing an English teaching model under the concept of "student-centered, outcome-based education" certification, and a multiple assessment system of "continuous quality improvement", so as to help achieve the quality goal of professional development of non-English major normal students

Key words: normal professional certification; teaching model; teaching evaluation; college English

1. Introduction

Professional certification is an internationally recognized important way to guarantee and improve the quality of professional education in colleges and universities (Wang,2022).With the development of the connotative construction of higher education in China, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has carried out certification projects in engineering education, economic management, medicine and other related majors since 2006. Normal professional certification project began from 2017 and the MOE successively passed the "National Standards for Professional Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Majors in Regular Institutions of Higher Education" and "Implementation Measures for Professional Certification of Normal Majors in Regular Institutions of Higher Education (provisional)" in 2000. As a means of evaluating and monitoring the quality of higher education, the main purpose of the project is to prove and predict whether a major can meet the overdue quality standards of talent training, promote the connotation construction of normal university majors, focusing on university normal majors' competence cultivation. Its overall goal is to ensure that the talent training is consistent with the job demands, guarantee that the quality of talent professional development reaches the standard, and continuously improve the education mechanism relying on the market (Luo, 2021).

As a compulsory course for non-English major undergraduates in universities, college English courses play a major role in the cultivation of normal university students' English ability. The continuous advancement of normal professional certification project provides a new idea for the reform of college English curriculum. Compared with the certification standards of normal majors, there is still a large gap in the current college English teaching (Guo, 2024).

To discuss how to realize the certification goal of understanding international advanced English education concepts around the cultivation of normal university students of non-English majors has become one of the directions for college English curriculum reform (Cai, 2019).

However, although the current research on curriculum reform based on the concept of professional certification has been deepening and achieved rich results, current research focus is still more on specific normal majors instead of on the role of public courses. Furthermore, the practical research focusing on college English curriculum reform for non-English majors is extremely lacking as well. Based on this situation, this study takes non-English professional normal English course construction in Yanbian university as an example to study how to pass the curriculum reform practice around the measures for both the implementation of the relevant certification goals and the college English teaching guides, how to improve the English professional normal talent training quality and English ability, as well as how to ensure the quality of the professional development goals in particular.

2. Normal Professional Certification and College English Curriculum Reform

The certification project of normal university majors is a multidimensional project requiring interdisciplinary cooperation, in which college English courses shoulder the heavy responsibility of cultivating the English ability of non-English professional normal university students. In order to give full play to the role of the college English course, it is necessary to clarify the connection and mutual influence between normal professional certification project and college English curriculum reform.

2.1 Overview of the Normal Professional Certification Project in Higher Education

As a means of external evaluation, normal professional certification is an objective and fair evaluation of normal professionals' training quality according to the certification standards. In order to achieve the overall goal of standardizing and guiding the construction of normal majors, establishing and improving the quality assurance system of teacher education, and continuously improving the quality of teacher training, the project defines the following three certification concepts, they are student-centered (SC), outcome-based education(OBE) and continuous quality improvement (CQM) (MOE, 2017).

The project lays emphasis on the evaluation of normal university students' training quality from learning- effect-orientation. It also emphasizes the construction of a three-level progressive certification monitoring system from the perspective of specific certification level and process, which includes the monitoring of basic requirements of running schools, certification of teaching quality average standards, and certification of teaching quality excellence standards. The measures stipulate that the certification process consists of application and acceptance, professional self-evaluation, material review, on-site examination, conclusion review, rectification and improvement. The implementation of the certification has a far-reaching impact, and provides services and decision-making reference for the government, universities and society in policy formulation, resource allocation, funding investment, employer recruitment, college entrance examination application (MOE, 2017) .

2.2 College English Curriculum Reform

The reform of college English curriculum is a process of keeping pace with the times and constantly adapting to the needs of the society and educational development. While getting into 21st century, China's economic development accelerated, the pace and scope of opening to the outside world further expanded, college English courses are constantly facing new development opportunities and challenges (Wang, 2011). MOE has issued several programmatic documents to better respond to the new needs of the development of the country, society and students. In 2004, the Higher Education Department of MOE issued the "College English Curriculum Teaching Requirements" (Trial), and in 2007, a new one was revised and released (Zhou & Zhan, 2016). Since then, two editions of the College English Teaching Guide (referred to as the Guide hereinafter) were developed and revised in 2015 and 2020 to continuously promote the reform and development of college English curriculum.

Throughout this century, although the system and content are both inherited and developed in the formulation and improvement of the above four programmatic documents, whose theme and fundamental goal is still to deepen the reform of undergraduate education and teaching and comprehensively improve the quality of talent training(He, 2020).The latest guide, while clearly adhering to the instrumental and humanistic nature of college English courses, has more distinct diversity in the specific teaching objectives and curriculum setting, with more emphasis on the reality of colleges and universities and refining the teaching objectives and curriculum levels (MOE, 2020).

Relevant regulations have released a strong signal of expanding the autonomy of schools, and have provided programmatic document support for different universities to try different curriculum system construction based on their own needs. According to the actual needs of colleges and universities, paying attention to the training of normal majors in the curriculum is not only in line with the principles of diversity and the times in the revision of the guides, but also becomes a new direction of college English curriculum reform under the background of the current certification project of normal majors.

The Guide makes it clear that the new curriculum system includes three categories: “general English”, “ESP” and “intercultural communication English”, which focuses on cultivating students’ ability to apply English, reflecting the characteristics of meeting the current situation of English teaching in China and serving the strategic needs of the country (Zhou & Zhan, 2016). As far as the professionalism of college English courses is concerned, college English should focus on cultivating college students’ ability to learn and exchange international cutting-edge information in the field of professional learning in English. Furthermore it should pay attention to the subject differences in language teaching, and become a compulsory public professional course to meet the professional learning and research needs of non-English major students, and to provide language support and service for their professional learning and future work (Cai, 2017). Public English teaching should not only consider the school orientation and the talent training objectives of the departments, but also refer to the requirements of foreign languages stipulated in the national standards of the teaching quality of the students’ majors. Specialized purpose English course, the course we will discuss here included, is a concept of curriculum system construction that meets both the goal of normal certification and the professional principles of college English courses.

2.3 The relationship between Normal Professional Certification Project and College English Curriculum Reform

Based on the above analysis, college English courses should always keep up with the pace of the times and constantly adapt to the needs of national and social development. In terms of the ability training of normal students in non-English majors, how to meet the requirements of the national foreign language standards and effectively improve this special and large education group’s normal English ability is undoubtedly a new problem and challenge to face in the current college English curriculum reform.

The purpose of normal professional certification project is to fully implement the fundamental task of cultivating morality and actively build the quality assurance system of teacher education (Li & Liu, 2024). The concept of “student-centered, outcome-based education and continuous quality improvement” emphasized by the certification of normal major plays an important guiding role in the reform of college English curriculum, and the two parts are consistent in the core goal of improving the quality of talent training. The reform of college English curriculum should work halfway with the development of the certification project of normal majors, and promote the reform of college English curriculum under the guidance of the certification concepts. In order to better realize the goal of talent training of normal certification, college English courses need to expand the new curriculum system, update the teaching content design, innovate teaching methods, explore diversified teaching evaluation system, and implement the certification concepts of “student-centered, outcome-based education and continuous quality improvement” into every link of curriculum reform.

From the perspective of the fit of college English curriculum reform and the certification standards of normal majors, the certification standards of normal majors put forward clear requirements on the curriculum setting, teaching content and teaching methods of normal majors. As one of the important supporting courses for normal majors, the reform of college English courses should carry out closely around the certification standards, complement and cooperate with each other to ensure the convergence between the curriculum reform and the certification standards. The reform implemented well could broaden the college English curriculum system, explore new teaching modes and teaching methods, stimulate students’ learning motivation and enthusiasm, improve students learning effectiveness, and then improve the quality of talent training for normal education majors.

The following part will take the curriculum reform of college English general education course “English for Teaching and Teacher Education” specially offered by our school for non-English professional normal students in recent years as an example, to explain how to develop a new direction of college English curriculum reform based on the perspective of normal professional certification.

3. The Construction and Practice of the Course

3.1 Clarifying the English Classification and Training Objectives of Non-English Majored Normal Students

Yanbian University, located in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, the largest Korean community in China, is a comprehensive local ethnic university with 25% proportion of non-English major normal undergraduates on average among the total population. Under the background of the normal professional certification, it is both an innovation and the general trend to meet the training objectives and graduation requirements of our school, according to the certification standards of the normal majors and combining with the actual training of undergraduate talents of the normal majors. As the first related majors to participate in and pass the second round of certification, Musicology and Chinese language and Literature provide both valuable experience for the subsequent certification, and expose problems such as the lack of college English course objectives, and teaching contents do not match with the certification standards and certification objectives of normal majors. In line with the certification concept of "continuous quality improvement", the university has closely combined the rectification and improvement of the first round of certification with the professional self-evaluation of the second round, and started the college English curriculum reform of normal school certification majors. Starting from the fall semester of 2022, our university has innovatively adopted the "English for Teaching and Teacher Education" textbook, the only textbook in China developed specifically for non-English major normal university students. After two rounds' practice, the curriculum system has begun to take shape.

At the beginning of the course, our college made some unified arrangements to actively set up a course teaching team, and tried to formulate the "one outline and multiple editions" course syllabus according to the certification standards of normal majors based on both the requirements of the Guide and the content of the teaching materials. The teaching objectives focus on the needs of students' majors and future employment positions for English application ability, the combination of specific subject content with language teaching objectives, cultivating the English ability related to the normal university major, and solving the language problems encountered in the process of students' subject knowledge learning (Ji, 2017). According to the specific certification requirements, the syllabus is designed to support the graduation requirements of specific majors. At present, psychology, primary education and preschool education have become the first batch of majors that have passed the second level certification after the curriculum reform, and the professional support effect of normal English courses is obvious. Based on the above successful curriculum reform practice, in the future we will expand the scope of the practice, refine classification training and formulate liberal arts, science, engineering, management, and art syllabuses to better meet the training target of different normal majors and their graduation requirements according to the professional categories and the national standards (Wang, 2022).

3.2. The construction of the Teaching Mode under the Concept of "Student-centered, Outcome-based Education" Certification

The certification concept of normal majors is in the core position and has a series of standardized requirements for the effect of talent training. The practice of the certification concepts has become an important measure of current education (Lu & Lan, 2024). The concept of "student-centered" requires the reform to organize the curriculum and implement the teaching with the students as the center; "Outcome-based education", emphasizes on the learning effect as a guidance, and evaluates the training quality based on the output orientation compared with the requirements of the core competence of normal graduates; "Continuous quality improvement", emphasizes the comprehensive and whole process evaluation. The results should be applied to the improvement of teaching and promote the continuous improvement of the training quality of normal professional students. (MOE, 2017)

3.2.1 The Correspondence between the English Course Objectives and the Graduation Requirements of Normal University Students

"English for Teaching and Teacher Education" course closely focuses on the curriculum objectives to implement the normal concept of certification, through the "student-centered" listening, speaking, reading, writing, translating activities to strengthen students' comprehensive ability of English. At the same time, the curriculum content combines the normal professionals' needs, and echoes with the courses they take, such as pedagogy, so that students can improve not only their English language ability but also teaching skills and teaching practice ability. It gives full play to the function of college English courses to provide language support and service for students' professional study and future work. Taking the pre-school education majors' course named "English for Teaching and Teacher Education" which was certified in 2023 as an example.

The course syllabus concretizes the objectives of college English course, corresponding to the graduation requirements of the major in general knowledge, career development planning and communication skills, and giving play to the supporting and linkage role of college English courses in the training of normal professional talents.

Table 1: The Correspondence between Course Objectives and Graduation Requirements

Course Objectives	Corresponding Graduation Requirements
<p>Objective 1: In the language activities such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, translating, students can describe the basic concepts in pedagogy, such as teaching methods, teaching design elements, evaluation means, etc. By mastering the basic concepts of pedagogy, students can distinguish between teacher-centered and student-centered teaching modes, summarize their advantages and disadvantages; can use measurable verbs to write the teaching objectives, can use several elements of teaching design and briefly design the teaching content; can distinguish formative evaluation from summative evaluation, and preliminarily formulate the curriculum evaluation system.</p>	<p>General knowledge: Master certain basic knowledge of natural science, humanities and social science, educational art aesthetic, and educational information technology, and have basic humanities, science and artistic qualities.</p>
<p>Objective 2: With the consciousness of independent learning, lifelong learning and professional development, understand that teachers are sustainable career; establish correct views of teachers and students, strengthen the professional belief of lifelong learning, and can make lifelong learning and career development plan according to the needs of educational development in the new era.</p>	<p>Career development planning: Have the ability of self-learning and self-management and lifelong learning consciousness; formulate the career development plan of preschool teachers based on the reform and development status of preschool education at home and abroad and the basic policies and development status of regional preschool education.</p>
<p>Objective 3: Master basic communication skills and methods for cooperative learning with other students; develop reading ability to acquire and refine information; able to express ideas in English in practice and able to communicate effectively with other students and teachers.</p>	<p>Communication skill: Master basic communication and cooperation skills and methods, respect others, good at listening, good empathy and expression ability, able to communicate effectively with colleagues, peers, experts, parents and communities in educational practice and social practice.</p>

3.2.2 The Combination of Normal-subject Content and Language Teaching Content

It is a highlight of this course to combine the specific normal subject content with the language teaching content and implement the certification and teaching concept of “student-centered” + “outcome-based education”. “Student-centered” + “outcome-based education” concepts are reflected in that the course is guided by students English teaching practice and application needs, and focuses on cultivating students English application ability, improving learning effect and achievement output. “outcome-based education” concept implements in every teaching link, forming a complete teaching closed loop.

The course contents closely relate to teacher education and classroom teaching, which consist of the following nine topics:

Teacher professional development (Teachers: Nature or Nurture?);

Teaching philosophy (Educating: Teacher-centered or Learner-centered?);

Teaching style and teaching models (Teaching styles and models: from theory to practice);

Lesson preparation (Lesson Planning: Well begun is half done);

Writing teaching objectives (Teaching objectives: To begin with the end in mind);

Visual teaching tools (Visual Thinking Tools: A Common Language for Teaching);

Teaching assessment (Assessment: of learning, for learning or as learning);

Interdisciplinary teaching (Binding Teachers Together: Challenges or Opportunities?);

Integration of modern educational technologies (Technology in Education: Embrace It or Get Replaced by It?).

These topics not only cover the necessary topics such as classical theoretical introduction and lesson preparation, teaching objective writing and teaching assessment, but also introduce the emerging hot topics such as mind mapping, interdisciplinary teaching and educational technology integration in the field of education, paying attention to students new learning needs in the information age.

3.2.3 APAR Modular Teaching Design

The structure, arrangement and teaching mode of the curriculum also fully reflect the integration of student center and output orientation, and the unity of normal major nature. The course adopts a modular design, which pays attention to the systematization and coherence of knowledge. Through the connection and transition between various modules, students can gradually establish a complete knowledge system in the process of learning.

Specifically, each module develops around a theme, according to the order of unit theme, topic-related quotes, unit goals, subject knowledge learning and practical application. Unit contents echo and relate to each other as well. Each unit follows the APAR teaching mode (Zhang, 2021) to promote the teaching process, namely Awareness (trigger thinking), Presentation (content presentation), Application (practical application) and Reflection (reflection and improvement). This arrangement framework helps to take students as the center, fully understand the learning situation, and guide students to gradually and deeply understand and master the unit subject knowledge.

Take Unit 4 lesson plan design (Lesson Planning: Well begun is half done) as an example. The unit content closely relates to the first three units. Unit 1 focuses on teacher professional development, and conceptually enables each normal professional student to understand the basic professional qualities of excellent teachers, summarizes the elements to ensure the sustainable development of teachers and correctly reflects on their advantages and disadvantages of becoming qualified teachers. To give full play to the ideological and political role of the curriculum, and to initially establish teachers' professional ethics from the perspective of ideology and values, is the emotional and value basis of further learning the teaching concept, teaching style and teaching mode in the following two units, as well as the key to learning subject knowledge. Understanding the similarities and differences between teacher-centered and student-centered teaching concepts and objectively evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of the two teaching paradigms is the premise of implementing the learner-centered teaching philosophy. Through the study of the third unit, the internal connection between learning style and teaching style is set up, and the teaching mode used by teachers in different subjects are summarized through specific cases. Furthermore, the advantages and disadvantages of different teaching styles are distinguished, and will then become the premise and relevant knowledge of the next unit. In this way, students can not only gradually understand and master the subject theory, form a relatively complete knowledge chain, but also apply and test their English application ability and teaching practice ability in specific classroom teaching design activities, and realize the real language output and teaching ability construction.

In a specific teaching process, at the beginning, teachers make full use of the Awareness section, taking students as the center to trigger their independent thinking and self-construction, and to combine the prior knowledge with and new one. Then, teachers make the presentation of subject knowledge through explanation and discussion on the Presentation section.

Furthermore, through rich case analysis and group practice activities in Application section, teachers create opportunities for students to combine practical applications of specific teaching situations with the output of teaching skills, which gradually improve the teaching practice ability including teaching theories, teaching methods, teaching design and other contents, and give full play to the student-oriented role of the curriculum. APAR teaching mode design is a comprehensive teaching mode that can link activities among before-class, in-class, and after-class procedures to achieve the teaching objectives in an authentic and complete teaching process demonstration.

It provides a combination of theory and practice teaching examples and experience, and of great significance for the improvement of normal students English application ability and teaching skills.

3.3 Evaluation System under the Concept of “Continuous Quality Improvement”

The concept of “continuous quality improvement” emphasizes the all-round and whole-process evaluation of teaching, and more emphasizes the application of evaluation results to teaching improvement, so as to promote the continuous improvement of the training quality of normal education professionals (MOE, 2017). The essence of this process is to integrate the teaching process, learning process and evaluation process closely through the continuous intervention of evaluation, and realize the integration of teaching evaluation.

Firstly, the whole process of the integration of teaching evaluation begins with the teaching and learning objectives of both teachers and students. The teaching objectives here include both the overall objectives of the course and the specific unit objectives, which not only reflect the requirements of the curriculum standards, but also conform to the actual situation of the students. In the teaching process, teachers should design teaching activities around these objectives to ensure the pertinacity and effectiveness of teaching activities. At the same time, students should also make clear their learning goals in order to maintain a sense of direction and motivation in the learning process.

Secondly, designing a reasonable evaluation scheme is the key to realizing the integration of the whole-process teaching and evaluation. The evaluation scheme of this course fully considers the teaching objectives and learning goals, adopts diversified evaluation methods and means, such as flip task in class with learning platform to online and offline classroom participation, discussion, test, group display integration of teaching design, and extends to consolidate the development of after-class, group inquiry activities, etc. This evaluation method of integrating online and offline and running through each teaching link can fully reflect students learning process and achievements, which also provides a basis for teachers to adjust their teaching strategies. With the help of online teaching, learning and evaluation means, the teaching evaluation contents are real time records collected to realize the transparency, objectivity and fairness of the evaluation process and ensure the accuracy and credibility of the evaluation results. This mixed teaching evaluation method is of various forms and more scientific, and also makes up for the subjectivity and singleness of the traditional classroom evaluation, conducive to the establishment of a good teacher-student relationship between teachers and students (Shi, 2020).

In addition, the course promotes the continuous improvement of the quality of talent training with a comprehensive integrated teaching evaluation system. In order to give full play to the function of promoting teaching and learning, this course adopts the evaluation system combining formative evaluation and summative evaluation. Building a comprehensive evaluation system with formative evaluation as the core requires the coordinated promotion of teachers and students (Dong, 2020), Formative evaluation carries out the whole teaching process, accounting for 60% of the overall performance evaluation of the course. Teachers use online platforms, activities and tasks in traditional classroom teaching to collect students’ learning feedback to understand the learning progress and difficulties; According to students performance and teaching feedback in the learning process, they adjust teaching strategies and teaching methods to meet students’ learning needs. In the teaching process, teachers also adopt teaching methods such as group presentation and inquiry learning, including teaching objective writing and collective teaching plan evaluation, to promote the development of students’ abilities including independent learning ability, cooperative learning ability and professional inquiry. Teachers also pay attention to guiding students to participate in the evaluation process, and cultivate their self-evaluation and peer-evaluation ability. Students’ self-evaluation and reflection help to timely find problems in the learning process, summarize, adjust learning strategies and improve learning efficiency; peer evaluation helps to exchange ideas, mutual learning, learn from each other’s strengths, enhance team awareness, and realize the comprehensive and diversification of teaching evaluation.

Continuous quality improvement of teaching-learning-evaluating integration is not only a process of continuously improving the teaching quality of courses, but also a process of guiding students to continuously to learn, apply new teaching concepts and methods, master advanced evaluation techniques and tools, improve students' English application ability and teaching practice ability. Furthermore, it is a process to implement the spirit of the Guide and enhance teachers’ evaluation theoretical knowledge learning and skills training. In the teaching process, in particular, teachers’ formative evaluation theory literacy and practical ability are enhanced to enable them to master the theory and concept of evaluation for learning to accurately deal with the relationship between evaluating and teaching, and make full use of feedback information to improve teaching (Jin & Sun, 2020).

4. Conclusion

As an important way to achieve the training goals in colleges and universities, curriculum setting plays an important role in the college talent training (Liu, 2023). Wu Yan, the vice minister of MOE also stressed that “curriculum is the core element of talent training” (Wu, 2018). Based on the concept of certification of normal majors, this study explores the reform of college English curriculum system based on the training of normal English ability of non-English majors to provide a new direction and practical path for the reform of college English curriculum, and help improve the training quality and English ability of non-English professional teachers. After two rounds of teaching practice and improvement, a relatively complete curriculum system has been initially formed, and the teaching effect is significant, making up for its "normal" deficiency as a public education course (Hu, Gao & Zhang, 2022). The relevant research and curriculum reform results will present in the subsequent empirical research papers.

It is worth noting that at present, the research on curriculum reform based on the concept of professional certification is more limited to the construction of normal majors, and there are few theoretical exploration and empirical research on how public courses, especially college English courses can contribute to the training of professional talents. The teaching practice of this study is limited of course by the restriction of the sample to one Chinese ethnic minority university and the relatively short period of its normal English curriculum reform, which makes it challenging to know about effectiveness over longer period time. In order to provide a panoramic picture of Chinese normal professional certification, the future study should expand the scope of research, enrich the curriculum system, and discuss the feasibility and sustainable development path in broader ethnic minority regions of China.

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