Construction of a Tiered and Categorized Development Support System for Foreign Language Teachers in Vocational Colleges under the Three Major Global Education Initiatives

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Abstract: *Implementation of UNESCO's education transformation, Belt and Road Education Plan and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has put forward new demands regarding professional competence and internationalized teaching ability for foreign language teachers in China's vocational colleges. Some problems exist including imbalance of knowledge structure, lacking enterprise practice experience, poor intercultural literacy, significant deficiencies in information-based teaching competence among foreign language teacher workforce in vocational colleges; current teacher development support mechanism suffer from ambiguity of tiers, homogenized training path, and an incomplete evaluation and incentive system that is ill-equipped to meet the demands of global education reform and internationalized cultivation of talents in vocational education. Based on the core tenets of the Three Major Global Education Initiatives and considering the actual development dilemmas of foreign language teachers in vocational colleges, this paper introduces the concept of tiered and categorized development, starting from teachers' competence stage, job responsibility, disciplinary background and development orientation, constructing a three-level teacher tiering and categorization framework consists of junior level, intermediate level, and senior level, building up an integrated support system composed by competence improvement training, career development paths, and diversified evaluation and incentives, proposing implementation paths through optimizing policies and institutions, implementing school-based model, and operation monitoring and improvement. We hope our research can offer actionable practical solutions for professional and internationalized development of foreign language teachers in vocational colleges and cultivate technical and skilled talents with global competence.*

Keywords: *Three Major Global Education Initiatives; vocational colleges; foreign language teachers; tiered and categorized development; teacher professional development; support system*

1. Introduction

Economic globalization is ongoing, international industrial cooperation and people-to-people and cultural exchanges continue to deepen. The education transformation by UNESCO, Belt and Road Education Plan and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for global higher education all advocate internationalization of vocational education. Foreign language teachers in vocational colleges who are on the front line in cultivating internationalized technical and skilled talents have their own professional level that will affect the output quality of vocational education and international competitiveness of its graduates.

Foreign language teaching in vocational colleges is different from those in regular undergraduate institutions with emphasizing combination of the instrumental attribute of language and the occupational attribute of jobs requiring teachers realizing two-way competence supply of "language + specialty". There are a series of practical dilemmas facing the development of foreign language teachers in vocational colleges: The teachers' teaching philosophy still follows the traditional teacher-centered knowledge transmission mode; Most teachers don't have front-line enterprise practices and inadequate understanding about the application of foreign languages related to jobs leading to the disconnection between their teaching content and actual industry needs; Shortcoming in information-based teaching and intercultural communication competence among teachers; At an

institution level, Insufficient regular training supply, Tendency towards formality on teacher's study and further training, Need to stimulate teachers' motivation for self-directed development etc.

The majority of existing teacher training models disregard individual differences of teachers (teaching experience, professional foundation, research capacity) by using a "one-size-fits-all" training scheme without tiered and categorized precise development support which leads to a mismatch between the supply of training and the real needs of teachers. Based on our study and project research practice, we build a tiered and categorized development support system suitable for the era background of the Three Major Global Education Initiatives for foreign language teachers in vocational colleges that aims at solving the practical difficulties faced by teacher development providing theoretical reference and practical path for constructing the foreign language teacher workforce in vocational colleges.

2. Connotations of the Three Major Global Education Initiatives and the Realistic Situation of Foreign Language Teachers in Vocational Education

2.1 Core Demands of the Three Major Global Education Initiatives

Three major global education initiatives as a joint force to promote global educational equity, quality improvement and sustainable development: Firstly, the education transformation by UNESCO focuses on implementation of SDG4—goal of quality education; advocate the digital transformation of education, strengthen the construction of the teaching workforce, advance lifelong learning emphasizing inclusive and equitable education. Secondly, The Belt and Road Education Plan was launched in 2016 focusing on educational connectivity, joint talent cultivation, co-construction of cooperation mechanisms, promote educational exchanges and mutual learning between countries, achieve people-to-people connectivity. Last but not least, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for global higher education aims at 2030 propose ensure that everyone can access quality vocational education and higher education, unleash individual development potential, serve global sustainable development.

Three major initiatives that guide us as follows for the teaching of foreign languages in vocational colleges: The teaching of foreign languages shall not be just about transmitting linguistic knowledge like vocabulary and grammar; Conforms to international industry standards developing students' intercultural communication competence and global competence; Achieves a deep integration between foreign language courses and professional jobs and supports cross-border industrial cooperation; Uses digital educational means to innovate teaching models and empower the internationalization of vocational education. All these force foreign language teachers to upgrade their teaching philosophy, broaden their international horizon and rectify shortcomings in industry practice.

2.2 Current Development Status and Challenges of Foreign Language Teachers in Vocational Colleges

The external guarantees for teacher development have some drawbacks – heavy teaching tasks leave no time for studying and training; lack of a systematic and differentiated teacher training program in schools with homogenized training content; an overemphasis on quantitative indicators in evaluation and assessment does not put much value on practical teaching, teaching reflection and curriculum development which hampers teachers' intrinsic motivation for development.

In summary, confronted with challenges from the Three Major Global Education Initiatives, foreign language teachers in vocational colleges face all kinds of problems such as concept transformation, knowledge update, practical ability upgrade, digital literacy improvement and international horizon expansion; the old uniform teacher development model can not meet the requirements of the new era, we need to find tiered and categorized precise support paths urgently.

3. Construction of a Tiered and Categorized Development Framework for Foreign Language Teachers in Vocational Colleges

3.1 Theoretical Basis for Tiered and Categorized Development

According to adult learning theory and teacher professional development stage theory, there are

great differences between teachers at different career stages for their teaching experiences, knowledge reserves, competence shortcomings and development needs. One size fits all training model is found too demanding by new teachers while insufficient for experienced ones. Tiered and categorized development means set tiers based on the professional development stage and current competence level of teachers; Divide types in light of job responsibilities, professional backgrounds, and development orientations so as to exactly correspond with training resources, study programs, and development tasks, realizing personalized teacher growth and improving the effect of teacher training.

Taking into account the job characteristics of foreign language teachers in vocational colleges, we classify them into three tiers (junior, intermediate, senior) corresponding to the initial induction and growth stage, the mature teaching practice stage and the teaching research innovation and leadership stage respectively; establish differentiated competence standards, development goals and growth tasks for different tiers.

3.2 Three-Tier Classification Standards

Junior teachers (less than 3 years since induction): Most of them are new hires who are foreign language teachers. Basic Requirements: Bachelor's degree or above in a foreign language major and basic foreign language proficiency. Core competence Standards: Can do regular foreign language classroom teaching, have basic ability for classroom management and instructional design; Know the basic concept of vocational education; Simple application of information-based teaching tools. Development Focus: Consolidate the basic teaching skills, be familiarized with the features of foreign language teaching in vocational education, transform general language teaching into vocational foreign language teaching.

Intermediate teachers (4 – 8 years of teaching): Stable classroom teaching experience. Backbone of foreign language teaching at this institution. Must have master's degree or above with teaching experience for complete courses. Core competence standards: Can do vocational foreign language instructional design according to the specialty characteristics of the institution, conduct blended teaching; Basic intercultural teaching competence; Participation in curriculum reform, teaching research projects or textbook development; Some enterprise practice experiences. Pay attention to teaching innovation, "language + specialty" curriculum development and improve industry practice ability.

Senior teachers (more than 8 years of teaching) Specialty leaders and backbone teachers. Core competency standards: Excellent curriculum development, teaching research, scientific research ability to lead teaching reform projects; Deep connection with industry and enterprises with dual-teacher competence; International education vision can conduct internationalized curriculum development; Ability to mentor and guide teachers' leadership in school-based teaching research. Focus on output of teaching achievements, scientific research innovation, teacher leadership, external exchange and cooperation.

The classification standards are subject to dynamic management. Based on teachers' annual comprehensive performance, dynamic adjustment of tiers is achieved, and lifelong fixation is not practiced.

3.3 Design of Classification Dimensions

According to tiering, we established various classifications of differences in teachers' position: dividing teachers into three development orientations (teaching practice-oriented, curriculum development-oriented, and teaching research and scientific research-oriented) respectively.

Teaching practice-oriented teachers: Attention to classroom teaching and innovation of classroom model, design tiered instructions, analyze the learning situation; focus on improving students' workplace foreign language application ability. Suitable for those who are committed to frontline teaching.

Focuses on curriculum development Teachers focusing on curriculum development: Buiding up vocational foreign language curricula, compiling loose-leaf textbooks, creating industry-specific foreign language teaching resources, conform to the requirements of professional cluster jobs, create an integrated course in "language + specialty" Suitable for dual-teacher teachers who are familiar with industry dynamics.

Teaching research and scientific research-oriented teachers: Project research, teaching reform research, international education policy research; Publish papers or teaching reform project results, organize school-based teaching research. Suitable for researchers.

One is highlighted by a teacher and thought about others. The institutions will match appropriate study resources or project tasks based on their classification; this breaks the single evaluation orientation of "emphasizing research over teaching".

4. Tiered and Categorized Development Support System and Guarantee Mechanisms

Thus, according to the junior – intermediate – senior tiering together with three different directions for development (teaching practice, curriculum development, and teaching research and scientific research); we construct an overall support system of competence improvement support, career development paths as well as diversified evaluation and incentives.

4.1 Tiered Competence Improvement Support Programs

Differentiated training content is designed for teachers at different tiers and implemented through a blended online and offline approach.

Junior teachers: Consolidate foundations. Vocational foreign language teaching methods training, classroom management training, general vocational education knowledge training and basic information-based tool training are carried out. The mentor system is set up for apprentices paired with masters; senior teachers offer one-on-one guidance focusing on improving instruction design and classroom implementation ability. Junior teachers must complete required hours of online study, teach observation and teaching reflection to assist new teachers to quickly adapt to their foreign language teaching position at vocational colleges.

Intermediate teachers: Deepen competence. Focus on integrating vocational foreign language course design, intercultural communication teaching, development of digital teaching resources and enterprise practice study; conduct special workshops and discussions for teaching cases. Create a teacher enterprise practice system so that they can go into cooperative enterprises, get used to actual workplace foreign language scenarios and remedy their shortcoming in industry practice. Promote participation by teachers in school- and province-level teaching reform projects.

Senior teachers: Lead innovation; Assist senior teachers in international exchange or high-end domestic and international vocational foreign language study programs, lead curriculum reform and textbook compilation; On-campus teacher training task; Mentor/guide; Help senior teachers to apply for teaching reform project of all level, carry out action research based on international education concept, produce teaching and scientific research result.

4.2 Diversified Career Development Paths

Single professional title promotion channel is broken, diversified development channels are built: Firstly improve the induction training loop. Only new teachers who complete tiered training and pass the assessment can be stable in taking up their posts; Secondly broaden the study and exchange channels by pursuing international exchanges, regional teaching research and enterprise practice on different tiers; Thirdly establish a mentor system where senior teachers act as mentors guiding junior and intermediate teachers regularly; Fourthly establish special funds encouraging teachers to apply for teaching reform projects, compiling textbooks and attending academic conferences which provide material guarantee for teacher development. Teachers according to their own classification orientation make independent plans for their personal development portfolio, and schools will regularly follow-up the completion of their personal development goals.

4.3 Diversified Evaluation and Incentive Guarantee Mechanisms

Change the traditional paper-based and teaching hour based assessment model; Build a multi-dimensional comprehensive evaluation system: covering teaching quality, curriculum development outcome, enterprise practice effectiveness, teaching research outcomes, student feedback, and teaching reflection (quantitative indicators and qualitative evaluation), adopting diversified evaluation approaches by using student evaluation of teaching, peer classroom observation and review,

self-reflection, and enterprise expert evaluation.

Differentiated incentives based on tiered and categorized results: Classroom teaching effectiveness and improvement in students' workplace language ability is an important basis of assessment for teaching practice-oriented teachers; Course and textbook resource outcomes will be considered in performance recognition for curriculum development-oriented teachers; Project and paper outcomes etc., have been emphasized by teaching research and scientific research-oriented teachers; Tiered and categorized evaluation results are linked to awards/training/Professional title review. Special performance rewards have been set up to stimulate the intrinsic motivation for self-directed development among teachers that perform outstandingly in curriculum reform, internationalized teaching, and enterprise practice.

5. Implementation Paths for the System

5.1 Policy Integration and Optimization of the Institutional Environment

Institutions: Incorporate the tiered and categorized development of foreign language teachers into vocational college's plans on constructing the whole teaching workforce; conform to the requirements of the Vocational Education Law; Clarify the competence standard of foreign language teachers in vocational colleges. Set up special funds for developing foreign language teachers' professional skills so that they can implement study and training, enterprise practice, and external exchange programs. Improve the management system of teacher enterprise practice, make it a necessary condition for the tier recognition of intermediate and senior teachers. Open departmental coordination: Coordinate between academic affairs office, human resources office, and all teaching departments to coordinate training, assessment, professional title, etc.; Break down institutional barriers, provide institutional guarantee for implementing the tiered and categorized system.

5.2 School-Based Implementation Model

According to the characteristics of the school's professional clusters, vocational colleges adopt a school-based implementation mode in which the training is carried out through "core general modules + categorized elective modules" (the core modules have general content such as vocational foreign language teaching, intercultural education, and information-based teaching; the electives are based on the three orientations: teaching practice, curriculum development, and teaching research and scientific research for teachers' independent choice according to their own classification orientation)

Teaching research models on campuses (workshops, teaching salons, mentor-apprentice pairing), Set up a mechanism of "industry experts entering the campus" -invite enterprise job experts for regular lectures to remedy teachers' shortcomings in industry cognition; Teacher development portfolio which fully records teacher training, practice, curriculum development, and teaching research results, dynamically update teachers' tiered and categorized levels; Inter-college exchange encourage, draw mature experience from sister institutions, optimize school's implementation plan constantly.

5.3 Operation Monitoring and Continuous Improvement

We have established a regular monitoring and feedback mechanism with monitoring indicators such as teaching effectiveness, curriculum development, teacher competence growth and students' comprehensive foreign language literacy: we collect data every semester; Comprehensive classroom observation, student questionnaire and teacher interview were used for collecting feedback information. Based on the deficiencies found in monitoring, there will be dynamic adjustment of training contents and study programs.

Feedback loop: The effectiveness evaluation of collecting teachers' opinion for training content and format after teacher training will be done, tiered and categorized standards and support program will continue optimizing. The tiered and categorized system is not fixed and unchangeable, based on new development of the Three Major Global Education Initiatives and change in industry job demands, tier standards and training tasks will be frequently updated so that it can self-iterate update its system.

6. Conclusion

Given the Three Major Global Education Initiatives, foreign language teachers in vocational

colleges have a mission to cultivate technical and skilled talents with global competence. Foreign language teachers in vocational colleges face many challenges (updating their teaching philosophy, enhancing their industry practice ability, improving their intercultural literacy and upgrading their digital teaching competence); the traditional homogenized teacher training model is not suitable for real needs any more.

By categorization of teacher development tiers (junior, intermediate, senior) and different development orientations for teaching practice, curriculum development, and teaching research and scientific research, providing tiered training, diversified development paths, and a comprehensive evaluation and incentive mechanism, implementing this on the aspects of policies and institutions, school-based practice, and monitoring and improvement will exactly meet the growth needs of different teacher groups and solve the development dilemma of foreign language teachers in vocational colleges.

Teacher workforce development is a long-term project; vocational colleges should continually adjust themselves according to the trend of global education reform, improve resource supply, stimulate the intrinsic motivation of self-directed development by teachers, promote the professionalization and internationalization of foreign language teachers, consolidate the teaching workforce foundation for internationalized cultivation of talents in vocational education, and better serve the Belt and Road Initiative and high-quality development of vocational education.

Fund Projects

This article is the final outcome of the 2024 "Three Integrations" Foreign Language Teaching Reform Special Project of the Foreign Language Teaching Advisory Committee for Vocational Colleges of the Ministry of Education, entitled "Research on the Development Paths of Foreign Language Teachers in Vocational Colleges under the Background of the Three Major Global Education Initiatives" (Project No.: WYJZW-2024-1053).

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