

# An Exploration of English Curriculum Assessment in Vocational School: School A as an Example

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**Abstract:** Evaluation of English courses in vocational schools is an important part of course teaching. The purpose of evaluation is to test the quality of teaching, diagnose teaching problems, regulate the progress of teaching, test the learning effect of students, and motivate students to make progress. Evaluation has a positive effect on the development of both students and teachers. The author of this paper analyzes the actual situation of School A and the actual situation of students' learning as well as students' needs. The application of the multiple evaluation system in the English program of this school is discussed to improve the effectiveness of the program.

**Keywords:** Vocational English; Curriculum assessment; Multiple evaluation system; Formative assessment; Student-centered evaluation

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## 1. Domestic and international research on curriculum assessment

In the path of educational development, different scholars have defined curriculum evaluation differently. Ralph W. Tyler introduced the concept of curriculum evaluation during the Eight-Year Study. He argues that the curriculum evaluation process is inherently a procedure for determining the extent to which curriculum and teaching plans are actually achieving their educational goals. Taylor's evaluation theory is the first, more complete, and influential theoretical model in the history of modern Western educational evaluation. In 1961, Beauchamp, an American expert in curriculum theory, argued that curriculum evaluation consists of those processes necessary to judge the effectiveness of the curriculum system and the effectiveness of the planned curriculum<sup>[1]</sup>. After that, Bloom suggested that "Evaluation is the systematic collection of evidence to determine whether some change has actually occurred in the learner, and to determine the amount as well as the degree of change in the individual student"<sup>[2]</sup>. Bloom criticized the traditional hierarchical screening of educational assessment and agrees that curriculum assessment is pluralistic and diverse and should be distributed in every process of teaching and learning. However, domestic scholars such as Yu Lin believe that "classroom teaching evaluation is both a product of classroom teaching and an indispensable part of classroom teaching"<sup>[3]</sup>. And Zhang Feifei pointed out that English courses in vocational education need to be evaluated, which means that a comprehensive evaluation of basic elements such as the teacher, the students, and the classroom ecosystem is needed<sup>[4]</sup>. In addition, Wu Liwei believes that

the innovation and practice of the talent cultivation model inevitably affect the teaching and evaluation of English in vocational schools<sup>[5]</sup>.

## 2. Characteristics of the curriculum in vocational schools and factors for its evaluation

Vocational school is a kind of school differentiated from a general high school. The fundamental mission of secondary vocational and technical schools is to cultivate a moral, literate, and skilled labor force of excellence for the front-line industries such as the production industry and the service industry. At the same time, China's "one-size-fits-all" policy has resulted in the need for academically low achievers to enter vocational schools to learn a skill to earn a living. Therefore, vocational schools have the following two characteristics: (1) students' poor performance in literacy curriculum; (2) skills-based employment orientation.

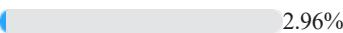
The newly released English Teaching Syllabus for Vocational Schools calls for a competency-based curriculum design that schools should focus on students' individual development and future career development. And it requires schools to cultivate students' ability to use the language in an integrated manner and cultivate their ability to learn to learn. In the assessment program of the curriculum, it is mentioned that it requires a combination of formative and summative assessments. And both the teacher and the students should be the subject and object of assessment in order to promote students' motivation to learn and improve teachers' teaching skills. Considering the characteristics of vocational education, diversified assessment methods should be adopted to assess students' performance, like English skills, English cognition, students' emotions and attitude.

## 3. School A's school background, curriculum realities, and methods of curriculum evaluation

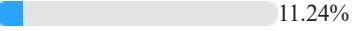
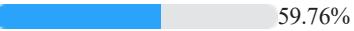
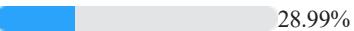
This study mainly uses the literature method, questionnaire method and interview analysis method. The literature method is mainly a method of collecting, identifying and organizing and analyzing literature to form a scientific understanding of the facts about curriculum assessment. The questionnaire survey was drawn from both domestic and foreign English test assessment systems. A random sample of 169 students was surveyed in School A in February 2024 to investigate how the school's English program is assessed and the level of satisfaction with the assessment of the English program. Then, in March 2024, in-depth interviews were conducted with three students at the school. Each student had a 10-minute one-on-one interview. These 3 interviews were conducted to understand the students' needs in English and to identify gaps in the school's assessment system.

School A is a secondary vocational school with engineering-oriented subjects such as automobile repair and mechatronics. And the ratio of male to female students in the school is 9:1. There were 169 participants in the questionnaire ( $n = 169$ ), including 164 males and 5 females. In the survey, it can be found that only 19 people are interested in the subject, as shown in the chart (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Gender ratio of participants

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	164	 97.04%
Female	5	 2.96%
Total	169	

**Table 2.** Distribution of students' interest in professional courses

Your interest in the subject of English	Number	Percentage
More interested	19	 11.24%
General interest	101	 59.76%
Not much interest	49	 28.99%
Total	169	

In the survey, it was found that the students' English language foundation was poor. Students said it is difficult for them to memorize the vocabulary that they learned in class or before. And some of them cannot even spell out the 26 letters of the alphabet correctly. 85% of the students said they were embarrassed to speak English. During the interview, Student X said, "The idea of many of us in the class is that I came to this school to learn a skill, and that specialized classes are important. I've been taking literacy classes for nine years already, and I think it's useless." Although more than 70% of the students said that teachers often ask questions and organize activities in the classroom, in the interviews, students said that the questions are basically simple answers about words and sentence patterns. And the classroom activities are more about simple discussions without feedback.

More importantly, it was found in the survey that the school often neglects English courses in its school curriculum and seldom provides a language environment for students to practice. In view of the above facts, students are not interested in learning English. And teachers also have a perfunctory idea in English courses. Through investigations, the evaluation of the English course in the school is based on the teacher-centered, textbook-oriented, classroom-oriented, and test-oriented evaluation model.

## 4. Deficiencies in the teaching of the English program in School A

### 4.1. The main body of evaluation in the school is relatively simple

Under the background of teaching informationization, the school adopts IT-assisted teaching. But it still fails to break through the teaching mode of "the teacher speaks and the students listen. The English teachers in school A are still the center of teaching and the only evaluators of the course. In teaching, the teachers evaluate the students' speaking, listening, and writing abilities, and the form of evaluation is quite traditional, which makes it difficult to stimulate the students' interest in learning.

### 4.2. The evaluation objectives of English courses are not reasonable enough

The goal of vocational schools is to cultivate a large number of skillful talents and high-quality laborers on the basis of compulsory education. Therefore, it is mentioned in the syllabus that the study of English is for the long-term development of the future. So, teachers should make a comprehensive and objective evaluation of students from multiple levels and angles. In the evaluation system of the school, much attention is paid to academic achievement, ignoring the evaluation of students' learning attitude, emotional will and personality development. At the same time, the development of students' ability to apply knowledge is also neglected.

### 4.3. The evaluation methods of the curriculum are not rich enough

The evaluation of students' achievements in school is more in the way of correcting the assignments, which the teachers assign the assignments. After the students finish them, the teachers correct them one by one. In this way, it is difficult for students to get detailed feedback from teachers. At the same time, the workload of the teachers is heavy.

The course evaluation of many teachers in school is still dominated by the final exam with formative evaluation

occupying a very small part. Neither can it improve the initiative of students' learning, nor can it improve the effectiveness of teachers' courses. In school A, there are many different specialties with different needs for English. For example, the Department of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering does not require a high level of mastery of English, while the requirements of Business English are very high. The lack of rich evaluation methods is not conducive to students' checking and filling.

#### **4.4. The evaluation system is not scientific enough**

The evaluation system contains only usual grades and final grades. The students' emotional will, learning attitude, and personality development are not included in the evaluation system. It is mentioned in the syllabus that students should be evaluated in multiple dimensions, from skills, emotions and consciousness, to cultivate students' thinking of developmental learning.

### **5. Strategies for Evaluation of English Program in School A**

School A is an engineering vocational school whose sex ratio is grossly disproportionate, approximately 9:1. The boys in this school have a weak foundation in English and do not gain a sense of achievement in the study of English subjects. It is often said that a house will have many hidden dangers if the foundation is not properly laid. In the same way, if the preliminary work of language accumulation is not done well, boys will get tired of learning English and even develop a resistance mentality at a later stage. So, it is not surprising that there are scores in the teens and twenties in English among the students of the school.

In this case, schools and teachers should do a better job of teaching evaluation rather than "strike." According to the teaching experience, the author proposes the following teaching evaluation strategies:

#### **5.1. Evaluation system**

##### **5.1.1. A combination of pluralistic forms of assessment**

A combination of formative and summative assessments should be used in the evaluation of the course. In the questionnaire survey, 68.3% of the students think that diversified classroom methods and assessment methods are more likely to stimulate learning interests. Summative assessment is the assessment implemented after the completion of teaching activities. This way of assessment is often found in traditional English teaching classrooms, and it is a teacher-oriented way of assessment that is often used for selection and assessment. At the end of the semester exams and tests are summative assessments, which aim at determining whether the teaching objectives have been achieved, so this assessment method does not allow teachers and students to have timely feedback. Formative assessment is a series of assessments in the course process, which can well fill the deficiency of summative assessment. Diversified assessment methods can make students realize their own deficiencies in English learning, and at the same time, they can also have a clear idea of their own strengths. Not only can they check their shortcomings and make up for them in a timely manner, but they can also motivate students to learn English to a certain extent.

##### **5.1.2. Take care of the actual needs of students**

The developmental needs of students are the primary purpose of student learning. Schools should build an assessment system that suits the characteristics of the school, meets the multiple needs of the students, and improves the teachers' teaching level <sup>[6]</sup>. Teachers need to take into account the needs of their students, no matter what form of assessment they use. Teachers need to take the student's perspective and make the student the center of learning and the center of assessment.

## 5.2. Evaluation objects

### 5.2.1. Diversified assessment methods

Diversified assessment methods can not only assess students' learning effectiveness in a comprehensive and multidimensional way, but also increase the interest of the classroom. Alternative assessment is one of the assessment methods advocated by scholars. Alternative assessment is categorized into outcomes and performances. There are many specific ways to implement these two types of assessment: (1) Product-based assignments: multiple-choice questions, essays, portfolios, concept maps; (2) Performance-based assignments: oral presentations, topic studies, demonstrations, drama, debates, dance, and other expressive forms of assessment. The use of these methods is organized according to the needs of the course as well as the abilities of the students. At the same time, when designing and using these strategies, it is important that the students are the main focus and the teacher plays a supportive role in order for the students to recognize their shortcomings and also to develop the habit of lifelong learning.

Various methods of formative assessment can be widely used in the four aspects of listening, reading and writing in English. In the assessment of listening, game assessment methods can be used for assessment, such as PPT game design, traditional classroom games, questions and so on. In reading assessment, the Star Reading test can be used to assess reading ability. In English writing assessment, concept maps, mind maps, and other assessment methods can be used. Teachers can use scenario acting, role-playing, speech, debate, and other performance activities for oral assessment, which can not only increase the fun of the classroom, but also assess the students' attitude, oral expression ability, and organizational skills in a multi-dimensional way. Let's take role play as an example. Students can be evaluated on the basis of their performance on the stage to assess the change in their attitude towards the English subject. The speed and tone of voice change can be assessed for oral expression ability. Correct use of words and sentence patterns can be used as part of the assessment of language proficiency and language application.

In addition to teacher-involved assessment methods, there is also student self-assessment and peer assessment. Self-assessment enables students to think about their own strengths and weaknesses and to change their learning strategies according to their own needs. Peer assessment is a way for students to supervise each other, which not only promotes common progress among students, but also increases cooperation and communication skill among students. Regardless of whether students use self-assessment or mutual assessment, the teacher should clearly and explicitly explain the evaluation criteria between evaluations. The teacher's modeling of assessment can make students more aware of the evaluation criteria.

### 5.2.2. Diversification of assessment content

In assessing students, cognitive, functional, social and meta-competencies need to be assessed. Cognitive ability refers to the linguistic knowledge of phonetics, vocabulary, grammar and communicative topics; functional ability refers to the linguistic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing; social ability refers to the attitudes and behaviors of emotions, attitudes and values; and meta-competence refers to the ability to learn independently such as learning strategies. Diversified content assessment takes care of students' differences, and at the same time, it is more effective in providing students with the "right medicine" to solve the problems and promote their English learning ability. In the assessment of the four competencies, the criteria are particularly important. In the assessment, it is important to avoid the inconsistency of standards and indicators brought by individualized understanding and personal bias.

### 5.2.3. Vertical dimension assessment

Vertical dimension assessment is a crucial component of dental assessment. In recent years, scholars have proposed layered instruction that promotes equitable education. The aim is to maximize the effectiveness of education based on students' abilities. Vertical assessment is divided into 2 parts:

- (1) Pre-school assessment: Before the beginning of each semester, students' English academic level is comprehensively assessed in terms of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. At the same time, students can be

asked to have a one-on-one chat and conversation to assess their emotions and attitudes. Based on the results of the assessment, a personalized learning goal can be set, taking into account the student's interests and needs.

(2) Academic assessment: Adopt qualitative and quantitative analysis methods to assess the English program.

Quantitative analysis refers to the analysis of students' performance in various aspects of the learning process, as well as final grades. The quantitative analysis needs to be compared with the pre-school assessment to analyze students' progress and the parts that need to be improved so as to promote students' English learning. Qualitative analysis is the use of questionnaires to investigate the achievement of English course objectives. On the basis of careful analysis of the achievement of teaching objectives, teachers summarize the successes of teaching, analyze the shortcomings of the teaching process and propose improvement measures to gradually realize the orientation of English learning with competence as the goal.

### **5.3. Evaluation subjects**

A diverse assessment approach to the curriculum helps to make each student stand out in his or her learning. In the assessment of English courses, the use of multiple assessment subjects enables students to have a more comprehensive view of themselves. In addition to teacher assessment, students can participate in self-assessment to reflect on their learning process, ability and performance. In addition, peer assessment is also an effective way for students to assess each other and promote each other's growth. Parents, as the guardians of students, can also participate in course assessment. For vocational education and skills training courses, industry experts and enterprises can participate in the evaluation to ensure that the curriculum matches the actual needs. They can provide advice on the assessment of students' vocational qualities and skills.

AI assessment is an emerging topic, and it is considered a relatively fair assessment tool. It not only reduces the workload of teachers, but also measures students' level in a prescribed and standardized way. AI assessment is more often used in English listening and speaking. Schools use AI to assess students' responsiveness and accuracy in listening, their accuracy in pronunciation and vocabulary application in speaking. AI can record each record and audio recording, which can let students and teachers have a clear idea about the level of improvement of students' ability after a period of learning. However, AI has no way to assess meta-competence and social competence. As a machine, it lacks emotional mobility and does not motivate students well. Nevertheless, it plays a very important role in assisting the teacher in assessment. When using AI assessments, teachers can give analyzed grading rubrics to improve students' understanding of their knowledge. For example, in the oral expression section, pronunciation, pause and repetition are important parts of the test. Students need to practice more in this part. In this way, students' ability can be improved faster.

## **6. Conclusion**

The teaching of English in vocational secondary schools should implement the fundamental task of cultivating morality and focusing on the all-round development of students. The 2020 curriculum standard for vocational schools calls for the promotion of core academic qualities and the implementation of diversified assessment based on academic quality. Therefore, in the curriculum assessment of School A, we should carry out multi-dimensional and all-round evaluation from the actual situation and actual needs of students to promote students' learning and lay a foundation for their sustainable development in the future.

## **Disclosure statement**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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