A Study of Effectiveness of Cultivating College Students’ Professional English Ability through English Salon—Taking AIB English Salon as an Example

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Abstract. A survey response (93.98%) from 203 of 216 graduates who took part in English Salon were conducted by the general situation of graduates using English. We realized the enterprise requirements for staff English application ability and the current situation of English usage by graduates in the workplace, analyzing the problems and difficulties of using English in their post. Also, we believed that English Salon was helpful in developing their English speaking skill in their professional ability training. Some suggestions will be taken to improve English Salon in cultivating college students’ professional English ability.

Introduction

With the integration of the world economy, English, as a general communicative language, is becoming more important in terms of employment and career advancement, which has even become a measure of the quality of a person to some extent. Higher vocational English teaching should take the cultivation of professional English ability as the core, and promote higher vocational students listening and speaking abilities and comprehensive application abilities. However, there are still many problems in teaching English in Higher Vocational Colleges in China. The second classroom teaching, as an important auxiliary teaching part, plays an active role in improving students’ professional ability [1]. As the second class of English training, English Salon refers to a style which allows students to develop a more comprehensive and in-depth language skills level [2]. Taking AIB English Salon as an example, the paper is to explore the effectiveness of cultivating college students’ professional English ability through English Salon so as to make students better equipped to meet the needs of employers after graduation.

Object and Method

The Research Object

Empirical research was conducted in a total of 203 graduates who took part in AIB English Salon from 2011 to 2019, 88 English major students and 115 non-English major students.

Method of the Research

Given the research objective, which is conceptually descriptive, we choose the method of questionnaire, which we considered to be the most appropriate for this situation. The questionnaire included mainly dichotomous questions, semi-open questions and multiple-choice questions [3]. A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed, among which 216 were recovered, and 203 valid questionnaires were collected - the effective rate was 93.98%.

Results and Analysis

The purpose of the survey of graduates' working units is to understand their destination upon
graduation and employment. According to table 1, 66.01% of graduates work in private enterprises, which shows that private enterprises are more and more favored by graduates and become an indispensable part of our employment. Graduates working in state-owned enterprises, joint ventures and foreign-funded enterprises account for 9.36%, 6.40% and 6.90% respectively, indicating that these three types of enterprises are still attractive despite their small number of employees. By the way 7.88% of graduates start their own businesses, representing the new direction of employment.

Table 1. The organization you are working belongs to.

| item                                      | %     |
|-------------------------------------------|-------|
| government agency or public institution   | 3.45% |
| Chinese enterprise                       | 9.36% |
| joint venture enterprise                  | 6.40% |
| wholly-owned foreign enterprise           | 6.90% |
| private enterprise                        | 66.01%|
| Other                                     | 7.88% |
| total                                     | 100   |

Figure 1 shows that 36.04% of English Salon graduates are engaged in management job, they are engaged in marketing, service, technology and production account for 31.53%, 16.67%, 13.51% and 2.25% respectively.

![Figure 1. Your type of job.](image1)

According to the positions surveyed in figure 2, 44.82% of the respondents are engaged in management, among which 6.40% of them are in senior management level, 11.33% of them are intermediate management and 27.09% of them are primary management. Front-line production personnel accounted for 6.40%, other positions accounted for 48.77%.

![Figure 2. Your position.](image2)

As figure 3 shown, 21.67% of them passed College English Test A and 10.34% of them passed
College English Test B. Some graduates also passed CET-4 and CET-6 (47.78% and 38.92% respectively). 0.99% of them passed IELTS or TOEFL, and 11.82% of them passed other exams, such as BEC. Most of graduates have obtained the English proficiency certificate which is equal to the English level required by the college, while some graduates have passed higher level English exams and obtained corresponding certificates.

![Bar chart showing English proficiency levels](image)

**Figure 3. Your English proficiency certificate.**

In the survey “Is your English certificate useful in your job hunting?” (See figure 4), 71.92% of people think it is useful, 17.73% of people consider it is as useless, 10.34% of people is unknown. This shows that the current English certificate examination has a promoting effect on English learning. The enterprises have highly recognized these certificates when recruiting graduates so that their English level can directly benefit their employment.

![Bar chart showing usefulness of English certificates](image)

**Figure 4. Is your English certificate useful in your job hunting?**

Figure 5 shows 30.05% of graduates think that English knowledge and skills learned at school can meet the needs of their positions, 42.86% of them think that they are basically satisfied, 21.67% of them cannot meet the needs of their positions, and 5.42% of them are far from satisfied. The English knowledge and skills which graduates learned at school are basically compatible with social development and meet the requirements of the enterprises.

![Pie chart showing English knowledge and skills](image)

**Figure 5. Do your English knowledge and skills learned in school meet the requirements of the position?**
The frequency of using English and the most common way to use English at workplace are dependent on their job demand. Different industries have different requirements, such as the staff who engaged in foreign trade or a foreign capital enterprise will use English frequently as shown in Table 2. 42.86% of graduates are frequently using English, half of subjects use English sometimes or occasionally. Only 7.38% of them never use English at all.

Table 2. The frequency of using English at work.

| item        | frequent | sometimes | occasionally | never  |
|-------------|----------|-----------|--------------|--------|
| %           | 42.86%   | 20.20%    | 29.56%       | 7.38%  |

Figure 6 shows 5.91% of graduates choose translation as the most common way to use English at work, 8.37% of them choose reading, 11.82% of them choose writing, 14.78% and 15.76% of them choose listening and speaking, 43.35% subjects used all of the above. As the requirement for the all-round English ability of college student rises, it is of great necessity to develop student’s comprehensive ability in English, especially their listening and speaking ability.

Figure 7 shows that the specific situations of using English are business reception, business contact, product or service introduction. The English ability most involved in these occasions are listening and speaking skills. In addition, reading and translating professional literature, life reception and attending trade fairs also accounted for a considerable proportion. Therefore, it is very important to strengthen students' listening, speaking, reading and translation ability in English Salon activities. In addition, specific scenarios should be simulated to enhance students' English vocational ability.

Figure 7. The specific situations of using English.
With the development of social economy, the requirements for English comprehensive ability are much higher now. Different positions have different requirements on English skills. The ability of students comprehensive application in English needs to meet the employer’s demand. Figure 8 shows that 40.10% of graduates think comprehensive ability is the most important, 34.16% of them think listening and speaking ability needs to be strengthened, and translation ability (11.39%) are also some of the skills that graduates need to focus on improving. Reading and writing skills accounted for less than, 5.94% and 8.42% respectively.

Figure 8. Which English skills do you think you need to improve in your position?

As figure 9 shows, the biggest problems graduates encounter are the lack of vocabulary and Terminology, accounting for 36.95% and 44.33% respectively. A small vocabulary has negatively effects on the improvement of student’s listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. 34.98% of them think there is little chance to use English at work, 14.29% of them think English learning is not practical, and 14.78% of them believe cultural differences are also a problem.

Figure 9. The problems and difficulties of using English in your position.

Figure 10 shows 49.26% of graduates think English has a great influence on their salary, job promotion and future development, 35.17% of them think it is normal, only 10.84% and 4.43% of them believe it has little or no influence. English as an international language, has become one of the necessary conditions for graduate’s job hunting, employment, salary raise and career promotion.

Figure 10. The influence of your English level on your salary, promotion and future development.
According to table 3, 76.35% of graduates believe that English Salon is helpful to their jobs, 20.20% of them are not sure whether English Salon is helpful, only 3.45% of them think English salon will not help them. This survey shows English Salon is accepted by most of graduates.

Table 3. Do you think English Salon is helpful to your job?.

| item               | Not helpful at all | Not helpful | Not sure | Helpful | Very Helpful |
|--------------------|--------------------|-------------|----------|---------|--------------|
| %                  | 1.48%              | 1.97%       | 20.20%   | 29.06%  | 47.29%       |

English Salon was usually held 12-14 times each semester. As table 5 shows, 82.75% of graduates participated more than 6 times each semester when they studied in school, and 29.06% of them participated 12-14 times. It shows that the frequency of graduates who took part in English Salon were high when they were studying in school.

Table 4. How many times a semester have you participated in English Salon when you were studying in school?

| item                | 1-3 times | 3-6 times | 6-9 times | 9-12 times | 12-14 times |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-------------|
| %                   | 2.46%     | 14.77%    | 24.63%    | 29.06%     | 29.06%      |

The reasons of graduates who participate in English salon are diverse, not only for training English proficiency but also for expanding the horizon and communication. Making friends and exercising listening & speaking become one of the main reasons for graduates to attend English Salon (80.29% and 68.47% respectively), and 48.77% of graduates want to learn basic knowledge which ranks third. Entertainment ranks fourth. Cross-culture knowledge ranks fifth. Job development, Academic/lessons, improving exam score and English competition rank sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth as figure 11 shows.

Figure 11. Why did you participate in English Salon? (Multiple choice).

In the survey "your favorite English Salon program in school", as shown in figure 12, festival activities and English lectures ranked first and second, accounting for 42.41% and 22.78% respectively. Daily activities ranked third, accounting for 21.84%. English competitions ranked fourth, accounting for 12.03%. English Salon introduce western cultural knowledge to students through traditional western festival activities such as Halloween fashion show and Thanksgiving Day. Various kinds of academic lectures such as CET-4 and CET-6 lectures, job-hunting English lectures were also popular topics for students.
It is obvious that English Salon improves the graduates' listening and speaking skills, and has also developed their comprehensive quality. Figure 13 shows that more than half of graduates thought that English Salon was helpful at different levels to their listening skills and public speaking skills, accounting for 67.49% and 58.13% respectively. 44.33% of graduates believed that English Salon was helpful to their autonomous learning. Many students believed that English Salon was helpful to their problem-solving, leadership, and management skills.

A total of 158 students responded to "Do you have any suggestions or comments to help us improve?" The results are as follows: (1) establishing a students’ English training base which serves to provide a new space for the students to have a basic level of English proficiency to meet professional requirements; (2) Innovating activities themes, discuss related career topics, including job interview, internship, career planning, workplace etiquette and entrepreneurship etc.; (3) Diversifying activity form, carry out English lectures inviting alumnus to share their work experiences with students, organize outdoor communication activities simulating daily business transactions; (4) Carrying out cross-cultural communication, invite foreigner's to take part in activity and experience the differences between Chinese and western cultures; (5) Cooperation with enterprises. Provide students with off-campus exhibition internship or part-time opportunities, get real practice from society; (6) Strengthening teamwork and communication among staff.

Conclusion

The survey results are as follows: (1) English has a great influence on the graduate's job hunting, employment, salary raise and career promotion. As the requirement for all-round English ability of college students rises, it is of great necessity to develop our students professional English ability. (2)English Salon cultivates college student’s professional English ability: improving student’s comprehensive ability especially listening and speaking ability, and also developing their other
ability such as autonomous learning, problem solving skills, leadership skills and management skills. English Salon strives to explore and adapt to the ever changing needs society and the workplace, and has made breakthroughs in the needs of students' lifelong career development.

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