

Attribution Analysis and Countermeasures of Silence Phenomenon in Public English Classes at Vocational Colleges

Wen Deng*

Chengdu Textile College, Chengdu, China

*Corresponding Author: Wen Deng

ABSTRACT

Silence phenomenon in public English classes at higher vocational colleges in China poses a significant challenge to teaching quality and student development. This study investigates the multidimensional causes of classroom silence, focusing on student-related factors (weak foundational skills, utilitarian learning mindsets, and psychological barriers), teacher-related issues (outdated pedagogical methods and negative attitudes), and cultural-environmental influences (traditional values conflicting with modern educational needs and the marginalized status of English courses). This paper proposes targeted countermeasures which include fostering students' metacognitive abilities through reflective practices, adopting student-centered teaching strategies (e.g., interactive activities and digital tools), enhancing institutional support via incentive mechanisms and teacher training, and promoting a culturally inclusive classroom environment. By addressing these factors holistically, the study aims to mitigate classroom silence, improve learner engagement, and advance pedagogical reforms in higher vocational English education.

KEYWORDS

Classroom Silence; Higher Vocational Colleges; Public English Courses; Attribution Analysis; Teaching Strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher vocational education in China relies heavily on the quality of talent cultivation, which is essential for building a skills-based society. Public English courses in these colleges are instrumental in developing the language abilities necessary for technical talents to succeed in an international context (Ministry of Education, 2020). However, the phenomenon of classroom silence is prevalent in public English classes in higher vocational colleges, characterized by low student participation and poor classroom atmosphere, which negatively affects teaching quality. This phenomenon not only contradicts the educational philosophy of student-centered learning, but also leads to an imbalance in language input and output, creating a vicious cycle of silence-anxiety-more silence. (Macintyre et al., 1998). Therefore, it is crucial to analyze the causes of this phenomenon and develop targeted strategies to address it, which is essential for promoting reforms in higher vocational English teaching.

2. CAUSES OF SILENCE

2.1. Student Dimension

Weak English Foundation: Non-English major freshmen in vocational colleges often have low English scores and limited vocabulary, making it difficult for them to follow teachers' lectures,

leading them to remain silent. This is corroborated by Vygotsky's (1978) ability gap in the Zone of Proximal Development, where students choose silence due to cognitive overload. Additionally, the development of fundamental English skills among rural students is significantly shaped by teachers and the educational setting they experience during their primary and secondary school years.

Cognitive Mindset: Students often adopt a utilitarian learning perspective, focusing primarily on passing exams, as reflected in the phrase "60 points is enough." This mindset, prevalent among vocational students, leads to a lack of motivation and engagement, with only a few recognizing the impact of English on future career development. The solidification of this mindset results in students' lacking a deep understanding of English learning and its relevance to careers. According to Bandura (1977), people's confidence in their capabilities plays a significant part in determining how much effort they exert and how long they persist in pursuing their goals when facing challenges, which in return means that low efficacy expectations lead to diminished effort and engagement, resulting in poorer performance outcomes.

Psychological Mechanisms: Introverted or timid students are reluctant to answer questions, partly because of the influence of collectivist culture, where the occurrence of mistakes is regarded as detrimental to the group's public image. This defensive silence (Tatar, 2005) is particularly evident in group discussions, where most students worry about mistakenly speaking and damaging the group's image (Zheng, 2022). The face-saving culture in China fosters a principle of not taking initiative, not opposing, and not taking responsibility. Students' personality traits also affect their classroom behavior, with extroverted students more likely to participate and introverted students more inclined to remain silent.

2.2. Teacher Dimension

Outdated Teaching Methods: Many teachers still use traditional methods like PPT + explanation, which lack interaction and fail to engage students. And the inability to regularly incorporate smart teaching tools exacerbates this issue. When teaching methods are overly simplistic, students are less inclined to think critically, leading to lower learning efficiency.

Teaching Attitude Bias: Teachers often respond to silence with a negative attitude, failing to adjust or improve their methods, focusing solely on completing teaching tasks while neglecting student development. Teachers' attitudes directly influence students' learning motivation and classroom atmosphere, which means that teachers can greatly affect how motivated students are to learn English. If teachers have discouraging attitudes or use unengaging teaching methods, it can lead to students losing interest in English ([Wang & Littlewood, 2021](#)).

2.3. Cultural Environment Dimension

Traditional Value Conflicts: Traditional Chinese culture emphasizes humility and reserve, advocating for being quick in action but slow in speech and cautious speech, which conflicts with the modern educational need for expression courage (Gu, 2019). Students are reluctant to express themselves in public, fearing mistakes and losing face, and worrying about personal errors bringing shame to the class. The tendency in higher vocational education to prioritize skills over humanities places English courses on the periphery of professional group construction (Huang, 2020). Additionally, collectivist and face-saving cultures influence students' classroom behavior, making them more inclined to avoid drawing attention and making mistakes.

Course Status Dilemma: Under the "1+X" certificate system, higher vocational colleges compress public English courses, reducing the number of semesters or total hours dedicated to English learning. And students focus on professional courses, aiming only to pass exams, which leads to a lack of emphasis on public English courses.

3. COUNTERMEASURES

3.1. Student Dimension Strategies

Cultivating Metacognitive Abilities: Course cognition involves students clarifying course objectives and learning plans through reflective writing, which can stimulate their learning motivation. This method helps students see how they're doing and what they need to achieve, which makes them more independent and motivated. As Zimmerman et al. (2002) mentioned, self-regulation helps turn mental abilities into useful skills and self-regulated learning prepares students for ongoing education and allows them to apply their skills in various contexts.

Setting Learning Goals: Encourage students to set personal learning goals and provide corresponding resources and support. By setting specific achievable goals, students can better plan their learning process and gain a sense of accomplishment. Goal setting positively influences task performance. Chung et al. (2021) suggested that when students engage in a planned revision process with goal setting, it improves their confidence and writing results.

3.2. Teacher Dimension Strategies

Attitude Adjustment: Focus on student-centered teaching, encouraging and supporting students, minimizing criticism, and fostering good teacher-student relationships. Teachers' positive attitudes and support significantly enhance student participation and learning motivation. Tang & Hu (2022) emphasized the need to monitor teachers' attitudes toward English to protect student motivation. Administrations should provide training to help teachers maintain a positive outlook, which can help alleviate student dissatisfaction with English instruction and boost their motivation in university settings.

Teaching Method Innovation: Enhance student involvement by incorporating interactive activities like games, role-playing, and group discussions. This method supports Kolb's (1984) concept of experiential learning as a continuous and interactive process where knowledge results from direct experience, which can help learners explore their strengths. Zhang (2020) believed that class activities significantly impact learners' speaking proficiency and encourage researchers to explore the quality and influence of teaching activities.

Language Adjustment: Adjust teaching language according to students' understanding, avoiding the use of Chinese throughout the whole English class. To promote English practice among students, consider organizing a range of events such as English corners for informal conversation, speech contests to build public speaking skills, and cultural festivals to immerse students in English language and culture. Utilize digital platforms like Superstar Learning to increase classroom interaction, such as raising hands, answering, and sharing discussions. These innovative methods can effectively stimulate students' learning interest and participation.

Breaking Historical Traditions: Encourage students to express themselves boldly, breaking through traditional silence norms, and share their opinions. By creating an open and inclusive classroom environment, students can freely express themselves, reducing the phenomenon of silence due to fear of mistakes. Teachers can enhance academic performance by actively improving the classroom environment and engaging more with students, as noted by Tong et al. (2022). Additionally, Roldan et al. (2021) highlighted that interactive learning activities help students develop respect for others, appreciate differences, and recognize diverse abilities, fostering new friendships.

3.3. School Dimension Strategies

Providing Platforms for Self-Expression: Organize English live shows, English song competitions, English dubbing, and English tour guide simulations to provide students with more opportunities to

express themselves. These activities improve English skills, increase confidence, and encourage participation. Bandura (1997) highlighted that success helps build a strong belief in one's abilities, but failures can weaken it, especially if they happen before confidence is well-established.

Building Teacher Learning Platforms: Conduct specialized lectures to help teachers update their teaching ideas and methods. Organize demonstration class observations to promote teacher exchange and learning. Host teaching competitions and curriculum thought and politics competitions to stimulate teachers' teaching enthusiasm. Guo (2023) noted that the National Vocational College Skills Competition improves comprehensive teaching abilities by focusing on classroom teaching as the starting point and using information methods as teaching methods.

Developing School-Based Textbooks: Develop English textbooks related to students' majors to increase teaching practicality and appeal. Using textbooks relevant to students' professions can better motivate students and enhance their participation.

Incentive Mechanisms: Establish a "Golden Course" construction special fund, providing annual support with a certain amount of money for blended teaching courses. Makule & Otieno (2024) discovered that school incentives improve teacher performance by encouraging them to work more hours, feel less stressed, be more productive, and appreciate their work more.

Perfecting Teacher Development Channels: Incorporate classroom interaction quality into the title evaluation system. These incentives can motivate teachers to actively explore and implement new teaching methods, thereby improving classroom interaction quality.

4. CONCLUSION

Silence is a common problem in English classes at higher vocational colleges. It is a complex educational issue involving students, teachers, and cultural environments. Through in-depth analysis of these factors, we conclude that students' weak English foundations, solidified cognitive mindsets, and psychological constraints are primary causes of silence. Teachers' outdated methods and biased attitudes also play a significant role. Conflicts between traditional values and modern educational ideals exacerbate the problem. To address this, the paper proposes multi-dimensional strategies, including cultivating students' metacognitive abilities, innovating student-centered teaching methods, providing platforms for self-expression, and implementing incentive mechanisms. Through these efforts, the paper hopes to effectively alleviate the silence phenomenon in higher vocational English classes, enhance students' learning motivation and participation, and drive reforms in higher vocational English teaching.

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