Incorporate curriculum requirement and social requirement into learner needs

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Abstract. College English is still treated as an academic center course in China mainland, and college instruction is aimed at transmitting the type of knowledge and skills that academic center courses require; although, the national College English Curriculum Requirements prescribe that the goal of college English instruction should be geared at the cultivation of the ability to use English, at the same time, enhance learner autonomy, comprehensive calibers in order to cater for the demand of social development of international communication. The present study, from the perspective of context-based courses, set out to explore how to incorporate curriculum requirements and social requirements into learner needs. The project adopted Wigginss and Mctighe's backward design to decide on what to teach, how to teach and how to evaluate. First, the course was analyzed to construct a concept map of the content and objectives of the course, social requirements were investigated, and learner needs were analyzed, based on which the context-based course was developed. For instruction, an optional design was provided so that students could choose according to their requirements, and a variety of teaching methods were adopted with reference to the requirement of different content and objectives. In this project, task-based approach, project-based learning, community service learning, and case teaching methods were tried. To ensure the attainment of basic requirements, the unit assessment was adopted as the main tool of evaluation, which performed the function of both summative assessment and formative assessment. It was found that, when curriculum requirements and social requirements are integrated into learner needs, learners would be more motivated, and they learn better. However, one semester's study seemed to indicate what learners care about most was not a social requirement, but a summative assessment of the course.

Keywords: Curriculum requirement, social requirement, learner needs.

INTRODUCTION

College English is still treated as an academic center course in China mainland, and college instruction is aimed at transmitting the type of knowledge and skill that academic center courses require although the national College English Curriculum Requirements prescribe that the goal of college English instruction should be geared at the cultivation of the ability to use English, at the same time, enhance learner autonomy, comprehensive calibers in order to cater for the demand of social development of international communication. The present study, from the perspective of context-based courses, set out to explore how to incorporate curriculum requirements and social requirements into learner needs.

The past decades witnessed an increasing number of studies on social requirements and College English Curriculum Studies ranging from investigation of the

social requirement for College English (Xuewen, 2011), evaluation framework to College English evaluation standards (Duqin, 2007) to analysis of the basic requirements of College English teaching and requirements of the social needs. All studies seem to suggest that there is a gap between the English college Curriculum and the social requirements. However, former studies all draw upon questionnaires as the major technique for data collection and could not reflect the real social and vocational needs. All this might be one of the reasons why they have not produced much effect on College English instruction or evaluation. To explore the real requirements of vocational tasks, there is a need to analyze the tasks that in-service staff do and examine the relationship between this type of social requirement and College English.

The project adopted Wigginss and Mctighe's backward design to decide on what to teach, how to teach and how to evaluate. First, the course was analyzed to construct a concept map of the content and objectives of the course, social requirements were investigated, and learner needs were analyzed, based on which the context-based course was developed. For instruction, an optional design was provided so that students could choose according to their requirements, and a variety of teaching methods were adopted with reference to the requirement of different content and objectives. In this project, task-based approach, project-based learning, community service learning and case teaching methods were tried. To ensure the attainment of basic requirements, the unit assessment was adopted as the main tool of evaluation, which performed the function of both summative assessment and formative assessment.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Backward design

The Backward Design pattern was proposed by Wiggins and Mctighe (2005) in their book "Understanding by Design". In this book, they proposed that "Deliberate and focused instructional design requires us as teachers and curriculum writers to make an important shift in our thinking about the nature of our job. The shift involves thinking a great deal. First, about the specific learning sought, and the evidence of such learnings, before thinking about what we, as the teacher, will do or provide in teaching and learning activities. Though considerations about what to teach and how to teach it may dominate our thinking as a matter of habit, the challenge is to focus first on the desired learnings from which appropriate teaching will logically follow. Our lessons, units, and courses should be logically inferred from the results sought, not derived from the method, books, and activities with which we are most comfortable. The curriculum should lay out the most effective ways of achieving specific results….In short, the best design

derives backward to form the learnings sought." … until we are quite clear about which specific understandings we are after and what such understandings look like in practice we can best decide, as guides, what "sites" to have our students "tourists" visit and what specific "culture" they should experience in their brief time there only if we are clear about the particular understandings about the culture we want them to take home. Only by having specified the desired results can we focus on the content, methods, and activities most likely to achieve those results." There are three stages of backward design: Stage 1: Identify desired results; Stage 2: Determine acceptable evidence; Stage 3: Plan learning experiences and instruction (Figure 1).

In Stage 1, we consider our goals, examine established content standards (national, state, district), and review curriculum expectations. Because typically we have more content than we can reasonably address within the available time, we must make choices. This first stage in the design process calls for clarity about priorities.

Contextual teaching and learning (CTL)

The contextual teaching and learning initiative is a work in progress. University faculties, in collaboration with P-12 educators, are involved in a variety of projects to study the teaching and learning process. In addition, they continue to research ways to organize the many bodies of knowledge that address various aspects of teaching and learning. The first of eight recent projects sponsored by the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education was conducted at The Ohio State University in partnership with Bowling Green State University. A preliminary definition of CTL emerged from that study (Contextual Teaching and Learning 2000): Contextual teaching and learning is a conception of teaching and learning that helps teachers relate subject matter content to real-world situations; and motivates students to make connections between knowledge and its applications to their lives as family members, citizens, and workers and engage in the hard work that learning requires.

Thus, CTL can help students connect the content they are learning to the life contexts in which that content could be used. Students then find meaning in the learning process. As they strive to attain learning goals, they draw upon their previous experiences and build upon existing knowledge. By learning subjects in an integrated, multidisciplinary manner and in appropriate contexts, they are able to use the acquired knowledge and skills in applicable contexts (Berns and Erickson, 2001).

Constructivism

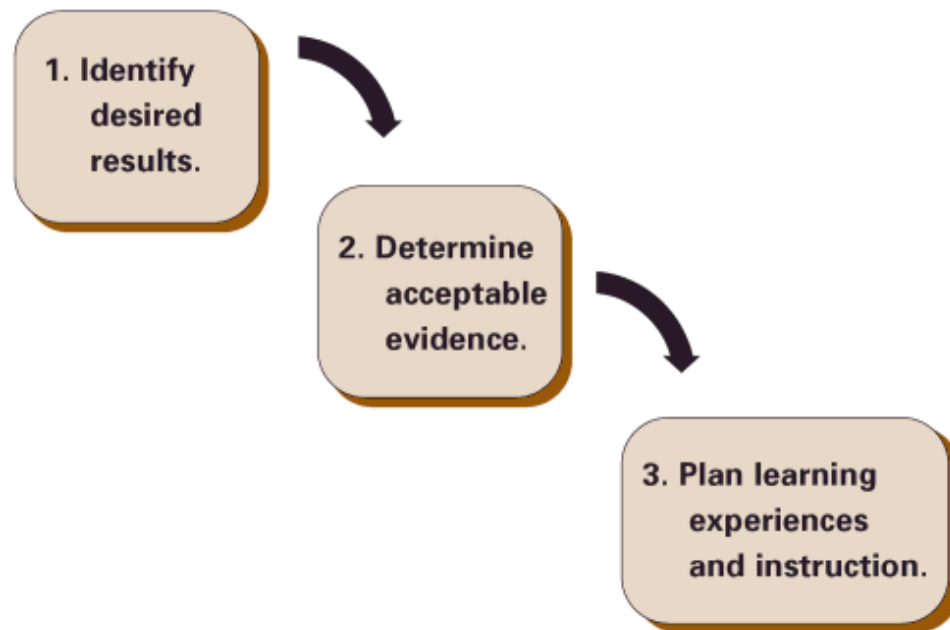Constructivism can be described as a theory that deals

Figure 1. Three stages of backward design.

with the way people create meaning in the world through a series of individual constructs. Constructs are the different types of filters that we choose to place over our realities to change our reality from chaos to order. Von Glasersfeld describes constructivism as, "a theory of knowledge with roots in philosophy, psychology, and cybernetics" (p 162).[1] Simply stated, it is a learning process that allows a student to experience an environment first-hand, thereby, giving the student reliable and trustworthy knowledge. The student is required to act upon the environment to both acquire and test new knowledge. So in this teaching and learning model, students construct their own knowledge by testing ideas based on prior knowledge and experience, applying these ideas to a new situation, and integrating the new knowledge gained with pre-existing intellectual constructs. Rooted in the theories of John Dewey (1900), constructivism calls for active participation in problem solving and critical thinking regarding an authentic learning activity that students find relevant and engaging (Briner, 1999).

Authentic assessment

Authentic assessment is an umbrella concept that refers to the measurement of "intellectual accomplishments that are worthwhile, significant, and meaningful," as compared to multiple choice standardized tests. Authentic assessment can be devised by the teacher, or in collaboration with the student by engaging the student's voice. When applying authentic assessment to student learning and achievement, a teacher applies criteria related to the "construction of knowledge, disciplined inquiry, and the value of achievement beyond the school." The authentic assessment reflects educational policy research that recommends a "high priority on strategies that research has already shown to increase student learning."

Authentic assessment tends to focus on complex or contextualized tasks, enabling students to demonstrate their competency in a more "authentic" setting. Examples of authentic assessments include the performance of the skills, or demonstrating the use of a particular knowledge; simulations and role plays; studio portfolios, strategically selecting items; exhibitions and displays. According to Ormiston, "Authentic learning mirrors the tasks and problem solving that are required in the reality outside of school".

RESEARCH DESIGN

Previous studies of social requirements

Investigation in 1984

In 1984, Chen Qingchang and other researchers did a questionnaire survey on university graduates in Beijing, Harbin, Xi'an, Wuhan, Dalian, and Shanghai, etc. to get information about people's reading, such as time, material, speed, skills and vocabulary capacity. It is found that among the reading materials that people approached every day, magazines, instructions, and abstracts

account for more than 65%, which shows that foreign language textbooks could use some of the content in these areas, although such material is boring or too deep in professional content, in order to make a consistency of learning and using, and reduce the further reading difficulty, students must select some of magazines, instructions and abstracts when they are in the higher grades.

Investigation in 1996

In 1993, Ying Huilan conducted a questionnaire survey in Sichuan, Jiangxi, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Beijing, Heilongjiang, etc., focusing on the English level of college graduates, usage and needs of the community and the survey shows that:

1. There is an active demand for listening, 42% of the respondents thought the demand is large but not in urgent need, 23.43% of the respondents believed that the demand is primary, and 8.58% of the respondents judged the demand to be low.
2. There is a heavy demand for speaking, 37.82% of the respondents thought the demand is large but not in urgent need, 29% of the respondents believed that the demand is primary, and 8.82% of the respondents judged the demand to be low.
3. There is a heavy demand for writing, 38.28% of the respondents thought the demand is large but not in urgent need, 28.77% of the respondents believed that the demand is primary, and 9.28% of the respondents judged the demand to be low.
4. There is an active demand for translating, 40.37% of respondents believe that the demand is large but not in urgent need, 15.31% of survey respondents believe that the demand is primary, and 3.25% of respondents judged the demand to be low.

Investigation in 2001

In 2001, Fu Zheng conducted a survey in five cities --- Hangzhou, Ningbo, Wenzhou, Taizhou, and Shaoxing --- on the requirements of enterprises. The survey involved 126 units of various types of banks, investment companies, securities companies, import and export companies, high-tech companies and 320 professionals (college education accounted for 90%, non-English speaking professionals account for 88%). The survey shows that reading and listening were regarded as the most important skills at work. In addition, the requirement for English skills in work is somewhat different from what it is in college. College English instruction could not meet the diverse needs of various units. This makes it more difficult for college graduates to meet the needs of society.

Investigation in 2006

In 2006, Ma Xinbang conducted a questionnaire survey on the enterprise to assess levels of English skills in listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating of recruited college graduates in recent years. The respondents were 240 employees from 26 units in medicine and health, banking, insurance companies, and foreign trade companies. Statistical analysis of findings indicates that listening and speaking are the most widely used. The survey demonstrates that the use of English is quite different in different positions. It also reflects a certain gap between the current English instruction and social expectations.

Investigation in 2007

In 2007, Wang Duqin made an in-depth investigation of social requirements for English. First, he calibrated the skills required for college English with reference to Common European Framework and then created a questionnaire on the basis of the calibration. He then surveyed 500 enterprises and institutions in Beijing concerning the situation of English at work and the requirement different enterprises and institutes set for college graduates in terms of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. Based on the analysis of social requirements, Wang developed a new framework with four levels of requirements for listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation, with an indication of the requirements of different enterprises and positions for English. It was found that though English is not so frequently used at work, the requirement is not very low, especially in speaking and reading. The survey reveals the diverse requirements of different enterprises and posts for different skills of English.

Investigation in 2011

In 2011, Hu Xuewen investigated the English proficiency of the staff and the university graduates, in order to understand the social requirement of English for non-English major graduates in colleges and universities. The investigation involved hundreds of employers, including governments and institutions, state-owned enterprises, private (private) enterprises, foreign-funded enterprises, colleges and universities and research centers. The survey shows that the best-needed English language skill is listening and speaking. College English teaching should attach more importance to listening and speaking. Being able to read technical documents and to do daily oral communication in English are the two most important skills related to practical business. The investigation suggests that college English should be integrated with

specific requirements of different posts at work.

Summary

Since the 1980s, every few years, some scholars would do a wide range of investigations of social needs. However, previous studies mainly employed questionnaires as the technique for data collection and tend to focus on whether English is badly needed or frequently used, which skill is most demanded, and so on. Although there are investigations on specific requirements for listening, speaking, reading and writing, which reveal the diverse requirements for listening, speaking, reading and writing, they fail to reflect the real needs of different enterprises and institutes. What type of tasks are staff required to do at work? What difference do they have from the type of tasks students do in college? How well can college students handle such tasks? Is there any relevance between the requirements of the course of college English and the social requirements of different institutions or enterprises? Former studies, due to their technique for data collection, fail to answer these questions. There is a need to conduct further study in this respect, and this is what the present study is to focus on.

Subjects

Due to the limitation of funds and manpower, this study chooses sophomore non-English majors at the Beijing Institute of Petrochemical Technology as subjects. The students come from different departments and are of various majors, including accounting, international trade, public administration and mechanical engineering.

Objectives

The present study is aimed to:

1. Identify the type of tasks students need to do when they enter enterprises to work
2. Assess how well college students can fulfill the tasks at work
3. Explore the relevance of college English to social requirements.
4. Explore contextual College English Curricula which cater to learners' needs.
5. Develop an authentic assessment model to meet the social requirements.

Data collection and analysis

This study mainly draws upon two types of data: authentic materials from companies and test results. For authentic materials from companies, qualitative analysis will be made in terms of what the employees are required to do, and the requirement of different materials for workers. This is to reveal the type of tasks students might be faced with when they serve in certain companies in the future. The test results will be analyzed with SPSS 11.5 to examine how well students can fulfill the tasks. The analysis will be made of students' performance in finishing the tasks and their performance in their mid-term examination to find the relevance of college English to social requirements.

Procedure

1. Select companies and get firsthand material from those companies
2. Analyze the material from companies and design the tasks according to the material
3. Invite the employers to evaluate the design of tasks, and devise a test after all requirements are met
4. Distribute and retrieve the test paper and read over all the test papers with the companies' help.
5. Analyze the data with the research tool SPSS 11.5
6. Present the findings and discussions on paper

Analysis of research

Former studies seem to show that there are some differences between social tasks and what they do at college. After we have made the questionnaires, telephone interview, E-mail interview, manual and other materials, then we made a brief analysis of the data. Analysis of the authentic materials in this study reveals that the difference does not simply lie in the type of tasks students are to complete, but also in the text they read. Analysis of the materials employees encounter at work and the tasks they are supposed to complete reveals that there is a huge difference between social tasks and what students do at college. Reading in vocational tasks is mainly for obtaining information, accomplishing tasks and solving problems, which is much different from the reading in the course of College English. When students have never read such materials, and have never attempted to complete such tasks, how well can they perform when they step into society and are required to do these things? In the following chapter, an analysis of the research findings may help us to get a clear picture of students' performance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Students' performance in vocational tasks

The test of vocational tasks employed in this study is

Statistics

total score in vocational task

N	Valid	149
	Missing	0
Mean		42.1477
Median		44.0000
Std. Deviation		14.81935
Skewness		-.291
Std. Error of Skewness		.199
Minimum		6.00
Maximum		77.00

Figure 2. Correlation between students' performance at college and that in vocational tasks.

aimed at assessing how well students can fulfill the tasks at work. Statistical analysis of students' performance shows that though students' performance at college may be excellent, they are not qualified for vocational tasks in terms of their ability to apply English to doing things. Students' performance in the vocational task seems to suggest that they have a long way to go to meet the social requirement.

Total score

Analysis of students' overall performance shows that students still cannot meet the requirements of enterprises and institutions. As can be seen from Figure 6, the mean score is only 42.1477; the maximum score is only 77 while there are students who can only score 6 points. There is a big gap between college English and social requirements. They are not qualified for vocational tasks in terms of their ability to use English to do things according to the analysis of data (Figure 2).

There is little co-efficiency between students' reading at college and their reading in vocational tasks

In the test of vocational tasks, four tasks require the students to read. To analyze whether there is relevance between college English reading and vocational reading, a comparison was made between students' performance in the vocational test and students' performance in their mid-term examinations. Analysis of the comparison indicates that there is little co-efficiency between the two (Figures 3 and 4). Surprisingly, there is a slightly negative co-efficiency between students' reading in the mid-term examination and their reading of the email. In the test of vocational tasks, students read for specific information. That is, the purpose of reading is not like in the CET4 test

or the mid-examination. Students are not required to make inferences, analyze the structure, or logic, make deductions, and so on. What they need to do is to know what the customer wants them to do. The slightly negative co-efficiency implies that simply training students for the test in college or CET4 cannot prepare students for their work.

There is little relevance between students' writing in college and their writing on a test of vocational tasks

Comparison analysis of data indicates that there is little co-efficiency between students' writing performance in the mid-term examination and their vocational writing task. In CET4 or examinations at college, writing remains narration-oriented and argumentation-oriented, but in vocational contexts, for example in this test, writing is more task-based. Students write to communicate, solve problems, and so on. So writing in the workplace does not only require students to express themselves logically in coherent discourse but also show their professional awareness, culture and good effect. Non-coefficiency between writing in college and writing in the workplace implies that we cannot expect to cultivate the type of competence just through the course of English in college (Figure 5).

There exists some co-efficiency between students' performance in translation in college and their performance in translation in vocational tests

The Requirement has set a requirement for translation and translation is thus included in nearly all tests at college, not excluding CET4 and 6 of course. However, what students are required to do is just complete the sentences through the translation of phrases, which is not

Correlations

		reading achievement in mid-term exam	sales contract in vocational task	quality/quanity discrepancy and claim in vocational task	email reading in vocational task
reading achievement in mid-term exam	Pearson Correlation	1	.007	.006	-.007
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.928	.945	.930
	N	149	149	149	149
sales contract in vocational task	Pearson Correlation	.007	1	-.001	.238*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.928	.	.993	.004
	N	149	149	149	149
quality/ quanity discrepancy and claim in vocational task	Pearson Correlation	.006	-.001	1	.151
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.945	.993	.	.066
	N	149	149	149	149
email reading in vocational task	Pearson Correlation	-.007	.238*ᵃ	.151	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.930	.004	.066	.
	N	149	149	149	149

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 3. Correlations between reading at college and in the workplace.

Correlations

		fast reading in mid-term exam	sales contract in vocational task	quality/ quantity discrepancy and claim in vocational task	mail reading in vocational task
fast reading in mid-term exam	Pearson Correlation	1	-.139	.050	-.078
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.160	.611	.431
	N	104	104	104	104
sales contract in vocational task	Pearson Correlation	-.139	1	-.008	.058
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.160	.	.938	.558
	N	104	104	104	104
quality/ quantity discrepancy and claim in vocational task	Pearson Correlation	.050	-.008	1	.268*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.611	.938	.	.006
	N	104	104	104	104
mail reading in vocational task	Pearson Correlation	-.078	.058	.268*ᵃ	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.431	.558	.006	.
	N	104	104	104	104

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 4. Correlations between reading at college and in the workplace.

a translation in the real sense, but a test of memory. But in workplaces, what students are supposed to translate is a complete introduction of a product. Though there is some co-efficiency between the two, the correlation is not significant enough (p = .07). Therefore, the practice of sentence completion translation might not cultivate the

Correlations

		writing in mid-term exam	reply e-mail in vocational task
writing in mid-term exam	Pearson Correlation	1	.118
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.152
	N	149	149
reply e-mail in vocational task	Pearson Correlation	.118	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.152	.
	N	149	149

Figure 5. Correlations between writing in college and the workplace.

Correlations

		translation in mid-term exam	translation in vocational task
translation in mid-term exam	Pearson Correlation	1	.149
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.070
	N	149	149
translation in vocational task	Pearson Correlation	.149	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.070	.
	N	149	149

Figure 6. Correlations between translation in college and the workplace.

type of ability needed for translation at work. It is necessary to conduct translation practice with reference to translation requirements in vocational tasks (Figure 6).

There is little co-efficiency between students' knowledge of vocabulary and their performance in tests of social tasks

Vocabulary has always been considered a basis for the predictor of one's language proficiency, without which nothing can be expressed. However, comparison analysis of data indicates that there is little relevance between students' performance in vocabulary and structures and their performance in vocational tasks. It shows vocabulary is important but it is not everything (Figure 7).

There is significant co-efficiency between students' overall performance in college and their performance in vocational tasks

Though there is little relevance between students' reading in college and reading at work, between their writing in college and writing at work, there is significant relevance between their total performance at college and their total performance in vocational tasks. This implies that the higher the score students obtain in a mid-term examination, the better they can meet the social requirements (Figure 8).

Summary

Analysis of students' performance in vocational tests shows that there is little relevance between what students do in college and how well they can do in vocational tasks. It implies that even though when students can get a high score in CET4, it does not necessarily mean they can understand the manuals, and e-mails they encounter at work. Even though they can score very high in writing and translation in their examinations at college, it does not necessarily mean they can deal with vocational tasks with success. However, when students' overall performance is considered, we can find a significant correlation between the two. It seems to tell us if students

Correlations

		vocabulary and structures in mid-term exam	sales contract in vocational task	quality/ quantity discrepancy and claim in vocational task	reply e-mail in vocational task	mail reading in vocational task	translation in vocational task
vocabulary and structures in mid-term exam	Pearson Correlation	1	-.013	-.176	-.042	-.038	.130
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.903	.102	.700	.724	.229
	N	88	88	88	88	88	88
sales contract in vocational task	Pearson Correlation	-.013	1	-.062	.174	.139	.052
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.903	.	.567	.106	.196	.631
	N	88	88	88	88	88	88
quality/ quantity discrepancy and claim in vocational task	Pearson Correlation	-.176	-.062	1	.283*	.223*	.214*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.102	.567	.	.008	.037	.045
	N	88	88	88	88	88	88
reply e-mail in vocational task	Pearson Correlation	-.042	.174	.283*	1	.308*	.552*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.700	.106	.008	.	.004	.000
	N	88	88	88	88	88	88
mail reading in vocational task	Pearson Correlation	-.038	.139	.223*	.308*	1	.507*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.724	.196	.037	.004	.	.000
	N	88	88	88	88	88	88
translation in vocational task	Pearson Correlation	.130	.052	.214*	.552*	.507*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.229	.631	.045	.000	.000	.
	N	88	88	88	88	88	88

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Figure 7. Correlations between vocabulary at college and performance in the workplace.

Correlations

		total score in mid-term exam	total score in vocational task
total score in mid-term exam	Pearson Correlation	1	.263*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.001
	N	149	149
total score in vocational task	Pearson Correlation	.263*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.
	N	149	149

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 8. Correlations between performance in college and the workplace.

can do well in college, they can do better in workplaces. Anyway, it does not mean that college English instruction can cultivate the type of abilities needed in workplaces. There is still a big gap between college English and social requirements.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to uncover the real social requirement for

English and whether there is a relevance between students' performance in College and their performance at work. It is found from this study that there is a correlation between students' overall performance in college English test and their performance in vocational tasks, which implies that the better they do in college, the better they will perform in their future careers.

It is also found that there is little relevance between students' reading in college and reading at work, and between their writing in college and writing at work. This

may be because the type of text they read, and the type of tasks they are to complete at work are quite different from what they read and complete in college. College English instruction still cannot cultivate the type of abilities that they need in their future work.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDY

Limitations

The low or even non- coefficiency between reading, writing and translation at work and those in college, on the one hand, suggest that the current course of College English cannot meet the social requirement for English, on the other hand, it suggests the current tools of assessment cannot evaluate the type of abilities that enterprises and institutions require. There is still a great gap between the standards of college English and the requirement of society. To meet the needs of society, and to produce the type of talent for society, there is a great need for the course of College English to adjust their standards, objectives, content, and evaluation with reference to the social requirement.

Further study

To find the actual requirement of different enterprises and companies, and to provide relevant instruction to students according to their future needs, there is the necessity to conduct an investigation on a larger scale, involving more institutions and more subjects.

  It was also found that when curriculum requirements and social requirements are integrated into learner needs, learners would be more motivated, and they learn better. However, one semester's study seemed to indicate what learners care about most was not a social requirement, but a summative assessment of the course. There must be some further study about how to incorporate curriculum requirements and social requirements into learners' needs.

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