

Research on the Reform of College English Oral Teaching in Applied Undergraduate Colleges

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Abstract: Improving students' practical abilities is an important part of the educational teaching in the applied undergraduate colleges. Oral English ability is a key educational goal for college students to improve their English proficiency. Nevertheless, it is still not very effective at present, as far as our oral English teaching is concerned. This paper first investigates the current situation and problems in oral English teaching at applied undergraduate colleges. It further discusses the suitable teaching models of the college and puts forward some effective suggestions for improvement, aiming to provide more efficient talent development.

Keywords: Applied undergraduate colleges; College English; Oral teaching

Online publication: September 18, 2025

1. Introduction

Roused by national education policies and actively promoted, undergraduate education has become a main characteristic of the education system. Under this backdrop, English, as one of the important means for technical exchange and cultural interaction across the world, has also gained increasing attention, and spoken English ability, one of the core competencies for practical workers, has been particularly emphasized in the Ministry of Education's College English Teaching Guide (2020 Edition)^[1]. Although people have already realized the importance of spoken English, many applied undergraduate colleges do not pay enough attention to oral English teaching. This is because they place greater emphasis on cultivating the ability to practice skills and techniques in practice.

Currently, students of non-English majors in applied undergraduate colleges all encounter the "muteness" of English to some extent. Studies indicate that approximately 4.98% of students are "very good" in oral English according to self-evaluation, and more than three-fourths of the students encounter various difficulties, including their poor fluency and expressions, inappropriate conversation, and rather poor language expressions for communicating and work^[2]. This scenario indicates a severe imbalance exists between the methods taught by

conventional oral English classes and the skills necessary for applied professionals. Wang Jingjing has indicated that, under the professional application-oriented English teaching in oral teaching, there are still some problems, including an overemphasis on theory at the expense of practice, limited teaching methods, and disparities in students' foundational English proficiency. This leads to the fact that the efficiency of professional application-oriented oral English teaching is not high. Students still fail to meet market demands in actual employment ^[3]. So, this paper starts from the state of teaching of college English oral in the applied undergraduate colleges, in order to find effective teaching means and improve the applied English oral teaching.

2. The current situation of college English oral teaching in applied undergraduate colleges

At present, the college oral English teaching in applied undergraduate institutions is facing various challenges, and the current situation is not optimistic. The author will conduct an analysis from three aspects: the design of the college English curriculum, students' English proficiency and motivation levels, and teachers' teaching models.

2.1. Issues in college English curriculum design and the neglect of oral English instruction

For so long a time, college English teaching has neglected oral English teaching. Although enthusiasm for English education continues to grow in China, Chinese students' competence in oral English is still not satisfactory in general. Taking Xiangtan Institute of Technology, where the author works, as an example, in the setting of college English courses, the course content is usually divided into two main parts: the Comprehensive Course and the Video-Audio-oral Course. These two parts correspond to two different textbooks, respectively, aiming to comprehensively improve students' English abilities. However, in the actual course arrangement, the Comprehensive Course occupies the vast majority of class hours, while the proportion of class hours for the Video-Audio-oral Course is very small.

Take the arrangement of a college English course for sophomores as an example, only two class hours of English teaching per week and a total of 32 class hours per semester, of which only 8 class hours are for the Video-Audio-oral Course, so there is a very brief exercise time for students to practice spoken English. In this way, the situation becomes more severe in junior and senior years, due to there not being any college English lessons given in these two years, and students losing the opportunity to further exercise and enhance their oral English skills. This unevenness in teaching targets of courses has caused a severe lack of students' oral English training opportunities. Insufficient oral training opportunities caused students to be helpless in actual English communication. And the phenomenon not only influences the improvement of students' personal English ability, but also has adverse effects on the future employment of students' working competition strength.

Then, most applied undergraduate colleges have not yet established a complete oral English curriculum system. In these colleges, oral English teaching is usually integrated into the college English audio-visual speaking courses, and no special oral English proficiency assessment mechanism has been established. Gao Dexin and Yu Xiujin pointed out that although many universities have offered reading, writing, and listening courses for non-English major students, students "hardly have the opportunity to speak", and the oral English teaching part in reading and writing classes is just "skimming over the surface" ^[4]. Due to the lack of attention to oral English teaching, both teachers and students generally pay little attention to this skill. As a result, oral

English teaching often only stays on the surface form and fails to be effectively implemented, thus leading to insignificant teaching results.

2.2. Students with weak academic foundations and low levels of learning motivation

Learning motivation can be understood as the inclination to start and sustain different types of learning behaviors. It functions as an internal driving force that encourages students to actively engage in educational activities. Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, learning motivation can be divided into two main categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation arises from internal learning needs, such as a learner's curiosity or interest in the subject matter. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is influenced by external factors, such as encouragement from parents, praise from teachers, or job-related demands, which serve as incentives to learn.

The undergraduate college students of non-English majors think college English courses are not a key part of their majors, they don't care about college English courses, and have no interest in college English courses. Compared with English major students, non-English major students have a relatively weak "language knowledge system (including vocabulary, morphology, and syntax)." They often encounter obstacles in oral communication due to insufficient vocabulary^[5]. The author observes that students in applied undergraduate colleges generally have a weak foundation in English. It is quite difficult for students to express their ideas smoothly in oral English classes. Gradually, they become less and less confident in their oral English ability. In addition, most Chinese students are more introverted and are unwilling to communicate with others in class about their minds and thoughts, let alone communicate with strangers. Without practice, their oral English cannot be improved. A survey demonstrates that Chinese students' poor oral English skills are caused by a lack of confidence and anxiety about learning a second language. Lack of good oral expression leads to a lack of ability to transmit English messages. There are mainly four reasons for foreign language anxiety: students with a pessimistic attitude to the classroom environment, afraid to communicate, afraid of being criticized, and afraid of examinations. In this way, most students lack motivation for speaking English^[6].

Regarding the system of college English education, college students receive only English courses in their freshman and sophomore years. In this period, college students have just ended the hard study life in high school, and then they have a relatively high and free period of college life. They may lose interest in studies and lack the sense of initiative, resulting in a passive attitude of passively listening to teachers. Second, some students feel that their future work English application is very limited, and they have not realized the importance of English learning from an international perspective. This lack of external motivation also results in a poor learning effect of college English due to students' slow oral English learning.

2.3. The oversimplified teaching mode and the outdated teaching methodology

The main purpose of college English teaching is to cultivate students' comprehensive skills and application abilities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, enabling them to conduct daily cross-cultural communication, so as to enhance students' comprehensive cultural qualities and cross-cultural awareness, and to promote traditional Chinese culture in English^[7]. However, at the applied undergraduate colleges, college English teaching often places too much emphasis on final exam scores and the passing rate of the college English test. Teachers spend a great deal of time explaining vocabulary and grammar and conducting intensive training on problem-solving skills for the college English Test Band 4 and Band 6. This leads to an excessive

emphasis on the one-way input of English language knowledge and British and American cultures in teaching. In the traditional teaching model, teachers play the role of instillers in the teaching activities, “teacher’s presentation” being the center of classroom activities, while students just passively receive knowledge, which leads to the students’ neglect of their active learning. The author still witnesses some teachers using very traditional educational thinking and methods. As can be seen from some oral English classes, in the traditional situation, the language education between teachers and students is infrequent; This conventional “one-size-fits-all” teaching method does not address the different learning styles and needs of students^[8].

The English course, as a foundation course for colleges and universities, is usually taught by only one teacher and attended by dozens, or even hundreds, of students. From observation of classroom teaching, most of the teachers adopt a teacher-centered classroom teaching model, which emphasizes the presentation and interpretation of the knowledge points in the textbook step by step. However, this approach tends to limit the opportunities for students’ independent study, critical thinking, and oral practice, resulting in poor and insufficient student initiative in class, a lack of motivation, feeling bored in class, and a one-way knowledge transmission still dominates in class. Secondly, students lack sufficient opportunities for oral expression and practice in English classes, and their oral English proficiency falls far short of expectations.

3. Strategies for reforming college English oral teaching in the context of applied talent development

To break through the current difficulties in college English oral teaching and effectively serve the goal of cultivating applied talents, teaching reform must identify key entry points and advance systematically. First, traditional perceptions should be transformed to elevate the status of oral instruction within the overall curriculum system. Second, stimulating students’ learning interest is a critical link in the reform. Only by prioritizing oral teaching in mindset and effectively mobilizing students’ learning motivation can a solid ideological foundation and sustained momentum for reform be provided. Ultimately, the realization of teaching effectiveness relies on substantive innovation in classroom teaching models.

3.1. Giving oral English training a high priority and establishing a diversified and vibrant learning atmosphere

To study language, the oral is the most important step. To listen is the basis of speaking, while listening and speaking are good for reading and writing. The more chances students are given to get in touch with English, the stronger their comprehensive ability to grasp English will be. At present, applied undergraduate colleges usually attach importance to the cultivation of their characteristic and advantageous disciplines, but there are still relatively insufficient investments in college English teaching, especially in college students’ oral English teaching. With the progress of society, especially due to the trend of economic globalization, China’s international exchanges have become increasingly close. Thus, proficient oral English communication has become a crucial factor to enhance students’ professional competitiveness.

Applied undergraduate colleges have to make the instruction of oral English a top priority in their strategic development plan by adding it. This includes providing systematic support in areas such as course design, the allocation of teaching resources, and the development of teaching staff. Firstly, educators might appropriately increase the proportion of oral English teaching in the course system to guarantee the students’ adequate opportunities for practice and experience. After that, educators should introduce advanced teaching

aids to enrich teaching methods and increase the interaction and efficiency of English learning. Meanwhile, a professional development program for oral English teachers should be conducted to improve their teaching skills and overall abilities for maintaining a high level of teaching quality. This strategy is expected to improve the students' oral English ability and their competitiveness in the job market.

Furthermore, application-oriented undergraduate colleges should also establish a genuine English learning environment for their students. According to Numan, a key principle in teaching oral English is offering learners ample chances to use the language in meaningful and relevant contexts^[9]. For instance, at Xiangtan Institute of Technology, where the author is employed, the college—oriented towards practical application—has held diverse English-related events, including English conversation gatherings, English speaking competitions, and multilingual voice-over contests. These initiatives not only enhance students' campus experiences but also foster greater enthusiasm for learning English.

3.2. Applying established teaching theories to effectively stimulate students' motivation in learning oral English

Linguist Giles emphasizes that the drive to acquire a second language plays a crucial role in achieving proficiency^[10]. Clearly defined learning objectives can foster a positive mindset. For instance, goals such as “desiring to understand the cultures of English-speaking countries” or “aspiring to communicate with international peers” serve as strong motivators. A critical challenge that oral English instructors must address is how to integrate well-established pedagogical theories into spoken language instruction and effectively inspire students' enthusiasm for learning oral English.

Wen Qiufang was a professor in the China Foreign Language Education Research Center of Beijing Foreign Studies University in 2015. She took the lead in a research group led by the combined major outcomes in Second Language Acquisition, such as Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Swain's Output Hypothesis. According to comprehensive research on the situation in foreign language education in China today, Wen advocated a new China-oriented method of foreign language teaching — The Production-Oriented Approach (POA)^[11]. This theoretical system consists of three parts: teaching concepts (learning-centered theory, integrated learning and application theory, and holistic education theory), teaching assumptions (output-driven, input-facilitated, and selective learning), and teaching processes mediated by teachers (driving, facilitating, and evaluating).

There are currently many scholars who have examined teaching design issues within the context of the Production Oriented Approach (POA) at different phases of the teaching process, such as the “driving” phase and the “facilitating” phase^[12–13]. In addition, ample empirical evidence has shown that following this theoretical teaching model can help improve students' listening and speaking skills. In the long process, the POA has become a relatively mature teaching pattern in China, and teachers can learn relevant teaching plans put forward by some scholars for reference in their teaching. In oral English teaching, by guiding the teaching pattern of POA, the students are not a passive “spectator”, and they need to become the subject of every learning phase. In the driving phase, students converse and choose materials of English to be taught by the instructor from practical situations to foster the learning interest. In the facilitating phase, students work in groups, interact with each other, accomplish spoken tasks and express their opinions, and then improve their oral skills in English. Based on the author's conviction, using the Production-Oriented Approach in university oral English courses can enhance students' enthusiasm for studying oral English courses and remarkably enhance students'

oral expression ability.

3.3. Transforming the oral English teaching model

Because the class hours for English in college are limited, students rarely get speaking practice in class. As a result, the oral communication skills of college students tend to be poor because they do not have enough time to practice speaking, which affects their oral proficiency performance. Under the constant development of internet technology, the traditional teaching mode can no longer arouse the students' passion and satisfy their various learning requirements, so applying the modern teaching aids to teaching can effectively enrich teaching modes and stimulate students' learning passion. For instance, artificial intelligence can help educators promote a switch from a teacher-centered education to a learner-centered one. AI in education has gradually developed, and its influence on learning English has been an ever-increasing research interest ^[14].

Firstly, artificial intelligence — particularly in the form of adaptive learning — makes possible the shift from the more conventional, lecturer-dominated paradigm to learner-oriented education. For example, as educators use data-driven algorithms to dynamically adapt the teaching content, teaching methods, and teaching pace of the students based on the interests, knowledge level, and interaction status of the students, a highly personalized and efficient learning process (i.e., highly efficient and effective teaching) will be achieved. Teachers can use AI technologies to collect students' learning information, like learning records, learning levels, and lack of learning content, and then formulate personalized learning plans, such as recommending suitable practice materials for learning students' speech features. Furthermore, based on the class students' statistical information, teachers can dynamically adjust teaching knowledge points and teaching methods, so as to achieve better targets for the majority of students. Moreover, the personalized learning powered by the AI, as well as various and open teaching resources provided by AI, enables the students to break through the boundary of time and space of traditional classrooms; This fosters active learning by granting access to a wealth of educational materials, promoting the development of self-directed learning abilities and a mindset oriented toward lifelong learning ^[15].

Then, with the help of AI, educators can transform the teaching models into more multimodal and innovative modes. Multimodal education provided by AI brings fresh vigor, in that multimedia delivery modes—visual, auditory, and tactile information—are merged in order to form a relaxing and intimate learning atmosphere to decrease students' oral expression anxiety. The extension with AI allows multimodal teaching to have intelligence and personalization. It can analyze students' learning habits and proficiency levels, customize matching multimodal materials (such as dialogue scenarios that combine videos, images, and sounds), evaluate oral practice in real time, and provide precise feedback (such as correcting pronunciation and grammar mistakes), which enables students to efficiently improve their oral English skills in a diverse environment and AI integrate with VR technology provide immersive teaching. Students can participate in role-playing exercises and interact with virtual characters within simulated real-life scenarios—such as dining establishments, hotels, and international conferences. In this way, students can greatly improve their oral communication skills as well as their ability to think and respond spontaneously.

Lastly, with the AI-assisted assessments, in the long run, the evaluation systems can evolve toward greater objectivity and a focus on continuous progress. Traditional oral assessment systems heavily depend on manual assessments, which leads to a lack of consistency and precision. The intelligent evaluation platform adopts NLP and artificial intelligence technology for the full and real-time assessment of multiple attributes of students'

oral situation, including oral pronunciation, pitch, speaking speed, word expression, grammar, fluency, etc. This has promoted the transformation of the evaluation method from a single summative evaluation — mainly based on test scores, teacher-dominated, with students in a passive role — to a combination of summative and formative evaluations. The latter stresses the students' learning rather than the teacher's assessment, resulting in a more positive learning attitude for students. At the same time, it helps students develop gradually and timely manner because of its multivector character. Meanwhile, with its high objectivity and efficiency, compared to human evaluation, AI evaluation has attracted more attention in recent years. It offers in-depth information for individual learners' problematic points, which greatly lowers the burden of teachers' evaluation work and helps teachers better focus on each student's customized learning demands and differences. Meanwhile, real-time analysis can help teachers understand teaching problems, develop teaching plans, and finally enhance the effectiveness of teaching.

Artificial intelligence's profound application in college English oral teaching is unfolding a profound revolution in the education system, which has made teaching more efficient and effective via intelligent teaching methods, personalized teaching, and intelligent evaluation.

4. Conclusion

So far, the oral English skills of most university students can only be trained in oral English courses. There are still some important factors that greatly hinder the training of spoken English: The curriculum for spoken English is unscientific and impractical to implement; there is a lack of systematic instruction from instructors; oral abilities are not emphasized; students lack inner motivation; there is a lack of fully immersive foreign language environments; and the conventional classroom teaching model has drawbacks, etc. If the applied undergraduate colleges want to make the oral English teaching better, then the active cooperation between teachers and students must be required. On one hand, the applied undergraduate colleges should take proactive steps to organize various oral English activities and optimize the specialized teaching staff training and development. On the other hand, teachers ought to go beyond the traditional and monotonous teaching methods, use artificial intelligence in teaching and update their teaching methods, and accept more fashionable teaching methods, such as the Production-Oriented Approach, to improve oral English teaching and stimulate students' active participation to the largest extent. Therefore, besides the guidance from educators, college students as active subjects in oral English learning must also see the importance of oral English, regulate learning attitudes, and actively participate in class activities. As a result, only joint efforts among colleges, teachers, and students can effectively resolve the issue of "dumb English" among college students, thereby cultivating high-quality, well-rounded talents for the country.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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