Innovation and Enlightenment of Spoken English Competition for English Teaching in China's Higher Vocational Colleges

Zhiyong Long

Anhui Business College, Wuhu, China

Abstract: **Against the backdrop of globalization, English teaching in higher vocational colleges needs to enhance students' English application abilities to meet social demands. The Spoken English Competition for Higher Vocational Colleges has evolved with a rigorous competition system and diverse question types, aiming to improve students' English application capabilities and promote teaching reforms. Current challenges in higher vocational English teaching include traditional teaching concepts, curriculum content disjointed from vocational needs, uneven student proficiency levels, and single-dimensional evaluation systems. The competition has driven a shift toward "student-centered" teaching concepts, optimized teaching designs, updated teaching content, and promoted diversified teaching evaluations. Based on the competition, higher vocational English teaching should adopt vocational competency-oriented curriculum design, apply diverse teaching methods, leverage online resources and modern educational technologies, and build a diversified teaching evaluation system. Future reforms in higher vocational English teaching must deepen, using the competition to further optimize instruction and cultivate high-quality skilled talents adaptable to social development.**

Keywords: **Higher Vocational Colleges; Spoken English Competition; English Teaching; Vocational Competence; Teaching Evaluation.**

I. INTRODUCTION

In an era of close international exchanges, English is crucial for higher vocational students to integrate into global environments and expand career opportunities. With the development of higher vocational education, the requirements for English teaching have increased, but traditional teaching models—characterized by single methods and content divorced from reality—restrict the improvement of students' English abilities. Against this backdrop, the Spoken English Competition for Higher Vocational Colleges, which examines students' oral communication skills in workplace contexts, has emerged as a platform for student display. This paper explores the relationship between the competition and higher vocational English teaching, analyzes its impact on teaching (such as stimulating learning motivation and promoting teaching method innovation), and provides insights for teaching reforms to enhance talent cultivation quality. As a response to the challenges of traditional higher vocational English teaching, the competition undertakes the mission of reforming instruction and improving students' practical English skills, powerfully driving the transformation of teaching models and optimization of content.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE SPOKEN ENGLISH COMPETITION FOR HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGES

1. Development History and Current Status of the Competition In the early 21st century, the Spoken English Competition for Higher Vocational Colleges emerged with the growth of economic development and international exchange needs. The "National Higher Vocational and Technical College Practical Spoken English Competition," launched in 2004, has continuously improved its competition system—evolving from a focus on basic expression to incorporating scenario communication, workplace description, on-site debate, and other links to comprehensively assess students' comprehensive abilities. The competition's scale has also expanded significantly, from involving a few regions to covering more than 30

provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions nationwide, with millions of participants. In 2021, the final round attracted over 100,000 online and offline viewers. The competition's content has shifted from campus life to workplace applications and added a "Chinese Stories" segment to cultivate cultural communication capabilities.

2. Analysis of the Competition System and Question Types The competition adopts a three-tiered selection system: preliminary, semi-final, and final rounds. The preliminary round examines basic expression through campus-themed speeches; the semi-final incorporates workplace simulation scenarios; and the final round includes "Chinese Stories" narration, workplace debates, and other components to comprehensively test abilities. With diverse question types—such as impromptu speeches (assessing language and cultural proficiency), on-the-spot descriptions (exercising information extraction and logical expression), scenario communication (simulating real-life situations), and debates (requiring high-level thinking, expression, and teamwork skills)—the competition evaluates multiple dimensions of competence.

3. Purpose and Objectives of the Competition The Spoken English Competition aims to cultivate higher vocational students' oral expression abilities and their comprehensive competence to communicate proficiently in English in workplace settings, while driving other disciplines to cultivate high-skilled talents to international fields and reserve international talent (Deng Wei, 2022). Through diverse competition formats, it enhances students' listening and speaking skills and adaptability. From a talent cultivation perspective, the competition promotes the improvement of students' comprehensive qualities, fostering innovative and critical thinking as well as cross-cultural communication awareness. For teaching, it urges teachers to update concepts, optimize content, and adopt teaching methods such as group collaboration and scenario-based instruction. Today, the competition has become a showcase for the achievements of higher vocational English education, prompting institutions to adjust strategies and facilitating the reform and development of higher vocational English education.

III. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT STATUS OF HIGHER VOCATIONAL ENGLISH TEACHING

1. Teaching Concepts and Models for a long time, due to the relatively weak English foundation of higher vocational students, traditional teacher-centered English teaching has dominated, with instructors delivering knowledge in a "cramming" style from textbooks (Shao Dan, 2020). Teachers control the classroom, teaching knowledge according to fixed syllabus and textbooks, while students passively receive information like "containers" for knowledge. When explaining grammar, teachers directly present rules and examples, with students passively listening and taking notes, lacking opportunities for active thinking. This creates dull and uninteresting classrooms, dampening students' enthusiasm, restricting their thinking, and hindering the realization of their potential. The "cramming" model lacks specificity and individuation. Higher vocational students have diverse English foundations and learning abilities, making it difficult to accommodate everyone with uniform teaching content and pacing. In large classes, teachers cannot pay attention to each student: those with weak foundations fall behind and lose confidence, while those with stronger skills find the content too simple and lose motivation. This "one-size-fits-all" approach hinders teaching tailored to students' aptitudes and their all-around development. Moreover, the model prioritizes knowledge imparting over practical application, with teaching centered on textbooks and disconnected from real-life and workplace scenarios. Students may master knowledge but struggle to apply it in actual communication—for example, lacking workplace English expressions and communication skills in professional contexts, which affects job performance and prevents knowledge from being transformed into practical abilities, failing to meet social and career development needs.

2. Teaching Content and Curriculum Design Higher vocational English teaching content is severely disconnected from vocational needs, and curricula prioritize theory over practice, restricting the cultivation of students' professional capabilities. In terms of content, many higher vocational English textbooks have not been updated to keep pace with contemporary vocational developments, with topics and scenarios divorced from real workplaces. For instance, textbooks often focus on campus life and daily conversations while neglecting common modern workplace English applications such as cross-border e-commerce and international business negotiations. Take cross-border e-commerce—a booming field due to internet development—as an example: existing textbooks lack content on platform operations, customer communication, and trade terminology, leaving students unable to engage with real workplace English scenarios, resulting in a significant gap between what they learn and job requirements, and making it difficult to adapt to positions after graduation. In curriculum design, the emphasis on theory over practice is prominent. Theoretical courses account for a large proportion of teaching time, with basic English, grammar, and reading taking precedence, while practical courses such as speaking, translation, and workplace English application have insufficient class hours. Practical teaching is often limited to simple classroom simulations, far removed from real work scenarios. For example, role-playing simple dialogues in speaking practice lacks authenticity and challenge, failing to exercise students' practical adaptability and communication skills and meeting the needs of professional competence development.

3. Students' English Proficiency and Learning Attitudes Higher vocational students exhibit uneven English proficiency and problematic learning attitudes, posing challenges to teaching. Student backgrounds are diverse, including those from general high schools, secondary vocational schools, and single-enrollment pathways. General high school students may have some grammar and vocabulary foundations, with some achieving good college entrance exam scores in English; secondary vocational students often have weaker foundations, with neglected English curricula, limited vocabulary, shaky grammatical knowledge, and poor listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills; and some single-enrollment students also have unstable English foundations. Diverse student backgrounds and significant proficiency gaps make it difficult for teachers to set unified teaching goals and plans, failing to meet the needs of different learners. In terms of learning attitudes, some students lack enthusiasm for English. Those in majors with low English relevance may view English as less important for career development and prioritize professional skills over language learning—common among engineering students, who invest little time and effort in English. Others develop fear and aversion to English due to past learning setbacks, such as poor exam results or inadequate speaking skills, leading to low classroom participation, passive learning after class, and perfunctory homework. Additionally, some students use inappropriate learning methods, such as rote memorization of vocabulary and grammar, lacking understanding and application skills, and being unable to use knowledge flexibly. They may memorize words without focusing on usage and collocations, leading to errors in writing and speaking, while overly relying on teachers' classroom explanations, lacking autonomous learning abilities, and failing to utilize online courses and other learning resources.

4. Teaching Evaluation Systems Higher vocational English teaching evaluation overly relies on exam scores, with single-dimensional evaluation methods limiting teaching quality and student development. Dominated by exam results, evaluations focus on knowledge memorization and test-taking abilities, failing to reflect students' learning processes, attitudes, and comprehensive language application skills. Final exams primarily assess basic grammar and vocabulary knowledge, unable to test speaking, practical communication, and problem-solving abilities—students may achieve high scores through rote memorization but perform poorly in real-world communication. Single-exam evaluation leads to teaching content and methods becoming exam-oriented. Teachers teach according to exam syllabus, emphasizing knowledge points and test-taking skills while neglecting the cultivation of students' comprehensive language abilities and interest. The "sea of questions" approach makes teaching tedious, triggering student aversion, and reducing attention to speaking and listening training, resulting in unbalanced development of students' comprehensive English skills. Furthermore, this evaluation system dampens students' motivation and self-confidence—those with poor exam results may feel frustrated, doubt themselves, or even give up—while ignoring individual differences and restricting personalized development.

IV. ENLIGHTENMENT OF THE SPOKEN ENGLISH COMPETITION ON HIGHER VOCATIONAL ENGLISH TEACHIN

1. Transformation of Teaching Concepts The Spoken English Competition for Higher Vocational Colleges has driven a profound shift in teaching concepts from "teacher-centered" to "student-centered," emphasizing students' principal role and autonomous learning abilities. Under the traditional "teacher-centered" model, instructors dominate the classroom, teaching English knowledge according to fixed syllabus, with students passively receiving information and lacking opportunities for active thinking. Limited classroom interaction and low engagement make it difficult to motivate students or provide sufficient oral practice (Chen Shuang, Zhang Xiaohan, 2024). In contrast, the competition takes students as the main body, requiring them to independently collect materials, organize language, and conduct simulation training during preparation—urging teachers to transform their roles and return classroom autonomy to students. Under the "student-centered" concept, teachers focus on individual differences, design personalized teaching plans, and act as learning guides. In class, they organize activities such as group discussions and scenario simulations—for example, debating "how to improve performance in scenario communication" to allow students to exchange strategies independently, with teachers providing timely guidance to cultivate thinking and oral expression skills. This transformation has significantly enhanced students' autonomous learning abilities. No longer dependent on teachers, students actively expand their knowledge through reading English books and watching English films; during competition preparation, team collaboration training not only improves English proficiency but also cultivates teamwork and competitive awareness, which are crucial for students' future careers and social lives.

2. Optimization of Teaching Design The content and requirements of the Spoken English Competition are closely aligned with workplace realities, prompting teachers to introduce real work scenario tasks into teaching designs and adopt diversified teaching methods such as project-based and situational approaches to stimulate students' interest and improve their oral English application abilities. Project-based teaching has been widely applied in competition-based teaching

designs. Teachers decompose teaching content into specific projects, requiring students to complete tasks through group collaboration. In an "international business negotiation" project, students role-play representatives from different companies to negotiate cooperation projects, requiring market research, competitor analysis, strategy development, and English communication during negotiations. Throughout the project, students independently research, gather information, and make plans, fully leveraging their initiative. Group collaboration cultivates teamwork and communication skills, as students refine their ideas and plans through discussion, improving oral expression and problem-solving abilities. Situational teaching creates realistic language learning environments for students. Teachers use multimedia resources (e.g., images, videos, audio) to simulate various workplace scenarios, allowing students to practice oral English in context. When teaching "hotel service English," teachers play a video of front-desk reception and ask students to simulate dialogues between staff and guests, applying learned vocabulary and skills to handle check-ins, answer inquiries, and provide assistance. This immersive approach makes students feel the practical value of English, stimulating interest and enhancing speaking fluency and accuracy. The competition-driven optimization of teaching design has greatly sparked students' learning interest. No longer finding English boring, students actively participate in various activities. Through completing real workplace tasks and engaging in project-based and situational learning, they not only improve oral English but also develop professional qualities and comprehensive abilities, laying a solid foundation for future careers.

3. Updating of Teaching Content The Spoken English Competition has had a positive and profound impact on updating teaching content, prompting it to focus on workplace English and social hot topics, providing students with more practical and targeted learning materials to meet future career needs. With workplace English as its core, competition content covers diverse professional scenarios and tasks, increasing the proportion of workplace English in teaching. Teachers select and design major-specific workplace English materials based on students' vocational needs. For example, hotel management students may focus on English expressions and communication skills in scenarios like hotel reservations, front-desk reception, and room service (Hao Congrong, Wang Wengai, 2018). Such content helps students understand their majors' workplace English applications, master relevant vocabulary and expressions, and improve communication skills in professional settings. Social hot topics, another key competition focus, require teaching content to keep pace with the times. Teachers introduce current issues into classrooms for discussion and debate. When addressing environmental protection, for instance, they guide students to discuss global climate change and pollution in English, expressing opinions and suggestions. This not only improves English expression and critical thinking but also enhances social responsibility and mission. Additionally, teachers should encourage students to follow international affairs and cultural exchanges to cultivate global perspectives and cross-cultural communication abilities. To better integrate workplace English and social hot topics, teachers should develop school-based teaching materials and resources, compiling targeted textbooks and supplementary materials based on students' majors and vocational needs, and collecting case studies, videos, audio, and other resources to provide diverse learning materials. Online platforms can also be used to build digital resource libraries, offering anytime, anywhere learning opportunities to meet personalized needs.

4. Diversification of Teaching Evaluation The Spoken English Competition has promoted the shift from single to diversified teaching evaluation systems in higher vocational English, enhancing evaluation objectivity and effectiveness. Traditional evaluations, dominated by assumptive assessments (e.g. final exams), focus on exam scores and fail to reflect learning processes or comprehensive abilities. The competition, which emphasizes students' oral expression, adaptability, thinking, and teamwork during the event, has popularized formative and process evaluations. Formative evaluation assesses students' in-class performance, homework completion, and group participation to track progress (Zhang Zhanbo, Guan Liyuan, 2024); process evaluation continuously monitors learning dynamics, such as regularly assessing students' speaking fluency and vocabulary accuracy during competition preparation to adjust teaching strategies dynamically. The competition also breaks the monopoly of teacher-centered evaluation. Student self-evaluation allows reflection on task completion against standards to identify strengths and weaknesses; peer evaluation promotes communication in group activities—for example, mutual feedback during speaking practice cultivates critical thinking and teamwork while making evaluations more comprehensive and objective. Evaluation methods have also diversified. Beyond traditional exams and homework, oral presentations (e.g., themed speeches) assess expression and thinking; project reports evaluate comprehensive English application and project management skills after task completion; scenario simulations (e.g. business negotiations, hotel receptions) assess practical language use and adaptability. These diversified methods stimulate learning interest, comprehensively evaluate English competencies, and provide strong support for cultivating high-quality technical talents while guiding higher vocational English teaching reforms.

V. STRATEGIES FOR REFORMING HIGHER VOCATIONAL ENGLISH TEACHING BASED ON THE COMPETITION

1. Vocational Competency-Oriented Teaching Content Design Higher vocational English teaching reforms should design content based on vocational competencies, integrating professional scenarios to enhance students' workplace English application abilities. For example, different scenarios (school, restaurant, airport, bank, hotel, community, hospital, mall, tourist attraction) can be used to design corresponding oral training tasks (Shao Yi, 2024). Hotel management students might learn hotel English through "receptionist" case studies and simulate customer communication to strengthen English proficiency in hospitality settings; computer science students could focus on vocabulary like "hardware" and "CPU (Central Processing Unit)" to facilitate future technical exchanges. Teaching content should also integrate real work tasks. For example, marketing students might undertake an "international market promotion plan" project, working in groups to research and write English proposals, exercising both English and professional skills. Inviting industry experts to share cases can help students better understand vocational needs. Through case analysis and role-playing, cross-cultural communication abilities can be cultivated, along with professional ethics and teamwork skills, preparing students for career development.

2. Application of Diversified Teaching Methods Adopting diverse teaching methods is key to improving higher vocational English teaching quality. Teachers should leverage online and offline resources to implement hybrid teaching models, encourage the development of school-based materials, and adapt to local conditions and timeliness (Zhi Anli, 2025). Project-based teaching, as in an "international business negotiation" project for international economics and trade students, allows groups to negotiate while learning professional vocabulary and communication skills, fostering teamwork and autonomous learning. Situational teaching uses multimedia to create real language environments—for example, playing tourist attraction videos in travel English classes and asking students to simulate tour guides—to stimulate interest and improve speaking skills. Group collaborative learning assigns tasks like "English speeches" based on student proficiency, with members dividing responsibilities to enhance comprehensive English abilities. Task-driven teaching designs assignments (e.g. "English translation") to motivate learning and improve skills.

3. Utilization of Online Resources and Modern Educational Technologies Online resources and modern educational technologies offer new opportunities for higher vocational English teaching. Platforms like China University MOOC provide high-quality English courses across multiple fields for students to learn on demand. Apps such as Baicizhan and Liulishuo enable fragmented learning. Multimedia resources create vivid scenarios to boost engagement. Online learning platforms facilitate resource sharing, homework grading, and learning process tracking, providing data support for teaching evaluation. VR and AR technologies allow students to simulate visits to famous scenic spots, experience the cultures of English-speaking countries, enhance cross-cultural communication skills, and stimulate learning motivation. Through their rich forms and interactivity, fun learning resources provide students with immersive learning experiences, prompting them to participate more actively in learning and develop a positive learning attitude (Zhang Yuanyuan, 2025).

4. Building a Diversified Teaching Evaluation System Building a diversified teaching evaluation system is crucial. Classroom performance assesses students' initiative, participation in discussions, and collaborative abilities, motivating active students while guiding those with low engagement. Homework takes various forms: written assignments test basic knowledge, oral tasks exercise speaking skills, and practical projects cultivate comprehensive abilities. Evaluations focus on quality, innovation, and effort. Project outcomes are assessed from dimensions such as completion quality, teamwork, and innovation—for example, in an "English drama performance" project. Oral tests use formats like reading aloud and dialogues, with professional judges evaluating pronunciation, intonation, and other aspects. Excellent students are praised, while those with weaknesses receive targeted guidance. Additionally, student self-evaluation and peer review are introduced: self-evaluation helps students reflect on their learning, while peer review promotes communication, cultivates critical thinking and teamwork, makes evaluations more comprehensive and objective, and enhances student participation and motivation.

VI. CONCLUSION

With the development of the times and changes in social needs, reforms in higher vocational English teaching must continue to deepen. Guided by the Spoken English Competition, teaching content and curriculum design can be further optimized to more closely align with vocational needs and industry trends. Meanwhile, new English courses and teaching modules— such as English for artificial intelligence and big data—can be developed to cultivate students' English application abilities in emerging fields. By continuously deepening teaching reforms, fully utilizing competition resources, and focusing on

students' personalized development and cross-cultural communication skills, higher vocational English teaching will better meet society's demand for high-quality skilled talents. This will lay a solid foundation for students' future development, cultivate more outstanding talents with global vision, innovative spirit, and practical abilities, and make greater contributions to China's economic and social development.

REFERENCES

[1] Deng Wei, "Analysis of English Teaching Reform Based on the National Vocational Spoken English Competition," Journal of Liaoning Provincial College of Transportation, 2022(24): 91-94.

[2] Shao Dan, "Research on the Reform of Spoken English Teaching in Higher Vocational Colleges under the Background of Spoken Skills Competition," Journal of Shazhou Vocational and Technical College, 2020(01): 50-54.

[3] Chen Shuang, Zhang Xiaohan, "Pathways for Smart Campus to Lead Online Ideological and Political Education," Journal of Liaoning University of Technology, October 2024.

[4] Hao Congrong, Wang Wengai, "Analysis of Curriculum Reform of Tourism English Based on Student Differences," Journal of Taiyuan Normal University, January 2018: 87-89.

[5] Zhang Zhanbo, Guan Liyuan, "Research on Development Strategies for the Inheritance System of Traditional Ethnic Sports Education in Sichuan Ethnic Areas," Chinese Wushu, November 2024: 126-128.

[6] Shao Yi, "Application of Virtual Simulation Technology in Spoken English Teaching of Higher Vocational Colleges," Journal of Yueyang Vocational and Technical College, 2024(4): 26-29.

[7] Zhi Anli, "Integration of Etymological Culture in English Lexicology and Teaching Reform under the Multimodal Teaching Model," Journal of Heihe University, 2025(16): 8-86.

[8] Zhang Yuanyuan, "Discussion on the High-Quality Development of Introducing Artificial Intelligence into College Spoken English Teaching," Journal of Harbin University, 2025(02): 136-140.