

Questionnaire Survey Research Report of Oral English Learning Needs—Taking English Specialty Classes of Nursing Majors in a Vocational Medical College as an Example

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ABSTRACT

In order to investigate oral English learning needs of students in a vocational medical college, 114 nursing majors were selected as research subjects. Through a questionnaire survey, classroom observation and semi-structured interview, students' status quo, learning problems and needs of oral English learning in English specialty classes of nursing majors were examined. Using SPSS17.0 as the research tool, 7 factors were summarized and used to analyze students' opinions, attitudes and conceptions in regard to oral English learning habits, problems, strategies, aims, testing needs, applying ability, course evaluation and feedback. Based on the findings, mending measures and feasible suggestions were drawn from 3 dimensions, i.e. school, teacher and students. Finally, this article discussed how to balance teaching and learning in college oral English course, such as taking advantage of online-and-offline combined model to improve students' oral English learning efficiency and communicative competence. Accordingly, "double qualified" vocational and technical talents who master both professional skills and English proficiency can be cultivated for the nation and society.

Keywords: Oral English; Needs Analysis; Teaching Reform; Communicative Competence

1. INTRODUCTION

In the language learning environment of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), compared with the input skills of English listening and reading, English writing and oral production skills have always been the weaknesses of Chinese students' English learning, especially their oral English expression ability is extremely weak. Even after more than ten years of formal English learning in high school, most students cannot even use simple English for daily communication and interaction at the university level. The problem of "Chinglish" in college students' oral English expression is extremely serious.[1] "Dumb English" is even more serious which is the long-existing and still non-solved problem that has plagued the English learning of several generations of students in China [2]. Poor oral performance is the most obvious in international standardized tests such as IELTS and TOEFL, in which the oral scores of Chinese students are counted down all year round in the world[3][4]. The main reason is that China's test-oriented education has not included oral examinations into the scope of college entrance examination for a long time, and students have lacked effective oral training and natural environment for daily oral practice[5]. This has caused the overall low-level oral ability and communicative competence of Chinese college students.

The current situation is worrying [6]. The oral English proficiency of university-level undergraduates is still so, as higher vocational college students with a weaker English foundation, their oral English level is even more unoptimistic [7]. The purpose of this research is to investigate and study the English characteristic intensive classes with a relatively good English foundation in higher vocational colleges to elicit the needs of higher vocational students for oral English learning, so as to provide references and suggestions for the school to further improve the curriculum, for teachers to improve teaching methods, and for students to improve spoken English learning strategies, and finally to achieve the goal of improving students' overall oral English level, spoken proficiency and communicative competence.

2. RESEARCH SUBJECTS, METHODS AND TOOLS

The subject of this study is a total of 114 students from two freshmen English-speaking classes of a medical nursing vocational college. The students are recruited into the class according to the scores of the college entrance examination and the oral interview test before admission. Students' basic learning experience of English is more than 10 years, starting from elementary school to date. The average

English score of the college entrance examination is 111.8 points (total score is 150 points), with the highest score 132 points, the lowest score 70 points, and the standard deviation is 9.8, indicating that enrolled students have a comparatively good overall English foundation among vocational college students and small individual differences. It should be pointed out that only a very small portion of students entered the class through the single-entry test (another college entrance test which is easier than the standard one), whose scores are also all above 80 points (total score is 100 points). Except for the unified oral English test after the college entrance examination in which only reading a short passage is required, the oral interview for the intensive English class in which common oral topics are provided for students to answer impromptu, and the final exam for freshman oral English course, most students have not ever taken other standardized oral English tests. The research method adopts a 5-point Likert Scale questionnaire survey method[8], in which the questionnaire survey questions are adapted from existing questionnaires[9] to increase its validity and reliability. The questionnaire is filled out anonymously. Besides, the researcher has fully explained the requirements of the questionnaire and has excluded students' questions and concerns before the questionnaire is issued to guarantee collected questionnaire data is true and valid. A total of 114 questionnaires are issued and 113 valid questionnaires are returned, with a return rate of 99.12%. Combining classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, the reliability and validity of the research are guaranteed through triangular verification. Statistical analysis software SPSS17.0 is used as the research tool to process, summarize and analyze the questionnaire data.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Through KMO test and Bartley sphere test, $KMO=0.674 > 0.6$ (Sig.000), indicating that the questionnaire is highly valid and can be used for factor analysis. Combining with the Scree Plot analysis, we can get factors of 7 dimensions: 1. Oral learning habits, 2. Oral learning problems, 3. Oral learning strategies, 4. Oral learning objectives, 5. Oral test requirements, 6. Oral English ability, 7. Oral language course evaluation and feedback. Through reliability analysis, Cronbach's $\alpha=0.774 > 0.7$, suggesting that the questionnaire has high reliability and the data is convincing. As is shown in Table 1, according to data results of SPSS17.0 factor analysis, it can be concluded that generally students have poor oral learning habits, weak oral English ability, which get the minimum means (Mean=3.12, Mean=3.17 respectively); oral learning problems and oral test requirements have got the highest means, as high as Mean=3.68, Mean=3.52, implying that students realize that they have many oral problems and are willing to take oral exams; the difference between oral

learning habits and oral learning objectives is the most obvious, with a standard deviation as high as Std.=0.74, Std.=0.71. The standard deviation of oral test requirements and oral English ability is the lowest, Std.=0.53, Std.=0.57 in respective, whose differences are the least significant.

Table 1. Statistical Analysis of Data in 7 Factors

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Oral learning habits	113	3.1224	.74002
Oral learning problems	113	3.6794	.63106
Oral learning strategies	113	3.4292	.66183
Oral learning objectives	113	3.2644	.71197
Oral test requirements	113	3.5221	.53057
Oral English ability	113	3.1735	.57040
Oral language course evaluation and feedback	113	3.2419	.64318
Valid N (listwise)	113		

Through further dimension reduction, the author conducted further statistical data analysis for each dimension, and obtained more specific questions and related conclusions on each factor.

3.1. Oral Learning Habits

In this dimension, we can further analyze that most students combine their interests and hobbies, and actively learn oral English through movies, TV, the Internet and other channels, with the highest mean (Mean=3.97) and the lowest standard deviation (Std.=0.949); only a very small number of students improve their oral English by participating in English speeches, debate competitions, etc., whose average is the lowest (Mean=2.62), and the standard deviation is high (Std.=1.183). Most students are reluctant to communicate with family, classmates or teachers about their feelings of oral English learning, where the average value is low, Mean=2.77, while the standard deviation is as high as Std.=1.26, and the difference in habits is the most obvious. In addition, although the majority of students claim that they like to speak English, the average value is as high as Mean=3.85, yet they rarely set oral learning goals, whose average value is only Mean=2.72, and they cannot use English on general topics, such as discussion on current affairs, news, cultural customs, etc., whose score is relatively low (Mean=2.81). Through classroom observations, the author found that students were inclined to be silent in class. They did not dare, did not want to, or were unable to answer impromptu oral questions raised by the teacher. It was just a few students who actively thought and frequently answered the questions. Through random interviews, the author discovers that in addition to completing the lessons, the students have not developed the habit of independently looking for learning partners to practice oral English after the class. Some students even

express that the tasks of professional and other courses are too heavy, and oral English ability is just an extra skill which does not attract their enough attention.

3.2. Oral Learning Problems

In this dimension, students generally think that in oral expression, neither vocabulary nor professional knowledge is enough, and their expression is not smooth (Mean>4); with the smallest standard deviation (Std.=0.8~0.9). Furthermore, the author finds that the biggest problem is that students' vocabulary is not enough, whose mean is high (Mean=4.31), and the standard deviation is the lowest (Std.=0.81). What's interesting is that none of the classmates is very satisfied with their fluency in oral expression. When it comes to fear of losing face in oral communication, the difference among students is the most obvious, with a standard deviation as high as (Std.=1.38), indicating that students' willingness to express themselves is closely related to their distinctive personality. The item with the lowest average value is inability to understand interlocutor's words in oral communication (Mean=2.85), indicating that students do not think that oral communication problems are caused by listening. Being able to understand other person's words but unable to speak out in response means that listening input and oral output skills are not effectively combined. In addition, students have many grammatical errors, inaccurate pronunciation, timidity and nervousness when speaking in English. Meanwhile, they do not have partners for spoken communication, do not use liaison, contraction or reduction etc. pronunciation skills, do not express ideas appropriately, do not organize content, and lack cultural background knowledge. There are also problems in other aspects, and the average value is between 3.5 and 3.8.

3.3. Oral Learning Strategies

In this dimension, most students improve their oral English by reading text aloud, and pay attention to seeking an authentic oral English practice environment (Mean=3.9). There are quite a few students who improve their oral English by repeating, following audio and video materials, or participating in classroom English dubbing exercises organized by the teacher (Mean=3.7). It is worth noting that due to the lack of a suitable oral English practice atmosphere, very few students find foreign students to be oral practice partners (Mean=2.22) or participate in activities such as English corners to improve their oral English (Mean=3.16). In addition, some students establish cooperative relationships with their classmates, practice oral English together (Mean=3.55), or improve their oral English through reading English books and newspapers (Mean=3.31).

3.4. Oral Learning Objectives

In this dimension, the author discovers that most students learn spoken English to promote professional learning, to apply for a job in the future, or for practical purposes such as future use in work (Mean>3.7), in which indirect extrinsic motivation[10][11] and instrumental motivation[12] are dominant. Very few students practice oral English in order to have the opportunity to work abroad in the future (Mean=2.64) or to make foreign friends (Mean=2.84), indicating that students' motivation and needs for external communication are not strong. Moreover, some students learn spoken language to understand foreign cultures, to have daily conversations with foreigners, or to communicate with foreign counterparts in their majors (Mean=3.15).

3.5. Speaking Test Requirements

In this dimension, students generally proclaim that they would like to take the Oral English Test (Mean=4.02, Std.=0.94) at the university level, and believe that the Certificate of Oral English Test is helpful for graduation and job hunting (Mean=4.54, Std.=0.64). In the meanwhile, taking the oral English test can promote their own oral English learning (Mean=4.28, Std.=0.71). The average of these 3 scores is the largest and the difference is the smallest, suggesting that students have realized that obtaining oral examination certificate is extremely essential and important for their job search and career development in the future, and this motive can promote their oral learning in return. Considering learning oral English to pass the exam for studying abroad, for passing the final oral exam, or for passing internationally-standardized oral tests like IELTS and TOEFL, students get the lowest scores in these 3 items (Mean=2.14, Mean=2.84, Mean=2.79 respectively), indicating that neither do students practice oral English for high-level needs of going abroad for further study nor for low-level needs like passing basic exams. Besides, they are not willing to obtain globally-recognized oral certificates in order to find a better job which is required in a renowned hospital in China. Additionally, students are interested in oral English test, learning oral English for the purpose of upgrading to university for a degree, and for passing national CET/PETS oral tests. They scored high in these 3 items in respective (Mean=3.78, Mean=3.80, Mean=3.51), suggesting that improving academic qualifications and obtaining an oral certificate generally recognized by the society is also one of the important motivations for students to take the oral examination.

3.6. Spoken Language Ability

In this dimension, students can express their thoughts in simple English (Mean=3.71), and often use the fixed phrases and sentence patterns they have mastered in oral

communication (Mean=3.60). The scores are relatively high, indicating that students can use simple English and knowledge they have learned to express their wishes. However, almost no classmates believe that they can communicate with foreigners in English in daily lives (Mean=2.78) or use English freely in a complex social environment (Mean=2.23), implying that there is a huge gap between oral theory learning and practical application in English. In fact, students cannot apply the theoretical knowledge they have learned into oral communication practice, and theory and practice are out of touch, resulting in learning disabilities. At the same time, many students directly apply some of the Chinese language rules to spoken English (Mean=3.55), which shows that Chinese thinking mode is deeply ingrained and poses a considerable obstacle to students' spoken English learning.

3.7. Oral English Course Evaluation and Feedback

In this dimension, the vast majority of students agree that it is necessary for teachers to correct students' language errors in class in time (Mean=4.20, Std.=0.87). Correspondingly, a very small number of students believe that teachers should allow students to express their ideas freely without directly pointing out language errors (Mean=2.23, Std.=1.21). The comparative data implies that the students' basic skills in oral English are weak and cannot self-discover the problems of oral expression. For this reason, the teacher needs to clearly point out the errors and correct them for students immediately. Furthermore, students focus more on accuracy and standardization of oral expression, rather than communicativeness and fluency of oral expression. Interestingly, during classroom observation, the author discovers that if the teacher interrupts students' conversation midway and reminds them of correcting language errors in time, most of the students will be at a loss and even unable to continue completing their oral expression. This finding is in sharp contrast to the demands of students, indicating that students do not realize the real problems and coping strategies of their own oral English. In terms of oral practice, students think that there is little oral practice in English class (Mean=3.10, Std.=1.36), and even less oral practice after the class (Mean=3.99, Std.=1.07). Through classroom observation and interviews, the author considers that the main reasons are: First of all, because the class scale is too large, there are fewer opportunities to practice in class, which cannot meet the oral practice needs of every student; second, most students are accustomed to classroom silence and lack the ability to actively think about or answer questions raised by the teacher. They are unwilling to take the initiative and seize opportunities to speak out to practice oral English; what's more, students lack the awareness of autonomous learning, which means they are not willing to spend time after class to practice and improve oral English spontaneously. Regarding classroom feedback, students do not consider that speaking

courses in class are not enough (Mean=2.93, Std.=1.27). In addition, they hold a neutral attitude on whether oral materials (textbooks, reading materials, teachers' supplementary materials, etc.) are sufficient or not (Mean=3.00, Std.=1.15).

4. PROBLEM-SOLVING MEASURES AND RECTIFICATION SUGGESTIONS

Based on the problems in the 7 dimensions, the author proposes solutions and rectification suggestions from the aspects of schools, teachers and students.

4.1. Oral Learning Habits

Schools should actively develop English corners, oral English recitations, speeches, and debate competitions to stimulate students to strengthen their daily oral training; teachers can put oral practice homework as process evaluation assessments into final exam grades, and use formative-assessment method to facilitate instruction and strengthen supervision of students' oral learning.

4.2. Oral Learning Problems

Schools should actively carry out international exchange and cooperation programs, create conditions to import and export exchange students, and improve students' oral communication through project cooperation. Via aforementioned joined efforts, the dilemma that "No one dares to speak, no one wants to speak, no one can speak" will be alleviated. In the meantime, teachers should strengthen the training of students' basic phonetic knowledge, appropriately supplement common grammatical phenomena in the process of oral English instruction, and encourage students to practice oral English by establishing study groups and finding spoken learning partners. The most important thing is that students must dare to step out of their comfort zone, break the status quo and understand that "Quantitative changes cause qualitative changes". Furthermore, they should get accustomed to paying attention to the accumulation of related topics and cultural background knowledge and professional vocabulary, dare to improve oral expression skills through classroom speeches and after-class exercises gradually.

4.3. Oral Learning Strategies

Students can take advantage of oral English dubbing practice software and Apps like Mofunshow and Qupeiyin to train their oral skills by following, repeating and recording funny audio and vivid video materials. In this way, not only can they practice speaking English regularly, but they can cultivate English speaking interest as well by

accomplishing each small task and finding a sense of self-achievement for the long run, thus form a good habit of autonomous oral practicing gradually as time goes by. For better language learners, they may choose to imitate the TV Show-"Immersive" performance model which allows performers to dub the voice of an excerpt of a renowned movie, cartoon, or TV series without the hints of subtitles, just in synchronization with background music for classroom presentations.

4.4. Objectives of Oral Learning

Teachers should guide students to shift from an external instrumental motivation of language learning to internal integrative motivation. They need to help students understand that test scores and certificates are not the ultimate goal of learning, but interests and hobbies are the best teachers for a lifetime of study and self-improvement.

4.5. Speaking Test Requirements

Teachers should actively guide students to participate in various oral examinations at all levels from the aspects of studying and working abroad, college upgrading, job applications and so on, and encourage them to seek essential oral certificates as a stepping stone for future career plan. Through tests, the pertinence and purpose of students' oral practice will be clear-cut, and students can be motivated and thus improve the demand for spoken ability improvement by means of taking tests in return.

4.6. Spoken Language Ability

Students should strengthen the input of the target language, train and develop the habit of thinking in English, gradually get rid of the interference and restraint of their mother tongue, and actively seek out real context to elicit and practice language output.

4.7. Oral Language Course Evaluation and Feedback

Schools should actively carry out curriculum reform, appropriately increase the total oral English class hours, and reduce the burden of other non-core courses on students' study. For teachers, they should add supplementary materials on related oral topics for students' reference. And for students, they can use the words, phrases and expressions they have learned to organize their language and express their opinions freely. It is noteworthy that they do not need to be afraid of making grammatical errors and thus affect the fluency or completeness of language expression, thereby affecting the communicative function of the language and causing oral communication obstacles.

5. CONCLUSION

This survey shows that among students with a solid foundation in English in higher vocational colleges in China, there is a strong demand for oral English learning, and students urgently need to improve their oral English expression and communication skills in order to adapt to new forms of requirements set for them, such as entering a higher university, graduating from college, finding a good job in a foreigner-laden hospital and going abroad for work, etc. Through this survey, the author suggests that by following "input-driven and output-oriented"[13] principal, higher vocational colleges need to integrate their own school's conditions with students' academic situations, formulate appropriate oral instruction curriculum design and arrange reasonable oral teaching plan. In the meanwhile, modern and information-based multimedia technology should be integrated to help carry out the teaching reform of oral English courses and promote the construction and development of oral English courses, so as to meet the urgent needs of higher vocational college students for the improvement of oral English communication skills. Via "Change promotes education, and good education improves learning", internationalized competent vocational and technical talents who can both "Speak English and be professional in majors" will be cultivated for the country and society to meet the demands of global modernization development.

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