

Research on Improving Students' Oral Expression Ability in Putonghua Teaching of Vocational Undergraduate Programs

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Abstract: Within the vocational undergraduate education system, students' oral communication skills serve not only as a key indicator of comprehensive competence but also as essential competencies for future career development. However, current Mandarin instruction in vocational undergraduate programs still faces significant challenges in enhancing students' oral expression abilities. This paper analyzes the importance of cultivating oral communication skills among vocational undergraduates, examines existing issues in teaching practices, and proposes targeted improvement strategies. The research aims to provide insights for reforming Mandarin education in vocational undergraduate programs, thereby fostering high-quality applied talents that meet societal demands.

Keywords: Vocational undergraduate education; Putonghua teaching; Oral expression ability

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1. Introduction

As one of the key types of higher education, vocational undergraduate education aims to cultivate high-level technical and skilled professionals with solid theoretical foundations and outstanding practical abilities. In various professional settings, strong oral communication skills enable students to convey information clearly and accurately, enhance communication effectiveness, and boost their career competitiveness. As the core course for developing students' oral expression skills, how to effectively improve their oral proficiency through teaching reforms has become a critical issue that vocational undergraduate education urgently needs to address^[1].

2. The importance of oral expression skills development for vocational undergraduate students

2.1. Meeting career development needs

With the deepening socio-economic development, industries across sectors are placing higher demands on professionals' communication competence and collaborative skills. Whether in customer engagement within service industries or

technical project presentations, clear and fluent verbal communication serves as a critical foundation for effective work execution. Take tourism management as an example: tour guides must possess exceptional interpretation skills to vividly convey cultural and historical insights about attractions to visitors. Similarly, marketing students need to accurately communicate product information and persuade clients during negotiations to secure collaborations. Therefore, enhancing students' oral communication abilities will better equip them to meet the evolving demands of future career development.

2.2. Enhancing students' comprehensive competencies

Oral communication skills constitute a vital component of students' comprehensive qualities. Effective verbal expression not only demonstrates linguistic organization and application abilities but also reflects logical thinking, communication techniques, and self-confidence. Students who can articulate their viewpoints clearly during classroom discussions, group projects, and social practices tend to gain greater recognition and support from peers, while fostering teamwork spirit and leadership skills. Moreover, through oral communication training, students can enhance cultural literacy and aesthetic appreciation, promoting well-rounded development ^[2].

For instance, when delivering keynote speeches or impromptu presentations, students must organize their thoughts around specific topics, refine viewpoints, and articulate them with appropriate language and emotional expression. This process not only enhances language organization skills but also deepens understanding of knowledge and critical thinking. Through peer interactions, students learn to listen attentively, comprehend others' perspectives, and respond or refute ideas with clear communication, practices that cultivate critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. When students confidently express their ideas in public settings, their self-awareness and interpersonal skills significantly improve. This leads to greater engagement in academic and social activities, proactive responsibility-taking, and the formation of a positive personal development cycle. Such comprehensive skill enhancement not only positively impacts students' current learning experiences but also lays a solid foundation for their future holistic development in professional and social contexts.

2.3. Promoting campus culture development

In campus life, students' oral communication skills play a vital role in shaping campus culture. Diverse activities such as speech contests, debate competitions, and drama performances provide platforms for students to showcase their verbal abilities. These initiatives not only enrich students' extracurricular experiences but also foster a positive campus environment, igniting their passion for learning and creativity ^[3].

When students actively participate and boldly express themselves in these activities, the clash and exchange of diverse perspectives can spark intellectual creativity, fostering an open and inclusive campus culture. For instance, the intense debates between opposing sides in speech contests not only showcase students' logical reasoning skills and language organization abilities, but also guide spectators to think from multiple angles, cultivating a rational perspective on issues. Drama performances, through vivid verbal delivery and emotional resonance, allow students to appreciate artistic charm while deepening their understanding and identification with cultural values. Additionally, daily academic interactions such as classroom discussions, group collaborations, and club activities rely heavily on strong verbal communication skills. Clear communication facilitates knowledge sharing, experience transfer, and emotional connection, enhancing class cohesion and campus belongingness. This process subtly elevates campus culture, transforming it into a vital spiritual force that drives student growth and institutional development.

3. Issues in oral expression competency development in mandarin teaching for vocational undergraduate programs

3.1. Inadequate clarity in teaching objectives

Some vocational undergraduate institutions lack clear objectives in cultivating students' oral communication skills within

Mandarin language instruction. The teaching approach often focuses excessively on standardized pronunciation training while neglecting practical application scenarios. This one-sided pedagogical approach results in students mastering correct Mandarin pronunciation but still struggling to express ideas fluently in real-life communication situations, demonstrating deficiencies in communication techniques and situational adaptability.

Current teaching objectives predominantly focus on certification standards such as “Passing the Putonghua Proficiency Test Level 2 Grade B or Level 2 Grade A”, with core assessment metrics centered on phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar norms. However, there is a lack of targeted design for oral communication skills tailored to specific professional roles—such as doctor-patient communication strategies for nursing students, product presentation techniques for marketing majors, or project presentation capabilities for engineering students^[4]. For instance, a vocational undergraduate institution’s Putonghua curriculum outlines merely states “developing students’ ability to express themselves clearly and fluently in Putonghua” without incorporating specialized professional requirements. This disconnect between teaching content and real-world communication needs leads to graduates often exhibiting the phenomenon of “speaking Putonghua fluently but lacking professional jargon”, failing to meet workplace demands for communication efficiency and professional competence.

3.2. Relatively monotonous teaching model

In the teaching process, many educators still adhere to the traditional “lecture-practice” model. After explaining a concept and demonstrating pronunciation, students mechanically repeat exercises, which fails to engage their learning motivation. Moreover, outdated teaching methods and underutilized digital resources create an insufficient immersive oral communication environment, ultimately resulting in suboptimal educational outcomes.

In traditional classrooms, teachers often dominate the learning process, dedicating excessive time to explaining phonetic theories and correcting pronunciation. Students passively absorb knowledge without opportunities for active expression or deep critical thinking. For instance, during oral training sessions, common practices involve students taking turns reading texts or designated passages while teachers provide pronunciation feedback. This rigid format severely limits students’ expressive content, hindering the development of personalized thinking and authentic communication skills. Interactive teaching methods like group discussions and role-playing simulations remain underutilized. Even when implemented, their lack of clear task objectives and professional scenario design often results in superficial engagement, making it difficult for students to fully immerse themselves in role-based communication exercises. Some educators still rely on basic PPT presentations rather than leveraging digital tools such as online learning platforms, speech simulation software, and virtual training environments to create immersive professional communication scenarios. This approach prevents students from familiarizing themselves with potential workplace communication situations, confining language proficiency improvement to mechanical classroom drills that fail to bridge the gap between “speaking” and “effective communication”.

3.3. Disconnection between teaching content and occupational requirements

Vocational undergraduate education exhibits strong career orientation, yet current Mandarin instruction remains loosely aligned with students’ future professional needs. The curriculum predominantly focuses on literary recitation and Mandarin proficiency test preparation, lacking targeted training in oral communication techniques and standardized practices for diverse occupational scenarios. For instance, mechanical engineering students receive insufficient training in workplace communication skills such as product presentations and technical exchanges, resulting in a disconnect between academic knowledge and practical job requirements^[5].

For instance, nursing students rarely receive systematic training in professional oral communication skills such as doctor-patient interaction and medical condition disclosure, leaving them unable to master language strategies for clear information delivery and patient emotional support in clinical settings. Marketing students lack practical oral training in sales negotiation and client communication, making it challenging for them to adapt flexibly to diverse client needs and

communication styles in future careers. Moreover, educational content inadequately addresses essential professional oral competencies like colloquial industry terminology and cross-departmental collaboration etiquette. This results in graduates often requiring extended adaptation periods to workplace communication patterns, ultimately affecting their career entry points and professional competitiveness.

3.4. Weakness in practical teaching components

Enhancing oral communication skills requires extensive practical practice, yet current teaching approaches often fall short in this regard. On one hand, limited time allocated for hands-on activities fails to meet students' training needs. On the other hand, practice methods remain monotonous, lacking diversity and innovation. Most exercises still rely on traditional formats like classroom presentations and dialogue drills, failing to connect with real-world professional scenarios. This disconnect makes it challenging for students to develop authentic oral communication skills in authentic contexts.

3.5. The evaluation system is not sufficiently refined

The current evaluation system for Mandarin instruction in vocational undergraduate programs primarily relies on Putonghua proficiency test scores and final exam results, employing a relatively simplistic assessment approach. This framework fails to comprehensively evaluate students' oral communication skills, particularly their practical application abilities in real-life scenarios. Moreover, the evaluation process lacks focus on students' learning trajectories, making it difficult to promptly identify challenges in oral expression training. Consequently, this system struggles to provide effective feedback and targeted instructional guidance that could enhance teaching effectiveness.

4. Strategies for enhancing students' oral expression skills in mandarin teaching at vocational undergraduate levels

4.1. Clarify teaching objectives and emphasize vocational orientation

The Mandarin instruction in vocational undergraduate programs should align with students' future career development needs, clearly defining objectives for oral communication skill cultivation. During teaching processes, emphasis should not only be placed on standard Mandarin pronunciation training but also on developing students' verbal expression abilities and communication techniques across diverse professional scenarios. For instance, nursing students should focus on mastering effective patient communication skills, emotional support techniques, and accurate medical information delivery. E-commerce majors, on the other hand, require enhanced verbal communication competencies in online marketing and customer service contexts ^[6].

4.2. Innovative teaching methods to stimulate learning interest

The workplace scenario-based teaching method involves educators creating authentic workplace scenarios tailored to different professional environments, enabling students to practice oral communication skills through simulated workplace settings. Examples include role-playing scenarios such as hotel front desk reception, business negotiations, and classroom instruction, where students assume various roles to enhance their verbal expression abilities and communication techniques through real-life dialogues. This approach effectively motivates students and facilitates the practical application of oral communication skills in real-world professional contexts.

The paired cooperative learning approach divides students into groups to collaboratively complete oral expression tasks. Through activities such as situational dialogues, role-play performances, and text recitations, students work together to correct each other's pronunciation, rhythm, intonation, and delivery techniques. This interactive process fosters mutual learning and progress, with real-time documentation to create formative assessment metrics. This method not only cultivates teamwork spirit but also enhances students' oral communication skills and adaptability in real-life scenarios.

The project-based teaching approach involves instructors designing career-related project tasks to enhance students'

oral communication skills through practical implementation. For instance, marketing majors conduct market research and deliver project presentations, while tourism management students develop travel itineraries and provide tour guide commentary. This methodology enables students to integrate theoretical knowledge with real-world applications during project execution, effectively improving both verbal communication proficiency and problem-solving capabilities in practical scenarios.

4.3. Optimize teaching content to align with occupational demands

Integrate real-world occupational scenarios by incorporating numerous case studies relevant to students' majors into teaching content, enabling them to understand standardized oral communication norms and techniques across different professional contexts. For instance, cases such as medical dispute resolution, product sales negotiations, and technical proposal presentations can be introduced into lessons. Through case analysis and simulated dialogues, students will master practical oral communication methods applicable in real-world work environments.

This study implements specialized oral training programs tailored to the unique characteristics of different academic disciplines. For instance, students majoring in early childhood education receive targeted training in reciting children's literature and simulating communication scenarios, while those in architectural engineering focus on engineering presentations and technical briefings. Such customized oral training enables students to effectively enhance their professional communication skills within specific occupational fields.

4.4. Strengthening practical training to enhance practical competence

Increase practical training hours and optimize teaching schedules by allocating more time to Mandarin language instruction, ensuring students have sufficient opportunities for oral expression practice. For instance, adopt a natural classroom teaching model to guarantee project-based training reaches all students. Furthermore, raise the proportion of practical training hours from the original 30% to 50% of total instructional time, enabling continuous improvement in students' oral communication skills through hands-on practice.

To diversify practical training methods, educators should extend hands-on learning beyond traditional classroom activities. For instance, organizing extracurricular programs such as volunteer services, social practice initiatives, and vocational skills competitions allows students to hone their oral communication skills in authentic real-world settings. Additionally, leveraging modern information technologies, including live webcasts and online debates, can expand practical training channels through digital platforms.

4.5. Improve the evaluation system and conduct comprehensive competency assessment

To develop a diversified evaluation framework centered on oral communication skills, we should establish a comprehensive assessment system that evaluates not only students' Mandarin pronunciation standards but also their practical communication abilities, interpersonal skills, and adaptability in real-life scenarios. For instance, key evaluation criteria such as fluency, accuracy, logical coherence, and expressive power can be incorporated to holistically assess students' oral communication competencies.

The evaluation system adopts diversified approaches by incorporating formative and summative assessments into summative evaluations. Summative assessments include standardized Mandarin proficiency tests and oral practice evaluations, while formative assessments cover classroom performance and homework completion status. Summative evaluation is based on comparative analysis of pre-and post-test results alongside student learning progress metrics. Additionally, a combined approach integrating student self-assessment, peer evaluation, and teacher feedback can enhance the objectivity and fairness of the assessment process.

5. Case analysis

5.1. Practice of Putonghua teaching reform at Hainan vocational university of science and technology

Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology has implemented teaching reforms to address challenges in Mandarin instruction. The university first established career-oriented teaching objectives and developed customized oral communication training programs tailored to different academic disciplines. For instance, it set specific language proficiency goals for preschool education students, focusing on practical communication scenarios such as home visits, hosting cultural events, and negotiating community project collaborations, while providing standardized speaking techniques for these real-world situations.

The teaching methodology integrates workplace scenario-based instruction, collaborative peer learning, and project-driven pedagogy. Teachers design diverse learning contexts tailored to specific curricular content and professional settings, enabling students to practice oral communication within authentic environments. Group project activities such as hotel service skills competitions and tourism route design contests are organized to enhance students' verbal communication abilities and teamwork skills through collaborative task completion. The curriculum incorporates numerous industry-related case studies and targeted oral training modules aligned with students' majors. For instance, in Mandarin instruction for early childhood education programs, practical examples like classroom improvisation techniques and parent-teacher meeting scripts are introduced. Through simulated dialogues and case analyses, students acquire essential workplace communication skills through real-world application.

In practical teaching components, this study has expanded instructional hours and diversified training formats. Through partnerships with multiple enterprises, students gain internship opportunities to hone oral communication skills in authentic professional environments. Meanwhile, online platforms facilitate interactive language practice activities such as pronunciation check-ins and virtual debates, significantly boosting student engagement and learning motivation. Regarding evaluation systems, we have established a comprehensive assessment framework. Beyond standardized Mandarin proficiency test scores, we emphasize process-oriented evaluations including formative assessments and summative evaluations to holistically assess students' oral communication competencies.

5.2. Reform outcomes

Through educational reform initiatives, students at this institution have demonstrated remarkable progress in oral communication skills. They have achieved outstanding results in vocational skills competitions, classical poetry recitation contests, and literary recitation events, earning widespread recognition from enterprises and society. Concurrently, students' learning motivation and self-confidence have significantly improved, with their attitude toward Mandarin acquisition shifting from passive absorption to proactive engagement. Furthermore, these reforms have enhanced teachers' instructional capabilities, driving comprehensive improvements in the school's Mandarin language education quality.

6. Conclusion

Enhancing oral communication skills among vocational undergraduate students stands as a key objective in Putonghua (Mandarin) education and an essential requirement for cultivating high-quality applied professionals. By implementing strategies such as clarifying teaching objectives, innovating instructional methods, optimizing curriculum content, strengthening practical training, and refining evaluation systems, we can effectively address current challenges in vocational Putonghua education, improve students' verbal communication abilities, and lay a solid foundation for their future career development. In future teaching practices, vocational colleges should continuously explore innovative approaches and advance Putonghua education reforms to meet societal demands for talent cultivation.

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