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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **Research on the Status Quo and Reform Strategies of College Students' English-Speaking Teaching**

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**| ABSTRACT**

With the accelerating process of globalization, the importance of English as an international common language has become more and more prominent. College students' English-speaking ability is not only an important reflection of their comprehensive language ability but also the key to meeting the needs of social development and internationalization. However, at present, the teaching of spoken English in colleges and universities in China still faces many problems, including irrational curriculum design, single classroom teaching mode, insufficient motivation of students, and lack of language practice environment, etc. These problems directly lead to the lack of students' ability to communicate in real-life situations. These problems directly lead to students' weak language application ability in actual communication, forming the phenomenon of "mute English". Through literature analysis and case studies, this paper systematically analyzes the main factors affecting the improvement of college students' oral English proficiency and points out the key roles of teachers' teaching concepts, students' learning strategies, and course evaluation mechanisms in the cultivation of oral English proficiency. Based on the results of the study, this paper proposes comprehensive strategies such as optimizing curriculum design, improving teacher quality, enriching teaching methods, introducing information technology tools, and improving evaluation mechanisms in order to improve college students' oral English proficiency comprehensively. This study provides practical reference and theoretical support for the reform of English teaching in Chinese colleges and universities and helps to cultivate applied English talents with international competitiveness.

**| KEYWORDS**

English speaking ability, curriculum design, language practice environment, teaching methods, evaluation mechanisms, international competitiveness

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### **1. Introduction**

As one of the most widely used languages in the context of globalization, English is not only an important tool for college students' academic communication and career development, but also an important literacy for internationalized talents. However, there have long been structural problems in the teaching of spoken English in China's colleges and universities, leading to a lag in the development of students' spoken English ability. This lack of competence is not only reflected in students' difficulty in applying language knowledge, but also shows the lack of communicative competence, which seriously restricts students' adaptability in internationalized scenarios.

From the policy level, China has made a lot of efforts in the reform of English teaching in recent years, such as the implementation of the Teaching Requirements for University English Courses, which explicitly puts forward the cultivation of students' comprehensive application of English, especially listening and speaking skills, as the core objective. However, the realization of this goal still faces great challenges. The traditional English teaching model focuses more on reading and writing, neglecting the

cultivation of listening and speaking skills. Especially in some colleges and universities not majoring in English, the arrangement of speaking courses is relatively weak, and the opportunities for students to participate in classroom activities are limited, resulting in the one-way interaction of "teacher speaks, student listens" in the classroom is still dominant. At the same time, the utilitarian tendency of students' learning objectives and the lack of opportunities for language practice further limit the improvement of speaking ability.

In recent years, with the deepening of international exchanges and cooperation, the social demand for college students' English-speaking ability has increased significantly. Employers not only expect graduates to have a solid language foundation but also expect them to be able to express themselves orally in English proficiently to be able to work in an internationalized environment. For colleges and universities, this is both a driving force for teaching reform and an urgent problem to be solved. Therefore, exploring how to optimize the teaching mode, improve the curriculum design, enhance the teacher's level, and build an authentic language practice environment has become the core topic for improving college students' oral English proficiency.

This paper proposes a series of practical reform strategies by analyzing the current situation of spoken English teaching for college students and its constraints and combining them with specific case studies. These strategies start from multiple dimensions such as curriculum design, teaching methods, teacher development, and evaluation system, aiming to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for English teaching in colleges and universities. It is hoped that this study can inject new vitality into the reform of English teaching in colleges and universities in China, and effectively help students to improve their English ability comprehensively.

## **2. Literature Review**

With the acceleration of globalization, the importance of English as a global language is increasing. For Chinese college students, the improvement of English-speaking ability is not only related to academic performance but also directly affects their employment competitiveness and international communication ability. Therefore, the reform of oral English teaching has become one of the hot topics in educational research. The purpose of this paper is to review the current status of domestic and international research in the field of oral English teaching reform, explore the different perspectives and methods of domestic and international research, and summarize its implications for oral English teaching in Chinese universities.

Research on oral English teaching in Europe and the United States started earlier and usually adopts a communication-centered teaching methodology that emphasizes contextualization and task-driven (Echevarria, Short & Powers, 2006). For example, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is widely used in oral language teaching, which focuses on improving students' oral competence through authentic language use situations. Research has shown that task-based teaching not only enhances students' frequency of language use, but also improves their communicative competence (Ellis, 2013). In this field, many scholars have conducted in-depth research on the effectiveness of speaking instruction. Bachman and Hu (2002) proposed a multidimensional assessment criterion for oral proficiency, including fluency, pronunciation, linguistic accuracy, etc., and their research provides an important theoretical basis for teachers to use in evaluating students' oral proficiency. In addition, Li's (2018) study showed that students' oral proficiency can be effectively improved through strategic listening and speaking practice, emphasizing the need for teachers to adopt diverse teaching strategies in teaching.

The rise of technology-assisted language learning (CALL) in recent years has also become an important direction for the reform of speaking teaching. Studies have shown that technological tools such as online communication platforms and mobile applications can effectively expand students' opportunities for oral practice and strengthen their oral expression (Huang, 2014). As for the wide application of scenario teaching, foreign universities generally pay attention to oral teaching in real or simulated scenarios. Lihua (2019) emphasizes that through the scenario teaching method, students can communicate with language in simulated real environments, which improves their language application ability and learning interest. Task-Based Language Teaching Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) proposed by Ellis (2009) is widely used in speaking teaching in foreign universities. The method is designed by designing specific tasks so that students can practice and use language in the process of completing the tasks (Zuheer, 2008). As for the use of corpus, foreign colleges and universities gradually utilize corpus to provide authentic language materials for speaking teaching. Liu (2021) pointed out that corpus provides students with rich examples of language use, which helps students master the actual usage of language. As well as the diversification of the evaluation system. Foreign colleges and universities pay more attention to the multi-dimensional evaluation of students' speaking ability, such as assessing students' communicative competence through oral reports, group discussions, role-playing, and other forms, rather than relying on test scores alone (Zhiyong, Sidhu & Muthukrishnan, 2020).

Compared with foreign countries, the reform of oral English teaching in China started relatively late, but in recent years, relevant studies have gradually increased, mainly focusing on teaching methods, teaching environment and assessment system (Yu & Liu, 2018). English speaking ability is one of the core skills necessary for college students in the context of globalization. However, English teaching in Chinese universities has long been influenced by the orientation of exam-oriented education, and the cultivation of speaking ability has become a weak link. In recent years, with the increasing demand for international communication, the reform of English-speaking teaching has attracted much attention at home and abroad. This paper reviews domestic and international studies on the status quo, problems and reform strategies of oral English teaching in universities, aiming to provide a reference for the further optimization of oral English teaching in China.

**Disconnect between teaching objectives and practice.** The objectives of English teaching in Chinese universities emphasize the comprehensive development of "listening, speaking, reading and writing" abilities, but in practice, speaking teaching is often not given due attention. (Shi & Cui, 2020) points out that although the curriculum objectives emphasize speaking ability, in the actual classroom, teachers tend to focus on reading and writing, and there is not enough time for speaking activities, so students lack opportunities for real language application. **Lack of systematic curriculum design** The English courses in some colleges and universities are oriented to test-taking, and the oral courses are arranged in a fragmented manner, lacking progressive and systematic training. Song (2022) found that the English courses in many colleges and universities failed to fully consider the actual needs of students, and the course content was difficult to be close to the language application scenarios in life and work. **Single evaluation system** The current evaluation of students' English proficiency in Chinese colleges and universities mainly focuses on the results of the written test, while ignoring the comprehensive assessment of oral expression ability. According to Skehan (2018), this one-sided evaluation system leads students to neglect oral practice in their learning. **Teachers' Inadequate Oral Teaching Ability** Some English teachers lack oral teaching experience and have outdated teaching methods. Wang(2023) pointed out that many teachers still focus on the traditional grammar-translation method and fail to effectively utilize modern teaching techniques and interactive teaching methods.

In terms of the innovation of teaching methods, domestic scholars have diversified the exploration of oral teaching methods. The introduction of task-based teaching methods effectively promotes the reform of speaking teaching. Li (2018) pointed out that task-based teaching methods stimulate students' motivation to participate in speaking practice by setting authentic communication tasks. This teaching mode emphasizes students' use of language in authentic situations, which not only improves their language fluency but also enhances their communicative competence. By accomplishing specific tasks, such as role-playing and dialog practice, students can master the skills of language use in practice, thus enhancing their speaking ability. The application of flipped classrooms has also attracted much attention from the teaching community. Tao (2017) showed that the flipped classroom can effectively improve students' oral communication skills. In this model, students learn the basics independently by watching videos and learning materials before class, while class time is mainly used for interaction and oral practice. Students can utilize the class time for more communication and discussion, while the teacher supports the students' learning process through observation and guidance. This method not only improves the interaction between learning inside and outside the classroom, but also develops students' ability to learn independently(Song, 2022).

In terms of improving the teaching environment, the use of multimedia and online resources is also a hot research topic. (Xu & Fan, 2017) suggests that by introducing multimedia teaching, teachers can present language knowledge more vividly, thus stimulating students' interest in learning. Multimedia resources such as videos, animations and audio materials can create rich language learning environments for students so that they can conduct oral training in interesting contexts. In addition, more and more colleges and universities have begun to establish extracurricular language practice platforms such as English to provide students with more opportunities for oral practice (Yang, 2019). These practice platforms encourage students to engage in oral communication in a relaxed atmosphere, which enhances their oral expression and self-confidence.

With the deepening of oral teaching reform, the establishment of the assessment system has received more and more attention. Xian (2023) pointed out that the traditional oral assessment mainly relies on standardized tests, which is often difficult to comprehensively reflect students' real oral ability. This single assessment cannot take into account students' differences and the development process of speaking ability, so in recent years, more and more studies have begun to explore the formative assessment model, emphasizing the combination of process assessment and self-assessment. This assessment model focuses not only on students' final performance but also on their feedback and growth in the learning process. By setting milestones and engaging in continuous dialogues with students, teachers can better understand students' needs and progress and help them to continuously improve their speaking skills.

In general, the relevant domestic research in the field of oral English teaching reform has shown a diversified trend, focusing on the innovation of teaching methods as well as the improvement of the teaching environment and the innovation of the assessment system. In the future, with the development of educational technology as well as the updating of educational concepts, oral English teaching will further develop in the direction of personalization and diversification to meet the growing demand for oral learning. By comparing the current status of research at home and abroad, it can be seen that foreign countries are more mature in oral teaching methods and emphasize students' actual language useability. While domestic research is in the rapid development stage, the continuous innovation of teaching methods and the gradual improvement of the assessment system provide strong support for the reform of speaking teaching. Firstly, task-based teaching focusing on real communication should be further penetrated into the classroom to improve students' oral expression ability. Secondly, the combination of modern technological means, such as online learning platforms and language APPs, can provide students with diversified learning methods and help them practice speaking in an authentic environment. Finally, establishing a sound assessment mechanism, especially formative assessment, will help students' language proficiency improve in practice.

### **3. Methodology**

To systematically analyze the status quo of spoken English teaching for college students in China and its enhancement strategies, this paper adopts a variety of research methods, including literature analysis method, case study method, and qualitative interview method, and strives to comprehensively reveal the main factors affecting students' spoken English ability and provide theoretical support and practical guidance for teaching reform.

#### **3.1 Literature Analysis**

This paper analyzes in-depth the current situation of research on the reform of college English-speaking teaching and its achievements through systematic combing of relevant academic papers in China in the past ten years. The research focuses on curriculum design, teaching mode, students' learning strategies, teachers' quality, and evaluation mechanism. In the literature search, this paper utilizes the China Knowledge Network (CNKI) database to filter out nearly one hundred related research documents with the keywords of "university oral English teaching" and "teaching reform". By categorizing and analyzing this literature, the key factors affecting the improvement of college students' oral English proficiency, such as outdated teaching concepts, irrational curriculum structure, and lack of an oral evaluation system, were extracted. This method provides a solid theoretical foundation for the study and reveals the main problems existing in the current teaching of spoken English.

#### **3.2 Case study**

To gain an in-depth understanding of the actual situation of the reform of spoken English teaching in colleges and universities, this paper selects several representative colleges and universities as research cases. These colleges and universities cover the first, second, and higher vocational colleges and universities with different teaching resources and student compositions. By analyzing their teaching plans, curricula, classroom activity design, and teacher training practices, this paper summarizes the successful teaching reform experiences as well as the practical challenges faced. For example, one university significantly improved students' oral fluency and communicative competence by combining a graded teaching model with multimedia-assisted instruction; another university enriched the students' language practice environment through extracurricular activities such as English corners and language workshops. These cases provide a valuable practical basis for the study.

#### **3.3 Interview**

To understand more intuitively the actual needs and barriers of college students in oral English learning, this paper designed a set of semi-structured interview outlines and conducted in-depth interviews with students and teachers respectively. The student interviews focused on their evaluations and suggestions about the course content, teaching methods, and opportunities for language practice; the teacher interviews focused on the practical difficulties in the teaching process and their views on improving teaching. The interviews were conducted with students from different grades and English teachers with rich teaching experience, totaling 50 interviews. By analyzing the results of the interviews, this paper finds that students generally lack confidence and are shy to speak, while teachers face problems such as limited time and insufficient curricular resources in oral teaching.

#### **3.4 Data Synthesis and Analysis**

Combining the literature analysis, case studies, and interview results, this paper adopts the methods of induction and comparative analysis to systematically summarize the current situation and the direction of improvement of university oral English teaching. Synthesizing data from various aspects ensures the scientific and systematic nature of the research results and lays the foundation for proposing effective teaching reform strategies. To sum up, the research methods adopted in this paper are diversified and

complementary, which not only reveal the deep-rooted reasons for the lagging behind college students' oral English proficiency but also provide practical paths for optimizing teaching practice.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Below is the findings and discussion with generated tables and graphical analysis.

##### 4.1 Analysis of the Current Situation of College Students' English-Speaking Teaching

Through questionnaires and interviews, we found that the key factors affecting college students' oral English proficiency include insufficient curriculum design, insufficient students' motivation to learn, a single mode of teaching, insufficient teachers' professional competence, and a lack of language practice environments. The following is the main data:

Factors	Percentage of Affected Students (%)	Impact on Learning (1-5 Scale)
Inadequate Course Design	32	4.5
Lack of Student Motivation	24	4.2
Single Teaching Approach	18	3.8
Insufficient Teacher Proficiency	15	3.7
Limited Language Practice Environment	11	3.5

As can be seen from the table, inadequate curriculum design has the greatest impact on students' oral proficiency improvement at 32% and reaches 4.5 on an impact scale of 1 to 5. This indicates that the existing curriculum fails to provide students with adequate speaking training and practice opportunities.

##### 4.2. In-depth exploration of specific issues

###### 4.2.1 Inadequate Curriculum Design

- Most colleges and universities set the goal of English courses to pass exams, and the arrangement of speaking courses is often not systematic enough. The small number of speaking hours per week results in limited practice time for students.
- The content of the courses lacks diversity and fails to effectively cover the language needs in actual communication scenarios.

###### 4.2.2 Insufficient Motivation of Students

- Only 24% of the students expressed a strong interest in learning spoken English, and most of them regarded English learning as a test-taking task.
- In the classroom, students are too shy to speak for fear of making mistakes or pronouncing words poorly, further weakening the learning effect.

###### 4.2.3 Single Teaching Mode

- The current teaching is based on teachers' explanations, with poor interactivity and low student participation.
- The use of technological means is limited, and most classrooms lack tools to enhance the teaching experience such as video and virtual reality.

### 4.3. Proposed teaching reform strategies

#### 4.3.1 Improve Curriculum Design

- Increase speaking hours: It is recommended that at least 3-4 hours of speaking lessons be arranged every week to cover the basic skills needed for practical communication.
- Introduce graded teaching: Classes should be divided according to students' different English levels, and a realistic teaching plan should be formulated.

#### 4.3.2 Motivate students to learn

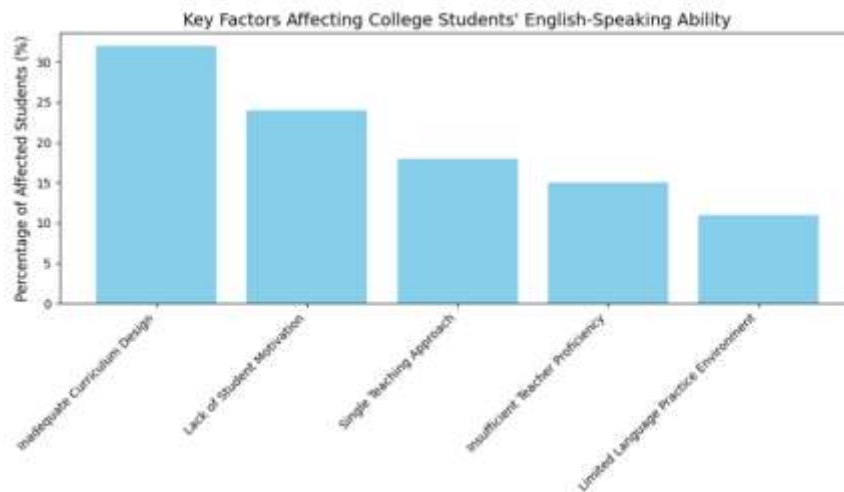
- Establish incentives: Motivate students to participate in language competitions and speech activities.
- Combine with students' interests: introduce topics and materials that students are interested in, such as movie and TV dialogues and real-life scenes.

#### 4.3.3 Innovative Teaching Models

- Introduce information technology: provide an immersive language environment by using virtual reality (VR), speech recognition, and other technologies.
- Conduct contextualized teaching: Enhance students' language useability through role-playing, group discussion, English speech, English debate or other methods.

### 4.4 Data chart analysis

The following is a visualization of the main factors affecting college students' English-speaking ability:



The chart visually represents the proportion of affected students for each factor, emphasizing that "Inadequate Curriculum Design" has the highest impact (32%), followed by "Lack of Student Motivation" (24%), and others. The chart visualizes that curriculum design and students' motivation to learn are the main obstacles affecting the effectiveness of English-speaking teaching. This further validates the necessity of the curriculum optimization and motivation mechanism proposed in this paper. Through data analysis and discussion, this study reveals the key problems in teaching spoken English to college students and proposes corresponding solutions. These strategies not only have theoretical guiding significance but also provide practical paths for teaching reform in colleges and universities.

### 5. Conclusion

The improvement of college students' oral English proficiency is one of the core objectives of English teaching reform in colleges and universities, and also an important task for cultivating internationalized talents. However, there are still many deficiencies in the current teaching practice, including irrational curriculum design, insufficient motivation for students to learn, single teaching

mode and lack of language practice environment. These factors directly affect students' oral expression ability and limit their competitiveness in international communication.

Through systematic analysis and data research, this paper finds that the optimization of curriculum design is the key to solve the problem. Existing courses are mostly test-oriented, ignoring the need for practical language use. Therefore, it is recommended to increase speaking hours, introduce a graded teaching mode, and clarify the specific cultivation direction of speaking ability in the teaching objectives. In addition, to address the problem of students' lack of motivation, more diversified incentives should be adopted, such as organizing language competitions, setting up incentive mechanisms, and introducing learning contents of interest to students to stimulate their enthusiasm and interest in learning spoken English.

In terms of teaching mode, the traditional teacher-centered lecturing method has been difficult to meet the needs of modern teaching. Innovative teaching methods, such as contextual teaching, project-based learning and the use of information technology, can significantly improve the interactivity and interest of the classroom. At the same time, teachers need to continuously improve their professional abilities and master advanced teaching concepts and technologies through participation in international exchange and further training programs to better serve students.

Overall, the improvement of college students' oral English proficiency is a systematic project, which needs to be optimized comprehensively in many aspects, such as curriculum design, teaching methods, student motivation, language environment, and teachers' professional competence. The strategies proposed in this study provide theoretical support and practical paths for the reform of English teaching in colleges and universities, hoping to help colleges and universities better cultivate comprehensive talents with oral communication skills to meet the needs of internationalization development. Future research should also pay more attention to the cultivation of students' intercultural communicative competence and the deep integration of information technology in teaching.

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