



The Empirical Student on the Application of China's Standard of English: the Case of A Vocational College Ningxia Province, China

Zhouyi Zhai

Graduate School of Human Sciences, Assumption University, Thailand

E-mail: Chonna15@gmail.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2724-4539>

Received 02/02/2023

Revised 05/03/2023

Accepted 06/03/2023

Abstract

Background and Aim: Oral English is a necessary ability for students' career development and plays an important role in their employment and sustainable development. This study aims to improve the oral English ability of non-English major students at a higher vocational college.

Materials and Methods: The scaffolding tool, especially classroom interactional competence, was used to increase oral English ability. A qualitative study was conducted in a Financial English class with 36 students at one vocational college in Ningxia, China.

Results: The result shows that the empirical study of how the improvement of oral English through scaffolding can align with the oral requirements of CSE. The findings indicated the overall oral abilities of the students were approximately CSE 3 and CSE 4. Using the CSE Oral English Scale as an analysis criterion, students' oral competence development was relatively balanced, with almost all aspects of competence developing.

Conclusion: Although students still have some minor errors in pronunciation, this does not affect the student's understanding of each other's expressions. Also, the variety of scenarios in conversation tasks indicated the development of oral interactional competence in English of students, which was inseparable from CIC with Translanguaging as the tool that was used during the semester.

Keywords: Oral English Ability; Classroom Interactional Competence; Translanguaging; China's Standards of English Language Ability

Introduction

With the continuous development of China's economy in recent years, international communication such as the Belt and Road Initiative created a major need for students with a high English proficiency level. Oral English is a necessary ability for students' career development and plays an important role in their employment and sustainable development (Dong 2015). For students in higher vocational colleges, oral English ability not only affects their international vision and intercultural communication ability but also affects their ability to adapt to their jobs. Therefore, oral English should not only be used as a pure academic skill but also promote their development in future job occupations. As English became the lingua franca around the world, it became necessary to unify the standard of English-level grading in China. As an international standard for describing the language ability of foreign language learners, The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) - 2001 had become the most influential language competence framework in the main part of the world. Due to China's special national needs and the characteristics of English learners, it was not feasible to directly apply CEFR. The Ministry of Education of China started the "China's Standards of English" project in 2014 and released the "China's Standards of English" in February 2018. China's Standards of English (CSE) scales divide into nine grades of English proficiency, A (A1-A3) is the primary, B (B1-B3) is intermediate, and C (C1-C3) is advanced. According to the requirements of the National





Education Examinations Authority (NEEA), the B5 and B6 levels correspond to the level of English learners in the higher vocational college stage. Among them, the oral English ability has been specially formulated through four dimensions: language expression, pragmatic ability, language knowledge, and language use strategies. From oral English ability China's Standards of English Language Ability, there is a clear requirement for fluency and interaction of oral expression. For students in higher vocational colleges, improvement of fluency in oral English is more important to their future careers (Cheng, 2016). In their future work, students in higher vocational colleges will encounter oral English communicative situations and the situation may be more complex and targeted.

Objectives

This study aims to improve the oral English ability of non-English major students at a higher vocational college

Literature reviews

China's Standards of English (CSE) is an adopted vision of CEFR (Foley, 2019). Learners were viewed as language users by the CEFR, and language learning was viewed as a social activity (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (Council of Europe (CoE). 2018: 27). The CEFR (2018) introduced the European Language Portfolio (ELP) to describe the nature of language learning as social communication activities rather than a subject to learn (Lekpetch & Foley, 2022). ELP allows language learners to customize their own language portfolio for recording their learning track and experience, formulating and modifying learning objectives, and summarizing a language learning model suitable for their long-term (Lekpetch & Foley, 2022). Since the publication of the CSE in 2018, Chinese scholars have conducted studies that largely concentrated on the CSE itself, with few empirical studies on its application (Min, G., & Xiumei, L., 2022). The purpose of this paper was to provide an empirical study on the application of CSE by horizontally and vertically recording the improvement of competence in oral English under CSE and helping students to create their own Language Portfolio (García & Wei, 2014; Evnitskaya, 2018).

Conceptual Framework

The research of the Empirical Student on the Application of China's Standard of English: the Case of A vocational College in Ningxia Province, China, designed the research conceptual framework as follows;

Topic:	Credit card		
The area of topic:	Daily Life		
Activity/Action	Oral description, Oral exposition, Oral instruction, Oral interaction, Oral expression strategies: planning, Oral expression strategies: execution, Expressing intentions in speaking		
Relevant Descriptions:			
CSE 3	Oral description	•	Can express personal needs, wishes, and feelings in simple terms
CSE 4	Oral exposition	•	Can briefly describe the steps of common activities



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Relevant Descriptions:		
		in work or study contexts.
CSE 4	Oral instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can briefly respond to others' inquiries in daily communication.
CSE 4	Oral interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can speak with clerks at the bank about day-to-day tasks.
CSE 3	Oral interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can communicate with others, such as hotel front desk staff, for general needs and inquiries.
CSE 3	Oral expression strategies: planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can selectively and appropriately use oral expressions when greeting people or saying farewell, based on communicative needs.
CSE 4	Oral expression strategies: Execution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can gain time for thought by repeating certain words or phrases
CSE 3	Oral expression strategies: Execution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can use filled pauses (e.g. em, uh, er) to gain time for thought.
CSE 3	Expressing intentions in speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can use plain language to make a suggestion in routine situations

Methodology

Participants: The participants of this study were 36 first-year Financial major students from a higher vocational college. The 36 students were divided into 18 peers. The sampling method of this study was mixed method sampling. All participants are from the Financial English class. All the groups of students had mixed English proficiency, based on their exam results from General English class in the pre-semester. The original score came from the final test scores of General English in the previous semester, and the grading criteria came from the general English course. This score and grade were used only for the initial grouping of students. Most importantly, they all had at least 6 years of English learning experience.

Data collection: Qualitative methods were used to collect and analyze the data. In this study, the class Financial English was used as an experimental class, which lasted on the semester, 14 weeks. Students worked in pairs to pick out a keyword and had a conversation about it. This task was an improvisation task, there was no time to prepare in advance. The keywords of the topics were all related to the knowledge they had already learned. All conversation tasks were held in Weeks 13 and 14 of the semester. Students' Achievements recording data [SD] of 18 peers (Total of 36 students) were collected.

Data analysis: Dealing with the conditions and quality of data, 6 peers (a total of 12 students) of recording data were selected for data analysis. According to China's Standards of English Language Ability, which was issued by The Ministry of Education of China in 2018, there are three parts related



to oral English performance. The researcher compared and analyzed the students' oral performance with the requirements of CSE on oral ability. The conversations were relatively daily, handling unexpected situations, providing service to customers, and so on. The results of the analysis showed the different activities/actions contained in conversations and the CSE level of those activities.

There are examples of data analysis as follows.

The symbols and abbreviations used in transcription are described below:

S No.: No. is student number, ex: S1= Student 1

[laughs]: The words in square brackets represent laughing, coughing, and also back-channel such as Mm, Uhum, No, Right, and so on.

[.]: This represents a pause longer than one second.

[8 sec]: This represents how long pauses are in the talk.

{ }: The pronunciation of words or sentences needs to be corrected.

Example 1

Keyword: credit card

S1: Yang Rui S2: Liu Haiyun

1 S1: Hi, Yang. I have had a problem recently

2 S2: What's the matter? What happened?

3 S1: I am going to shopping always {shortage} money beside what to buy recently.

4 S2: That you can do a credit card, can overdraw consumption.

5 S1: How do I get my credit card?

6 S2: You can apply at the bank counter or online.

7 S1: What should I do if I {apply} online.

8 S2: [Umm] I think you should fill in your relevant information first.

9 S1: Will they give me a {bonus} after I submit the information?

10 S2: No, the [Umm] No the card won't be [.] [laughs] No the card won't be issued until your information is reviewed.

11 S1: Can I open the credit card after I receive it?

12 S2: Yes, you must remember the password and [.] Yes, you must remember the password when you open it and the [.] and the [.] [Umm] and the payment date.

13 S1: Ok I see. Thank you

14 S2: You're welcome. Have a good time.

- Oral Description: S1 told S2 that she had a problem with the shortage of money, see Line 1 and Line 3. S1 can express her feelings and needs in short, clear words. [CSE 3]

- Oral Exposition: The whole conversation was related to S2 giving S1 the suggestion to apply for a credit card for financial difficulties, and S2 outline the way and the steps for credit card application. S2 can briefly describe the steps of credit card application. [CSE 3]

- Oral Instruction: According to S2 own needs, S2 asked S1 about how to apply for a credit card and S1 gave the appropriate answer, see Lines 8-10. S1 and S2 can respond to each other about the normal task and make conversation to complete. [CSE 4]

- Oral Interaction: While the role of S1 and S2 was not bank employee and customer, their conversations demonstrated their ability to communicate with bank staff about daily business



activities such as credit card applications. [CSE 4] and [CSE 3]

- Oral Expression Strategies-Planning: S1 greeted partner S2 and started the conversation, and they finished the conversation with thanks and goodbye. [CSE 3]

- Oral Expression Strategies-Execution: During the conversation, S2 can gain time for thought and organize utterances in English by repeating words and also by pauses, see Line 8. [CSE 3] and [CSE 4]

- Expressing Intentions in Speaking: The conversation between S1 and S2 reflects the fact that they can use plain language to make suggestions in English or respond verbally to others' suggestions in the right way. [CSE 3]

- In terms of clarity and fluency, the daily conversation between S1 and S2 is mostly clear and fluent. Even if there are some pronunciation errors, it does not affect their understanding of each other's meaning. To sum up, the oral English abilities of S1 and S2 are between CSE3 and CSE4.

Results and Discussion

The results were found as follows;

The frequencies of CSE 3 and CSE 4 in the scales

The scales of competence	Sub aspects	Frequencies of CSE 3	Frequencies of CSE 4
Oral Expression	Oral description	6	-
	Oral narration	1	-
	Oral exposition	-	6
	Oral instruction	1	3
	Oral argumentation	1	1
	Oral interaction	1	5
Oral expression strategies	Oral expression strategies: planning	5	1
	Oral expression strategies: Execution	6	5
	Oral expression strategies: assessment and compensation	-	-
Pragmatic expression	Expressing intentions in speaking	5	2
Total		26	23

The overall oral abilities of the students were approximately CSE 3 and CSE 4. Using the CSE Oral English Scale as an analysis criterion, students' oral competence development was relatively balanced, with almost all aspects of competence developing.

The competencies of Oral Expression, students were basically at the stage of CSE 4. These six areas of Oral Expression. Students were better at summarizing the steps of a task and guiding others to complete it, as well as responding appropriately to requests from others in different situations. So, in the case of Oral Exposition, Oral Instruction, and Oral Interaction, students were better developed and belonged to the CSE 4 stage. However, students struggled to express their thoughts and feelings in more complex language. So, in the case of Oral Description and Oral Narration, on the other hand, students



were weaker and belonged to CSE 3 stage.

The competencies of Oral Expression Strategies contained three areas, and students were basically at stage CSE 3. Students chose the appropriate language according to different role needs and conversation objects, or they could buy themselves time to organize the language through short pauses and repetition. They had enough ability for planning and execution. It should be mentioned that the development of Oral expression strategies: assessment and compensation, was not shown in the data.

The competencies of Pragmatic expression, students were clearly at stage CSE 3. The students can require services at public venues, such as banks. Also, when another person asked for suggestions, the students can provide appropriate ones with suitable reasons.

During the analysis of data, I found there were some minor errors in the pronunciations and utterances organization of students. However, those errors did not affect the understanding of each other during the conversation.

Example 1, in Line 3, S1 means when she went shopping, she did not have enough money. However, according to the transcription of data, it was not that clear meaning. S2 can still understand exactly what S1 means by keywords like shopping, shortage money, etc. Then S2 offers advice on credit cards to solve the S1 problem. The development of interactional competence of students, which was inseparable from CIC with Translanguaging as the tool that I used as the teacher during the semester. For example, I enhanced the CIC of students through Tanslanguaging. It did not just allow students to use Chinese to create a familiar environment of learning, but also during the teaching process, I used keywords in English with explanations in Chinese, and continually simplify and repeat topics and questions by reformulation. Those techniques shaped learning opportunities for students, and also as their own experiences and learning tracks were recorded in Language Portfolio. By persistently recording, the Language Portfolio helped students create their own way of learning English in the future (Lekpetch & Foley, 2022).

The conversation tasks indicated that the improvement of the CIC of students can also benefit the development of interactional competence, which is not limited to certain scenarios. Oral English communication is restricted by context, and the interaction between context and language competence should be considered in the improvement of oral English ability (Hua & Yan, 2020). Even though the students pick the same keyword, the conversations were under different scenarios with different peers of students.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the students' impromptu speaking tasks by using the CSE Oral English Scale to show where the students' oral English abilities were located. The results show that students are between CSE 3 and CSE 4, and their oral ability development is relatively balanced. Although students still have some minor errors in pronunciation, this does not affect the student's understanding of each other's expressions. Also, the variety of scenarios in conversation tasks indicated the development of oral interactional competence in English of students, which was inseparable from CIC with Translanguaging as the tool that was used during the semester.



Peer No.	Keyword	Scenarios	Role of students	Other situations
Peer 1	Credit card	Friends chat	Friends or classmates	
Peer 2	Mortgage loan	Bank service	Bank staff and customer	
Peer 3	Credit card	Friends chat	Friends or classmates	Students had a short chat with the teacher before the peer conversation.
Peer 4	Currency exchange	Bank service	Bank staff and customer	
Peer 5	Bank service	Bank service	Bank staff and customer	
Peer 6	Credit card	Bank service	Bank staff and customer	

The keywords of conversation tasks were all financial terms. This was not restricted to the scenarios of students' conversations, even under the same keywords. For example, Peer 1 and Peer 6 picked up the same keyword 'Credit card'. However, Peer 1 was the daily chat between friends, Peer 6 was the conversation between bank staff and customers. It showed that the students had enough oral interactional competence in English under different scenarios. The students of Peer 3 had a short greeting dialogue with the teacher before the conversation task began, which also reflected that there was no obstacle for students to switch between different roles. Those different scenarios of conversations showed the progress of students' oral English ability under different situations and roles.

Recommendations

The results indicated that the benefit of improvement in the CIC of students was not limited to the classroom. It also can improve their oral English communication skill in daily tasks. Even though the students pick the same topic word, the conversations were under different scenarios with different groups of students. The development of CIC has not only been shown to improve academic language proficiency in the classroom, but also daily language proficiency.

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