

*Original Paper*

# Factors Influencing College Students' Spoken English Learning and Improvement Strategies

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## **Abstract**

*In the context of globalization, spoken English proficiency is an indispensable ability for college students, but many students can not solve the problem of oral expression even after years of learning. This paper makes an in-depth analysis of the factors that have a negative impact on students' spoken English learning from multiple aspects, including psychology, environment, language and so on, and points out that psychological barriers are the most prominent problems, such as lack of self-confidence and anxiety, and the environment where English is used is relatively narrow, and there are obvious differences between the two languages. This paper puts forward a series of reasonable suggestions, including the use of mobile technology, the use of task-based learning method, the creation of good learning environment, the use of vocabulary chunking strategy, and the adjustment of teaching methods. This paper points out that in order to improve spoken English, we should not only pay attention to the external learning environment, but also adjust the psychological state, and create good opportunities for students to communicate and practice.*

## **Keywords**

*spoken English, college students, learning strategies, task-based language teaching*

## **1. Introduction**

### *1.1 Research Background*

With the rapid development of globalization, English has become the most influential language in the world, playing an important role in business, culture, technology and other fields. For college students in non-English-speaking countries, English is no longer a subject, but the key to enhancing competitiveness and improving career development. Chinese students usually start learning English in primary school, and continue to learn for 12 years before entering university, mastering a large number of English words and grammar knowledge.

In the development of English education in China, there are many paradoxes, which are enough to make people feel shocking. Although students have been systematically trained for many years, they can not speak English fluently and confidently, and can not accurately express their opinions in the process of communication. They can get good grades in grammar and reading comprehension, but they can not communicate with native speakers and can not introduce their own opinions to others, which is the so-called “dumb English”. Educators, learners and policymakers have been concerned about this issue.

Solving this problem is conducive to the development of individual learners, but also conducive to the development of the whole country. In recent years, China has invested a lot of money in educational reform, and in the 2000s, the country launched the College English teaching reform, which requires the cultivation of students’ speaking ability and communication ability in the teaching process. Universities have set up oral English courses, built English corners, and tried a variety of teaching methods, but there is a big gap between classroom teaching and policy intentions.

### *1.2 Research Purpose*

In this study, the factors that restrict the development of spoken English are systematically analyzed, and reasonable suggestions are put forward for the purpose of improvement. The survey focuses on five aspects: first, the psychological barriers encountered by students in the process of learning spoken English; second, the influence of the environment on students’ oral practice; third, the differences between the two languages lead to linguistic challenges; fourth, the impact of teaching methods and assessment systems on students’ oral English; fifth, how to solve the above problems.

### *1.3 Theoretical Framework*

This study draws on two theories, which are complementary. Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis holds that affective variables will have a direct impact on the process of learning a second language, including self-confidence, motivation, anxiety and so on. If learners have low self-confidence or high anxiety, the “affective filter” will be triggered, which will interfere with the input of language and make it difficult to master the language. This framework can help to explain why many Chinese students can not speak English fluently.

The second theoretical foundation is task-based language teaching, which emphasizes the importance of doing in learning, which requires learners to communicate with each other in a meaningful way and not to be limited to a certain language form. In the process of learning English in China, this teaching theory has been supported by a large number of empirical studies, and it is found that if this method is used systematically, it can promote the fluency and accuracy of learners’ oral English.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Definition and Measurement of Spoken English Proficiency*

Oral English proficiency is a multidimensional concept, which not only needs to ensure that the pronunciation is accurate, but also needs to ensure that the grammatical structure is reasonable and the

vocabulary is rich. In the process of research and construction, it is necessary to grasp the complexity and fluency, and to ensure the accuracy of expression. At the same time, the speed of speech production should be relatively fast, and the language structure should be more complex and diverse. The development speed of these dimensions is relatively fast, and it can be affected by many factors.

In the process of evaluating students' speaking ability, the methods used by researchers include analysis and integration. The former is to analyze the students' performance in pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary and other aspects, and the latter is to evaluate the students' overall performance. When it comes to diagnosis, researchers use a variety of methods to describe the students' oral performance.

### *2.2 Empirical Studies on Speaking Difficulties*

In recent years, more and more empirical studies have focused on the factors that affect the performance of learners in English learning. In the quantitative study, cluster analysis and principal component analysis are used to analyze which factors will have a significant impact on the oral English performance of Chinese college students, and it is concluded that the most critical factor is the lack of language environment and the lack of extracurricular practice (Jia & Zheng, 2004). This conclusion further shows that this is a systemic problem, not just an individual problem, and the students' language skills can not be improved because of the lack of support.

Rohmatin et al. (2025) took 69 students as research objects, analyzed the difficulties faced by students in learning English, and analyzed the reasons from the aspects of external and internal factors. Descriptive statistical analysis method is used to analyze Krashen's affective filter hypothesis. It is found that the impact of internal factors on students' learning difficulties is greater than that of external factors. The most prominent internal barrier is the fear of making grammatical mistakes, and the vocabulary is not rich enough, and the social pressure is relatively large when communicating with peers. In the process of classroom interaction, students have a weak ability to use English, which is only a moderate impact. The conclusion is that psychological constraints are more important than environmental constraints.

Some scholars have analyzed the anxiety of college students in English learning, and it is found that most students have strong anxiety in English speaking, and there are obvious differences between individuals (Chen et al., 2007; Liu, 2015). The greater the anxiety, the worse the oral performance, and the two are negatively related, which will lead to a vicious circle. Anxious students do not dare to speak, which leads to the lack of practice, and their English proficiency can not be improved, which will further enhance their anxiety.

### *2.3 Research Gaps*

Although the research has achieved certain results, there are still many shortcomings. First, in the process of research, we only focus on the difference between the two groups, but do not analyze the reasons for the difference. Second, the interaction between the two factors is not analyzed, and the impact of environmental constraints on psychological barriers is not analyzed. Third, although the intervention study has achieved good results, the effectiveness of the intervention measures in the real

classroom environment needs to be tested. This paper combs the existing research results and puts forward a reasonable framework.

### **3. Factors Influencing Spoken English Learning**

#### *3.1 Psychological Factors*

For Chinese college students, if they want to learn spoken English well, they need to overcome many psychological obstacles, which are the most direct and powerful obstacles. Speaking anxiety is the most critical factor. Anxiety is a kind of emotional response, which will be nervous and uneasy in the process of using foreign languages. In the classroom, when students are asked to give presentations or participate in pair work, they will feel anxious.

There are many reasons for the formation of speaking anxiety. Some students are afraid of being evaluated, which will lead to self-doubt and negative feelings. In the process of socialization, Chinese students emphasize the maintenance of face, try to avoid mistakes and pursue perfect performance. Many students said that they were “frozen” when they spoke English, and they had symptoms such as sweating and rapid heartbeat (Chen & Li, 2007).

Low self-confidence will cause anxiety, and students with low self-confidence will not have a high vocabulary, and their pronunciation and grammar are not perfect, so they think that their spoken English is not good, and they can not be understood by others. This self-perception leads to communication avoidance: they only speak when necessary, do not communicate with others, and do not take the initiative to communicate with others, which leads to a lack of practice opportunities, and their English proficiency is low, which weakens their self-confidence and forms a negative feedback loop.

In addition, some people are too perfectionistic, which is also an important psychological barrier. In the process of learning, Chinese students have to pass many examinations, and mistakes will be punished, so they are afraid of making mistakes. When speaking, they are afraid of making mistakes and try to avoid them, which consumes too much cognitive resources and makes it difficult to speak fluently.

#### *3.2 Environmental Factors*

Whether the learning environment is good or not will have a direct impact on the development of students' speaking ability, and Chinese students are inevitably restricted by the learning environment. The most critical restriction is that English is only a foreign language in China, not a second language. Chinese students are obviously different from students in other countries, because English is their main communication tool, and Chinese students do not use English to communicate in their daily lives, do not use English to shop, do not use English to interact with others, and do not hear English in the street, so they can only learn English in the classroom, and the classroom is the only place where they can get English learning opportunities.

The problem of large class size is particularly prominent. Most Chinese universities organize English teaching in large classes, with a minimum of 40 students and a maximum of more than 60 students. If

the teacher wants to give every student a speaking opportunity, he needs to prepare for a 90-minute class, but each student can only speak for 1-2 minutes. In reality, students who are not confident can hardly get speaking opportunities, because some students are loud and occupy most of the speaking opportunities. In this way, students can not get enough practice opportunities, which is not conducive to the improvement of their spoken English level, and students can not accumulate experience in practice. The lack of real communication purposes restricts the development of students' learning. In real life, people speak to get information, to express their ideas, to communicate with others, to complete tasks and so on. However, in English classrooms, students speak because the teacher asks them to, to show what they have learned, to show their accuracy, or to accept evaluation. This is not a real language environment, students do not have the same motivation as real communication, the quality of practice is low, students are not willing to invest more energy.

In the process of research, we also found that language attrition is a problem, that is, the language skills that have been mastered have not been used for a long time, and the contact with the language environment has been reduced, resulting in the decline of language skills. In the study, the English learning of Chinese college students was tracked for ten months, and it was found that their vocabulary fluency declined significantly in three months, but there were some positive changes in the next stage (Pan, 2025). This conclusion shows that students' spoken language can only be maintained if they are in a good language environment.

### *3.3 Linguistic Factors*

There are obvious differences between the two languages in terms of structure, which is a challenge for Chinese students to learn spoken English, and the differences exist in many aspects, including phonology, syntax and so on.

From the phonological level, Chinese is a language with tones, and the meaning of words is distinguished by pitch contours, while English uses intonation to express emotion and achieve the purpose of communication. Therefore, Chinese learners are not good at grasping the intonation of English, and there are also difficulties in understanding the rhythm and stress. Chinese can not distinguish English vowels, which is a challenge for learners. Learners may confuse /i/ and /ɪ/ (such as "sheep" and "ship") or /æ/ and /e/ (such as "man" and "men"), resulting in problems of understanding. Chinese syllables do not have consonant clusters, which require learners to grasp the pronunciation rules of "strikes" and "texts" and break through the constraints of their native language phonology.

From the grammatical level, the two languages are obviously different in the encoding of time, number and relationship. English verbs have tense, such as "I went", "I will go", while Chinese expresses time with adverbs. English articles can be used to indicate the reference of noun phrases, which are not available in Chinese. English prepositions can describe the relationship between time and space, which are not available in Chinese. Learners should pay attention to these characteristics in the process of learning, and should not spend too much cognitive resources.

Lexical factors are also an important factor. Many Chinese students have a large vocabulary, which can

be seen when they read, but the vocabulary that can be used in the process of speaking is relatively small. According to the study, the vocabulary types of Asian learners are different, which are divided into two types, one is to play a role in maintaining speech, the other is to play a role in grammatical control. If the two types of vocabulary are not enough, it will lead to the phenomenon of long-term silence and the breakdown of speech.

Lexical fluency refers to the ease with which learners can find the required words when they speak. This is an important content in spoken communication. Compared with reading and writing, speaking requires higher speed and accuracy in retrieving words. When retrieval fails, learners may encounter “tip-of-the-tongue” and other situations, and may use circumlocution to solve the problem. Longitudinal research shows that the richness of learners’ vocabulary is relatively high, but it is difficult to retrieve words quickly under time pressure.

### *3.4 Educational Factors*

The development of students’ speaking ability is inevitably related to the education system. China’s education has been driven by the exam for a long time, and students’ reading, writing and listening skills are relatively prominent, but their speaking ability is relatively weak, which is not taken into account in the college entrance examination, and the “backwash effect” is relatively prominent. Teachers are not paying enough attention to spoken English teaching. Although the CET has set up spoken English tests, many students still regard listening and speaking as less important skills.

In the traditional teaching model, this orientation has been continuously consolidated. In the English classroom, the teacher is the dominant force, and the teaching mode is relatively single, which only uses text translation, grammar explanation and so on. In the process of organizing speaking activities, the teacher controls the whole process, only guides the students to read the model sentences repeatedly, and guides the students to answer the questions set in advance. These activities can only improve students’ pronunciation level, but can not meet the needs of students’ spontaneous expression.

In the process of reforming college English teaching, we should make efforts to solve these problems, and use communication methods to guide students to learn independently. Some universities have made bold innovations in teaching, including task-based teaching, small group teaching, and integrating technology into teaching. Xidian University has achieved good results in the process of innovation, integrating AI tools with cultural education, and students’ cross-cultural communication ability has been significantly improved, but the scale of innovation is relatively small.

In the process of evaluation, there are also many obstacles. When evaluating students’ oral language, the accuracy of students’ language should be emphasized, and students’ speaking errors should be avoided as far as possible, so as to avoid taking risks in oral language learning. In the process of evaluation, students should have a strong sense of responsibility, because students’ oral errors may affect their grades or have a negative impact on their development.

## 4. Improvement Strategies

### 4.1 Psychological Intervention Strategies

In order to eliminate psychological barriers, we must make efforts from many aspects to enhance students' confidence and eliminate anxiety. The first thing to do is to change students' understanding of mistakes, so that students can realize that mistakes are inevitable in the process of language learning, and it is a necessary part of language learning. Children can learn their mother tongue through repeated attempts, and adults should also regard mistakes as an opportunity to learn. Teachers should set an example for students, accept their own mistakes bravely, and encourage students to take risks.

If students want to speak confidently, they should actively participate in speaking activities and gradually increase the requirements for speaking. Students should first participate in activities with low requirements and low anxiety, and then gradually complete more difficult tasks. For example, students can record their own speaking content with mobile phones, and then speak with their partners in a reliable way, and then participate in small group discussions, and finally speak in front of the whole class. Each step can bring students a good experience and help them develop self-efficacy. Recording and self-evaluation can also play an important role, so that students can objectively evaluate their own performance, challenge their own negative self-perception, and gradually improve their performance.

In the process of teaching, we should create a good psychological environment for students, set reasonable rules for communication, and not ridicule students' mistakes. Teachers should guide students to plan in advance, encourage students to participate in teaching in various ways, and give positive feedback to students in time, so that students can reduce their emotional filter and be willing to take risks in communication.

### 4.2 Environmental Creation Strategies

In China, the English environment is relatively narrow, and teachers and students should jointly create a good English environment, so that students can speak English in this environment, and the establishment of English corners and English clubs is the most traditional way. In the process of organizing activities, students with the same language learning goals can communicate with each other in a relaxed environment, without pressure, and can communicate with each other, which requires the formulation of reasonable schedules, the use of diversified activity formats, and the organization of games and discussions.

Technology can bring good tools for environmental construction, and the effectiveness of mobile learning has been proved, which can help learners improve their spoken English. When learning, learners can communicate with native speakers through Hello Talk and other software, and can communicate with people in different time zones. Voice social media can also play a role, such as WeChat voice, which can relieve the pressure of real-time communication. The use of automated speech recognition tools can bring good feedback to learners, and learners can practice independently without being evaluated by others.

Shadowing is an effective way to cultivate fluency and automaticity, which requires learners to listen to

English recordings and repeat them immediately after listening. Students can listen to the dialogue content of the movie, the broadcast content of the news, and the podcast, not only to master the pronunciation, but also to grasp the rhythm, intonation and so on. This method can be used in any time and space, as long as there is a mobile phone and headphones, it can be used in learning, and it is necessary to use this method for 15 minutes every day to improve the speech rate and reduce the frequency of pausing.

Self-talk refers to the description of one's own actions and thoughts in English, which is an effective learning method. Students should describe their own actions in English when they are doing things, such as "I need to open the refrigerator", "I need to go to the library after class", and so on. In this way, students can form the habit of thinking in English, not to translate Chinese into English in their mind, and to master the skills of sentence organization without social pressure. With the passage of time, students will become more fluent in their self-talk.

#### *4.3 Task-Based and Technology-Enhanced Learning*

Task-based language teaching can provide a reasonable framework for the organization of speaking teaching, so that students can communicate in real situations and no longer rely on isolated language practice. This method divides the whole teaching process into several stages, including task performance, planning, language focus and so on. The most critical stage is the language focus stage, which is after the task is completed, and students can use their own language resources to communicate, and then learn the target language.

In the process of learning English, Chinese students have a higher level of TBLT, and the development potential of M-TBLT is relatively high. A quasi-experimental study focuses on the analysis of six steps of M-TBLT teaching model, and integrates the advantages of Liulishuo and WeChat into the teaching of English speaking (Jia & Lu, 2025). It is found that students have made rapid progress in fluency, accuracy and complexity, but there is no significant change in lexical complexity. Qualitative research found that students could use mobile phones to communicate with others in real time, get feedback quickly, and have a good experience in learning.

In the process of task design, we should analyze the difficulty and type of tasks in depth, so as to obtain good results. In the process of completing the puzzle and drawing, learners need to share information with each other, which is enough to reflect the significance of communication. In the process of completing the task, learners can discuss controversial issues with each other and reach consensus. In the process of completing the task, learners can make reasonable choices from a variety of options and explain the reasons for their choices, so as to achieve the purpose of argumentation. Teachers should arrange tasks according to the degree of structure, so that learners can gradually feel the importance of language.

In the teaching process of TBLT, we should focus on the planning stage. Before reporting to all students, we should prepare for a long time, repeatedly polish the content to be reported, and master the language to be used. In the planning stage, students can use dictionaries, ask teachers for advice, and

communicate with partners to enhance their performance and reduce their anxiety, so that they can create a good language form in a natural context. As Jane Willis (2025) notes, this is when “learners will each be working at their own level, building on, improving and extending the language they already have”.

#### *4.4 Vocabulary Development Strategies for Speaking*

In the process of fluent speaking, lexical access plays an important role, and vocabulary teaching should not only enable students to understand vocabulary, but also guide students to use vocabulary reasonably. Learning words in the form of collocation is the most reasonable method. Native speakers do not construct sentences word by word, but retrieve a large number of pre-assembled phrases, such as “as a matter of fact”, “if I were you, I would”, “I don’t know about you”, etc. Through the study of these words, learners can process more information, reduce the processing load, and have more cognitive resources to monitor grammar and plan messages.

Specifically, students should master a series of high-frequency vocabulary in the process of learning, including expressions such as “What do you think?”, “Sort of”, “Clarify”, “That’s a good point”, etc., which can be regarded as “Type B vocabulary”, which can be used to maintain the stability of speech. Through the mastery of this vocabulary, learners can maintain smooth communication in the process of looking for content words.

If students can make vocabulary books, they can accumulate a large number of active vocabulary. They can sort out vocabulary from many aspects, including travel, education, environment, technology and so on, and set goals for themselves in the process of communication and use vocabulary. The use of mobile phones and other electronic products can enable students to review vocabulary repeatedly and master the vocabulary for a long time.

In the process of teaching vocabulary, the corpus is an important reference, which can make students deeply feel which words are used by native speakers in the process of communication. Researchers have compared the written and spoken vocabulary frequency lists, and found that there are obvious differences between the two, some words are used more frequently in academic writing, but rarely used in daily conversation, so students should consult the spoken corpus, and analyze the transcripts of natural conversations to understand the vocabulary used by native speakers.

#### *4.5 Teaching Method Reform and Assessment Innovation*

In order to provide favorable conditions for the development of oral English teaching, it is necessary to adjust the institutional level, which is the most critical link in the process of reform. Small group teaching is conducive to the improvement of students’ oral English, but in the large class teaching, students’ oral English can not be cultivated effectively. Therefore, colleges and universities should reasonably set the number of students in oral English courses, not more than 20 students, so that students can get enough time to speak in class and get the guidance of teachers. If the school’s resources are not enough, the small group teaching mode should be adopted, and students should be guided to learn independently and cooperate with each other.

In the process of promoting the professional development of teachers, it is necessary to carry out methodological reform. Some English teachers in China have long used the grammar translation method in teaching, and they can not get good results in the process of implementing the task method or communication method. In training, we should focus on the use of effective classroom management methods, grasp the principles of task design, adopt effective methods to correct errors, and adopt effective methods to evaluate students' oral performance. In the process of demonstration teaching, teachers can find innovative methods.

To play the role of "washback effect", we must deepen the reform of teaching assessment, and clearly show that spoken English is an indispensable content in the process of college English teaching and assessment, which requires teachers to set reasonable assessment tasks, communicate with students in real situations, and guide students to master a variety of communication skills. Assessment criteria should be reasonable, not only to pursue accuracy, but also to pursue fluency, to encourage students to communicate with others, even if there are errors in the process of communication.

Formative assessment can be carried out without causing anxiety to students, which is significantly different from high-stakes testing. Self-assessment checklists can help students understand their own learning progress. In the evaluation of performance, the use of rubrics can enable students to master evaluation skills and get diversified feedback. Teachers should not focus on students' mistakes, but should analyze the causes of mistakes, and guide students to understand the importance of learning. Portfolios can help students collect learning samples, which can promote their self-improvement and enhance their self-efficacy.

## **5. Conclusion**

### *5.1 Summary of Findings*

In this study, the factors that have a negative impact on the oral English learning of Chinese college students are analyzed, and reasonable suggestions are put forward for the purpose of solving the problems. The study points out that the difficulties encountered by students in learning oral English are not caused by a single factor, but by the joint action of multiple factors.

From a psychological point of view, students are afraid of being evaluated by others and have low self-confidence, which is the most direct barrier. They are afraid of being embarrassed, do not dare to speak in public, and are trapped in a negative cycle, which is not conducive to improving their oral proficiency.

From the environmental point of view, students do not have enough opportunities to communicate in real English, and the class is relatively large, so each student's speaking time is relatively short, and the English context is not perfect, so students do not often use English in their daily life. In the study, it is further found that the most important reason why students can not improve their oral English is that the environment is not good and there is not enough extracurricular practice.

From the linguistic level, there are obvious differences between the two languages, which are reflected

in grammar, phonology and vocabulary, and learners need to be fully aware of the differences between the two languages, and to grasp the characteristics of English, which puts forward higher requirements for learners, and will affect the smoothness of expression. The biggest problem in vocabulary is that the fluency is not up to the standard, which is more prominent than the vocabulary size.

From the educational point of view, the traditional grammar translation method and the test-oriented teaching method have not paid enough attention to the cultivation of students' spoken language skills. Even if students are required to speak, teachers only pay attention to the accuracy of students' speech, and students have fewer opportunities to communicate in real situations.

In this study, the integrated strategy is analyzed, which requires psychological intervention to eliminate the anxiety of learners and restore their confidence, create a good environment with the help of technology, guide learners to learn mobile learning methods, use vocabulary chunks reasonably in the process of learning, and constantly adjust teaching methods and assessment methods.

### *5.2 Implications for Theory and Practice*

Through the analysis of these conclusions, we can deepen our understanding of second language acquisition, and the psychological factors will have a significant impact, which can be used to support Krashen's view, and also to show that learners should not only master the knowledge of linguistics, but also reduce the filtering rate in the process of learning. In the process of learning, we should make good use of the relationship between internal and external factors, and establish a reasonable acquisition model.

This paper can provide guidance for a variety of people, including learners, teachers and administrators. Learners need to master the language and adjust their psychology in the process of learning, and mobile phones can be used to practice more conveniently. Teachers should not only create a good learning atmosphere, but also give students constructive feedback. Administrators should actively innovate teaching methods and improve the quality of assessment.

### *5.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions*

There are many shortcomings in this study. First, it only synthesizes the literature and does not conduct empirical research, and can not provide original data for the effectiveness of intervention in the development of higher education in China. Second, the paper regards all college students as a homogeneous group, but there are obvious differences between students of teaching-oriented institutions and students of research-oriented institutions, between English majors and non-English majors, and between students of different grades. Third, the rapid development of educational technology has changed the teaching landscape, and the significance of such changes has not been fully analyzed.

In the next stage of research, we should fill these gaps, conduct longitudinal research, and compare the effectiveness of different teaching methods in a controlled environment. In the research process, we should also pay attention to the differences between individuals, analyze personality traits, learning style, motivation and other contents, and put forward reasonable suggestions for the development of

students' oral language. At the same time, we should make good use of AI technology, improve the feedback system, and analyze whether the tools used can bring support for human teaching.

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