

A Practical Study on Workplace Scenario Demonstration Teaching in Vocational College English from the Perspective of the Output Hypothesis

ZENG Yangxue

Hubei Preschool Teachers College, Wuhan, Hubei 430000, China

Abstract: Against the backdrop of China's ongoing vocational education reform, vocational college English courses are oriented toward cultivating students' practical language skills and postmatching communicative competence. Nevertheless, traditional classroom practice has long been dominated by knowledge-oriented input activities, where teachers focus on explaining vocabulary, grammar and textbook texts while offering limited opportunities for students to produce authentic language output. Such teaching practice easily gives rise to the wellknown phenomenon of "dumb English", under which students can recognize words and understand written passages but fail to deliver appropriate oral expressions when facing realworld workplace communication tasks. Drawing on Merrill Swain's Output Hypothesis in secondlanguage acquisition research, this paper carries out quasiexperimental teaching research centered on workplace scenario demonstration. Over a sixteenweek teaching cycle, data are collected through oral proficiency pretests and posttests, questionnaires and classroom observation. Research findings indicate that workplace scenario demonstration guided by outputdriven principles can effectively improve vocational students' oral fluency, linguistic accuracy and workplaceoriented pragmatic competence. It also helps relieve orallearning anxiety and enhances students' overall motivation and selfconfidence in English learning. This study provides practical pedagogical references for promoting outputoriented reform in vocational college English teaching.

Keywords: Output Hypothesis; Vocational college English; Workplace scenario demonstration; Language output; Workplace communicative competence

I. Introduction

As vocational education in China continues to advance to meet industry and enterprise workforce needs, College English in higher vocational colleges bears a dual mandate: equipping students with basic language literacy and developing practical English abilities for their future careers. In actual classroom contexts, however, many vocational English teachers still follow the traditional teaching logic that prioritizes knowledge input. Classroom time

is mostly spent on text translation, grammatical analysis and vocabulary memorization, and students are seldom placed in simulated occupational contexts to complete interactive communicative tasks. Restricted by such learning environments, numerous vocational learners can cope with reading exercises but struggle to organize spontaneous oral utterances when confronted with typical workplace events such as business reception, job interviews and product introduction.

The imbalance between input and output in

vocational English classrooms calls for theoretical guidance from secondlanguage acquisition studies. Swain's Output Hypothesis posits that comprehensible input alone cannot guarantee successful second language acquisition. Meaningful language output serves indispensable functions that facilitate learners' internalization of targetlanguage knowledge. When learners are pushed to produce comprehensible output, they become aware of gaps within their interlanguage system, test tentative hypotheses about linguistic rules and conduct metalinguistic reflection upon language forms. These cognitive processes cannot be triggered merely by receiving reading or listening materials.

Workplace scenario demonstration teaching creates simulated occupational contexts and requires students to complete communicative tasks via role-taking and in-class performance. Such teaching activities provide natural conditions for pushed output and fit well with the practicaltraining orientation of vocational education. In this context, this study implements workplace scenario demonstration activities within regular vocational English classes, observes changes in learners' oral performance and affective states, and explores how the three core functions of output operate in real vocational teaching contexts. This study aims to offer feasible pedagogical strategies for frontline vocational English educators and enrich empirical studies concerning the application of the Output Hypothesis within Chinese vocational teaching contexts.

II. Theoretical Framework

Merrill Swain first proposed the Output Hypothesis on the basis of observations of French immersion programs in Canada and further refined its theoretical framework in subsequent research.

Swain pointed out that even learners receiving a large quantity of comprehensible input may still retain obvious deficiencies in grammatical accuracy and pragmatic appropriateness. Input lays the foundation for language learning, yet output activates deeper cognitive processing that contributes to secondlanguage development. Three core functions of output have been identified in the theoretical literature. The noticing function refers to the process whereby, during output activities, learners will detect discrepancies between what they intend to express and what they are linguistically capable of producing. This awareness drives them to notice relevant targetlanguage knowledge that they have not yet fully mastered. The hypothesistesting function describes the process in which learners continuously adjust their language forms by testing their assumptions about targetlanguage rules and receiving feedback from teachers or peers. The metalinguistic function refers to learners' ability to reflect upon, analyze and process language knowledge through outputrelated thinking, which transforms fragmented linguistic knowledge into systematic, internalized language competence.

Workplace scenario demonstration teaching is a situational pedagogical approach tailored for vocational education. It extracts typical communicative events from real-life job scenarios and reconstructs them for classroom simulation. Unlike rigid pattern drills, scenario demonstration emphasizes communicative authenticity rather than mechanical recitation. Students need to take on specific professional roles, cope with situational variables and accomplish practical communicative goals. When combined with the Output Hypothesis, workplace scenarios provide reasonable communicative settings for pushed output. Instead of passively absorbing knowledge,

students are pushed to produce language to fulfill role-based communicative assignments. Teacher feedback after each round of demonstration creates conditions for repeated output practice, allowing the noticing function, the hypothesis-testing function, and the metalinguistic function of output to be activated in classroom practice. The integration of theory and teaching activity connects language learning with vocational requirements, responding to the core goal of developing application-oriented professionals in higher vocational colleges.

III. Research Methodology

This study adopted a quasi-experimental design. Two parallel intact classes of non-English majors from a higher vocational college in Hubei Province were selected as the research sample, comprising 40 students in the experimental class and 40 in the control class. Both groups were taught by the same English instructor to control for potential variables arising from differences in teaching styles. Pre-test results indicated no statistically significant difference in oral English proficiency between the two classes prior to the experiment. The experimental class received workplace scenario demonstration teaching guided by the Output Hypothesis, while the control class followed conventional teaching procedures dominated by text-based explanation, grammar instruction, and written exercises. The teaching experiment lasted for 16 weeks, equivalent to one regular semester.

Multiple research instruments were employed for data collection. A specially designed oral English test was used for pre-test and post-test assessment. Scoring dimensions included oral fluency, linguistic accuracy, pragmatic appropriateness in workplace contexts, and task completion. Questionnaires were

distributed to students in the experimental class after the experiment to collect data on their learning motivation, self-confidence in oral expression, and subjective evaluations of the scenario-demonstration-oriented classes. Non-participant classroom observation was also conducted throughout the semester to record students' levels of engagement, interactive behaviors, and practical output performance during classroom activities. This study addresses three core research questions: (1) whether workplace scenario demonstration teaching guided by the Output Hypothesis can improve vocational college students' oral English proficiency; (2) what impact this teaching mode has on students' English learning motivation and self-confidence; and (3) how teachers can properly design and implement workplace scenario demonstration activities within vocational English classrooms.

IV. Implementation of Workplace Scenario Demonstration Teaching

Before formal classroom implementation, the teacher carried out pre-class preparatory work. Typical workplace communicative scenarios closely related to students' future career paths were selected, covering job-hunting self-introductions, reception of foreign visitors, product presentations, and handling of customer complaints. Based on the specific requirements of each scenario, targeted linguistic resources—including key vocabulary, functional sentence patterns, and sample dialogues—were compiled as supportive input materials.

At the beginning of each class, the teacher presented clear workplace communicative tasks and defined output requirements for students. When students realized what communicative goals they

needed to achieve, they naturally perceived their own linguistic shortcomings, and the noticing function of output was activated. After the task is clarified, the teacher offers targeted input support. Unlike the extensive knowledge-based explanation typical of traditional classes, such input was task-oriented and served the subsequent scenario demonstration output. Students are then divided into small groups. Within each group, students assigned professional roles, drafted scripts, and conducted in-group rehearsals. During group preparation and on-stage demonstration, students were prompted to organize language to complete communicative tasks. They constantly adjusted their expressions based on their own judgment, which activated the hypothesis-testing function of output.

After each group finished its demonstration, a joint evaluation was conducted. The teacher gives targeted feedback focusing on fluency, grammatical correctness and workplace pragmatic appropriateness. Peers were also encouraged to offer constructive suggestions. Based on the feedback received, students revised their scripts and conducted a second round of demonstration. Repeated output pushed learners to reflect on language forms, promoting the realization of the metalinguistic function of the Output Hypothesis. Throughout the teaching process, output served as the core driving force of classroom activities, and scenario demonstration provided real-life communicative conditions for students' language production.

V. Research Results and Discussion

According to the oral test data collected before and after the experiment, the average pre-test score of the experimental class stood at 61.3, and that of the control class was 60.9, showing no

significant difference between the two groups. After sixteen weeks of teaching intervention, the average post-test score of the experimental class rose to 80.1, while the average score of the control class reached only 68.6. A marked improvement was observed in the experimental class in terms of oral fluency and workplace pragmatic appropriateness. Questionnaire statistics showed that most students in the experimental class held positive attitudes toward the scenario-demonstration-oriented teaching. More than 89% of respondents indicated that such classroom activities strengthened their willingness to speak English. Approximately 85% of students believed they could produce more appropriate utterances under simulated workplace conditions, and over 92% reported a higher interest in English learning. Records from classroom observation further complemented the test and questionnaire data. Students in the experimental class took a more active part in group discussions and scenario performances. Along with repeated output practice, stuttering frequency and grammatical mistakes decreased gradually, and students learned to adjust their expressions according to feedback. In contrast, students in the control class remained relatively passive in oral practice sessions and tended to rely on memorized content rather than spontaneous language production.

These results demonstrate the effectiveness of workplace scenario demonstration teaching under the guidance of the Output Hypothesis. When students were placed in simulated workplace contexts and pushed to complete communicative output tasks, the noticing function, hypothesis-testing function, and metalinguistic function of output were activated effectively. Targeted input support and multi-round, feedback-driven repeated output further facilitated learners' language internalization. Apart from the improvement in

linguistic competence, affective factors such as learning motivation and self-confidence were also enhanced. Nevertheless, several practical issues warrant teachers' attention in real classroom practice. Scenario tasks should match students' actual professional backgrounds. Over-complicated task settings may cause excessive learning pressure, while overly simple tasks cannot trigger effective pushed output. Timely and specific feedback, rather than general comments, plays a vital role in enhancing learners' output quality.

VI. Conclusion

This paper explores the implementation effect of workplace scenario demonstration teaching in vocational college English from the perspective of the Output Hypothesis. Research results demonstrate that output-oriented workplace scenario demonstration can effectively improve vocational students' oral fluency, linguistic accuracy, and workplace-oriented pragmatic competence. Meanwhile, such teaching practice helps boost students' learning motivation and self-confidence, easing the common "mute English" dilemma prevalent in vocational English teaching. By setting simulated professional communicative tasks, this teaching mode bridges the gap between textbook knowledge and actual workplace demands, conforming to the workforce development orientation of higher vocational education.

For vocational English educators, it is necessary to appropriately shift the teaching focus from teacher-centered knowledge input toward output-driven instruction. Teachers should design authentic workplace scenario tasks suitable for students' majors, create sufficient opportunities

for students to engage in pushed output activities, and provide targeted feedback to support repeated output practice. It should be noted that this study has certain limitations. The sample scope is confined to a single higher vocational college, and the duration of the teaching experiment is limited. Future research may expand sample sources, extend research cycles, and combine online teaching resources to diversify scenario output forms, thereby further exploring the long-term effects of output-oriented vocational English teaching.

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