

Application Status and Innovation Paths of Artificial Intelligence Tools in Higher Vocational English Teaching

Yumei Zou, Tingting Liu

Zhalantun Vocational College, Zhalantun, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, 162650, China

ABSTRACT

Under the national policy promoting the integration of vocational education modernization and informatization, artificial intelligence (AI) is a key factor reshaping the ecology of higher vocational education. Higher vocational English teaching faces challenges such as low efficiency, insufficient personalized support, and traditional models struggling to meet diverse needs. This paper focuses on higher vocational English teaching, sorts out the application status of AI tools, analyzes obstacles and limitations, and explores innovation paths. Adopting a combination of questionnaires, interviews, and case studies, the research investigates from four dimensions: classroom teaching, after-class tutoring, evaluation and feedback, and resource construction. It reveals issues regarding tool penetration, teachers' and students' experience and acceptance, and the alignment with teaching objectives.

KEYWORDS

English teaching in higher vocational colleges; Artificial intelligence tools; Application status; Innovation paths; Human-machine collaboration; Teaching model transformation

1 Research Background, Status, and Methods

1.1 Research Background and Significance

The rapid development of AI has profoundly transformed traditional teaching methods. As an important venue for cultivating technical talents, higher vocational education faces new opportunities and challenges in English teaching. Higher vocational English teaching aims to develop students' abilities in workplace foreign language communication, cross-cultural exchange, and practical language application. However, traditional teaching methods focus on rote memorization of words and grammar, with single teaching methods and content, leading to low student interest and poor learning outcomes.

This research holds both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it enriches the theory of technology-assisted language teaching and clarifies the role and function of AI in higher vocational education. Practically, it comprehensively sorts out the current application status, providing teachers with new teaching ideas such as creating intelligent vocational scenarios and adopting project-based tasks. The transformation of teaching methods not only improves students' language application skills but also places new requirements on teachers to adapt to new technologies and achieve professional development. Therefore, this research aims to provide theoretical support and practical reference for the new human-machine collaboration model in higher vocational English teaching.

1.2 Domestic and Foreign Research Status

In recent years, the application of AI technology in the global education field has increased, and research on the integration of higher vocational English teaching with intelligent tools has gradually developed. Developed countries in Europe and America have earlier applied automated learning and intelligent teacher systems to vocational education language teaching. They use language processing technology to design personalized learning paths and provide real-time feedback, focusing on improving students' language learning efficiency and self-directed learning abilities. Domestic research started late but has gained rapid academic attention under policy promotion. Current domestic research mainly explores the preliminary application of intelligent translation and speech recognition tools in teaching and their impact on traditional teaching, believing that they offer new possibilities for addressing problems such as poor English foundations and insufficient motivation among higher vocational students. Domestic research is shifting from simple technology application to changes in teaching models and the roles of teachers and students.

1.3 Research Content and Methods

This research deeply analyzes the application forms of AI tools in higher vocational English teaching and the resulting teaching reforms, exploring how these technologies change traditional listening, speaking, reading, and writing training methods. Based on the analysis of current status, it proposes future innovation plans, explores paths for the

comprehensive integration of AI tools into higher vocational English teaching, and forms a new model of vocational competence cultivation supported by technology.

The research adopts a multi-method combination of literature analysis, case study, and comparative study. It constructs a research framework by sorting out domestic and foreign theories on AI application in education, compares differences in technology application among vocational colleges of different regions and types to explore a development path with Chinese characteristics for vocational education, and emphasizes the combination of qualitative research and quantitative analysis. In-depth interviews and classroom observations are used to collect teachers' practical experience, providing feasible plans for the reform of higher vocational English teaching in the AI era.

2 Analysis of the Application Status of AI Tools in Higher Vocational English Teaching

2.1 Main Types of Applied Tools and Their Functions

Currently, the application scope of AI tools in higher vocational English teaching is expanding and deepening. Intelligent speech evaluation systems use automatic speech recognition and natural language processing technologies to real-time assess students' pronunciation accuracy, fluency, and intonation, providing immediate feedback, which has a significant effect on improving listening and speaking abilities. AI writing correction tools integrate functions such as grammar error correction, vocabulary optimization, sentence structure diversity evaluation, and article structure analysis, offering efficient and accurate guidance for students' written expression. The main applications include the following aspects:

Tool Category Typical Tool Examples Core Teaching Functions.

Intelligent Speech Evaluation Systems Liulishuo, English Dubbing Fun Real-time pronunciation evaluation and correction, intonation analysis, oral fluency training.

AI Writing Correction Tools Pigaiwang, Grammarly Automatic grammar and spelling error correction, vocabulary usage suggestions, sentence polishing, textual coherence evaluation.

Adaptive Learning Platforms Huijiang Online School Intelligent Learning System, Yuantiku Learning situation diagnosis and competence assessment, personalized learning path recommendation, adaptive exercise pushing, learning progress tracking.

Virtual Simulation Conversation Assistants ChatGPT, AI English Partner Assistant Simulating real conversation scenarios, providing open-ended language interaction practice, real-time responses and contextualized feedback.

2.2 Investigation of Application Effects

AI tools are widely used in higher vocational English courses. Speech recognition and real-time feedback systems provide students with personalized pronunciation correction and oral practice environments, effectively addressing the lack of individual practice opportunities for students in large-class teaching. They significantly reduce teachers' correction workload while increasing students' writing training opportunities.

Adaptive learning platforms dynamically adjust content difficulty by analyzing each student's learning trajectory through algorithms. This flexible approach maintains the learning enthusiasm of students with different foundations and lowers the psychological threshold for classroom participation. Virtual simulation technology and chatbots have achieved remarkable results in simulating real language environments. For example, imitating workplace communication scenarios allows students to conduct role-playing and skill training in a relaxed atmosphere, which is particularly necessary for higher vocational English teaching that emphasizes vocational competence cultivation.

Teachers' roles are undergoing transformation. Some teachers have shifted from knowledge transmitters to learning assistants and curriculum designers. They use AI analysis reports to identify knowledge blind spots in the class and optimize subsequent teaching plans. Although there is still room for improvement in the breadth and depth of tool application, the supporting effect of AI on higher-order goals such as critical thinking and cross-cultural communication abilities requires more empirical research, and related technology development needs continuous improvement.

2.3 Main Existing Problems and Challenges

Although the application of AI tools in higher vocational English teaching has been carried out, it faces practical difficulties. Students not only over-rely on technical tools but also weaken the process of independent thinking and language digestion and absorption, which may hinder the development of critical thinking in the long run. Some teachers not only are accustomed to traditional lecture-based teaching models but also have ability gaps. They lack confidence in operating intelligent systems, preventing advanced tools from entering real classrooms. The misalignment between technical tools and teaching objectives has become a major difficulty. Unbalanced allocation of teaching

resources limits the depth of application. High-quality platforms are concentrated in a few demonstration colleges, leaving most colleges facing problems such as insufficient resources and slow system updates, forming a new digital divide. More importantly, current applications basically remain at the level of skill training, lacking mature methods to integrate AI with in-depth teaching objectives such as cross-cultural communication.

3 Innovation Paths of AI Tools in Higher Vocational English Teaching

3.1 Building an "AI + Vocational Scenario" Intelligent Learning Environment

AI technology constructs an "AI + Vocational Scenario" intelligent learning environment by simulating real work scenarios, deeply integrating language learning with future vocational practice. It breaks through the limitations of traditional language laboratories and creates highly simulated digital task scenarios, such as foreign hotel front desk reception, cross-border e-commerce customer service conversations, or international technical exhibition consultations. This allows students to naturally acquire professional English while solving practical problems, shifting learning motivation from external drive to internal recognition of vocational needs.

The technical support is achieved through the collaboration of natural language processing, speech recognition and synthesis, and multimodal interaction technologies. Generative AI simulates customers with different accents and speech rates to raise variable business questions to students, conducting real-time analysis and guiding feedback on the accuracy, appropriateness, and procedural standardization of students' language responses, providing data support for the adjustment of personalized learning paths.

The educational philosophy behind the design of this environment reflects the modern application of "learning by doing" and "situated learning" theories. It transforms abstract language knowledge into concrete vocational actions, promoting students to shift from passive knowledge recipients to active task performers and collaborators. AI is not only a tool but also a highly patient "vocational mentor."

3.2 Developing Data-Driven Personalized Learning Paths

Higher vocational English teaching has transformed from the traditional unified model to a student-centered model through the creation of data-driven learning paths. AI tools are used to real-time collect and analyze multi-dimensional data of students, such as practice completion rate, response time, error types, interaction frequency, and knowledge point review status. This path design is not a static preset but a continuously optimized dynamic process to ensure the timeliness of teaching interventions.

The effective operation of the path also relies on the detailed decomposition of the learning objective competence model. AI decomposes comprehensive abilities involved in higher vocational English, such as workplace conversation, business correspondence writing, and professional literature reading, into quantifiable and trackable micro-competence points. Through continuous evaluation of the mastery level of each node, the system intelligently plans the optimal progression sequence, ensuring that learners are always in the "zone of proximal development"—not frustrated by overly difficult content nor inefficient due to overly simple content.

3.3 Creating a New Human-Machine Collaboration Classroom Teaching Model

The new human-machine collaboration classroom teaching model breaks the traditional pattern of teachers lecturing unilaterally and students listening passively, forming a complementary intelligent teaching environment. Teachers' roles are no longer knowledge transmitters but designers of learning activities, guides of human-machine interaction, and stimulators of in-depth thinking. AI tools provide precise assistance by analyzing student learning data to generate real-time personal learning situation reports, making teaching decisions more reasonable. For example, during oral practice, the AI speech recognition system immediately feeds back students' pronunciation fluency. Teachers are freed from repetitive work to focus on organizing in-depth communication activities, such as guiding group discussions on specific vocational conversations generated by AI for critical thinking. This division of labor makes personalized guidance in large classes possible, allowing teachers to invest in more creative teaching interactions instead of repetitive work.

This approach mainly relies on the dynamic cycle of "teacher-led - intelligent diagnosis - student-centered - feedback loop." The key point is that teachers arrange project tasks according to teaching objectives. For example, using AI to build a simulated international business negotiation scenario, students' language output during role-playing includes written plans and oral communication. AI tools conduct preliminary analysis and scoring, identifying common language difficulties and individual knowledge gaps. Teachers refer to AI diagnostic information to implement targeted classroom explanations and assistance, focusing on cultivating students' cross-cultural communication skills and critical thinking abilities rather than just correcting grammar errors. The model combines AI's ability to process data quickly and accurately

with teachers' emotional care and intelligent guidance, balancing large-scale teaching and personalized training.

For the new model to be effective, human-machine interaction must be natural and smooth. Teaching activity design should not simply stack technologies but require overall transformation targeting the improvement of students' comprehensive abilities. After arranging students to practice conversations with AI roles, teachers guide students to reflect on and evaluate the shortcomings of the AI conversation partner's language strategies. This process itself trains students' critical thinking and self-awareness. Teachers are no longer the sole authority but become collaborators with students in exploring and solving problems. AI serves as an accessible intelligent learning companion and ability booster. Ultimately, the goal of the human-machine collaboration model is not to replace teachers with machines. Although technology provides support, the joint creation of a more helpful and interactive intelligent learning environment is the purpose, enabling the comprehensive improvement of students' English proficiency and vocational literacy.

4 Strategies and Suggestions for Promoting the Application of AI Tools in Higher Vocational English Teaching

4.1 Suggestions for College Administrators

Constructing a diversified teaching evaluation system is crucial. Traditional standards are difficult to accurately measure the impact of AI on teaching. Schools should promote the establishment of a comprehensive evaluation framework covering language ability improvement, learning participation, and digital collaboration capabilities. Data privacy protection must be prioritized. Schools need to formulate special policies, clarify the boundaries and protection measures for the use of teachers' and students' data, ensure the safe use of AI tools within a legal framework, and prevent technology abuse.

4.2 Suggestions for Teachers

Teachers need to actively regard AI as a strategic partner for improving teaching effectiveness rather than a passive challenge. This promotes the transformation of teachers' roles from traditional knowledge transmitters to designers, guides, and enablers of the learning process. Teaching design can draw on project-based teaching methods, using AI tools to create highly simulated vocational scenarios.

The focus of teachers' professional development must shift to building human-machine collaboration teaching capabilities. Teachers not only need to be familiar with the operation of various AI tools but also possess the ability to critically integrate technologies. When guiding students to use AI translation tools, teachers should design comparative analysis activities to ensure that technology application always serves clear educational goals.

To meet students' personalized learning needs, teachers can use AI tools to provide adaptive learning support. AI systems can analyze learning data to identify weak links such as listening, speaking, or writing. Based on this, teachers can customize personalized practice resources and tutoring strategies. In this process, teachers interpret learning rules and provide humanistic care, motivation encouragement, and value guidance that machines cannot replace, realizing the organic combination of modular education and personalized training.

5 Conclusions and Prospects

5.1 Summary of Research Conclusions

The application of AI tools in higher vocational English classrooms has become an important symbol of the modernization of vocational education. Technology integration is reflected in the gradual entry of intelligent teaching systems, automated scoring tools, and generative language models into teaching practice. These tools not only improve the effectiveness of language practice but also focus on strengthening writing abilities, customized grammar practice, and learning feedback links. Although this application follows the global trend of technology in English teaching, higher vocational education places greater emphasis on cultivating language application abilities in workplace settings, making it significantly different from general higher education.

The misalignment between technical tools and the characteristics of vocational education has become a developmental obstacle. Careful observation shows that current systems generally lack pertinence to vocational environments. There are gaps in teachers' and students' technical capabilities, and the poor integration of traditional methods with intelligent technologies affects teaching effectiveness. This indicates that simply introducing technology cannot bring real changes; supporting teaching methods and evaluation rules must be established.

5.2 Future Research Prospects

In technology-assisted teaching scenarios, the methods for intelligent agents to perceive and respond to learners' emotional states urgently need in-depth exploration. Current systems mostly focus on knowledge-level error correction and evaluation but have very limited ability to assist with emotional factors such as learning anxiety and motivation changes. In the future, it is necessary to develop intelligent assistants capable of recognizing emotions through multiple means, capturing students' emotional states through speech characteristics, facial expressions, and interactive behaviors, and promptly providing emotional support that meets the characteristics of vocational education. This is particularly important for maintaining higher vocational students' enthusiasm for English learning.

Rapidly developing generative AI has shown great potential in creating vocational English practice scenarios. Future research should focus on using such technologies to build highly realistic workplace communication environments, allowing students to repeatedly practice language use in professional scenarios with controllable risks. At the same time, it is necessary to be cautious about the problem of reduced active thinking among students caused by technology dependence, explore ways to balance teachers' teaching leadership and students' critical thinking, and ensure that AI always aids education rather than replacing educational value.

Facing the trend of digital transformation in vocational education, research on the ethical issues of intelligent technology urgently needs to be strengthened, especially in aspects such as information privacy, algorithmic fairness, and the distinction between human and machine responsibilities. An ethical normative framework that conforms to the characteristics of Chinese vocational education needs to be established. This is not only related to the long-term development of technology application but also a key opportunity to cultivate higher vocational students' digital literacy and scientific and technological ethics awareness, ultimately promoting the formation of a new English education ecology where technology assistance and humanistic care are equally important.

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