



From Eloquence Training to Public Speaking: A Paradigm Shifts in Chinese Vocational Education's Communication Competency via 14th Five-year Plan Textbooks

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the paradigm shift from "eloquence training" to "public speaking" in Chinese vocational education, focusing on communication competency development through an analysis of textbooks under China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025). This study identifies the challenges in curriculum design, resource allocation, and regional disparities by systematically examining six national planning textbooks. The findings reveal that public speaking is marginalized as a component of broader eloquence courses, lacking independent curricula and standardized teaching frameworks. Despite the growing emphasis on practical training, textbooks exhibit fragmented content and insufficient integration with workplace demands. This study proposes strategic reforms, including curriculum restructuring, blended learning models, and alignment with international standards, such as those from the National Communication Association (NCA). Targeted recommendations address regional inequities in Putonghua proficiency and advocate enhanced job-specific modules to improve graduate employability. This study contributes to the global discourse on vocational education modernization by highlighting pathways to align communication training with 21st-century labor market needs.

Keywords: Chinese vocational education; Public speaking; Eloquence training; Communication competency; Curriculum reform; Employability; Putonghua proficiency.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, which is characterized by the growing trend of globalization and frequent exchange of information, the ability to communicate has become one of the most important skills for career and social development. In the case of vocational education, the development of students' potential to appropriately convey messages, share information, and foster friendly relationships in future work and societal settings is identified as a critical educational goal. The literature review reveals that effective vocational education is responsive to the labor market and should move away from the exclusive emphasis on acquiring job-specific technical skills to focus on foundational competencies that support learning and work throughout life (Hamdani et al., 2021; Werdiningsih et al., 2021). In its most sophisticated form, public speaking not only allows students to boost their self-esteem and

improve their language skills but also to develop critical thinking and flexibility, both of which are very much required in the current workplace (Hamdani et al., 2021; Werdiningsih et al., 2021).

The vocational education system of China has always given high priority to producing quality skill-based talent as per market requirements. Implementing China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) has further enhanced the modernization and standardization of vocational education systems, with more emphasis placed on the issue of aligning curricula with changing labor market needs (Zhang et al., 2022). For the program to be effective, vocational education must have a curriculum that meets these needs to produce graduates who can compete globally (Hamdani et al., 2021). The development of communication competency in vocational education, especially in public-speaking training, has been less explored. Although traditional "eloquence training" has been dominant in communication curricula for a long time, there is a growing focus on "public speaking" to meet changing societal needs (Pan, 2024).

This study examines the 14th Five-Year Plan textbook to analyze the current state of communication skills development in Chinese vocational education. By reflecting on existing challenges, it seeks to identify effective pathways for transitioning from "eloquence training" to "public speaking", providing evidence for optimizing communication curricula. The current landscape necessitates stronger integration of career readiness competencies into vocational curricula to facilitate active engagement with job market realities (Sisinyize et al., 2024). Additionally, educators need to enhance their competencies, ensuring that they can effectively deliver modern educational approaches that emphasize interactive and communicative learning (Tuah et al., 2021). These efforts are crucial for advancing vocational education toward a new benchmark in competency cultivation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

National planning textbooks for vocational education in China

Every five years, the Chinese government releases a "Five-Year Plans of China" (2024) detailing national development strategy, outlining the main objectives and priorities for economic growth, technological innovation, education, and sustainability. These plans guide various industries, including vocational education, with the aim of enhancing the skills of the workforce and making education better aligned with market demand. China has entered the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025). Table 1 presents the list of national planning textbooks for vocational education during China's 14th five-year plan. These textbooks are part of the government's initiative to modernize and standardize vocational education. Among these, there were six textbooks related to public speaking abilities.

Table 1. China National Planning Textbook for PSC

Level	Major Category	Textbook title (translation)	Author	Publisher
Vocational Education	General fundamentals	A Tutorial on Eloquence and Speech Training (3rd Edition)	Ding (2022)	Higher Education Press
Vocational Education	General fundamentals	Practical Training in Public Speaking and Eloquence	Liu & Fan (2019)	Dalian University of Technology Press
Vocational Education	Business and Economics	A Practical Tutorial on Public Speaking and Eloquence (2nd Edition)	Yan (2019)	China Science Publishing & Media Co., Ltd.
Vocational Education	General fundamentals	A Practical Tutorial on Eloquence and Speech (2nd edition)	Gu & Pei (2021)	Northeast Normal University Press
Vocational Education	General fundamentals	Eloquence and Speech (4th Edition)	Tang & Tang (2021)	Higher Education Press

Level	Major Category	Textbook title (translation)	Author	Publisher
Vocational Education	General fundamentals	Practical Training in Public Speaking and Communication (3rd edition)	Zhao (2021)	Higher Education Press

Source: National Planning Textbook Bibliography for Vocational Education in the 14th Five-Year Plan (MOE of China, 2023).

Brief introductions of the six textbooks in Table 1 are as follows:

A Tutorial on Eloquence and Speech Training (3rd Edition) is divided into four major parts: The Quality Section, the Language Section, the Application Section, and the Workplace Section, comprehensively covering various trainings related to eloquence and speech. The Quality Section explores the relationships between eloquence and humanistic qualities, thinking abilities, psychological qualities, and etiquette. The Language Section focuses on training scientific vocalization, Standard Chinese (Putonghua), expression methods, and body language. The Application Section provides practical skills such as public speaking, recitation, listening, conversation, debate, hosting, and job interviews. On the other hand, the Workplace Section focuses on workplace eloquence skills, such as interpersonal communication, job application, management, marketing, and public relations, helping readers communicate freely in different situations.

Practical Training in Public Speaking and Eloquence covers ten practical training projects that enhance learners' language expression and communication abilities. The book's content includes basic language skills, body language, themed speech, impromptu speech, debate skills, job hunting, negotiation, workplace communication, and adaptable eloquence training.

A Practical Tutorial on Public Speaking and Eloquence (2nd Edition) covers the training of eloquence skills in various situations, such as public speaking, debate, recitation, hosting, job hunting, social interaction, sales promotion, negotiation, service and management, helping readers comprehensively improve their language expression abilities. The book first introduces basic training, such as vocalization and body language, and then systematically explains the skills and preparatory work of public speaking, debate, and recitation. The book also provides practical strategies for eloquence in job hunting, social interaction, sales promotion, and negotiation. It particularly explores the art of language in service and management. Finally, guidance on basic knowledge of Standard Chinese and proficiency tests helps readers meet their language communication needs in various situations.

A Practical Tutorial on Eloquence and Speech (2nd edition) is divided into four units, comprehensively explaining oral expression and speech skills. The first unit introduces the basics of oral expression, including how to make the expression clear and voice pleasant. The second unit focuses on speech preparation, design, and control skills. The third unit elaborates on informative, persuasive, and impromptu speech strategies. The fourth unit provides practical skills, including self-introduction, effective conversation, debate, and hosting essentials.

Eloquence and Speech (4th Edition) are divided into four parts: Language, Expression, Skills, and Application, systematically introducing the theories and practices of eloquence and speech. The Language Section explores the importance of pronunciation and body language. The Expression Section explains expression methods, such as narration, description, reasoning, and lyricism. The Skills Section covers speech skills such as humor, euphemism, questioning, and listening. The Application Section focuses on practical application scenarios, such as civilized language use, hosting, impromptu speech, and debate.

Practical Training in Public Speaking and Communication (3rd edition) is divided into three modules to improve readers' public speaking and communication abilities systematically. Module One

focuses on basic skills training, covering basic skills such as successful mentality, body language, pronunciation, and intonation. Module Two focuses on skill training, improving communication abilities such as listening, retelling, narration, explanation, and reasoning. Module Three conducts comprehensive training, carrying out practical drills for public speaking, job hunting, debate, and hosting scenarios.

Integrated Analysis of Textbooks Related to Public Speaking

Taking the six textbooks into comprehensive consideration, this study identified the areas where there are still gaps in current public speaking training in Chinese vocational education. First, currently, there are no textbooks specifically tailored to public speaking. Independent public speaking courses usually fall within the scope of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching (Maryam et al., 2019). As can be seen from Table 1, native-language public speaking is only regarded as a part of eloquence courses (such as hosting, reciting, debating, etc.). This is consistent with international vocational education literature and policies that consider public speaking ability as a dimension of communication skills (Bylkova et al., 2021; Tambunan & Kurniawan, 2024). This situation makes it difficult to fully carry out public speaking teaching because its resources are often shared with the teaching units of other forms of eloquence. Therefore, the current situation of public speaking teaching in Chinese vocational education is similar to that internationally, highlighting the need to implement public speaking training in Chinese higher vocational education institutions.

Second, as can be seen from the major professional categories in Table 1, this course is generally classified as a general basic course, and only one of them is categorized under finance and business major. As a general basic course, it is usually compulsory, but only for undergraduate majors such as teacher education, Chinese language and literature, and drama, film, and television literature (Chinese University Massive Open Online Course, n.d.). Other majors are usually offered as general elective courses (Xiao, 2022; Zhang & Xie, 2022). As a result, public speaking ability has not been listed as a core general skill and there is insufficient investment in teaching resources and innovation. For example, a course can only be offered when there are at least 40 registered students. This form of large-class teaching is not conducive to refined teaching in small classes (Chan & Smith, 2024; Shan, 2020; Wang et al., 2024). Therefore, it is difficult to change the nature of public speaking courses in the short term, and improving the efficiency of classroom teaching may be a more realistic approach.

Third, among the six selected textbooks, Ding (2022), Liu and Fan (2019), Gu and Pei (2021), and Zhao (2021) all used the term "practical training," indicating that they recognized that public speaking courses not only require knowledge imparting but also should attach great importance to practical training. However, challenges may be faced in actual classroom implementation, mainly because of overly complex teaching unit settings and limited classroom time. Judging from the textbook catalogs, each form of "eloquence" occupies at least one teaching unit, requiring teachers to complete knowledge imparting within limited class hours. Taking Chinese vocational education institutions as an example, each semester usually has 19–20 weeks, among which four weeks are for practical training; two weeks are for preparation, review, and examination; and one week is canceled due to public holidays. Therefore, the actual teaching duration for general courses is only 12–13 weeks (Feng, 2021; Hu & Li, 2019; Zhu, 2010). Considering that general elective courses usually have only two class hours per week (40 minutes per class hour), teachers spend almost all of the time explaining textbook content and cannot set aside sufficient time for students' practical training (Huang & Wang, 2024; Jiao, 2008). Therefore, it is necessary to streamline curriculum content to ensure that the time for practical training is guaranteed. To this end, we propose focusing on the teaching of Speech and Eloquence in the cultivation of public speaking abilities.

Fourth, there are significant differences in the catalogs of each textbook, mainly manifested in two aspects: (1) the lack of a unified teaching standard for the public speaking module and (2) the failure

to effectively empower job-seeking performance. On the one hand, the proportion of public speaking ability varied. Most textbooks allocate only public speaking ability to one of the numerous chapters on eloquence. For example, in the textbook compiled by Gu and Pei (2021), the proportion of public speaking ability increased by half, whereas the content of other forms of eloquence was limited to only one chapter. This reflects the great variability in the structure of textbooks. A possible reason is the lack of a unified standard for public speaking abilities. Therefore, proofreading textbook catalogs concerning internationally recognized standards is recommended. One such standard is the "Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form" developed by the National Communication Association (NCA) (Morreale et al., 2007), which includes eight dimensions of competence, as shown in Table 2. On the other hand, although the content of job-seeking eloquence is set in most textbooks with varying capacities, individual textbooks still exist. For instance, neither of the textbooks compiled by Gu and Pei (2021) and Tang and Tang (2021) contain a job-seeking eloquence unit. The lack of investment in teaching job-seeking eloquence is highly likely to result in vocational diploma students being unable to perform well during job interviews.

Table 2. Eight Dimensions of Public Speaking Competence

Competence Descriptions
Chooses and narrows a topic appropriately for the audience & occasion
Communicates the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion
Provides supporting material (including electronic and non-electronic presentational aids) appropriate for the audience & occasion
Uses an organizational pattern appropriate to the topic, audience, occasion, & purpose
Uses language appropriate to the audience & occasion
Uses vocal variety in rate, pitch, & intensity (volume) to heighten & maintain interest appropriate to the audience & occasion
Uses pronunciation, grammar, & articulation appropriate to the audience & occasion
Uses physical behaviors that support the verbal message

Note: Adapted from NCA (Morreale et al., 2007)

Fifth, these textbooks exhibit a distinct regional bias. Although most textbooks are designed for a national audience, those developed by Liu and Fan (2019) and Gu and Pei (2021) focus on the northeast region (Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning Province). The Northeast has an advantage in promoting Putonghua, while Guangdong Province lags behind. Especially in a global city such as Shenzhen, the diversity of the population and the prevalence of local dialects have increased the demand for standard Putonghua training. People from all over the country populate Shenzhen, and mastering Putonghua is crucial for local residents, especially those with a distinct Guangdong accent (Chen, 2023; Smyth & Gao, 2011; Talamini et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022; Zhong et al., 2017). However, we noticed that textbooks used in vocational colleges in Guangdong, such as the Practical Spoken Language by Yan (2005), have become outdated as they have been nearly 20 years since their publication (as shown in Figure 1). Therefore, more educational resources should be invested in cultivating public speaking abilities in vocational colleges in Shenzhen and Guangdong, and targeted improvements should be made to the Practical Spoken Language textbook.

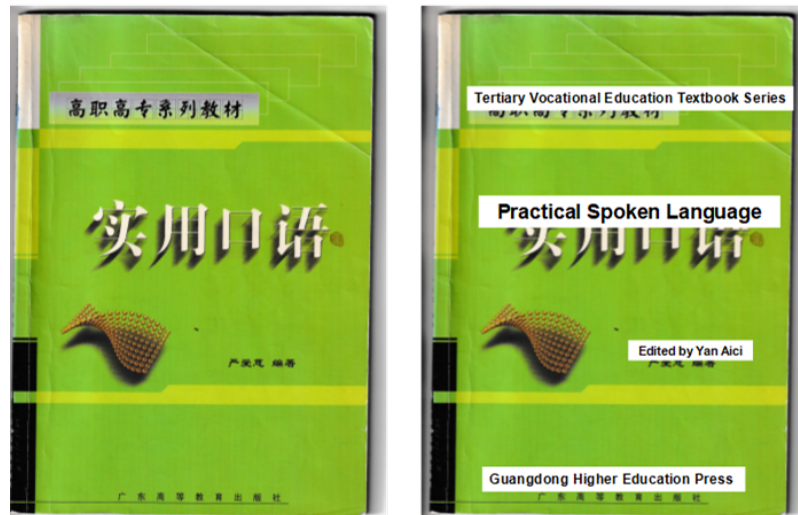


Figure 1. Front cover of the textbook Practical Spoken Language

Source: Practical Spoken Language, part of the Higher Vocational College Series, was published by Guangdong Higher Education Press. Developed by Yan (2005), the left and right covers are identical, but the right covers the English translation.

DISCUSSION AND INSIGHTS GAINED

Based on the analysis of content related to public speaking in the national planning textbooks for vocational education during the 14th Five-Year Plan period, it is evident that there are many areas for improvement in the cultivation of public speaking abilities in Chinese vocational education. This observation aligns with findings that acknowledge the significance of effective communication skills in vocational education, emphasizing the need for specific competencies in public speaking and related areas (Burhanuddin, 2021; Gardini & Hikmat, 2024).

In terms of curriculum positioning and setting, although public speaking ability is closely related to eloquence courses, the current curriculum setup is insufficient to meet the needs of comprehensive teaching. International vocational education regards public speaking as a crucial part of communication competency, indicating that the importance of distinct public speaking courses is globally recognized (Burhanuddin, 2021; Wei & Fan, 2024). This suggests that Chinese vocational education should reexamine the independence and significance of public speaking courses. It is advisable to appropriately separate public speaking courses from eloquence courses in some majors and to establish a specialized public speaking curriculum system. This ensures adequate allocation of teaching resources and avoids the limitations of teaching caused by resource sharing with other forms of eloquence (Burhanuddin, 2021; Gardini & Hikmat, 2024; Leopold, 2016).

Regarding the nature of the curriculum and investment in teaching resources, since public speaking courses are mostly classified as general basic courses and often serve as general elective courses in non-specific majors, they do not receive sufficient attention in the educational environment. Research has highlighted the necessity for vocational education institutions to adjust their curriculum strategies (Wu et al., 2023). When conditions permit, they should enhance the status of public speaking courses across various majors, incorporating them as core generic skills and increasing investment in teaching resources, such as teacher training and facilities (Burhanuddin, 2021; Grieve et al., 2021). Moreover, exploring an online-offline blended teaching model could be beneficial given the current large-class teaching situation. Utilizing online platforms for theoretical knowledge acquisition while reserving offline classes for practical drills and guidance can significantly enhance teaching efficiency (Hidayah & Puspitasari, 2023; Wei et al., 2024).

Regarding teaching content and practical training, the contradiction between the complex teaching content in current textbooks and limited class hours is prominent. Streamlining the teaching content is an urgent task. This should be predicated upon cultivating public speaking abilities, rationally integrating textbook chapters, and highlighting key content (Puluhulawa et al., 2022). For example, content closely related to public speaking, such as vocal skills, speech structure design, and on-the-spot adaptation, can be deeply integrated, thereby reducing unnecessary details (Gardini & Hikmat, 2024).

Furthermore, schools and teachers should actively expand their channels of practical teaching. In addition to classroom instruction, organizing speech contests and club activities can provide students practical opportunities to strengthen their public speaking skills (Hermansyah, 2021).

Regarding textbook standards and content optimization, the lack of a unified teaching standard for the public speaking module and insufficient focus on job-seeking performance are significant hurdles. Referencing internationally recognized standards, such as those formulated by the NCA, may standardize textbook compilation and ensure the systematic and scientific nature of cultivating public speaking abilities (Mortaji, 2018; Wu et al., 2023). Concurrently, each textbook should emphasize the integration of job-seeking eloquence content. Depending on the characteristics of the different majors, targeted teaching units can be designed for job-seeking speeches, interview communication, etc. This strategy enables students to better apply public speaking skills in job-seeking scenarios, enhancing their employability based on mastery of these skills (Dwyer & Davidson, 2021; Wei et al., 2024).

Regional differences: The disparities observed in educational resources across regions highlight the need for targeted investments, especially in areas where the promotion of Putonghua is less pronounced (Morreale, 2015). Developing region-specific teaching materials and resources could help adapt public speaking education to local contexts, thereby boosting language proficiency and public speaking skills (Caiyan, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study systematically analyzed public speaking-related content in national planning textbooks for vocational education under China's 14th Five-Year Plan, uncovering both the current state and challenges in cultivating public speaking competencies in Chinese vocational education (An & Abdrahim, 2024; Xu, 2024). Key issues identified include insufficient curriculum autonomy, inadequate teaching resource allocation, misaligned content-practice integration, nonuniform textbook standards, and regional disparities, all of which hinder students' public speaking proficiency, weaken communication competency outcomes, and potentially impede their long-term career adaptability. However, these challenges also highlight clear pathways for paradigm shifts in communication competency education. Transitioning from "eloquence training" to "public speaking" requires a concerted effort from vocational institutions, textbook developers, and educators. By prioritizing curriculum restructuring (e.g., standalone public speaking courses), resource prioritization (teacher training, blended learning facilities), targeted content design (job-specific modules such as interview speeches), standardization aligned with NCA benchmarks, and regionally adaptive pedagogy (e.g., Putonghua-focused materials in Shenzhen), a scientific and systematic public speaking framework can be established. This transformation enhances students' employability and holistic competence and aligns Chinese vocational education with global communication standards, catering to the demands of an interconnected era and laying the groundwork for high-skill talent development (Liu et al., 2022; Zhang & Sun, 2021). As vocational education reforms deepen, we anticipate breakthroughs in public speaking education that will empower students to thrive in professional and civic contexts.

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