

A Study on the Current Status of English Learning and Teaching Countermeasures for Secondary Vocational School Students under the Background of the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination

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Abstract: Taking students from a vocational school of medicine and health in Guangxi as research subjects, this empirical study conducts an investigation from dimensions including English proficiency, willingness for further education, learning difficulties and examination-preparation needs. The results show that students generally have a weak foundation in English yet hold a strong desire for further education; vocabulary and grammar constitute core learning barriers; there is a prominent misalignment between existing curricula and examination-preparation demands; students' preparation needs focus on score-oriented test-taking, and they demonstrate high acceptance of speciality-integrated and fragmented learning. Deep-seated dilemmas arise from four interwoven issues: structural mismatch between teaching provision and further-education requirements, a vicious circle of poor prior knowledge and insufficient learning motivation, superficial integration between English and speciality courses, and asymmetric information about examination requirements. Accordingly, this paper proposes reform pathways corresponding to these dilemmas from five dimensions: developing examination-preparation resources, implementing stratified teaching, optimising classroom instruction, providing examination-requirement guidance and offering psychological support. It aims to provide practical references for adapting English teaching in medical-health secondary vocational schools in Guangxi to the reform of the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination.

Keywords: Vocational Education College

Entrance Examination; Secondary-Vocational English; Current Status of Learning; Teaching Countermeasures

1. Introduction

In 2019, the State Council of China issued the National Vocational Education Reform Implementation Plan, which put forward for the first time the establishment of the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination system and improved the examination and admission method of "cultural quality plus vocational skills"^[1]. The newly-revised Vocational Education Law of the People's Republic of China in 2022 legally established the institutional status of the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination and incorporated it into the national education examination system^[2-3]. Since then, this system has been largely established, substantially broadening pathways for secondary-vocational graduates to access junior colleges, vocational undergraduate institutions and applied-science universities. In 2026, Guangxi Autonomous Region fully implemented the reform of the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination, further opening up pathways for secondary-vocational students to pursue undergraduate studies and unprecedentedly strengthening the further-education function of secondary vocational education.

The comprehensive advancement of the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination has accelerated the transformation of secondary-vocational education positioning from the traditional "employment-oriented" model towards "equal emphasis on employment and further education". As a core general subject in this college entrance examination, the quality of English teaching directly determines

secondary-vocational students' competitiveness in further-education admissions^[4-5]. Majors offered by medical-health secondary-vocational schools, such as nursing, pharmacy, Chinese materia medica, traditional Chinese medical rehabilitation technology, rehabilitation technology and beauty and body art, inherently feature dual training objectives of employment and further education^[6]. From an employment perspective, posts such as clinical nursing, pharmacy services and rehabilitation physiotherapy require students to recognise common English labels for medicines and understand basic English instructions for nursing and rehabilitation; professional English competence has become a vital component of post competence. From a further-education perspective, policy dividends brought by the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination have greatly stimulated students' aspirations for undergraduate studies, and English test-taking ability has become a rigid threshold they must cross^[7-8]. Nevertheless, many secondary-vocational schools still adopt the old employment-oriented framework for English courses, following the principle of "practicality and sufficiency". Disconnects exist between teaching content and further-education requirements; stratified teaching is poorly implemented; integration with speciality knowledge remains superficial. Such circumstances fail to satisfy new talent-training demands.

Against this backdrop, grounded in the realities of vocational education reform in Guangxi, this

study selects students majoring in medicine and health in secondary vocational schools as respondents. Questionnaire surveys are adopted to systematically identify the real-world English-learning status and genuine examination-preparation needs of students, analyse deep-rooted teaching dilemmas, and put forward corresponding reform measures covering stratified teaching, resource development, classroom optimisation, examination-requirement-oriented teaching and psychological support. It intends to supply empirical evidence and operable practical schemes for the further-education-oriented transformation of secondary-vocational English curricula.

2. Investigation on the Current Status of Secondary-Vocational Students' English Learning under the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination

Participants in this study are Grade-2024, Grade-2025 and Grade-2026 students from a secondary vocational schools of medicine and health in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, covering majors of nursing, pharmacy, Chinese materia medica, traditional Chinese medical rehabilitation technology, rehabilitation technology, beauty and body art and other disciplines. A self-designed Questionnaire on Secondary-Vocational Students' English-Learning Status and Preparation Needs for the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination is used (see Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis of Key Characteristics of Survey Samples (n=359)

Category	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Category	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	85	28.72	Major	Nursing	109	30.36
	Female	274	71.28		Traditional Chinese Nursing	23	6.41
Age	Under 16	8	2.23		Pharmacy	71	19.78
	16-18	305	84.96		Chinese Materia Medica	72	20.06
	Over 18	46	12.81		TCM Rehabilitation Technology	25	6.96
Grade	Grade 2024	95	26.46		Rehabilitation Technology	2	0.56
	Grade 2025	206	57.38		Beauty and Body Art	47	13.09
	Grade 2026	58	16.16		Others	10	2.79

The questionnaire contains five dimensions: respondents' basic information, English proficiency, learning motivation, learning difficulties and examination-preparation requirements, so as to systematically understand the English-learning realities and authentic preparation demands of medical-health

secondary-vocational students and provide objective foundations for English-teaching reform in secondary vocational education. Question types include single-choice and multiple-choice items. Questionnaire items are developed based on literature review and consultations with front-line teaching specialists.

A pilot survey involving 30 students was conducted before formal distribution, and revisions were made to questionnaire structures and contents according to feedback to guarantee favourable content validity. SPSS 26.0 statistical software was employed for descriptive statistical analysis of valid data; open-ended questionnaire responses were coded and categorised, and qualitative content supplemented quantitative outcomes. Questionnaires were distributed via the Wenjuanxing online platform. In total, 390 questionnaires were sent out. After eliminating invalid responses including incomplete answers and patterned replies, 359 valid questionnaires were finally obtained, yielding an effective response rate of 92.05%. Respondents cover multiple majors; the sample size meets basic requirements for survey research and possesses certain representativeness.

3. Analysis of Survey Findings on Secondary-Vocational Students' English-Learning Status under the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination

3.1 Weak English Foundation alongside Strong Willingness for Further Education

Survey results reveal that 93.03% of students self-assess their English proficiency as average or poor. Specifically, 43.73% can only read simple sentences; 35.93% know merely a small number of simple words; 13.37% understand almost no English. Only 6.97% report good or above-average English competence. Student English proficiency presents an obvious pyramid distribution with a large base and a small apex. Overall foundations are fragile and inter-individual differences are prominent. This corresponds to the reality of relatively low entry thresholds for secondary-vocational admissions and fractured English knowledge accumulated in junior-high-school education.

In terms of aspirations for further education, 62.95% of students explicitly intend to sit the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination, and 71.35% have plans for undergraduate study. Among drivers for English learning, "preparing for further-education admission via the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination" ranks highest at 63.51%, exceeding options such as "improving personal competence" (58.22%) and "teachers' requirements / task completion" (37.60%). These statistics demonstrate that policies for the

Vocational Education College Entrance Examination have effectively ignited students' enthusiasm for further education, and the value of English for progression is widely acknowledged. Nevertheless, students exhibit distinctly exam-oriented learning motivation, while intrinsic interest remains limited: merely 9.75% of students are highly interested in English, and 80.78% report neutral interest. Although such utilitarian motivation can deliver short-term impetus for examination preparation, insufficient interest may lead to wavering commitment or even abandonment once students encounter learning obstacles.

3.2 Prominent Deficiencies in Vocabulary and Grammar, and Misalignment between Curricula and Examination-Preparation Requirements

Regarding learning difficulties, 70.75% of students cite challenges in memorising vocabulary and mastering grammar as the top impediments. 58.50% cannot keep pace with classroom teaching due to weak prior knowledge; 35.10% consider question types in the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination English test difficult and lack systematic revision strategies. Deficiencies in vocabulary and grammar generate fear of examinations and even learned helplessness when students confront test items. This constitutes a core priority for subsequent teaching reforms.

Concerning curriculum adaptation, 45.68% of students perceive current classroom content as dull; 21.17% report insufficient classroom exercises and examination-preparation resources. With respect to awareness of examination requirements, only 4.74% fully understand question formats and assessment points for the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination English subject; 62.40% possess preliminary understanding; 32.87% have no relevant knowledge whatsoever. These data highlight marked misalignment between existing teaching and examination-preparation demands: teaching content bears limited relevance to examination assessment points; systematic explanations of examination requirements and targeted special-topic training are scarce. Consequently, students lack clear revision orientations, spend substantial time on non-exam content and suffer low preparation efficiency.

3.3 Examination-Score-Focused Preparation Demands, and Preference for Speciality-Integrated and Fragmented Learning

For examination-preparation content, over 40% of students demand intensified training for each examination question type. Gap-fill-in questions (60.72%), written expression (59.89%) and reading comprehension (58.77%) represent the three most-requested exercise categories. This indirectly reflects how vocabulary-grammar deficits undermine test-taking performance: gap-fill items directly assess lexical and grammatical application; written expression builds on syntax and vocabulary accumulation; reading comprehension relies on vocabulary size and competence in analysing complex sentences. In respect of teaching modes, 62.67% expect more knowledge-point explanations; 55.43% welcome instruction on test-taking skills; 48.75% want increased exercise drills. 67.68% explicitly require question banks, special-topic test papers and mock examination papers, showing that their preparation needs are heavily oriented towards raising test scores.

In terms of learning formats, 50.70% accept blended online-and-offline learning such as after-class assignments and push notifications for error-correction exercises; 49.58% approve of in-class real-time drills. Acceptance of large-scale concentrated mock examinations remains comparatively low (28.69%). Students prefer fragmented, instant consolidation modes, consistent with secondary-vocational learners' characteristic of short attention spans and limited capacity for prolonged concentration. Concerning content preferences, 58.22% hope that classes incorporate speciality-related English content such as pharmaceutical English and traditional Chinese-medicine English. They maintain that speciality-connected learning enhances practical utility and learning interest, supplying solid learner-evidence for speciality-integrated teaching.

3.4 Pedagogical Details Revealed by Open-Ended Responses

Open-ended questionnaire feedback clusters around three themes. First, unreasonable teaching rhythms: disjointed knowledge transitions and excessively rapid difficulty escalation prevent students with weak foundations from following lessons. Second, sub-optimal classroom efficiency: insufficient focus on examination-relevant assessment points

and excessive non-examination content. Third, inadequate personalised tutoring: struggling learners receive insufficient targeted guidance, and differentiated learning needs of students at varied proficiency levels cannot be satisfied. Though scattered, these practical issues directly shape classroom experiences and learning outcomes and deserve priority attention in teaching reforms.

4. In-depth Analysis of Dilemmas for Secondary-Vocational Students' English Learning under the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination

4.1 Structural Mismatch between Teaching Provision and Further-Education Requirements

Most secondary-vocational schools retain employment-oriented English curriculum frameworks following the principle of "practicality and sufficiency". Partial adjustments have been made for the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination, yet reform intensity remains inadequate and students perceive limited pedagogical change. Teaching content prioritises general English knowledge, while special-topic examination training is insufficient; quantity and quality of exercises fail to match progression standards. This creates a disconnect described as "taught content is not examined, and examined content is not taught", lowering examination-preparation efficiency. Fundamentally, this mismatch stems from curriculum systems lagging behind policy shifts and calls for systematic top-level reconstruction.

4.2 Vicious Circle of Weak Prior Knowledge and Insufficient Learning Motivation

Secondary-vocational students suffer severe gaps in prior English knowledge: inadequate vocabulary storage and incomplete grammatical frameworks hinder comprehension of advanced learning materials and readily trigger frustration. Meanwhile, classroom content disconnected from specialities and real-life contexts further erodes learning interest. Low learning investment leads to stagnant academic performance, forming a vicious cycle: poor prior knowledge → failure to learn → lack of interest → poor academic results. This undermines learning outcomes, diminishes learners' self-efficacy and may induce academic burnout.

Breaking this cycle hinges on enabling students to experience learning success and rebuild self-confidence.

4.3 Superficial Integration between English Teaching and Speciality Training

General English and speciality-specific English are isolated from each other. Textbooks emphasises general linguistic knowledge with limited incorporation of medical and nursing scenarios. Students struggle to perceive the practical value of English for both speciality development and further-education, resulting in low intrinsic motivation and preventing positive cycles of “learning through practical application”. For medical-health majors, English serves not merely as an admission tool but also as essential vocational literacy. Superficial speciality integration weakens the educational value of English courses.

4.4 Asymmetric Information about Examination Requirements Undermines Targeted Preparation

Students generally possess limited awareness of examination requirements for the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination, leading to unfocused revision and mindless question-practising. Some front-line teachers lack thorough research into proposition patterns and marking criteria for Guangxi’s Vocational Education College Entrance Examination and possess few mature pedagogical strategies for test-taking instruction, so cannot deliver well-targeted guidance. Information asymmetry for both educators and learners constrains teaching quality and preparation efficiency and deprives students of a sense of security and control during revision.

5. Countermeasures and Suggestions for Secondary-Vocational English Teaching under the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination

5.1 Develop Examination-preparation Resources and Implement Blended Learning

Shortages of preparation resources and disconnect between exercises and real-world examinations embody the core mismatch between teaching provision and further-education demands. Schools should organise teachers to thoroughly study official syllabuses and past examination papers for Guangxi’s

Vocational Education College Entrance Examination, systematically sort high-frequency assessment points, and compile assessment-point handbooks, special-topic question banks and mock examination papers. Priority should be given to three high-demand question types: gap-fill-in items, written expression and reading comprehension, ensuring exercises align with real-examination requirements. Furthermore, intelligent teaching platforms can support a closed-loop learning workflow: pre-class 5-8-minute micro-lectures plus preview quizzes; in-class timed real-time exercises with instant feedback; post-class personalised error-correction practice pushed according to response data. This online-and-offline blended model accommodates students’ preference for fragmented learning and enables individualised knowledge gap remediation, allowing every student to practise on personal weaknesses and boost preparation efficiency.

5.2 Implement Stratified Teaching to Consolidate Basic English Competence

Marked heterogeneity in students’ English foundations represents a prominent learner characteristic. Uniform-pace whole-class teaching inevitably generates situations where struggling learners cannot keep up and advanced learners lack intellectual challenge. Therefore, placement tests should be administered at the beginning of preparation phases to divide students into three proficiency tiers: foundation consolidation, competence improvement and advanced enhancement. The foundation tier focuses on remedying core junior-school and primary-school vocabulary and basic grammar to repair knowledge fractures, with appropriately slowed teaching rhythms for genuine mastery. The improvement tier delivers systematic instruction on core knowledge points aligned with examination syllabuses alongside basic-item training, gradually building competence up to examination standards. The advanced tier targets difficult key question types and strengthens training for test speed and accuracy to pursue high scores. Pedagogically, the “administrative class plus streamed teaching” model can be adopted: English lessons are delivered in streamed stratified groups, balancing instructional targeting and administrative convenience. A twice-per-semester dynamic re-placement mechanism should be established to promote or demote

students according to assessment outcomes. This stimulates motivation for advancement while avoiding negative labelling effects of stratification.

5.3 Integrate Speciality-specific English and Optimise Classroom Teaching Design

Bridging divides between general English and speciality-specific English constitutes the key to fostering intrinsic learning motivation. Medical-health speciality English can be moderately embedded into regular English classes. Lexical teaching may incorporate English terms for common medicines and nursing operations, allowing vocabulary memorisation alongside accumulation of professional terminology. Reading materials can adopt short popular-science passages on traditional Chinese-medicine culture and medical science, cultivating test-taking competence while broadening speciality horizons. Role-play classroom activities simulating real-world vocational contexts such as pharmacy dispensing and nurse-patient communication enable contextual language application and help students appreciate English's practical value. In addition, classroom time allocation should be optimised to strike appropriate balances between knowledge explanation, question-type drills and test-taking-skill coaching, addressing student complaints of tedious classes and insufficient focus on examination points and improving classroom effectiveness.

5.4 Strengthen Guidance on Examination Requirements and Test-taking Skills to Clarify Preparation Orientations

Guidance on examination requirements should run through the whole preparation cycle. At early preparation stages, special thematic sessions should interpret official syllabuses, question-type structures, marking criteria and proposition trends. These sessions build holistic learner understanding and support formulation of phased revision objectives, alleviating preparation-related anxiety stemming from information gaps. In mid-preparation phases, test-taking strategies are taught alongside special-topic drills: reading comprehension training focuses on information localisation, inferential reasoning and main-idea generalisation; gap-fill-in instruction emphasises part-of-speech prediction and contextual analysis; for written expression, systematic

frameworks, high-score sentence patterns and cohesive vocabulary are organised. Even students with weak foundations can master answer templates and gradually build examination-taking self-confidence. In late-preparation stages, full-scale mock examinations with detailed feedback sessions train students in time management and skill deployment, translating knowledge reserves into tangible examination performance.

5.5 Attend to Students' Psychological Well-being and Build Joint Home-School Educational Synergy

Combined pressures from English-learning difficulties and further-education admissions readily trigger negative emotions, so corresponding psychological support must accompany teaching practice. Encouraging assessment should prevail in classrooms; tiered learning tasks ensure learners at every proficiency level can experience achievement and develop self-confidence. Schools may cooperate with school counsellors to deliver lectures covering psychological guidance, emotion regulation and time management, fostering positive mindsets for coping with preparation pressure. Meanwhile, home-school collaboration should be strengthened. Through parent-teacher meetings and class communication groups, families receive briefings on Vocational Education College Entrance Examination policies and rational educational concepts. Reasonable expectations and adequate emotional support from home consolidate joint educational forces and mitigate academic burnout.

6. Conclusion

This study systematically explores English-learning realities for medical-health secondary-vocational students under the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination. It empirically uncovers structural causes for pedagogical-reform dilemmas amid the transition towards further-education and offers evidence for understanding implementation complexities of Vocational Education College Entrance Examination policies at local secondary-vocational institutions. Targeted optimisation measures are accordingly constructed: resource-adapted examination-preparation frameworks resolve structural mismatches between teaching provision and

progression demands; stratified progressive pedagogical strategies break vicious cycles of weak prior knowledge and low motivation; speciality-integrated classroom design removes barriers between general English and speciality training; consistent guidance on examination requirements eliminates information asymmetry; and a combined psychological-support and home-school-collaboration educational mechanism safeguards the whole preparation process. These five inter-connected measures constitute an internally consistent reform framework, providing practical guidance for the further-education-oriented transformation of English teaching in medical-health secondary-vocational schools under the Vocational Education College Entrance Examination.

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