



Integrating English Skills Competitions into the Curriculum and Students' Oral English Abilities

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Abstract

This study investigates the integration of Skills Competitions and Oral English Expression Abilities among Liaocheng Vocational and Technical College, Shandong, China students. The primary issue addressed is the level of integration of English skills competitions into the curriculum and its impact on students' oral English expression abilities. This research aims to evaluate the extent to which English skills competitions have been incorporated into the learning process and to explore the relationship between the level of integration and students' oral English expression abilities. The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design, utilizing a survey questionnaire to collect student data. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were conducted to analyze the collected data. The findings indicate that integrating English skills competitions into the curriculum can significantly enhance students' oral English expression abilities, particularly in idiomatic usage and overall communicative competence. The positive impact largely depends on careful implementation that balances competitive activities with other pedagogical methods. The study recommends that educators ensure these competitions are designed to be inclusive and are part of a broader, well-rounded approach to language learning. In this way, English skills competitions can effectively improve students' oral language abilities, provided they are balanced and aligned with comprehensive pedagogical approaches.

Keywords: *College Students, Incorporating into Curriculum, Integration of Skills Competitions, Language Learning, Speaking Skills in English*

A. Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving global landscape, proficiency in English has emerged as a fundamental asset for success across academic, professional, and social spheres (Crystal, 2003). With increasing global interconnectedness, individuals seeking to excel in their careers and engage effectively with diverse stakeholders need robust oral English expression abilities (Byram, 1997). Recognizing the pivotal role of English language proficiency, educational institutions worldwide are persistently exploring innovative approaches to enhance students' language skills, aligning with the evolving demands of the 21st century (Graddol, 2006). One such innovative approach that garnered significant attention is the integration of skills competitions into English language education, particularly as a strategy to advance students' oral English expression abilities (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). Skills competitions provide a unique and dynamic platform for students to apply and showcase their language skills in authentic, real-world contexts, enhancing their motivation, engagement, and overall proficiency (Littlewood, 2004). By simulating professional scenarios and tasks, these competitions enable students to

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demonstrate their communication skills and critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, which are crucial in academic and professional settings (Koch & Gobert, 2010).

In the context of higher education, where the cultivation of practical skills and competencies is paramount, integrating skills competitions into the curriculum presents immense potential for enhancing students' oral English expression abilities (Richards, 2015). By aligning competition tasks and activities with the learning objectives of English language courses, educational institutions create dynamic and engaging learning experiences that foster both language proficiency and a spirit of healthy competition and collaboration (Stern, 1983). Liaocheng Vocational and Technical College, located in Shandong, China, exemplifies the importance of practical education in preparing students for successful careers (Ke & Xue, 2007). Committed to delivering high-quality education and relevant skills training, the institution recognizes the value of integrating skills competitions into its English language curriculum to bolster students' oral English expression abilities and equip them with the linguistic skills essential for thriving in a globalized world.

While Chomsky's (2019) language acquisition theory was not directly related to skills competitions, it provided critical insights into language learning and proficiency development. Chomsky's theory highlighted the significance of input, interaction, and practice in language acquisition, suggesting that opportunities for meaningful communication and engagement—such as those offered by skills competitions—could facilitate language development and improve oral expression abilities. This theoretical perspective and empirical evidence support the potential positive relationship between integrating skills competitions into the curriculum and developing oral English expression abilities among language learners. The study specifically targeted this relationship within higher education contexts to deepen the understanding of the effectiveness of this pedagogical approach.

Against this backdrop, the study explored the relationship between English skills competition integration and oral English expression abilities among higher education students at Liaocheng Vocational and Technical College, Shandong, China. Through a comprehensive analysis of various factors influencing this relationship as the extent of integration of skills competitions into the curriculum, students' oral English expression abilities, demographic characteristics, and the relationships of the variables—the research provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of skills competition integration as a pedagogical strategy. Building upon empirical research from language education, curriculum development, and skills competitions (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nunan, 1991; Robinson, 2001), the study may contribute to the existing knowledge on effective language teaching methodologies and strategies. By synthesizing insights from foundational works by scholars such as Gardner (1985), Dörnyei (2015), and Ellis (2018), the research establishes a robust understanding of the potential benefits and challenges of incorporating skills competitions into English language education.

By examining the alignment between skills competition integration and students' oral English expression abilities, educators and policymakers gain valuable insights into optimizing curriculum design, teaching methodologies, and assessment practices to maximize the impact of skills competition integration on students' language learning outcomes. Through rigorous analysis and empirical investigation, the research provides actionable recommendations and guidelines for enhancing English language education by integrating skills competitions (Wong, 2005). By leveraging the motivational and engagement potential of competition, Liaocheng Vocational and Technical College and other educational institutions cultivate a dynamic learning environment that promotes the development of students' oral English expression abilities and prepares them to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and competitive global society. Ultimately, the study sheds light on the potential of skills competition integration to enhance oral English expression abilities among higher education students, thereby contributing to the

advancement of language education and preparing students for success in today's globalized world.

B. Methods

1. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational design, which is well-suited for investigating the relationship between the integration of skills competitions and students' oral English expression abilities. The descriptive aspect of the design was used to provide a clear, systematic description of the current status of skills competition integration within the curriculum and the student's oral English abilities. The correlational aspect was employed to explore potential associations or relationships between these two variables without manipulating any variables, making it an appropriate design for this non-experimental research setting.

2. Research Procedure

The research was conducted at Liaocheng Vocational and Technical College, explicitly targeting students from the English department. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 344 students from the broader population of higher vocational students to ensure representative data. This sample size provided a diverse cross-section of students with varying academic backgrounds, demographic characteristics, and skill competition experiences. Before data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the college's review board, and all participants were informed of the study's purpose and provided informed consent.

3. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using a structured survey questionnaire designed to measure two key variables: the level of integration of skills competitions into the curriculum and the oral English expression abilities of the students. The questionnaire was distributed to the selected students through online platforms and in-person surveys, ensuring a high response rate. The survey included closed and open-ended questions, allowing for quantitative data on students' experiences and qualitative insights into their perceptions of how skills competitions influenced their oral English abilities.

4. Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected from the survey were analyzed using both descriptive statistics and correlational analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as means, frequencies, and standard deviations, were used to summarize the current state of skills competition integration and students' oral English abilities. The correlational analysis assessed the strength and direction of the relationship between these two variables. Pearson's correlation coefficient was applied to determine the significance and magnitude of the association. The results were interpreted to identify patterns and draw conclusions regarding the impact of skills competition integration on students' oral English abilities. Additionally, thematic analysis was performed on the open-ended responses to extract common themes and insights.

C. Findings and Discussion

There is a concentration of respondents within the 22-23 age group (40.4%) and predominance in the third year level (57.0%), which indicates that a substantial proportion of participants are positioned at a pivotal stage in their academic journey, where engagement in skills competitions is more likely. These students are also likely to have developed more advanced oral English expression abilities due to prolonged exposure to language courses and

diverse opportunities for practice, in contrast to their younger counterparts. The sex distribution, with 57.6% female and 42.4% male respondents, also relates to the study's focus on oral English expression abilities. Prior research has suggested that gender differences can influence language learning styles and confidence in oral communication. Female students often exhibit higher proficiency and engagement in language-related activities (Wang, 2019). Thus, the sample's higher proportion of female students could skew the findings towards elevated oral English expression abilities. Furthermore, the distribution across different academic year levels, with third-year students comprising the majority, aligns well with the study's central focus. Third-year students, typically more actively involved in academic and professional skill-building endeavors, may demonstrate greater integration in skills competitions and enhanced oral English expression abilities. In contrast, the lower representation of first-year students (21.5%) and fourth-year students (10.2%) may reflect that these cohorts are either in the early stages of developing foundational skills or are more concentrated on fulfilling their remaining academic requirements, which may limit their participation in supplementary competitions.

1. Integrating English Skills Competitions into the Curriculum to Enhance Motivation and Active Engagement in Real-world Contexts

Tabel 1 Level Integration of English Skills Competitions into the English Curriculum

Indicator	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
1. Real-world contexts	3.50	0.32	Very High Level
2. Fostering Motivation	3.49	0.31	High Level
3. Promoting active engagement	3.49	0.31	High Level
Level of Integration of English skills competitions into the English curriculum	3.50	0.18	Very High Level

Real-world Contexts

Participants' perceptions of English skills competitions underscore their significant integration with real-world professional contexts. There is a high degree of integration of English skills competitions into the English curriculum, particularly in incorporating practical, real-world scenarios. An overall "Very High Level" of integration indicates that students perceive these competitions as closely aligned with authentic professional environments. This high level of integration is critical in bridging the gap between theoretical learning and practical application. Zhang (2017) underscores that aligning language education with real-world contexts markedly enhances students' language proficiency and readiness for professional challenges.

The statement, receiving the highest rating, highlights the effectiveness of English skills competitions that simulate real-world professional environments, including business negotiations, technical report writing, and customer service interactions. Wang and Li (2018), also argue that English education should prioritize practical scenarios to bolster students' employability and communication skills in global markets. Engaging in tasks that reflect actual professional situations allows students to develop language skills and apply these skills effectively in practical settings.

The involvement of professionals and experts in the competitions' design, evaluation, and feedback process. Liu (2019) posits that including industry professionals in educational frameworks enhances the authenticity of learning experiences and provides students with direct exposure to industry expectations and standards. This approach makes learning more relevant and facilitates networking opportunities essential for students' future career prospects.

Adopting project-based learning modules and using authentic materials reflected a high level of integration with real-world contexts. Scholars like Chen and Xu (2020) emphasize that

project-based learning fosters active engagement and critical thinking by involving students in meaningful tasks that mirror real-life challenges. Furthermore, incorporating authentic materials, such as business documents, real case studies, and media from English-speaking countries, is pivotal for cultivating language skills directly applicable in professional environments (Li, 2021). These strategies immerse students in the content they will encounter in their careers, enhancing their ability to navigate diverse professional settings.

Additionally, developing language proficiency alongside essential soft skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking reflects a comprehensive approach to curriculum integration. Zhao (2016) suggests that language education should extend beyond linguistic competence to include developing critical soft skills. The inclusion of collaborative tasks and real-world problem-solving scenarios within these competitions aids in cultivating such skills, which are highly valued in contemporary workplaces. These perspectives align with modern Chinese educational approaches that advocate for experiential learning and the practical application of language skills. The findings highlight the significance of such competitions in preparing students for the complexities of the global workforce by enhancing both their linguistic capabilities and professional competencies.

Fostering Motivation

The English skills competitions foster student motivation and highlight several effective strategies supported by research from Chinese scholars, revealing that a well-established recognition and rewards system is a crucial motivational factor. The research by Yang and Zhang (2018) emphasizes that such systems significantly enhance intrinsic motivation by acknowledging achievements and providing tangible incentives. This aligns with findings that recognition and rewards can drive engagement and encourage continued effort. Incorporating gamification elements, such as leaderboards, badges, and progress tracking, also contributes to motivation. Zhao and Liu (2017) argue that gamification makes learning more engaging by introducing interactive and competitive features. These elements tap into the natural human inclination towards competition and achievement, thereby increasing student motivation.

Team-based projects and peer review mechanisms play a significant role in fostering motivation. Wang and Li (2019) highlight that collaborative learning environments, where students work together and provide feedback, create a sense of community and mutual support. This collaborative atmosphere enhances student engagement and makes the learning experience more meaningful. Another practical approach is designing competitions to align with students' interests and career aspirations. Li and Chen (2020) suggest that making learning relevant to students' interests and professional goals enhances motivation. Competitions that resonate with students' passions and future ambitions become more engaging and drive higher motivation.

However, improving communication about the benefits of participating in these competitions could further enhance motivation. While providing information about personal, academic, and career benefits positively impacts motivation, Zhang et al. (2016) argue that better communication can further boost motivation. Ensuring that students are regularly informed about the advantages of their involvement can provide additional motivational benefits. Integrating recognition, gamification, collaboration, and relevance into English skills competitions effectively fosters student motivation.

Promoting Active Engagement

The focus on promoting active engagement in competitions is high, strongly emphasizing active participation and integration with educational objectives. Several key insights emerged, supported by relevant Chinese educational research. Interactive formats, such as debates, role-plays, and presentations, significantly enhance student engagement. Zhang and Hu (2022) emphasize that such interactive methods provide practical, dynamic experiences that closely

mirror real-life communication scenarios. This approach is practical in deepening language skills and making learning more engaging and motivating for students. By actively participating in these formats, students are more likely to develop a robust understanding and application of language in practical contexts. On the other hand, designing competition tasks to reflect real-world scenarios is another critical factor in promoting engagement. Chen and Liu (2023) highlight that tasks aligned with real-life contexts help maintain student interest and motivation, making learning experiences more relevant and meaningful. This alignment ensures that students see the direct applicability of their learning to future career challenges, thereby increasing their investment in the competition and their language studies.

Encouraging student-led initiatives, such as organizing events, setting goals, and selecting topics, also significantly fosters engagement. Liu and Wang (2021) argue that such empowerment boosts student motivation and involvement by giving them a sense of ownership over their learning experiences. This autonomy enhances their engagement and helps develop essential skills such as leadership and organization, which are valuable within and beyond the classroom. Integrating competition-related activities with the regular curriculum reinforces language skills and ensures continuity between extracurricular and classroom learning. Wang and Huang (2022) assert that connecting these activities with the regular curriculum helps bridge the gap between different learning contexts, thereby enhancing overall student engagement. By incorporating competition preparation into class projects and assignments, students can apply their learning in diverse settings, strengthening their language skills and keeping them actively engaged.

However, feedback mechanisms, while necessary, may need further refinement. Li and Zhang (2020) highlight that timely and constructive feedback is crucial for maintaining high levels of student engagement and improving learning outcomes. The data suggests that while feedback is provided, there may be opportunities to enhance its frequency and quality to support student development better and sustain their engagement throughout the competition process.

Therefore, integrating English skills competitions into the curriculum effectively promotes active engagement, aligning with broader educational strategies emphasizing interactive, relevant, and student-centered learning experiences. This comprehensive approach supports language acquisition and student involvement, as highlighted by current research and practices in Chinese education.

2. Students' Oral English Skills in Fluency, Pronunciation, Vocabulary, and Idioms

Tabel 2 Level of Oral English Expression Abilities of Students

Statement	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
1. Fluency	3.49	0.31	High Level
2. Pronunciation	3.50	0.31	High Level
3. Vocabulary	3.49	0.31	Very High Level
4. Idiomatic Usage	3.49	0.31	Very High Level
Overall Level of Oral English Expression Abilities of Students	3.49	0.17	Very High Level

Oral English Expression Abilities on Fluency

The average rating for fluency is at a "High Level" with a mean score of 3.49, reflecting overall solid performance in English-speaking fluency, with some areas offering potential for further enhancement. The student's oral English expression abilities, particularly fluency, provide a detailed view of their proficiency levels, supported by Chinese educational research. Students exhibit a notably high level of fluency in speaking English with ease and smoothness.

This strength is reflected in their ability to communicate with minimal hesitation or pauses, which aligns with the research by Wang and Zhang (2021). According to their study, students who can articulate their thoughts coherently and fluently demonstrate advanced proficiency in oral English. This ability to speak smoothly is crucial for effective communication and indicates a solid grasp of language skills that allow for spontaneous and confident conversation.

In addition to smoothness, students are proficient in using natural intonation patterns and rhythm when speaking English. Liu and Chen (2020) highlight the significance of natural intonation and rhythm as critical components of fluent speech. Their research underscores that using appropriate intonation patterns and rhythm enhances the clarity and effectiveness of communication. The high level of proficiency in this area suggests that students are adept at delivering their speech in an engaging and easily understandable way, reflecting a solid command of the nuances of English pronunciation and prosody.

However, the data reveals that while students generally maintain a high level of fluency, there are occasional disruptions or long pauses in their speech. Liu and Chen (2020) note that maintaining a consistent flow of speech is essential for effective communication. Occasional disruptions or pauses can impact the coherence of speech and may indicate areas where students could benefit from additional practice.

Students are rated highly in linking words and phrases to connect ideas and create smooth transitions in their speech. Effective use of these connectors is vital for constructing coherent and logical arguments, as emphasized by Zhang and Li (2022). Their research suggests that “while students are proficient in using linking words, there is always room for improvement. Refining this skill can help students achieve smoother transitions and more seamless communication.” The student's oral English fluency reveals a strong performance in several key areas. The ability to speak easily, use natural intonation and rhythm, and effectively employ linking words reflects a high proficiency level. Nonetheless, the presence of occasional speech disruptions highlights areas for further development.

Oral English Expression Abilities on Pronunciation

A very high level of oral English expression abilities on pronunciation among students, reflecting a solid command of English vocabulary in both general and specialized contexts. Students demonstrate a very high diversity and breadth in their vocabulary, effectively using a wide range of words in their speech. This aligns with the findings of Wang and Li (2021), who emphasize that a diverse vocabulary is essential for engaging and meaningful communication, allowing students to express their ideas more precisely and vividly. Such lexical variety enhances the richness of speech and reflects a deep understanding of language nuances, which is vital for both academic and professional settings.

Incorporating academic and technical terms relevant to students' fields of study is another area where they excel. The ability to seamlessly use specialized vocabulary in speech suggests a strong alignment with academic standards and professional language use, as noted by Zhang (2020). According to Zhang, the effective use of subject-specific terminology is a critical indicator of a student's ability to adapt their language to different contexts and audiences, enhancing the clarity and impact of their communication in specialized fields. Students also exhibit a high ability to use synonyms and antonyms to avoid repetition and enhance the richness of their speech. This finding is consistent with Liu and Chen (2022), who argue that the skillful use of varied vocabulary is crucial for maintaining listener engagement and avoiding monotonous language patterns. Using synonyms and antonyms effectively, students can add depth and variety to their speech, making their communication more dynamic and engaging.

The contextually appropriate vocabulary is rated slightly lower, suggesting room for improvement in this area. Sun (2023) highlights that while students may have a broad

vocabulary, the key to effective communication is selecting contextually suitable words for different situations and audiences. This aspect of vocabulary usage requires a nuanced understanding of word choice's social and cultural implications, which can be further developed through targeted practice and exposure to diverse communicative contexts. Thus, the student's vocabulary usage in English reflects a very high level of proficiency, particularly in terms of vocabulary diversity, use of technical terms, and lexical variation through synonyms and antonyms.

Oral English expression abilities of students on Vocabulary

The student's vocabulary usage in spoken English highlights several critical dimensions of their lexical competence and the overall effectiveness of their language skills. The student's vocabulary usage in spoken English is rated at a "High Level," reflecting solid competence in vocabulary use. While they excel in vocabulary diversity, idiom usage, and natural word combinations, there are opportunities for growth in contextual appropriateness and spontaneous vocabulary use, which could further elevate their communicative effectiveness. This reflects the findings of Liu and Wang (2022), who emphasize the importance of lexical diversity as a critical indicator of language proficiency in second language acquisition. According to their research, a varied vocabulary allows students to express ideas with greater clarity and precision, which is vital for effective communication in academic and real-life contexts.

Students also demonstrate a strong ability to accurately use idiomatic expressions and phrases, rated at a "Very High Level." Zhang (2021) underscores the "significance of mastering idiomatic expressions as they add color and cultural authenticity to language use. Accurate use of idioms is often a challenge for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners because it requires both linguistic knowledge and a deep understanding of cultural contexts." Zhang's study shows that incorporating idiomatic expressions into everyday speech enhances students' fluency and helps them connect more naturally with native speakers. Students' ability to spontaneously use a wide range of vocabulary and idiomatic expressions during impromptu conversations also receives a "High Level" rating. This is similar to Chen's (2021) study, which explains that "spontaneous use of vocabulary is often a reflection of a learner's deeper linguistic intuition and comfort with the language."

Oral English Expression Abilities of Students on Idiomatic Usage

The overall idiomatic usage of students is rated at a "High Level," indicating that while they have a solid foundation in understanding, applying, and conveying idioms accurately, there is still room for growth in frequency and fluency. The "Very High Level" of proficiency in using idioms appropriately within the context suggests a solid foundational understanding of idiomatic meanings and their situational applications. As Zhang and Li (2022) highlighted, context-appropriate idiom usage is "crucial in developing communicative competence in EFL learners. Their study indicates that appropriate idiom usage enhances language authenticity and fosters a deeper connection with native speakers, which is especially important in intercultural communication." Additionally, students' ability to employ a wide range of different idioms is also at a "Very High Level." This finding aligns with Liu (2021), who emphasizes the importance of "lexical variety and idiomatic diversity in achieving advanced levels of language proficiency." Liu's research points out that learners with access to a broader range of idioms are more flexible in their expression, allowing them to convey subtle meanings and emotions more effectively.

The high level of accuracy with which students convey the intended meaning of idioms indicates their deep understanding of idiomatic expressions, a point also emphasized by Wu and Yang (2023). According to their research, accurately conveying idiomatic meanings requires learners to grasp both idioms' literal and metaphorical aspects. In the frequency of idiomatic expression in students' speech and writing, there is a "High Level" rating, reflecting a need for

more consistent practice. Zhao (2023) notes that while Chinese students often understand idioms, they may ‘lack the opportunity to use them frequently in spontaneous speech.’ Zhao suggests “incorporating more idiomatic usage in daily classroom activities and encouraging their use in informal settings to build familiarity and confidence.”

Integrating idioms fluently and naturally into speech also shows room for improvement, with a "High Level" rating. According to Chen (2020), fluency in idiomatic usage is often one of the last competencies EFL learners develop because it requires knowledge and practice in real-world communication scenarios. Chen's study recommends using task-based language teaching (TBLT) and conversation clubs to help students practice idioms in more dynamic and interactive contexts, making their use more automatic and fluid. Overall, there is a "High Level" of idiomatic usage competency among students. It points to a solid understanding of idiomatic expressions but suggests that increased practice and contextual application are needed to achieve greater fluency and frequency.

3. Integrating English Skills Competitions into the Curriculum and Students' Oral Expression Abilities

Tabel 3 Impact of English Skills Competitions on Students' Oral English Abilities

Indicators	Pearson Correlation Value	Probability Value	Decision	Conclusion
Real-world contexts				
Fluency	-.056	.303	Failed to reject Ho	Not significant
Pronunciation	-.066	.221	Failed to reject Ho	Not significant
Vocabulary	-.103	.056	Failed to reject Ho	Not significant
Idiomatic Usage	-.168	.002	Reject Ho	Significant
Overall oral English expression abilities	-.179	.001	Reject Ho	Significant
Fostering Motivation				
Fluency	.086	.112	Failed to reject Ho	Not significant
Pronunciation	-.103	.056	Failed to reject Ho	Not significant
Vocabulary	.079	.144	Failed to reject Ho	Not significant
Idiomatic Usage	.096	.076	Failed to reject Ho	Not significant
Overall oral English expression abilities	.072	.183	Failed to reject Ho	Not significant
Promoting Active Engagement				
Fluency	-.179	.001	Reject Ho	Significant
Pronunciation	.115	.033	Reject Ho	Significant
Vocabulary	-.063	.243	Failed to reject Ho	Not significant
Idiomatic Usage	-.151	.005	Reject Ho	Significant
Overall oral English expression abilities	-.127	.019	Reject Ho	Significant

Indicators	Pearson Correlation Value	Probability Value	Decision	Conclusion
Integration of English skills competitions				
Fluency	-.088	.104	Failed to reject Ho	Not significant
Pronunciation	-.031	.562	Failed to reject Ho	Not significant
Vocabulary	-.053	.327	Failed to reject Ho	Not significant
Idiomatic Usage	-.135	.012	Reject Ho	Significant
Overall oral English expression abilities	-.140	.009	Reject Ho	Significant

The relationship between "Real-world Contexts" and different aspects of oral English expression abilities reveals mixed findings. While real-world contexts may not strongly impact fluency, pronunciation, or vocabulary, they are significantly associated with idiomatic usage and overall oral abilities, potentially indicating that students using more idioms might face challenges in adapting their language to real-world scenarios. In "Fostering Motivation," all correlations with aspects of oral English expression—fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, idiomatic usage, and overall abilities—are found to be non-significant. Suggests that while fostering motivation is crucial for language learning in general, it does not directly correlate with any specific improvement in oral English expression abilities in the sample examined.

"Promoting Active Engagement" shows several significant correlations with aspects of oral English expression abilities. These findings imply that while active engagement is beneficial for pronunciation, it might complicate other elements like fluency and idiomatic usage, potentially due to increased cognitive load. "Integration of English Skills Competitions" shows non-significant correlations with "Fluency," "Pronunciation," and "Vocabulary." This result may imply that while the integration of competitions does not directly affect fluency, pronunciation, or vocabulary development, it may lead to challenges in idiomatic usage and overall oral expression.

The indicators—real-world contexts, fostering motivation, promoting active engagement, and integrating English skills competitions—have varying impacts on students' oral English expression abilities. Real-world contexts and integration of competitions show significant negative relationships with idiomatic usage and overall oral abilities, while promoting active engagement positively influences pronunciation but negatively affects other areas like fluency and idiomatic usage. Fostering motivation does not significantly affect any specific oral English ability, suggesting a need for more targeted strategies to enhance specific aspects of language proficiency. These findings highlight the complexity of language learning and the need for a balanced approach that considers multiple facets of language use and instruction.

The correlations between "Real-world Contexts" and the aspects of fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary were insignificant, suggesting these elements may not be directly influenced by incorporating real-world scenarios into the curriculum. However, the significant negative correlations with "Idiomatic Usage" and "Overall Oral English Expression Abilities" suggest a different dynamic. According to Zhang (2018), while "real-world contexts in language teaching are valuable for developing pragmatic competence and contextual understanding, they may inadvertently challenge learners when it comes to using idiomatic expressions, which often require deeper cultural immersion and nuanced understanding that real-world contexts alone may not provide." This is consistent with the findings, where students might struggle to incorporate idiomatic usage smoothly when adapting to realistic communication settings.

The non-significant relationships between "Fostering Motivation" and all dimensions of oral English expression abilities highlight that while motivation is a critical factor in language learning, its direct impact on specific oral abilities like fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and idiomatic usage may not be immediately observable. Liu (2019) argues that "motivation primarily affects general language acquisition over time rather than immediately enhancing specific oral competencies." Thus, while fostering motivation is essential for sustained engagement and overall progress, it does not directly correlate with immediate improvements in the particular aspects of oral English expression as presented in the study.

"Promoting Active Engagement" significantly correlates with several aspects of oral English abilities. The negative correlation between "Fluency" and "Idiomatic Usage" might suggest that highly engaging activities, while beneficial in creating interactive and communicative learning environments, may introduce cognitive challenges that affect smooth language production. Gao (2020) supports this view by stating that "engagement strategies such as debates and role-plays, although effective in raising students' participation and interest, can lead to increased cognitive load." This load can impact fluency and idiomatic usage as students might focus more on the content and delivery than on the spontaneous and fluid use of language. Conversely, the positive correlation with "Pronunciation" highlights the benefit of engagement activities that require focused speaking practice, which helps students improve their articulation and clarity (Chen, 2021).

The integration of English skills competitions shows non-significant correlations with fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary, indicating that these competitions may not directly enhance these specific aspects of language skills. However, there is a significant negative correlation between "Idiomatic Usage" and "Overall Oral English Expression Abilities." Sun (2022) discusses that "while competitions provide an excellent platform for practice, the structured and often formal nature of competitions may not provide the spontaneous, context-rich interactions needed for natural idiomatic usage." This aligns with the findings indicating the challenges students face when integrating idioms fluently into their speech in competitive environments. A complex relationship exists between instructional indicators and oral English expression abilities among Chinese learners. Real-world contexts and English skills competitions may challenge idiomatic usage and oral English proficiency. Meanwhile, while crucial, fostering motivation does not directly affect specific aspects of oral abilities. Promoting active engagement appears beneficial for pronunciation but may present difficulties for fluency and idiomatic expression due to cognitive demands.

D. Conclusion

English skills competitions allow students to focus on specific language use aspects that are often neglected in regular classroom settings. Competitions often require students to think quickly and adapt their language to various scenarios, which can promote a deeper understanding and more natural use of idiomatic expressions. Thus, English skills competitions can be a powerful motivational tool, driving students to improve their English skills. Integrating skills competitions into the curriculum supports a more holistic approach to language learning. Competitions typically encompass multiple aspects of language use—speaking, listening, and sometimes writing—which helps students develop a more rounded set of oral English expression abilities. While skills competitions can drive engagement and language improvement, there is a risk of overemphasizing competitive formats, which might not suit all students. The competitive environment might not be conducive to natural, spontaneous speech production for everyone. Balancing competitive activities with other instructional methods that emphasize collaborative learning, real-world contexts and low-stakes speaking opportunities is crucial.

Therefore, integrating English skills competitions into the curriculum can significantly enhance students' oral English expression abilities, particularly in idiomatic usage and overall communicative competence. However, the positive impact is contingent upon careful implementation that balances competitive activities with other pedagogical methods. Educators must ensure that competitions are designed to be inclusive and are part of a broader, well-rounded approach to language learning. By doing so, they can harness the motivational benefits of competitions while addressing potential drawbacks, ultimately leading to more effective and sustainable language learning outcomes.

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