

# ***An Exploration into College Students' Comprehensive English Application Ability Improvement Based on NECCS—A Case Study of Haojing College of Shaanxi University of Science and Technology***

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**Abstract:** Language testing can positively influence language teaching and learning. The National English Competition for College Students (NECCS), a significant contest measuring students' comprehensive English application ability and the effectiveness of college English teaching, not only reveals students' weaknesses and key challenges but also exposes shortcomings in teaching methodologies. Consequently, it generates a beneficial washback effect on college English instruction. Using NECCS as a framework, this study conducts a multidimensional statistical analysis of the 2025 competition results from our institution, combined with an in-depth review of 60 sample test papers. It systematically identifies weaknesses in students' English learning and their pedagogical causes, proposing specific strategies to enhance comprehensive English application ability, ultimately aiming to improve both student competence and overall talent cultivation quality.

## **1. Introduction**

Amid deepening globalization and the widespread application of AI technology, the importance of English as an international lingua franca is increasingly prominent. College students' comprehensive English application ability directly impacts their academic development, future career competitiveness, and international communication skills. The "College English Teaching Guide" (2020 Edition) emphasizes that college English is an integral part of higher education, a course balancing humanistic and practical aspects [1]. It aims to cultivate students' English application ability, cross-cultural communication skills, autonomous learning capacity, and comprehensive cultural literacy to meet the needs of the nation, society, institutions, and individuals. However, current college English teaching faces challenges such as insufficient student motivation, traditional teaching methods, and monotonous assessment approaches, leading to unsatisfactory outcomes.

In view of this reality, effectively assessing and enhancing students' comprehensive English ability has thus become a crucial entry point for teaching reform. Language testing can positively influence language teaching and learning [2, 3]. NECCS, a nationwide contest, comprehensively

covers listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation skills, alongside logic reasoning and cultural knowledge modules, providing a holistic reflection of students' proficiency. Therefore, a thorough and objective analysis of NECCS performance can better identify issues, prompt teaching reflection and improvement, and ultimately enhance the quality of college English teaching.

This study focuses on the 2025 NECCS results from our institution. Through systematic analysis and sample review, it aims to identify weaknesses in student learning and deficiencies in teaching, proposing targeted strategies for improvement to offer empirical evidence and practical reference for college English teaching reform.

## 2. Analysis and Discussion of NECCS Results

The total score for the NECCS is 150 points, covering five language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, translation) with diverse question types and topics, comprehensively assessing knowledge areas like listening, reading, translation, writing, culture, and thinking [4]. In 2025, 419 students from our institution registered for NECCS (Type C), 50 were absent, and 1 result was invalid, leaving 368 valid scores. The following Table 1 shows the 2025 NECCS score statistics.

Table 1: 2025 NECCS Score Statistics

Student Group	Average Score	Listening Comprehension (30)	Vocabulary & Grammar (15)	Cloze (10)	Reading Comprehension (30)	Translation (15)	IQ Test (10)	Error Correction (10)	Writing (30)
All Students	45.84	9.62 32.1%	5.71 38.1%	2.67 26.7%	7.66 25.5%	6.54 43.6%	1.54 15.4%	0.65 6.5%	11.57 38.6
Freshman	42.39	9.06	5.51	2.39	7.11	5.61	1.46	0.58	10.68
Sophomore	48.41	10.07	5.74	2.91	8.24	7.04	1.58	0.71	12.3
Junior	46.95	9.75	6.11	2.69	7.39	7.36	1.59	0.67	11.7

### 2.1 Overall Performance Overview

The overall average score was 45.84. Scores showed a clear hierarchy: freshmen below average, sophomores and juniors above, with sophomores performing best. This suggests the effectiveness of intensive English courses and phased testing for sophomores. Sophomores benefit from foundational knowledge retained from freshman year and vocabulary/test-taking skills acquired during CET-4 preparation, representing a "golden period" for English learning. Strengths were observed in translation, writing, and reading, indicating relatively stronger output abilities. Weaknesses were evident in error correction, the IQ test, and cloze tests, exposing significant deficits in grammatical accuracy, flexible language use, and logical reasoning. Error correction had the lowest average score, being the major point of loss.

### 2.2 Detailed Analysis

#### 1) Listening Comprehension

Listening Comprehension comprises short conversations, long conversations, short news, and monologue dictation. Students performed weakly overall, particularly in monologue dictation (avg. 2.21 shown in Table 2) This section tests comprehension, summarization, and accurate spelling, making it challenging. It also reflects a general lack of listening practice. Teachers should strengthen training across all question types, encourage listening to English news, and focus on summarization skills.

Table 2: Listening Comprehension Score Statistics

Listening Comprehension	Short Conversations	Long Conversations	Short News	Monologue Dictation
Average Score	2.57	2.57	2.27	2.21

## 2) Vocabulary & Grammar

This multiple-choice section (15 points) tests prepositions, word discrimination, verb tense/voice, and situational dialogue application. Analysis reveals weaknesses in applying grammar knowledge, particularly verb tenses/voices and word meaning discrimination. Teachers should enhance practical training in these areas.

## 3) Cloze Test

The cloze test (avg. 2.67) focuses on word meaning and form. Main issues involve verb form changes and understanding contextual coherence. Teaching should emphasize integrated language use, discourse cohesion, logical sequence, and text structure, training students to analyze English texts macroscopically.

## 4) Reading Comprehension

The diverse reading sections (3 parts) require strong comprehension, summarization, reading skills and contextual logic strategies. Part A (selecting suitable transition sentences) tests discourse logic and cohesion strategies; Part B (answering questions) tests information extraction and reading skills; Part C (summary writing with provided words) tests overall understanding and summarization. Students scored lowest in Part A (avg. 1.61 shown in Table 3), indicating unclear understanding of textual logic structure. Teaching should move beyond word/sentence-level analysis to paragraph/text-level analysis, incorporating reading skills.

Table 3: Reading Comprehension Score Statistics

Reading Comprehension	Section A Cohesion & Logic	Section B Answer Questions	Section C Summary Writing
Average Score	1.61	3.13	2.92

## 5) Translation

Translation includes E-C and C-E sections. Common errors involve unclear sentence structure, incorrect verb forms, and literal word-for-word translation, leading to awkward and unnatural translations. This reflects a lack of focus on translation teaching and skill training.

## 6) Error Correction

This section had the lowest score rate. Reasons are twofold: 1) This question type is rare or absent in other major tests (CET-4/6, Postgrad Entrance Exam, TOEFL, IELTS), so students lack familiarity and strategies. 2) More crucially, it exposes systematic weaknesses in foundational English knowledge—grammar, vocabulary, and pragmatics. Errors frequently occur in word class discrimination, verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, non-finite verbs, article/preposition usage, collocations, and sentence logic. This indicates insufficient emphasis on consolidating and training basic language knowledge in teaching, often prioritizing test-taking skills and modular instruction over long-term accuracy and normative correctness.

## 7) IQ Test

IQ questions differ from conventional ones, testing not only English knowledge but also intelligence, critical thinking, and mathematical reasoning. Scores were very low (avg. 1.54). This is because 1) this type mainly appears in contests, so students have little exposure; 2) teachers rarely organize intelligent game-like activities in daily teaching. However, logical reasoning is a crucial core competency for contemporary students, significant for academic development, problem-solving, and future employment. Therefore, the systematic cultivation of this ability in current teaching practices is essential.

## 8) Writing

The writing section consists of practical writing and argumentative essay writing. Students scored better in argumentative essays, commonly found in various exams. Practical writing scores were lower (avg. 3.03), often due to ignoring format and genre requirements. Teachers should train students in various practical writing genres, especially graph/chart descriptions, enhancing their

ability to convert data, images, and outlines into text and improve summarization skills.

### **3. Pathways for Improving Comprehensive English Ability Based on NECCS**

The multidimensional analysis of NECCS results provides a clear "diagnosis" and "roadmap" for teaching reform. To achieve the goals set by the College English Teaching Guide and enhance students' application ability and comprehensive literacy, this study proposes the following insights and reform paths:

#### **3.1 Optimize Teaching Content: From Knowledge Transmission to Ability Cultivation**

##### **3.1.1 Emphasize Listening and Speaking Training**

Current teaching often prioritizes textbooks through lecturing and passive learning, neglecting the student's central role, classroom interaction, and practical application. Cultivating comprehensive ability, especially listening and speaking, is crucial. Future listening teaching should move beyond traditional materials, incorporating authentic resources like BBC/VOA. Second classroom activities (English corners, plays, dubbing, song appreciation, themed parties, lectures) should be fully utilized to create an immersive environment and enhance auditory comprehension and oral expression [5].

##### **3.1.2 Integrate Vocabulary, Grammar, and Discourse**

Solid grammar and ample vocabulary are essential. If vocabulary/grammar are "bricks," discourse teaching instructs how to build a coherent, meaningful "structure." Discourse teaching doesn't replace vocabulary/grammar but provides context, purpose, and soul. New items should be embedded in meaningful sentences, dialogues, or paragraphs. Teaching should analyze text structure, paragraph logic, and cohesive devices, explaining vocabulary/grammar within discourse context to foster macro-understanding, summarization, and logical reasoning. Teachers should transition from knowledge providers to language guides and context creators, enabling students to acquire applicable "language ability" rather than fragmented "knowledge points."

#### **3.2 Innovate Teaching Models: From Teacher-Centered to Student-Centered**

College English is a complex ecosystem. Teachers must employ varied strategies to motivate students, completely change the passive "cramming" method, and become learning facilitators and guides. Blended online-offline learning should be promoted using technology to increase interaction and interest.

#### **3.3 Restructure the Evaluation System: From Summative to Process-Oriented Assessment**

Move away from relying solely on final exams towards a formative assessment system. Assessment content should expand from reading/writing/translation to include listening/speaking/comprehensive application. Assessment methods should incorporate diverse indicators like class participation, presentations, discussions, and learning reflections to motivate autonomous learning and promote continuous progress.

#### **3.4 Build a Competition Talent Pool**

The strong performance of sophomores suggests establishing a "talent pool" by identifying

students through various contests and selecting top performers. This pool should be dynamically managed (merit-based, removing underperformers/graduates, adding new talents) to efficiently prepare for major competitions at various levels. This improves selection efficiency, reduces workload, increases success rates, and integrates preparation into daily teaching management.

#### 4. Conclusion

NECCS acts as a precise "mirror," reflecting the strengths and weaknesses of students' comprehensive English application ability and providing scientific empirical evidence for teaching reform. Based on multidimensional score analysis, this study reveals deep-seated deficiencies in grammatical accuracy, summarization, logical thinking, and discourse application, highlighting the need for tiered training and integrated teaching. Accordingly, we propose reform paths: optimizing content, innovating models, restructuring assessment, and building a talent pool. This promotes a shift from "knowledge transmission" to "ability cultivation" and from "teacher-centered" to "student-centered" instruction. Future college English teaching should emphasize discourse-level application integrated with critical thinking, fostering a new ecology where competitions promote learning and assessment promotes teaching, truly enhancing students' comprehensive English application ability and international competitiveness to meet the new demands of the era on higher foreign language education.

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