

# ***Research on Strategies for Enhancing College English Teachers' Competence in Vocational Undergraduate Education against the Backdrop of the Free Trade Port***

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**Abstract:** The construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port imposes new professional and scenario-based requirements on college talents regarding their application abilities in industry English and Free Trade Port English. There is a structural mismatch between the competence supply of vocational undergraduate college English teachers and this demand. Based on national vocational education policy documents, College English-related guidelines, and existing academic achievements, this study constructs an NDECPODRL competence structure model, encompassing educational literacy, curriculum development ability, curriculum teaching ability, professional knowledge, industry competence, digital literacy, scientific research ability, and learning ability. Adaptive adjustments are made to the dimensions of industry competence, curriculum development ability, digital literacy, and scientific research ability based on the Free Trade Port's industrial ecosystem. Accordingly, strategies are proposed, including optimizing the pre-service education curriculum system, constructing a post-service phased and personalized training system, establishing a multi-party collaborative training mechanism between schools and enterprises, stimulating teachers' subjective initiative, and transforming practical teaching abilities. This forms a "pre-service training—post-service training—school-enterprise collaboration—independent development" four-dimensional integrated enhancement framework, providing theoretical reference and practical pathways for the competence transformation of vocational undergraduate college English teachers.

## **1. Introduction**

The construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port (FTP), driven by international trade and investment, coupled with the rapid development of tourism, modern service industries, high-tech industries, and cross-border e-commerce, has introduced new, specialized, and scenario-based standards for the English communication skills and industry-specific language service capabilities of university graduates. As a crucial platform for cultivating high-level technical and skilled talents, undergraduate vocational education's College English curriculum bears the dual mission of

solidifying language foundations and aligning with occupational demands. However, the current College English teaching staff in vocational undergraduate programs largely originate from academic training paths in traditional universities, lacking practical industry experience and theoretical literacy in vocational education[1]. This leads to a disconnect between curriculum development and industry needs, while their digital literacy and research capabilities struggle to support the deeper requirements of educational digital transformation and industry-education integration. Consequently, a core contradiction has emerged: a structural mismatch between the urgent demand for interdisciplinary foreign language talents in the FTP and the supply of capabilities from College English teachers in vocational undergraduate programs. Therefore, systematically constructing a path for teacher capability enhancement, based on the vocational undergraduate education and the regional characteristics of the FTP, has become an urgent practical issue for research[2].

This study aims to construct a College English teacher competency model for vocational undergraduate education that embodies both "undergraduate" and "vocational" characteristics, integrates "FTP features," and subsequently proposes a four-dimensional integrated strategy for improvement: pre-service training, in-service professional development, university-enterprise co-cultivation, and self-development. At the theoretical level, this research expands the analytical framework for foreign language teacher development studies in vocational undergraduate education, addressing the deficiency in existing research regarding a systematic focus on College English teacher competency structures. At the practical level, this research provides actionable pathways for vocational undergraduate institutions to optimize their teacher development systems, assisting teachers in transforming industry practical experience into practical teaching content, thereby achieving a precise alignment between what students learn in school and what is required for positions within the FTP.

## **2. Current Status and Demand Analysis**

### **2.1 Demand for English Language Skills**

The Hainan Free Trade Port focuses on industries such as international trade, cross-border investment, duty-free shopping, medical tourism, and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) services. Its language service scenarios exhibit distinct industry-specific characteristics. The tourism industry requires practitioners to possess English communication skills for tasks like explaining attractions, hotel reception, airport transfers, and catering services, as well as the ability to introduce the Free Trade Port's policy advantages in English. The foreign trade and cross-border e-commerce sectors demand talent proficient in specialized language skills such as business letter writing, customer development and management, cross-border platform operations, and business negotiations[3]. Industries like aviation, exhibitions, and medical and wellness tourism necessitate a combination of general spoken English, industry-specific terminology, and cross-cultural communication strategies. Basic English skills are increasingly insufficient to meet the demands of these professional scenarios, making industry-specific English and Free Trade Port-specific English critical shortcomings in the talent's skill set. If universities continue to orient their talent cultivation goals toward passing College English Test Band 4 and 6, while neglecting systematic training in industry-specific English practical skills, graduates will face significant limitations in job adaptability and career development potential. Consequently, university English education needs to shift from a general capability cultivation model to a classified training model of "general spoken English + industry-specific English + Free Trade Port scenario English," posing new challenges to the competency structure of university English teachers.

## 2.2 Current Status

The faculty of College English teachers in vocational undergraduate programs primarily comprises master's or doctoral graduates from general universities, specializing in English Language and Literature, Foreign Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, and Translation Studies. Their academic training mainly focuses on language research and literary appreciation, with relatively limited experience in vocational education theory and industry practice. In terms of nurturing qualities and curriculum teaching abilities, teachers generally possess a solid language foundation and classroom teaching experience. However, the integration of ideological and political education into courses often remains superficial, and their understanding of vocational undergraduate students' cognitive characteristics and career development needs is not precise enough. Regarding curriculum development capabilities, teachers largely rely on nationally compiled textbooks or those from undergraduate institutions, finding it difficult to develop project-based courses and loose-leaf teaching resources based on typical job tasks. Industry competence is the weakest dimension; teachers lack timely and in-depth understanding of the development trends of key industries in the Free Trade Port, occupational standards, and language service demands. Opportunities for practical experience in enterprises are limited, and evaluation mechanisms are imperfect, leading to a low conversion rate of practical achievements into teaching content. In terms of digital literacy, teachers can use basic teaching platforms but are still in the nascent stage for deeper applications such as AI-assisted language teaching and learning data analysis. Overall scientific research capabilities are weak, with research topics often poorly integrated with industry needs and teaching practices, and insufficient capacity for promoting research outcomes and serving industries. Although learning abilities have a certain foundation, vague professional identity and unclear professional development paths restrict the sustainability of self-directed development[4].

## 2.3 Main Problems

There is a significant disconnect between pre-service training and in-service professional development. Before employment, teachers receive academic education that lacks modules in vocational education theory, industry-specific English teaching methods, and Free Trade Port English. Post-employment training often focuses on general teaching skills and fails to systematically address the specific competency needs of College English teachers in vocational undergraduate programs. The school-enterprise cooperation training mechanism is often superficial; teachers' practical experiences in enterprises lack overall planning by professional leaders and unified assessment standards, making the practical process prone to superficiality and difficulty in forming convertible teaching cases and curriculum resources. Training content is misaligned with the demands of Free Trade Port industries, with insufficient provision of specialized training in industry-specific English and Free Trade Port English. As a result, teachers have limited opportunities to enhance their language service capabilities in specific areas such as tourism, foreign trade, and cross-border e-commerce. Teachers' subjective initiative has not been effectively stimulated; the role positioning of College English teachers in vocational undergraduate education remains unclear, and performance evaluations offer insufficient incentives for industry practice, curriculum development, and achievement transformation, leading to a lack of intrinsic motivation for continuous learning and proactive transformation among teachers. These interconnected issues constitute systemic barriers to teacher competency improvement, urgently requiring responses from the perspectives of model construction and strategy design.

### 3. Competency Structure Model and Theoretical Framework

#### 3.1 Competency Structure Model

The competency structure for university English teachers in vocational undergraduate education must simultaneously address the academic nature of higher education and the practical nature of vocational education. Its model construction should be fundamentally guided by national vocational education policy documents, framed by the "University English Teaching Guide (2020 Edition)" and the "Higher Vocational College English Curriculum Standards (2021 Edition)," and fully incorporate research findings from academia on vocational (undergraduate) education teacher competencies and university English teacher competencies. Accordingly, this study constructs an NDECPODRL competency structure model comprising eight primary elements, which form a three-tier architecture of core, support, and development layers based on their functional positioning.

Cultivation of Character and Ethics resides in the core layer, reflecting the fundamental task of fostering virtue and cultivating talent. It encompasses ideological and political knowledge, curriculum ideological and political education skills, as well as an awareness of character cultivation, professional ethics, and professional spirit, exerting value guidance and a radiating effect on other competency elements. The support layer consists of curriculum development ability, curriculum teaching ability, professional knowledge, industry competency, digital literacy, and research ability[5]. These elements are interconnected, mutually reinforcing. Curriculum development ability requires teachers to master job-specific knowledge and typical work tasks, possess skills in curriculum system construction and project-based curriculum development, and develop a conscious awareness of curriculum development; curriculum teaching ability encompasses English teaching knowledge, student knowledge, instructional design, instructional implementation, and instructional evaluation, with its core being the precise grasp of the differentiated characteristics of vocational undergraduate students compared to higher vocational college and general undergraduate students in terms of language proficiency, cognitive styles, and career development needs; professional knowledge includes English disciplinary professional knowledge, language and cultural knowledge, English language proficiency, intercultural communication ability, and an understanding of the value of the English discipline; industry competency is a key dimension distinguishing vocational undergraduate teachers from general undergraduate teachers, involving industry knowledge, industry communication and cooperation, industry practice, industry service, and industry awareness; digital literacy focuses on digital technology knowledge and skills, digital applications, digital awareness, and digital social responsibility; research ability covers research methods, research topic selection, research design and implementation, academic writing, achievement dissemination, as well as problem awareness and academic integrity. Learning ability is located in the development layer, encompassing professional development pathways for English teachers, self-directed learning, reflective innovation, and a lifelong learning philosophy, constituting the internal driving force for teachers' sustainable professional development.

#### 3.2 Adaptive Adjustment

The NDECPODRL model provides a general framework for English teachers' competencies in vocational undergraduate universities. However, the regional particularities of the Hainan Free Trade Port (FTP) construction necessitate contextualized adaptation of this model. The industry competency dimension needs to strengthen two secondary elements: "FTP English Application Competency" and "Industry English Teaching Transformation Competency." The former refers to

the teacher's ability to use English for workplace communication and business processing in specific scenarios such as tourism, foreign trade, cross-border e-commerce, and exhibitions. The latter emphasizes the teacher's ability to transform industry language service demands into teaching objectives, content, and evaluation standards. The curriculum development competency dimension should expand the elements of "Project Curriculum Development Based on FTP Post Requirements" and "Loose-leaf Workbook Preparation," to ensure that curriculum content closely aligns with the typical work tasks of key industries in the FTP. The digital literacy dimension needs to upgrade the elements of "Artificial Intelligence-Assisted Language Teaching" and "Digital Teaching Resource Development" to respond to the deeper requirements of educational digital transformation on teachers' technological application abilities. The research competency dimension focuses on the elements of "FTP Foreign Language Education Applied Research" and "Transformation of Industry Language Service Achievements," guiding teachers to conduct research on real language problems in FTP talent cultivation and transform the achievements into replicable teaching plans or industry standards.

## **4. Improvement strategy**

### **4.1 Optimizing Pre-service Education Curriculum System**

Pre-service education serves as the foundational stage for teachers' competency structures. Currently, English teachers in vocational undergraduate universities predominantly come from academic training programs in regular universities, with curricula primarily focused on linguistics, literature, and translation theory. These programs often lack modules in vocational education theory, industry-specific English teaching methodology, and Free Trade Port English. The optimization path involves reconstructing pre-service training curricula, adding compulsory content such as principles of vocational education, foreign language pedagogy for vocational undergraduates, industry-specific English course development, and an introduction to Free Trade Port language services. This will enable future teachers to develop a basic understanding of the type positioning of vocational undergraduate education and the language demands of the Free Trade Port before entering the profession. Simultaneously, collaboration between universities and key industries within the Free Trade Port should be promoted for joint training programs. Enterprise internships should be integrated into the pre-service education credit system, requiring pre-service teachers to complete at least one semester of practical experience in tourism, foreign trade, cross-border e-commerce, and other settings, thereby accumulating genuine industry-specific language service experience[6]. Teacher admission standards also need to be raised accordingly, with industry practice experience and vocational education literacy serving as crucial assessment dimensions for recruiting English teachers in vocational undergraduate universities, thus ensuring the competency foundation of the teaching force from the outset.

### **4.2 Establishing a Post-service Phased and Personalized Training System**

Post-service training is a key support for the continuous development of teachers' competencies. Based on the NDECPODRL model, a teacher competency assessment tool should be designed to diagnose teachers' proficiency across eight dimensions: educational literacy, curriculum development, curriculum instruction, professional knowledge, industry capabilities, digital literacy, research capabilities, and learning capabilities. Based on the diagnostic results, teachers will be categorized into different developmental stages, and tiered and classified training programs will be formulated accordingly. Training content should be modular, covering specialized workshops on Free Trade Port English, industry-specific English course development workshops, AI-assisted

language teaching workshops, curriculum ideological and political teaching design and implementation workshops, and applied research methodology training. Each module corresponds to specific competency elements within the model. Training formats can flexibly adopt blended online and offline workshops, visiting scholar programs, teaching competitions, and temporary placements in enterprises. Furthermore, a training credit accumulation and achievement transformation mechanism should be established, requiring teachers to convert their acquired knowledge into curriculum design proposals, teaching cases, or research topics, thereby visualizing and transferring the effectiveness of the training.

#### **4.3 Establishing a Multi-Party Joint Training Mechanism between Schools and Enterprises**

Joint training between schools and enterprises is the core path to breaking through the bottleneck of teachers' industry capabilities. Vocational undergraduate colleges should sign long-term cooperation agreements with key industry enterprises in the Free Trade Port, jointly build teacher practice bases, and provide teachers with opportunities to work in real positions. In terms of organizational methods, three team models can be adopted. "Course Practical Teaching Teams" can be formed based on courses, with professional leaders providing overall planning. Teachers in the same course domain can jointly visit enterprises to understand industry frontiers, set unified practical goals and tasks, share experiences after practice, and collaboratively complete loose-leaf work manuals and practical reports, then integrate the results into the course practical teaching modules. "Position Practical Teaching Teams" can be formed based on job responsibilities, allocating different practical modules according to teachers' professional fields and interests. For example, teachers of business English correspondence writing courses can be assigned to customer development and management modules, while language course teachers can be assigned to pre-sales and after-sales service modules. After each member completes their practical tasks, they integrate their work to form a complete job manual. "Industry Practical Teaching Teams" can be formed based on industries, further refining and integrating based on position teams, discussing talent training programs with industry experts and partner enterprises, and forming industry practical work manuals. These three types of teams progress in layers, ensuring the systematic nature and transformability of teachers' practical achievements.

#### **4.4 Stimulating Teachers' Subjective Initiative**

Teachers' subjective initiative is the core driving force for professional development, and its stimulation depends on strengthening professional identity, clarifying development paths, and improving incentive mechanisms. Vocational undergraduate colleges should help college English teachers clearly understand their roles in the vocational undergraduate education system and talent cultivation in the Free Trade Port, thereby enhancing their sense of professional mission and belonging. Teachers should be guided to formulate personal professional development plans, combining the language service needs of the Free Trade Port with their personal ability improvement goals, and clarifying phased development tasks. A performance appraisal and professional title evaluation mechanism guided by ability development should be established, incorporating teachers' participation in enterprise practice, curriculum development, industry services, teaching reform, and achievement transformation into the evaluation system. Substantial incentives should be given to teachers who achieve significant results in Free Trade Port English teaching, industry English curriculum construction, and applied research. Teachers should be encouraged to conduct teaching reflection through action research, teaching logs, classroom video analysis, and other methods, and to empower teaching innovation with digital technology, forming a virtuous cycle of autonomous learning and continuous improvement.

#### 4.5 Transformation Path for the Improvement of Practical Teaching Ability

The ultimate goal of improving teachers' practical teaching ability is to effectively transform industry practical experience into teaching content and teaching activities. The transformation of practical experience into teaching content requires teachers to systematically sort out job tasks and language service needs after enterprise practice, extract teaching cases, practical training projects, and loose-leaf textbooks that can be integrated into courses, thereby closely aligning teaching content with the actual job requirements of the Free Trade Port. The transformation of practical projects into practical training cases requires teachers to match appropriate teaching methods according to course themes. Case teaching methods are suitable for guiding students to analyze real work cases and discuss solutions. Task-driven teaching methods stimulate students' learning motivation by creating real work scenarios. Project-based teaching methods promote students' mastery of practical skills through collaboration using real industry projects as carriers. The transformation of practical achievements into teaching and research achievements requires teachers to extract problems from enterprise practice into research topics, forming projects, papers, patents, or industry standards, which in turn feed back into teaching and industry development. Cooperation and transformation run through as two main lines. Teacher-student vocational skills competitions promote teaching through competition. Peer practical teaching teams cooperate to share experiences. School-enterprise "dual-qualified" teachers cooperate to develop projects, jointly promoting the continuous improvement of teachers' practical teaching ability in real task scenarios.

#### 5. Conclusion

This study addresses the urgent demand for interdisciplinary foreign language talents in the construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port. It systematically examines the structural shortcomings in the competency supply of college English teachers in vocational undergraduate programs and constructs the NDECPODRL competency structure model, which includes humanistic literacy, curriculum development ability, curriculum teaching ability, professional knowledge, industry competence, digital literacy, research ability, and learning ability. Based on the industrial ecosystem and language service characteristics of the Free Trade Port, contextual adjustments were made to the dimensions of industry competence, curriculum development ability, digital literacy, and research ability. Subsequently, strategies such as optimizing pre-service education curriculum systems, constructing a post-service phased and personalized training system, establishing a multi-party joint training mechanism between schools and enterprises, stimulating teachers' subjective initiative, and transforming practical teaching abilities were proposed, forming a "pre-service cultivation—post-service training—school-enterprise joint training—autonomous development" four-dimensional integrated improvement framework. This research provides a systematic and regionally appropriate theoretical reference for the competency transformation of college English teachers in vocational undergraduate programs. Future work can conduct empirical research based on the model to further test and optimize the competency structure model and cultivation strategies, thereby promoting the high-quality development of vocational undergraduate foreign language education.

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