ENHANCING PROFESSIONAL ENGLISH SKILLS IN SPORTS PROGRAMS: APPLICATION AND CHALLENGES OF INTERACTIVE TEACHING METHODS

ZiLin Cheng[1], Tao Luo[2,3*]
[1]Department of Management, Guizhou Vocational College of Sports, Huaxi 550025, Guiyang, China.
[2]The Affiliated Hospital of Guizhou Medical University, Guiyang 550004, Guizhou, China.
[3]School of Economics, Guizhou University, Huaxi District, Guiyang 550025, Guizhou, China.
*Corresponding Author: Tao Luo, Email: chewy_luo@163.com

Abstract: This study explores the potential of interactive teaching methods in the English teaching of sports-related programs, aiming to enhance students' professional English skills. Based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) pedagogy, interactive teaching methods employ real-life vocational scenarios, cooperative learning, and role-playing to help students master professional terminology and communication skills in international sports events, cross-cultural exchanges, and sports management. The paper reviews existing literature, analyzes the advantages and challenges of interactive teaching, and, through the lens of constructivist theory, proposes suggestions for improving instructional practices. The study finds that interactive teaching significantly increases student engagement and language application skills, with the use of modern technologies, such as augmented reality (AR) tools, further enhancing educational outcomes. However, current sports English teaching faces challenges such as resource limitations, large class sizes, and low student engagement. This study recommends that teachers tailor curriculum design to students' needs and proposes future research directions to further verify the effectiveness of interactive teaching methods in improving professional English skills.
Keywords: Interactive teaching methods; Sociocultural theory; English for specific purposes; Sports english; Professional skills; Constructivism

1 INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization, English has become a key tool for international communication and professional interaction, particularly in the field of sports, where English proficiency is critical for organizing international events, cross-cultural communication, and sports management [1]. Upon graduation, sports students are expected to participate in various international sports events and cross-cultural exchanges, and mastering professional English language skills is essential for their success in these activities. However, current English teaching methods struggle to meet this demand, as there is a significant disconnect between traditional teaching approaches and the requirements of sports-related professional contexts [2]. To address this issue, interactive teaching methods have been increasingly introduced into sports-related English teaching in recent years.

Although interactive teaching methods have proven effective in many language learning fields, their application in sports English education remains limited, with most existing studies focusing on theoretical discussions rather than in-depth empirical research. Thus, a key issue in this field is how to apply interactive teaching methods in sports English education to enhance students' professional skills. Interactive teaching methods are grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT), which emphasizes the internalization of language through interaction and collaboration, especially within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where students can complete tasks beyond their abilities with the guidance of a teacher [3].

The primary motivation for this study is to fill the gaps in current research by exploring the potential of interactive teaching methods in sports English education. By integrating interactive teaching methods with English for Specific Purposes (ESP) pedagogy, this paper aims to analyze how these methods can improve students' language application skills in real-life professional settings. Sports students not only need to master general English language skills but also professional terminology and communication strategies required for international sports events and cross-cultural exchanges [4]. However, current teaching resources and methods are limited, and many courses lack realistic simulations of future professional scenarios, resulting in low student motivation for learning English.

The purpose of this study is to explore the advantages and challenges of interactive teaching methods in sports English education through a review of the literature and to provide specific recommendations for improvement, helping teachers better implement these methods. The paper first reviews the theoretical foundations of interactive teaching methods, then discusses their current application in sports English education, and finally offers directions for future research and instructional improvements.

In the following sections, the paper first discusses the theoretical background of interactive teaching methods, linking them to constructivism and sociocultural theory to highlight their role in language instruction. The article then explores ESP theory and its application in sports English education. Finally, the paper conducts a literature review to analyze the current shortcomings of sports English teaching and the practical application of interactive teaching methods.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Background of Interactive Teaching Methods

SCT serves as one of the main theoretical foundations for interactive teaching methods. According to Vygotsky, learning is a process of social interaction, particularly in language learning, where students develop their cognitive and language skills through interaction with others. SCT emphasizes that individuals internalize external knowledge through interaction with others (teachers or peers) within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) [3]. The core of this theory is to help learners complete tasks they cannot accomplish independently through interaction, thereby promoting language and cognitive development.

Interactive teaching methods, through teacher-student and peer interaction, engage students in language learning and help them internalize new language knowledge through practice. Research shows that interactive teaching effectively improves language proficiency, particularly in second language acquisition, where interaction fosters cooperation and communication within a sociocultural context, helping students understand the practical application of language [5]. Vygotsky's ZPD concept is especially important, highlighting how students, with proper guidance and support from teachers, can achieve higher levels of language proficiency through interaction [6]

In second language acquisition, SCT provides a framework where students can gradually internalize and master language through collaborative learning and interactive activities. This teaching method promotes students' understanding and application of language skills and provides opportunities for practicing in real-life contexts.

2.2 English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Theory

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a teaching theory focused on addressing students' future professional language needs. ESP emphasizes not just basic language functions but also the actual application of language in specific professional fields. In sports-related programs, for example, students need to master specialized terminology, communication skills, and industry-specific language to effectively communicate in their future careers.

According to ESP theory, vocational English teaching must be tailored to the specific needs of a profession, emphasizing practical application rather than merely learning language rules. For sports students, ESP course design should integrate sports-related professional vocabulary, oral expression, and report writing, among other practical skills [1]. However, current studies show that the application of ESP in sports programs has not been fully explored, particularly in integrating language teaching with the actual needs of sports careers.

Currently, sports English education faces several issues, including a lack of specialized teaching materials tailored to sports career scenarios, limited teaching resources, and insufficient empirical research on how to effectively improve students' professional English communication skills. These issues highlight the need for further exploration of how ESP teaching can better meet the needs of sports students [2].

2.3 Current Status of Sports English Education

In sports programs, the goal of English teaching is not only to improve students' language proficiency but, more importantly, to enhance their ability to apply language in international sports settings. Sports students must develop certain communication skills to succeed in areas such as international sports events, cross-cultural exchanges, and sports management. However, existing English teaching methods are often traditional and lack close integration with professional demands in the sports industry.

Research shows that sports students face several challenges in learning English, including low motivation, insufficient teaching resources, and curriculum designs that do not effectively meet career demands [2]. Moreover, students often show little interest in learning English, especially in large class settings or environments lacking interaction, which limits their improvement in English proficiency and hinders their ability to meet language requirements for future careers.

To enhance sports students' professional English skills, teaching must be closely linked to real-life vocational scenarios. Research demonstrates that interactive teaching methods significantly improve student engagement and practical application skills through simulations of real scenarios, role-playing, and cooperative learning [7]. Additionally, the use of modern technologies, such as digital tools and mobile applications, can provide new teaching models and innovative practices in sports English education [8].

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Constructivism and Interactive Teaching Methods

Constructivist learning theory posits that knowledge is not directly transmitted from teachers to students but is actively constructed by students through interaction and practice. Based on this theory, interactive teaching methods emphasize that students construct knowledge through collaboration and interaction with teachers and peers rather than passively receiving information. Piaget, a leading figure in constructivism, argued that learning results from the cognitive development of individuals, which occurs through interactions with their environment. Vygotsky further developed

constructivism by proposing SCT, which stresses that knowledge is constructed through social interaction, especially in language learning, where interaction plays a critical role [9].

In the application of interactive teaching, the teacher's role shifts from a knowledge transmitter to a facilitator and guide. Students, through problem-solving and group discussions, actively participate in knowledge construction. In sports education, for example, interactive teaching can use teamwork and role-playing in real-life scenarios to facilitate students' understanding and application of professional English skills [10]. Studies show that such interactive methods not only increase student participation but also effectively promote deep understanding and transfer of knowledge [11].

3.2 SCT and Sports English Teaching

SCT emphasizes that learning is a social process, and students develop cognitively through interaction with others. A core concept of SCT is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where students can complete tasks beyond their current ability with the support of a teacher or experienced peer. In sports English teaching, Vygotsky's theory has special significance. Sports students need to master professional language skills through practice and interaction, and teacher guidance and peer interaction play critical roles in this process [12].

In sports English education, SCT provides theoretical support for the vocational application of language. For instance, in the context of sports events or international sports management, students need to effectively communicate in English. These professional language skills can be practiced and improved through interactive teaching methods that simulate real scenarios, enhancing students' language practice abilities. Research shows that interactive teaching provides a collaborative and practical learning environment for students, helping them better master sports-related English skills [13].

3.3 Application of ESP

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) focuses on providing students with specialized English training related to their future professions. For sports students, ESP course design needs to cater to the specific demands of their careers, particularly in international sports management, event communication, and sports education. Research shows that ESP can significantly improve students' professional English proficiency and help them better apply English in their future careers [14].

ESP courses emphasize not only basic language functions but also the professional context of students' backgrounds, providing highly targeted language training. Current research highlights that sports students often lack motivation, and course content does not align well with career demands. The application of ESP can use real-life scenarios, such as sports event organization and international sports communication, to help students better master language skills and enhance their professional competitiveness [15]. However, empirical research on ESP teaching in sports programs remains limited, and more studies are needed to explore its effectiveness across different cultural backgrounds and teaching environments [16].

4   CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

4.1 Effectiveness of Interactive Teaching Methods in English Instruction

Interactive teaching methods have been proven to be effective in English instruction, particularly in cultivating vocational skills. Research shows that interactive methods significantly improve students' communication and language application abilities through group discussions, role-playing, and scenario simulations. For example, Chang et al. [17] found that combining augmented reality (AR) technology with interactive teaching not only increased students' motivation but also significantly improved their performance in learning complex motor skills.

In English language instruction, interactive methods help students effectively apply English in real-world professional environments by simulating vocational scenarios such as job interviews and meeting discussions. Zhang & Zhang [18] compared traditional and interactive teaching modes, finding that interactive teaching fosters effective communication between students and teachers and enhances student autonomy and creativity. The greatest advantage of interactive teaching methods is that they provide students with real-life language application scenarios, helping them bridge the gap between language skills and vocational skills.

4.2 Specific Applications in Sports Programs

In sports programs, interactive teaching methods effectively enhance students' communication skills in sports events and their use of professional terminology. Sports students need to acquire specific English skills, especially for communication in cross-cultural sports events. Research shows that interactive teaching methods, through simulations of real scenarios (e.g., press conferences or dialogues between coaches and athletes), help students apply English effectively in vocational contexts. Knijnik et al. [19] point out that dialogue-based teaching methods help students develop their creativity and enhance their understanding of sports terminology and rules.

Additionally, interactive teaching in sports education fosters teamwork and simulates sports-related scenarios to help students master complex sports terminology. For example, Malenko [2] found that using interactive techniques and

digital tools improves sports students' English proficiency and enhances their ability to apply professional terminology in sports management and event organization.

4.3 Challenges

Despite the significant effectiveness of interactive teaching methods in improving students' English skills, several challenges remain in their application. First, large class sizes often make it difficult for students to effectively participate in interactive activities, reducing the effectiveness of teaching. Malenko [2] noted that sports programs often have large class sizes, making it difficult for teachers to provide personalized guidance, leading to passive participation for some students during interactions.

Second, low student participation is another major issue for interactive teaching. Cao [20] found that although interactive teaching provides more opportunities for participation, some students, due to limited language skills or lack of confidence, may avoid participating in interactive activities, limiting the effectiveness of the teaching method.

Additionally, resource limitations are a significant challenge. Zhang & Zhang [21] highlighted that many schools lack adequate digital teaching resources or professional materials, significantly diminishing the effectiveness of interactive teaching. To ensure the success of interactive teaching methods, schools must provide more teaching resources and technical support to help teachers effectively implement these methods.

5 THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

5.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Interactive Teaching Methods

Advantages: Interactive teaching methods offer numerous advantages in sports English education. First, they enhance student engagement and initiative. Through group discussions, role-playing, and other interactive activities, students can actively participate in the learning process and improve their mastery of both language and professional skills. Research shows that interactive teaching methods help students develop communication skills, particularly in sports-related scenarios such as event commentary and athlete communication. Knijnik et al. [22] highlighted that dialogue-based teaching methods promote students' creative thinking and improve their mastery and application of sports terminology.

Second, interactive teaching methods provide students with practical opportunities to improve their professional English skills through real-life applications. Khaydarova [23] pointed out that interactive methods, especially those simulating real professional scenarios, help sports students effectively master sports-related professional terminology and communication skills.

Disadvantages: However, interactive teaching methods also have certain limitations. First, large class sizes pose a common problem. In large class settings, it is difficult for teachers to ensure that every student fully participates in interactive activities, which can result in some students being neglected or insufficiently engaged in the learning process [2]. Second, students' language proficiency levels vary widely, and interactive teaching must consider individual differences. Cao [20] argued that teachers must balance the needs of students with varying language skills when designing interactive activities to prevent frustration or loss of confidence in some students.

Moreover, resource limitations are a significant challenge for interactive teaching methods. Zhang & Zhang [21]noted that the lack of appropriate teaching resources, especially digital resources for sports programs, can limit the effectiveness of interactive teaching.

5.2 Combining Theory with Practice

To better apply the theory of interactive teaching methods to practice, teachers need to adjust teaching content based on students' actual needs. Khaydarova [23] suggested that teachers can improve students' language application skills by introducing more realistic scenarios related to students' future careers, such as sports event press conferences or post-match interviews.

Additionally, using modern technology can enhance the effectiveness of interactive teaching methods. Chang et al. [17] found that combining AR technology with interactive teaching not only increased students' motivation but also significantly improved their performance in learning complex motor skills. By using AR technology, students can practice English communication skills in virtual scenarios, which is particularly suitable for sports English education.

Furthermore, course design should focus on the differentiated needs of students. Cao [20] recommended that teachers use tiered instruction and group discussions to ensure that students with varying language proficiency levels can participate effectively in interactive activities and benefit from them. Moreover, by assigning tasks of different difficulty levels or providing personalized guidance based on students' professional needs, teachers can help students at all levels achieve maximum learning outcomes.

5.3 Directions for Future Research

Most existing studies focus on the application of interactive teaching methods in general English instruction, with relatively few studies specifically addressing sports English education. Future research can further explore how to better integrate interactive teaching methods with the vocational skill needs of sports students. For example, studies can

examine how **interactive** teaching methods improve sports students' communication skills in international events and how multimedia tools and digital platforms can further optimize interactive teaching.

Additionally, existing studies mainly focus on small-scale experiments. Future research can conduct larger-scale empirical studies to verify the effectiveness of interactive teaching methods. Zhang & Zhang [21] suggested that future research explore the application of interactive teaching methods across different cultural backgrounds and how teaching strategies can be adjusted based on students' cultural contexts.

6   CONCLUSION

Through this study and a review of the literature, interactive teaching methods have demonstrated significant potential for improving professional English skills in sports programs. Grounded in SCT, interactive teaching methods effectively promote students' language proficiency, particularly in scenarios closely related to vocational applications, such as communication in sports events and the use of sports terminology. The study shows that interactive teaching, through collaboration, role-playing, and scenario simulation, helps students better master language skills in vocational contexts. Additionally, the application of ESP theory ensures that sports English education is more aligned with students' actual needs, with course design tailored to future professional scenarios, thereby improving students' communication skills and mastery of professional terminology.

Based on the theoretical analysis in this study, teachers can optimize sports English instruction, especially when resources or data are limited, by: Task-Based Interactive Teaching: By introducing real-life sports event scenarios such as press conferences and post-match interviews, teachers can create meaningful interactive tasks that help students practice language skills in realistic or simulated environments. This not only motivates students but also helps them develop the skills necessary for using English in their future careers. Utilizing Modern Technology: Despite resource limitations, teachers can leverage existing digital tools such as mobile applications, online interactive platforms, and augmented reality (AR) technology to provide a more engaging and immersive learning experience. Even simplified online tools can introduce simulated scenarios, enhancing students' language practice. Differentiated Instruction: Given that students' language proficiency levels vary, teachers can ensure all students participate effectively in interactive activities by using tiered instruction and group activities. Moreover, by assigning tasks of varying difficulty or providing personalized guidance based on students' professional needs, teachers can maximize learning outcomes for students of all levels.

While this study highlights the potential of interactive teaching methods in sports English education, there are some limitations. First, the conclusions are primarily based on a literature review, lacking large-scale empirical data. Future research can design large-scale experiments and surveys to further verify the effectiveness of interactive teaching methods across different educational contexts and explore their long-term impact on professional English skills development. Second, the application of interactive teaching methods in different cultural contexts requires further exploration. Since students from different cultural backgrounds face varying needs and challenges in language learning, future research can examine how interactive teaching methods can be adjusted to suit students' cultural and vocational backgrounds to ensure their broad applicability globally. In conclusion, interactive teaching methods hold significant promise for enhancing sports English education, but their effectiveness and feasibility still require further empirical validation and exploration.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

REFERENCES

[1] Ettl Rodríguez F I, Kandel-Cisco B. Language-supportive coaching practices for athletes who are learning english. Journal of Sport Psychology in Action, 2020, 1-12. DOI: 10.1080/21520704.2020.1806158.

[2] Malenko O. The problems of job-oriented foreign language teaching in training of students in physical education and sports. Scientific Journal of National Pedagogical Dragomanov University. 2020, 4(124): 55-58. DOI: 10.31392/npu-nc.series15.2020.4(124).11.

[3] Alkhudiry R. The contribution of vygotsky's sociocultural theory in mediating l2 knowledge co-construction. Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 2022, 12(10), 2117-2123. DOI: 10.17507/tpls.1210.19.

[4] Ettl Rodríguez F I, Kandel-Cisco B. Language-supportive coaching practices for athletes who are learning english. Journal of Sport Psychology in Action, 2020, 1-12. DOI: 10.1080/21520704.2020.1806158.

[5] Pathan H, Memon R A, Memon S, et al. A critical review of vygotsky's socio-cultural theory in second language acquisition. International Journal of English Linguistics, 2018, 8(4), 232. DOI: 10.5539/ijel.v8n4p232.

[6] Shvarts A, Abrahamson D. Dual-eye-tracking vygotsky: a microgenetic account of a teaching/learning collaboration in an embodied-interaction technological tutorial for mathematics. Learning, Culture and Social Interaction, 2019, 22: 100316. DOI: 10.1016/j.lcsi.2019.05.003.

[7] Hanafi H. Innovation in the teaching and learning of english for physical education department. AMCA Journal of Education and Behavioral Change, 2023, 3(1): 7-10. DOI: 10.51773/ajeb.v3i1.237.

[8]   Garnes-Tarazona I. Exploring socio-cultural elements in three commercial english language learning apps. International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching, 2018, 8(1): 65-82. DOI: 10.4018/ijcallt.2018010105.

[9]   Charles A S. Rivers and fireworks: social constructivism in education. In Dynamic Learning Spaces in Education. Springer Singapore. 2018. DOI: 10.1007/978-981-10-8521-5_16.

[10] Song J. Application of the concept of "constructivism" in the teaching of physical education theory taking the theoretical course of leisure sports major as an example. Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Culture, Education and Economic Development of Modern Society (ICCESE 2019). DOI: 10.2991/iccese-19.2019.211.

[11] Suhendi A, Purwarno P, Chairani S. Constructivism-based teaching and learning in indonesian education. KnE Social Sciences, 2021, 76-89. DOI: /10.18502/kss.v5i4.8668.

[12] Backes A.F, Ramos V, Zeilmann Brasil V, et al. Pedagogical principles of constructivist-oriented teaching practices in team sports. Journal of Physical Education, 2022, 34(1). DOI: 10.4025/jphyseduc.v34i1.3405.

[13] Khadimally S. Role of the social constructivist theory, andragogy, and computer-mediated instruction (cmi) in adult esl learning and teaching environments. In Advances in Educational Technologies and Instructional Design. 2019, 1-37. DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-3223-1.ch001.

[14] Qing H. Study on the project-based approach to teaching efl writing for students in sport universities. 2019. DOI: 10.25236/fer.2019.020722.

[15] Mohamad N S, Muhamad Romli T R. Application of theory of social constructivism in teaching arabic teachers to apply higher order thinking skill. International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development, 2021, 10(2). DOI: 10.6007/ijarped/v10-i2/10130.

[16] Tadesse A, Eskelä-Haapanen S, Posti-Ahokas. Eritrean teachers' perceptions of learner-centred interactive pedagogy. Learning, Culture and Social Interaction, 2021, 28: 100451. DOI: 10.1016/j.lcsi.2020.100451.

[17] Chang K-E, Zhang J, Huang Y-S, et al. Applying augmented reality in physical education on motor skills learning. Interactive Learning Environments, 2019, 28(6): 685-697. DOI: 10.1080/10494820.2019.1636073.

[18] Zhang Z, Zhang Y. Research on effective strategies of college physical education interactive teaching based on machine learning. Applied Bionics and Biomechanics, 2022, 1-8. DOI: 10.1155/2022/1843514.

[19] Knijnik J, Spaaij R, Jeanes R. Reading and writing the game: creative and dialogic pedagogies in sports education. Thinking Skills and Creativity, 2019, 32: 42-50. DOI: 10.1016/j.tsc.2019.03.005.

[20] Cao R. Research on interactive teaching method in oral english teaching. 2019 International Conference on Arts, Management, Education and Innovation, 2019. DOI: 10.23977/icamei.2019.098.

[21] Zhang Z, Zhang Y. Research on effective strategies of college physical education interactive teaching based on machine learning. Applied Bionics and Biomechanics, 2022, 1-8. DOI: 10.1155/2022/1843514.

[22] Knijnik J, Spaaij R, Jeanes R. Reading and writing the game: creative and dialogic pedagogies in sports education. Thinking Skills and Creativity, 2019, 32: 42-50. DOI: 10.1016/j.tsc.2019.03.005.

[23] Khaydarova S. EFFECTIVE approaches to teach english to football players based on learners' beliefs and attitudes. Foreign Languages in Uzbekistan, 2020, 182-191. DOI: 10.36078/1596472370.