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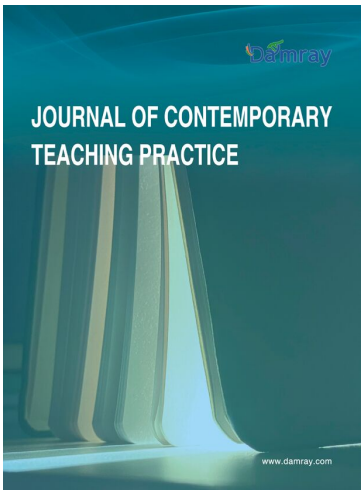


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# Research on Strategies for Vocational Foreign Language Education to Serve the Belt and Road Initiative

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on strategies for vocational foreign language education (with English as the core) to serve the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aiming to address the current disconnect between vocational English education and the needs of BRI-related enterprises. Using the literature review method and survey method (interviewing 12 "going global" enterprises and 8 vocational colleges), the study sorts out differences in vocational English needs across four core BRI fields—infrastructure, trade, cross-border e-commerce, and logistics—as well as the capacity focus of technical and service positions. It also analyzes core issues in vocational English education regarding curriculum content, practical teaching, cross-cultural cultivation, and teacher development. Based on this, four key strategies are proposed: constructing an "English + industry" modular curriculum system to match field-specific needs; building a "dual-qualification + internationalized" teaching team to strengthen teaching support; deepening the "school-enterprise collaboration + scenario-based" practical teaching model to enhance application capabilities; and establishing an "industry-oriented + digital" teaching resource database to provide resource guarantees. The findings indicate that vocational English education needs to achieve in-depth integration with BRI demands through multi-dimensional reforms, cultivating compound talents "capable of communication, proficient in business, and knowledgeable about culture" to support the initiative. In the future, teaching can be optimized by integrating AI technology to dynamically adapt to new cooperation trends.

## Keywords

Vocational Foreign Language Education; English; the Belt and Road Initiative; Talent Cultivation; School-Enterprise Collaboration; Modular Curriculum

## 1. Introduction

Since the proposal of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's cross-border cooperation with BRI partner countries has expanded from infrastructure construction to diverse fields such as trade, logistics, and cross-border e-commerce.

As a global lingua franca, English has become a key tool to break down collaboration barriers and enhance cooperation efficiency. Currently, BRI-related enterprises have an increasingly urgent demand for compound talents with "English proficiency + vocational skills". However, vocational foreign language education (with English as the core) still suffers from a disconnect with job requirements, making it difficult to fully support the advancement of the BRI (Tinmaz et al., 2022).

## 2. Definition of Core Concepts and Theoretical Basis

### 2.1 Definition of Core Concepts

Vocational foreign language education (with English as the core) is a type of education distinct from general English and exam-oriented English, characterized by "vocational orientation" and "competence integration". Its educational goal focuses on "BRI job adaptation". For example, it cultivates the ability of "reading English equipment manuals and communicating technical details with foreign teams" for overseas engineering technical positions, and the ability of "handling English inquiries and resolving cross-cultural disputes" for cross-border e-commerce customer service positions (Zhang & Zou, 2020). Its educational scenarios cover professional courses in higher vocational colleges (e.g., *Engineering English*, *Cross-border E-commerce English*) and enterprise customized training (e.g., English training camps for overseas projects). Its educational content emphasizes the integration of "English language + industry skills": it not only teaches grammar and vocabulary, but also imparts industry terminology and communication skills in combination with real business scenarios. For instance, in foreign trade English courses, it not only explains the usage of "negotiation", but also teaches English phrases for "price negotiation" and the expression of contract clauses.

### 2.2 Theoretical Basis

Human capital theory provides core support for vocational English education. This theory holds that the knowledge and skills of workers are important human capital, and their value can be enhanced through education investment. In the context of the BRI, vocational English proficiency is precisely key human capital: For individuals, technical positions requiring engineering English proficiency offer salaries 25%-40% higher than those without English requirements. For enterprises, a foreign branch of Power China improved the collaboration efficiency between Chinese and foreign employees by 20% through "engineering English + cross-cultural" training, reducing rework caused by language misunderstandings. For the country, developing vocational English education can alleviate the shortage of "foreign language + industry" talents and reserve human capital for the advancement of the BRI. At the same time, this theory emphasizes "investment-return matching", requiring vocational English education to accurately align with job requirements and avoid inefficient investment due to vague content.

A vocational college, for example, first assessed the English foundation of cross-border e-commerce majors (learning needs), then designed a "basic vocabulary + phrase training" course based on customer service scenarios (target needs). Eventually, the job adaptation rate of these students increased to over 80%, which confirms the practical value of this theory (Garzón-Artacho et al., 2020).

## 3. Demand and Current Status of Vocational English Education under the BRI

### 3.1 Analysis of Industry and Job Demands

Vocational English demand in core BRI fields shows significant differences. As a focus of "hard connectivity", the infrastructure sector concentrates on technical communication: In overseas railway and power projects, engineers need to read English design standards (e.g., *International Building Code*), write technical disclosure documents, with core terminology including "reinforcement" and "concrete strength". A survey by an overseas branch of China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC) shows that 85% of technical employees consider "engineering English application ability" an essential quality. Moreover, as projects expand to the Middle East and Africa, the demand for understanding "accented English (e.g., Indian, Nigerian English)" is also increasing (Zhang, Meng, & Zhang, 2024).

### 3.2 Current Status of Vocational English Education

Currently, vocational English education has carried out BRI-related explorations and achieved certain results. In terms of curriculum design, some colleges have begun to replace traditional general English courses: A higher vocational college in Zhejiang offers *BRI Cross-border Trade English* for business English majors, explaining trade policies of BRI partner countries and correspondence writing; a higher vocational college in Guangdong adds an "Overseas Engineering English" module to its construction engineering technology major, covering engineering terminology and English

standards for construction safety. In terms of teaching materials, books such as *BRI Vocational English Series (Engineering Volume)* and *Cross-border E-commerce English Practice* include real cases to enhance teaching practicality (Wang, 2025).

In terms of school-enterprise cooperation, "order-based training" and practical cooperation are gradually advancing: A higher vocational college in Shandong has jointly established a "BRI Foreign Trade English (targeted class)" with a foreign trade enterprise. The enterprise sends senior managers to teach and provides internship positions, allowing students to participate in English order processing in their third year. A higher vocational college in Henan has launched an "Engineering English Training Camp" with an overseas branch of CSCEC, inviting overseas engineers to explain communication skills. Outstanding students can enter the enterprise's overseas project teams. Some training institutions also provide customized training for enterprises. For example, a training institution designed an "engineering English + cross-cultural" course for a foreign branch of Power China, reducing problems caused by language misunderstandings by 20% after training (Ma, 2025). "live streaming phrase design" to improve teachers' industry English application ability (Xu, 2023).

## 4. Conclusions and Prospects

Vocational foreign language education (with English as the core) is an important foundation for supporting BRI cross-border cooperation. Although relevant explorations have been carried out, problems such as curriculum disconnect, weak practical teaching, insufficient teachers, and lack of resources prevent it from fully matching enterprise needs. In the future, it is necessary to promote the in-depth integration of vocational English education with BRI needs through four strategies: "English + industry" modular curriculum, "dual-qualification + internationalized" teaching team, "school-enterprise collaboration + scenario-based" practical teaching, and "industry-oriented + digital" teaching resource database, so as to cultivate more compound talents who "can communicate, master business, and understand culture".

Future research can further optimize teaching by combining AI technology, such as developing intelligent English dialogue robots to simulate "BRI client inquiries" and improve practical training efficiency. At the same time, it is necessary to dynamically track new trends in cooperation with BRI partner countries, such as new trade demands under the RCEP framework, and adjust curriculum modules and resource content in a timely manner to ensure that vocational English education continues to provide high-quality talent support for the BRI.

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