

Dilemmas and Optimization Strategies of Practical Oral English Training for Tourism Majors in the Context of Culture-Tourism Integration

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Abstract: *As the boundary between the cultural sector and the tourism industry becomes increasingly blurred, the competence profile expected of tourism professionals is being fundamentally reshaped. Oral English, once treated as a peripheral language skill, has evolved into a core occupational competence that interweaves linguistic accuracy, cultural interpretation, and service professionalism. Drawing on a review of policy documents, industry developments, and classroom observations in vocational tourism programs, this paper examines the structural dilemmas that constrain practical oral English training for tourism majors. Four interrelated problems are identified: training content is detached from authentic culture-tourism work scenarios; simulated situations lack cultural depth; the teaching workforce is short of genuine industry experience; and assessment remains dominated by one-shot summative testing with little process-based evidence. In response, the paper proposes a reconstructed training system built on a three-dimensional objective framework integrating language proficiency, cultural literacy, and professional ethics; a modular curriculum organized around real work processes; a dual-scenario mechanism that couples on-campus simulation with off-campus practice; and a multi-agent, evidence-based evaluation system. Implementation pathways are further elaborated, including the development of locally rooted cultural training projects, the introduction of industry mentors, the use of digital-intelligent technologies for immersive cross-cultural communication, and task-driven teaching anchored in real enterprise projects. Finally, safeguard mechanisms concerning governance, teacher development, platform construction, and quality monitoring are discussed to ensure the sustainability of the reform.*

Keywords: Culture-tourism integration; Tourism major; Oral English; Practical training; Teaching reform; School-enterprise cooperation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The institutional merger of culture and tourism administration in China in 2018 marked a turning point at which the two sectors, long managed in parallel, began to converge at the levels of policy, market, and consumption [1]. Since then, the integration of culture and tourism has moved from a slogan of industrial policy to an observable restructuring of products, destinations, and consumer expectations. Heritage sites are reinterpreted through immersive storytelling, intangible cultural heritage is repackaged as participatory experience, and night-time cultural districts have become engines of urban tourism. Alongside this domestic transformation, the recovery of inbound travel and the continued expansion of visa-free arrangements have brought a growing flow of international visitors whose expectations extend well beyond sightseeing toward meaningful cultural engagement [2].

These shifts have direct consequences for tourism education. The frontline personnel of the culture-tourism industry—tour guides, travel consultants, scenic-area interpreters, study-tour coordinators, and hospitality staff—are increasingly required to explain culture, not merely to transmit information. Explaining the symbolism of a garden layout, the etiquette of a tea ceremony, or the narrative logic of a historical quarter in fluent and culturally appropriate English is a task that conventional oral English courses, built around scripted dialogues and decontextualized drills, are poorly equipped to support. The result is a widely perceived mismatch between the graduates produced by tourism programs and the competence profile demanded by employers.

Against this background, the present paper investigates the practical oral English training component of tourism major programs. It asks three questions: What new demands does culture-tourism integration impose on oral English training? What structural dilemmas prevent current training from meeting those demands, and why do they persist? And how can the training system be reconstructed and implemented so that it serves authentic cultural tourism work? The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 1 analyzes the demands and internal logic

of the reform. Section 2 examines the dilemmas and their causes. Section 3 proposes a reconstructed training system, Section 4 details implementation pathways, and Section 5 discusses safeguard mechanisms. Section 6 concludes.

2. DEMANDS AND LOGIC OF REFORMING PRACTICAL ORAL ENGLISH TRAINING IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURE-TOURISM INTEGRATION

2.1 Deep Integration of Culture and Tourism and the Reconstruction of Competence for International Tourism Posts

The integration of culture and tourism is not a simple addition of two industries but a qualitative change in what tourism work consists of. When the product being sold is culture itself—history, custom, craft, festival, and lifestyle—the practitioner's role shifts from logistical service provider to cultural mediator. A guide at an ancient water town is no longer expected only to manage a group and recite dates; she is expected to render local knowledge intelligible and appealing to visitors from different cultural backgrounds, to answer unexpected questions, and to handle culturally sensitive situations with tact. Studies of tourism employment consistently indicate that employers now rank communicative and interpretive abilities alongside, or even above, routine service skills [3].

For internationally oriented posts, this mediation must be performed in English, often in real time and under conditions of uncertainty. The competence required is therefore composite: it includes linguistic fluency and accuracy, a working command of culture-specific vocabulary, the pragmatic skill of adjusting register and explanation depth to different audiences, and the intercultural sensitivity to anticipate misunderstanding. Oral English training that isolates pronunciation and sentence patterns from this composite competence prepares students for an industry that no longer exists.

2.2 The Practical Demand for Reforming Oral English Practical Training

Three pressures converge to make reform urgent. First, the employment market sends an unambiguous signal: culture-tourism enterprises repeatedly report that new graduates can pass written English tests yet freeze when required to improvise an explanation for a foreign visitor or to handle a complaint in English. Second, national vocational education policy explicitly demands deeper industry-education integration and the alignment of training with real work processes [4], which exposes the weakness of oral English courses that operate as self-contained language classes rather than as components of professional training. Third, students themselves, facing a competitive labor market, increasingly recognize that demonstrable oral communicative competence is a differentiating asset and express dissatisfaction with training that feels repetitive and disconnected from their career imaginaries.

These pressures share a common root: the training system was designed for an era in which English was a screening credential rather than a working tool. Reform is therefore not a matter of marginal adjustment—adding a few tourism dialogues to an existing syllabus—but of rethinking the objectives, content, situations, and evaluation of oral English training as a whole.

2.3 Positioning the Objectives of Practical Training for Culture-Tourism Integration

The objective of training should be repositioned from "using English correctly" to "accomplishing professional communication in culture-tourism work." This repositioning is consistent with the tradition of communicative language teaching, which holds that language ability is constituted through meaningful use in context rather than through the accumulation of forms [5]. It is also consistent with English for Specific Purposes, which derives course objectives from an analysis of the target situation rather than from an abstract syllabus of grammar. In practical terms, the repositioned objective can be stated as follows: upon completion of training, students should be able to perform the oral communication tasks of typical culture-tourism posts—receiving and orienting international visitors, interpreting cultural content, narrating itineraries, handling inquiries and complaints, and cooperating with foreign partners—at a level of fluency, appropriateness, and cultural adequacy acceptable to employers.

Such an objective has two implications that guide the whole reform. It implies that evaluation must be performance-based, because communicative accomplishment cannot be inferred from paper-and-pencil tests; and

it implies that cultural content is not decoration but the very substance of what students learn to say.

3. DILEMMAS OF PRACTICAL ORAL ENGLISH TRAINING FOR TOURISM MAJORS AND THEIR CAUSES

3.1 Training Content Detached from Authentic Culture-Tourism Work Scenarios

The most visible dilemma is the gap between what is practiced in class and what is done at work. Many programs still organize oral English around generic dialogues—booking a room, checking in at an airport, ordering in a restaurant—that bear limited resemblance to the interpretive and relational work of culture-tourism posts. Materials age slowly while the industry changes quickly: new formats such as study tours, immersive exhibitions, and cultural livestreaming rarely enter the classroom. Analyses of vocational tourism curricula have repeatedly noted that textbooks lag behind industrial practice and that training items are selected for linguistic convenience rather than occupational relevance [6]. The consequence is a perverse form of preparation: students become fluent in situations they will rarely encounter and remain speechless in the situations that define their jobs.

3.2 Insufficient Creation of Training Situations and Weak Integration of Cultural Elements

Even where content is nominally tourism-related, the situations in which oral practice occurs remain thin. Role-plays are often performed between classmates who share the same cultural background and already know the script, which removes the informational and intercultural gap that makes real communication demanding. Situated learning theory reminds us that competence is acquired through participation in authentic activities within a community of practice, not through rehearsal in a vacuum [7]. Cultural content, when present at all, is typically delivered as declarative knowledge—lists of festivals, dates, and attractions—rather than as communicative resource: students may know the facts of the Dragon Boat Festival without being able to explain its meaning to a curious foreigner in natural, audience-sensitive English. The separation of "culture class" from "oral English class" reproduces in the curriculum exactly the separation that the integrated industry has abolished.

3.3 The Dual-Qualified Teaching Workforce Lacks Genuine Industry Experience

Oral English for tourism is commonly taught by language teachers whose professional biography runs from university to classroom. However strong their linguistic command, they have rarely guided a group, handled an on-site complaint, or negotiated with an overseas agency, and therefore cannot model the tacit judgments—what to omit, how to soften, when to simplify—that distinguish professional communication from classroom talk. The policy ideal of the dual-qualified teacher, competent in both pedagogy and industry practice, is widely affirmed but weakly institutionalized: qualification certificates are easier to obtain than genuine work experience, and teacher evaluation systems reward publications and teaching awards rather than industry engagement [8]. Meanwhile, the practitioners who possess the missing experience are rarely present in the classroom, because mechanisms for employing industry mentors remain occasional and informal.

3.4 Monolithic Assessment and the Absence of Process-Based Evidence

Assessment practices lag furthest behind the reform agenda. In many programs, oral English is still graded through a single end-of-term examination—often a prepared dialogue or a short presentation—that rewards memorization and penalizes the risk-taking through which communicative competence actually develops. There is little systematic collection of evidence about how a student's performance evolves across the semester: recordings are not archived, rubrics are not consistently applied, and feedback, when given, is summative and generic. Research on formative assessment shows that ongoing, criterion-referenced feedback is among the strongest levers for improving learning [9]; its absence means that both students and teachers navigate without instruments. Moreover, assessment by a single classroom teacher, however conscientious, cannot certify workplace readiness—a judgment that properly belongs also to industry assessors and to authentic audiences.

4. RECONSTRUCTING THE ORAL ENGLISH PRACTICAL TRAINING SYSTEM ORIENTED TOWARD CULTURE-TOURISM INTEGRATION

4.1 Building a Three-Dimensional Objective System of Language Proficiency, Cultural Literacy, and Professional Ethics

The reconstructed system begins from objectives. Three dimensions should be specified jointly and explicitly. The language dimension covers fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and the command of genre-specific discourse — welcoming, narrating, explaining, mediating, and negotiating. The cultural dimension covers both declarative familiarity with the culture being presented and the interpretive skill of rendering it across cultural boundaries, including awareness of taboo, humor, and face. The professional dimension covers service ethics, responsibility, teamwork, and occupational identity, which surface in speech as tone, patience, and tact. Stating these dimensions as one integrated framework matters because it prevents the old hierarchy—language first, culture optional, ethics assumed—from silently reasserting itself in timetabling and grading.

4.2 Restructuring Modular Training Content Around Real Work Processes

Content should be reorganized from topic-based units into process-based modules that mirror the workflow of culture-tourism posts. A sensible architecture distinguishes pre-tour communication (itinerary confirmation, expectation management), on-tour performance (site interpretation, interactive questioning, emergency handling), and post-tour follow-up (feedback collection, complaint resolution, relationship maintenance), complemented by modules for emerging formats such as study-tour facilitation and digital cultural presentation. Each module specifies its target tasks, its cultural content load, and its communicative functions, so that linguistic progression and occupational progression advance together. Because modules are defined by work processes rather than by textbook chapters, they can be updated as the industry evolves without dismantling the whole curriculum.

4.3 Establishing a Dual-Scenario Mechanism Coupling On-Campus Simulation with Off-Campus Practice

Simulation and reality each have irreplaceable functions, and the reform should articulate them rather than choose between them. On-campus scenarios—simulated tour-guiding halls, digital rehearsal studios, and peer- and teacher-audience performances—provide safe, repeatable, feedback-rich practice in which errors are cheap and experimentation is encouraged. Off-campus scenarios—internships at scenic areas, museums, travel agencies, and cultural events—provide the irreducible authenticity of real audiences, real stakes, and real unpredictability. The mechanism should guarantee circulation between the two: problems encountered in the field return to the classroom as training material, and skills rehearsed on campus are deliberately deployed and evaluated in the field.

4.4 Improving a Multi-Agent, Whole-Process, Evidence-Based Evaluation Mechanism

Evaluation should be redesigned along three axes. Along the agent axis, teacher assessment is complemented by industry mentors, peers, and—where feasible—real visitors, each bringing a distinct and valid perspective on communicative effectiveness. Along the process axis, one-shot examinations give way to accumulated evidence: recorded performances, reflective journals, task artifacts, and staged portfolio reviews that make growth visible and assessable. Along the criterion axis, analytic rubrics aligned with the three-dimensional objectives replace holistic impressions, so that a student's pronunciation, interpretive quality, and professional demeanor are each judged against explicit descriptors. Together these axes convert evaluation from a screening event into a steering instrument that feeds back into teaching.

5. IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAYS OF ORAL ENGLISH PRACTICAL TRAINING ORIENTED TOWARD AUTHENTIC CULTURE-TOURISM SCENARIOS

5.1 Tapping Local Cultural Resources to Develop Distinctive Oral Training Projects

Every institution is located somewhere, and that somewhere is a training resource. Local heritage sites, museums, festivals, crafts, and culinary traditions provide content that is simultaneously authentic, culturally rich, and distinctive—three properties that generic textbooks cannot offer. Programs should systematically convert these resources into training projects: compiling bilingual interpretive scripts for local sites, developing presentation tasks around local intangible cultural heritage, and building a living bank of locally rooted communicative tasks. Such projects have a double effect: they give students something real and specific to talk about, and they cultivate the ability—transferable to any destination—of transforming local knowledge into engaging English narration. They also strengthen the institution's identity and its value to the regional culture-tourism economy.

5.2 Introducing Industry Mentors and Building a Mixed School-Enterprise Teaching Team

Because classroom teachers and practitioners hold complementary kinds of expertise, the teaching team should be deliberately mixed. Experienced guides, interpreters, and cultural-venue managers can be engaged as part-time mentors who co-design tasks, demonstrate authentic performance, sit on assessment panels, and share field cases, while full-time teachers contribute pedagogical structure, linguistic scaffolding, and continuity. Effective school-enterprise cooperation in vocational education depends less on goodwill than on institutional arrangements—contracts, remuneration, joint planning, and mutual evaluation—that make the collaboration routine rather than ceremonial [10]. A mixed team also creates a channel through which industry change flows continuously into the curriculum.

5.3 Creating Immersive Intercultural Communication Situations through Digital-Intelligent Technologies

Digital-intelligent technologies can partially compensate for the scarcity of authentic foreign interlocutors and sites. Virtual reality can place students inside reconstructed heritage environments where they practice interpretation under conditions of visual richness and time pressure; speech recognition and AI-based evaluation can provide immediate, tireless feedback on pronunciation and fluency; and AI conversational agents can play the role of foreign visitors with varied accents, temperaments, and levels of prior knowledge. Evidence from technology-enhanced language learning suggests that such immersive, feedback-rich environments can raise engagement and accelerate the development of oral skills, provided that technology is subordinated to pedagogical design rather than treated as an attraction in itself [11]. The guiding principle is simulation fidelity in service of communicative purpose.

5.4 Connecting with Real Enterprise Projects and Implementing Task-Driven Teaching

The strongest form of training situation is a real commission. Programs should seek standing agreements with culture-tourism enterprises under which students undertake authentic tasks—preparing English interpretive materials for an exhibition, staffing the reception of an international cultural festival, producing English promotional commentary for a destination—under dual supervision of teachers and enterprise staff. Task-driven teaching, in which language is learned through the effort to accomplish meaningful tasks, has a well-established rationale in second-language pedagogy [12]. Real enterprise tasks intensify this rationale: the audience is real, the quality threshold is external, and the consequences of success and failure are felt. The teacher's role shifts accordingly from performer of model language to designer of tasks, provider of scaffolding, and organizer of reflection.

6. SAFEGUARD MECHANISMS AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT FOR THE TEACHING REFORM

6.1 Establishing School-Enterprise Collaborative Governance and Incentive Mechanisms

Reform collapses without governance. A joint steering structure—bringing together program leaders, enterprise partners, and teacher and student representatives—should own the training system: approving module designs, coordinating internship placement, and reviewing evaluation evidence. Incentive mechanisms must run in both directions. Enterprises that contribute mentors, sites, and real tasks need tangible returns, such as priority access to graduates, staff training services, and shared branding; teachers who invest in industry engagement and training redesign need recognition in workload calculation, promotion criteria, and professional development opportunities. Where such incentives are absent, cooperation degenerates into symbolic agreements and the reform reverts to the classroom.

6.2 Strengthening Teachers' Industry Practice and Intercultural Competence

Teacher development should be treated as core infrastructure rather than peripheral welfare. Structured industry secondments—regular, assessed periods in which language teachers work inside culture-tourism enterprises—convert abstract knowledge of the industry into embodied experience that subsequently informs task design and feedback. These secondments should be paired with targeted training in intercultural communication, interpretive techniques, and assessment literacy, and with communities of practice in which teachers and industry mentors jointly analyze recordings of student performance. The objective is not to turn language teachers into tour guides, but to ensure that every teacher possesses enough situated knowledge to judge authenticity and to coach students toward it.

6.3 Building a Smart Oral Training Platform Integrating Virtual and Physical Resources

A unified platform should bind the components of the system together. Functionally, it should host the modular task bank and its bilingual resources, support recording, archiving, and annotation of performances, deliver AI-assisted feedback on pronunciation and fluency, connect students with remote mentors, and aggregate assessment evidence into individual learning profiles. Architecturally, it should integrate rather than duplicate existing facilities, linking the physical simulation venues, the digital rehearsal environment, and the off-campus practice sites into one traceable training chain. Data governance—consent, storage, and appropriate use of learner data—must be designed in from the outset rather than retrofitted.

6.4 Forming a Closed Loop of Continuous Quality Monitoring and Feedback

Finally, the reformed system must be able to correct itself. A quality loop should connect four points: the objectives and standards defined at design time; the evidence collected during training; periodic multi-source review involving teachers, mentors, students, and employers; and documented revision of modules, tasks, and rubrics. Graduate follow-up—tracking how alumni perform in culture-tourism posts and what training they retrospectively found valuable—closes the loop at the longest time scale and keeps the system accountable to the industry it serves. Continuous improvement of this kind transforms reform from a one-off project into an institutional capability.

7. CONCLUSION

Culture-tourism integration has changed what tourism professionals do, and therefore what tourism education must teach. For oral English training, the implication is a shift from language as credential to language as professional communicative capability—a capability that is simultaneously linguistic, cultural, and ethical. This paper has argued that the current dilemmas of training—detached content, thin situations, an under-experienced workforce, and monolithic assessment—are structural rather than accidental, and that they require a correspondingly systemic response: a three-dimensional objective framework, process-based modular content, coupled simulated and real scenarios, evidence-based multi-agent evaluation, and implementation pathways grounded in local culture, industry partnership, digital-intelligent technology, and real enterprise tasks, all protected by governance, teacher development, platform, and quality-loop mechanisms. The argument is necessarily programmatic, and its limitations should be acknowledged: the proposals await empirical validation across diverse institutions and regions, and the measurement of their effects on students' workplace performance remains a task for future research. What is already clear is that incremental patching of the old training model cannot close the gap between classroom and industry; only a reconstruction oriented toward authentic culture-tourism work can.

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