An Empirical Study of IELTS Speaking Course for Advanced Nursing Majors in Chinese Nursing Vocational College

Xu Lei

Sichuan Nursing Vocational College, No. 199, First Ring Road, Deyang City 618000, China

E-mail: 1061959820@qq.com

Abstract— In order to enhance international communication and cooperation, cultivate students with inter-cultural and international nursing awareness, improve foreign-concerned nursing ability, intensify English language learning, IELTS courses were adapted to teaching advanced nursing majors in a Chinese Nursing Vocational college. This article specifically focused on the effect of IELTS Speaking course which aimed to improve English spoken and communicative competence. Research methods including both quantitative questionnaire survey and qualitative interview were applied to 98 subjects who registered in this course. The results showed that students' learning motivation and interest were fully triggered, and their spoken ability was more or less improved and learning needs were satisfied in general after this short-time experiment. As a consequence, this course should be carried out for long term to better equip students with internationally "double-qualified" certification, i.e. English competence plus professional expertise.
Keywords— IELTS speaking, Spoken competence, Vocational nursing majors, Advanced English course.

I. INTRODUCTION

In order to cultivate internationally-qualified nurses for hospitals abroad and at home, a newly-founded Nursing Vocational college in China just opened a specially-designed class for advanced nursing majors so as to improve their comprehensive English competence and thus be trained as double-qualified graduates who can use English as a tool to serve foreign patients both overseas and at home. The curriculum designed for them contains courses including English Phonetics, Grammar and College English courses as basic foundation; IELTS Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing as follow-up courses for students to intensify integrated English ability and then pursue a high grade in IELTS examination; ISPN as ESP course to help students get the credential to work as internationally-eligible nurses all around the world. This article focuses on researching the effect of IELTS Speaking course in which English spoken and communicative competence is especially trained and enhanced.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Chinese English learners are notorious for their lack of oral English competence throughout their English learning experiences as some Chinese scholars have pointed out in their published papers. Chen (2003) stated that in traditional English classes, "Cramming" is ubiquitous and the aftermath is that the majority of students who commit grammatical

rules deep to memory and can get a high score in paper examination are not able to speak English in daily lives, even if it is just a simple sentence. In Su and You's contrastive study (2005), they mentioned that college English education in China focuses too much on fostering students' translation and reading skills, rather than listening and speaking skills. By contrasting the results of experimental group and comparing group, it revealed that students' speaking grade is positively related to their comprehensive English grade. In Tian's research (2006), she asserted that English language learning needs large amount of oral practice, and only through authentic and contextual communicative activities can students finally manage to use it. After this teaching experiment, it proved that TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching) is efficient to improve communicative competence. Through a survey of clinical nursing workers in the hospital, Niu et al., (2009) stated that there exists a great gap between a lack of oral English courses for nursing majors in vocational colleges and an urgent need for nurses to improve oral English. In Liao's paper (2009), he designed a curriculum setting for improving foreign-related nursing majors' oral competence via integrating basic oral English, professional nursing English and IELTS speaking together. Wu et al., (2010) further pointed out that English spoken and communicative competence is an essential skill in foreign-related nursing work, without which nurses cannot communicate with patients effectively, let alone understand their needs and serve them well.

As a remedy for long-standing negligence in nurturing English spoken competence in Chinese context, opening IELTS Speaking course in the Chinese Nursing Vocational college aims to improve students' oral English ability and further consolidate communicative competence as a result.

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

3.1 Background

Based on their English grades in Chinese College Entrance Examination and pre-college face-to-face speaking interview produced by English teachers in this college, 2 intensified English classes including 49 nursing major freshmen for each in Grade 2017 were selected as subjects. IELTS Speaking course was opened in the second semester, after IELTS Listening and College English courses finished. In IELTS Speaking course, the teacher designed to implement teaching curriculum as follows: surrounding a certain common topic in IELTS, teacher presented basic vocabulary, related phrases and extended oral expressions in the class, pretended to be the IELTS examiner, asked questions in sequence and led students to organize their words, enrich contents and produce a consummated answer by imitation and self-innovation. Besides, each individual student was pushed to give English presentation based on a popular topic, after which both the teacher and peers would give feedback and constructive suggestions for improvement. After 1 semester's teaching and learning experiment, authentic data and necessary information were gathered in time for further research.

3.2 Methodology

Both questionnaire survey and interview were used as quantitative and qualitative research methods to increase the reliability and validity of this study and to elicit persuading results and conclusions.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Analysis of Questionnaire Survey

97 out of all 98 students filled in this 5 Point-Likert-Scale based questionnaire and gave valid data. Through reliability and validity tests by SPSS 17.0, Cronbach's Alpha is 0.818 and KMO is 0.812, which means data collected by the questionnaire is highly reliable and valid for further analysis. In Factor Analysis, 5 factors were drawn from 22 specifically-designed questions, which can be concluded as Factor 1: students' learning objectives in IELTS Speaking course, Factor 2: students' attitudes to learning College English course, Factor 3: students' first-hand learning

experience in IELTS Speaking course, Factor 4: students' learning interests and competence in IELTS Speaking course, Factor 5: learning, teaching and evaluation emphasis in IELTS Speaking course. In the following table, Mean and Std. Deviation in each factor are listed.

Table.1:   Mean and Std. Deviation in Each Factor

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Factor 1	97	3.6959	0.52760
Factor 2	97	3.0879	0.82288
Factor 3	97	3.7131	0.53182
Factor 4	97	3.6134	0.47189
Factor 5	97	4.3969	0.50872

From the table above, in Factor 1, we can find that the majority of students have a positive attitude to learning this course, for purposes such as taking IELTS test, working or studying abroad, broadening horizon and learning how to communicate with foreigners in authentic and native English., etc. Besides, many students agree that this course is beneficial for strengthening their comprehensive English skills and abilities, which is proved by the number of students passing CET-4 (College English Test Band 4). Over 50% advanced nursing majors did it while only about 10%

in other majors combined. In Factor 2, it is easily found out that in College English course, students lack the opportunity of practicing spoken English and they are tired of being passive leaners to learn too much tedious vocabulary and grammatical linguistic knowledge. Furthermore, they think the topics in textbook are too out-of-date to satisfy their needs in real-life situations. By contrast, in Factor 3, students show great interest in learning IELTS Speaking course, in which they become active learners and get a lot of opportunities to think and express ideas in English through classroom activities. Meanwhile, since classroom atmosphere is light-hearted and friendly, students are eager to interact with teacher and discuss with partners in English surrounding a certain topic. Especially through individual English presentation, students are highly motivated to integrate what they learned in IELTS Speaking course with English linguistic knowledge they acquired in other English courses and manage to present their ideas and insights to audience based on an interesting topic eventually. In this way, students become more courageous to speak English and express their innovative thoughts. Therefore, it helps students to learn, understand and use oral English better in daily lives as a consequence. As for Factor 4, we may illustrate the results in the following figures.
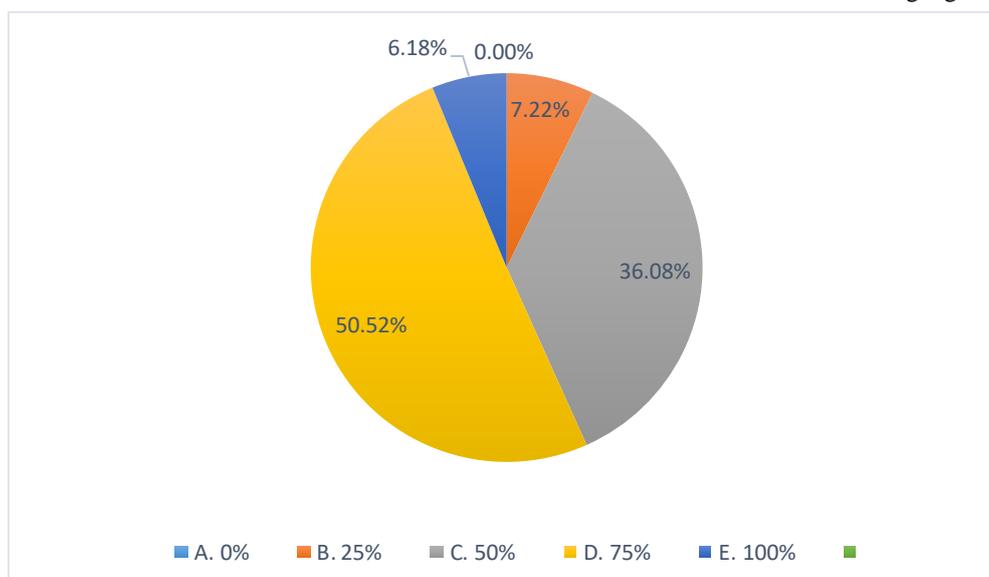

Fig.1: Students' Understanding Level in

In Figure 1, it manifests that most of students understand over 50% percent of the contents in this course, accounting for about 93% in total, while half of the students understand 75% of the contents. Moreover, especially a remarkable 6% of students are confident to claim 100% understanding of the course, which implies teaching methods and strategies are proper and suitable for students and teaching material is quite acceptable for them to understand.
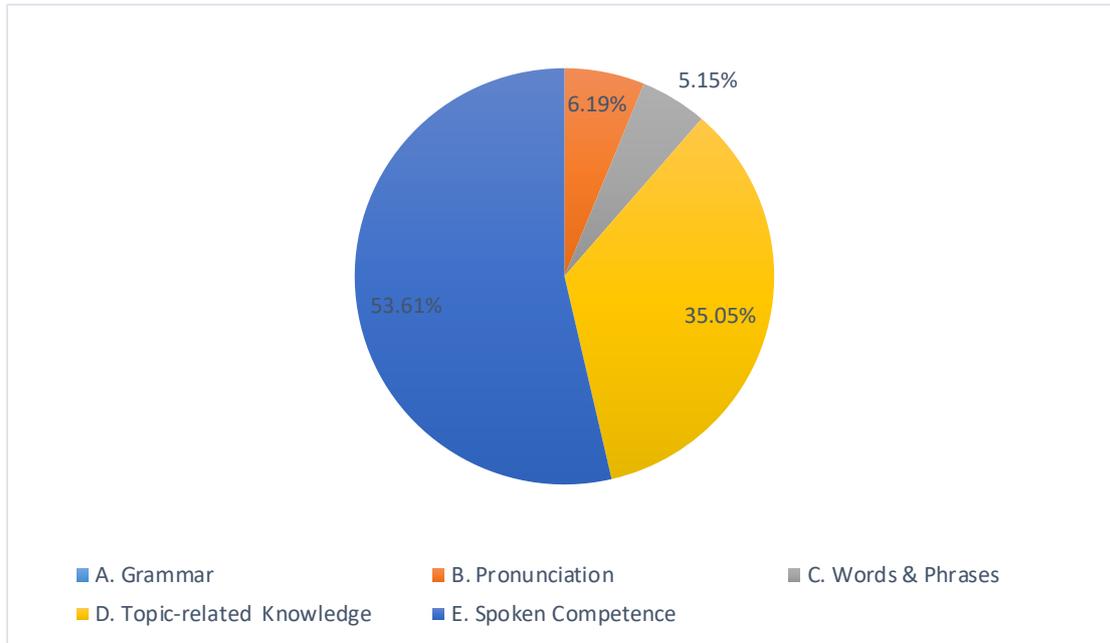

Fig.2: Students' Favorite Learning Content in

In Figure 2, it illustrates that students favor learning topic-related knowledge and practicing speaking ability most in this course, accounting for nearly 90% in total. However, no student shows interest in learning grammar (0%), and only about 10% of students combined love to learn pronunciation, new words and phrases in this course. Unsurprisingly, students intend to learn topic-related knowledge and how to use oral English to express ideas in common topics rather than acquiring basic linguistic stuff which they have been strenuously learning since the beginning of their English learning experience and are still learning in College English course.

Since this course meets their urgent needs to improve speaking and communicative competence in English which is the weakest point for Chinese learners, their learning motives are highly triggered as shown in Figure 3 bellow.
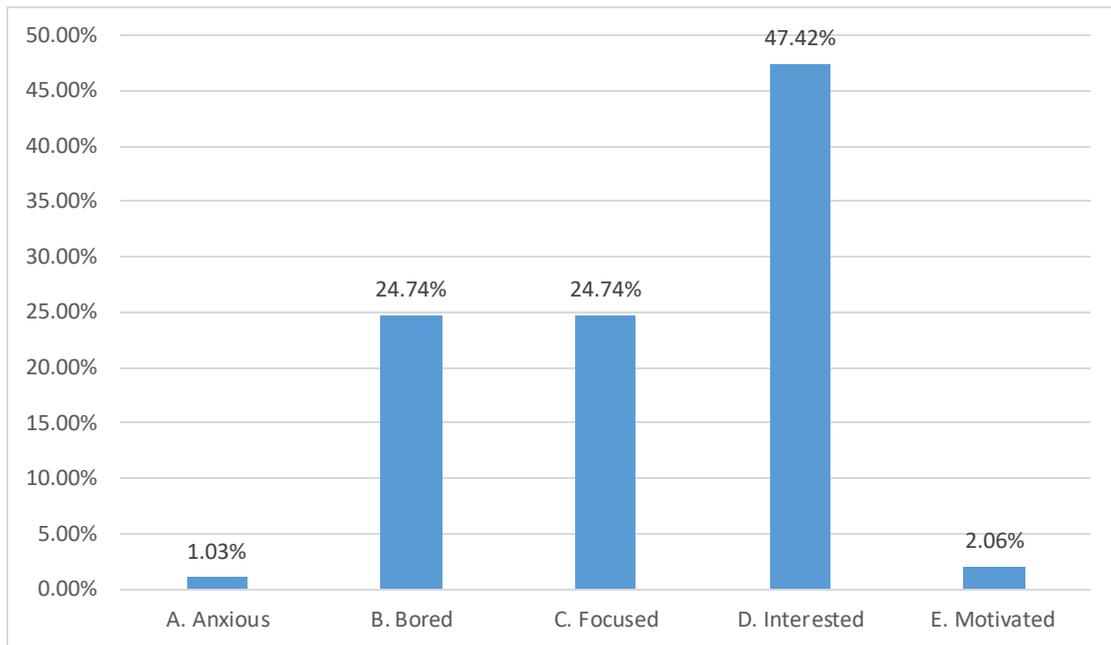
Fig.3: Students' Feel about Learning in

Collected data just match with what the researcher has observed in the class, i.e. classroom atmosphere is so carefree and energetic that students scramble to answer questions and discuss interesting topics with partners in English. It is worth noting that a quarter or so students feel anxious or bored in learning this course maybe because of their weak English foundation or unwillingness to participate in English-speaking activities in this course. Even though this phenomenon is rare in IELTS Speaking course but prevalent in other English courses through classroom observation, teachers need to ponder how to change these passive learners into active learners by all means.

In Figure 4, it compares students' learning competence with teacher's teaching competence in this course from students' perspective.
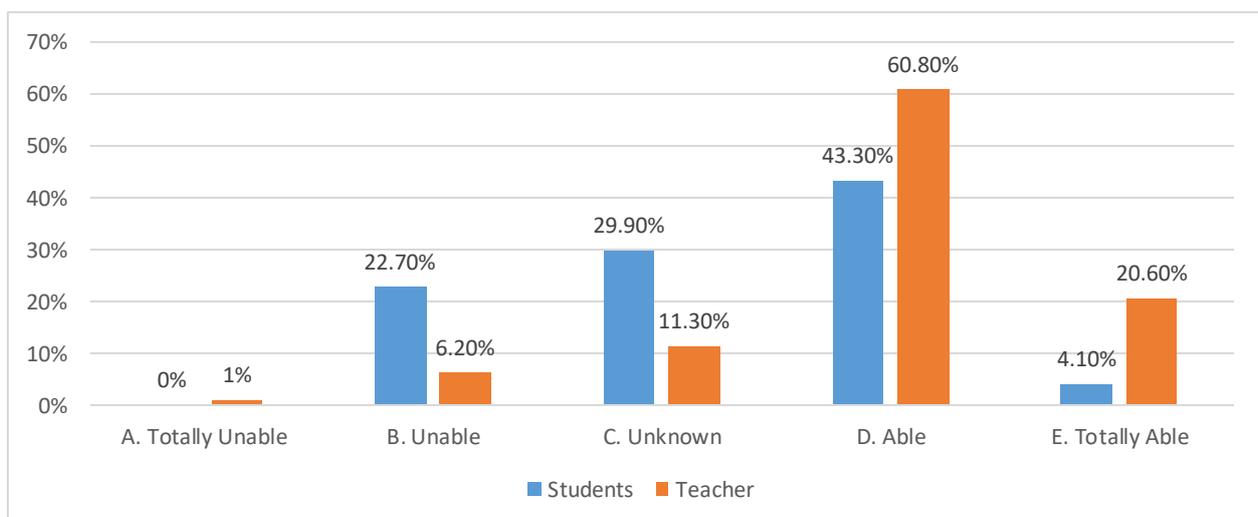

Fig.4: Students' Learning and Teacher's Teaching Competence in

In general, the majority of students believe both they and their teacher are competent to learn and teach in this

course, making up around 50% and 80% in respective, which further shows they are less satisfied with themselves than with the teacher maybe due to higher expectation set for themselves. In the meantime, 50% of students think they are unable or unknown whether they are qualified to learn demonstrates their lack of confidence or insufficient learning

in this course. Therefore, the teacher should always encourage them to practice more speaking both in and outside of the classroom so as not to lag behind,

In Factor 5, Teaching, learning and testing focuses are comparatively listed in Figure 5 as following.
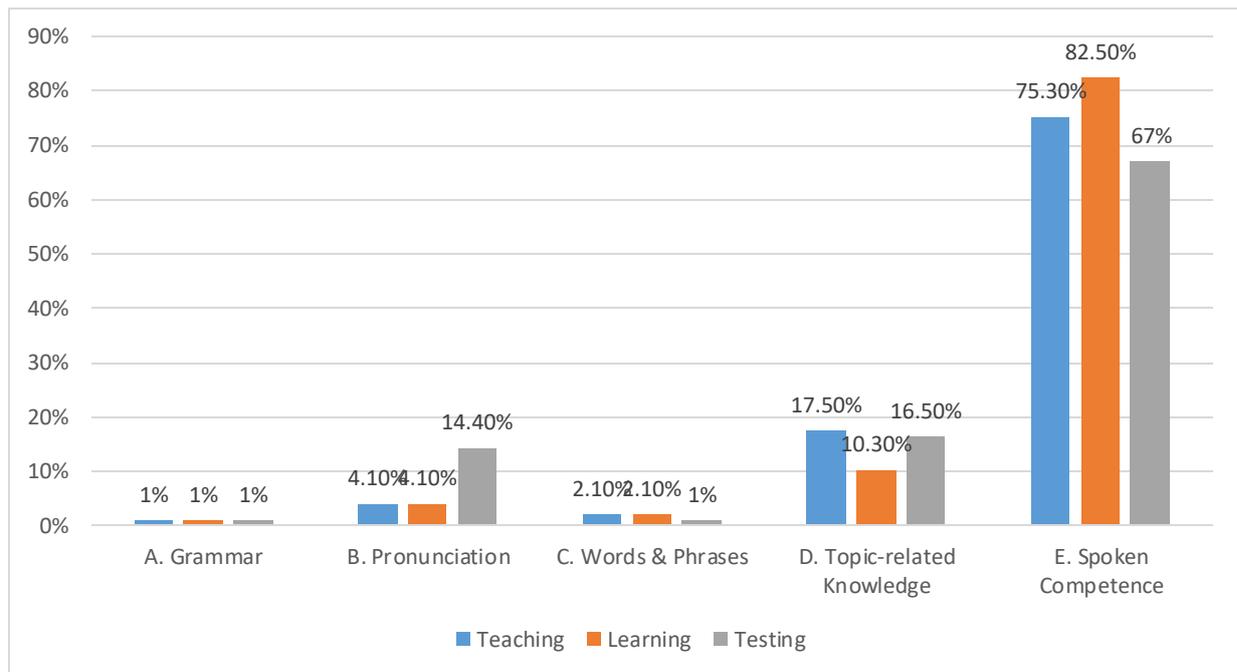

Fig.5: Teaching, Learning and Testing Focuses in

Obviously, spoken competence is deemed as the most important emphasis in all 3 aspects, in a dominant fashion ranging from 67% to 82.5%. Topic-related knowledge (10.3%~17.5%) comes only second to the former shows that in addition to improving spoken competence, quite a lot of students are also willing to learn relevant knowledge in the spoken topic, which can help them better understand, organize and enrich expression of contents in their spoken performance. The least favored in all 3 aspects is grammar (only 1%), indicating that students are tedious of learning grammatical rules and regulations and they don't think learning grammar is essential or critical in IELTS Speaking course.**4.2 Analysis of Interview**

After interviewing randomly-selected subjects in this

course, some constructive suggestions for curricular improvement are attained.

Some of the interview abstracts are listed below:

Many students praise and give applause to this course in general.

"In this class, a lot of opportunities are offered for us to practice spoken English, and we are encouraged to create our unique ideas by active learning rather than passive learning in other college English courses where cramming is prevalent and we are just knowledge receiver rather than language constructor."

"Maybe debate can be used as a good way for us to extend and develop thoughts, analyze and organize opinions by ourselves, compare and contrast standpoints with rivals,

foster critical thinking ability and cultivate teamwork spirit in the meantime."

However, relatively few students claim a lack of interest or motivation more or less in the class.

"I think some topics in the course are a little bit too common in our lives, and thus seem not so interesting and devoid of curiosity to us. I want this class to be much more unpredictable and more challenging in terms of the content."

To sum up, firstly, as for classroom performance, students claim that they are not able to express ideas in English as the same as what they think in mind and that they make so many mistakes in speaking which indicates collaborative and comparative learning with peers should be encouraged to fill in this gap. Secondly, as for PPT presentation which is set for individual student at the beginning of each lesson, students feel that even though topics in presentation are various and rich, yet their set-up of PPT is a little bit disordered and insights are not sublimated in the end. Moreover, students benefit a lot from customizing PPT by themselves, presenting skills and talents in front of the class through overcoming innate shyness and lack of confidence, all of which is conducive to developing all-rounded abilities and necessary career skills in the future. In addition, some students suggest that instead of standing on the platform, the teacher should take the microphone down to the audience and share more learning experience and native way of speaking English with them. By this way, bilateral communication, mutual trust and harmonious learning atmosphere will be made. As for classroom activities, some students recommend that other than in-class individual presentation, the teacher should organize more group-work for them to practice speaking English by in-class

debate and extracurricular cooperation and reinforcement with partners, such as role playing and dubbing classical voices in the movies via quite a lot of useful English dubbing applications. Last but not least, relatively few top students recommend that the teacher should not use a constant set piece to present the class, such as putting up a question first and then asking students to answer, giving hints, showing related expressions subsequently and offering feedback in the end when necessary, which suggests students' different learning needs should be taken into account by the teacher and more innovative learning models, activities and practices should be promoted to adjust to different individuals.

4.3 Making Micro-lecture

In order to promote this course throughout the college and help more students in other majors to learn it by themselves online, a micro-lecture in which a common topic in IELTS- "College" is selected and produced by a number of top students under the guidance of the lecturer. Based on "College-specialized, Student-centered, Teacher-guided" principal, teaching design includes the following:

The background of lecture sets on the landmarks of the college-the front door, Nightingale's Sculpture, the pavilion beside teaching building where 3 main scenes are produced. The class begins with teacher's greetings and introduction of IELTS Speaking course, then the topic is divided into 3 sub-topics in which key language points, useful expressions are presented in front of audience. By using scenic shooting method, the teacher introduces, explains and extends each sub-topic in sequence, then the students use attained knowledge in this lecture to make interactive conversations with each other and accomplish oral communications in simulated real-life situations.

Table.2: Teaching Design of the Micro-lecture

Teaching Objectives:	Students are able to introduce their college in general and describe their major in more detail by using oral English fluently.
Key & Difficult Teaching Points:	Professional vocabulary and jargons related to specific medical majors and oral expressions.
Teaching Activities, Teaching Process & Entry Point:	Setting the college as teaching site, choosing proper teaching material by integrating college's features with students' specified majors. Teaching theme is divided into 3 sub-topics to introduce, illustrate and conclude language points. Students mimic real-life interactive oral practices to get familiar with, master and extend daily oral expressions in relevant topic and then apply it in daily lives freely.

Table.3: Teaching Process in the Micro-lecture

1. Lead in the topic, instruct key and difficult words, phrases and expressions.
2. Practice, master and extend oral expressions in related topic by students' cooperative real-situation exercise.
3. Summarize skills and techniques in answering each question and assign related homework for students to organize their words and form their own unique answers and practice with partners.

Table.4: Modern Technology Used in the Micro-lecture.

Equipment:	Hand-holding stable platform, 4K 60fps video camera, Tripod stand
Processing Technic:	Video Studio, Adobe Photoshop, Audacity, Adobe Flash, Microsoft PowerPoint, Geometer's Sketchpad

Summary: By using heuristic teaching method and knowledge transference model from the lecturer, and via simulated interactive oral practices from the students, interest and practicality in both teaching and learning are greatly increased, and students improve their spoken English through "learning by doing" (Dewey, 1916) as a consequence.

V. CONCLUSIONS

After 1 semester's learning IELTS Speaking course, on the one hand, students' spoken English and communicative competence have been greatly improved, on the other hand, they gradually become aware of the importance to acquire both international nursing skills and English competence.

Frankly speaking, to pass Chinese standardized paper-examination such as CET is not quite enough. In replacement, after intensive training, no longer is it a tall order for them to take IELTS, get international language credential and speak English with foreign patients, understand their needs and then help doctors treat them, which is in more urgent demand in daily working situations if they want to work overseas and serve foreigners. As a result, IELTS Speaking course plays a crucial role in linking pre-set basic College English, Phonetics, Grammar courses and subsequent professional ISPN course, which combines to cultivate cross-cultural consciousness and international nursing awareness, improve foreign-concerned nursing ability, intensify English learning,

in order to foster high-quality international nursing talents, broaden working and studying channels for graduates and provide them with a better platform to continue studying or work abroad after graduation.

REFERENCES Chen Hui, 2003. Reform of English Teaching for Foreign-concerned Nursing Speciality. Journal of Nursing Science 18(6): 461-462

[2] Dewey. J, 1916. Democracy and Education: An introduction to the philosophy of education. New York: Macmillan.

[3] Liao Ya-hui, 2009. On curriculum setting of vocational foreign-related nursing oral English. Journal of Yueyang Vocational and Technical College 24(5): 66-68. DOI:10.13947/j.cnki.yyzyxb.2009.05.013

[4] Niu Xiao-Ting, Wang Hui and Liu Yu-qiang, 2010. Analysis and countermeasures of the English level of nurses and the present situation of English teaching in nursing specialty. Journal of Nurses Training 25(18): 1651-1653. DOI:10.16821/j.cnki.hsjx.2010.18.007

[5] Su Hui-fen and You Gui-lan, 2005. New trends of nursing English teaching in English nursing major. Nanfang Journal of Nursing 12(6): 67-69. DOI:10.16460/j.issn1008-9969.2005.06.037

[6] Tian Jun-yin, 2006. Preliminary study of task-based approach in the teaching of nursing oral English. Northwest Medical Education 14(4): 463-465. DOI：10.13555/j.cnki.c.m.e.2006.04.040

[7] Wu Xi, Guo Qiao-hong and Huang Ning-yi, 2010. Current situation analysis and improvement plan of oral teaching in vocational medical college. Journal of Changsha Railway University 11(3): 126-127