

# The Impact of Personal Learning Environments on Chinese Junior High School Students' Spoken English Narrative Competence

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## ABSTRACT

This study designed and implemented a personal learning environment platform for spoken English teaching in a junior high school in China to improve students' spoken English narrative competence. Altogether, 83 junior high school year one students took part in this study. The participants were divided into experimental and control classes for the two-month-long experiment. The personal learning environment-based spoken English platform was implemented in the experimental class, while the control class used traditional face-to-face instruction. Pre- and post-spoken English tests and semistructured interviews were used in the study. The data analysis revealed that PLEs has the potential to boost students' learning motivation and enthusiasm and improve their spoken English narrative performance as well. This study advanced practical research of PLEs in junior high school and enhanced the theoretical research in spoken English teaching.

## KEYWORDS

junior high school, personal learning environments, spoken English teaching, spoken narrative competence

## INTRODUCTION

The Internet is rapidly changing the way knowledge is created, acquired, and used, as well as opening up new and promising avenues for education (United Nations Educationnel, Scientific and Cultural Organization & Tsinghua University, 2022). During Coronavirus Disease 2019, to ensure "school is suspended without suspension," many schools started online teaching. Therefore, the dual impact of technological progress and public health events increased users' demand for quality online learning platforms that can bring them authentic and personalized learning experiences.

As Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China stated (2010), "Information technology had a revolutionary impact on the development of education and must be prioritized."

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With the rapid development of information technology, the Internet now stimulates profound changes in the field of education. Information and communication technology (ICT) held enormous promise for educational reform. For example, a well-designed platform could support students' differentiated learning with technology while also promoting students' overall development.

As stated in the Ten-Year Development Plan for Information of Education in China (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2010), "We should provide learners with an information-based environment and service for personalized learning." The development of adaptive online learning platforms has been proposed in our country's education informatization development plan. Additionally, there has been a discernible integration of personalized training initiatives into national and regional policy documents, aiming to foster increased flexibility and personalized learning across all levels of education.

Meanwhile, as part of the new curriculum reform process, as the *English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education* (2022 edition) (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022) stated, it was proposed to promote the deep integration of information technology and English teaching. In light of this, greater emphasis was placed on the reform of teaching and learning practices in the realm of educational informatization.

Furthermore, there is a potential to leverage modern information technology as a valuable support system for English teaching in accordance with the stipulations of the curriculum standards. Specifically, the curriculum mandates that junior high school students should spend a minimum of 30 minutes per week to engage in extracurricular audiovisual activities. In light of this, modern information technology can play a vital role in facilitating and enhancing such activities, contributing to the overall efficacy of English language instruction.

As a result of the swift evolution of the Internet, online learning has grown in popularity, and learning is no longer limited to the traditional classroom and a set period of time. Consequently, a growing number of researchers started to integrate big data and artificial intelligence technologies into the field of education.

The primary aim was to cater to a broader spectrum of learners with personalized and high-quality learning resources and tools. The integration of information technologies in education has been going on for more than two decades, with learning management systems (LMSs) emerging as one of the most popular applications. Numerous Chinese scholars have attempted to apply LMSs to junior high schools's spoken English teaching in recent years. For example, Zhang and He investigated the application of the Liulishuo app in junior high school English teaching, while Li designed the English interest Dubbing app to encourage junior high school students' enthusiasm for spoken English teaching, etc. These applications facilitated online teaching and learning (Shen, 2018).

Table 1 shows the advantages and disadvantages of some spoken English learning software in China:

However, due to the challenge of designing tasks suitable for all levels of students, only a small percentage of students were actively engaged in these online learning platforms. Therefore, individual differences in learning were ignored, and students with weak foundations were unable to participate in class activities, particularly in spoken activities (Wang & Zhang, 2014).

Furthermore, teachers generally evaluate students' performance by using unified standards, so students cannot be evaluated individually, which makes it difficult to pique students' learning interests and foster their learning confidence.

Given these circumstances, the purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the Personal Learning Environment-based Spoken English platform (PLEs-SE) on junior high school students' spoken English narrative competence.

Thus, the following research question was posed:

*Question: How does the PLEs-SE platform affect junior high school students' spoken English narrative competence?*

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