

Current Situation and Reform of English Major Talent Cultivation Models in Chinese Universities

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ABSTRACT

In the context of an increasingly severe employment situation, graduates from English majors in Chinese universities no longer enjoy the same level of societal favor as they did a decade ago, leading to an oversupply of students and intensified competition.

KEYWORDS

Current English major cultivation models; Drawbacks of traditional education model; Measures to reform the current cultivation models

1 Introduction

The current English major cultivation model falls significantly short of meeting societal needs.

The language knowledge and skills acquired by students on campus are far from adequate to meet the requirements of prospective employment positions.

Therefore, cultivating versatile English talents has become a top priority for English majors in universities to respond to employment challenges in the new era.

Since the economic and social reforms initiated three decades ago following China's reform and opening-up, the basic framework of a market economy has initially taken shape within the Chinese economic system.

However, the education system responsible for providing human capital remains a product of the planned economy era, exerting adverse impacts on economic and social development.

Against the backdrop of globalization and the profound development of artificial intelligence technology, the cultivation of English major talents in universities is facing unprecedented challenges and opportunities.

Societal demand for English talents has shifted from a singular focus on language skills to a composite ability of "language + professional expertise," while the lag in traditional teaching methods has led to a decline in graduates' employment competitiveness.

This model targeted specific occupational roles, dividing majors based on production objects or processes, and emphasized professional knowledge and specialized skill education.

Its characteristic was enabling students to quickly adapt to job requirements upon graduation.

The main drawback of this model is its overly narrow professional scope, with a heavy emphasis on science and engineering over humanities, professional skills over fundamentals, knowledge over abilities, and technology over qualities.

The resulting graduates can only function within a very narrow professional range, lacking the ability to integrate, reorganize, and innovate knowledge and technology, which is severely out of sync with the current economic development model and its rapid changes, necessitating urgent reform.

2 Significant Drawbacks of the Traditional Education Model

Chinese university English majors primarily focus on learning communicative skills in foreign languages. However, language, in essence, is merely a tool that maximizes its value when integrated with other professional skills and applied accordingly, thereby more fully serving China's economic construction endeavors.

Nevertheless, the current cultivation model for English majors in universities generally exhibits incompatibility with modern educational development, where "language proficiency is inadequate" and "professional expertise is lacking" remain unresolved issues.

Upon entering specific job roles, they must quickly adapt to their responsibilities.

Hence, the language knowledge and skills acquired on campus fall far short of meeting the requirements of prospective employment positions.

2.1 Monotonous Teaching Modes: Disconnection from "Teacher-Centered" to "Student-Centered" Approaches

Traditional English major teaching has long relied on a "teacher lecture + student note-taking" model, with severely

inadequate classroom interaction.

This model results in passive knowledge acquisition by students, hindering the cultivation of critical thinking and autonomous learning abilities.

2.2 Imbalanced Curriculum Structure: "Binary Division" Between Language Skills and Humanities

The current English major curriculum still predominantly focuses on language skill training, with humanities and science courses accounting for less than 30%.

This structure results in students having a narrow knowledge base, making it difficult for them to adapt to composite job requirements.

Reform Direction: It is essential to break down the "language-centric" curriculum barriers and construct a modular curriculum system of "language + professional expertise."

Versatile English talents outperform specialized English talents in competitiveness because English major students possess a narrow knowledge base.

Hence, cultivating versatile English talents has become a top priority for English majors in universities to respond to employment challenges in the new era.

2.3 Weak Faculty Strength: Limited Professional Backgrounds and Lack of Industry Experience

The shortage of versatile faculty members is a key factor constraining talent cultivation.

A survey conducted by a certain university revealed that only 15% of English teachers possess interdisciplinary backgrounds (such as law, economics, computer science), 32% of teachers admit to having noticeable regional accents in their spoken English, and 45% of teachers have not participated in corporate practice or overseas training.

Reform Focus: It is crucial to strengthen faculty development through a combination of "attracting and nurturing" talents.

On one hand, attract versatile talents with industry backgrounds (such as corporate translators, international legal experts); on the other hand, encourage existing teachers to participate in corporate practice and overseas training to enhance their "dual competency." In the "English + Nonferrous Metals" talent cultivation program at a certain college, the initial lack of metallurgical industry knowledge among teachers resulted in superficial teaching of professional terminology.

Subsequently, the integration of language and professional expertise was achieved by involving corporate engineers in curriculum design, highlighting the urgency of faculty reform.

2.4 Lagging Evaluation System: Conflict Between Examination-Oriented and Competency-Based Approaches

The existing evaluation mechanism still predominantly relies on final exams and CET-4/6 scores, neglecting process-based evaluation and practical ability assessment.

Data from a certain university showed that final exams account for 60% of the total grade, while ongoing assessment (assignments, attendance) account for 40%.

Only 8% of courses incorporate practical projects (such as translation reports, simulated conferences) into their assessment.

This system leads students to "study for exams" rather than for ability enhancement.

For instance, some students pass the TEM-8 exam but struggle to handle professional texts (such as legal contracts, medical reports) in actual translation work.

Reform Path: It is essential to establish a "competency-based" multi-dimensional evaluation system that incorporates practical achievements, innovative projects, and cross-cultural performance into assessments.

2.5 Structural Changes in the Employment Market: From "General English" to "Professional English"

With the development of artificial intelligence translation technology, the demand for general English positions (such as basic translation, secretarial work) has sharply declined, while the shortage of English talents in professional fields (such as legal English, scientific English) has widened.

Reform Implications: Universities need to proactively align with industry demands and dynamically adjust their major directions.

2.6 Upgrading Internationalization Demands: From "Language Tool" to "Cultural Mediator"

Against the backdrop of the "Global Civilization Initiative," enterprises require English talents to possess cross-cultural communication and international dissemination abilities.

For instance, a certain multinational corporation explicitly requires applicants to "tell China's stories effectively in English" during recruitment, but traditional curricula lack relevant training, rendering students incapable of fulfilling such

roles.

Reform Direction: It is necessary to integrate cross-cultural communication and international discourse construction into the curriculum.

The growing reliance on interdisciplinary approaches to solve various problems has led to the emergence of new cross-disciplinary research fields.

3 Connotation and Basic Characteristics of Versatile Talents

"Composite," in its literal sense, refers to the synthesis of two or more entities.

Versatile talents possess basic knowledge and abilities in two (or more, but generally two) majors (or disciplines).

This encompasses the integration of social sciences and natural sciences, as well as multiple specializations, and the synthesis of intellectual and non-intellectual factors.

The knowledge characteristics of versatile talents include:

3.1 Broad and Solid Foundations

Versatile talents should possess a basic understanding of the foundational theories and skills of two (or more) majors (or disciplines), thereby having a wide knowledge base and solid foundations.

3.2 Knowledge Integration

Versatile talents possess multi-disciplinary knowledge that is not loosely connected but intercrosses and integrates, forming new knowledge and becoming a catalyst for new thinking methods and comprehensive abilities.

4 Cultivation Paths for Versatile Talents

The cultivation of versatile talents requires the following paths: undivided liberal arts and science education in basic education, rationalization of major settings in higher education, and strong financial support.

4.1 Undivided Liberal Arts and Science Education in Basic Education

The prominent requirement for versatile talents is the integration of natural sciences and social sciences.

From this perspective, it is essential to first break down the high school liberal arts and science division system that is geared towards the college entrance exam.

4.2 Rationalization of Major Settings in Higher Education

Currently, China's major settings are unreasonable, as students cannot switch majors once selected, and majors are set with specific occupational roles in mind.

Given the changes in the economic landscape, some majors have become outdated.

A viable path is to divide the four-year university education into three distinct stages for students: the first and second years focusing on broad-based professional foundational knowledge education; the third year emphasizing applied knowledge with internships in enterprises; and the fourth year requiring students to integrate theory with practice and complete specific projects.

The close collaboration between schools and enterprises rationalizes major settings, truly achieving an integration of industry, academia, and research.

4.3 Reconstructing English Major Education with a Holistic Education Philosophy

4.3.1 Curriculum System Reform: Constructing a "Language + Professional Expertise + Literacy" Three-Dimensional Framework

Modular Curriculum Design

Based on the principle of "solid foundations and broad scopes," the curriculum is divided into three modules: language skills, professional expertise, and interdisciplinary studies. For example:

Core Modules: English Language Foundations, Advanced English, Cross-Cultural Communication

Professional Modules: Secondary School English Teaching Methodology, Educational Psychology (for teacher education direction); Cross-Border E-Commerce Practices, International Logistics (for business direction)

Expansion Modules: Artificial Intelligence and Language Services, Regional and Country Studies

4.3.2 Practice-Oriented Curriculum Integration

Combining professional terminology learning with industry practices.

For instance, in the "English + Nonferrous Metals" talent cultivation program, teachers help students understand the contextual meanings of professional vocabulary through methods such as equipment picture labeling and production

flowchart analysis, achieving a deep integration of "language serving professional expertise."

5 Cultivation Initiatives for Versatile English Major Talents

5.1 Reforming the Current Management System and Strengthen the Innovative Awareness of Foreign Language Talent Policies

Pay attention to absorbing and drawing on modern management philosophies and methods; improve the integration of foreign language talent policies, covering all aspects of foreign language talent development, including cultivation, introduction, and utilization, to gradually standardize foreign language talent management in a scientific, institutionalized, and regulated manner.

Reform and deepen the cadre and personnel system, establishing new systems to promote the emergence and healthy growth of various foreign language talents.

5.2 Aligning with Market Demands and Set Major Directions

Through market research, develop a "language + professional expertise" cultivation model based on an understanding of market demands.

For instance, set directions such as Business English, Tourism English, and Engineering English within the English major.

Adhere to the principles of balancing professionalism with fundamentals, knowledge with abilities, and technology with qualities in the cultivation approach, enabling graduates to quickly adapt to job requirements in their respective fields.

5.3 Adjusting Curriculum Structure

Revise the professional construction plan to generally reflect a focus on foundational English language knowledge and skills in the first and second years, while offering more distinctive professional courses for third and fourth-year students.

From the first to the second year, prioritize cultivating students' solid English language knowledge foundation and strong English language application abilities to highlight the language advantages of foreign language talents.

Key courses include Comprehensive English, English Listening, English Speaking, English Audiovisual, Second Foreign Language, English Translation, and Practical English Grammar, initially determining professional intentions.

In the third and fourth years, while studying professional required courses, students can choose grouped courses that satisfy a specific professional direction.

5.4 Emphasizing Second Foreign Language Education

According to relevant data, currently, only a small portion of job vacancies are specifically for English talents, with the vast majority seeking talents proficient in languages such as Japanese, Korean, Spanish, and Portuguese.

Due to the relative scarcity of talents proficient in these languages, enterprises have lower work experience thresholds for recruiting such talents compared to those recruiting English talents.

Based on market needs and considering practical circumstances, appropriately reduce English courses and expand second and third foreign language courses.

5.5 Establishing On-Campus and Off-Campus English Major Practical Training Bases

Firstly, establish practice centers with different professional focuses on campus by utilizing electronic and network technologies to configure internal local area networks.

Secondly, it is essential to sign agreements with relevant enterprises to establish English internship bases jointly operated by schools and enterprises.

5.6 Strengthening Cultural Research to Consolidate and Expand the Traditional Advantages of Foreign Language Disciplines

In the next stage of teaching reform, while consolidating and expanding the traditional advantages of language disciplines, it is crucial to highlight the central role of cultural research.

5.7 Laying a Solid Foundation in General Education to Enhance and Solidify the New Competitive Edge of Composite Foreign Language Professionals

The development of society exerts two seemingly opposing influences on higher education: on one hand, there is a growing refinement in disciplinary classifications and specialized fields; on the other hand, the cultivation of innovative talents necessitates the impartation of broad knowledge.

Implementing general education for university students represents a significant trend in the future development of higher education.

Only in this way can they delve deeper into the foreign languages they study and better appreciate the foreign cultures they encounter.

5.8 Strengthening Faculty Development

To cultivate talents with composite knowledge, professional teachers should possess both English language proficiency and specialized knowledge.

Given the current status of the faculty, the goal of faculty development should be to continuously optimize the faculty structure, strive to improve teachers' academic and teaching levels, and strengthen their research, teaching innovation, and practical abilities, ultimately forming a dynamic faculty with new educational philosophies, strong reform awareness, and youthful vigor.

6 Constructing a Framework for Cultivating Composite English Major Talents through Effective Approaches and Methods

(1) Solid Foundation: Basic knowledge is relatively stable and essential for everyone.

Only when foundational courses or basic theories of courses are internalized into students' individual qualities can they adapt to the challenges of knowledge renewal and obsolescence in the information-rich society.

(2) Broad Knowledge Base: A significant characteristic of modern scientific and technological development is the rapid increase in modern information and the swift renewal of knowledge and technology.

Therefore, higher education institutions should keep pace with the technological revolution, update their technologies, and emphasize curriculum coordination and the completeness of knowledge and hierarchical structures to cultivate students with a wide range of knowledge who can adapt to work or research in different professional and interdisciplinary fields after receiving training in two or more majors.

(3) Comprehensive Qualities: Students should possess qualities that integrate their careers with human civilization and social progress, along with a sense of social responsibility.

7 Conclusion

English is an applied discipline whose function is communication, determining its applied and practical nature.

This nature requires English talents to possess practical foreign language application abilities.

Universities should reintegrate existing teaching modules, update and broaden disciplinary course content, introduce courses related to English practical application abilities, and increase the proportion of elective courses.

Reform is not an endpoint but a continuous optimization process. Universities need to embrace changes with an open attitude to supply society with high-quality talents possessing patriotism, international vision, and interdisciplinary capabilities.

To achieve this talent goal, a reasonable and effective curriculum system is a crucial guarantee.

The development of the times and societal changes will continue to pose new requirements for English education.

Only by continuously adapting, adjusting, and improving in educational practices can we cultivate high-quality composite English professionals.

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