

# ***A Study on the Employment Dilemmas and Paths of China's English Majors in the Context of Education Internationalization***

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**Abstract:** Employment is not only related to economic and social development, but also related to social stability and harmony, and involves many issues such as education reform. In the 21st century, the trend of education internationalization has presented fresh chances and difficulties for the job market of English department. Unemployment upon graduation is a common nightmare for English majors in China. Therefore, it is urgent to analyze the employment situation of English majors and put forward feasible strategies. This study aims to investigate the dilemmas and paths of Chinese English majors within the framework of education internationalization. This study discusses the dilemma of Chinese English majors in the job market, analyzes influencing factors, discusses several contradictions between the separation of profession and discipline, the weakening of English in basic education and the large demand, the academic English teaching and humanistic quality education, as well as graduates' immature career outlook and the real needs of society, and points out the countermeasures and suggestions to redefine compound talents, reduce the scale of schools, develop special training programs, balance the "humanism" and "instrumentality" of English Majors and enhance the students' professional ability and guide the correct career view.

**Keywords:** Education Internationalization, Employment, English Majors

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Education Internationalization Background**

The internationalization of higher education refers to the pursuit of integration with the international higher education system, the internationalization of personnel training mode, the internationalization of education quality, the internationalization of diplomas, and the internationalization of education services based on retaining reasonable domestic educational characteristics [1]. And as defined in the Dictionary of Education, education internationalization is seen as a significant post-World War II trend wherein countries engage in exchange, discussion, and collaboration to address common educational challenges. This trend underscores the importance of viewing the functions and objectives of education from a cross-border, cross-cultural, and global perspective. It also emphasizes the need for various elements of education to interact and integrate with one another to promote global educational development [2]. As an example, consider the quantity of international students, which

is a crucial measure of the level of internationalization in higher education, since the 21st century, countries worldwide have increasingly prioritized the internationalization of education. Despite economic downturn and the impact of COVID-19, there has been a consistent growth in the number of international students. According to UNESCO, global enrollment in higher education for international students rose from 2.11 million in 2000 to 6.39 million in 2021, marking a threefold increase over this period. From 2018 to 2020, global enrollment for international students grew at a faster rate than overall higher education enrollment globally. Currently, China is entering a new phase characterized by deep engagement with globalization and studying abroad remains an essential pathway for China's cultivation of high-level international talent. UNESCO data indicates that in 2021, a record-breaking total of 1.021 million Chinese students will pursue studies at overseas institutions of higher education.

## **1.2. Research Significance**

English is one of the most important and widely spoken languages in the world, and almost every university language department offers an English major. According to the National Standards for the Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Majors in Colleges and Universities announced by the Ministry of Education, English majors must be developed by the English department with high standards of overall quality, strong foundational language proficiency, a thorough understanding of English language and literature, the requisite professional knowledge, and the ability to adjust to the demands of social and economic development at the national level. With the background of education internationalization and the implementation of China's "Belt and Road Initiative" and other national strategies, new requirements have been put forward for the education of English majors, and the talents of English majors can promote the development of education internationalization. In such a mutually reinforcing relationship, the employment of English majors is of great importance. Studying the employment problems and paths of English majors is helpful to cultivate professionals who can adapt to the international working environment and deal with cross-cultural communication affairs; It is helpful to provide the direction for education reform, promote the teaching content to be in line with international standards, improve the teaching quality and international competitiveness of English students, and guide students to choose the appropriate professional direction according to their own interests and market demand, and cultivate composite talents with international vision and professional ability.

## **2. Employment Status and Influencing Factors of English Majors**

### **2.1. Employment Situation**

The current employment situation for English majors has become increasingly challenging, with their strategic position and popularity in the job market declining. According to statistics on the top ten majors having the greatest rate of turnover in the first half-year following graduation in 2018, undergraduate business English majors had a turnover rate as high as 37%. Additionally, according to Mycos'6 2019 Employment Report of Chinese College Students, English education majors were among the red card majors in vocational college employment in 2019, indicating high unemployment rates and low overall employment satisfaction and salary. The imbalance between job opportunities and unemployed individuals has led to an unprecedented downturn in employment for English major graduates, resulting in historically low employment rates [3].

## **2.2. Influencing Factors**

### **2.2.1. Personal factors**

First, the original intention of major selection is not pure. There are many students who are transferred and choose English majors against their will to enter the university because the low grade threshold. The reason why some English major graduates pursue a master's degree in English language and literature against their will is that many have no choice but to be transferred, because this is their only chance to obtain a master's degree. There are very few students who want to study for the English major itself, and the number of people who want to transfer out of the English major is increasing every year [4]. Second, lack of professional quality. Many English majors spend a lot of time on learning a single basic English skill, and can only master basic instrumental language ability, which is difficult to meet the requirements of composite talents under the background of education internationalization. Third, immature employment concept. Graduates lack scientific life planning, unrealistic analysis of their own employment situation. Students' employment concepts tend to be conservative, and graduates tend to be admitted to relatively stable civil servants, public institutions and state-owned enterprises when they are employed. The number of college graduates who choose to enter private enterprises is decreasing year by year, and the phenomenon of "slow employment" and "living on parents " is everywhere. Their own advantages are very limited in the employment competition, leading to their difficulty in finding their ideal jobs [5].

### **2.2.2. School-related factors**

First, colleges blindly expand the scale of enrollment of English majors, resulting in an oversupply of English majors and great pressure on the employment environment. According to incomplete statistics, China's general undergraduate colleges and universities, in addition to foreign language universities, normal universities and comprehensive universities, many medical, agriculture, mechanical and electrical, Marine, posts and telecommunications, petroleum, geology and mining and other specialty colleges and universities have English majors. At present, the total number of students on campus is about 600,000, and up to 200,000 English majors graduate each year [4]. Second, the teaching setting of college English majors is out of line with the market demand, Linguistics, pragmatics, and American and American literature are over-valued by colleges and universities, while translation, business English, scientific and technological English and other fields with high market demand are inadequately cultivated. Neither the quantity nor the quality of compound talents training can meet the market demand. Third, the quality of teachers is poor, and the teaching quality is outdated. Since so many English majors are offered, especially in universities of science and technology, it is difficult to guarantee the quality and teaching effect of English department teachers.

### **2.2.3. Social and policy factors**

First, China issued a document resulting in one of the most popular employment positions for English majors in China--off-campus English training teacher positions. The exam-oriented education system prevalent in China is widely recognized in the international education market. During this test-focused stage, English is often taught in isolation from other subjects, leading Chinese students to improve their English scores only by mechanically rote memorization and practice questions, making it challenging to foster a genuine interest in future English studies. Second, the innovative development and widespread promotion of intelligent translation software has led to a sharp decline in the demand for English translation talents [4]. Third, In the "Internet+" era, the requirements of the society for talents are more stringent, and enterprises need technical composite talents who possess

expertise in relevant fields and foreign languages, and can facilitate the enterprise's success in cross-cultural communication, while the foreign language proficiency of China's English majors is insufficient for the core operations of enterprises [6].

### **3. Problem and Contradiction Analysis**

#### **3.1. The Contradiction Between the Separation of Profession and Discipline**

The English department consists of the discipline and the administration. The connotation of English major includes subject content and language skills. When the English department in China was renamed to accommodate languages other than literature and translation, the separation of language learning and content learning intensified. The students are honing the same fundamental language skills as they did in high school, while the curriculum and teaching materials of the English department are not aligned with the practical needs. The discipline content is only based on English and American literature readings, introduction to English Linguistics and so on which have no subject substance, leading the students unable to meet the more specific needs of the job market, which is exactly the essential factor for the existence of the discipline [4].

#### **3.2. The Contradiction Between the Weakening of English in Basic Education and the Large Demand for Foreign Language Talents in the International Environment**

The promulgate of the double reduction policy aims to strictly control off-campus training, improve the disorderly development of off-campus training institutions, and the adverse phenomenon of "reducing the burden on campus and increasing the burden on campus" [7]. The dual reduction policy has imposed strict bans on the English teaching and training market, which has led to the most favored employees of educational institutions - English majors- lost the most common and secure path to employment. On the other side, the status of English in basic education has gradually declined. Since 2009, representatives of the "two sessions" have constantly put forward proposals to lower the scores of foreign languages in the college entrance examination, or even withdraw from the college entrance examination, and even a private college entrance examination plan has appeared, suggesting that the weight of English scores should be reduced to restore the core value of Chinese education, and many experts also believe that the plan is "very feasible" [8]. With the continuous improvement of China's international status, the in-depth development of international trade, and the scientific deployment of the "Belt and Road" Initiative, there is an increasing demand for high-quality English professionals in social positions, which lead to English major students' concerns about professional prospects and personal career planning [9].

#### **3.3. The Contradiction Between Academic English Teaching and Humanistic Quality Education**

English majors need to cultivate English professionals with good comprehensive quality, solid basic English language skills, solid knowledge of English language and literature and necessary relevant professional knowledge and can meet the needs of the country's economic construction and social development. Under the background of the new era, the concept of foreign language education in China takes the development of students' quality as the goal, the development of ability as the core, and the fundamental task of moral cultivation and all-round development as the educational policy [10]. As a result, the teaching of English majors in colleges and universities mainly focuses on language general education, ignoring the highly employment-oriented education of specialized English based on professional disciplines. There are many small talents trained by colleges and

universities to master the basic skills of English, and few compound talents are competent for professional work in the context of internationalization.

### **3.4. The Contradiction Between Graduates' Immature Career Outlook and the Real Needs of Society**

At present, some college students lack scientific career planning and clear career development goals. They do not understand the future employment space of their major or the actual needs of social positions, but blindly follow the guidance of teachers to learn [9]. Under the new situation, more and more students' employment concept tends to be conservative, and their employment intention tends to be more stable than before [5]. Students have excessive employment expectations, one-sided emphasis on job stability and salary level when choosing a career; Some students have a wait-and-see mentality, hesitate and finally miss the opportunity [11]. Aim high and aim low, Self-deprecation, lack of employment foresight, these negative characteristics are contrary to the market demand and treatment for composite English talents in the context of internationalization.

## **4. Countermeasures and Suggestions**

### **4.1. Redefining "Compound Talents" by Market demand**

As early as 1998, the Ministry of Education issued a document state that China should soberly face the reality that every year only a small number of professionals combining foreign language and literature, foreign language and linguistics are needed for the teaching and research of foreign literature and linguistics, while many compound talents combining foreign language and other related disciplines are needed. It is the requirement of the socialist market economy for foreign language professional education and the demand of the new era to train this kind of composite foreign language professional talents. China needs English talents who are engaged in the teaching and research of foreign literature and linguistics, and even compound talents in the fields of diplomacy, economy and trade, business, law and journalism are very limited [12]. Therefore, for example, the English department of education, science and technology, medicine and agriculture in colleges and universities should combine the characteristic science and technology majors to create a composite talent training program that can do research in English in teaching, engineering, medicine, agriculture and other scientific and technological fields.

### **4.2. Reduce the Scale of Schools and Develop Special Training Programs**

The root cause of the phenomenon of "small talents are abundant and big talents are few" among English major graduates is the excess number of English departments in colleges and universities. Therefore, it is extremely necessary to reduce the enrollment scale of English majors reasonably and implement the training mode of "fewer recruitment and better education" [3]. Universities and their schools of foreign languages should further improve the new compound English talent training system according to their history, conditions and teaching staff, and in accordance with the principal of adapting to school conditions and highlighting characteristics [13]. Through the overall coordination of the correlation between different types of courses and different learning stages, on the one hand, the systematic construction of students' professional knowledge is enhanced, and on the other hand, their humanistic literacy is enhanced in the process of foreign language education [10].

### **4.3. Balance the "Humanism" and "Instrumentality" of English Majors**

To find a balance of the training goal between "humanism" and "instrumentality" of English majors is the root of improving the employment dilemma of them. Some scholars believe that Chinese

English majors should return to the humanistic discipline standard, focus on the cultivation of humanities and general English talents, and consider the cultivation of compound talents when conditions are available [14]. Cultivating "humanism" is the initial intention of every English major, but market demand is the core indicator of employment. In this era of education globalization, "conditions" do available. Foreign language education pursues the integration of instrumental value and humanistic value. Only by integrating "instrumentality" and "humanism" is the education project based on the present and facing the future [15]. Major characteristic colleges and universities can combine their industry advantages to cultivate English majors with humanities and general knowledge, and at the same time, integrate industry advantage discipline knowledge to cultivate a group of high-end composite talents in the new era to meet the requirements of international exchanges in the industry, balance the "humanism" and "instrumentality". Adapt to the needs, reflect the characteristics, but also in line with reality, according to local conditions, highlight the characteristics, pay attention to quality [16].

#### 4.4. Enhance the Students' Professional Ability and Guide the Correct Career View

As far as English majors are concerned in the current employment dilemma, improving professional quality is essential. It is difficult for English majors to meet the requirements of their posts if they only master an instrumental language without practical ability. The school should optimize the curriculum and help students develop a detailed career planner [17]. Colleges and universities should take quality as the core and insist on the construction and development of professional connotation, demand-oriented, explore the multi-talent training model, innovation-driven, improve students' ability and quality. Take practice as the starting point to strengthen students' application ability. Take development as the leader, improve professional teachers' ability and accomplishment. Standardize and improve the level of running schools by means of evaluation [18]. Schools should also incorporate career planning courses into compulsory courses, hold career planning competitions, carry out employment lectures, and cultivate the correct awareness of choosing a career.

## 5. Conclusion

The employment of college graduates is related to people's well-being, economic development and the future of the country. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected and globalized, the role of education takes on greater importance. The internationalization of education has opened a wealth of new opportunities for students, equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and cultural understanding necessary to navigate a complex and ever-changing global landscape, yet also put forward new requirements for the development of English education in China. Addressing students' blind and immature employment view and weak career planning guidance, as well as the strategic position and popularity of English majors in the job market declining in contemporary China, English departments in Chinese universities should integrate special purpose English education into humanities and general education, establish an employment guidance system for English majors, reasonably guide graduates to establish mature employment concepts, and improve the employment rate of Chinese English majors.

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