

Research on English Education Reform Oriented by Workplace Needs

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of economic globalization, there is a growing demand for talents with strong comprehensive English application skills. However, traditional English education in China often emphasizes theoretical knowledge over practical workplace communication, leading to a significant gap between graduate competencies and employer expectations. This study explores pathways for employment-oriented reform in English education. Through questionnaires and interviews analyzing industry needs, it identifies core requirements including effective communication, cross-cultural skills, professional English application, and professional ethics. The research examines current issues in curriculum design, teaching methods, textbooks, and evaluation systems. It proposes shifting the focus from language knowledge to vocational ability by implementing a modular curriculum combining general and industry-specific English, adopting student-centered teaching approaches such as task-based and scenario-simulated methods, developing integrated teaching materials aligned with real-world contexts, and establishing a multidimensional evaluation system. The findings aim to enhance the practical English proficiency and professional competitiveness of graduates, thereby better supporting national economic and social development strategies.

Keywords: Enterprise Demand; Application Ability; Evaluation System Reform; Artificial Intelligence; Education Policy

1. Introduction

In the context of globalization, English has become an indispensable tool in the workplace. Whether it is the global cooperation of multinational enterprises, the international expansion of domestic enterprises, or the foreign

affairs activities of government agencies, English plays an important role. However, in recent years, many enterprises and institutions have reported that there is a gap between the English proficiency of college graduates and the actual needs of the workplace. This gap not only affects the operational efficiency of enterprises, but also restricts the career development of graduates. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to reform university English education based on workplace needs.

2. Analysis of the Workplace Needs of English Talents

2.1 Classification by Salary Level

According to the "List of Corporate English Use Frequency and Purpose Data", there are significant differences in the frequency and purpose of English use between positions with different salary levels. Positions with a monthly salary of $\leq 5,000$ yuan, the frequency of English use is 45.9%, mainly for basic email processing and simple document translation; The frequency of positions with a monthly salary of 5,000-8,000 yuan has increased to 65.2%, mainly involving customer communication, meeting minutes and cross-border collaboration support; For high-paying positions with a monthly salary of \geq yuan, the frequency of English use is as high as 77.5%, focusing on core businesses such as business negotiations, international project management and strategic decision-making. This indicates that the higher the salary level, the higher the English proficiency requirements, and the more inclined it is to apply advanced business English.

2.2 Classification According to the Nature of the Enterprise

Multinational enterprises rely on English the most, with a frequency of 78.9%, mainly for global team collaboration, headquarters reporting, and cross-border contract signing. The frequency of English use by state-owned

enterprises is 47.3%, mainly focusing on the review of overseas investment documents and the communication of "Belt and Road" projects. The frequency of English use in private enterprises was 42.6%, mainly for foreign trade order processing, cross-border e-commerce operations and technical document reading. While English is used relatively infrequently (40.6%) in government agencies, it is also indispensable in diplomatic reception, policy document translation, and international conference preparation. This shows that different types of enterprises have different concerns about the needs of English. Multinational enterprises pay more attention to cross-cultural communication and international business English, state-owned enterprises and private enterprises pay more attention to industry-related English applications, and government agencies focus on English proficiency at the foreign and policy levels.

2.3 Classification by Region

The frequency of English use in first-tier cities (Beijing/Shanghai/Guangzhou/Shenzhen) is 65.5%, mainly involving high-frequency international conferences, cross-border mergers and acquisitions, and high-end talent recruitment. The frequency of English use in non-first-tier cities was 48.3%, mainly for supply chain coordination, equipment import and basic foreign trade business. First-tier cities are more internationalized and have more complex business operations, so the frequency and requirements of English use are also higher, while non-first-tier cities are more focused on basic foreign trade and supply chain management business.

2.4 Classification by Industry

The frequency and purpose of using English also varies greatly across industries. The information technology (IT) industry uses English most frequently at 89% and is on the rise, mainly for code commenting, technical documentation and global open source community collaboration[1]. The frequency of English use in the financial industry is 85%, which is also on the rise, mainly involving international financial report analysis, cross-border investment and financing agreements, and compliance review. English is used 78% in the education/research industry, mainly for academic paper publications,

international fund applications, and joint laboratory management. The frequency of English used in manufacturing is relatively low, at 63%, mainly for equipment manual interpretation, international standard certification and overseas factory coordination. This indicates that the IT, finance, and education/research industries have a more urgent need for English and are more inclined to the application of professional English, while the manufacturing industry focuses more on technical English and content related to international standards.

2.5 Distribution of Purposes of Use

In the study on the distribution of the purpose of using English in the workplace, a sample survey of employees of Fortune 500 companies showed that daily communication ranked first with a proportion of 52%. In the context of global collaboration, employees of multinational companies often need to communicate with colleagues and partners in different time zones across regions through emails and instant messaging. For example, Amazon's operations team coordinates inventory, distribution and other matters with warehouses and logistics departments in Europe, Asia, and the Americas via email every day. Microsoft's technical team uses instant messaging tools such as Skype to conduct real-time, cross-time meetings with developers around the world to solve technical problems and move projects forward.

At the same time, the proportion of professional document writing and reading has reached 34%, and its application scenarios are widely involved in contract formulation, business report writing, technical specification interpretation and other fields. Taking Huawei as an example, when participating in the bidding of international communication projects, team members need to write rigorous bidding documents in English. When signing cooperation agreements with overseas suppliers, it is necessary to review the contract terms repeatedly to ensure accurate expression. All of this fully shows that in the workplace environment, English is not only a tool for daily communication, but also a core medium for handling professional business, which puts forward high requirements for practitioners' comprehensive application of English. It is necessary to fully master grammatical, accuracy, vocabulary professionalism, business communication

etiquette, standard expression of technical documents, etc.

3. Problems in Current University English Education

3.1 Disconnect between Teaching Objectives and Workplace Needs

Traditional university English teaching has long focused on the cultivation of language knowledge and skills, guided by the English syllabus of Level 4 and 6, emphasizing the explanation of grammar rules, vocabulary accumulation, and basic training in listening, speaking, reading and writing. A survey by the Ministry of Education shows that more than 65% of college English courses are still test-oriented. However, there is a clear deviation between the emphasis on practicality and professionalism in workplace English applications. [2] A recruitment survey conducted by a well-known human resources agency on 1,000 companies found that 78% of employers said that although most of the newly recruited college graduates have passed the English level 4 and 6 exams, it is difficult to effectively use English for communication and business processing in actual work scenarios, such as participating in international business negotiations and writing English business plans. [3] For example, when a graduate was interviewing for a marketing position at a multinational FMCG company, he was unable to clearly express his views due to his lack of English communication skills in the English case analysis and impromptu speech session, and finally missed a good opportunity.

3.2 The Teaching Content Lacks Practicality

At present, the content of college English textbooks is mostly based on literary works and cultural introductions, and is not closely integrated with the actual application content in the workplace. A large number of textbooks still focus on the appreciation of classic literary works and the introduction of foreign cultures, involving less practical content such as business English and technical English. Statistics from the China Foreign Language Textbook Research Center show that less than 15% of the mainstream college English textbooks on the market are related to high-frequency workplace application scenarios such as business negotiation, contract writing, and technical

document translation. Taking the "College English Comprehensive Course" used in our school as an example, 80% of the textbooks are literary articles, and only 2 involve business scenarios, and the content is mostly simple business greetings and daily conversations, which is far from the complex business communication scenarios in actual work. This kind of content setting makes students feel helpless and at a loss when facing real business email communication, English product manual writing and other work tasks after graduation. In the new era, enterprises have put forward higher requirements for talents' language practice ability. At present, the content of college English textbooks is relatively close to social sciences. Although this kind of content can help students expand their English vocabulary, accumulate culture, and learn humanistic knowledge, they lack the cultivation of students' English practical skills, which is obviously inconsistent with the employment needs of enterprises. In addition, under the influence of traditional language education concepts, teachers usually focus on teaching theoretical knowledge from textbooks, rarely expand and extend language knowledge, and rarely provide students with opportunities for language practice, resulting in the phenomenon of "dumb English" among students.[4]

3.3 Single Teaching Method

In traditional college English classrooms, the "teacher-centered" cramming teaching model still dominates. In the classroom, teachers mostly teach by unilaterally explaining texts, translating sentence by sentence, and arranging after-class exercises. Students passively accept knowledge and lack opportunities for active participation and practice. A survey by the Chinese Academy of Educational Sciences shows that in about 70% of college English classes, students spend less than 10 minutes actively speaking on average. This teaching method seriously restricts the cultivation of students' practical application ability and innovative thinking. [5] Compare English teaching at internationally renowned universities, such as the case teaching method and group discussion method used by Harvard University, encourage students to discuss and debate in English around real business cases and hot social issues, and improve students' language application skills and critical thinking in

practice [6]. In contrast, our country's single teaching method makes it difficult for students to adapt to the diversified workplace and actual needs of English talents, and cannot effectively cultivate compound talents with cross-cultural communication skills and business English application skills.

3.4 Insufficient Construction of Teaching Staff

At present, some college English teachers lack practical experience in the workplace, which seriously restricts the quality and effectiveness of workplace English teaching. According to a survey of 200 colleges and universities across the country released by the China Foreign Language Education Research Center in 2024, about 63% of college English teachers have no overseas work experience, and more than 50% of teachers lack practical work experience in the corporate or commercial field. This makes it difficult for them to integrate important content such as communication skills, business negotiation strategies, and professional email writing standards in the real workplace into their teaching. For example, in business English courses, due to the lack of practical experience in business contract drafting and international business negotiation, teachers can only teach theoretical knowledge according to textbooks, and students cannot access real workplace English application cases, making it difficult to effectively improve their workplace English application ability.

In addition, there are relatively few opportunities for training and further study for university English teachers, which has become an important factor hindering the improvement of teaching quality. According to the survey, only about 30% of college English teachers can get the opportunity to participate in professional training or academic exchange activities every year, and the training content is mostly language theory, and less than 20% of the practical training is closely related to workplace English teaching. This situation leads to the slow update of teachers' teaching concepts and methods, making it difficult to adapt to the rapid changes in workplace needs. In the context of the rapid development of artificial intelligence technology and the continuous expansion of English application scenarios in the workplace, some teachers still use traditional grammar-translation teaching methods, which cannot guide students

to master English skills that meet the needs of the digital workplace, such as hosting cross-border online meetings and online collaborative exchanges in international business projects.

3.5 The Evaluation System is not Perfect

The existing college English evaluation system mainly focuses on test scores, emphasizing the evaluation of students' language knowledge, while the evaluation of students' practical application ability and comprehensive quality is insufficient. This evaluation system is difficult to fully reflect students' real English proficiency and workplace adaptability, and is not conducive to guiding students to develop in the direction of workplace needs.

4. Suggestions for Reforming College English Education Based on Workplace Needs

4.1 Adjust the Teaching Objectives

The goal of college English teaching should shift from the cultivation of traditional language knowledge and skills to the cultivation of application skills in the workplace. The World Economic Forum's Future of Employment Report points out that by 2027, cross-cultural communication skills and digital communication skills will become the core needs of workplace English applications. Specifically, college English teaching should focus on cultivating students' abilities in all aspects.

The first is cross-cultural communication skills. With the increasing frequency of multinational corporate collaboration, students need to master business etiquette, communication styles, and negotiation strategies in different cultural contexts. For example, when communicating with European and American companies, we should pay attention to direct and efficient communication methods; While cooperating with Japanese companies, more attention should be paid to subtle and euphemistic expressions and layers. The second is the ability to apply business English, including business contract writing, business speeches, business negotiations, etc., which are indispensable skills in the workplace. [7] Taking the recruitment requirements of a multinational company as an example, more than 90% of foreign-related positions clearly require candidates to be proficient in business English writing and oral

expression. The third is professional English ability. Different disciplines have their own professional English knowledge and terminology, such as medical English, legal English, engineering English, etc. Mastering professional English can help students better read cutting-edge international literature and participate in international academic exchanges and industry cooperation. Fourth, English thinking ability. It is crucial for students to get rid of the shackles of their mother tongue thinking and use English for independent thinking and logical expression to improve the fluency and accuracy of English communication in the workplace. Through the cultivation of these abilities, students can proficiently use English for workplace communication, business processing and problem-solving, truly meeting the workplace needs of English talents. [8]

4.2 Optimize Teaching Content

The teaching content should be closely integrated with the actual needs of the workplace, and the proportion of business English, industry English and cross-cultural communication related content should be increased. For example, in the preparation of textbooks, practical cases such as business negotiations, contract drafting, technical document translation, and international conference preparation can be added to enable students to better understand the application scenarios and requirements of workplace English in the learning process. At the same time, attention should also be paid to cultivating students' English information retrieval and processing skills to meet the needs of quickly obtaining and analyzing information in the workplace.

4.3 Innovative Teaching Methods

Diversified teaching methods are used to improve student engagement and self-directed learning ability. For example, teaching methods such as project-based learning, case teaching, role-playing, and group discussions enable students to learn and apply English in practice. In addition, modern information technologies such as online learning platforms and virtual reality can also be used to provide students with a richer and more authentic learning experience [8]. For example, through online learning platforms, students can communicate and cooperate with foreign counterparts in real time

to improve their cross-cultural communication skills; Using virtual reality technology, it can simulate international business negotiations, international conferences and other scenarios, allowing students to perform practical work in a virtual environment and enhance their practical application ability.

4.4 Strengthen the Construction of the Teaching Staff

On the one hand, it is necessary to strengthen the training of English teachers in colleges and universities to improve their ability and teaching level of English in the workplace. Teachers can be organized to participate in corporate internships, industry training, international exchanges and other activities, so that they can have an in-depth understanding of the practical application of workplace English and enrich the teaching content and methods. [9] On the other hand, English talents with workplace experience can be introduced as part-time teachers to bring more real and practical workplace English knowledge and experience to students. At the same time, teachers should also be encouraged to actively carry out teaching research and reform, and explore college English teaching models and methods suitable for the needs of the workplace. In addition, colleges and universities should vigorously employ dual teachers who are proficient in international translation to improve students' translation skills.

4.5 Improve the Evaluation System

Establish a diversified and comprehensive evaluation system, which not only focuses on the evaluation of students' language knowledge, but also strengthens the evaluation of students' practical application ability and comprehensive quality. Evaluation methods can include classroom performance, project assignments, case analysis, oral examinations, and practical work to fully reflect students' learning outcomes and ability levels. In addition, an enterprise evaluation mechanism can also be introduced to invite enterprise experts to participate in the student evaluation process, so that the evaluation results are more in line with the needs of the workplace and provide strong support for students' employment and development [10].

5. Conclusion

In the context of economic globalization, the demand for English talents in the workplace is increasing, and the requirements for English application ability are also getting higher and higher. At present, there is a certain disconnect between university English education and workplace needs, which needs to be reformed urgently. By adjusting teaching objectives, optimizing teaching content, innovating teaching methods, strengthening the construction of teaching staff, and improving the evaluation system, we can effectively improve the practicability and pertinence of English education in colleges and universities, cultivate more practical English talents that meet the needs of the workplace, and make greater contributions to the development of the country, society and enterprises.

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