

The Positioning and Challenges of English Teaching in Cultivating International Talents in China under the Context of Globalization

Lei Zhang

Department of Translation and Language Sciences, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, 08005, Spain

Abstract: Against the backdrop of deepening economic globalization and increasing international exchange and cooperation, China's demand for internationally oriented professionals with cross-cultural communication skills, professional qualities, and a global perspective is becoming increasingly urgent. As a universal language of communication, the quality of English teaching is directly linked to the effectiveness of China's international talent development. Therefore, clarifying the positioning of English teaching and analyzing the challenges it faces are of great practical significance. Through literature research, policy interpretation, and practical observation, this paper systematically examines the core competency requirements of globalization for China's international talent. It then defines three core roles for English teaching in talent cultivation: as a core language tool, a bridge for cross-cultural communication, and a link between professional competence and international standards. Furthermore, based on the current state of English teaching in China, this paper analyzes the challenges facing English teaching from five perspectives: imbalanced teaching objectives, lack of cross-cultural teaching, regional resource imbalances, insufficient digital adaptation, and disconnection from professional needs. The study finds that English teaching needs to move beyond the traditional exam-oriented approach and toward a comprehensive training model that integrates language application, cultural understanding, and professional expertise to better support the development of internationally oriented professionals. The conclusions of this paper provide theoretical references and practical guidance for optimizing English teaching systems and improving the quality of talent cultivation.

Keywords: Globalization, English teaching, International talent cultivation, Teaching orientation, Teaching challenges.

1. Introduction

In the third decade of the 21st century, although globalization has been partially impacted by anti-globalization sentiment, scientific and technological revolutions and industrial transformations continue to advance, and economic, cultural, and educational ties between countries continue to deepen. As the world's second-largest economy, China's demand for international talent is increasing both in terms of quality and quantity as it pursues the Belt and Road Initiative, international industrial capacity cooperation, and participation in global governance. This requires not only solid professional skills but also versatile talents who can overcome language barriers, understand diverse cultures, and adapt to international rules. As the universal official and business language of the world, English proficiency has become a key indicator of the core competitiveness of international talent, and English teaching has therefore been incorporated into China's strategic support system for building a strong nation through talent. At the policy level, the "China Education Modernization 2035" clearly aims to "cultivate top-notch innovative talents with global competitiveness" and requires education to "strengthen international exchanges and cooperation and enhance its level of openness to the outside world." The "Guidelines for College English Teaching (2020 Edition)" emphasizes that college English teaching should "cultivate English application skills, enhance cross-cultural communication awareness, develop independent learning skills, and enhance comprehensive cultural literacy," providing a fundamental direction for teaching. However, in practice, English teaching remains disconnected: some regions prioritize exam

preparation over practical language application; cross-cultural teaching is superficial, failing to cultivate the ability to navigate cultural differences; urban and rural areas and regions have unevenly distributed teaching resources, creating an imbalance in the foundation for talent cultivation; the use of digital teaching tools is sporadic and ineffective; and vocational English education is disconnected from industry needs, making it difficult to support applied, international talent. Against this backdrop, re-examining the positioning of English teaching and analyzing its challenges is both an inherent requirement for optimizing the teaching system and crucial for China to seize the global talent pool. This article, drawing on policy and practice, explores the definition of its positioning and challenges, offering insights for English teaching reform and the cultivation of international talent.

2. The Core Role of English Teaching in China's International Talent Cultivation in the Context of Globalization

In the international talent cultivation system, English teaching is more than just language instruction; it is also a key link connecting local talent with international needs. Its role revolves around the core competencies that globalization demands of talent and can be categorized into three dimensions. First, English teaching is a core vehicle for "language tool skills." In a globalized world, international journal publications, conference discussions, and cross-border business transactions all rely on English as a foundational tool. Nearly 80% of scientific journals

worldwide are published in English. Researchers lacking English literacy skills face difficulties in achieving cutting-edge results and promoting Chinese research internationally. In international trade, English is the universal language for business communication. The "Guidelines for College English Teaching (2020 Edition)" lists "English application skills" as a core objective. Through systematic listening, speaking, reading, and writing training, students master vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatic rules, enabling them to communicate in diverse contexts. Second, English teaching serves as a bridge for cultivating "intercultural communication skills." Globalization is not only about economic integration but also about the integration of diverse cultures. Talented individuals must possess cultural empathy and tolerance for differences [1]. English teaching fosters students' cross-cultural awareness by leveraging the cultural knowledge underlying the language. Business English teaches etiquette from different countries, such as the emphasis on timeliness in Europe and the United States, interpersonal skills in the Middle East, and direct communication in the United States and tactful expression in Japan. In daily instruction, literature, film, and television analyze the values of English-speaking countries to help students understand cultural differences. UNESCO's "The Mission of Education" states that "education should promote respect for cultural diversity." English teaching integrates language and culture, achieving a balance between communication and cultural respect. Finally, English teaching serves as a nexus between professional competence and international integration. Global talent demand is shifting from single language proficiency to a complex combination of "language + professional expertise." For example, multinational corporations require engineers with "engineering + English skills," international medical institutions require medical professionals with "medicine + English skills," and international organizations require legal counsel with "law + English skills." English teaching needs to move beyond "general English" and expand into "professional English." Computer science majors in universities offer "Computer Professional English" courses, which teach programming terminology and technical documentation reading. Medical majors offer "Medical English" courses, which train students in reading English medical records and writing reports. Vocational colleges offer "Industrial English" courses in manufacturing to help students understand overseas equipment specifications [2]. This model can enhance students' international professional perspectives and help them transform their professional knowledge into practical skills in the international workplace.

3. Challenges of Imbalanced Teaching Objectives and Disconnected Learning Stages

Although English teaching has been clearly positioned to cultivate "applied skills" and "comprehensive literacy," in practice, the imbalance in teaching objectives and the disconnected learning stages remain prominent, seriously hindering the efficiency of cultivating international talent. On the one hand, some regions and schools still maintain a "test-oriented" approach, neglecting the practical application of the language. While the proportion of listening and speaking in English language exams has gradually increased in the middle school and college entrance exams, some schools, driven by

enrollment rates, continue to focus on grammar, vocabulary memorization, and test-taking skills, neglecting listening and speaking skills. For example, rural junior high school English classes often follow a "grammar-memorization-exercise" model, leaving students with few opportunities to speak. As a result, they continue to struggle with "dumb English" and "deaf English" even after entering high school. At the higher education level, some universities still link CET-4 and CET-6 scores to graduation and degree certificates. University English teaching revolves around exams, leaving students reliant on rote memorization but struggling to communicate in English. This orientation is out of sync with the practical skills required for international talent [3]. The Ministry of Education's 2023 "Report on the Status of Language Life in China" shows that only approximately 30% of university students can speak English fluently in daily conversations, and less than 15% can participate in international academic exchanges, highlighting shortcomings in the development of practical skills. Furthermore, there is a disconnect between English instruction in primary and secondary schools and universities, resulting in wasted resources and low learning efficiency. In textbooks, there is overlap between primary and secondary school English content and university English content. For example, topics such as attributive clauses and environmental protection, already covered in high school, still appear in university textbooks, leading to a sense of repetition and diminished learning motivation. Furthermore, primary and secondary schools focus on "basic language knowledge," while universities require "applied skills and cross-cultural literacy." This lack of foundational practical skills in primary and secondary schools makes it difficult for students to transition from "knowledge memorization" to "skill application." For example, some students can memorize English texts in high school but struggle to master English speeches or essays in university. Furthermore, the quality of English instruction in primary and secondary schools varies significantly across regions. Students in remote areas struggle to keep up with the progress of their university education due to their weak foundations, further exacerbating transition issues. This wastes resources, delays students' improvement in English proficiency, and hinders the systematic development of international talent [4].

4. Challenges of Lack of Cross-Cultural Teaching and Insufficient Practice Scenarios

Cross-cultural communication skills are core competencies for international talent. However, the current lack of cross-cultural teaching and insufficient practice scenarios in English instruction in China makes it difficult for students to adapt to the multicultural environment of globalization, creating a key bottleneck restricting the quality of talent development. Firstly, cross-cultural instruction is marginalized in English instruction and not integrated into core processes. Most English classes still focus on "language knowledge transfer," with cross-cultural content often serving as supplementary knowledge points, lacking systematicity and depth. For example, when explaining a lesson, teachers may briefly mention the background of Western Thanksgiving and Christmas, but fail to delve into the underlying values and social structures. They also fail to guide students in comparing cultural differences between China and the West or train them in strategies for coping with

cultural conflict. When teaching vocabulary and grammar, they often focus on word meaning and usage, neglecting cultural connotations. For example, "dragon" symbolizes "evil" in English but "auspicious" in Chinese. Without this understanding, students can easily misunderstand each other in cross-cultural communication due to inappropriate word choice. Furthermore, cross-cultural teaching lacks an assessment system. English exams such as the junior high school entrance exam, the college entrance exam, and the CET-4 and CET-6 still primarily focus on language knowledge and skills, with little emphasis on cross-cultural competence, leading to a lack of motivation for schools and teachers to implement cross-cultural teaching. The 2022 "China Intercultural Communication Education Development Report" shows that only approximately 25% of English teachers in primary and secondary schools regularly engage in cross-cultural teaching activities, and cross-cultural content accounts for less than 10% of class hours in university English courses. This marginalization hinders the development of students' cross-cultural awareness and competence. Furthermore, the lack of authentic cross-cultural practice scenarios in English teaching leads to a disconnect between students' learning and application. Cross-cultural competence requires authentic communication and practice, but current teaching practices are often confined to the classroom, lacking direct interaction with native English speakers and authentic international communication situations. Primary and secondary school English practice often involves "classroom dialogue exercises" and "role-playing," based on simulated scenarios within textbooks and lacking the ability to replicate real-world communication. While universities host "English Corners" and "International Cultural Festivals," these are limited in attendance and are primarily for "entertainment and interaction," making them less effective as systematic training. Furthermore, geographical and resource constraints make it difficult for some primary and secondary schools to invite foreign teachers and organize international exchanges, further limiting students' exposure to authentic situations [5]. This situation leaves many students with limited cultural knowledge but limited ability to apply it in real-world communication. For example, while they know the Western business etiquette of a firm handshake, they still make mistakes when meeting with foreign clients due to nervousness or unfamiliarity, highlighting the disconnect between theory and practice in cross-cultural teaching.

5. Challenges of Regional Resource Inequality and Disconnected from Professional Needs

Globalization is creating a diversified demand for international talent, requiring both high-end academic talent and applied professional expertise. However, the current imbalance in regional resource availability and disjointed demand in English teaching in China hinders talent development, hindering the overall quality of international talent cultivation. On the one hand, the uneven distribution of English teaching resources between urban and rural areas, and across regions, has led to an imbalance in the foundation for talent cultivation. In terms of teaching staff, urban English teachers generally hold a bachelor's degree or higher, some with overseas experience. Rural teachers tend to have lower academic qualifications and lack training. The Ministry of Education's 2023 "Report on the Development of the Rural

Compulsory Education Teacher Team" shows that less than 5% of rural junior high school English teachers hold a master's degree, compared to over 20% in urban areas. As many as 30% of rural primary school English teachers hold non-major degrees, making teaching quality difficult to ensure. Regarding equipment, urban schools generally have multimedia classrooms and speech labs, some with AI-powered teaching systems. However, in rural areas, multimedia coverage is less than 60%, and speech equipment and English reading resources are scarce, leaving students with limited hardware for listening and speaking training. Urban areas have access to high-quality textbooks, online courses, and international exchange programs. Rural areas have slower textbook updates, and online resources are limited by network connectivity, making it difficult to access cutting-edge content [6]. This disparity leaves rural students with a weak English foundation, making it difficult for them to keep pace with urban students after entering higher education, exacerbating the regional talent gap. Furthermore, vocational English instruction is disconnected from industry needs, making it difficult to cultivate applied, international talent. As China's manufacturing and service industries expand globally, vocational education needs to cultivate professionals with industry-specific English proficiency. However, current vocational English instruction remains largely generic and lacks industry specificity. For example, some vocational English classes still focus on everyday conversations and basic grammar, lacking courses like "English for the Mechanical Industry" and "English for the Logistics Industry." This makes it difficult for graduates to adapt to new roles after graduation. For example, an automobile manufacturer hired vocational education graduates with solid mechanical maintenance skills, but they struggled to read English equipment manuals and communicate with foreign technicians, requiring retraining. Furthermore, many vocational English teachers lack practical industry experience, making it difficult to integrate their teaching into real-world scenarios. For example, logistics teachers, without prior experience in cross-border logistics, were unable to explain practical topics like "filling out cross-border documents in English." This disconnect between instruction and industry makes it difficult for vocational education professionals to meet the internationalization needs of businesses and hinders the globalization of Chinese industries.

6. Challenges of Inadequate Digital Transformation Adaptation and Lagging Teacher Competencies

Against the backdrop of rapid digitalization and intelligentization, the digital transformation of English teaching has become a trend. However, current challenges in English teaching in China include insufficient digital transformation adaptation and lagging teacher competence, hindering the effectiveness of digital tools and hindering the efficiency and quality of international talent development. Firstly, the digital transformation of English teaching lacks a systematic design, and resources are not well-suited to teaching needs. In recent years, schools across the country have introduced a large number of digital English resources, but their application is often fragmented and lacks deep integration with teaching objectives and content. For example, some teachers treat MOOCs as mere homework, without

integrating them into classroom instruction, resulting in poor learning outcomes. AI-powered oral assessments focus solely on pronunciation, lacking assessments of pragmatic accuracy and communication logic, making it difficult to comprehensively improve oral English. Some apps tend to be entertainment-oriented, out of touch with the needs of academic and business English training. Furthermore, resource homogeneity is prominent, with overlapping courses across different platforms and a lack of personalized resources tailored to different levels and majors. For example, digital resources for academic English writing in universities focus primarily on paper structure and lack guidance on international journal submission techniques and conference etiquette, failing to meet the demand for academically oriented international talent. On the other hand, English teachers' digital teaching capabilities lag behind, making it difficult for them to adapt to the demands of digital teaching. Digital teaching requires not only mastery of basic tools like PowerPoint and live streaming but also the ability to design digital lessons. However, most teachers' skills remain limited to "technology application" and lack "teaching design" capabilities [7]. For example, some teachers still use the traditional "livestream explanation" model for online teaching, without interactive features like bullet screens and group discussions to enhance engagement. Some teachers lack the ability to use big data analysis, making it difficult to adjust their teaching based on vocabulary mastery and listening error rates, resulting in a lack of targeted learning. Furthermore, the digital training system for teachers is incomplete. Existing training programs mostly consist of short lectures, lack a systematic "theory + practice" approach, and are disconnected from actual teaching needs, making it difficult for teachers to apply what they learn. The 2023 "China Teachers' Digital Teaching Competence Development Report" shows that only approximately 35% of English teachers are proficient in designing "digital English teaching plans," and approximately 40% are unable to use big data to analyze learning outcomes. This lag in skills severely hinders digital transformation and hinders the effectiveness of talent development through digitalization.

7. Conclusion

In the context of globalization, English language teaching serves as a "language carrier," "cultural bridge," and "professional integration link" for the cultivation of international talent in China. Its quality directly impacts China's position in the global talent competition. However, from a practical perspective, English language teaching still faces multiple challenges in promoting international talent development: imbalanced teaching objectives and a disconnected learning process weaken the development of applied skills; a lack of cross-cultural teaching and insufficient practice hinder the improvement of cultural literacy; regional resource imbalances and a disconnect between professional needs lead to an imbalance in talent supply; and insufficient adaptation to digital transformation and lagging teacher capabilities hinder the optimization of teaching efficiency. These challenges stem from both the path dependence of traditional education models and the gap between globalization's demand for diverse and high-quality talent. Overcoming these challenges requires efforts in four

key areas: First, optimizing the alignment of teaching objectives with academic stages, breaking away from the test-oriented approach and establishing a tiered system of "foundational-application-professional." This will strengthen content collaboration between primary and secondary schools and universities to avoid wasted resources. Second, we must enhance cross-cultural teaching and practical scenarios, integrating cross-cultural content into the entire teaching process and providing real-world practical opportunities through international exchanges, on-campus residencies, and simulated training. Third, we must balance regional resources, narrowing disparities between urban and rural teachers through support, digital sharing, and rural hardware upgrades to ensure equal learning opportunities for rural students. Fourth, we must promote digital transformation and enhance teacher capacity, building a personalized and professional digital resource system, and improving training to enhance teachers' ability to design digital lessons. As a fundamental component of cultivating international talent, English teaching must be guided by global needs, transcending traditional limitations and achieving a synergistic development of "language proficiency, cultural literacy, and professional competence." Only in this way can we cultivate more internationally oriented talents with a global perspective, adaptable to international rules, and capable of participating in global competition, thus providing support for China's deep integration into globalization and achieving high-quality development. In the future, we need to adapt to the needs of the times and continue to explore the "English +" integration model, so that English teaching can truly become a "booster" for the cultivation of international talents.

References

- [1] Lei Yu. Theory, research methods and practice of English teaching in the context of globalization - a review of "Research on New Developments in English Teaching" [J]. Foreign Language E-learning, 2022, (03): 99. DOI: CNKI: SUN: WYDH.0.2022-03-020.
- [2] Yu Yangyang. The transformation of English learning motivation in the context of globalization - rethinking English education and teaching [J]. International Public Relations, 2019, (03): 66-67. DOI: 10.16645/j.cnki.cn11-5281/c.2019.03.047.
- [3] Wen Qian, Zhang Hua. China goes global: challenges and responses to English as a foreign language teaching and teacher education [J]. East Asian English Teaching and Teacher Education: Global Challenges and Local Responses, 2020: 113-134.
- [4] Zhu Hua. Globalization and New Challenges of English Teaching in China [J]. English Today, 2003, 19(4): 36-41.
- [5] Xu Zhe. Globalization, Culture and English Teaching Materials: Focusing on China [J]. Multilingual Education, 2013, 3(1): 6.
- [6] Wen Qian, Zhang Hua. China Goes Global: Challenges and Responses of English as a Foreign Language Teaching and Teacher Education [J]. East Asian English Teaching and Teacher Education: Global Challenges and Local Responses, 2020: 113-134.
- [7] Liu Yan, Ge Zhongqiang, Gao Linlin. Enlightenment of MOOC on English Course Teaching in Chinese Universities from an International Perspective [J]. Enterprise Herald, 2014, (11): 177+185. DOI:10.19354/j.cnki.42-1616/f.2014.11.123.