

A Comparative Study of English Language Education in Chinese and Western Universities from the Perspective of Language Education Planning

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Abstract: The perspective of language education planning provides new insights into the study of English education in Chinese and Western universities. By systematically examining the differences between the two models in terms of their development history, teaching status, planning policies, etc., the intrinsic characteristics and development trends can be deeply analyzed. The study shows that Chinese university English education focuses on language skills training, follows standardized teaching and assessment models, and conforms to the development logic led by government guidance and planning. In contrast, Western university English education emphasizes the cultivation of humanities literacy, advocates personalized teaching and diverse evaluation methods, and conforms to the inherent requirements of market demand and autonomous development. The comparative study results suggest that Chinese university English education should be based on its own positioning, deepen teaching reform, establish a sound evaluation system, expand international cooperation space, improve policy guarantee mechanisms, comprehensively enhance the quality of English education and international competitiveness, and lay a solid foundation for cultivating internationally-oriented talents in the new era. This research has important reference value for promoting the development of Chinese-style, world-class university English education.

Keywords: language education planning, Chinese and Western universities, English education

Introduction

With the deepening of globalization, the status of English as a globally common language is increasingly prominent. As important sites for the cultivation of English talents, universities' English education quality directly relates to the enhancement of national comprehensive strength and international competitiveness. For a long time, there have been significant differences between Chinese and Western university English education in development concepts, teaching models, evaluation systems, etc., reflecting the influence of different social systems and cultural traditions on education. A systematic study of the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western university English education, drawing on each other's strengths, is of great significance for promoting the reform and development of Chinese university English education^[1]. Based on the theory of language education planning, this paper compares and analyzes the characteristics of Chinese and Western university English education in terms of development history, teaching status, planning policies, etc., explores optimization strategies for Chinese university English education, and provides references for cultivating

high-quality English talents with a global vision and cross-cultural communication abilities.

1. Theoretical foundation of language education planning

1.1 Concept and connotation of language education planning

Language education planning refers to the systematic design and arrangement of language education goals, content, methods, and evaluation at the macro level by governments, educational institutions, or other relevant organizations. It involves language policy formulation, curriculum design, textbook compilation, teacher training, etc., aiming to optimize the allocation of language education resources and improve the quality and efficiency of language education. The connotation of language education planning includes multiple dimensions such as language proficiency cultivation, language and culture dissemination, and language resource development. According to statistics from UNESCO, over 60% of countries and regions worldwide have formulated explicit language education planning policies, which have had profound effects on the local development of language education^[2].

1.2 Theoretical development of language education planning

The theoretical origin of language education planning dates back to the 1960s, and after more than half a century of development, it has formed a relatively mature theoretical system (seen as figure 1). Early language education planning theories mainly focused on the relationship between language policy and language education^[3]. With the deepening of research, scholars began to examine language education planning from interdisciplinary perspectives such as sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, and education, proposing a series of new theoretical models such as Cooper’s descriptive framework of language education planning, Kaplan and Baldauf’s language education ecology model, etc. These theories provide important guidance for the practice of language education planning. Table 1 lists several major genres of language education planning theories.

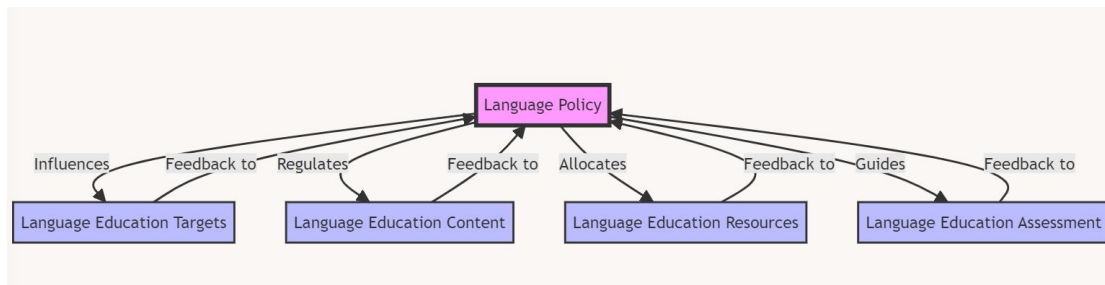


Figure 1 The Relationship between Language Policy and Language Education

Table 1 Major Genres of Language Education Planning Theories

Theoretical Genre	Representative Scholars	Core Perspectives
Language Policy Theory	Spolsky, Cooper	Emphasizes the guiding role of language policy in language education
Language Ecology Theory	Kaplan, Baldauf	Focuses on the interaction between language education and social environment
Language Management Theory	Neustupn, Jernudd	Explores strategies for identifying, evaluating, and adjusting language issues

1.3 Application of language education planning in university English education

In the field of university English education, language education planning plays an increasingly important role. On the one hand, universities can formulate English teaching plans that suit their own characteristics and talent development goals. For example, a certain engineering university closely integrates English teaching with major studies, offering distinctive courses such as Engineering English and Academic English, which have achieved good results. On the other hand, the planning of university English education needs to correspond with national and regional language policies^[4]. China's *National Standards for English Major Teaching Quality in Higher Education Institutions* explicitly states that English education in universities should cultivate compound talents with patriotism and an international perspective. Based on this, universities have carried out reforms in English education and teaching, promoting the development of English education.

2. Current situation and planning of English language education in Chinese university

2.1 Development history of Chinese university English education

The development of Chinese university English education can be traced back to the late 19th century. After more than a hundred years of evolution, it has formed a relatively complete educational system. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, university English education experienced a transition from being a “tool language” to focusing on “humanistic literacy.” In the 1980s, Chinese university English education entered a period of rapid development^[5]. The number of English majors in universities nationwide increased from 8 in 1980 to 443 in 2000, an increase of more than 50 times. In the 21st century, university English education has paid more attention to the cultivation of students' comprehensive abilities, implementing a series of measures such as the reform of college English teaching and the national standards for teaching quality of English majors. Figure 2 shows the trend of changes in the number of English majors in Chinese universities since 1949.

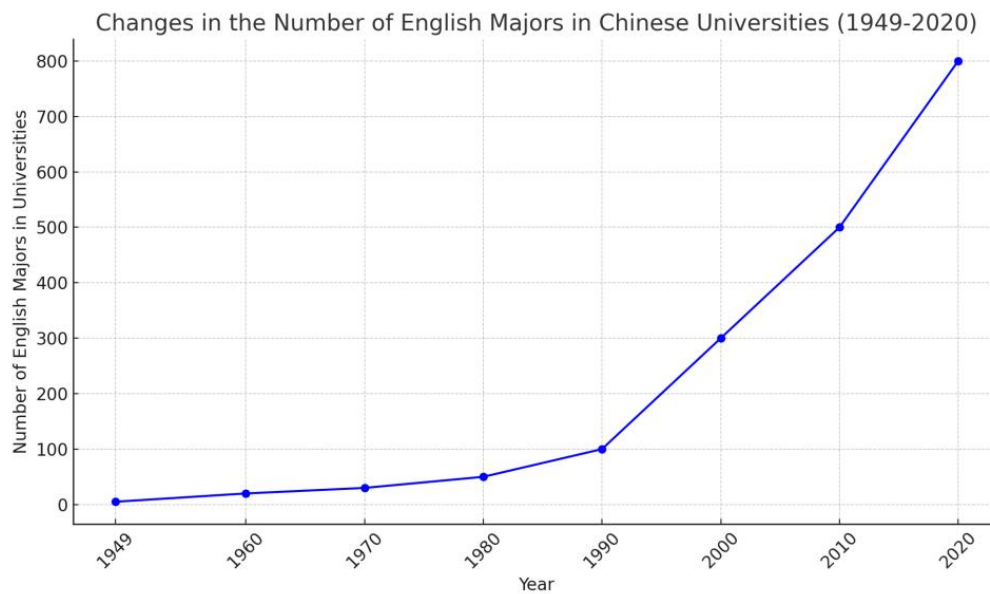


Figure 2 Changes in the Number of English Majors in Chinese Universities from 1949 to 2020

2.2 Analysis of the current situation of Chinese university English education

Currently, Chinese university English education exhibits characteristics of scale, diversity, and informatization. According to statistics from the Ministry of Education, in 2020, there were a total of 1,259 ordinary universities in the country offering English majors, with a total enrollment of 458,000 students. Meanwhile, university English education is becoming increasingly diversified. In addition to traditional English courses focusing on listening, speaking, reading, and writing, practical courses such as English speech, English debate, and cross-cultural communication have been introduced to meet students' diverse learning needs^[6]. Furthermore, the widespread application of information technology has also promoted the transformation of university English education, with new models such as blended online and offline teaching

and smart classrooms continuously emerging. Table 2 lists some innovative initiatives in university English education.

Table 2 Some Innovative Initiatives in University English Education

University Name	Innovative Initiative	Main Content
Beijing Foreign Studies University	International Talent Cultivation Plan	Implementation of all-English teaching, offering courses in country and regional studies
Shanghai Jiao Tong University	Engineering English Teaching Reform	Integrating professional knowledge with English language proficiency to enhance engineering practical abilities
Wuhan University	Cross-cultural Communication Skills Cultivation	Offering cross-cultural communication courses, organizing exchange activities between Chinese and foreign students

2.3 Interpretation of Chinese university English education planning and policies

To promote the high-quality development of university English education, the national and various levels of education departments have introduced a series of planning and policies. In 2018, the Ministry of Education issued the *National Standards for English Major Teaching Quality in Higher Education Institutions*, which clarified the training objectives, curriculum system, teacher requirements, etc., for English majors, providing basic guidelines for university English education. Universities have formulated their own development plans for English education in accordance with their actual situations. Taking Peking University as an example, its “Double First-Class” construction plan proposes to build first-class English education, enhance the international competitiveness of talents, and plans to establish multiple internationally renowned English teaching and research teams by 2030^[7]. Shanghai International Studies University’s “Striving for Excellence” development plan emphasizes innovation in English education and teaching models, promoting deep integration of information technology and English education, and building world-class English majors. The implementation of these plans and policies will undoubtedly promote new developments in Chinese university English education.

3. Current situation and planning of Western university English language education

3.1 Development history of Western university English education

Western university English education originated in medieval England, primarily serving the education needs of the noble class at that time. With the influence of British colonial expansion and the Industrial Revolution, English gradually became an international language, and the status of English education in higher education continued to rise. In the 20th century, Western countries represented by the United States entered a period of rapid development in university English education, forming an educational philosophy and model oriented towards cultivating international talents. After World War II, Western university English education paid more attention to the integration of language skills and cultural literacy, giving rise to new teaching methods such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)^[8]. Figure 3 shows the trend of changes in the proportion of international students in American universities, reflecting the development trend of internationalization in English education.

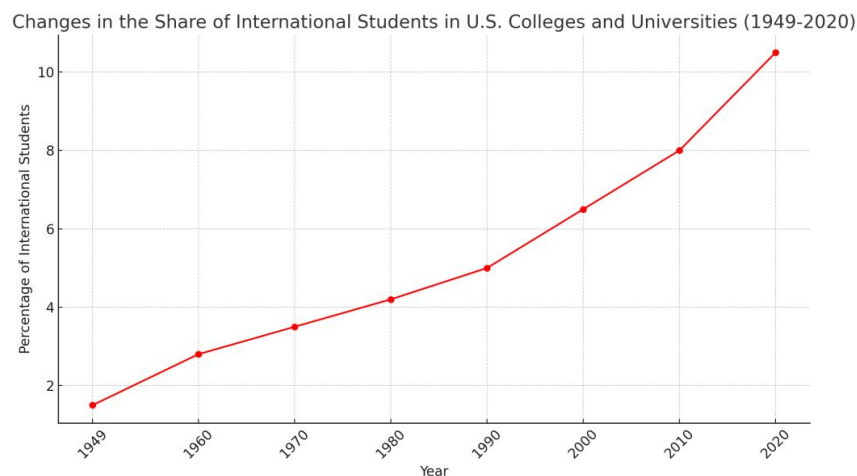


Figure 3 Changes in the Proportion of International Students in American Universities from 1949 to 2020

3.2 Analysis of the current situation of Western university English education

Currently, Western university English education demonstrates characteristics of globalization, personalization, and digitization. On the one hand, the status of English as a common academic language is further consolidated, with an increasing number of universities adopting English as the language of instruction to attract outstanding students worldwide. Taking Harvard University as an example, in 2020, its proportion of international students reached as high as 25%, representing more than 160 countries and regions. On the other hand, Western university English education emphasizes tailored instruction to meet students' personalized learning needs. The AP English exam introduced by the College Board in the United States provides high school students with opportunities to study college-level English courses. Additionally, digital tools such as online education platforms and mobile learning apps are widely used in English teaching, improving the convenience and interactivity of teaching. Table 3 lists some innovative projects in American university English education.

Table 3 Innovative Projects in American University English Education

Project Name	Implementing University	Main Content
Global Language Program	Yale University	Offering multilingual courses to cultivate students' global competence
English Bridge Program	University of California, Berkeley	Providing academic English intensive training for international students
Writing Center Project	University of Michigan	Providing writing guidance services for non-native English-speaking students

3.3 Interpretation of planning and policies in Western university English education

Western countries highly prioritize strategic planning and policy guidance in university English education. Countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia have introduced special plans to increase support for English education. For example, the “English Language Programs” led by the U.S. Department of State aims to improve the quality of global English education, funding teacher training, textbook development, and other efforts. The UK government’s “GREAT” plan aims to promote British education to attract excellent international students and enhance the international influence of English education^[9]. Australia's *International Education 2025 Strategy*, developed by the Department of Education, identifies English education as a key area, planning to double English teaching market revenue by 2025. These plans and policies reflect the importance that Western countries attach to English education as a means to enhance national soft power, exerting a profound influence on the global English education landscape.

4. Comparison of English language education between Chinese and Western universities

4.1 Comparison of objectives and positions

There are certain differences in the training objectives and functional positioning of university English education between China and the West. Chinese university English education emphasizes tool-oriented training and focuses on enhancing students' language skills and application abilities to meet the needs of national economic and social development. In contrast, Western university English education places more emphasis on humanistic aspects, emphasizing the cultivation of students' critical thinking and cross-cultural communication skills to meet the challenges of the globalization era. Data shows that in 2020, the employment rate of English majors in Chinese universities was 85.7%, higher than the national average, reflecting the instrumental value of English education. On the other hand, at Ivy League universities in the United States, the average GPA of English majors is as high as 3.7 (out of 4.0), reflecting the effectiveness of English education in cultivating humanistic literacy.

4.2 Comparison of curriculum settings and teaching methods

Chinese and Western university English education each have their own characteristics in terms of curriculum settings and teaching methods. The curriculum system of Chinese university English education is relatively complete, covering various language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation, emphasizing the learning and application of basic language knowledge. Western university English courses are more diversified, focusing on the integration of language and culture, as well as disciplinary content, emphasizing the cultivation of students' autonomy and inquiry abilities. In terms of teaching methods, Chinese university English education is gradually transitioning from being teacher-centered to student-centered, introducing new teaching models such as task-based teaching and project-based learning. Western university English education places more emphasis on student participation and practice, widely adopting interactive teaching methods such as group discussions, case analyses, and scenario simulations^[10].

4.3 Comparison of Evaluation Systems

There are both similarities and differences in the evaluation systems of university English education between China and the West. The commonality lies in the emphasis on a combination of formative and summative assessments, focusing on the process-oriented development of students' language abilities. The difference lies in that the evaluation of Chinese university English education pays more attention to standardized examinations, such as the National College English Test (CET), emphasizing the examination of language knowledge and skills. In contrast, the evaluation of Western university English education places more emphasis on diversified assessment, combining various forms such as course papers, project reports, and language proficiency portfolios to comprehensively assess students' language application abilities and humanistic literacy. Taking the United States as an example, more than 80% of universities use TOEFL or IELTS scores as admission standards for international students, reflecting the trend of diversified evaluation in English education assessment.

4.4 Comparison of planning and policies

The planning and policies for university English education in China and the West exhibit both similarities and differences. Similarities lie in both considering English education as a vital measure to enhance national comprehensive strength and international competitiveness, vigorously supporting the cultivation of English talents and discipline construction. However, differences arise in that Chinese university English education planning places more emphasis on top-level design and government leadership, highlighting the close integration of English education with national strategy. In contrast, Western university English education planning leans more towards market orientation and university autonomy, emphasizing the international development and resource integration of English education. Data shows that in 2020, the enrollment scale of English majors in Chinese universities reached 125,000, ranking at the forefront nationwide. Meanwhile, the proportion of international students in English majors at American universities is as high as 28%, far

exceeding other majors.

5. Insights and suggestions for the planning of English language education in Chinese universities

Through comparative analysis of Chinese and Western university English education, we can derive the following insights and suggestions: Firstly, it is necessary to further clarify the strategic positioning of English education, strengthen its alignment with national development strategies, and serve the needs of economic and social development. Secondly, efforts should be made to deepen English education and teaching reforms, optimize curriculum systems, innovate teaching modes and methods, and improve the quality of talent cultivation. Thirdly, it is essential to improve the evaluation system of English education, establish a diversified assessment mechanism, and promote the comprehensive development of students' language abilities and overall qualities. Fourthly, enhancing international exchanges and cooperation is crucial, drawing on advanced concepts and experiences from Western university English education to enhance the international level of English education. Lastly, it is imperative to improve the policy guarantee system for English education, increase funding input, and create a favorable ecological environment for English education.

6. Conclusion

Comparative studies of university English education between China and the West are of significant importance for advancing English education in China. By systematically analyzing the differences between the two models in terms of educational objectives, curriculum settings, teaching methods, evaluation systems, and development plans, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the laws and trends of English education. The contrast between the instrumental, standardized, government-led characteristics of Chinese university English education and the humanistic, diversified, market-oriented principles of Western university English education reflects the influence of different social systems and cultural traditions on education. In the future, Chinese university English education should be grounded in national conditions, draw on international experience, deepen teaching reforms, improve evaluation systems, strengthen international cooperation, and enhance policy guarantees to continuously improve the quality of talent cultivation and enhance cultural soft power, contributing wisdom and strength to realizing educational modernization and building a community of shared future for humanity.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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