

# On Innovative Talent Training Modes of English Normal Students

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This paper examines the necessity of innovative training methods for English normal students in China amidst the increasing global demand for English education. By evaluating the shortcomings of the traditional talent training model, which emphasizes theoretical learning over practical experience and neglects the integration of Chinese traditional culture in English language education, the study proposes innovative talent cultivation strategies. These strategies include curriculum redesign, focused teaching practice, encouragement of autonomous learning and possibilities of amalgamating Chinese traditional culture into English education training. By bridging the gap in existing literature, this exploration aims to present implications for English normal students' education that respond to current societal needs and anticipate future requirements of a globalized world.

*Keywords:* talent training modes, English normal students, integration of Chinese traditional culture

## Introduction

In an increasingly globalized world where the confines of geography are routinely dissolved by digital resonances, linguistic proficiency has ascended as an indispensable role in facilitating international communication. Among the diverse languages, English takes primacy due to its ubiquity and utilization across the globe. Amid internationalization, English has attained the status of a universal language, underpinning various disciplines such as scientific research, business discourse, and cultural interchange (Graddol, 1997). Consequently, the call for high-quality English education in contemporary society has soared exponentially. Specifically, at the fundamental education level in our nation, superior English education directly impacts the collective foreign language capability and, subsequently, the future global competitiveness of the country (Nunan, 2003).

As the improvement of education quality largely depends on the teaching ability of teachers, normal universities, which have traditionally served as teacher training institutes, bear a significant responsibility in this panorama. These establishments hold a cardinal role in not just teaching English but also in churning out

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educators capable of efficaciously conveying this universal language to ensuing generations. Their role in molding competent English educators is pivotal in meeting this escalating demand. Therefore, for the normal student group, which has always been known for cultivating high-quality teachers, how to stimulate their innovative spirit and teaching ability and thus enhance their teaching practices, has great research value.

Nevertheless, the mandate of these establishments extends beyond mere teacher training. They are concurrently obligated to perpetually reimagine their pedagogical strategies and update their curriculums, thereby aligning with the perpetually mutating global landscape. In fact, the process of training English normal students is not static, and the English normal students of the new era have to adapt to the requirements of the times and remain alert to the needs of the society.

To be frank, the current status of English normal students' education in China has numerous problems. It is worth noting that, on one hand, the traditional talent cultivation model for English normal students pays more attention to theoretical learning and knowledge accumulation, but relatively less attention to the accumulation of practical teaching experience and the cultivation of innovation ability and awareness. On the other hand, the more serious problem of this model is neglecting the effective integration of Chinese traditional culture with English learning and practicing. To a great extent, the cultivation of English normal students is overly focused on language skills and theoretical knowledge, while local and national culture integration is neglected. Hence, in the pursuit of global competence, the educational institutions risk losing cultural identity. Given China's rich history and culture, this neglect seems a considerable miss in education. Consequently, the traditional talent cultivation model undoubtedly restricts the problem-solving ability of English normal students when they encounter problems in the future teaching process, and also affects their future teaching effectiveness. What's more, as they just do not know how to effectively introduce Chinese outstanding traditional culture to foreign friends, the next generation they teach will become more voiceless in recommending Chinese culture and value even though they can speak English fluently.

Therefore, in view of the challenges and problems faced by the current English normal students' talent cultivation, this study aims to propose and discuss in detail a set of innovative talent cultivation strategies for English normal students. First, based on the literature, the paper will deeply analyze the current status and problems of talent cultivation. Subsequently, the discussion will expand to proposing innovative talent cultivation strategies such as reforming curriculum design, bolstering teaching practice, fostering autonomous learning, and exploring the potential of infusing Chinese traditional culture into English normal students' cultivation. The goal is to supplement the existing literature and offer practical implications for English normal students' education.

### **Literature Review**

In recent years, with the development of globalization and the changing societal demands for education, teacher education has gradually shifted towards an emphasis on the deep integration of theory and practice, notably innovative teaching methods, and the cultivation of critical thinking skills (Ke, Yin, & Huang, 2019). This shift is a response to rapidly emerging educational challenges and the need to prepare English teachers for complex, diverse, and continuously evolving educational environments (Pu et al., 2021).

Among numerous studies involving English normal students, many researchers have identified problems with the prevailing training model. It appears that this model overly relies on traditional classroom instruction and memorization of theoretical knowledge, often neglecting hands-on teaching experience and innovation (Zhao

et al., 2022). Consequently, although these students acquire substantial theoretical knowledge, they frequently find themselves ill-prepared for practical teaching scenarios.

Responding to this predicament, academia has initiated various innovative strategies encompassing models, such as problem-based learning (PBL) and project-based learning (PjBL). These models have demonstrated promising results in engaging students and promoting creative thinking (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). Then several studies have affirmed the importance of integrating culture into language teaching. Chen (2023) pointed out that culture can provide contextual background, making language learning more meaningful and interesting. Hu (2002) believed that incorporating culture into language teaching could aid students in better understanding different societies and people. Despite these efforts, implementing comprehensive reforms at a systemic level remains an urgent challenge. This paper will explore methods to effectively introduce such changes in the broader education system.

### **Limitation of the Traditional Talent Training Mode**

In the interwoven fabric of today's global society, English proficiency has soared to become an indispensable skill, for the prevalence of English has expanded to various sectors, ranging from education and commerce to the digital realm, effectively establishing it as a global lingua franca (Crystal, 2003). Augmented by the language's influential role in international diplomacy, the importance of English proficiency is evident in both personal and professional arenas. According to Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, language serves as a symbol of power that can significantly influence an individual's trajectory of social mobility (Bourdieu, 2018).

Shifting our gaze towards the realm of teacher training, we recognize the instrumental role of normal universities. These institutions are heralded as incubators for future educators, facilitating their growth and professional development. Nevertheless, the accelerating pace of societal evolution calls for teachers who possess not only competence but also versatility, adaptability to the shifting educational paradigms (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Consequently, traditionally deployed pedagogical methods by such universities are being critically examined in light of evolving educational demands.

Then, Zeichner's (2005) critique suggested an overhaul of teacher preparation programs, making a case for incorporating teaching strategies that foster critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills among students, thus better reflecting the complexities of society. As a matter of fact, teachers are needed to put down the traditional role of knowledge disseminators so as to become transformative agents. Only in this way can teachers foster holistic individuals capable of deftly navigating the intricacies of the 21st century. Such perspectives underscore the imperative for normal universities to constantly reevaluate and adapt their teaching methodologies.

As Bourdieu (2018) has noted, language acquisition is not an isolated process but plays an integral role in forming one's cultural capital. In addition to linguistic proficiency, other factors, such as cross-cultural communication skills need to be significantly emphasized. Hence, there is room for improvement of the current training model. In fact, there are multiple challenges faced by the traditional talent training of English normal students. A recurring issue is the lack of practical hands-on teaching experience during the training phase. Another challenge perceived is the inadequate exposure to diverse teaching methods that could cater to varied student learning styles, which highlights the need to equip English normal students not just with content knowledge but also pedagogical knowledge (Shulman, 1987). Lastly, the traditional talent training mode is greatly put away from Chinese traditional culture.

### **Innovative Talent Training Modes and Case Analysis**

There are many cases of implementing innovative training strategies. Here, the paper primarily introduces three examples to demonstrate the wide applicability and remarkable effects of innovative training strategies.

#### **Holistic Education at Shanghai International Studies University**

The English education curriculum at the Shanghai International Studies University embraces a holistic educational approach. It emphasizes nurturing students' soft skills while fostering independent thinking and emotional intelligence. Sequel to basic linguistic and literary professional knowledge, the university offers courses in cross-cultural communication, academic English writing, and English phonetics training. Such a curriculum aims to refine students' comprehensive language skills and cross-cultural communication abilities. Furthermore, extracurricular activities and academic lectures add to the diverse learning platform, fostering communication, collaboration, and teamwork skills among students. The holistic educational approach provides graduates from this university with a competitive edge in the job market.

#### **The Experiential Learning Method of Beijing Foreign Studies University**

In the course setup for the English education major at Beijing Foreign Studies University, there is an emphasis on the combination of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, with particular attention given to practical components. For example, they offer practical courses like "Teacher's Oral Expression" and "Micro-classroom Teaching", offering students the opportunity to simulate real teaching environments and apply learned teaching theories and methods in practice. Moreover, each student needs to complete an educational internship for one semester before graduation. Under the supervision of a guiding teacher, they participate in real classroom teaching, substantially enhancing their practical experience and allowing them to apply what they've learned to actual teaching. According to feedback, this mode of combining theory and practice greatly enhances the teaching skills of the students and improves their employment competitiveness.

#### **The Flipped Classroom at South China Normal University**

The School of Educational Science and Technology at South China Normal University widely uses the flipped classroom model in its English education major. Before each class, students need to read or watch related teaching materials through online platforms, and then discuss and deeply study during class. The flipped classroom model transforms traditional students who passively receive information into active learners, greatly enhancing their interest in learning and motivation. Simultaneously, class discussion also improves their critical thinking and teamwork abilities. According to feedback, students generally react positively to this teaching model. They report that it makes learning more structured and easier to understand, increasing their satisfaction with the course. In the long term, the flipped classroom model also cultivates students' self-learning and problem-solving abilities.

### **Integrating Chinese Traditional Culture With the Talent Training**

#### **Importance of Chinese Traditional Culture**

Chinese traditional culture, with its rich wisdom and unique insights into human life and the universe, has a profound influence on every aspect of Chinese society, including education. Since ancient times, it has shaped the beliefs, values, and behaviors of the Chinese people, laying a solid foundation for the development of various disciplines and professions. According to Leung (2008), Confucian ideals of humility, respect for authority, and

reverence for learning are deeply ingrained in the Chinese education system. In this regard, English teaching, particularly for normal students, is of no exception.

The integration of Chinese traditional culture into English normal students' education is of crucial importance. As Leung (2008) argued, the influence of cultural values on behavior, perceptions, and learning styles cannot be ignored because it is the local culture that defines us, shapes us, and makes us unique even if we live in an increasingly globalized world. The inclusion of Chinese traditional culture in the curriculum can help students gain a better understanding of their own history and identity. Additionally, this would enable them to bring the richness of their own culture into their English language use and comprehension.

### **Possible Strategies for Integration**

There are several potential strategies to integrate Chinese traditional culture into English teaching. Chen (2023) suggested the use of cultural materials related to Chinese history, folktales, and poetry in English lessons to create a more engaging and effective learning environment. English normal students should be encouraged to learn more about their cultural heritage and integrate this knowledge into their future teaching methods, as the success of any cultural integration strategy will ultimately depend on the educator's ability to link the relevance of the cultural content to the target language. In a word, while there are challenges associated with integrating Chinese traditional culture into English language teaching, potential strategies like incorporating cultural materials into lessons and enhancing teacher's cultural understanding can help address these obstacles.

### **Successful Cases of such Integration**

The case of integrating Chinese traditional culture in the teaching curriculum of Comprehensive English courses at Southwest University in China stands as an effective model (Sun, 2023). The innovative approach combined linguistic competencies with cultural insights, explicitly emphasizing on the teaching of Chinese traditions, philosophies, and values. Students, as a result of this integration, reported not only an enhanced recognition of their cultural heritage but also exhibited respect for their history which eventually led to noticeable improvement in their English communication skills.

Another instance that showcases successful integration is exemplified through Confucius Institutes worldwide (Hartig, 2012). These institutes are committed to promoting Chinese language and culture to their host countries, thus exhibiting a tangible representation of how language learning and cultural appreciation can be intertwined efficiently.

The successful practices drawn from these cases indicate that the dual integration of cultural understanding and language learning can contribute significantly towards improved language proficiency and cross-cultural awareness. Notably, the integration of Chinese traditional culture can pique students' interest and increase motivation, thereby encouraging active participation in the learning process (Sun, 2023). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to strike an appropriate balance between cultural teaching and linguistic competence to ensure one does not eclipse the other (Hartig, 2012).

### **Suggestions for Improving the Talent Training of English Normal Students**

Integration of real-world contexts: The study finds a need for integrating real-world contexts into the curriculum. To enhance the practicality of the course content, educational institutions should actively incorporate real-life scenarios and case studies into English language teaching pedagogy. Such methods can help students bridge the gap between theory and practice and improve the application of learned skills.

Enhanced use of technology: The traditional training model does not adequately leverage technology in facilitating English learning. Thus, there's a need for increased use of educational technologies. The incorporation of digital tools such as language learning apps, online language labs, and multimedia resources could enrich the learning experience, providing diversified and interactive ways to enhance language proficiency.

Development of soft skills: Findings from semi-structured interviews revealed that students yearn for opportunities to develop soft skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. Incorporating pedagogical strategies that foster these skills could better prepare students for future career demands.

Balance of Chinese culture introduction and English knowledge: Given the efficacy of cultural integration in language teaching, it is crucial to equip English teachers with the necessary pedagogical skills to effectively implement such practices. Their training needs to incorporate an understanding of the cultural elements of language teaching, going beyond just linguistic fluency. This could potentially redefine the role of English teachers bringing them closer to being cultural diplomats.

### Conclusions

This research was sought to understand the effectiveness of the current talent training model for full-time English normal students. The main findings of the research were multi-faceted. It was found that while the existing model provides a decent foundation for learners, it does not fully address the practical application of English proficiency, as evidenced by the lack of real-world context in the curriculum. Additionally, the study indicates that there's room for improvement when it comes to utilizing technology in the teaching-learning process. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews shed light on the desire of students to expand their skill set beyond just language proficiency towards soft skills like critical thinking and problem-solving, often deemed necessary in a career context. These collective findings illustrate both the strength and the limitations of the current talent training model. Lastly, integrating Chinese traditional culture into English education has positive implications for teaching and learning, and the most critical factor rests on the delicate balance between promoting cultural awareness and ensuring linguistic competence. Further research and careful planning are required to ensure this cultural based pedagogical approach is feasible across different educational contexts.

This study provides a roadmap for the enhancement of the current talent training model, specifically in normal universities. However, the significance of this research cannot be overstated. With English being an international language, the manner in which it is taught directly influences the ability of students to participate in global communication and exchange effectively. By identifying areas for improvement in the current teaching model, this research helps normal universities better shape future generations of English students. Inherent within this research is the call for continuous research and implementation of modern, practical teaching-learning methodologies that centric to English normal students' evolving learning needs.

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