



A Study on English Proficiency of University Graduates and Its Influencing Factors Based on the 3E Model

Chuanlan Tang^(✉) and Junying Zhang

School of Public Foreign Languages, Xihua Normal University, Sichuan, China
tangchuanlan2022@163.com

Abstract. In recent years, the international and domestic political and economic situation is changing rapidly, China's international status has been improved to a greater extent, and international exchanges and cooperation are more active than ever. This has also put forward new requirements for English proficiency and talent training in our universities. Based on this, this study examines the development of university graduates' English language proficiency and its labour market returns. This study is based on the "3E" model of language proficiency, human capital theory and signalling theory, and takes graduates with a bachelor's degree or above and at least one year's work experience as the subjects of the study. The study adopts a mixed method of quantitative research supplemented by qualitative research to investigate the development of English language proficiency and its labour market returns. The study uses a mixed method of quantitative research and qualitative research to analyse the development of English language proficiency and its labour market returns.

Keywords: English language proficiency · workforce market returns · undergraduate English language education

1 Introduction

From the perspective of English education in colleges and universities, first of all, as the instrumental education and cultivation of students' general knowledge, the boundary between its cultivation objectives and those of professional examinations is unclear, thus leading to the arrangement of the curriculum and system of English education in colleges and universities to serve more for Grade 4 and 6 examinations, which makes it difficult to highlight the advantages of the language exposure environment and atmosphere in colleges and universities. Secondly, the development of English language skills in colleges and universities has both a signal role similar to that of a certificate and a role in helping graduates to improve their own intrinsic qualities and practical abilities in their job search and in the medium to long-term work process. On this basis, it will help universities and individuals to further reflect on the current process of developing English language proficiency, which is highly relevant in practice.

2 Research Methodology and Subjects

2.1 Research Methodology

(i) Questionnaire Method

The questionnaire method is one of the most commonly used quantitative research methods and was used in the quantitative part of this study to collect more objective data. This study draws on the CGSS household questionnaire, the CEFR and the EF EPI's measure of English language proficiency to develop its own questionnaire, "English language proficiency of university graduates and its workforce market returns". The survey questions are mainly drawn from the literature and confirmed by combining the research questions with established surveys [1].

(ii) Interview Method

In addition to the questionnaire method, this study also used semi-structured interviews with the research participants to obtain deeper thoughts and perceptions for a more in-depth analysis.

This study combines the content of a self-administered questionnaire to conduct an interview study on the workforce market returns to English language ability and English language education in higher education in China, focusing on the non-financial returns to English language ability in the workforce market for graduates and their thoughts and feedback on English language education in higher education [2].

2.2 Subjects of Study

In the interviews, on the one hand, the willingness to be interviewed at the end of the questionnaire and the content of the completed questionnaire was used to screen and identify interviewees for invitation to interview [3]. On the other hand, the researcher's own social network was used to invite interviewees who were willing to be interviewed, met the interview requirements and had different characteristics and attributes to be interviewed [4].

3 Research Questionnaire and Interview Design

3.1 Study Questionnaire Design and Distribution

(i) Content Design of the Questionnaire

The first part contains the basic information of the interviewees and their family situation, mainly including the interviewees' gender, ethnicity, education, profession, place of birth and high school entrance examination, parents' education, etc. The second part is related to the respondents' English education at university, mainly including the respondents' undergraduate majors, the types of English courses offered at undergraduate level, and the foreign exchange opportunities provided by the university during their undergraduate years [5]. The third part is related to the employment and occupation of the respondents,

mainly including information related to the respondents' job search after graduation, the general situation of salary income, the nature of the salary unit, etc.

(ii) Distribution of Questionnaires

The population of this study is graduates with a bachelor's degree or above and one year or more of work experience. Due to the characteristics of the study population and factors such as the epidemic, this study mainly uses an online questionnaire distribution format [6]. The questionnaires were distributed mainly through the researcher's undergraduate and employed classmates, colleagues from past jobs and internships and those who were contacted by the supervisor.

In this study, 25 questionnaires were collected in a pre-survey, and various methods were used to identify and eliminate invalid questionnaires, and to talk to the respondents about any poorly designed, ambiguous and difficult-to-answer questions, before the original questionnaire was revised to form the official questionnaire [7]. In the formal survey, 229 questionnaires were returned, of which 214 were valid, with an effective rate of 93.4%. STATA 15.0 was then used to collate, count and analysis the data to analysis and study the graduates' English language proficiency and its development, and the workforce market returns to English language proficiency.

3.2 Research Interview Design and Data Collection

(i) Interview Outline Design and Research Ethics

Questionnaires, as quantitative research tools, have an important role to play in data collection and analysis, but suffer from an inability to cover non-quantitative measurement factors and a lack of depth, so further research is needed in conjunction with interviews. The interviews in this study were divided into two main steps, pre-interviews and formal interviews. The pre-interviews were mainly to support the analysis content of the questionnaire, while the formal interviews were to expand and dig into the results of the questionnaire analysis and the pre-interviews to present some more in-depth questions and reflections.

(ii) Data Collection for the Interviews

In order to meet the objectives and needs of the study, a total of 10 interviewees were interviewed in this study, and the basic information table is shown in Table 1. The selection of interviewees covered different types of universities, different majors and different types of workplaces as far as possible, and in order to understand the long-term role and rewards of English in the workforce market, most of the interviewees in this study had more than three years of work experience and half of them had job-hopping experience. Respondents were invited through initial contact through the researcher's own social connections and extended coverage by snowballing. Due to the location of the workplace and the impact of the current epidemic in the country, all interviews were conducted online and each interview lasted approximately one hour.

Table 1. Basic information about the interviewees (Own summary)

	Gender	Type of undergraduate college	Special	Type of unit	Years of work
S1	Female	Half of the colleges	Non-English	Government Offices	5
S2	Female	First-class disciplines	English	State-owned enterprises	3
S3	Male	First-class universities	Non-English	State-owned enterprises	4
S4	Female	Half of the colleges	Non-English	Private	9
S5	Male	Half of the colleges	Non-English	Private	9
S6	Female	First-class disciplines	English	Private	6
S7	Male	First-class disciplines	English	Foreign companies	6
S8	Female	First-class disciplines	English	Foreign companies	5
S9	Male	First-class universities	Non-English	Foreign companies	7
S10	Female	First-class disciplines	English	High School	2

4 Research Ideas and Models

4.1 Research Ideas

This study uses questionnaires and interviews to investigate the development of English language proficiency among college graduates in China and their workforce market returns. In order to present the overall research idea more concisely, the research questions, theoretical basis and research methods of this study are presented in a comprehensive manner through Fig. 1.

4.2 Research Hypothesis

In response to the research questions of this study, the specific research hypotheses of this study, taking into account the literature review and the findings of existing studies, are as follows.

H1: Combined with the “3E” model, financial incentives, learning efficiency and language exposure factors have a significant effect on the English listening and speaking skills and literacy skills of university graduates.

H1-1: Financial incentives and learning efficiency have a significant effect on the English listening and reading ability of college graduates.

H1-2: The language exposure factor of university major has a significant effect on graduates' English listening and reading skills.

H1-3: International exchange opportunities among the language exposure factors have a significant effect on graduates' English listening and reading skills.

H1-4: There was no significant effect of the language exposure factor of English language courses and teaching in colleges and universities on graduates' English listening and reading skills.

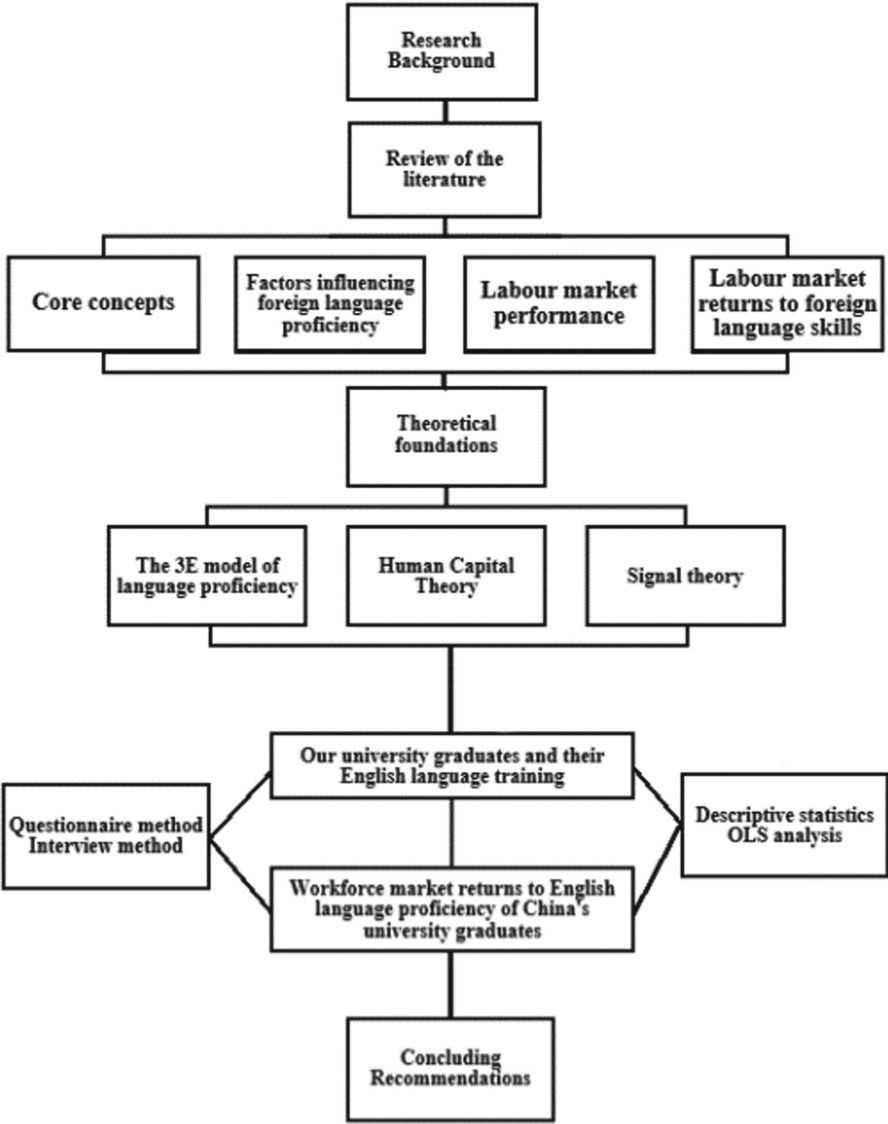


Fig. 1. Research idea map (Self-drawn)

H2: Combined with signal theory1, there is a significant workforce market starting salary return for HE graduates' English listening and speaking ability, while literacy does not have a significant starting salary return.

H3: Combined with human capital theory2, there are significant workforce market returns to current salaries for both English listening and reading skills for HE graduates.

5 Conclusion

The majority of graduates have the ability to use English for daily oral and written communication, but the number of graduates who have the ability to speak and read professional English and are able to use it in their daily work and life is still relatively small. In surveys and interviews with graduates on the development of English language skills, we found that undergraduate English education varied somewhat between different types of universities and majors. From the perspective of different types of universities, the “double first-class” universities are more diversified in their English language curriculum, providing students with more in-class course options and opportunities for communication outside of class, and generally providing a more complete English language exposure environment. This is one of the reasons why there is a significant difference in the English language ability of graduates from different types of higher education institutions. The main difference between the two is that English majors focus on theoretical English content, while English minors focus on the development of professional English skills.

References

1. Wang in. A study on the cultivation of English proficiency of college graduates in China and their labor market returns [D] East China Normal University, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.27149/d.cnki.ghdsu.2022.001016>.
2. Ma Jing Wang Hongwei. A study on employment problems and countermeasures of graduates from colleges and universities in Qinghai - taking English major students as an example[J]. Old brand marketing, 2021 (03):86-88.
3. Wen jinyi Cui Sheng. The impact of college English level exam scores on college graduates' further studies--an empirical study based on data from the growth tracking survey of college students in the capital [J]. Educational Economic Review, 2020, 5(06): 91-107. <https://doi.org/10.19512/j.cnki.issn2096-2088.2020.06.006>.
4. Chen Yang. New thinking on the employment structure and training direction of college graduates in basic disciplines - taking “English+” as an example [J]. Changjiang Series, 2016(36):183.
5. Li Lina. The reform of English teaching mode in colleges and universities from the perspective of students' employment competitiveness[J]. China Training, 2016(02): 160. <https://doi.org/10.14149/j.cnki.ct.2016.02.125>
6. Li xiao wen. A study on the status of English speaking ability of college graduates in Changchun [J]. Talent, 2015(34):189.
7. Xiong jie. A few thoughts on the employment situation of English graduates in colleges and universities [J]. The House of Drama, 2014 (18):233+239.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

