RESEARCH REPORT

Globalization and English in Chinese higher education

JUNYUE CHANG∗

ABSTRACT: This paper sets China’s education of English majors within the changing global and national context. It examines the impact of accelerating globalisation and the rise of global English, the adjustment of China’s English language policy, the growth of the education of English majors and the challenges faced by this sector of education. To adapt to the changes, efforts have been made to change the training models, revise the national curriculum and update textbooks. The introduction of six new training models is significant: “English major plus courses in other specialisms”, “English major plus an orientation towards other disciplines”, “English major plus a minor”, “A major plus English language”, “English language plus another foreign language”, and “Dual degree: BA degree of English language and literature plus another BA degree”. Turning out ‘composite-type’ graduates has become a training objective of the curriculum for English majors, with consequent implications for the future development of this sector of education in China.

INTRODUCTION

Although views concerning the issues of globalisation are many and varied, there seems little disagreement about the fact that the world we are living in is changing at an accelerating rate. For more than a decade, people have been talking about globalisation and its impact on economy, society, politics and culture (Giddens, 1990, 1999; Fukuyama, 1989, 1992; Sklair, 1995; Robertson, 1995; Rodnk, 1997; Hirst et al., 1999, quoted in Mok, 2000: 638; Waters, 2001). In recent years, many researchers have turned their attention to the impact of globalisation on more specific areas or sub-areas as indicated in the works of Khan and Dominelli (2000), Thurow (2000), Thapisa (2000), Bae and Rowley (2001), and Lansbury et al. (2003). It is, therefore, only natural that attention should be paid to education, including teaching of the most widely used foreign or second language, English.

Education in the English language in the context of accelerating globalisation has been approached from different perspectives because of the value of English as the most commonly used language for global political, cultural and economic exchanges. Gupta (2001) discussed the contradiction between the establishment of English language education policies and the reality of learners’ exposure to the English language and likely occasions to use it. Short et al. (2001) examined the rise of English as a form of global communication and discussed the implications of the trend. Bamgboye (2001) discussed globalisation and its implications for ethical issues and relevant research by outlining phenomena in the spread of English around the globe and raising the issue of opportunism in English language teaching. Vogel (2001) emphasised the necessity of foreign language training in higher education, and described some ways of structuring foreign language programmes

∗School of English Studies, Dalian University of Foreign Languages, 94 Yan’an Road, Zhongshan District, Dalian, Liaoning Province, People’s Republic of China 116002. E-mail: junyuechang@yahoo.com

© 2006 The Author. Journal compilation © 2006 Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA.

This paper will focus on the impact of global changes on the education of English majors in China. It will examine the drastic changes of English language policy, the rapid development of the education of English majors, the challenges posed by the changing socio-economic and political context, and the implications of all these factors for administrators and practitioners.

THE RISE OF ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE

English has been the dominant foreign language in the curricula of educational institutions and in foreign language learning in Chinese society for more than two decades. However, the dominance in China’s foreign language education has gone through a zigzagged path and it is closely connected with the emergence of English as a global language on the broad background of globalisation and English language policies in China.

As Bamgboše (2001: 357) observed, English is recognised as the dominating language in the world as globalisation comes to be universally accepted in political and academic discourse. English as a global language grew with the spread of British colonial power in the 19th century and its dominant position has been strengthened by the powerful influence of the United States in the 20th century. More than 75 territories have officially recognised English as a primary or secondary language, and the number of speakers of English as a first or second language or foreign language, or those routinely exposed to English, has reached 2,213,507,500, making up over a third of the world’s population (Crystal, 2003: 107).

The dominance of English is clearly indicated in the following information. English permeates popular culture and has become the main language of popular music, advertising, satellite broadcasting, home computers, and video games; it is the language of international air traffic communication and is increasingly used in international maritime, policing and emergency services; it is used so extensively and deemed to be so important in the academic, scientific and technological sectors that over 80 per cent of all information is stored in electronic retrieval systems in English (Crystal, 2003: 106). Moreover, the internet is offers over 90 per cent of its information in English (Wang, 2002: 89). The survey of the use of English in 20 countries concluded that “the world of large scale commerce, industry, technology and banking is an international world and it is linguistically dominated by English almost everywhere, regardless of how well established and well-protected local cultures, languages, and identities may otherwise be” (Fishman, 1996: 628, quoted in Bamgboše, 2001: 357). The findings of the global survey also confirmed the conclusion of global dominance of English (the British Council, 1995, quoted in Bamgboše, 2001: 357).

In recent years, new changes in economy and new means of communication are providing new impetus to the growth of global English (Block and Cameron, 2002: 4). More business activities successfully cross the borders of more nation states, and more individual activities are going beyond local areas. More people are able to reach others in distant countries and
maintain regular contact with the help of modern means of communication. International activities and global communication require a shared global language. Supported by new technologies and the positive language environment, English is spreading further and wider than ever before.

The power and influence of English have been widely recognised nowadays in the context of globalisation. Bottery (2000: 6) demonstrated that the development of “globalisation” has been associated with the dominance of the English language. Reagan (2001: 63, quoted in Bamgbose, 2003: 425) discovered that language shift towards English is taking place at an accelerated rate. Short et al. (2001: 3–4) concluded that cultural globalisation was intimately connected with the development of English as a global language. Bamgbose (2003: 421) not only recognised the hegemony of English but also pointed out its influence on the choice of English in language education. Growing English competence has speeded up globalisation by facilitating political understanding, economic activities and cultural exchange; meanwhile globalisation has been functioning as a driving force to strengthen the position of English as a global language. Small wonder that many countries have been making efforts to promote English education so as to participate more fully in international activities.

CHINA’S ENGLISH LANGUAGE POLICY

It is in the broad context of a changing globe and the emergence of global English that China has started to embrace the English language. However, Chinese administrators, researchers and teaching practitioners feel deeply about English language policy and English language planning in China. English education began officially in China in 1862 (Guo, 2001: 50–51), but it had no consistent English language policy and no well-designed plan for English language education. Even after the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), English language policy shifts were motivated mainly by the prevailing political agenda of the time for about three decades. Political and economical considerations meant that Russian was adopted and promoted as the first preferred foreign language, and English was pushed to the verge of extinction in the 1950s. In the early 1960s, China’s break with Russia and its establishment of diplomatic or economic relations with many third world countries made it increasingly necessary to adopt a new policy towards English. English was officially stipulated as the first foreign language in middle schools during this period – this was the first time China had officially raised the concept of a first foreign language, indicating a great change in English language policy in China. Since the new policy took into consideration political and long-term economic needs, it is considered to have been practical and beneficial, although it was not consistently implemented during the Great Cultural Revolution (Hu, 2001: 249).

With the accelerating process of globalisation in the fourth quarter of the last century, China has maintained the policy favouring to English, and English education has seen unprecedented development since 1978. In 1979, the Ministry of Education (MOE, 1999) officially encouraged long-term planning and a balance of training speakers of different foreign languages. In 1982, the MOE required that English be taught as the main foreign language in middle schools (Liu et al., 2001, quoted in Hu, 2001: 250) and it also became the preferred foreign language in institutions of higher learning.

Foreign language policy in China is heavily biased toward English at present. English is now as dominant as Russian was in the 1950s in China, if not more. Could it be another
mistake to allow it to dominate both schools and universities? Considering English as a global language, these worries are not justified. The prominence that English has in language policy is due to the enormous prestige of its instrumental value. The dominance of English is such an inevitable reality that language policy must come to terms with it. The most important thing is that its dominance must be properly managed so as to produce maximally favourable outcomes for China.

In examining the choice of language, Bamgbose (2003: 422) identified the major constraints on free choice of language as historical, economical and bureaucratic. Since mainland China was never completely colonised by any English-speaking country in its history, maintaining or changing any colonial language policy did not really become an issue. Whether it was Russian during the 1950s or English in later years, promotion of any foreign language in PRC has not encountered the unconquerable social or cultural difficulties experienced when Japan attempted to implement its colonial language policy in occupied areas of China in the 1930s and 1940s. Bamgbose (2003: 422) holds that most policy decisions on language status are bureaucratic in three senses. First, they are taken by governmental or quasi-governmental bodies; secondly, their implementation depends on rules and regulations made by bureaucrats; thirdly, the officials responsible for decision-making are members of an elite that has a vested interest in maintaining the role and status of English. The theory seems to apply to China in general, but not completely. Chinese governmental bodies make the language policies with the help of experts, and formulate rules and regulations to implement policies, but the tendency to favour the policy-making elite is not obvious, if it exists at all. It is mainly economic power that has been constraining the choice of language in China in recent years. Normally, a person chooses to learn English because it offers the prospect of good job opportunities and other appreciable advantages like access to higher education and academic promotion. English is seldom used for internal communication; it is, therefore, not a central basis for deciding who has access to economic resources and political power, as it is in the countries where English is used as a second language. English is advocated in China mainly because it is prestigious in international business relations and communication.

The dominance of English as the first preferred foreign language in China has proved beneficial. Its communicative and instrumental function, sometimes its role as a lingua franca, and its global reach has accelerated China’s foreign trade and helped China’s economic growth in the past two decades. It has also promoted China’s exchanges with the outside world. However, it is worth noting that English language education suffers when the political agenda prevails over the long-term economic and educational agenda regardless of the global tide, while it helps China’s economic progress when the political agenda converges with the economic and educational agenda and when it goes in the direction of the global tide (Hu, 2001: 250).

GROWTH OF ENGLISH MAJORS IN CHINA

In the changing global context, the education of English majors has not only witnessed policy change but also experienced great development in China.

In the early 19th century, China started to feel the impact of the outside world, with increasing contacts with Britain, then the most powerful capitalist country. Under the threat of frequent foreign invasions and occupations in the middle of the 19th century,
China started its English education programme to learn from Britain and to strengthen itself. China established its first modern foreign language training institution, the School of Combined Learning in 1862; its subsequent incorporation into the Metropolitan College (predecessor Beijing University) in 1902 (Guo, 2001: 50–51) marked the official beginning of the education of English majors in China.

The education of English majors, normally requiring students to attend courses in English, English language theory and English literature to acquire a good command of the English language, was promoted by increasing exchanges with the outside world, and by increasing demand for English teachers with the official incorporation of English into national curriculum for middle schools in 1902 (Hu, 1999: 55). It kept developing in the first half of the 20th century in China – though not fast enough, since the links with the outside world were never severed, despite the turbulent years of fighting between warlords, the Japanese invasion, and the Chinese civil war. Before the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949, about 7,000 were students pursuing higher education in English majors (Hu, 1999: 57).

The education of English majors suffered its first setback soon after the founding of the People’s Republic, since the young republic politically turned to the Soviet Union when isolated by countries headed by the USA. English was replaced by Russian as the first preferred foreign language. In 1952, only eight institutions were teaching English in China (MOE, 1999: 5), and most English departments were closed down by the MOE because of the low demand for English graduates at that time and ignorance of the growing influence of global English in the outside world. In 1956, there were only 545 teachers of English on campus.

The detrimental effect of neglecting global English was felt in the mid-1950s. To avert the consequences of previous mistakes in foreign language policy, the MOE in 1956 started to make great efforts to revive the education of English majors in 1956 (Hu, 2001: 247), and the situation began to improve. In 1964, the MOE officially stipulated English as the first foreign language in schools, thus accelerating English education. The expansion of English education not only increased the demand for graduates from English majors but also prepared English-speaking civil servants for Chinese government. This was the first renaissance in the history of English education in China.

The rapid development of English education was held back by the political turmoil during the Cultural Revolution from 1968 to 1978. Although a few training classes were organised during this period, education was severely affected by strong political influence (MOE, 1999: 6).

It was not until the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1978 that the education of English majors ushered in the second renaissance. Since then, more institutions for English majors have been built, and the student enrolment has been increasing year by year. By the end of 1996, the number of university students of English had reached 55,899 (Cen, 1997: 7). And the number of institutions training English majors in higher education increased from eight in 1952 (MOE, 1999: 5) to 304 (MOE, 1999: 7) and to 420 in 2002 (SCFLM, 2002). Since 1999, student enrolment in English majors has been increasing at even greater speed. The number of students on campus reached 150,000 in 2001 (Wang, 2001); and it is highly probable that it has now reached 200,000.

In the past few decades, the education of English majors has grown rapidly and has contributed greatly to China despite its sufferings. In the first three decades in the history of the People’s Republic, English departments were almost the only institutions that turned
out English-speaking personnel. In the last two decades, the high quality staff in English departments not only has guaranteed good language training but has meant that this academic sector has also dominated language teaching research despite growing competition from the education of non-English majors, foreign-based training and training in the private sectors. The education of English majors has played an extremely important role for PRC. It helped China to maintain its contact with the outside world during the years of isolation, it helped China to prepare for the challenges from globalisation after the period of isolation, and it has been helping China for more than two decades to participate actively in the process of globalisation. Influenced by global and national changes, China has bid farewell to the cycle of slow development, withering, renaissance, setback and second renaissance. Supported by national foreign language policy, it is enjoying a period of unprecedented development against the background of accelerating globalisation and the rise of English as a global language.

**CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS**

China’s increasing participation in global economy and world affairs has speeded up the development of education of English majors in China. However, the impact of global and national changes has also brought problems concerning the education of English majors. These problems have been identified by such researchers as the South Project Group (1998: 3), Zhang and Yang (2000: 4), Fang (2001: 76) and Tan (2000: 83) as backward educational ideology, teachers’ inadequate language skills and professional competence, an outdated national curriculum, a failing school syllabus, inefficient training programmes, unsatisfying training patterns, obsolete textbooks, inefficient teaching, shortage of facilities, lack of language teaching research, much-criticised tests and inflexible management. The major challenges are identified as follows.

First, the calibre of English major graduates cannot meet the changing demands (Zhang and Yang, 2000: 3; Fang, 2001: 76; Shi, 2001: 90). Graduates from English majors in China are mainly trained in language skills, language knowledge, language theories and literary studies. Lacking knowledge in other disciplines, they cannot cope with tasks demanding the interdisciplinary knowledge required in a rapidly changing social, cultural, economic, scientific and technological world. Moreover, the educational ideology of teachers and administrators is still backward owing to the legacy of government planning system. Inflexible management, a rigid syllabus, teacher-centred teaching, and outdated materials cannot effectively prepare students for the changing market they are supposed to face.

Secondly, English major graduates are gradually losing their previous advantages in seeking employment (Zhang, 2000: 3; Fang, 2001: 76). The unchallenged prestige and the dominant status of English as the first preferred foreign language in society and ongoing reforms in primary and middle schools have greatly improved school-leavers’ English language skills. Undergraduates studying non-English majors are therefore starting their higher education with a better English foundation, and will graduate with greater English proficiency. With knowledge of their relevant disciplines and good English language skills, they are more likely to be favoured in the job market. Moreover, the numerous private language training institutions established in recent years offer flexible training programmes and are better oriented to the demands of the market system, thus turning out more competitive candidates for the job market. Graduates trained in English-speaking countries, with their greater English proficiency and their knowledge of relevant disciplines, are also

© 2006 The Author. Journal compilation © 2006 Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
posing challenges to English major graduates. Thirdly, a brain drain occurs at the rate of about 7 per cent every year among competent middle-aged and young teachers of English (Cen, 1997: 7; Tan, 2000: 83; Lan and Liao 2003: 140). The Chinese government’s loss of its tight control over teachers’ mobility in recent years, under the impact of marketisation and globalisation, has meant that individual teachers are more able to choose their jobs than before. Better opportunities abroad and higher salaries in foreign-funded or private enterprises in China are draining talented people from campus, thus exacerbating a severe shortage of English teachers.

Fourthly, the poorer academic background of students (Fang, 2001: 77) and the consequent lower quality of graduates from English majors are marring the image of this sector, and thus affecting the employment prospects of the graduates. Since 1999, China has expanded its higher education at a remarkable speed. The same thing has happened in the sector of English majors, only at an even greater speed, resulting in poorer levels of education among the students admitted. Increased numbers of students, a shortage of language teachers, the lack of teaching resources and inadequate language training in larger classes are likely to bring about poor results, consequently affecting the competitiveness of graduates in the job market.

Fifthly, pushed by the economic tide, some institutions have hastily transformed themselves for short-term goals and plunged into new ways of training regardless of their own capacity (Cen, 1997: 7; Fang, 2001: 76-7; Liu, 1995: 7-8). The courses offered lack system, quality and competitiveness, resulting in the sacrifice of students’ language training and fragmented knowledge in other disciplines and rendering the graduates less competitive.

With the recognition of challenges, problems are also identified in inflexible syllabuses, teacher-centred classes, monotonous teaching, over-dependence on force-fed teaching, test-oriented practice, too much mechanical teaching, too little fostering of critical thinking, lack of efficiency and inadequate incentives for improvement.

What is the solution for the education of English majors? Should English departments reduce themselves to language skill training institutions? Should they elevate themselves to more advanced literary and linguistic research and turn out translators, interpreters, and researchers in linguistics and literature? Or should they develop themselves into institutions that turn out ‘composite-type’ (Zhang, 1996: 6) graduates, as is advocated by many people, to meet the needs of society? And what are the possible ways in which they can maintain or strengthen their position in foreign language education?

### EXPLORATION OF NEW TRAINING MODELS

The education of English majors had been operated under the state planning system for many years, and it is not easy to make changes. Moreover, great demand for English graduates in the job market in the 1980s and early 1990s also obscured the urgency of reform in the education of English majors. It took about ten years for the full extent of the crisis to be realised.

Shanghai Foreign Studies University, one of the leading foreign languages universities, took a pioneering step in 1983 and diversified its training in language and literature to include more arts disciplines (Dai, 1999: 18). Other institutions followed, exploring ways of changing a training model which had been followed for several decades. The reform was wide-ranging, and great changes have been taking place ever since. The most significant is the change of training models. Six major training models have been identified (Zhu, 1995;
Model 1: English major plus courses in other specialisms. Students attend courses of English language and literature, and also courses in other specialisms so as to widen their range of knowledge.

Model 2: English major plus an orientation towards other disciplines. Students attend courses of English language and literature, and also courses in another discipline which are not enough to constitute a ‘minor’ but which allow students to acquire knowledge about one specific field besides English language and literature.

Model 3: English major plus a minor. Students attend the main courses of English language and literature, and then attend all the major courses in another discipline, constituting a minor, so that they can learn about an additional specific field besides English language and literature.

Model 4: A major plus English language. Students attend the courses in a major, and then attend courses to improve English language skills, so that they master one discipline and have adequate command of English language skills.

Model 5: English language plus another foreign language. Students attend the major courses in English language and literature, and then attend some courses to improve skills in another foreign language, so that they can acquire two foreign languages (albeit at different levels of competence) to help them compete in the job market.

Model 6: Dual degree: BA degree in English language and literature plus another BA degree. Students attend courses in English language and literature to earn a BA, and then attend all the required courses in the syllabus of another discipline for another BA, so that they have competence in two disciplines to compete in the job market.

Different as the patterns are, they all emphasise the importance of a solid foundation of English, on which to widen students’ range of knowledge. Priority is always given to raising students’ language competence; room is subsequently made available in the syllabuses for more courses in other disciplines. The additional courses are mostly closely connected with the demands of society and the economy.

Besides training diplomats, interpreters and other civil servants to master English language, English language training institutions in higher education have diversified their training and started to include economy, trade, management, law, science, etc., as well as language and literature, to meet the varied needs of society. The language and literature courses that used to dominate the syllabus appear alongside courses in economics, trade, finance, accounting, management, advertising, journalism, law, educational technology, tourism, diplomacy, second foreign language, teaching Chinese to foreigners and so on. A certain degree of combination is witnessed between many different disciplines in arts, and even between arts and science.

**CURRICULUM REVISION**

In response to national and global changes, curriculum change for English majors constitutes another important part of English education in recent years. It aims at implementing English educational policy, carrying out educational reform and realising educational objectives.

New curricula for English majors have twice been introduced in response to the changing situation in the last two decades. The first curriculum came into being in two versions. One version was issued and implemented in late 1989 for elementary college level (MOE,
and the other, issued in 1990, was devoted to advanced college level (MOE, 1990). It was initiated and designed by the First Textbook Writing and Supervision Committee, established in 1980 as a consultative, quasi-governmental organization under the leadership of the MOE, with the responsibility of writing textbooks, recommending textbooks and coordinating teaching in the education of English majors (He, 2001: 4–5). After approval from MOE, the curriculum was implemented and enforced by the establishment of a testing system, TEM, which is designed for English majors and enjoying a growing influence in the country. Curriculum revision has played a recognised and important role in standardising the education of English, in spite of some defects.

However, both English education and the society which it is supposed to serve have been changing at an unprecedented speed. The improvement of the level of English of middle school students in the 1990s indicated that the first national curriculum designed for undergraduates of English majors could not keep up with the changing situation. And China’s increasing participation in the process of globalisation demanded new qualities of English major graduates, which the first curriculum could not guarantee and was not devised to guarantee. Moreover, the new training patterns practised in the education of English majors proved more effective, rendering the former curriculum obsolete.

Preparation for curriculum revision was started in 1996; relevant nationwide surveys were completed in March 1998, and suggestions for developing the education of foreign language majors at college level for the 21st century were solicited by the MOE in April 1998. After MOE approval, these suggestions were issued to institutions educating English majors in December 1998. The draft suggestions paved the way for revision of the curriculum (He, 2001: 7). The new curriculum was completed in December 1999, and was approved and implemented by the MOE in April 2000 (He, 2001: 7). The new curriculum combined the two versions of the first curriculum, in a more coherent and more consistent manner. It emphasised the importance of providing a good foundation in English during the whole four-year process, but allowed for different types of English teaching in foreign language colleges and universities, comprehensive universities, normal universities, technology universities and two- or three-year colleges. It made it clear that English major degrees are supposed to turn out ‘composite-type’ graduates with a solid English foundation, a wide range of knowledge, and competence to work proficiently as interpreters, translators, teachers, administrators and researchers in institutions of foreign affairs, education, trade, culture, military etc. It classified the courses into three sections: language skills, language knowledge and relevant specialist knowledge. It clearly recognised the importance of knowledge of other specialisms for English majors, a recognition absent from the former curriculum. More than ever, it emphasised the importance of fostering students’ abilities, especially creativity, so as to prepare them for the challenges of the new century.

Driven by the global tide and internal demand, the national curriculum for English majors has been significantly revised. Helped by the power of the state, the curriculum is being implemented throughout the nation. It will help coordinate the education of English majors, and will promote the development of college-level education of English majors in China.

TEXTBOOK UPDATING AND DIVERSIFICATION

Teaching materials include far more than textbooks, but they are usually equated with textbooks as far as teachers and students in China are concerned. Because of inadequate
modern facilities and the conventional heavy dependence on textbooks, textbooks are
c onsidered to be one of the major factors that affect English teaching and learning in the
Chinese context. They are a major source of English language input for Chinese students and
a major support for Chinese teachers of English who lack native-like language competence.
Of all textbooks offered to English majors, jingdu, the intensive and comprehensive English
textbook, is considered to be the most important and has been the focus of attention in
academics for years. The change in jingdu textbooks will also shed light on the impact of
changing social, political and economic tides on the education of English majors.

In the 1950s, the only textbooks for academics were a two-volume college English
textbook written by Chen et al. for college elementary level, and a college English textbook
written by Xu for a higher level (Hu et al., 1995: 11). The writing of the textbooks was
influenced by Russian methods of teaching grammar and pronunciation. In the early 1960s,
a textbook by Wu mainly designed for third-year college students was available (Hu et al.,
1995: 11). In 1964, a textbook by Xu was in use by English majors (He, 2003: 47) and
sequels for higher-level college students, by Yu et al., were also introduced. This single set
of textbooks dominated English majors for about 20 years, with no change until the early
1980s.

Rapid development of the education of English majors in the 1980s and 1990s de-
manded updated and better-written textbooks. Over recent years, eight major textbooks
have achieved nationwide recognition, and more are in use in different institutions though
not recognised in the nation as a whole. The number of textbooks was so great, and the
variation in style and quality so wide, that the MOE found it necessary to assess teach-
ing materials, that assessment being conducted in October 1994 (Hu et al., 1995: 11–16).
An influential textbook by Li et al. has been updated, and another set of better designed
and multimedia-assisted college English textbook by Yang et al. has come into use, to the
benefit of students and of China’s English education programme.

However, with accelerating changes at the national and global level, no textbook can be
free from challenges. Changing social and economic situations are raising the expectations
of the teachers and students. Textbooks for English majors are considered to be very
outdated in method and content (North Project Group, 1998b: 8; South Project Group,
are criticised for overemphasis on imparting language knowledge and training language
skills without adequate coverage of knowledge in other disciplines (Tan, 2000: 83). The
textbooks are expected to include writings in different styles, to cover a wide range of
knowledge, to reflect recent developments, to help change teachers’ backward educational
ideology and to improve teaching efficiency (South Project Group, 1998: 3). Improved
quality is also demanded in other teaching materials, such as reference books and teaching
software.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The power of global and national changes has touched almost every aspect of our life,
including the languages to be learned and to be used. It has secured the dominance of
English as a foreign language in China, and has affected China’s foreign language pol-
icy. Under such circumstances, the education of English majors in China has, in recent
years, witnessed changing educational ideology, a stable English language policy, an
increased number of training institutions, enlarged enrolment of students, more qualified
teaching staff, large numbers of qualified graduates, improved teaching and intensified research.

These blessings come with challenges, however, and more problems in further development have been identified. Education of English majors in China is faced with challenges in raising the quality of graduates, maintaining its advantages, curbing a severe brain drain and smoothly transforming its training patterns.

The problems and challenges identified have significant implications for administrators and practitioners. Greater efforts need to be made in establishing an efficient management system, searching for appropriate training models suitable for each individual institution, adjusting the syllabus, maintaining an efficient teaching staff and raising teaching efficiency. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on guiding and enlightening rather than force-feeding. Greater importance needs to be attached to students’ autonomous learning and their personal development. More preparations need to be made to meet the further impact of the knowledge economy, so as to turn out all-round graduates with a solid language foundation, a wide range of knowledge, higher ethical standards and greater capability to cope with future challenges.

REFERENCES


He, Qixin (2001) Pei yang 21 shi ji de wai yu zhuan ye ren cai [The training of qualified English personnel for the 21st century]. Foreign Language World, 1, 4–8, 27.


Vogel, Thomas (2001) Internationalisation, inter-culturality, and the role of foreign languages in higher education.


of nationalities after China’s entry into WTO. *Journal of the Southwest Institute for Ethnic Groups (Philosophy and Social Science)*, 23(8), 262–5.


(Received 8 December 2004.)