Path to Success for College English Majors: Reflection Based on the Investigation

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Abstract. With the rapid popularization of intelligent technology, the employment of English majors was facing more and more challenges. Both students and parents were confused about the narrow employment of foreign language majors. In this sense, foreign language majors in colleges and universities should not only focus on language learning and research, but also focus on language as a tool to engage in other professional learning or practice activities with a higher degree of internationalization. This study will interview college English majors through questionnaires to investigate their understanding of English major goals, their future career planning, and their suggestions on school curriculum setting and teaching methods. This study believes that the cultivation of college foreign language talents should make necessary adjustments according to the talent needs of the current environment, innovate the teaching model and teaching method to adapt to the constantly changing society, enhance the interdisciplinary consciousness, and pave the way for the success of students, which has practical significance for the success and development of English majors. At the same time, it helps to cultivate practical and applied talents under the current environment.

Keywords: English major; Practical teaching; Interdisciplinary; Successful; Intelligent software.

1. Introduction

In today’s society, the rapid popularization of intelligent technology has brought more and more challenges to the employment and development of English majors. From the perspective of individual identity, students and parents are perplexed about the narrow employment of foreign language majors and are greatly distressed because of the lack of specific countermeasures. Based on the teaching practice and the needs of The Times, experts and scholars have discussed the development direction of English majors in the new era from multiple perspectives.

Foreign language majors in colleges and universities should not only focus on language learning and research as the main training goal, focusing on the unnecessary integration of English and literary creation courses but should pay more attention to language as a tool to engage in other professional learning or practice activities with a higher degree of internationalization, implement comprehensive reform of English majors and enhance interdisciplinary consciousness. At present, the curriculum of English majors in China still focuses on language, literature and culture education, with more emphasis on language itself, ignoring the cultivation of other knowledge for English majors. If students can learn new knowledge based on the existing language, it has important guiding significance for the future employment of students. This paper will study the path to college English majors’ success in the current environment. At the same time, it will explore what reform and innovation should be made at the teaching level based on the opinions of English majors. The research conclusions will provide references for the reform of teaching methods and courses for college English majors.

2. Literature Review

In recent years, much research on the employment prospects of English majors mainly focus on teaching challenges, talent training objectives and curriculum, career development methods and career planning.
Because of the fierce competition brought by the development of science and technology in foreign language education, scholars have carried out a lot of research. For example, Chen Huangyan et al. [1] Research shows that intelligent technology can help English professionals grow and improve their English skills. However, due to the many problems and shortcomings of artificial intelligence technology in machine translation [2], we believe that intelligent technology cannot wholly replace English professionals in the short term. It can be seen that the professional education of foreign languages in schools still has its own advantages.

Researchers have recognized that foreign language majors in colleges and universities should not only focus on language learning and research but also focus on language as a tool to engage in other professional learning or practice activities with a higher degree of internationalization [3]. Therefore, it is a severe problem for English major education to explore the development of English major students and help them become practical and applied talents. Domestic scholars have begun to examine the necessity of increasing interdisciplinary development in the curriculum of English majors. Some scholars believe that cross-language and cross-cultural communication competence has its linguistic basis and curriculum theory basis, and the cultivation goal of cross-language and cross-cultural communication competence for English majors determines the necessity of interdisciplinary curriculum design [3]. Students can learn new knowledge based on the existing language, which will be more secure for future employment [4]. Integrating different forms of multidisciplinary knowledge, skills, principles or ideas around certain topics[5] and building interdisciplinary development opportunities for students is a good way to broaden career opportunities for foreign language majors, enabling students not only to master the language in books but also to apply it to various practical activities. This is a breakthrough point for the success of English majors.

To improve the employment rate of English majors, promote the healthy development of English majors in the new era, and help students become talented in various ways, many universities have reduced the scale of English majors [6]. In particular, many schools have shifted from training traditional English talents in the direction of language and literature to training new composite English talents with “English plus Special Purposes”. In addition, English majors can still give full play to their language advantages in different positions through a postgraduate entrance examination, innovation and entrepreneurship, returning home to start businesses, and employment at the grassroots level [7], which is also a good way to reflect professional ability. In a sense, with the rapid development of global economic integration, English is widely used in all walks of life, and the career planning of English majors is crucial for students’ employment [8]. When Jianlan[9] analyzed students’ professional understanding, career planning and employment orientation through questionnaires, and explored the main reasons affecting the completeness of career planning from the aspects of students themselves, schools and society, which has certain reference value for the improvement of foreign language major education in colleges and universities.

Based on the study’s results and the limitations of the existing studies, we can see that the success of college English majors is of great significance in improving students’ learning motivation, employment ability and learning effect. Therefore, further research and practice are very necessary.

3. Research Design

After completing the essential background investigation, reading the relevant articles and completing the literature review, this study will increase the practicality and credibility based on the current relevant information. Through an in-depth understanding of English major students’ thinking and their views on the road to success, this study aims to further promote the generalization and summary of this topic in various ways. The following is the specific study design. Based on the current research status, the research questions and objects, as well as research tools and methods, are first determined. Secondly, in the process of practice, data is collected and analyzed step by step.
Finally, the analysis content is summarized, conclusions are drawn, and divergence and discussion are made simultaneously.

3.1. Research Questions

Many factors, including language ability, professional knowledge, practical ability and comprehensive quality influence the employment trend of college English majors. By adopting appropriate teaching methods and strategies, students’ English professional level can be improved, and expanding vocabulary is also crucial for students’ professional development. However, the current research still has some shortcomings that need further improvement and expansion. This study focuses on the path to success of college English majors and identifies the following research questions:

1. The difference in students’ satisfaction with English major courses and teaching before and after graduation;
2. The need for interdisciplinary courses and practical courses in the school curriculum;
3. Understanding of the impact of artificial intelligence technology on the employment of English majors;
4. English majors’ understanding of professional learning, career planning and success.

3.2. Research Objects

This survey takes some English majors who have graduated from the class of 2019 and some English majors who are still studying in North China Electric Power University (Baoding) as the survey objects. At the same time, two students were selected as interview subjects (their code names were Shi and Liu respectively).

3.3. Research Methods and Tools

3.3.1. Questionnaire Survey

This study designed a questionnaire covering five aspects, which are: Basic information (questions 1-3), satisfaction with the curriculum and teaching model (questions 4-5 and 8), the necessity of practical reform such as interdisciplinary reform (questions 6-8), the impact of intelligent technology (question 13), insights on life planning and employment prospects, understanding and suggestions for the success of English majors in the new era (questions 3, 9-12 and questions 14-17).

A total of 17 questions were designed in this questionnaire, including 15 questions including specific investigation contents, except two basic information questions. Most of the data collected in this questionnaire are scored on a scale of 1 to 10 for different possible answer options for the listed questions, which represents the degree of agreement with the content of the option. A small number of multiple choice questions collect data on questions with exact answer options. There are also two subjective questions to collect some respondents’ simple opinions.

3.3.2. Case Interview

According to the respondents’ answers, the researcher selected two representative students and invited them as subjects for further in-depth interviews. The topic of this interview is “College English majors’ views on the road to success”, to understand the views of specific relevant people. It mainly includes four aspects: the divergent discussion of the four plates, excluding the basic information in the questionnaire. The purpose of further interviews is to reveal the thoughts and desires of representative students to the public through detailed development and in-depth discussion. On the other hand, it can promote the depth of research and make it more credible and representative.

As for the relevant interviews, this study appropriately combined the word frequency and specific answers of the two subjective questions, questions 15 and 17, in the questionnaire to summarize and sort out. At the same time, the interview data processing will be analyzed one by one according to the four interview sections and the answers of the two interviewees.
4. Data Analysis Results

A total of 35 people participated in this survey, excluding non-survey objects, and 32 valid questionnaires were received. Among them are 5 boys, 27 girls; are 7 students in school and 25 have graduated. Two interviewees were selected from the valid questionnaires, both were graduated students. The following are the preliminary results of the data analysis of this study.

4.1. The Satisfaction Analysis of School Curriculum and Teaching Mode

The survey results on the satisfaction of the curriculum and teaching mode show that the respondents are more satisfied with the curriculum and teaching mode of the school (53% satisfied according to the score) than dissatisfied (47% dissatisfied according to the score). Among them:

In terms of satisfaction, the option of “Improving the professional ability of the major” got the highest score (7.19 points), and most of the students who agreed with this option were female students and graduated students; The lowest score (5.94) was for the “Interactive teaching style, the development of divergent thinking, the practice of speech and debate skills”, with the majority of male students and current students agreeing with this option. The remaining three options, “To learn knowledge that expands your personal area of interest”, “To learn knowledge that will benefit your future development” and “The significance of the course in enhancing practical ability”, all scored around 6.5 points and were generally accepted.

In terms of dissatisfaction, the option with the highest score is “The course does not provide substantial help to practical problems such as employment planning, and most of the courses are literary literacy courses”, which scored 6.74 points, and most of the female students and current students agree with this option; At the same time, the option that “Cannot enrich their professional level” scored the lowest (4.78 points), and the majority of female students and current students agreed with this option. The students also agreed with the original item: “The curriculum contains a lot of ‘bird courses’, and the course has no substantive content,” scoring 6.13 points. The remaining options “Lack of interactive teaching methods and boring classroom atmosphere” scored 5.78, which was in the middle level.

In response to the question “Based on your academic experience, do you agree with the proposed curriculum and teaching reform for English majors?” The data analysis result shows that the matrix question’s average score is as high as 8.03. It can be seen that respondents generally believe that curriculum reform is very necessary to practice. Among them:

The option of “Increasing practical, interdisciplinary and applied courses” scored the highest (8.28 points), and the male and female students who agreed with this option were equally distributed and their academic status was generally agreed;

The lowest score option was “Moderately adjusting the professional curriculum according to the social development trend.” For example, “Changing the literature appreciation course to an elective course” scored 7.56, and the number of male and female students who agreed with this option was similar;

The other three options, “Increase the connection between the course content and the events related to humanities and social sciences”, “Increase the connection between the course content and the majors with strong tools of science and engineering”, and “Strengthen practical activities to cultivate new abilities in English majors”, scored 8.25, 7.97 and 8.06 points respectively, which were in the middle.

It can be seen that although the satisfaction of the curriculum is higher, at the same time, it is also necessary and desirable to carry out curriculum and teaching reform following the relevant development of various factors.

According to the interviews of two cases, the researchers summarized the reasonableness of the arrangement of various courses for English majors and the help to life planning and career choice after graduation. The results showed that Shi and Liu both believed that the curriculum was relatively reasonable, and basic skills courses and a solid foundation were essential. Among them:
1) Shi especially stressed the importance of enhancing practical teaching, which will be able to achieve its effect on employment and development. Shi said, “In general, the existing curriculum design is reasonable, the first and most important thing to learn a language is accumulating and practicing, the basic skills of English students can cultivate a solid language foundation. However, with the progress of The Times and society, I think it is still necessary to improve practical teaching, do not read books, and do not learn a language, which will not play a big role in local employment and development, it is necessary to increase contacts with other fields, and use language as a bonus.”

2) Liu pays more attention to the specific classroom atmosphere and content, mentions the combination of English as a foreign language with other fields, and concludes that the comprehensive ability training of English majors is conducive to life planning and career choice. Liu said, “On the premise of laying a good foundation, English specialized courses can provide systematic exercises, a lot of interactive content in the classroom, and can use the language, and courses like the overview of British and American culture can enrich the background culture of English language, oral English and foreign teaching courses can be skilled in English language skills, and truly speak and communicate. It can cultivate high language application ability, research ability and, professional quality, ideological and political quality. At the same time, if you always have a skill in other fields and can use English professionally and systematically as a foreign language, I think you will have further opportunities for employment and development.”

4.2. The Analysis of Interdisciplinary and Practical Needs

As for the respondents’ demand for interdisciplinary and practicability, the score of the option “Is it necessary to improve the practicability and instrumency of foreign languages and combine teaching with other majors in an interdisciplinary way through four years’ study and current planning” was as high as 8.34 points, and 46.88% of the respondents chose a full score of 10 points. Therefore, English majors must carry out interdisciplinary practical reform.

In the further in-depth understanding of “If the interdisciplinary ability is to be practiced in English majors, which aspects should be specifically focused on the combination”, the radar shows that the score of the four options set is relatively average. Among them:

1) The highest score was “The development of cross-border capacity” (8.34 points);
2) The lowest score is “Teamwork and organizational ability” (7.47 points);
3) “How to broaden the scope of employment” and “practical ability” scored 7.94 and 8.22 points, respectively.

Combined with the analytical data of the previous section, it can be inferred layer by layer, and the reform of interdisciplinary teaching for these specific aspects in the listed options is generally recognized and can be put into practice.

As to whether students believe that English major teaching needs to implement practical reform such as interdisciplinary teaching, the study analyzed the results of case interviews (since this part still does not involve the subjective questions in the questionnaire, it can be directly summarized by the key words of the two people’s answers). Generally speaking, Shi and Liu both believe that this measure is necessary. Among them:

1) Shi mentioned that the advantage of cross-professional teaching is that it is more conducive to cultivating more talents with better comprehensive quality. Shi said: “This is necessary, as just mentioned, because English is a course that every major will learn, and the CET-4 and CET-6 are also essential exams, so there are many excellent non-English major language talents, so as students who take English as a major to study systematically, we should use this language. By combining some science and engineering or applied disciplines across disciplines, we may be able to kill two birds with one stone and cultivate more talents with better overall quality.”

2) Liu, who is interviewed, focuses on the advantages of interdisciplinary teaching for English majors to take advantage of one language application ability. Liu said: “I think this is very necessary, as English as a second foreign language has been widely involved in professional education. The
advantage of interdisciplinarity is that it can occupy the advantage of one language application ability, which will be more beneficial to the future development of English majors.”

4.3. The Impact of Intelligent Technology on the Employment of English Majors

Regarding the impact of intelligent technology, the matrix question of “Whether the development of intelligent technology has an impact on the employment situation of English majors” is summarized as follows:

1) The average score of the matrix is 8.19;
2) Thirty-one percent of respondents chose a 9, and 25 percent chose a 10.

It can be seen that more than half of the respondents believe that 90 to 100 percent of today’s intelligent technology development impacts the employment situation of English majors. Further, the open question discusses the changes in the path of English majors with the development of The Times and relevant responses.

Given the doubts about the future of English majors due to the development of intelligent technology in today’s society, the study analyzed and summarized the results of case interviews combined with the word frequency display of answers to relevant subjective questions in the questionnaire. Among them:

1) As for the development and reform of English major, interviewee Shi stressed the necessity of cultivating versatile talents and improving language ability. According to similar statements in the questionnaire answers, the respondents agreed that combining English majors with other fields and disciplines is urgent. Meanwhile, English majors are saturated with talents, so they should pay attention to practice and tools to better adapt to social development, which can provide necessary conditions for further study abroad and work in foreign companies. Shi said: “For the current development of English majors, I think it is necessary for interdisciplinary talents to increase the practical nature, not simply focus on textbook knowledge, it is more necessary to use English as an application tool in the field of need, do not learn dumb English, to speak and use, and this is also a weight to open up the development road. It can provide necessary conditions for studying abroad and working in foreign companies.”

2) Liu emphasized that smart technology is only an auxiliary tool and cannot completely replace the views of English professionals. At the same time, by summarizing the answers in this aspect of the questionnaire, it can be concluded that British professionals will change with the changes of the national environment and background and will make reforms and adjustments with the development of The Times and the level of science and technology. Liu said: “When it comes to the development of intelligent technology, as experienced English majors, we will also use intelligent technology such as translation software to assist learning, but to be honest, it cannot replace the human brain personally translate, just as an example, some of the content of the machine is blunter and lack of logic, such as some ancient poetry and extended meaning of the content. There is no way to use intelligent technology to communicate clearly. Therefore, I think that although intelligent technology has certain obstacles on the road to English majors, it cannot be completely replaced. The existence of English majors is still indispensable, and intelligent technology can be used rationally in developing it as a kind of promotion agent.”

4.4. The Prospect of Life Planning and the Understanding of the Success of English Majors in the New Era

As the background investigation of the interviewees’ choice of English major, the data results and relevant analysis of the question “Why choose English major” are shown as follows:

1) The option with the highest score is “the current college entrance examination score of the province, the popularity of each major and other practical considerations” (6.34 points), which shows that practical problems have a great impact on the choice of majors and road development;
2) The two options with higher than the average score of 5.9 are “full of interest in English learning” and “English major learning experience can be an advantage for further study in other majors in the
future”, with scores of 6.13 and 6.19 respectively, indicating that they also play a role in the choice of major;

3) The options with lower than average scores were “I hope to use it as the basis for further study abroad” (5.5 points) and “I hope to engage in related work” (5.34 points), among which “I hope to use it as the basis for further study abroad” was the choice of most graduates.

It can be taken into account that the impact of the new coronavirus epidemic in the past three years, most of the students who made this intention before choosing a major are 19 students, of course, it is undeniable that the boom of studying abroad in recent years is gradually backdating.

According to the analysis of the degree of help of various specific courses for English majors to life planning and career choice, the cross-disciplinary practice mentioned before is still not obvious. The professional compulsory course with the highest score (7.03 points) has the greatest impact, higher than the professional elective course and other professional minor.

According to the employment situation of English major students, although the degree of confidence of English major students is not high, they are still willing to engage in English-related work. Among them:

1) The average score of the matrix question “How confident you are about the career prospects of English majors” was low (4.38 points), and the highest score (18.75%) was only 3 points;

2) The average score of “Your willingness to engage in English-related work in the future” is 5.66 points, more than the average 5 points, and 25% of the respondents chose 6 points, the highest proportion of the choice.

The short-term planning of the respondents can be regarded as the basic planning direction of English majors. Among them, the four options of “domestic professional postgraduate study”, “study abroad postgraduate study”, and “domestic cross-professional postgraduate study and work” are basically equal to 25% each, of which the proportion of studying abroad is slightly lower (22%), and the balance of working is somewhat higher (28%).

For the topic of “what is real success”, the more important conclusion of practice is reflected. At the same time, the belief that English majors will be a boon to other fields, that English professionals will tend to change directions completely, and that the number of people choosing English majors will decrease have remained relatively stable, which is a realistic and controversial issue. Among them:

1) The highest scores of the two options related to success are 10 points, respectively, “Graduates of this major will face higher requirements, undergraduate graduates will go abroad for further study, doctoral study, with more abundant professional knowledge of English, only to meet the higher requirements of society.” (25%), “Graduates of this major need to apply their professional knowledge into practice and contribute to the society and the country.” (34.38%);

2) The average score of the four options of “How will the success of English majors change with The Times” is the same, and the radar icon is rectangular.

According to the interviews of the two cases, the researchers combined the answers to the corresponding subjective questions in the questionnaire to summarize the relevant understanding of what is the real success for English majors. Among them:

1) Shi and Liu both believe that it is vital to realize their life values and goals, and it is also essential to put what they have learned into practice. Shi gives a lot of examples in this regard: “First do the things you can do well, such as winning the TEM-4 and TEM-8, participating in the English essay contest, joining the school English corner, and if there is an accompanying interpretation program, you can actively participate in it to expand your horizons.”;

2) When Shi talked about success, she regarded the concept’s scope as a broad perspective, that is, different entry points for each individual would lead to other answers. Shi said: “The concept of success is comprehensive, the most important point is to achieve their own life values and goals, really use the study in life and work, to bring value to themselves and the society. Therefore, success can be multifaceted, and English majors have a specific path and multiple paths. A little anxiety is
good, I think, better than wasting time. It can increase your awareness of crisis, encourage you to collect information and adjust your direction in time constantly, but don’t worry too much.”

Liu pays attention to the needs of society, that is, adapting to development is the key to survival. Liu said: “For me, unlike many students who have a clear job search direction at the beginning, I am in the continuous exploration slowly out of a suitable way to get the certificate, the west is not bright, the east is bright, and there will always be a suitable position for their own. It is worth noting that with the increasing demand for new English talents, the employment direction of English majors will continue to broaden, so that the academic degree is not necessarily the only factor in determining the employment direction, the actual determining factors also include personal ability, experience and actual needs.”

Combined with the words mentioned in the questionnaire with high frequency, such as “knowledge reserve”, “actual income”, “personal value”, “social value”, “social contribution”, “adapting to social background”, “comprehensive ability improvement”, “compound talents” and “instrumental”, etc., It can be summarized as the actual determinants of success, including personal ability, experience and actual needs, and other skills needed to apply what you have learned to life and work truly. Bringing value to yourself and the society is the key to success.

5. Conclusions and Discussions

5.1. Conclusions

English major still plays an essential role in today’s society and the development of The Times, but talent training needs to adapt to social development and changes. After summarizing the data analysis results of questionnaires and interviews, this study finds the following main conclusions.

1) Both graduates and current students agree with the goals and values of the English major curriculum. They also have a certain understanding and cognition of the future planning of English majors and how to adapt to the ever-changing society and achieve real success.

2) In terms of the curriculum of existing schools and students’ satisfaction with the courses, although many students do choose this major based on practical factors, their satisfaction is very high through hands-on learning and experience. However, respondents generally reflect that the practicability of literary appreciation courses is not high, and the effect on employment and development is minimal, so it is suggested that it can be modified into elective courses as auxiliary learning.

3) The demand of students lies in practice. Based on the steady development of basic skills courses, there is a demand for increasing practical, interdisciplinary and applied content in the course setting.

4) Respondents generally believe that the development of intelligent technology is a huge stumbling block to reducing English majors. The continuous progress of artificial intelligence in foreign languages is mainly reflected in electronic translation software or real-time translation tools, etc., which can be applied to various occasions and objects, learning and conversation, and even practical functions such as intelligent subtitles.

5) About the understanding of success, every English major investigator has a different experience, finding a foothold and realizing the value of life is not easy. English majors, as a minority group with relatively high employment difficulty, are also included in this group.

5.2. Discussions

Based on the above research conclusions, this paper holds that there are still a lot of efforts to be made in the reform of English major under the current social background and in the development process of The Times.

1) The training goal of English majors should pay more attention to improving students’ comprehensive quality and professional ability.
English majors face many challenges during their college years, including academic pressure, language development, and career planning. However, the course study plays an important role in helping them in their future employment.

First of all, the course study at the university provides English majors with a solid language foundation and professional knowledge. Through systematic learning, they can master English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, and understand the English language’s cultural background and social application. These basic abilities and knowledge are very important for their future careers, whether they are engaged in translation, education, media, and other industries or entering international enterprises, which require good English skills and professional knowledge.

Secondly, the course study during the university develops English majors’ critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In the learning process, they need to carry out literature reading, research writing, academic discussion and other activities, which requires them to analyze, synthesize and innovate. These abilities are essential for their future employment, whether in academia or the real world, and require them to think independently, solve problems, and develop innovative ideas and solutions.

In addition, although college courses greatly help English majors’ career prospects, the professionalism and importance of English majors are declining. Therefore, in terms of talent training, English major education must conform to the social development and practical needs of English majors to a certain extent, and further increase the opportunities for the professional to participate in practice.

2) By implementing interdisciplinary teaching, we can realize the diversified needs of professional ability, divergent thinking and practical ability in personnel training.

This study found that interdisciplinary teaching has a higher advantage. This teaching method is one subject as the center, multiple disciplines will be integrated, cross prevalence, learn to apply, comprehensive design. It is beneficial to expand students’ vision, increase their understanding of knowledge and problem-solving ability, and enhance their core literacy. It can enhance students’ comprehensive ability, reduce the loss of talents, and provide a broader range of employment opportunities and more road choices for talents. Interdisciplinarity can make up for the lack of single English professional skills. It is feasible to combine the study of another major with English subjects and teach according to a reasonable and appropriate knowledge system, which is also generally recognized and supported by respondents and is very necessary.

In addition, English majors have strongly felt the employment pressure brought by the development of intelligent technology. However, as students who have systematically received English major teaching, respondents generally believe that in view of practical problems, the English major cannot exist if it carries out relevant reforms reasonably. As mentioned by the interviewer, the translation of some literary works cannot be realized by computer translation, and the English major will not die out, but it needs to innovate. From another point of view, if interdisciplinary teaching can be practiced, English major will become a new way out.

3) English major students should actively improve their comprehensive quality and professional ability, and realize the personal and social level of “success” as soon as possible.

Success can be seen as a personal and social level, from excellent students with rich knowledge reserves to compound talents with comprehensive solid ability, everyone has their own way and path to realize the value of life and make contributions. But in any case, the positive efforts of individuals are the key to this goal.

First of all, they should focus on cultivating their cross-cultural communication skills and increase their practical and social experience by participating in international exchange programs, internships or volunteer activities. Secondly, they should actively participate in academic research and exchanges to improve their educational level and research ability. In addition, they can also choose to double major, minor in other majors or participate in relevant certificate examinations to enhance their comprehensive competitiveness.
References


