

Research on the Transformation of University English Education Driven by Supply-Side Reform

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Abstract

The supply-side reform of education in China aims to innovate talents training mode and effectively improve the quality of English talents cultivation. This essay takes university English education of Liaoning Province in China as an example to address the urgent demand of English talents. In order to facilitate the supply-side reform and improve the competence of university education in Liaoning Province, the old industrial base in Northeast China, which is on the way of the overall revitalization, the paper analyzes not only the present situation of university English education in Liaoning Province, but also the key issues to be solved. As a discipline in universities, English is re-positioned and the transformation strategy of university English education is proposed as well. University English education in Liaoning Province needs to transform to foster students' comprehensive ability in applying English and enhance the cultivated English talents to keep pace with the regional economic and social progress so as to meet the needs of language service, accelerate the future economic growth in Liaoning Province.

Key words: Supply-Side Reform; University English education in Liaoning Province; Orientation of English discipline; Transformation of University English education ;

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The supply-side reform is like injecting a pool of fresh water into higher education, which will activate the endogenous power of industrial development. Due to the lag of educational output, education has become an important force in the supply side when the demand side of China's national economy is insufficient. "The Outline of the National Medium, Long-Term Educational Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)" was promulgated to propose the training of internationally competitive talents in professional fields, and the reform of English education to "improve university students' professional English level and their ability to conduct scientific research directly in English" (Cai, 2015). "The 13th Five-Year Training Plan of University Talents in Liaoning Province" stressed to speed up the cultivation of creative internationalized talents so as to promote university students well-developed and adapt to the social demand, which is set as the fundamental measure of talents training level. Efforts should be made to train application-oriented, multi-disciplinary and skilled talents with innovative spirit and practical ability (Chang, 2011). Liaoning Province has always been the political, economic and cultural focus in northeast China. With the further expansion of language needs, language service will enter the stage of personalization, customization, specialization and multi-level development. Confronting the educational supply-side reform, constructing the educational system with diversified forms, complementary functions, coordinated development and high quality and high efficiency is an urgent task for the regional economic development in Liaoning Province. English education is not only a cultural activity, but also an intercultural and interregional communication activity.

Liaoning Province, located in the north of China, is a window for northeast China to open to the outside world, and also a channel for resources, industry and agricultural products in northeast China. As an old industrial base of China's earliest heavy industry, Liaoning Province,

abundant in relatively complete industrial system and extensive economic ties, also constitutes an important basis in regional economic cooperation at home and abroad. University English education in Liaoning Province should focus on the opening to the outside world's overall strategy. Based on the actual situation of foreign economic and cultural exchanges in our province and oriented by the needs of social development, a new type of English talents training mode with prominent professional features and strong practical communication ability needs to be formed.

Moreover, the exchanges and cooperation between the universities in Liaoning Province and foreign universities have presented new features of all-round direction, wide field and high level. Some universities in Liaoning Province like Northeastern University, Northeastern University of Finance and Economics, Dalian University of Technology, Liaoning University and Dalian Maritime University have established close exchanges and cooperation with foreign educational institutions. With the gradual increasing development of higher educational internationalization, the comprehensive revitalization of Liaoning old industrial bases, and the strategic supply-side reform, the transformation of university English education will strongly improve the quality of talents cultivation, promote more universities in Liaoning Province to cooperate and exchange internationally, provide talents support for constructing Liaoning industrial cluster. It is of great significance to strengthen the economic cooperation

between our province and northeast Asia and enhance the development of Liaoning regional economy.

1. CURRENT SITUATION OF UNIVERSITY ENGLISH EDUCATION IN LIAONING PROVINCE

In the context of economic globalization, people's ability to communicate with foreign countries has been mentioned as a new strategic position. People have a stronger demand for language services and begin to pay attention to the improvement of their ability to communicate in foreign languages. In recent years the expansion of university English education has been increasing rapidly, and a great number of students have entered universities. English education, as a very important part of higher education, has also attracted the attention of the academic community. Although the National Ministry of Educational has established English teaching standards, and made clear that English education is to cultivate students' English comprehensive application ability. Relatively speaking, university English education in our province is still weak in cultivating students' cross-cultural awareness and pragmatic competence, students are in short of applied English talent, and unable to meet the demand of current society and the strategic needs of the supply-side reform in Liaoning Province. As shown in the figure below:

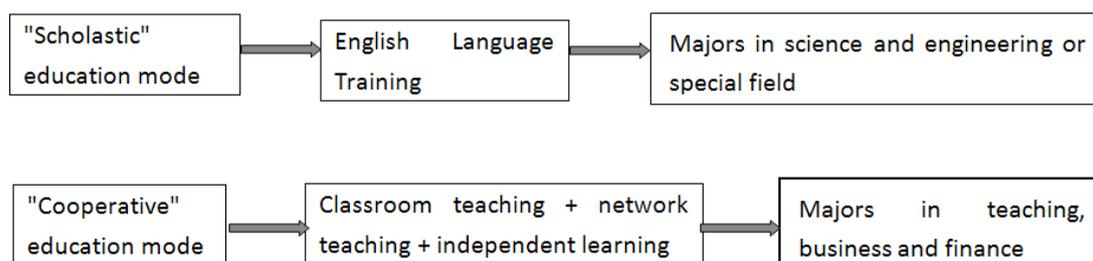


Figure 1
University English Education Mode in Liaoning Province

The figure above shows that the current university English education in Liaoning Province still prefers the exam-oriented education embodying language interpretation, language testing phase, ignoring the students ability of language understanding, language expression ability and language service. At present the curriculum models adopted in each university of our province is either "scholastic" or "cooperative". On the completion of two-year basic English education by using the unified teaching materials, class hours and teaching mode, students will opt their favorite majors out of their individual interests. The ultimate goal of English major education and non-English major education aim to promote students passing CET--4, CET--8 and CET--4, CET--6 respectively (Cui, 2013). Namely, passing English

tests still has a great influence on students. Obviously, university English education in Liaoning province lacks the educational practice related to the cultivation of employment ability, comprehensive application ability and innovation ability. We can see from the figure above that both the scholastic mode and the cooperative mode has been unable to adapt to the needs of social and economic development in our province. It is necessary to endow English talents cultivation with new connotation.

In view of the new opportunities and new demand brought from the supply-side reform, Liaoning regional economic development is in urgent need of transforming university English educational system to provide targeted language services for the educational supply-side reform in Liaoning Province. In multicultural mutual penetration

of modern society, it is necessary to reform university English educational system so as to promote the development of university English education effectively, to accelerate the process of enhancing regional economy in Liaoning Province .Consequently, the transformation research on university English education is the trend of educational internalization in Liaoning Province. Either the empirical research or the theoretical construction in universities of our province has a large space for supplement and development. Only by deepening the supply-side structural reform of education can the educational developmental potential be transformed into the driving force for promoting economic restructuring and upgrading, and bring new growth points for Liaoning economy under the new normal.

2. THE DISCIPLINE ORIENTATION OF UNIVERSITY ENGLISH EDUCATION

Nowadays almost all of the applied university courses emphasize practice, Only university English education can hardly meet this requirement, this makes the exam-oriented nature of English education in universities further legalized. We acknowledge that it is difficult to implement university English education into practice. But it is not totally out of the question. The key point is whether there is such a requirement and effort. If there is no such a request, it is the default that the course is taught

to meet the exam (Sun, 2009). As a matter of fact, it is well known that better English teaching effect origins from great efforts made to realize the principle of putting learning into practice. For many years, the direction of university English teaching in China has always been a fundamental. “The Requirements of University English Courses” in 2004 still requires university English courses to “try to ensure that they account for as much as 10 percent of total undergraduate credit “(Kang, 2013). This guiding ideology leads to the university English education lost in the circle of learning English for learning English, both the form and the content of university English level test is the product of the guiding ideology. Only in communication can language have life and development. The positioning of university English education in basic language teaching will inevitably result in the poor quality of education, which will eventually fall into the prison of exam-oriented education.

According to the survey results of some employers in our province, the majority of enterprises need the persons who can do relevant work in English. Nevertheless, the EGP talents cultivated by universities are of poorer applicable competence. Compared with the oversupply of EGP talents, ESP talents are in great demand, but in short supply. The supply and demand analysis of ESP and EGP in the figure below helps us to analyze and understand the content trend of university English education from the perspective of economic significance.

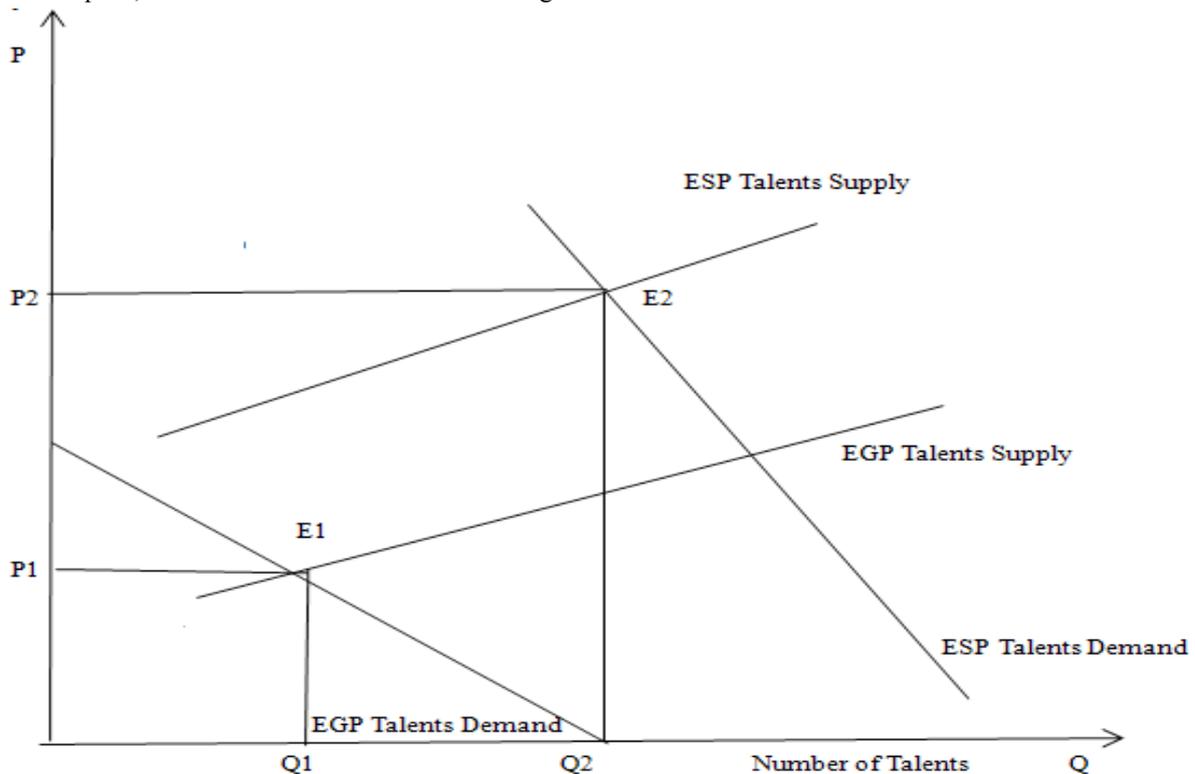


Figure 2
SP/EGP Supply and Demand Analysis

It can be seen that the marginal returns and utility of students' investment in ESP (according to the law of diminishing marginal returns) are greater than that of EGP. That is to say, the students with professional or vocational English will find an ideal job and obtain the higher incomes, the students with English advantage will skillfully use English at work and gain more economic benefits (Zhou, 2012). This shows that the development of economic globalization and the internationalization of higher education made English, as a tool of international, cultural communication, increasingly prominent, and highlighted the high social and economic value of education, which is of great significance to promoting Liaoning's foreign trade and economic development and promoting sustainable economic growth. According to the theory of language application economics, university English education in our province needs to be transformed and repositioned on language service so that English education can obtain as much output as possible under certain input conditions, improve the efficiency and effect of English education, and better serve the economic and social development of our province.

3. URGENT ISSUES TO BE SOLVED

The development of any industry is determined by the market, which often depends on the demand of

consumers. There is no exception for educational industry. The traditional language-centered English teaching mode has been unable to meet the needs of the economic and social development, both the score and the rate are no longer the only criteria for the quality of university English education, students suitability of the future work or posts will be the evaluation standard for the educational quality. The overall level of university English educational reform in Liaoning Province is uneven, the problem of "waste time and inefficiency" is still widespread, and the ability of suppliers is still seriously lacking. The English talents cultivated in universities are not enough to meet the demands of posts and society.

According to a survey to Beijing foreign-related hotels, interns from the universities in Liaoning Province reflect hotel English helps to improve the hotel service quality and enhance the hotel brand image so as to attract more guests. Students, however, suffer from their limited English language and inadequate competence to communicate in English with foreign guests about related hotel professional knowledge (such as cuisine features, cooking methods, equipment debugging, hotel regulations, etc.), which usually leads to guests dissatisfaction. In the 120 collected valid questionnaires, the intern's English competence is displayed:

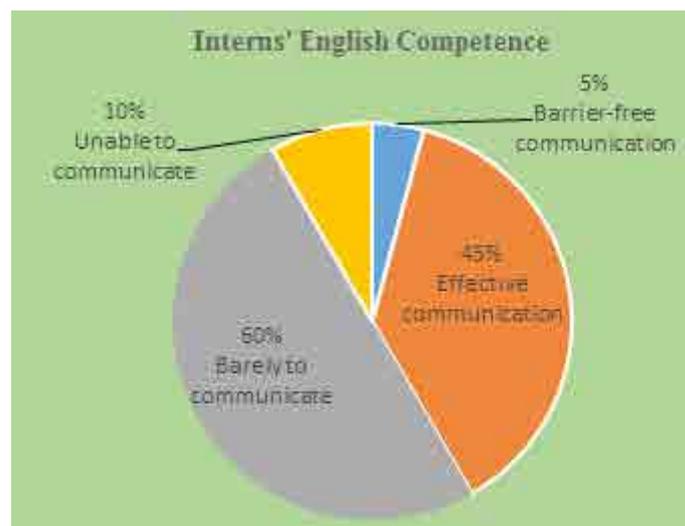


Figure 3
Interns' English Competence

It is really disappointed that most of the interns in hotels have difficulty in communicating in English. It is high time for university English education to convert a simple language tool into a service tool and a communicative tool that carries cultural transmission, to change from knowledge-centered teaching to the ability-cultivated language service. University English education should be in line with the epoch and reflect the latest requirements of the industry. What's important, university

English education needs to analyze the English demand, the English usage and the status of English training in relevant industries so as to establish a market-oriented training mechanism for English talents cultivation by integrating industry with education.

The markets demand for high-quality applied talents poses an unprecedented challenge to university English education. To the universities in Liaoning Province, the supply-side educational reform and the regional economic

development in Liaoning have made the transformation of university English education an indispensable and important basic guarantee and pilot project to study. In this situation, university English education must constantly innovate to adapt to the market demand and the basic requirements of cross-cultural communication, it is not only an urgent need of social development in

our province, but also the development trend of future education. The transformation from language education to language service, exploring the connotation of language and culture, and improving the quality of language service are the needs of the development of university English education in Liaoning Province.

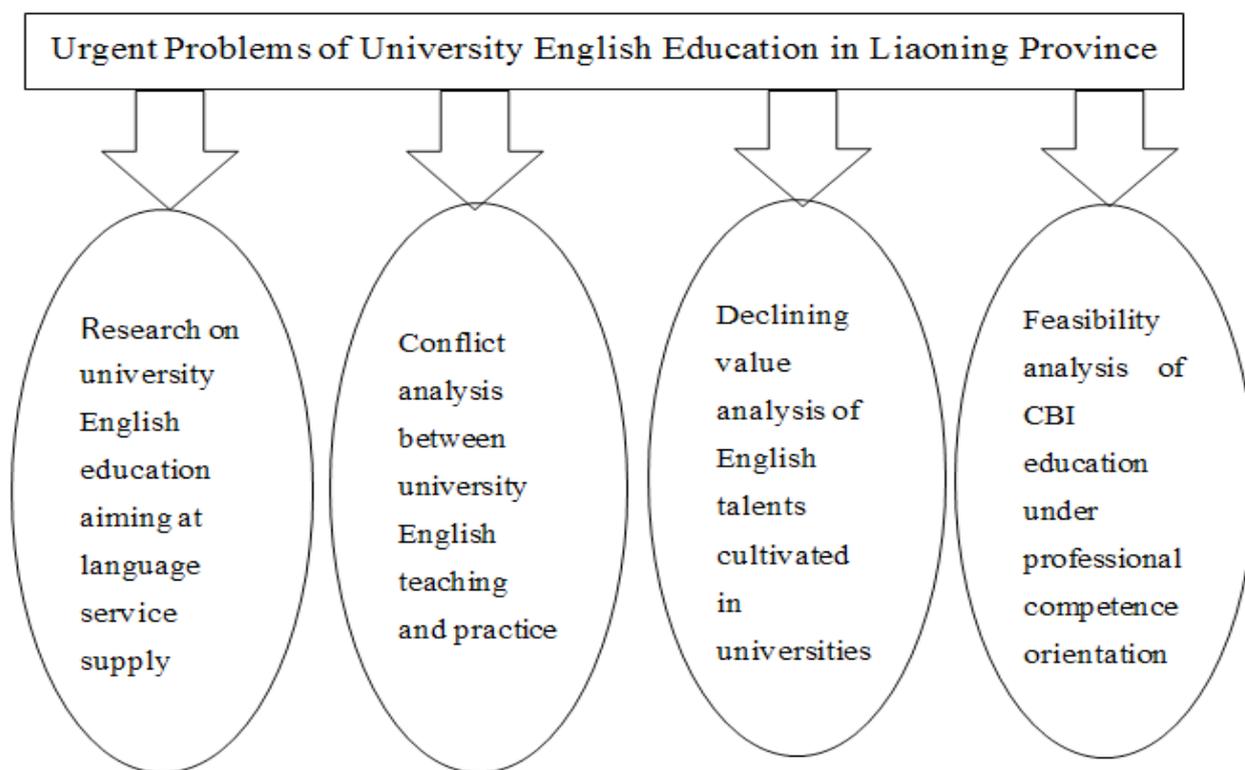


Figure 4
Urgent Problems of University English Education in Liaoning Province

4. STRATEGIES FOR UNIVERSITY ENGLISH EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION IN LIAONING PROVINCE

For many years, university English education ignores the demands of the national foreign language ability, neither the use goal of learning English has been proposed, nor the language requirement of cultivating students to learn the major in English is raised. In order to improve the efficiency of university English teaching and meet the needs of national foreign language ability, university English education should have new teaching orientation and language requirements. It is clear that the transformation of university English education is a complex system project. It is necessary to face such a problem in the process of transformation. For a long time, the thought of ignoring the cultivation of application-

oriented talents has become a major obstacle in the transformation of university English education, in which we need to break the shackles of the mind, change the personnel training mode, to meet the needs of specific industrial needs and regional economic development in our province. The higher education department of the ministry of education proposed: "As the society's demand for foreign language talents has become diversified, the former type of single foreign language major and basic skills cannot meet the needs of the market economy" (Shi, 2015). In the modern popularization era of higher education, university English education in Liaoning Province should meet the employment needs of university students on the basis of cultivating their language ability. Therefore, the talents cultivation mode of university English education must transform from the scholastic mode and cooperative mode into that of wide caliber and compound talents training. That is to say, what is needed and scarce in the society is the interdisciplinary talents

who combine foreign languages with other disciplines, such as English +accounting, English +finance, English +chemical industry, English +medicine and other interdisciplinary talent, it puts forward new requirements of university English education.

4.1 To Construct a Multi-Dimensional Curriculum System Dedicated to the Cultivation of Critical Thinking Ability

In recent years, the cultivation of critical thinking skills has attracted more and more attention from scholars at home and abroad. Professor Wen Qiufang suggested that the reform of English curriculum setting could be discussed from the perspective of cultivating students' ability of thinking and reasoning (Wen, 2012). British scholar Kastin emphasized that integrated interdisciplinary courses can promote the development of students' speculative ability. Based on his survey, university English courses which occupy the most teaching hours and the longest duration should try best to cultivate the students' critical thinking ability to fulfill their responsibility; it is better to be interdisciplinary, culturally compatible, internally and externally integrated and humanized (Liu, 2010).

University English education is positive to cultivate students' speculative ability where the course setting, teaching method and teaching mode all influence the students' ability of thinking. The latest "The Requirements of University English Courses" issued by the Ministry of Education in China stipulated that universities should combine multi-dimensional knowledge(such as comprehensive English, language skills, language application, language culture and professional English), and optimize and build a multi-dimensional curriculum system (Liu, 2015).

4.2 To Establish a Diversified Platform for English Practical Ability Training

In the current situation of revitalizing Liaoning old industrial base, university English education in our province need to stay out of the classroom teaching and get involved into social practice to integrate language study with the continuous requirement of the social economic development. Moreover, university English talents cultivation should unify and coordinate the talents training mode of relevant majors, and to build a social practice course and social practice base for university English education, so as to provide a good platform for English practice. The practice of English courses can be in the relevant enterprises, institutions, and related professional projects in the universities. University English education should be inside and outside class, on-campus or off-campus practice to make the students in the context of real English pragmatic competence. In a word, English teachers should guide students to develop

professionally and increase the content of practical teaching, and university English education needs to step into the society, practice and application.

4.3 To Cultivate Professional Communicative Competence

The purpose of university English education is to meet the needs of social professionals and improve students' English communication skills. Language communication should be meaningful, informative and purposeful. Effective professional communication not only requires students to master language skills, but also related professional communication skills. With the rapid increase of the demand for interdisciplinary talents in the society, the cultivation of English talents in universities must focus on their majors and give consideration to their professional knowledge and language acquisition. The content is related to specific majors and occupations; Specific learners need to be satisfied in terms of knowledge requirements; Words and phrases need to be used in the language application of professional activities (Zhang, 2016). This requires teachers to strive to use authentic materials close to the students' majors in the material selection and the content acquisition, also pay attention to the fun and the correlation of the input material. The degree of difficulty should be close to the real level of the learner and the learning task of the target working scene.

4.4 To Serve the Humanistic Needs of Career Development

University English education urgently needs to combine students' English learning practice, further divide language ability into the understanding ability, language expression ability and language service ability. A unified standard of university English comprehensive ability should be developed. In modern society, The economic value of language service is further demonstrated by the differences and attention of language service providers in investment and the willingness of language service consumers to consume language service (Wang, 2015). As a result, university English education should not only closely combine with professional characteristics to improve students' basic humanistic quality, but also serve students' future career development. In order to cultivate high-quality English talents, we need to combine English talents training with university students' career planning on the basis of fully investigating and understanding the professional needs and practical job skills requirements. In short, university English education should not only help students understand the industrial forefront research, and master the industry related English pragmatic ability, but also cultivate the "applicable language service talents" needed by enterprises.

SUMMARY

Facing the problems and the new challenges in university English education in Liaoning province, continuous exploration and innovation need to be made to create the theory and mode of university English educational practice. Only in this way can we achieve the goal of comprehensively improving university English education and university students' comprehensive ability of English application. In the context of economic globalization, the universal application of university English education in foreign economic and cultural activities will also enhance Liaoning's international influence and promote the extensive development of foreign economic and cultural tourism activities. The universities in Liaoning Province should, therefore, seize the opportunity for the development strategy of opening to the outside world. Guided by the development and market demand, university English education in Liaoning Province should focus on the foreign trade and economic and cultural exchanges, work closely with local governments and enterprises, rely on each other, form interaction, make joint efforts to train new English talents, and contribute to the building of a prosperous, civilized and happy new Liaoning.

It needs to be explained that the development of college English proficiency standards in China mainly comes from corpus, expert experience and practitioners' cognition, and there is a lack of practice standards from the industry. As we know, the orientation of universities is to cultivate students' applied and skilled talents, but the objective reality is that not every graduate is satisfactory after their first arrival in the society. University English education should be based on service employment and industry standards. To cope with the complex and changeable competitive environment, university English education should establish correct guidance, perfect the teaching means and teaching methods, make full use of modern teaching methods and advanced teaching equipment. This can not only enhance the teaching effect, but also improve students' cognition of the latest technology and development trend in the professional field. When students study in the university, the university should pay more attention to practice teaching English rather than focusing on the paper examination, which will negatively cause students to be stressful, and makes them loss of confidence in learning English. Student's ability of English language service is often hidden, perhaps there is no effect within a month or even several months of practice, but the students' practical ability of English language application is being improved slowly.

In addition, university English education is increasingly valued by employers. University English education is not only beneficial to students to master professional knowledge, to have certain language ability, also helpful to students to improve their professional quality and grade. It enables university students to engage in foreign affairs activities, promotes foreign exchanges,

and facilitates the diversification of market development. It is conducive to introducing foreign capital and learning advanced foreign management and technology. Therefore, university English education in Liaoning Province should serve the development of Liaoning regional economy as the aim, perform universities' function of social service, and improve the soft power of international cooperation and competition in Liaoning Province. In the rapid development era of the service economy, the transformation of university English education in Liaoning Province will play a guiding role in the development of university's language education and regional economy, and promote cross-cultural communication among people from different regions.

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