

On the Influencing Factors of English Majors' Participation in the "Excellent Teacher Program"

Jia Hongjun, Cheng Sisi, Wu Yuxin, Zheng Qiuyue, Dong Zhihao
College of Foreign Studies, Hubei Normal University, China

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ABSTRACT

About 10,000 normal college students will receive targeted training annually from 2021 in a bid to improve the performance of primary and middle school teachers in underdeveloped areas in China's central and western regions, according to a recent plan. The special training will be conducted by normal universities directly under the Ministry of Education (MOE). As the first batch of local normal universities to participate in the "Excellent Teacher Training Plan", Hubei Normal University has undertaken the teacher training work, including English majors. The effectiveness of the scheme will be directly affected by whether the scheme is implemented or not. Therefore, by means of questionnaires and interviews, this study investigated the influencing factors of English majors' joining of the plan and their willingness to return home upon graduation in Hubei Normal University. Through an analysis of teaching willingness, policy awareness, professional environment, and professional identity, this study attempts to find out the reasons for the differences and proposes corresponding strategies.

Key Words: Excellent Teacher Training Plan; English Major; Influencing Factors

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The prosperity of the country is inseparable from the development of high-quality education. In the past 70 years, China's education has gradually established a complete education system. However, there are still shortcomings in some aspects, including the uneven allocation of educational resources among regions. In order to solve this problem, China has successively introduced policies to support education in backward areas in the central and western regions such as "government-paid teaching students" and "Excellent Teacher Training Plan". Whether it is "government-paid teaching students" or "Excellent Teacher Training Plan", they have attracted countless students to apply for the program, and the reasons behind them are worth exploring.

Government-paid teaching students share some similarities with the "Excellent Teacher Training Plan": both of them need to work on teach for at least six years after graduation in the targeted places, and the goal is to cultivate qualified teachers, However, there are still some differences between the two policies. The policy of government-paid teaching students implemented since 2007 (Shi, 2018) refers to students who apply for one of the six normal universities directly under the Ministry of Education (Beijing Normal University, East China Normal University, Northeast Normal University, Central China Normal University, Shanxi Normal University, Southwest University), or locally designated normal colleges, and receive free teacher education under conditions. The purpose of government-paid teaching students is to attract outstanding talents to teach and train a group of excellent education experts for the country. In addition, government-paid teaching students have the qualification of exemption from examination for postgraduate studies, that is, government-paid teaching graduates who meet the requirements can be admitted as master's degree students in education, and may study professional courses on the job, pass the teaching assessment

and complete the thesis defense, and will be issued a master's degree certificate of education. This is undoubtedly very helpful for cultivating a well-rounded and excellent teacher. However, even under preferential policies (Ministry of Education, 2018) such as tuition-free accommodation, subsidized living expenses and exam-free postgraduate studies, some graduates have not fulfilled their contracts over the years. According to the survey and statistics (Li, 2022), in 2017, China has enrolled a total of 101,000 publicly-funded normal students, and upon graduation, 90% of them teach in primary and secondary schools. It seems that the policy is implemented well. However, further investigation showed that 51.8% of these government-paid teaching students stayed in provincial capitals and prefecture-level cities to work, while only 4.1 per cent went to rural areas or townships, and the rest worked in county-level schools. In other words, although the vast majority of government-paid teaching students have returned to work in the provinces, cities and regions limited by the agreement, most of them have decided to work in primary and secondary schools at the county level and above, which has not really played a role in balancing the gap in educational resources between urban and rural areas. It can be seen that regional differences are also an influencing factor for students to choose the path of government-paid teaching students, and also for their employment intentions after graduation.

In view of the above situation, this study takes the "Excellent Teacher Training Plan" introduced and implemented in 2021 as an example to investigate the influencing factors of the signing of students of the "Excellent Teacher Training Plan" in local colleges and universities and their willingness to return to their hometowns. The difference between the "Excellent Teacher Training Plan" and "government-paid teaching students" is that the students in this programme will be offered jobs in schools in their hometown and issued teacher qualification certificates upon graduation without taking the national teacher qualification examination, but there is no exemption from the provision of probationary postgraduate studies. On the other hand, the "Excellent Teacher Training Plan" is aimed at rural revitalization through education to provide excellent educational talents for underdeveloped areas in the central and western regions of China (Long, 2022). Therefore, the students of the "Excellent Teacher Training Plan" are to work in their hometown after graduation. Based on the above situation, the "Excellent Teacher Training Plan" has certain requirements for whether students are willing to return to their hometowns.

Therefore, this study takes the first batch of students of "Excellent Teacher Training Plan" in Hubei Normal University as examples, and analyzes their reasons for joining the programme and whether they are willing to return to their hometowns and engage in education through their investigation, so as to understand the current situation of the implementation of the "Excellent Teacher Training Plan", which can provide certain feasible suggestions, minimize the occurrence of future contract breaks, and promote the "Excellent Teacher Training Plan" to a certain extent.

RESEARCH OBJECTS AND METHODS

This study is designed to investigate the English majors under the "Excellent Teacher Training Plan" in the College of Foreign Studies, Hubei Normal University with the method of questionnaire and interview. The subjects are English majors of grade 2021 and 2022.

The questionnaire was compiled on the online platform and distributed through email for investigation. A total of 50 valid questionnaires were collected. Among the subjects, there are 9 boys and 41 girls, 10 students from cities, 20 students from counties and towns, and 20 students from rural areas. In addition, there are 10 students with an annual household income of less than 100, 000 RMB (? 100, 000 RMB), 24 students between 150, 000 RMB and 200, 000 RMB (>150, 000 RMB and ? 200, 000 RMB), and 16 students above 200, 000 RMB (>200, 000 RMB).

This survey refers to the questionnaire of Zhou (2018) on the study of free normal students' willingness to

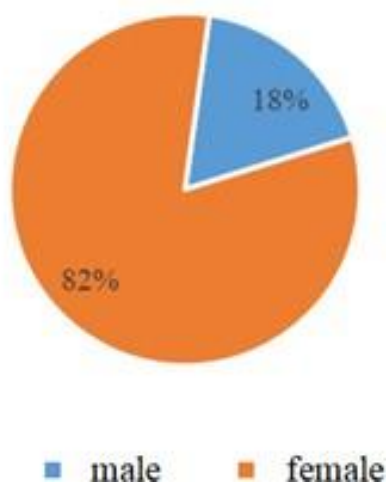
teach and its factors. We selected part of the items to investigate them from four aspects: teaching willingness, policy cognition, professional environment and professional identity. Through face-to-face interviews, a total of 6 videos and 2 audio recordings were collected, each lasting from 30 seconds to 2 minutes, the main contents of the interview are as follows: why did you choose the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan”? How did you learn about this policy? How do you feel about serving six years? Do you prefer to teach in cities or rural areas after graduation? Will you continue to teach after your contract expires? Have you ever regretted choosing the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan”?

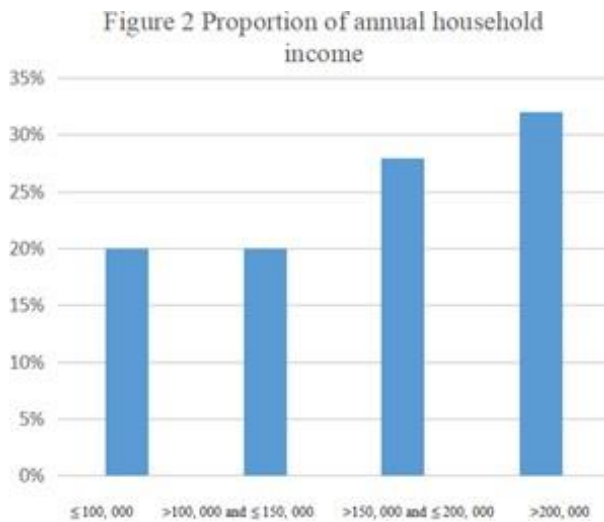
Finally, according to the training plan of English majors in the College of Foreign Languages, we analyzed the findings and made recommendations accordingly.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Analyzing Differences from Gender and Family Conditions This study conducted a questionnaire survey combining the factors of gender and family image of normal school students from four aspects: teaching willingness, policy cognition, occupational environment, and professional identity, and the following results were obtained. From Figure 1, it can be seen that among the English teacher training students surveyed in the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan”, the number of valid copies filled out by male students is relatively small, accounting for only 18%, while the number of valid copies filled out by female students is 82%. Girls are expected to have a stable job from an early age, while to be a teacher provides women with a long-term and stable work environment so that they can better take care of their own families. Therefore, the majority of students who choose the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan” are female students, and the same is true for the vast majority of liberal arts majors or language majors. As can be seen from Figure 2, 68% of the normal university students who choose the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan” have an annual household income of less than 200, 000RMB, and most of them belong to the low-income class. According to the information obtained during the interview, we can know that most of the parents of these students are working outside, without stable income source. Choosing the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan” can reduce the financial burden on the family. After graduation, their work is close to home, and their willingness to return is also relatively strong. They want to stay in their hometown, because living in a large city is very stressful. Moreover, having grown up in towns or villages, they are better able to participate in the construction of their hometowns.

Figure 1 Gender Ratio





After that, with the help of SPSS, this study also conducted a more comprehensive differential analysis and statistics. From Table 1, it can be seen that the differences, between men and women in teaching willingness, policy cognition, professional environment, are not significant, but there are big differences in professional identity. In terms of teaching willingness and professional environment, boys have higher values than girls. This indicates that a large proportion of boys who choose the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan” are willing to engage in the teaching profession and are willing to serve as teachers for a long time. Most of them consider this plan out of their love for education. But it doesn’t mean that girls don’t love this job. The vast majority of girls choose it because they love it, and a small number of them choose it for other reasons. While boys are much less likely to choose this major, which can be seen from Figure 1. At the same time, boys’ requirements for this professional environment are also relatively high. On the contrary, in terms of policy awareness and professional identity, girls have higher values than boys. It can be seen that when choosing the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan”, girls have a relatively higher understanding of this policy and profession than boys, and girls are more meticulous. From Table 2, it can be seen that household annual income varies in these four aspects. Among them, in the professional environment, compared with other families with an annual income, the value of households with an annual income of less than 100, 000 is much larger. For these students, influenced by family conditions, they prefer to have a stable job and income source. They choose the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan” to better save family expenses and reduce the burden on their families. And at the same time? they have more requirements for job treatment when considering.

Table 1 Gender Differences in Four Dimensions of English Normal Students

	Gender	Average Value	Standard Deviation	P
Teaching willingness	Male	0.52	0.23	0.486
	Female	0.46	0.22	
Policy Cognition	Male	0.72	0.20	0.055
	Female	0.87	0.22	
occupational environment	Male	0.61	0.21	0.382
	Female	0.54	0.23	
professional identity	Male	0.84	0.22	0.318
	Female	0.92	0.27	

Table 2 Differences in Annual Household Income of English Majors in Normal Universities from Four Dimensions

	Annual household income	Average Value	Standard Deviation	P
Teaching willingness	Up to 100, 000 RMB	.48	.23	0.418
	100, 000 to 150, 000 RMB	.44	.22	
	150, 000 to 200, 000 RMB	.59	.24	
	Above 200, 000 RMB	.50	.23	
Policy Cognition	Up to 100, 000 RMB	.77	.21	0.556
	100, 000 to 150, 000 RMB	.70	.22	
	150, 000 to 200, 000 RMB	.81	.18	
	Above 200, 000 RMB	.72	.23	
occupational environment	Up to 100, 000 RMB	.70	.15	0.347
	100, 000 to 150, 000 RMB	.55	.24	
	150, 000 to 200, 000 RMB	.58	.16	
	Above 200, 000 RMB	.56	.26	
professional identity	Up to 100, 000 RMB	.84	.24	0.987
	100, 000 to 150, 000 RMB	.86	.16	
	150, 000 to 200, 000 RMB	.84	.19	
	Above 200, 000 RMB	.87	.29	

(II) Analysis of English Majors’ Teaching Willingness

According to Table 3, it can be seen that there are many reasons why English normal students initially chose to apply for the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan”. There are two main reasons for the high average value: one is that the teaching profession is relatively stable and the welfare is good; the other is that the government arranges work and the employment is guaranteed. These two points are also an important reference for students to choose majors now. Besides, there are various welfare guarantees, such as the insurance fund for pension and house purchase. It is a stable and well-paid job. As can be seen in Table 4, the second is the advice from family, teachers, and friends, which is also a key factor for students when choosing their major.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of English Normal Teachers’ Willingness to Teach

Items	Average Value	Standard Deviation	P
27. Reason: Love for the teaching profession and desire to be a teacher in the future	0.42	0.499	0.249
28. Reason: Aspiring to change the backward state of education in the hometown	0.44	0.501	0.251
29. Reason: The teaching profession is stable and has good benefits	0.82	0.388	0.151
30. Reason: The teaching profession is respected by society	0.44	0.501	0.251
31. Reason: The state arranges the work, the employment is guaranteed.	0.68	0.471	0.222
32. Reason: Reduce the financial burden on the family	0.52	0.505	0.255
33. Reason: Advice from family, teachers and friends	0.62	0.490	0.240
34. Reason: Early admission to ensure college admission	0.12	0.328	0.108

(III) Analysis of English Majors' Policy Cognition

According to Table 4, whether male or female, their initial understanding of the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan” policy is basically through the introduction of school teachers or the recruitment work of universities. At the same time, combined with interviews, it can be seen that this policy is relatively unfamiliar to the first semester students at the beginning. After the policy was introduced, the school carried out publicity, and students had a preliminary understanding of this policy. Subsequently, corresponding universities such as Hubei Normal University conducted signing activities, so that students who choose this major have a better understanding of it.

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics of Policy Cognition of English Majors

Items	Female	Male	Headcount
A. Understanding channels: media publicity such as TV and internet	12	3	15
B. Understanding channels: college enrollment work	21	7	28
C. Understanding channels: Introduction to school teachers	29	7	36
D. Understanding channels: information exchange between classmates	8	6	14
F. Understanding channels: introduction of family members and relatives	19	4	23

(VI) Analysis of English Majors' Vocational Environment

From Table 5, it can be seen that the most important factors that English normal school students are concerned about the working environment after returning to their hometown in the future are personal future development and teacher benefits, which can be seen in both the total number of people in this option and the number of men and women who choose to work separately. It is in the policy of the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan” that normal university students will teach for no less than six years in primary and middle schools in the county and urban areas where the agreement is signed after graduation. However, there is no mandatory requirement to work there after the next six years, which makes most normal university students uncertain about their future development. It can be seen that the key to retaining these teachers for the central and western regions is the aspects they care about, such as personal development, teachers' remuneration, living conditions, etc, which play a significant role in the willingness of English normal students to return home and long-term teaching.

Table 5 Descriptive Statistics of Vocational Environment for English Normal Students

Items	Female	Male	Headcount
A. Concern factor: personal future development	33	8	41
B. Concern factor: marital issues	13	4	17
C. Concerned factor: teacher benefits	37	8	45
D. Concerned factors: living conditions	34	5	39
F. Concerned factors: teaching conditions	32	3	35
G. Concerned factors: others [salary and treatment]	0	1	1

Inspiration and Suggestions

Both national teacher training students and provincial teacher training students are paid for by the state. On the one hand, it provides quality teacher education for students from less developed areas, and on the other hand, it implements corresponding measures to encourage graduates to feed their hometown education, thus alleviating the problem of uneven distribution of educational resources. The difference is that the provincial teacher training students make up for the fact that the deployment of teacher training students benefits the

central and western regions but hardly benefits the rural areas, and this difference inevitably causes operational differences in the implementation of the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan”. Through the analysis of the survey results, it is found that the contracting of the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan” is affected by various factors such as gender, family conditions, personal career expectations, the general social environment, and the treatment of the teaching profession, etc. Very few students are not very willing to return to rural teaching positions, but the willingness to return to work in designated areas is generally positive among the teacher-training students. In the following, this study will discuss four stages, including selection and admission, school training, start-teaching, and post-career development.

Selection and Admission

At present, the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan” has been carried out for the second session, but there are many people who know little about the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan”. In order to select more high-quality students, it is necessary to increase publicity for schools and society, and select students who are willing to return to poverty alleviation counties and townships in the central and western regions to work as teachers for a long time; students who are interested in building a socialist modern education power and contributing to the revitalization of rural education. In addition, according to the survey, most of the students of the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan” mainly come from rural families. In addition, according to the survey, most of the students of the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan” are mainly from rural families. On the other hand, most of the children from rural families, due to the limitations of education and environment, do not consider to take risks, but prefer to choose a stable and long-term career and stay in the county. Therefore, in terms of early policy publicity and student selection, we should pay more attention to rural areas, so that more rural students can understand and participate the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan”, so as to adopt the strategy of going out, inviting in to cultivate a group of excellent teachers who can step into grassroots level, stay at the grassroots level and do well in the rural areas.

School Training

Without successful normal education, there will be no source of teachers (Deng, 1994). It is necessary to choose a high-quality professional teacher team to cultivate the professional basic knowledge, teacher skills, comprehensive quality ability and other aspects of the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan” normal students. Innovate and reform the teacher training model, set up a series of special courses for normal school students in the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan”, strengthen the practical training of the teacher profession, provide more internship opportunities to observe the lectures of famous teachers, lead the learning of excellent educators’ important expositions on education, help establish good teacher ethics, and improve the awareness of long-term and lifelong teaching. Innovate and reform the teacher training model, open a series of characteristic courses for “Excellent Teacher Training Plan” normal school students, strengthen practical training of the teacher profession, provide more internship opportunities to observe and observe the lectures of famous teachers, lead the learning of important discussions on education by excellent educators, help establish good teacher ethics, and improve the awareness of long-term and lifelong teaching. So as to lay the foundation for cultivating a large number of excellent primary and secondary school teachers.

Start-Teaching

Job Implementation

Education departments should build a precise docking platform for employers and graduates of the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan”, which not only highlights humanization, but also takes into account the needs of real education positions. Education departments at all levels should conscientiously carry out the requirements of the State Council and the relevant departments of the Central Government, and implement the exemplary measures of free education for teacher-training students, collaborate with relevant departments under the coordination of municipal Party committees and governments, and arrange the jobs for graduates of the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan”, reflecting the policy orientation of encouraging

excellent students to study teacher training, excellent talents to become teachers, and aspiring young people to pursue long-term teaching, showing college students and the public that the state attaches great importance to the graduates of the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan” and proving the feasibility and correctness of choosing the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan” to college students with practical actions.

Favorable Treatment

Most of the students choose to become teacher trainees in the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan” because of their personal interests, so in order to attract more people to join the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan”, it is essential to provide them with favorable treatment. We should improve the training program, establish the incentive mechanism for more rewarding work, create conditions and build a platform for the improvement of their professional ability.

Social Identity

In the general social environment, men bear more economic pressure, and the teaching force, although stable, is not paid at a high enough level to attract male input; while women, traditionally, pay more to their families and have a relatively low pursuit of their careers. For the difference in the number of male and female teachers, some regions choose to reduce the requirements for male teachers to enter the profession, which is obviously unfair to those who pay the same effort, is also not responsible for the students and parents, and does not solve the fundamental problem. Fundamentally, we should reduce gender bias against the teaching profession, improve the public image and social status of teachers, form a strong atmosphere of respect for teachers, make education the most respected career in society, enhance public recognition in the teaching profession, and encourage more talented young people to be educators for life.

Post- Career Development

Regarding the development of teacher trainees after six years of teaching under the “Excellent Teacher Training Plan”, it is necessary to further improve the relevant policies, and commend the teachers who have worked hard and achieved great teaching results during these six years. For those who still choose to stay in rural education positions, we ought to create greater development space for them on the road to education, so as to attract outstanding educational talents to long-term education. While as for the people who choose to leave education positions, we should also respect, and pay attention to their later career development.

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