






# Pre-service Teachers' Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) on EFL Learning: Evaluating the Economic Factors in the Chinese Context

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## Abstract

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the transformation of Chinese education going to market has reinforced alongside the deepening marketization process in China since the 1970s. To date, the Chinese have widely accepted English education's marketization. Many Chinese parents register for English classes in private training institutes for their children having a more intense immersion in the English environment and a better performance in school tests. However, the "Double Reduction Policy" implemented in 2021 considerably constrain the development of private. The English students and Preservice English Teachers (PST) have faced unprecedented challenges in the job market. Chinese educational institutes escalate the demands for Chinese ELT pre-service teachers (PSTs) when evaluating their eligibility in interviews. The ELT PSTs cannot proficiently speak English, therefore, are considered inferior in employability. This study utilizes 27 Pre-service Teachers' Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) survey statements investigating Chinese PSTs' relevant beliefs. Through examining the participating PSTs' enrolled program and analyzing the information collected from the group interview with the PSTs, the study explored how the PSTs' beliefs are related to the demand of the Chinese human resource market. Two concepts, "Material-centered Curriculum" and "Spirit-centered Curriculum," are raised in this study. Suggestions and implications about how to adjust the curricula for the Chinese ELT PST program are discussed.

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**Keywords:** English Language Education, PST program, BALLI, English speaking proficiency, Chinese context, employability

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## Introduction

English education in China was developed in the Chinese feudal society hundreds of years ago. The first documented prosperity China experienced in foreign language learning began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when foreign language learning prevailed in missionary schools and Christian colleges in China (Bolton, 2002). The second happened after the Chinese government resumed diplomatic and economic relationships with the capitalist countries in the 1970s. The “Open Door” policy infused momentum for Chinese economic development. With more intense contact with capitalist countries, Chinese people’s enthusiasm to learn English and other foreign languages was also revived (Adamson, 2002). To strengthen the foreign language capability of future Chinese generations, the China Ministry of Education has stipulated English as the official foreign language that has been mandatorily taught from Grade 3 onwards since 2001 (Wang, 2007).

Many relevant factors have influenced the quality of English education in China. For instance, EFL teachers’ beliefs and attitudes about language teaching can influence their classroom practices (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). So far, the literature concerning teachers’ views in the Chinese context covers the study of teachers’ professional identification (Caihong, 2011), the influence between teachers’ beliefs and practices (Tian, 2014; Zheng, 2009), and the factors influencing the formation of teachers’ beliefs (Zhang & Liu, 2014). Little is known about how the Chinese human resource market affects ELT PSTs’ beliefs. Another problem in English education in China is that the ELT teachers’ eligibility varies. Many Chinese parents born after the 1970s have received a university education. Compared with the older generations of Chinese parents, these well-educated Chinese parents want their children to receive a premium English education through qualified ELT teachers.

The current study attempted to explore the Chinese ELT Preservice English Teachers’ (PST) thoughts while studying in the university program because this stage could be crucial for cultivating the ELT teachers’ beliefs about English learning. The main research question was how English PSTs’ beliefs and English proficiency influenced their employment. The research findings’ significantly showed that the Chinese government changed its policy and attitude toward investing domestic and international capital in Chinese education. The findings of the study might also help explain why the English major is often ranked among the worst college majors to find a job in recent years (Zhang, 2018).

## Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

- *Teachers’ Beliefs*

Teachers’ beliefs refer to “teachers’ pedagogical beliefs, or those of relevance to an individual’s teaching” (Borg, 2001). Researchers have explored how teachers’ beliefs influence curriculum design and everyday teaching practices (Basturkmen, 2012; Farrell & Bennis, 2013). de Lemos (2005) that teachers’ beliefs influence the effect of their teaching practices in class. Furthermore, these beliefs “lie at the very heart of teaching” (Kagan, 1992). The factors influencing the formation of teachers’ beliefs comprised situational constraints (Borg, 2003; Fang, 1996), teacher preparation (Deal & White, 2006), school context, and learners’ academic and social background (Diaz Larenas, Alarcon Hernandez, & Ortiz Navarrete, 2015). Other than the influential factors above, economic factors could also influence the formation of ELT teachers’ beliefs. On one hand, ELT teachers in China are struggling to find a peaceful inner self. China is a communist country, and the society is established upon collectivism. However, the cultural elements contained in English teaching advocate more about individualism. On the other hand, the human resource market could also influence English teachers’ ideas about EFL learning.

- *Material-centered Curriculum (MCC)*

The proposal of the Material-centered Curriculum is inspired by three curriculum designs: the problem, the learner- and the knowledge-centered curricula (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2008). These three classic models are designed based on the educational theories of Dewey, Bode, and Tylor (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2008). Society, learners, and knowledge dominate classroom instruction in the three curricula. However, the three prevailing theories concern more about the denotation of the learning objectives. The essence of learning objectives or the connotation of learning should be embedded in human learning to realize their social usefulness and to meet their living needs. Marx (1867) claimed that the economic base decides the superstructure. That is to say, human minds and behaviors are instructed by their economic status. Deducing from this theory, ELT PSTs ought to learn the knowledge needed in the market, especially when employment happens in a buyer’s market. The material-centered curriculum that reflects the market demand could strengthen the ELT PSTs’ competitiveness in the human resource market.

Market choice has already been utilized to instruct educational reforms in many developed countries (Walford, 1996). In market-oriented educational reforms, parents’ opinions could largely represent their psychologically immature children, voicing how to amend the current education. Many countries implementing the reforms have produced a quasi-market so that the school could be more capable of responding to parents’ needs (Bartlett, 1993; Glennerster, 1991). The schools operated under the market-

oriented system are forced to provide greater diverse curricula involved in parents' operated market segments (Lvlin, 1991). It could be interpreted that parents' claims for the market-oriented reform are for their children to have better career prospects.

In market-oriented education, The PSTs' and their parents' beliefs about the PST program reflect its economic values. In addition, PSTs' beliefs could considerably influence the effect of their English learning and the teaching efficacy in future work (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). However, many Chinese ELT PSTs do not examine their beliefs until the stage of graduation. One reason is that in China, their parents make many high school graduates decide to study in the ELT PST program. In the program selection process at university, students tend to listen to their parents' suggestions when they are inexperienced and confused about future careers. Many ELT PSTs do not have well-established beliefs about English learning at university because their parents financially support them during their university studies. When having no pressure from tuition and living costs, many PSTs choose to escape from reality temporarily. They are not examining their English learning beliefs until graduation, when English proficiency becomes useful in employment. ELT PSTs start weighing each respect for their English skills and experience accumulated in job interviews and work.

- *Supply and Demand Theory*

One famous economic theory about the relationship between supply and demand in a market economy is the "Theory of the Invisible Hand" (TIH). This theory was first proposed by Scottish economist Smith (1776) and is still often quoted by scholars in current economic research (Bulte, Kontoleon, List, Turley, & Voors, 2017; Long, 2018; Quah, 1996). In his work *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Smith (1776) articulated the impact of market activities on production, capital circulation, and profit. In short, all businesses are operated for profit and always pursue the best. Based on the TIH, teachers could be considered the products in the human resource market. EFL PSTs' beliefs about English learning could be influenced by the market's preference for ELT teachers' specific knowledge and skills. In China, many international enterprises require their local employees to improve their English skills, and many big domestic companies need their employees to upgrade their language skills since the Belt and Road Initiative was implemented in 2013 (China Daily, 2019). Proficient spoken English is important in business negotiation and is usually required as an indispensable English skill for employees in English-related industries.

- *The Curriculum of ELT PST Programs in China*

The Chinese human resource market has been escalating the demand for ELT PSTs because of the overpopulated EFL learners in China. A decade ago, the English learning population in China was already estimated to be around 300 million (Hong, 2009), and the number has continued growing since then. The number had already exceeded the total population of English speakers in the United States (Sun, 2009). In Chinese higher education, almost 800 Chinese colleges were offering English majors in 2005, an increase from merely 200 colleges a decade ago (Hong, 2009). The English major is often among the worst college majors to find a job in recent years (Zhang, 2018).

To be compatible with social-economic development, the ELT PST programs in China have experienced several reforms. At the national administrative level, the curriculum reform for the English program has been discussed five times at national conferences (Zhong & Jiang, 2015). Some universities restructured their English programs and incorporated interdisciplinary courses into the curricula in the hope that their English graduates could develop versatile talents if they "know a little bit of everything" (Zhaoxiang, 2002). Nevertheless, some researchers (Chang, 2006; Dai & Hu, 2009; Jiang, 2014; Wang, 2015) argued that the versatility of English majors could undermine the quality of English programs and weaken English graduates' competitiveness in the job market.

The bone of contention is whether the four basic English skills (speaking, reading, listening, and writing) should be centered in the curriculum design of the ELT PST program. The enrollees of the ELT PST program are different from other university programs. The graduates from other majors could be equipped with certain techniques and knowledge other than English skills. English capability for ELT PSTs is not merely a foreign language skill decorated with their academic accomplishments. In the educational industry, English skills are important because English and its related linguistic knowledge are the products ready to be sold to students and parents in the market. The quality of the ELT classes is directly linked to parents' satisfaction. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the two nationwide English tests, TEMs (Test for English Majors), examine PSTs' four English skills. The quality of Chinese university graduates from all English programs, including the ELT PST program, is still evaluated by the two uniform assessments (Jin & Fan, 2011). Most educational institutes require TEM certificates as one of the requisite documents for employment in China.

- *Test for English Majors (TEM-4 and TEM-8)*

Test for English Majors (TEM) is designed to examine English major undergraduates. It is mandated by the National College English Teaching Syllabus (Yingyu zhuanyè sījī kaoshì dàgāng, 2009). There are two TEMs, the basic TEM-4, and the advanced TEM-8. The TEMs can evaluate English major students' academic performance and facilitate program placement based on the results (Zhaoxiang, 2002). The ELT PST

programs are included as English majors in Chinese higher education. Therefore, the ELT PSTs are required to participate in the TEMs. In the TEMs, spoken English is tested independently, and the scores that PSTs receive in the spoken English test would not be calculated in the total scores of the TEM examinations. The TEM participants who have passed the spoken English test would also be certificated separately. From the author's previous working experience at the Chinese universities, the two certificates issued for TEM written tests were considered by PSTs as "Door-knocking Bricks" in Job interviews. HR officers tend to filter out the applicants whose resumes do not include certificates in their qualifications. The job candidates that are invited to participate interview will introduce him/herself in English and answer questions in English. The advantage of the candidates' speaking proficiency is obvious, and they are more likely to be employed.

## Research Methodology

This study adopted the purposeful sampling method for data collection (Patton, 2015). Since the study aimed to investigate Chinese ELT PSTs' beliefs about English learning, the criterion for the sample selection was that the eligible participants should be students from the ELT PST program at a Chinese university. To enhance the trustworthiness of the data, there was no potential risk to participating in the survey, and their personal information would be kept confidential. Moreover, the Pre-service Teachers' Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) survey questionnaire and consent letter were issued to the invited PSTs in both English and Chinese to avoid misunderstandings. In the end, 74 out of 100 valid survey questionnaires were collected as the first source of the data.

After completing the BALLI survey, the second set of data was sourced through a focus-group interview. Fifteen volunteers from the participating PSTs were the subjects of the interview. The interview was carried out in a semi-structured conversation, and the interviewing questions were extensions developed from the statements in the BALLI survey. Chinese was used as the main language in the communication with interviewees to collect more useful information. The interview was electronically recorded, translated, and transcribed into English subsequently. The transcribed copies were sent back to the interviewees for a "member check" (Maxwell, 2013). In this way, it could be assured that the translated data precisely reflected the interviewees' original meaning.

The third set of data was collected from interviews with ten HR officers in English-related industries. Five of the interviewees were from elementary and secondary schools. Moreover, the other five were from foreign trade companies. The interview was conducted in an unstructured pattern. There were no preset questions, and all were connected to the HR officers' standards and attitudes toward the applicant's English speaking proficiency.

Finally, the curriculum of the participants' enrolled program was also analyzed. From the curriculum's design, the study explored how the curriculum was related to the PSTs' speaking proficiency.

## Results

Based on the participant's responses to the statements in the BALLI survey, 27 beliefs regarding English learning were summarized and analyzed. The BALLI survey used the 5-point Likert Scale as the measurement. In the measurement, participants are provided 5 points, ranging from 1 to 5, 1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree, as a score on each statement. There were two beliefs synthesized after the participants responded to these 27 statements. The first synthesized belief showed that the participating PSTs thought learning a foreign language was mostly about learning English grammar and vocabulary. The belief was drawn from the participant's responses to Statement #12 (Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words) and Statement #15 (Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning many grammar rules). The average scores that the participating PSTs gave on Statements #12 (2.39/5) and #15 (2.47/5) showed that they were inclined to agree with the two statements. The statements referred to two basic segments in EFL learning and were bound as one synthesized belief.

Secondly, the participating PSTs perceived proficient spoken English with a good accent as a supportive factor for career development. This synthesized belief was concluded from the participants' responses to Statement #5 (It is important to speak to a foreigner with an excellent accent), Statement #21 (If students learn to speak a second language very well, it will help them get a good job), and Statement #24 (Chinese citizens think that it is important to speak a foreign language). The average score that the participating PSTs marked in these three statements respectively were 2.01/5 (Statements #5), 1.92/5 (Statement #21), and 2.73/5 (Statement #24). The three BALLI statements clearly defined the participants' perspectives about the English-speaking skill and therefore were grouped as the other synthesized belief.

Trying to investigate how the curriculum influences the formation of two synthesized beliefs, the study examined the curriculum of the PST program in which the participants were enrolled. Table 1 presents the statistical data of the curriculum. As interpreted by the department administrator, all the courses concerning the training of the PSTs' four English skills were from the three classifications: Courses for All Foreign Language Majors (CAFLM), Courses for English Major (CEM), Courses for English Major with Different



Study Foci (CEMDSF). The statistics show that 62 courses in the curriculum are about English learning, and the credits take 36.4% in percentage. This figure indicates that the courses concentrating on training PSTs' English skills and knowledge are at a low rate. The participants from the interview also confirmed that they had been mandatorily taking many non-English courses, such as Military Training and Marxist Theory, in their program study. The credits of the selective courses in the CEMDSF were excluded from the calculation because English and non-English courses are mixed in this classification, and the PSTs' course registration is random and unpredictable.

**Table 1.** Curriculum that the PSTs are enrolled

Course classifications and qualities		Credits	Total	Percentage	Total Percentage
Liberal study courses	Core	32	42	18.8%	24.6%
	Selective	10		5.8%	
Courses for all foreign language majors	Core	8	8	4.7%	4.7%
Courses for English major	Core	32	32	18.8%	18.8%
Courses for English major with different study foci	Core	22	22	12.9%	12.9%
	Selective	15	15	9%	9%
Practical courses	Core	7	7	4.1%	6.4%
Teacher education courses		27	27	16%	16%
Comprehensive quality courses		13	13	7.6%	7.6%
Total:		170	170	100%	100%

After a comprehensive examination, the vocal training courses were inspected. As shown in Table 2, only four credits of English-speaking courses are designed in the curriculum. Another 31 credits of hybrid English courses, including Integrated Skills of English and Advanced English, include English vocal training. However, in all the hybrid English courses, eleven out of fifteen interviewed PSTs said that their teachers concentrated more on teaching them how to improve their reading, listening, and writing capabilities.

**Table 2.** English Speaking Related Courses

Course Name	Credits	Total Credits	Total Percent
Oral English	2.0	4	2.3%
English pronunciation	2.0		
Basic skills of English	4.0	31	18.2%
Integrated skills of English I	4.0		
English listening and speaking I	4.0		
Integrated skills of English II	4.0		
English listening and speaking II	4.0		
Integrated skills of English III	4.0		
English listening and speaking III	4.0		

Ten interviewees expressed that teachers' oral English had a Chinese accent. Moreover, the entire focus group remarked, in most of their English courses, the time used for English communication and interaction in class needed to be increased. All the interviewed PSTs hope to have more English-speaking courses added to their studied program. From the statistical and interviewing data, it could be seen that the curriculum of the participants' PST program is not elaborately designed to satisfy the students' material-oriented learning motivation. The PSTs' two synthesized beliefs, along with the curriculum of the PST program and the interview, piqued our interest to explore how the ELT PST program could be improved to be suitable with PSTs' beliefs in the Chinese economic context.

The feedback from HR officers reflected their concern about candidates' English speaking. The school officers expressed that speaking has become a prerequisite for an eligible English teacher in elementary and secondary education. English teachers are required to use English to conduct the majority of teaching content in classroom lectures. Therefore, a native-like accent in English could considerably improve communicative efficiency in class.

On the contrary, distorted vowel pronunciations in English vocabulary, especially single-syllable ones, will confuse students and set a bad example for students in their pronunciation practice. The HR officers from foreign trade companies said that candidates' speaking proficiency was viewed as more valuable than the business knowledge students studied at school. They also expressed that English PST graduates with proficient spoken English were more welcome in the job market. Because, as stated by the HR officers, the business knowledge and strategy applied in foreign trade were not complicated. The orders were usually placed through successful communication with clients. Therefore, a salesperson with proficient English speaking skills could save time and patience in communicating with potential clients. Effective and efficient communication is vital in business negotiation.

## Discussion

### • *The ELT PSTs' Learning of Vocabulary and Grammar*

The first synthesized belief (learning a foreign language is mainly about studying grammar and vocabulary) reflects that the PST participants perceive vocabulary and grammar learning as the essential task in the process of English learning. Learning vocabulary and grammar in practice refers to applying the attained knowledge to daily communication. Moreover, the output skills (Thornbury, 2005) and the input skills (Smith, 1993) are divided into two respects in communication. The output skills could be detailed as learners' writing and speaking skills, while the input skills mainly concern learners' listening and reading skills.

The information depicted by the interviewed PSTs shows that the method PSTs use for vocabulary learning malfunctions. In the interview with the PSTs, 10 out of the total 15 interviewees felt challenged to recognize the pronunciation of new English vocabulary. Based on our previous teaching experience at Chinese universities, many ELT PSTs face a similar problem. It was assumed that the PSTs could rely on the English phonetic symbols to solve the problem because the symbols demonstrate the rules and principles of English pronunciation to EFL learners. Nevertheless, 12 interviewed PSTs said that the knowledge about the English phonetic symbols was not taught during their elementary and secondary school education. In addition, it is difficult for them to recognize the pronunciation of strange English vocabulary.

To know the pronunciation of new vocabulary, most PSTs will turn to an electronic dictionary, mimicking the pronunciation produced by the simulator in the dictionary. In this way, the PSTs' acquisition of English pronunciation becomes as rigid as parrots learning the human language, and their independence in vocabulary learning is considerably restricted. Another problem with using an electronic dictionary is that the simulative pronunciation is usually too fast and ambiguous for most non-native English speakers. Moreover, the electronic dictionary does not illustrate the facial gestures and tongue movements involved in vocabulary pronunciation. Consequently, the PSTs are often misled, and their pronunciation effect is unsatisfactory. For instance, one mistake commonly made by Chinese ELT PSTs is that the vowel /i/ is pronounced as /i:/. The pronunciation of the word pairs "hit" and "heat," "bit" and "beat," "hill" and "heel" is indistinguishable from many Chinese ELT PSTs. The function of the English phonetic symbols is to clarify ELT PSTs principles and rules of pronouncing English vowels, consonants, and diphthongs. Technically, the English phonetic symbols illustrate how to position the tongue and facial gestures in vocabulary pronunciation. The application of the symbols is beneficial for ELT PSTs to pronounce English vocabulary with multiple syllables.

The English phonetic symbols could also assist ELT PSTs in correcting and reducing spelling mistakes. Chinese and English are two languages from different origins. Linguistically, Chinese is logographic, and its vocabulary consists of strokes and lines. Comparatively, English is an alphabetic language with a vocabulary composed of 26 letters. The linguistic discrepancy makes it difficult for Chinese EFL learners to spell the English vocabulary by its pronunciation. Simply put, the pronunciation of the English vocabulary is meaningless to Chinese people in spelling. For instance, when hearing the English word "nation," Chinese people could mistakenly spell it as "netoin," "nition" or "natoin." With the assistance of the English phonetic symbols, Chinese EFL learners' spelling performance could be improved because the symbols regulate that the reading /n/ in the word "nation" alphabetically corresponds to the letter "n" and /ei/ could be the letter "a" but could never be "i" in spelling. The letter combination should be "tion" when the symbols are read as /tʃən/.

The ignorance of phonetic symbols in EFL learning could obstruct PSTs from developing their speaking skills. If the pronunciation barrier could be surmounted, the PSTs could become more confident when communicating with interviewers in employment and students in classroom instruction. Misunderstandings caused by pronunciation mistakes could also be considerably avoided.

### • *The ELT PSTs' Spoken English*

In the Chinese context, the significance of ELT PSTs' spoken English in the human resource market is underestimated. The influence of the market on educational reform (Walford, 1996) suggests that market-oriented educational programs should be aligned with the claims of enrolled students and their parents. Likewise, in the Chinese context, the ELT PST program with a material-oriented curriculum should be congruent with learners' career pursuits. In the previous discussion, it could be seen that English-speaking proficiency is important for ELT PSTs in their career development. However, the information described by the participating PSTs reflects that their enrolled program did not develop their English-speaking skills sufficiently. According to the data released by Song (2021), among millions of EFL learners in China, less than one percent of the population is proficient in speaking. The statistical data is aligned with the results of our interview. To a different extent, all the interviewed PSTs expressed that they struggled in organizing language in verbal communication in English. Their major barrier in speaking English was the overlapping of vocabulary and grammar selection and verbal expression. As the interviewees stated, speaking is their weakest skill among all four basic English skills.

For preparing the ELT PSTs for future English teachers, the solidity of PSTs' basic English skills is crucial for their employment and future career development. However, the ELT PST program in the study does not develop PSTs' speaking skills equivalently as the other three English skills. Four reasons are concluded below as the explanations for the phenomenon, namely:

1. In the studied PST program, there are many courses concerning political education, which compresses the credit hours left for the speaking courses in the curriculum. The origin of the problem is rooted in the Chinese political system. China is a socialist country, and the country is governed by the Communist Party of China (CPC). To maintain its domination over the country, the CPC imposes political courses as compulsory at all levels of Chinese education. At the higher education level, many courses inculcate Communism, and Marxism arranged into university programs. In our studied PST program, there are 22 credits, or 13% of courses in the curriculum, which is about reinforcing students' military training and the CPC's political beliefs. Compared with the time allocated to study politics, four credits of Spoken English courses in the curriculum is too little.
2. The overloaded teacher-education courses in the curriculum impair the development of the PSTs' speaking proficiency. There are 27 credit hours, or 15.9% of Teacher Education courses in the curriculum. These courses are useful because they help PSTs learn how to manage classroom instruction and daily lecturing successfully. However, the arrangement of the Teacher Education courses neglects two important facts. First, the time spent learning knowledge of classroom management in Teacher Education courses is much more than what the PSTs need to pass the teacher-licensure exam. The knowledge required in the teacher-licensure exam is not too difficult. Most non-PST graduates could get prepared for the exam by self-study. Therefore, school administrators could adjust the curriculum's weight of Teacher Education courses. Secondly, the reality in the job market is that numerous non-PST graduates compete with ELT PSTs for teaching positions. From the data released by the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics, there have been more than seven million college graduates since 2014, and the number is up to 8.74 million in 2020 (Xinhua Net, 2020). The statistics show that ELT PSTs face huge competition in the job market. Alleviating the weight of Teacher Education courses in the curriculum could spare more time for students to consolidate their English skills, which enhances the ELT PSTs' competitiveness in employment.

PSTs' English skills, especially their speaking skills, are a few weapons they could use to defeat non-PST graduates in applying for ELT teaching positions. Because first, teacher licensure is not a barrier that stops non-PST graduates from applying for ELT teaching positions. Secondly, as stated above, the other three English skills (reading, listening, and writing) are not PSTs' priorities. When preparing for the college entrance exam, Chinese students have to experience intensive training in their English skills in reading, writing, and listening, which accounts for why non-ELT-PST graduates could also be capable of teaching elementary English knowledge.

3. Inadequate English environment is impeding Chinese ELT PSTs from achieving proficiency in English speaking. Speaking proficiency is challenging for any foreign language learner because speaking happens spontaneously and in real-time (Thornbury, 2000). Overlapping language organization and its production simultaneously are more difficult for Chinese ELT PSTs due to the fundamental differences between English and Chinese. In conversation, it is commonly seen that Chinese EFL learners hesitate in the selection of English sentence structures and vocabulary. Besides, the English environment in which ELT PSTs could practice spoken English is often artificially created. The ELT PSTs are less motivated to speak English in an inauthentic environment than to manipulate language on real-life occasions. Because an utterance is meaningless without involvement in some setting (Oller Jr, Sales, & Harrington, 1969). In comparison, native English speakers (NESs) at large converse with certain purposes. Their speaking skill is acquired as "communicative competence" (Hymes, 1972). NESs' communicative competence could be interpreted as their capability of being a "full" social member in the communities where they are engaged. The NESs' capability to "voice" is a human's willingness to be heard by others in social activities (Hymes, 1996). In China, Chinese is the official language functionally used by Chinese people for communication. China is not an immigration country and is the dominant language in daily communication. In our studied case, the ELT PSTs could rarely be exposed to a naturally existing English environment. When the PSTs could only speak English in an artificial language environment, the cultivation of PSTs' capability for "voice" will lose its incentives.
4. The PSTs' exam-oriented learning objective also contributes to why the importance of spoken English is undervalued in the PST program. The interviewed PSTs were more concerned about improving their reading, listening, and writing proficiency because these three English skills were directly related to the TEM exams. As mentioned above, the motivation driven by human's need for survival could be defined as "Material-centered." In the study, the participating PSTs' pursuit of higher education is for better employability after graduation, which fits the paradigm of material-centered motivation. In the Chinese context, the number of qualified applicants is always more than the positions offered in employment. It is infeasible for educational institutes to interview every applicant when there are so many. Educational institutes prefer to employ applicants with TEM certificates because, on this occasion, the TEM certificates are the objective references to evaluate the applicants' English capability.

In conclusion, the TEM certificates provide ELT PSTs a better employment opportunity. The skill training relevant to the TEM exams takes more weight than the speaking skill in the PSTs' psychology. The English-speaking test is not calculated into the total score of the TEM exams. On this occasion, the "material" that motivates PSTs to practice their speaking skill is removed. Aside from the scoring system, spoken English is overlooked by PSTs and the PST program.

### • *Proficient Spoken English to ELT PSTs' Career Prospects*

Having the TEM certificates provides ELT PSTs a better opportunity to participate in interviews. However, the certificates do not guarantee employment. Speaking proficiency plays a more decisive role in employment when all the applicants entering the interviews are TEM-certified. Conversations are mostly conducted in English in the face-to-face interviews held by educational institutes. Teacher candidates who can proficiently communicate with interviewers in English tend to impress the interviewers and thereby win a better opportunity to be employed.

The participating PSTs said proficient spoken English is a business card, impressing interviewers with their solid English skills. Some PSTs also expressed that speaking proficiency could improve their confidence in public speaking. In a public speech, self-confidence is people's belief in themselves (Bénabou & Tirole, 2002). More specifically, self-confidence refers to people's self-evaluation of their capability and prior performance in study and work, which is considered one of the twenty valuable skills by employers (Davies, 2000). Job applicants with high self-esteem and confidence usually perform better during an interview (Tay, Ang, & Van Dyne, 2006; Tross & Maurer, 2008). The employability of highly self-confident job applicants could be considerably improved (Eden & Aviram, 1993). In job interviews, high self-confident PSTs could organize their mind in a clear order and process their language with a stable speed and intonation. A good performance will leave the interviewers with a pleasant communicative experience, thereby increasing applicants' employability.

## Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the ELT PSTs' beliefs about English learning and the economic factors that influence the formation of their beliefs in the Chinese context. The study findings revealed that the Chinese ELT PSTs' weakness in English-speaking proficiency could be closely connected with the design of the curriculum and the market demand for ELT teachers. The ELT PSTs' beliefs about English-speaking proficiency are mutually contradictory and developed in two directions: first, the PSTs have realized the significance of English proficiency in employment and want to spend more time practicing their speaking skills; second, the non-English courses in the PST program and the TEM exams have taken most of the PSTs' study time. ELT PSTs could hardly be distracted from their designated school duties.

One of the limitations of this study was that it investigated English PSTs' beliefs in the Chinese inland province. There are special economic zones and special autonomous regions in China. English PSTs' beliefs and employment status quo might vary due to different economic situations and local policies in these regions. Further studies should concern more about the ever-changing policies of the Chinese government on private education, researching more on English major graduates' employability and employment opportunities in different Chinese areas. Artificial intelligence's impact on English-related jobs such as interpreter and translator is unprecedented. Linguistic researchers should study how to adjust and reform the English curriculum at the college level.

Future studies should also concern more about the irrationality of the curriculum design of the ELT PST programs in China. From the researchers' previous working experience at Chinese universities, the problem in the studied case is a prevalent phenomenon among Chinese university ELT PST programs. Future studies should also work more on balancing the speaking courses' credit hours in the ELT PST program. Moreover, future studies could explore how the ELT PST program could be bridged with the PST education of foreign universities. More immersion into the native English environment could strengthen the PSTs' speaking capability.

To improve English PSTs' speaking competence, university administrators should consider employing more eligible native English teachers for ELT PST programs. With more courses taught by native English teachers, there will be more time for PSTs to apply English communication to solve problems on authentic occasions. PSTs' grammar control would be best learned in communication (Oller & Obrecht, 1968). The PSTs' English capability could be consolidated if graduating from such an English program. As for developing ELT PST programs in China, future researchers and government administrators should seek a feasible approach for foreign educational institutes to open English PST programs suitable for the Chinese market.

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