

A STUDY OF EMPLOYABILITY AND STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE EMPLOYABILITY OF THAI LANGUAGE MAJOR IN CHINESE UNIVERSITIES IN YUXI NORMAL UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: This paper studied the concept of employability of students majoring in Thai language and analyzed the current situation of employability. This paper adopted the quantitative research methods. Through item analysis, exploratory factor analysis, and test of reliability and validity, there were three findings: 1) The employability model of students majoring in the Thai language includes four dimensions: professional theories and skills, professionalism, personality traits, and international perspective. 2) The overall employability of students majoring in the Thai language is at a medium level. All the students could be divided into five potential categories: "backward", "excellent", "potential", "utilitarian", and "balanced". 3) To enhance the employability of Thai language major, universities should focus on the teachers and students as the main role, based on classroom teaching, to carry out first-class teaching and cultivate students' awareness of participation in scientific research and innovation.

Keywords: Employability, Students of Thai Language Major, Employability Mode

Introduction

Xi Jinping (2022), General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, stated in the 19th National Congress report that employment is the top priority for citizens. In the government work report at the 20th National Congress, he further emphasized the implementation of the employment priority strategy, strengthening employment policies, improving the public employment service system, providing better support for vulnerable groups, eliminating unreasonable restrictions and discrimination in employment, and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to achieve self-development through hard work. With the continuous introduction of various employment-related policies, the Thai language-related industry, which has features of a "stable environment" and "market gap," has been regarded by the media as the next hot industry to rise. However, this "good situation" seems to conceal some uncertainties.

The "National Standards for Undergraduate Education Majors in General Higher Education Institutions (2018)" by the Higher Education Press of the Ministry of Education clearly states that: (1) Students majoring in foreign languages should possess correct worldviews, outlooks on life, and values,

along with good moral qualities, a sense of Chinese sentiment and international vision, social responsibility, humanistic and scientific literacy, a spirit of cooperation, innovative thinking, and basic disciplinary literacy. (2) Students majoring in foreign languages should have the ability to use foreign languages, appreciate literature, engage in cross-cultural communications, think critically, and possess certain research abilities, innovative abilities, information technology application abilities, self-learning abilities, and practical abilities. (3) Students majoring in foreign languages should have the ability to use foreign languages, appreciate literature, engage in cross-cultural communications, think critically, and possess certain research abilities, innovative abilities, information technology application abilities, self-learning abilities, and practical abilities.

The current changes in the Chinese economy have had a significant impact on the economies of ASEAN and the world. China's prominent position in Thailand's economy and trade is evident, and the two established a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2012. Exchange and cooperation in various fields have been extensive and in-depth. As of 2022, China has been Thailand's largest trading partner for nine consecutive years, while Thailand is China's third-largest trading partner among ASEAN countries. Cooperation between China and Thailand in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative is expected to increase. This will provide a vast job market for Thai-speaking talent, who urgently need to possess an international perspective, familiarity with international rules, and the ability to participate in international affairs and competition. Currently, the employment prospects for Thai language majors in domestic industries are optimistic, and in accordance with the principle of independent career choice and dual selection, their graduates primarily work in government agencies and domestic and foreign enterprises. Graduates with a degree in Thai language can engage in translation, management, and related work in fields such as trade, foreign exchange, cultural education, and tourism.

In the paper "Investigation and Analysis of the Current Situation of Talents Cultivation in Thai Language Major in Yunnan Province," Xiang (2015) pointed out that as an emerging minor language major, more and more people are optimistic about the employment prospects of Thai language and choose to study Thai language as a major. Although Thai language major has a relatively short history, it has developed rapidly and its scope is very broad. In addition to the basic learning and research of Thai language, it also includes Thai economy, trade, tourism, logistics, and so on, providing a wide range of choices for learning and employment. According to the survey, the employment options in China mainly include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Commerce, the Central Translation Bureau, and Xinhua News Agency (2022), while the employment prospects abroad are even broader. China is Thailand's main importer and exporter, and there are many foreign companies in Thailand, which provides a broad development space for Thai language talents. Yunnan Province ranks first among Chinese universities in cultivating and delivering Thai language talents to both domestic and foreign markets due to its geographical advantage. Overall, the employment situation of Thai

language talents in Yunnan Province is relatively optimistic and has been steadily increasing. However, the continuous expansion and development of the Thai language major has highlighted many problems, such as the increase in the number of students, balanced learning levels, and a shortage of outstanding compound talents, which have caused certain obstacles for the employment of Thai language talents. The problems in the cultivation of Thai language talents urgently need to be solved in order to promote their smooth employment.

The paper "Analysis of the Current Situation of Employment Difficulties for College Students and Improvement of Employment Guidance in Colleges and Universities" by Liu Ye (2018) points out that there are countless professions in society and everyone has many opportunities to choose a career. From another perspective, no profession can meet all of your expectations and desires, and every profession has its limitations. Therefore, the key to college students' employment is to improve their professional matching degree and fully understand the profession and the skills they need to possess. Most college students say, "I like this profession, so I want to pursue it," but they have never thought about whether they have the required level of skills for the profession.

Yuxi Normal University is a provincial full-time undergraduate institution with a clear goal of building a "first-class local application-oriented university". The university takes full-time undergraduate education as its main body and actively develops graduate education, strives to carry out international student education, actively integrates into regional higher vocational education, and gradually builds an integrated system of pre-job and post-job education. The university upholds the school motto of "truth, goodness, beauty, and application", based in central Yunnan, rooted in Yuxi, serving Yunnan, facing the whole country, and radiating Southeast Asia. It has trained nearly 65,000 qualified personnel for local basic education and economic and social development for Yuxi and surrounding areas, making contributions to the development of regional basic education and the economic and social development of central Yunnan. Yuxi Normal University has won honors such as "National Civilization Unit", "National Advanced School for Art Education", "National Advanced University for Arts Education", and "Advanced Unit for Graduate Employment and Entrepreneurship in Yunnan Province". The college has 57 undergraduate majors, including Thai, which is a key construction major in Yunnan higher education institutions. In the long-term process of running the school, the characteristics formed by the Thai major are mainly reflected in two aspects. First, the talent training mode is unique and effective, insisting on Sino-Thai cooperative education and sharing international resources. Students who graduate obtain dual graduation certificates and degree certificates from both Chinese and Thai universities, becoming trilingual application-oriented talents in Thai, English and Chinese, and having strong competitiveness for cross-border or remote employment. Second, the professional education is remarkably effective. The major has won 10 provincial-level construction projects for Thai majors, three Southeast Asian and South Asian boutique courses at the

national level, including "An Overview of Thai Literature", "An Overview of Thailand" and "Thai Phonetics", as well as the first "Yunnan Provincial Demonstration Center for Small Language Talent Cultivation Major" and "Yunnan Provincial Excellent Small Language Teaching and Research Office". Yuxi Normal University began to enroll Thai majors in 2006 and has trained nearly 2 thousand of Thai language professionals. At the same time, Yuxi Normal University has 30 overseas internship bases, providing broad internship and further education opportunities.

Research Objectives

This research "Current Situation of Employability and Strategies to Improve the Employability of Thai Language Major in Chinese University-Take Yuxi Normal University as an example" include three objects below:

- 1) To establish the employability model of students majoring in the Thai language.
- 2) To analyze the current employment status of Thai language major students.
- 3) To propose strategies to improve the employability of Thai language major students.

Literature Review

Thai Language Major in Chinese Universities

The study of Thai language focuses primarily on the fundamental theories and knowledge related to the Thai language, including grammar, oral proficiency, culture, and history of Thailand and other Thai-speaking countries. Students will receive training in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating Thai, while engaging in teaching and research related to the language. Also known as Dai language, Thai is predominantly spoken by the Dai-Tai ethnic group and can be found in countries such as Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, northwestern Vietnam, northwestern Cambodia, southwestern China, and northeastern India. The main courses are "Basic Thai", "Advanced Thai", "Practical Thai", "Thai Phonetics", "Thai Listening", "Thai Spoken", "Thai Reading", "Thai Writing", "Translation Theory and Practice", "Thai History and Culture".

The Yuxi normal university offers 57 undergraduate majors, among which Thai Language is a key construction major in Yunnan Province. In the long-term process of running the school, the unique and effective talent cultivation model is embodied in two aspects of Thai Language major. First, it insists on Sino-Thai cooperative education and shares international resources. Graduates receive dual graduation certificates and diplomas from the two schools in China and Thailand, and are applied professionals with competency in Thai, English, and Chinese, who can work across the country or overseas with strong competitiveness. Second, the Thai language major has been remarkably effective in its teaching. It has won 10 provincial-level projects for Thai Language major construction, and three national-level excellent courses in Southeast Asian and South Asian areas: "Overview of Thai

Literature", "Overview of Thai Nationality", and "Thai Phonetics". Furthermore, the university has been named as a "Yunnan Province Demonstration Center for Small Language Talent Cultivation" and an "Excellent Small Language Teaching and Research Room in Yunnan Province".

Employability Model

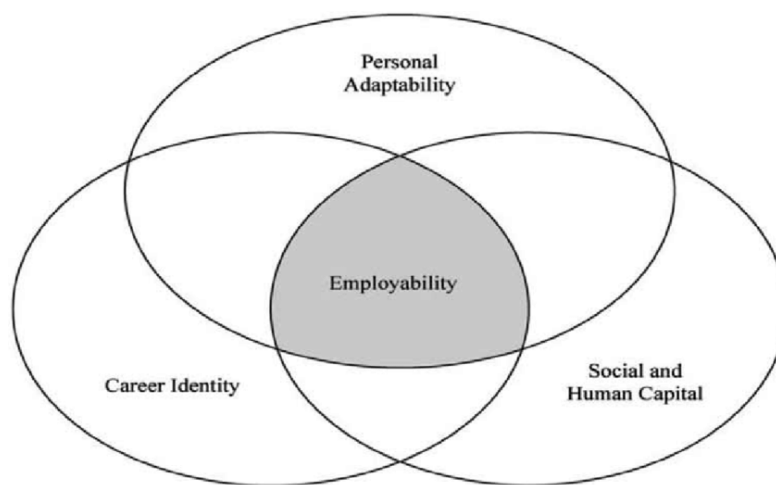
There is no unified standard for measuring the employability of college students. Researchers have summarized three influential theoretical models through literature analysis: the USEM model (Knight 2004), which emphasizes "professional competency orientation", the Career EDGE model (Pool 2007), which emphasizes "career development orientation", and the psycho-social model (Fugate 1977), which emphasizes "individual traits orientation". Some of the theoretical systems and structures in these three models can be referenced, but they also reflect a lack of fit with the Thai language major and Chinese employment market background. Therefore, this study will make revisions and clarifications based on the above three theoretical models.

The USEM model constructs an employability model composed of disciplinary understanding, skills, self-efficacy and metacognitive ability. The structure of this model emphasizes the understanding and monitoring of self in terms of professional knowledge and skills, but does not pay enough attention to the employment quality required by the market and position. Based on the unique curriculum and cultivate mode of Thai language majors, the researchers believe that the mastery of professional theories and skills included in the model is an indispensable foundational aspect in the employability structure of Thai language major students, so the first dimension is proposed—professional theories and skills. Specifically, the core courses that Thai language majors are required to master include "Thai Phonetics," "Basic Thai," and other essential theoretical knowledge and skills. Under unique job requirements, professional theories and skills is a crucial prerequisite for every job seeker and is also an external factor in the employability structure of this study.

The Career EDGE model proposed by Pool and Sewell consists of four dimensions: career development learning, experience of work and life, degree subject knowledge and skills, and generic skills. This model structure puts more emphasis on the skills and experience students must have in their careers. Based on the special requirements of Thai language positions and the degree of fit between the theoretical structure and the two aspects of career development learning, experience of work and life, the researcher proposes the second dimension of employability structure for Thai language major students—Professionalism. This refers to the abilities and personal traits that students should possess in addition to subject-specific knowledge and skills during the job search process and throughout their careers, specifically focusing on the application of computer multimedia technology demonstrated by students in pre-employment, the exhibition of interpersonal traits in specific job positions, and the abilities and traits of obtaining information, preparing for exams, and performing under pressure during

job recruitment. Good professionalism is an important factor for obtaining a job and gaining a firm foothold in the job, and it is also an external factor in the employability structure.

The Psycho-social employability model proposed by Fugate et al. divides employability into three elements: career identity, personal adaptability, and social and human capital. Compared with the previous two models, the Psycho-social model emphasizes the importance of individual traits in employment to a greater extent. The Educationist Parsons (1909) once said: "In education, everything is based on the personality of the educator." As the cradle for cultivating cross-lingual and cross-international workers, the Thai major also pays special attention to the cultivation of students' personality and feelings in the process of cultivating students, which aligns with the "people-oriented" concept approach in psycho-social employability theory.



Picture 1: Psycho-social employability model

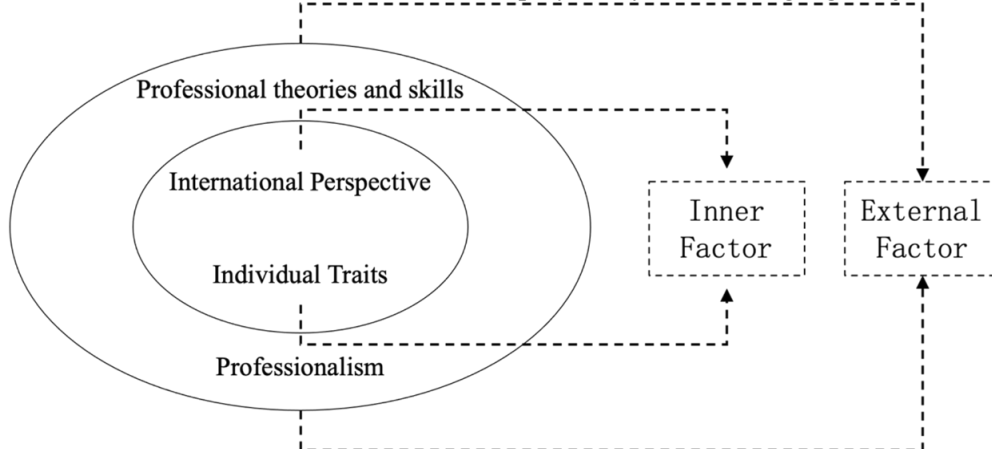
As the subject of employability, jobhunter must consider the compatibility and adaptability between themselves and the profession, whether it is based on personal traits, environment, salary, or nature of the work. In the book "Choosing a Career" (Parsons 1909) pointed out that "matching a career is the focus of career choice". He believes that everyone has their own personality, which forms corresponding personality traits. Each person's personality traits are different, and career intentions will be formed in the process of looking for a job. It can be seen from this that personality traits have a facilitating effect on the adaptation to job requirements, and different positions require different personality traits. By drawing upon the personal adaptability dimension of the psycho-social model, researchers propose the third dimension in the employability structure of Thai language major students—individual traits, and it is also an inner factor in the employability structure. It mainly refers to the unique personality characteristics that Thai language major should have based on "job matching". Specifically, in terms of students' pre-employment performance, it refers to what personality traits they show when they cope with and deal with various problems or relationships in learning and practice at

school. These personal traits inevitably have specificity and distinctiveness, so it is appropriate to consider them as a personality aspect of employability.

Considering China's cultural environment, employment market, and social demands, and in conjunction with the "National Standards for Undergraduate Teaching Quality of Ordinary Universities and Colleges" (2018) issued by the Ministry of Education, it is not difficult to see that the international perspective and experience of Thai language professionals as personal traits have become increasingly important in employment. By drawing upon the career identity dimension of the psycho-social model, researchers propose the third dimension in the employability structure of Thai language major students—international perspective, and it is also an inner factor in the employability structure. The focus is on Thai language major who not only have a passion for the Thai language and culture but also possess the ability to engage in international communication and collaboration. Additionally, they are expected to continuously develop themselves in their professional field. As a motivation aspect in the structure of employability, its importance in employability is self-evident.

In conclusion, the theoretical model of employability for Thai language major in this study consists of four dimensions: professional theories and skills, professionalism, individual traits, international perspective. As shown in Figure 2-2, individual traits and international perspective are inner factors in employability structure. It points to the upper limit level of individual employment capability. An employee who demonstrates depth, warmth, and an inherent passion for their position in their career is more likely to be favored by employers and driven to develop their career with enthusiasm and mission. But at the same time, Thai major is a "practical" major, employees who use Thai in their work are a "professional" industry, and "professional theories and skills" and professionalism are the lower limit of the employability structure, the role of basic guarantee cannot be ignored.

Picture 2: Theoretical model of employability of Thai language major



Methodology

This study conducted a survey on Thai major students from the first year to the fourth year at Yuxi Normal University using a self-designed questionnaire, and used the survey data to test the

measurement of the theoretical model. The reason for choosing all four grades of students as the research subjects, rather than only selecting the third and fourth grades, is because of the unique characteristics and special nature of the employability structure and talent training in Thai language major.

Sample 1: A total of 130 Thai language majors from freshman to senior year of Yuxi Normal University were selected as participants. Excluding the scales whose answering time was less than 120 seconds and the same answer for the entire scale, a total of 122 valid questionnaires were obtained. Among them are 41 boys and 81 girls; 28 freshmen, 32 sophomores, 30 juniors and 32 seniors. This part of the data was used in item analysis and exploratory factor analysis of employability model.

Sample 2: A total of 280 Thai language major students were randomly selected from Yuxi Normal University for the study. After removing the scale with response times less than 120 seconds and those who chose the same answer for the entire test, a total of 266 valid questionnaires sets were obtained. Among them, there were 78 male students and 188 female students; 52 freshmen, 69 sophomores, 78 juniors, and 67 seniors; 189 rural-oriented normal students and 77 non-oriented normal students; 16 students had very few social practice experiences, 52 students had relatively few experiences, 90 students had average experiences, 77 students had relatively many experiences, and 31 students had many experiences. This part of the data is used in the validity analysis and internal consistency analysis of employability model and the employment status survey.

Sample 3: Among the test participants in sample 2, 100 participants were randomly selected to be tested again after a two-week interval. There are 30 boys and 70 girls; 15 freshmen, 25 sophomores, 30 juniors and 30 seniors. This part of the data will be used in the test-retest reliability test of employability model.

Item analysis is carried out on the data of sample 1, the critical ratio method and the homogeneity test method will be used to remove any unsuitable questionnaire items. In the part of the critical ratio method, through the difference test of the high and low groups, the decision value (CR) of each topic is used to understand the discrimination of each topic. In the part of homogeneity test, the correlation between the item and the total score of the scale, the factor loading of the item in the common factor of the scale, and the reliability test are used to understand the homogeneity of each item and other items, so as to as a basis for screening and revising topics.

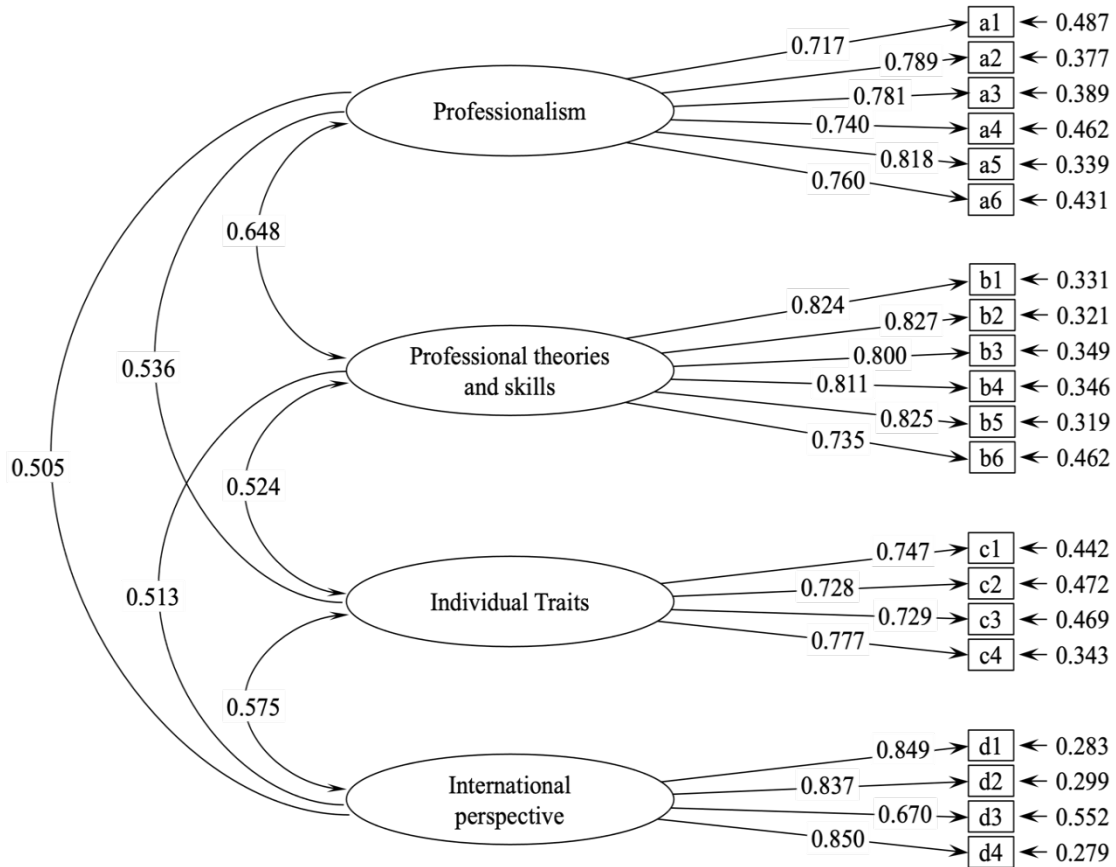
Analyzing the remaining 26 questions after item analysis, exploratory factor analysis was conducted using principal component analysis and maximum variation axis factor analysis. As a result, the KMO value was 0.923 and the Bartlett sphericity test value was 2452.851 with a significance level of $p < 0.01$, indicating suitability for factor analysis. According to the screening criteria of factor load less than 0.5, high load items on multiple factors, and less than 3 items on a certain factor, a total of 6 items that did not meet the criteria were deleted after three rotations. Finally, 20 test questions are

reserved, which belong to 4 dimensions. The specific results are shown in Table 3-2. The first factor is named professionalism, with a total of 6 test items; the second factor is named professional theories and skills, with a total of 6 test items; the third factor is named international perspective, with a total of 4 test items; and the fourth factor is named individual traits, with a total of 4 test items. The data analysis results confirm the rationality of the model dimensions by the research.

Results

Employability Model

Figure 3 is the formal employability model in this study, including four dimensions, professionalism, professional theories and skills, individual traits, and international perspective.



Picture 3: Employability model of Thai language majors in Higher Education

Discussion

The results of the study show that the employability of Thai language majors is at a moderate level, but the performance of each dimension is inconsistent, among them, the scores for individual traits and international perspective are relatively high, while the scores for professionalism and expertise

are relatively low. This result can first be explained by the research findings of scholars like Fang (2017), which indicate a clear positive correlation between the proportion of professional theory course learning and students' self-identification with professional literacy. Compared to lower grade students, higher grade students have studied more specialized theoretical courses.

In this study, higher grade students' self-evaluation of professionalism is higher than that of lower grade students, which confirms the possibility of this explanation. Furthermore, the results of this study are related to the background of recent epidemic. Because of the special period of the last two years, the form and content of students' practical experience has also changed. For example, the number of on-site internships in companies has decreased, the time has been shortened, and the form has changed from offline to online, and so on.

Based on the previous data analysis results and discussions, we propose some insightful thoughts and suggestions from the four dimensions included in the theoretical framework of employability in Thai language major students.

- 1) Take teachers and students as main body in classroom
- 2) Actively explore "practice classroom" to enhance employability
- 3) Fully develop the "broad space" contained in the "international perspective"

Conclusion

Based on the study get the three views below:

- 1) Established the employability model for Thai language majors in this study, including four dimensions professionalism, professional theories and skills, individual traits, and international perspective.
- 2) After Analyzing employment status of students in Thai language major, the potential categories of employability level of Thai language majors can be categorized five types: "backward type", "balanced type", "potential type", "excellent type", "utilitarian type".
- 3) Three suggestions are provided for the improvement of employability.

Recommendations

The firstly, take teachers and student as main body in classroom. Carrying out first-class teaching based on the classroom, good teaching and high-quality lectures can enable university teachers impart knowledge, The excellent system of knowledge and the allure of ideas can awaken the curiosity and the sense of purpose in students. To take teachers as the main body and participate in scientific research and cultivate innovation consciousness improves students' professional theories and skills.

The secondly, actively explore "practice classroom" to enhance employability. The social practice has a unique significance for the employment preparation and career development of Thai language majors. Provide more internship opportunities and improve the quality of internships.

Finally, fully develop the "broad space" contained in the "international perspective". Hire business management personnel to teach, strengthen international communication, and have university teachers work in multinational enterprises.

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