

# Research on the Undergraduate "Foreign Language+" Talent Cultivation in the Context of Cross-Border E-Commerce

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**Abstract:** With the arrival of the "Internet +" era, Cross-border e-commerce has emerged globally and become an essential economic growth point of China's foreign trade, which makes the imbalance between supply and demand of high-quality foreign language talents in this industry more prominent. This paper takes the talent needs of cross-border e-commerce enterprises as the starting point, focuses on the current situation of foreign language talents training in undergraduate institutions, analyzes the reasons for the shortage of compound foreign language talents in the cross-border e-commerce industry, and proposes that apart from the construction and innovation of foreign language disciplines, majors, curriculum and teacher system, universities should actively search for favorable cooperation with enterprises and the government to cultivate undergraduate "foreign language +" talents based on multi-subjects collaboration and integration of "government, industry, academia and research" mode, and efficiently deepen the coupling of foreign language education reform and the development of the new economic format.

**Keywords:** "Foreign language+" talent cultivation; Undergraduate institutions; Cross-order E-commerce

## 1. Introduction

In the era of "Internet+", as a representative of "digital economy + foreign trade", the cross-border e-commerce industry is developing rapidly in China, resulting in an extremely rapid expansion of the job market and thus bringing unprecedented opportunities to foreign language talents. However, the shortage of compound foreign language talents has also become a stumbling block to the development of this field. Is the undergraduate foreign language training model effective in avoiding the shackles of the traditional model and matching the characteristics and criteria of the current demand for industrial talents in cross-border e-commerce? How to build an innovative undergraduate training system for foreign language talents in response to industrial needs? These are issues that need exploring in the training of foreign language talents in universities under the new situation.

## 2. Current Situation of Foreign Language Talent Cultivation in the Context of Cross-Border E-Commerce

Cross-border e-commerce positions are mostly application-oriented, so compared with higher vocational institutions that focus on cultivating technical and applied talents in commerce, foreign language talent training based on industrial needs is more challenging for undergraduate institutions. However, the current shortage of foreign language talents means a gap between the quantity and quality of undergraduate foreign language talents and the demand for foreign language professionals in the cross-border e-commerce industry. The reasons are as follows.

### 2.1. Unclear Talent Development Objectives

Cross-border e-commerce specialty was not involved in the Catalogue of Majors in General Higher Education Institutions (2015). Faced with industrial needs, most undergraduate colleges and universities initially focused on achieving talent development goals through additional training tracks in international trade or e-commerce, while neglecting the adjustment and construction of foreign language talent

cultivation systems. The introduction of cross-border e-commerce was not introduced in the professional course (e.g. Business English) objectives, and the knowledge and skills required to become a cross-border e-commerce talent are not specified in the talent development programs either. Meanwhile, as a major that relies on a faculty with an absolute advantage in foreign languages, foreign language program has highlighted the characteristics of foreign languages in the training orientation and model, thus unsurprisingly failing to clarify the requirements of the cross-border e-commerce industry for personnel skills and quality in time to set scientific training objectives. Moreover, some institutions stick to language as the teaching core, or to the training of foreign language talents for commerce and trade, and neglect the high demand of cross-border e-commerce for talents with foreign language communication skills and the expansion of comprehensive professional skills in e-commerce. Consequently, there is a certain lag and one-sidedness in the talent development objectives, which results in the lack of integration of foreign language education with the new economic dynamics.

## ***2.2. Inadequate Curriculum and Lack of Teachers***

Some universities do not have a clear position on talent training, and the curriculum system is not yet sound, making the effectiveness of training foreign language talents for cross-border e-commerce ambiguous. First, there is a convergence in the disciplines and curricula of foreign languages. All the universities surveyed have established English majors and expanded into different areas on this basis, mainly in business, translation, and literature, and some of them have offered minor language majors such as Japanese and Spanish. However, some institutions still emphasize traditional language knowledge and the passing rate of professional examinations, so students' overall language skills and literacy are not effectively improved and homogenization is evident. Secondly, courses aimed at cultivating cross-border e-commerce talents are rarely incorporated into the existing foreign language curriculum system. A small number of universities offer core courses on cross-border e-commerce for business English majors, such as English for cross-border e-commerce, Cross-border e-commerce operations, and Cross-border e-commerce customs clearance practices from semesters 4-7 or 4-8, while the rest only offer introductory-level courses such as Introduction to International Business or International Trade Studies and Trade Practices as professional electives. The lack of teaching content closely related to the training of e-commerce talents has failed to provide students with systematic and up-to-date professional knowledge and training, which has hindered the cultivation of compound foreign language talents.

The lack of teachers is the main problem that plagues the training of foreign language talents in the context of cross-border e-commerce. At present, front-line foreign language teachers in universities generally lack a systematic knowledge system and practical experience in cross-border e-commerce, making it difficult for teachers to guarantee the quality of teaching. Except for a few schools that have built a school-enterprise support model in the cross-border e-commerce courses offered by English majors, most universities are still at the initial stage of building relevant teachers and adjusting their professional models. Moreover, teachers' lack of opportunities to receive skills training and practice makes them unequipped to update their knowledge reserves and cope with the rapidly changing rules of e-commerce platforms. Other undergraduate institutions have fought to attract 'dual-qualification' teachers but are often unable to attract or hold on to talent due to salary policies, title, and academic requirements. At the same time, in the face of staff turnover and the uncertainty of the return on foreign language talent in universities, the willingness of some corporate tutors to join the teaching profession is declining due to concerns about the cost of investment by companies.

## ***2.3. Deficient Practical Ability***

Practical teaching is a necessary means of developing applied and operational skills and is essential for transforming knowledge into competence. There are objective reasons why some of the current undergraduate foreign language majors have insufficient practical skills in cross-border e-commerce and are out of step with the actual needs of the industry. On the one hand, foreign language skills are diverse from professional e-commerce skills, as the former can improve in a learning context, and the latter cannot be inseparable from the actual working environment. On the other hand, undergraduate colleges and universities have been well known for teaching theory in the classroom and training academic talents. Although they realize the importance of practical teaching for foreign language talents in cross-border e-commerce well, it is difficult to break away from historical inertia and the shackles of realistic conditions. Now a few institutions have tried to introduce enterprises into the teaching practice of cross-border e-commerce courses for foreign language majors and carried out real trade projects with mutual promotion

inside and outside the school, which undoubtedly brings good references and demonstration to other universities. However, it is undeniable that some schools are subject to their teaching resources and have to rely on classroom practical training and teaching simulation software to add practical courses and update teachers' knowledge reserves. For example, the Aliexpress integrated platform can bring practical operation knowledge and experience to learners in classroom settings to a certain extent, but the considerable cost and high dependence on professional guidance also make it hard to popularize. Moreover, there are differences between the virtual environment and the actual trade environment, and training that is detached from professional job practice often leads to a lack of effective communication and problem-solving experience and competence.

In addition, there is a lack of integration between professional and entrepreneurship education for foreign language talents in cross-border e-commerce. One of the effective ways to optimize the professional curriculum while translating the teaching effect into real productivity is to find better models of school-enterprise cooperation and to provide students with more opportunities for innovation and practice in related fields. For example, some universities have supported and encouraged Business English students to actively engage in cross-border e-commerce entrepreneurship by funding activities, practical training bases, and creating a well-resourced professional environment. But for some remaining universities, further learning and exploration are needed. Besides, the research shows that undergraduate institutions have set up innovation and entrepreneurship parks or opened second classrooms, and about half of the parks involve cross-border e-commerce practical activities. But foreign language students prefer competitions to enhance their language knowledge skills (English speech contests or reading competitions) and entrepreneurial projects (cultural and media) and appear less likely to invest in hands-on cross-border e-commerce ventures in the choice of relevant activities. Meanwhile, some institutions have also tended to allocate more of these entrepreneurial training opportunities to business or management schools, which has resulted in the training of foreign language talents confined to the traditional teaching objectives, and eventually leading to a lower quantity and quality of talent training in line with industry needs.

### **3. Strategies for Cultivating "Foreign Language+" Talents in the Context of Cross-Border E-Commerce**

#### ***3.1. Clarify Training Objectives and Innovate Talent Training Mode***

In response to the problems pointed out by the enterprise side in the research, such as the current lack of comprehensive quality of local undergraduate foreign language graduates and their lack of ability to develop international business, the key to improvement lies in the fact that institutions should match the actual needs of social development in terms of talent training objectives and modes, and achieve a rational gyration in the cultivation of professional skills and vocational abilities in undergraduate foreign languages. In 2020, the Ministry of Education's Declaration on the Construction of the New Liberal Arts required foreign language majors to "cultivate comprehensive foreign language talents who meet the needs of national construction and foreign communication in the new era". Later, the Guide to Research and Reform Projects of the New Liberal Arts explicitly proposed to actively pursue the "foreign language +" talent cultivation mode and cultivate high-quality composite foreign language talents who are "multi-skilled and multi-competent".

In response to the requirements of the Declaration and the Guide, the university should take the needs of the local cross-border e-commerce industry as the guide, realize the precise match between professional construction and industrial development, grasp the multiple cores of "language", "field" and "practice" of "foreign language+" talents, clarify the goals and directions of "foreign language+" talents training, integrate teaching reform and entrepreneurial practice, carry out multi-faceted collaborative "government, industry, academia, and research" integrated education, and form a "foreign language+" talents training model with regional characteristics.

#### ***3.2. Improve the Curriculum and Build the Faculty***

The connotation of the new liberal arts is mainly reflected in breaking down the barriers between disciplines and majors, reflecting comprehensiveness, interdisciplinarity, and integration<sup>[3]</sup>. Cross-border e-commerce-related courses cover three main categories: foundation courses based on foreign trade and foreign languages; core courses based on cross-border e-commerce practices and platform operations; and extension courses based on the culture, history, and customs of different countries<sup>[6]</sup>.

Foreign language majors can offer courses such as cross-border e-commerce English, business foreign language correspondence and multilingual courses, which can fully highlight the advantages of foreign language communication while improving students' linguistic ability and meeting the needs of the refined cross-border e-commerce market. In addition, foreign language majors need to increase the number of core courses related to cross-border e-commerce, such as cross-border e-commerce operations and management, which require students to use a combination of foreign language and e-commerce knowledge and skills to promote all aspects of industry operations and further develop students' entrepreneurial skills. Courses such as Intercultural Communication help students to understand different cultural customs and business etiquette, enabling them to get more out of the market development and marketing process. As the cross-border e-commerce industry requires a wide range of comprehensive skills, the substantial "foreign language +" curriculum system must break down disciplinary barriers, integrate teachers and practical training conditions, and implement the intersection and interpenetration of multiple disciplines such as international business trade, online marketing, and computer science to ensure the cultivation of students' comprehensive cross-border e-commerce skills.

The construction of the undergraduate "foreign language +" talent training model depends on the comprehensive quality of the teaching staff. Therefore, universities should encourage teachers to actively improve their overall competence to achieve cross-fertilization of multidisciplinary knowledge in their teaching activities and improve the quality of teaching. Primarily, universities can prioritize importing foreign language talents with a background or vocational certificates in cross-border e-commerce, international business, and other related practices by increasing their treatment and policies for multidisciplinary background faculty staffing. Meanwhile, they should promote university-enterprise cooperation. On the one hand, the university can introduce the backbones of enterprises into the classroom for practical experience sharing, and invite experts to hold regular lectures or seminars on cross-border e-commerce to brief teachers and students on the latest industry developments, explain industry rules and conduct job operation skills training. On the other hand, foreign language teachers will have access to a wide range of high-level training opportunities in companies. By building a team of practical teachers with "foreign language + practical skills in e-commerce", the teaching effectiveness will be enhanced, strengthening the comprehensive practical skills of foreign language graduates and improving their marketability.

### ***3.3. Build Diversified Collaborative Practice Teaching***

The "foreign language+" talent cultivation in the context of cross-border e-commerce is characterized by multiple teaching settings, strong practicality, and closer integration with enterprises, so school-enterprise cooperation plays an irreplaceable role. Universities need to rely on the assistance of enterprises to implement talent training, and in the face of the talent gap, fully exploiting university resources and reducing the talent turnover rate are also the current concern of enterprises. Most of the surveyed enterprises showed their willingness to conduct co-culture with undergraduate universities. Thus universities should establish cooperation with excellent e-commerce enterprises to build a long-term "foreign language+" talent training system with the integration of "industry, university, and research", and achieve a win-win situation in the interaction.

Firstly, given that the body of knowledge on cross-border e-commerce focuses on continuous improvement in practice, universities can offer courses on cross-border e-commerce platforms and other entrepreneurship courses in foreign language majors, and make use of platforms such as AliExpress and eBay for students to conduct in-depth practice. At the same time, the university can integrate the faculty of both schools and enterprises, share curriculum resources, and improve the teaching system of foreign language majors with the cooperation and advice of each other to enhance the quality of talent training. Secondly, universities should invite enterprises into their schools to build practical training platforms and talent incubation bases for students or introduce enterprise work projects and products according to their situation, encourage students to carry out platform online shop operations on their own, apply language skills to cross-border e-commerce trade operations more intuitively, and enhance the employment and practical skills of foreign language students. Also, cross-border e-commerce professionals can be regularly invited to do entrepreneurial coaching training so that foreign language students can extend their career value chain and start thinking more innovatively about their professional skills learning and cross-border e-commerce entrepreneurship. Finally, universities can sign agreements with partner enterprises to regularly export high-quality foreign language talents with entrepreneurial passion and a high sense of responsibility to them, to enhance the synergy of enterprises, deepen cooperation and form a long-term and stable school-enterprise interaction chain.

It is worth mentioning that several undergraduate institutions have experimented to some extent with

cross-border e-commerce talent training and have gained considerable experience and achievements, which also brings a new development perspective to foreign language talent training. Therefore, in addition to the cross-fertilization of disciplines and collaboration between schools and enterprises, undergraduate institutions can further strengthen the linkage and mutual promotion, learn from each other's experiences and share resources, and collaborate to promote practical teaching and "foreign language+" talent cultivation.

### **3.4. Give Full Play to the Promoting Role of the Government**

Cross-border e-commerce cannot fully develop without government support, and training of foreign language talents in the industrial context also needs government promotion. The government should encourage and guide existing foreign language programs in undergraduate institutions to respond to market demand and transform into the direction of cross-border e-commerce composite talent training while improving minor language specialization, adjusting talent training strategies, and refining the "foreign language +" talent training system. Besides, The government can give full play to its role as a bridge between schools and enterprises, and build a good platform for cooperation and development, so that undergraduate foreign language majors can rely on universities, industrial parks, and enterprises to carry out co-culture and comprehensive research, thus further providing foreign language talents with more opportunities for practice and development, and forming an integrated education pattern of "government, industry, academia and research" with regional characteristics and the collaboration of multiple subjects. Finally, reinforce investment in undergraduate foreign language discipline construction to solve the problem of insufficient funds or resources encountered by institutions in training "foreign language +" talents. Policy and financial support should also be increased for those university students and graduates who start their businesses and actively participate in cross-border e-commerce ventures. Only by comprehensively promoting and continuously optimizing the construction of a training system for cross-border e-commerce composite talents can we fundamentally solve the problem of shortage of foreign language talents for cross-border e-commerce.

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