

The Exploration of English Inter-disciplinary Talents Cultivation in Ceramic Universities under the Background of "New Liberal Arts"—A Case Study of Jingdezhen Ceramic University

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Abstract: *In the era of "New Liberal Arts," the reform and development of foreign language majors face both opportunities and challenges. Only by seizing this opportunity and implementing reforms with a mindset of integration and innovation can English majors cultivate versatile talents that meet the demands of the times. This article, taking Jingdezhen Ceramic University's English major as an example, explores and reflects on how to reform the English major and cultivate versatile talents in line with the demands of the era. The exploration covers aspects such as philosophy and characteristics, curriculum design, textbook development, student practice and innovation entrepreneurship, as well as faculty structure adjustments, all within the broader context of the "New Liberal Arts" construction. It is hoped that this exploration will provide insights for the reform of English majors in other ceramic-related higher education institutions.*

Keywords: *New Liberal Arts, Inter-Disciplinary Talents, Integration and Innovation*

1. Introduction

In 2017, the concept of "New Liberal Arts" originated at Hiram College in the United States. Its original intention was to restructure traditional liberal arts, advocate the intersection of humanities and sciences, and integrate new technologies into traditional courses such as philosophy, literature, and language. This approach aimed at providing students with comprehensive interdisciplinary learning and research opportunities. In the subsequent years, countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom incorporated creative and innovative strategies into the construction of humanities disciplines, achieving some success and providing valuable insights.

The rise of the "New Liberal Arts" concept in China can be traced back to 2018 when the Ministry of Education issued the "Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of High-Quality Undergraduate Education to Comprehensively Improve Talent Training Capacity." This document outlined the overall plan for the construction of new engineering, new medical sciences, new agricultural sciences, and new liberal arts. In 2019, Wu Yan, the director of the Ministry of Education, delivered a report titled "New Mission, Grand Blueprint, New Liberal Arts, and Large Foreign Languages," making "New Liberal Arts" and "Large Foreign Languages" hot topics in academic discussions. In 2021, the Ministry of Education released the "Guidelines for the Research and Reform Practice of New Liberal Arts Projects," officially entering the project construction phase within the Ministry of Education's framework[1-2].

The core essence of "New Liberal Arts" is to "be rooted in the new era, respond to new demands, promote the integration, modernization, sinicization, and internationalization of liberal arts education" (Fan Liming, 2020).

2. Characteristics and Connotations of "New Liberal Arts"

Aligned with the requirements of the Ministry of Education's "Six Excellence and One Top" 2.0 Plan, the construction and development of "New Liberal Arts" possess the following characteristics.

Firstly, the development of "New Liberal Arts" is closely linked to the advancements in science and technology. In the context of the new era, the development of liberal arts disciplines is inseparable from big data, artificial intelligence, the internet, and other technological advancements.

Secondly, "New Liberal Arts" differs from traditional liberal arts in that it embraces integration and innovation. The construction and development of "New Liberal Arts" involve cross-disciplinary integration with science, engineering, and agricultural sciences. It breaks down old barriers while inheriting excellent cultural traditions. The construction of "New Liberal Arts" will inevitably give rise to new demands, new disciplines, new majors, and new courses. Only through continuous innovation can the challenges and issues arising from "New Liberal Arts" construction be addressed effectively.

Thirdly, the construction of "New Liberal Arts" has a distinctive Chinese character. In China, the construction and development of "New Liberal Arts" should be based on the national conditions and social development needs of China. With a rich civilization and outstanding traditional culture, telling the Chinese story and promoting Chinese culture globally to cultivate talents with cultural confidence and an international perspective is one of the missions of current "New Liberal Arts" construction in China.

Fourthly, the construction of "New Liberal Arts" is international. As China's comprehensive national strength grows, its influence in the international community also increases. The world is paying attention to China, and China is intensifying its connections with the international community. Therefore, the talents we cultivate should be high-quality international professionals capable of adapting to the new global landscape.

The implementation of the "New Liberal Arts" strategy in China helps optimize the disciplinary structure of higher education institutions, improve the quality of professional construction, and promote the establishment of a high-level talent training system. Foreign language disciplines are an important part of humanities, guiding international academic trends and promoting the internationalization of Chinese humanities. The construction of "New Liberal Arts" provides a direction and development opportunities for English majors facing challenges. Thus, foreign language professionals should seize this opportunity, strengthen the construction of "New Liberal Arts," and guide the reform of English majors with integrated and innovative concepts, transitioning talent development models to cultivate professionals who can meet local and national needs, as well as the demands of the "Belt and Road" initiative.

As a specialized institution in the field of ceramics, the foreign language department of ceramic universities should actively engage in the reform of English majors, switch talent development models to adapt to the new era, and overcome the challenges faced by the development of English majors.

This paper will combine the broader context of "New Liberal Arts" construction, taking the example of the English major at Jingdezhen Ceramic University's International Studies School, to explore and reflect on how English majors can be reformed and cultivate versatile talents that meet the demands of the times, covering aspects such as philosophy and characteristics, curriculum design, textbook development, student practice and innovation entrepreneurship, and faculty structure adjustments[3-4].

3. The Talent Cultivation Model and Path: Integration and Innovation

In the context of the "New Liberal Arts," many distinctive foreign language schools of higher education institutions are exploring reforms and talent cultivation models for English majors under the guidance of the national standards and guidelines. Representative examples include Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, which has a foundation in language and culture, integrates classical studies, business, and numerical intelligence, and innovatively explores interdisciplinary approaches for English major teaching and talent cultivation, achieving certain results. Similarly, Shanghai Jiao Tong University's School of Foreign Languages has developed three English major directions, namely language intelligence and pathology, comparative literature and cross-cultural studies, and intelligent translation, demonstrating distinct interdisciplinary features and significant achievements. The reforms in English majors at these schools reflect both integration (interdisciplinary) and innovation (new disciplines), inspiring reforms in foreign language majors at other higher education institutions.

In 2018, the Ministry of Education released the "National Standards for the Quality of Undergraduate English Teaching," defining English majors as disciplines that focus on the study and research of the English language, English literature, and the social culture of the United Kingdom. According to this definition, the importance of language skills, literature, and culture in English majors is evident. Thus, English majors need to emphasize language skill development, strengthen general cultural education, return to the essence of the major, and innovate. However, the standards also advocate for the cultivation of foreign language talents with "quality leadership, diverse training, and classified excellence."

Therefore, under the guidance of these standards, local universities' foreign language majors, in the context of the "New Liberal Arts," should not only instill correct humanistic values and solid language skills in students but also align with local needs and the characteristics of their own institutions. They should identify the school's positioning, highlight major characteristics, and enable students to become versatile and excellent talents. Only in this way can English majors adhere to the essence while innovating, deeply integrate with other disciplines, and explore a path suitable for the development of the major.

3.1. Philosophy and Features

Jingdezhen Ceramic University is a local comprehensive university with ceramics as its characteristic. The English Language and Literature major in the School of International Studies was established in 1999. Leveraging the school's strengths in ceramics, sculpture, and ceramic materials, the English major, with a focus on ceramics industry development and national demands, has gradually formed an interdisciplinary talent cultivation system with characteristics of integration and innovation. This is manifested in several aspects:

3.2. Expanding Disciplinary Boundaries, Leveraging Ceramic Advantages, Establishing the Ceramic Culture Research Center, Promoting Integration of Ceramics and English

In 2018, the school established the Ceramic Culture Research Center, aiming to research and promote Chinese ceramic culture. The center regularly invites internal and external ceramic experts to give academic lectures and engage in cultural exchanges. Professors interested in ceramic culture communication and exchange can participate in meetings, discussions, and exchanges, fostering a positive atmosphere for ceramic culture exchange. The center integrates the research strengths of various departments within the university, supporting external promotion of ceramic culture research and translation. Through these efforts, many teachers actively changed their knowledge structure, improved themselves through studying abroad, and participating in ceramic-related training, achieving significant results in the integration of ceramics and English. Some teachers have published translated works or edited ceramic English textbooks[5-6].

3.3. Optimizing Curriculum System, Upholding "Preserving Tradition While Innovating," Highlighting Interdisciplinary Features of English + Ceramics

In terms of curriculum design, the English major adheres to the philosophy of "preserving tradition while innovating." In the lower grades, the focus is on training students' English language skills and general education. At the same time, the integration of ideological and political education into the classroom cultivates students' national sentiments, a strong sense of social responsibility, and an international perspective. Key courses in this phase include comprehensive English, English listening and speaking, English reading, English speaking, English writing, advanced English, advanced English audio-visual speaking, English-Chinese and Chinese-English interpreting, introduction to English and American literature, introduction to linguistics, and English-speaking countries' society and culture. In addition to these professional courses, there are also general education courses, including an introduction to Chinese culture, a summary of modern Chinese history, military theory and national security, and sports and health. The design of these courses indicates that the core courses of the School of Foreign Languages are based on language and culture. Strengthening the construction of English major connotations and general education can guide students to focus on national culture, establish confidence in national culture, and help shape their correct values.

The second classroom supplements the first classroom effectively. To assist students in mastering solid English language skills, the School of International Studies conducts a rich and diverse second classroom, fully mobilizing students' enthusiasm for learning. The second classroom includes activities such as English song competitions, English speech competitions, English novel sharing sessions, English word competitions, translation competitions, and simulations of the TEM-4 exam. By encouraging competition-based learning, students' enthusiasm for learning is mobilized, further enhancing their language proficiency. Cultivating fundamentals in the lower grades ensures integration and innovation in the higher grades.

In the higher grades, the curriculum reflects the characteristics of English + Ceramics. The interdisciplinary nature of English + Ceramics reflects the cross-disciplinarity of the New Liberal Arts. Leveraging Jingdezhen's regional resource advantages, rich ceramic cultural atmosphere, and the School

of International Studies' advantageous ceramic disciplines, the English major continuously attempts integration and innovation with other disciplines, promoting common development. In the context of the New Liberal Arts, the English language department integrates the school's ceramic resources, conducts online and offline diverse teaching, and offers a series of ceramic courses, including Chinese Ceramic Culture Lectures (MOOCs), Chinese Ceramic Trade (MOOCs), Introduction to Ceramics, Ceramic Art Appreciation, History of Ceramic Technology, Ceramic Appreciation and Production, Ceramic Literature Reading and Translation, Ceramic Art Appreciation and Critique, and Chinese Ceramics and Western Culture. The design of ceramic courses aims to guide English major students in understanding Chinese ceramic culture, familiarizing them with the current status of the ceramics industry, and cultivating high-end compound talents in English + ceramics.

Currently, some undergraduate students from the School of International Studies pursue further studies after graduation, specializing in translating and promoting ceramic culture. They are dedicated to the dissemination of ceramic culture. Some students choose to pursue advanced studies in ceramic arts across disciplines, while others engage in occupations related to ceramic trade. It is evident that the English major at the School of International Studies of Jingdezhen Ceramic University has achieved certain accomplishments in reforming under the context of the new liberal arts. However, this is just an initial exploration with some shortcomings that need to be addressed.

3.4 Continuously Introducing New Ceramic English Textbooks and Ceramic English MOOCs to Enhance Curriculum System Perfection.

In order to effectively serve curriculum development, contribute to the advancement of ceramic culture and technology, and expedite the cultivation of interdisciplinary talents in ceramics and foreign languages, the School of International Studies at Jingdezhen Ceramic University consistently encourages its faculty to develop ceramic-themed English textbooks. Published ceramic English textbooks include "Fundamentals of Ceramic English," "Selected Readings in Ceramic English Literature," "Ceramic Technology English," "Spoken Ceramic Language Course," "Chinese Ceramic Culture English Course," and "Chinese Ceramic Business English Course." Additionally, the school has launched unique Ceramic Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) that enrich the curriculum resource pool, making a significant contribution to the construction of a comprehensive ceramic-themed foreign language curriculum system.

3.5. Emphasizing Student Practical Teaching, Encouraging Student Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and Bringing Industry Elites into the Classroom.

Highly qualified interdisciplinary talents not only require the armament of theoretical knowledge but must also undergo practical training to truly excel. Therefore, practical cognition is crucial for students majoring in English. Language skills learning should not be confined to the classroom or language laboratories alone. Only by exposing students to various competitions and international business exhibitions and conferences can they identify their shortcomings and continuously enhance their abilities. The School of International Studies provides students with various language skills training platforms. Corresponding practical components include translation workshops, business English workshops, English education workshops, media and cultural communication workshops, and comprehensive English course practical training.

In addition to language skills practice, there is also ceramic cognition practice. Learning about ceramic culture should not be limited to textbooks or online/offline teaching. It is essential to allow students to experience practical aspects to gain a more vivid and concrete understanding and a deeper insight into ceramic culture. Therefore, the School of International Studies provides students with a ceramic cognition platform. In the later years of their undergraduate studies, students undergo a week-long ceramic cognition practical course. Under the guidance of experienced teachers (with a background in both ceramics and English studies), students visit representative old ceramic factories in Jingdezhen to understand the rise and fall of modern and contemporary porcelain factories in Jingdezhen. Through visits to the China Ceramic Museum, students comprehensively study the evolution of ceramic shapes, decorations, and ceramic technology from ancient times to the Qing Dynasty.

By visiting the Imperial Kilns, students carefully observe every process of traditional Chinese ceramic production and appreciate the innovation and modern beauty of contemporary ceramics. Through a visit to Hutian Ancient Kiln, students learn about the ancient export porcelain navigation routes and trade conditions. By visiting the imperial porcelain factory, students gain in-depth knowledge of how ancient imperial porcelain was produced. These practical visits allow students to interact face-to-face with

ancient, modern, and contemporary Chinese ceramics, far beyond the limitations of textbooks, sparking students' interest in ceramics.

Furthermore, the school encourages and guides English major students to undertake innovative entrepreneurship projects. These projects involve elements from various disciplines, requiring collaboration across different departments to be successfully completed, reflecting the complementary nature of disciplines. Under the guidance of innovative entrepreneurship projects, students conduct field visits, design proposals, write research reports, and present their learning summaries. These projects not only enhance students' practical skills but also cultivate their ability to think independently.

Finally, the School of International Studies actively conducts industry elites entering the classroom activities. The Industry Elites in the Classroom project builds a platform for school-enterprise collaboration and cooperative education, injecting new content into teaching work and providing a reference model for applied universities to cultivate students. The entry of industry elites into the classroom promotes the diversified development of teaching models and helps improve the professional quality of teachers. Some university teachers lack practical experience and qualities from the business world, leading them to reflect on deficiencies and shortcomings in their teaching during this process. They actively explore methods to address these issues.

The aforementioned practical teaching and various teaching projects serve as effective and necessary supplements to the primary curriculum. They represent the School of International Studies' bold exploration of English major reforms in the context of the new liberal arts, achieving certain results. However, there are still some issues to address: some students have a one-sided understanding of English major studies, and the practical process is not consistently integrated throughout the semester. Due to time constraints, some learning experiences are too superficial and formality-driven. The school-enterprise cooperation system needs further improvement.

3.6. Optimizing Faculty Structure and Strengthening Teacher Team Construction

In the context of the "New Liberal Arts," the English major is undergoing reforms and a shift in talent development models. If foreign language teachers do not actively embrace change, resist innovation, and are unwilling to optimize their knowledge structure, many may face job changes or unemployment. The level of the teaching staff determines the success of English major reforms and the realization of talent development models. However, currently, most foreign language faculty in universities have a single structure, primarily mastering English language skills with little knowledge of other liberal arts disciplines, let alone science and engineering.

In the new liberal arts context, universities need to cultivate versatile foreign language talents that meet the demands of the era and society. This points the way for foreign language teachers to enhance themselves. To meet this opportunity and challenge, foreign language teachers should possess the following qualities:

Firstly, teachers need to have an interdisciplinary perspective, not limited to language skill instruction or traditional teaching methods. In the era of the "new liberal arts," emphasis should be placed on cultivating teachers' international perspectives and enhancing their comprehensive abilities.

Secondly, teachers need to possess the ability to integrate disciplines. In the context of the new liberal arts, foreign language teaching has become a process of interdisciplinary integration. Teachers, as the main educators, can only be well-prepared for cultivating versatile talents if they have the ability to seamlessly switch between different disciplines.

Moreover, the "New Liberal Arts" era is characterized by digital humanities, which includes features such as informatization, networking, digitization, visualization, virtualization, and intelligence. Digital humanities has close ties to foreign languages. Therefore, to enrich teaching, foreign language teachers must introduce artificial intelligence, big data, cloud technology, and virtual classrooms into their classrooms to achieve modern and diversified teaching.

In terms of faculty construction, the School of International Studies at the Ceramic University has made significant efforts and attempts in recent years. Firstly, the school enhances faculty training by encouraging teachers to pursue degrees, study abroad, and participate in short-term training and workshops. This aims to develop teachers into interdisciplinary talents in both English and ceramics, enabling them to understand the current development status of the domestic and international ceramics industry, master cutting-edge translation technologies, and possess digital humanities capabilities.

Secondly, the school strengthens cooperation and communication between different departments. Inviting experts from the School of Cultural Heritage, School of Ceramics Art and Design, and School of Materials Science to give lectures and exchange ideas regularly enhances the ceramic awareness of foreign language teachers. This facilitates resource sharing and academic communication between different schools, contributing to the development of English major courses and the cultivation of teachers' interdisciplinary innovation capabilities.

Thirdly, the school actively recruits foreign language talents, especially those with interdisciplinary backgrounds, to optimize the faculty structure. It forms interdisciplinary teaching and research teams, cultivating a faculty that can meet the demands of the "new liberal arts" era. However, due to the limitations of local colleges, there are still many obstacles to faculty development. The school has not yet established a mechanism for inter-school cooperation and exchanges, the efforts to recruit outstanding talents are not sufficient, and the school has not provided effective policies to assist in the cultivation of English + ceramics interdisciplinary teachers. These issues will need to be gradually addressed in future efforts to develop English major talent.

4. Conclusion

In the context of the "New Liberal Arts," many foreign language departments in higher education institutions are actively reforming English majors and transforming talent development models. The era of the "New Liberal Arts" places new demands on the construction of foreign language majors, giving them a new mission and social responsibility. To cultivate versatile and competent talents that meet national requirements, English majors need to shift their educational philosophy, transcend disciplinary limitations, integrate with different fields, and create new areas in the liberal arts. This involves addressing talent development goals, models, paths, and content. Although challenges and difficulties may arise in this process, seizing the opportunities of the "New Liberal Arts" development is crucial for the vibrant growth of foreign language education, paving the way for a distinctive and characteristic approach.

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