

Exploring the Cultivation Model of “English+Law” Composite Talents under the Background of “New Liberal Arts” Construction

Yuanyuan Shen*

School of Foreign Language, Nanjing Normal University Taizhou college, Taizhou 225300, Jiangsu, China

* Corresponding author

Abstract: *In the context of the “New Liberal Arts”, the trend of interdisciplinary research in linguistics in China is becoming increasingly prominent. Foreign language talents from a single disciplinary background can no longer satisfy the national development strategy. Therefore, the trend of “English + law” composite foreign language talents is put on the table. This paper discusses the necessity of cultivating “English+Law” composite talents from three aspects: the necessity for national macro strategy design, the necessity for economic and social development and trade globalization, and the necessity for optimization and sustainable development of English majors in colleges and universities. Clarifying the current situation of talent cultivation, the paper also points out the direction for cultivating interdisciplinary talents in terms of talent cultivation mode, composite curriculum system setting, and professional faculty construction.*

Keywords: *New Liberal Arts; “English+Law”; composite talent cultivation*

1. Introduction

In 2018, the Ministry of Education proposed to comprehensively promote the construction of “New Engineering, New Medicine, New Agriculture, and New Liberal Arts” in China, and form first-class undergraduate professional clusters with Chinese characteristics covering all disciplines. President Xi Jinping also proposed “to accelerate the development of emerging disciplines and interdisciplinary disciplines of great relevance, so that these disciplines can become important breakthrough points in China’s philosophy and social sciences”. Therefore, foreign language talents from a single disciplinary background can no longer meet the needs of the national development strategy, and the times call for complex foreign language talents. The development of cross-disciplines within the framework of cross-border integration of “English” and “law” majors and the cultivation of complex foreign language talents is the prevailing trend.

2. The Necessity of Cultivating “English+Law” Composite Talents

Entering a new era, with the promotion of the “One Belt, One Road” initiative and the construction of a discourse system that integrates different languages, China actively participated in global governance and the construction of the “New Liberal Arts”. The cultivation of “English + Law” composite talents has thus become an urgent task.

2.1 The Need for National Macro Strategy Design

In October 2014, the Fourth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Several Major Issues of Comprehensively Promoting the Rule of Law recommended “building a team of foreign-related rule of law talents who are well-versed in international legal rules and adept at handling foreign-related legal affairs”. In January 2017, the Ministry of Justice pointed out in its Opinions on the Development of Foreign-Related Legal Services that “the working system and mechanism of foreign-related legal services are still inadequate, the policies and measures are still not sound, the international competitiveness of China’s foreign-related legal services is still not strong, and there is a lack of high-quality foreign-related legal service talents.” Therefore, it is of necessity to “establish a high-quality foreign-related legal service team well-versed in international rules with a global

vision and international perspective, and build a number of large, strong, high service level of foreign-related legal service institutions to better serve economic and social development. “In September 2018, the Opinions of the Central Committee of Political and Legal Affairs of the Ministry of Education on Adhering to Both Virtue and Law to Implement the Education and Training Program for Excellence in Rule of Law Talents 2.0 proposed to “build a new pattern of training foreign-related rule of law talents” and “cultivate a group of high-level foreign-related rule of law talents who have an international perspective, are well-versed in international rules, and can participate in international legal affairs. Adept at defending national interests, courageous in promoting changes in global governance rules, and familiar with the legal system of countries along the “One Belt, One Road”, they ought to serve the construction of “One Belt, One Road” with high-quality specialized rule of law training. On February 25, 2019, President Xi Jinping made an important speech at the second meeting of the Central Committee for the Comprehensive Rule of Law, in which he pointed out the significance of accelerating the construction of a legal system for the extraterritorial application of our laws and strengthening the training of foreign-related rule of law professionals.

In 2019, the Ministry of Education proposed the construction of “New Liberal Arts” in universities, advocating the establishment of a new talent cultivation model and skill development model suitable for students’ growth needs on the basis of the reform of the traditional cultivation model. As a branch of ESP, “English + Law” can realize the cross-fertilization of foreign language and law education according to the construction concept of “New Liberal Arts”, and it has become one of the important research topics for universities. On April 17, 2020, Wang Yang, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Chairman of the CPPCC National Committee, hosted the 34th biweekly consultation forum of the 13th CPPCC National Committee. The theme of the symposium is “building a high-quality foreign-related legal service personnel team”, “to form a foreign-related legal service personnel team with a firm political stance, family sentiment, excellent professionalism, and practical skills is an important resource for China’s participation in the international governance system, and an important force for safeguarding national interests and the legitimate rights and interests of enterprises and citizens. It is imperative to place the construction of foreign-related legal service talents in the historical process of two major situations, namely, the overall situation of the strategy for the great rejuvenation of China and the unprecedented changes in the past century.”

2.2 Economic and Social Development, the Necessity of Trade Globalization

China is under a rapid socio-economic development, and with the advancement of globalization, China’s foreign trade is expanding remarkably. In 2019, the import and export trade volume of mainland China exceeded 30,000 billion RMB, and the stock of foreign investment was nearly 2,000 billion USD, rising from the 25th place in the world in 2002 to the second place. Foreign exchange reserves remain above US\$3,000 billion. According to customs statistics, “In terms of RMB, China’s total imports and exports grew by 2.4% from January to November 2019, of which exports grew by 4.5%. Imports were basically the same as the same period last year, and the trade surplus expanded by 34.9%.” (Li, 2019) However, “the complexity of the overseas investment market, the lag of China’s foreign-related investment law, the inadequate legal protection mechanism for overseas direct investment, and the investors’ lack of understanding of the relevant laws and regulations of the investment country, and even the neglect of the cultural customs can bring huge risks to the outward direct investment of Chinese enterprises.” (Zhang & Zhu, 2017)

In addition, in recent years, overseas trade barriers, trade protectionism, and unilateralism are on the rise. With increasing trade frictions, it has become increasingly important to protect overseas interests and the rights and interests of citizens abroad. However, as the second largest economy in the world, the proportion of foreign-related legal professionals is extremely low in China. The number and quality of foreign-related lawyers in domestic and international laws who are fluent in at least one foreign language are far from adequacy. “Since the economic reform, China’s foreign-related rule of law work has been continuously strengthened. The team of foreign-related legal talents has been growing and the service areas have been gradually broadened, promoting China’s international development, safeguarding the country’s sovereignty, security, and development interests, protecting the overseas rights and interests of enterprises and citizens, and promoting a community of human destiny.” (Huang, 2020) Therefore, the cultivation of “English + Law” composite talents is in line with the trend of economic and social development. It is an important guarantee in globalizing China’s trade and building a community of human destiny.

2.3 The Necessity for Optimization and Sustainability of English Majors in Universities

“The current situation facing foreign language education in China is, on one hand, a surplus of single foreign language talents; on the other hand, due to the lack of management and innovation abilities, foreign language professionals have poor social adaptability and low achievement in the workplace.” (Dong, 2017) University English teaching still follows the concept and model of general English in primary and secondary schools, which cannot effectively fulfill the needs of cultivating “international professionals” in various fields, nor does it meet the needs of foreign-related foreign language talents in the new era. The teaching philosophy of English majors emphasizes “generality” and “humanism”, but this philosophy is not enough to highlight the professionalism and technicality of English as a tool. The teaching objectives do not reflect professional characteristics, professional differentiation, and professional relevance; the language skills and professional knowledge structure of English teachers are one-dimensional, and there is a need for a composite and specialized “English + Law” teaching team. The content of the English+Law textbook is seriously disconnected from students’ professional knowledge. “English, English majors and law majors are mostly independent, and have not really achieved resource sharing and cross-border development. In terms of teaching and discipline development, it is reasonable to set the boundaries of disciplines and courses. However, the demand for talents is based on application and occupation, and the cultivation of professional talents should be oriented by market demand. Moreover, resources should be dynamically adjusted to cultivate the talents that are really needed by the country.” (Li & Zhang & Xu, 2015)

Therefore, in the process of building the “new liberal arts”, English should take the lead to serve the national development strategy, meet the challenges of technology and the new technological revolution, and fully integrate into the construction of a strong nation in higher education. The “English+Law” composite talent cultivation mode is in line with the construction idea of “New Liberal Arts” in colleges and universities, which breaks the barriers of majors, opens up the mechanism of interdisciplinary study, and promotes the deep integration of “English” and “Law”. “It helps to build professional clusters, achieve enriching connotation and improving system of English professional discipline construction, and effectively promote the sustainable development of English major. Meanwhile, the students develop the ability to specialize in “cross-composite+” areas in certain disciplines. Through integrated interdisciplinary knowledge construction to achieve decision-making and consulting functions for countries, regions, and organizations (or enterprises), students are induced to learn in depth. Perfection in foreign language teaching is highly valued. Applying the concept of the new liberal arts to the quality of education, China will cultivate a large number of professionals who are familiar with the Party’s policies and national guidelines, understand the national conditions of China, and have a global vision. Moreover, they will be proficient at foreign languages, familiar with international rules, and are proficient in international negotiations.

3. Feasibility of “English + Law” composite talents cultivation

Foreign language talents from a limited number of disciplines cannot meet the needs of the national development strategy, and the times call for complex foreign language talents. It is a prevailing trend to cultivate and develop interdisciplinary disciplines and train composite foreign language talents. “In the context of the new era and new liberal arts, the cross-fertilization of foreign language disciplines with other disciplines has gradually become a disciplinary development trend. Interdisciplinary research helps spawn new academic growth points and promote academic innovation and development.”(Dai Weidong:2020) Therefore, the cultivation of “English + Law” composite talents is a new talent cultivation mode in line with the times.

3.1 Clarify the goal and optimize the talent training mode

First of all, cultivating legal English composite talents is not exactly the same as cultivating high-end foreign-related rule of law talents. In the final analysis, “English + law” composite talents are first of all foreign language talents, a necessary stage for foreign-related rule of law talents, who can start from providing language services for foreign-related legal work. Only after the subsequent different stages of hierarchical training to improve, can they embark on the direct engagement in foreign-related legal practice. After different levels of training and improvement, they can start the career path of directly engaging in foreign-related legal practice. Therefore, “English+Law” composite talents should have English language sensitivity and good English language skills, be inquisitive, innovative, and stress-resistant. They should also have high quality of intercultural communication and legal thinking, a solid

knowledge of English language, and a good understanding of the politics, economy, society, history, and culture of major English-speaking countries. They should be familiar with the national conditions of China's rule of law and the social and legal cultures of British and American countries, master certain knowledge of British and American law, and form an interdisciplinary knowledge structure combining “English” and “international law”. In addition, they should be familiar with international legal rules, master the basic skills of legal English in audio-visual, speaking, reading, writing, and translation, and have strong foreign-related legal communication skills and the ability to engage in basic foreign-related legal affairs.

“Interdisciplinary and supra-disciplinary paradigms in which each discipline can provide or contribute its own unique fundamental knowledge and research methods are very important in terms of the fit between different disciplines. They are in a relationship of mutual influence, interaction, and constraint, which is the part-whole relationship in systems theory.” (Huang, 2020) Therefore, the cultivation of “English + law” composite talents means that English teaching must be transformed from the traditional English basic teaching mode to an interdisciplinary learning mechanism. So, the linguistic and literary contents of traditional English education can be optimized, and middle and junior level foreign-related legal talents can be cultivated to provide talent guarantee for the foreign-related legal affairs of China. The School of Foreign Languages can take the market demand as the guide, combine the professional ability of the disciplines and the characteristics of the school, the advantages of the location, teachers, the student population and other specific situations to determine the special training direction in line with their conditions. The focus can be misalignment competition, characteristic development to the principle of less but more precise to cultivate “English +” composite talents. In addition, the school will focus on the training of students' professional skills and the comprehensive development of students' professional abilities, highlighting the leading role of students in the process of talent training and giving full play to students' enthusiasm and initiative in learning. Students learn English cultural knowledge and train English language skills in the process of learning foreign-related legal English knowledge, mastering international law, international trade law and WTO rules, etc. At the same time, using English to learn relevant basic legal knowledge, they can strengthen English listening, speaking, and interpretation ability, and focus on developing basic foreign language skills and basic knowledge of Chinese and foreign law. To establish the joint training mode of school-enterprise and school-government, it is a long cycle and slow effect to rely only on universities to set up additional professional directions. Jointly related enterprises, companies, governments, institutions, etc. can cooperate with colleges and universities for orientation training according to the actual demand of their cooperation projects. In addition, an importance should be attached on strengthening the cooperation between foreign language colleges and law schools and actively promoting the crossover and integration of substantive disciplines such as teacher interchange, student interchange, course interchange, mutual recognition of credits, and mutual award of degrees.

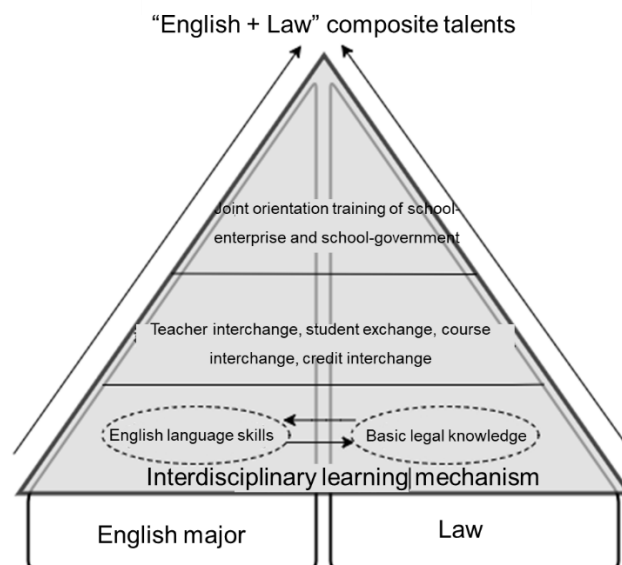


Figure. 1 “English + Law” composite talents

3.2 Clarify the practical situation and build a composite curriculum setting

“English + Law” is not just a course, but an emerging cross-discipline. However, “foreign-related legal talents cannot be cultivated by learning foreign languages first and then learning law; nor can they be cultivated by learning law first and then learning English, but by learning legal English.” (Ma, 2019) However, at present, the phenomenon of “two skins” between English teaching and law teaching still exists. The old curriculum system based on the division of foreign language and law can no longer accommodate the needs of the development of the new professional direction of legal English, nor can it cultivate foreign legal talents in the context of the “new era” and “new liberal arts”. “Innovation is the lifeline of higher education. The new situation in the new era requires the innovative development of higher liberal arts education, that is, to promote the construction of new liberal arts.” (Wu, 2019) Therefore, it is necessary to establish a new curriculum system, abolish the mode of “law course” + “English course” and establish a curriculum system with “English + law” as the core. The core curriculum system should be established. With social needs and employment as the guide, a legal English (professional direction) curriculum system and an interdisciplinary and complex curriculum group need to be built for students in applied undergraduate universities.

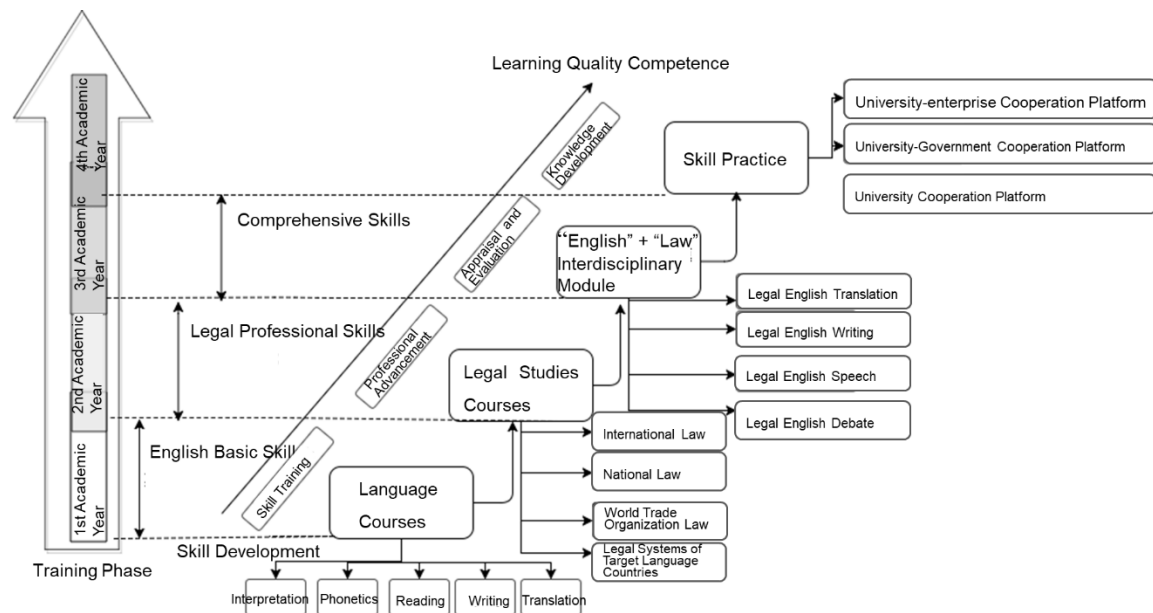


Figure. 2 Composite Course System

“China's foreign-related legal services personnel construction has an outstanding problem, the lack of integrated planning, overall design. To optimize the national regulations and national governance system, innovative institutional mechanisms, reflecting the characteristics of the law, top-level design, high level promotion, collaborative implementation” are required. (Wang, 2020) The cultivation of talents at the undergraduate level should focus on basic abilities and skills, which require students to have a basic understanding of the six basic departments of English and American law, and to be proficient in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating in English. Based on the “student-centered” training concept, a more open and inclusive “independent” learning environment should be built. Increase the construction of modularized, modularized, and distinctive curriculum groups in professional training, and encourage the development of comprehensive, problem-oriented and cross-disciplinary new courses. The development of new courses that are comprehensive, problem-oriented, and cross-disciplinary will be encouraged. The courses can be divided into the following three areas: first, language courses, including basic foreign language courses such as interpretation, phonetics, reading, writing and translation (the first and second academic years); second, law (including legal culture) courses, including courses on the national legal system, the legal system of the target country, the law of the World Trade Organization and international law (the second and third academic years); third, “English + law” cross-module study (the second and third academic years), and design task-oriented learning modules in line with the training objectives, such as legal English translation, legal English writing, legal English speech, legal English debate, etc., and make each module organic. The third “English + Law” cross-curricular module (second and third year) is designed to meet the training objectives of task-oriented learning modules, such as legal English translation, legal English writing, legal English speech, legal English

debate, and so on. The modules are organically integrated to form an overall synergy to serve the knowledge and ability required for the training objectives. In addition, to optimize the mechanism of talent cultivation, firstly, the cooperation among relevant government departments, relevant institutions, large and small enterprises in education should be promoted. Further training, cultivation, and development cooperation will build a practical platform for talent cultivation improving the quality of talent cultivation. Secondly, the communication and cooperation between foreign-related government departments, foreign-related organizations, foreign-related enterprises, foreign-related law firms, and universities and higher education institutions with teachers should be enhanced. Putting into practice the specific practice of talents in the whole process of talent training will develop the practical skills of “English + Law” composite talents effectively and efficiently through such a platform. (3rd and 4th year).

3.3 Deepen the reform and strengthen the construction of faculty

The cultivation of “English + Law” talents requires not only strong learning ability of students, but also high professional qualifications and teaching skills of teachers, which requires a high level of training for interdisciplinary teaching staff. However, most of the majors in colleges and universities are relatively independent and divided, and interdisciplinary teachers are very scarce. At present, most of the teachers in foreign language colleges who are engaged in interdisciplinary legal English teaching come from traditional foreign language and literature majors, not specializing in legal theory and practice. The teachers in law schools lack corresponding English professional knowledge and language teaching skills. In addition, in recent years, the Ministry of Education has listed English and law majors as red card majors, and the development of the two majors has fallen into difficulties respectively.

Therefore, it is necessary to establish a set of innovative teacher training mechanism to build a team of teachers with interdisciplinary quality and capable of teaching practice to ensure the implementation of teaching and the realization of talent training objectives. There are three specific ways: First, through “internal training”, qualified professional teachers are sent to participate in degree study, training, work, and exchange programs related to foreign law at home and abroad, and professional teachers are encouraged to actively participate in the Legal English Certificate Examination (LEC) and attend legal English academic conferences and lectures domestically and abroad. Secondly, teachers of relevant majors in universities can “go out”, enter legal practice departments, participate in foreign-related legal affairs, cultivate legal practice ability, and gain foreign-related legal expertise and work experience. Thirdly, the exchange and mutual appointment between higher education institutions and legal practice departments are further promoted, employment of famous domestic and foreign experts and scholars to give lectures, and appointment of famous legal English experts and scholars as honorary professors, visiting professors or part-time professors, etc. Therefore, the interdisciplinary transformation and “grafting” of teachers of related majors are fostered.

4. Conclusion

The cultivation of “English” + “Law” composite talents is a systematic project based on the national development strategy under the background of “New Liberal Arts” construction. The cultivation process requires precise alignment, careful design, and scientific application. Colleges and universities need to integrate resources, break through innovation, create necessary conditions, and fully understand the connotation of legal English majors (directions). They should be able to actively generate new interdisciplinary growth points of legal English, accelerate the establishment of market-oriented legal English majors (directions), and strive to promote the systematic development of junior-level foreign-related rule of law talents cultivation.

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