

From disciplinary separation to synergistic coexistence: an innovative reform study of interdisciplinary talent cultivation models for English majors

*Yun Long**, *Zhenze Song*

Beijing International Studies University, Beijing, China

*Corresponding Author. Email: bisu2000@163.com

Abstract. Under the construction background of the new liberal arts, traditional. English major is facing multiple challenges such as the impact of AI technology, escalating social demands, course homogenization, decline in employment competitiveness and so on. The study is conducted from the perspective of collaborative innovation, systematically examine the reform path of interdisciplinary talent cultivation models in the field of English studies. The study suggests that the essence of the crisis in the field of English the structural dislocation between the knowledge production model of a single discipline and the complex social demands. To deal with it, the solution is collaborative innovation through the four dimensions of openness, complementarity, innovativeness and applicability to achieve a radical transformation from "language as a tool" perspective to intercultural competence perspective.

Keywords: cross-disciplinary, collaborative innovation, new liberal arts, teaching model reform

1. Introduction

Entering the third decade of the 21st century, Chinese higher education is currently undergoing a profound paradigm shift. In 2020, the promulgation of "The New Liberal Arts Manifesto" marked a new phase in the reform of liberal arts education. This manifesto based on the new era, responds to new demands and comprehensively deployed the development of the new liberal arts, while emphasizing the innovative advancement of traditional liberal arts. It takes the path of interdisciplinary integration and cross-border fusion as the method, aiming to cultivate new individuals to possess a composite knowledge system and practical skills and also create a "world-class, talent cultivation system in the liberal arts with Chinese characteristics. At the same time, China has repeatedly emphasized the "Double First-class" construction documents the need to "break down the barriers between academic disciplines and specialties" and promote the development of new engineering, new medicine, new agriculture and new liberal arts construction. China focuses on establishing programs in interdisciplinary fields and foster growth points in different disciplines. Behind this policy, it lies a profound reflection of the traditional model for cultivating liberal arts talent which is hard to meet the complex demands of modern society.

As the largest and most widely spread foreign language major in higher education in China, the difficulties in its development are particularly acute. The English major is facing a fundamental question: At a time when language skills can be replaced by machines and pure language talent is being squeezed by versatile talent, where is the irreplaceability of the English major? On the one hand, the rapid development of AI technology is reshaping the business model of language services. English majors must go beyond instrumental training and return to the human nature of foreign language subjects by deepening classical study and critical thinking training to cultivate students' deep cultural literacy and critical ability. Tools such as machine translation and ChatGPT are increasingly performing well in basic translation and essay writing, and the demand for jobs that traditionally rely on language skills is shrinking. On the other hand, society's expectations for talent have shifted from "English speakers" to "Using English to solve professional problems." Moreover, the market urgently needs composite talents who can work in complex jobs such as international business, regional and country studies, cross-cultural digital marketing, and so on in English. From "tools dominance" to "Unity of instrumentality, humanity and science" to serve national strategic communication and mutual learning among civilizations. Improve from a monolingual to a "multi-lingual + regional country" system, and use national and regional knowledge to support international communication and global governance. Shift from "skill training" to "AI-enhanced capabilities" to create a new paradigm of human-machine collaborative language services. From the 'Intra-disciplinary circulation' to the cross-border integration of 'foreign language +', to form cross-border integration; From "Uniform standards" to "classification and stratification of excellence" to precisely align with national priorities and industrial frontiers."

The development and reform of English majors must go beyond mere technical level of course adjustments or teaching methods improvements. Instead, we need to delve into the fundamental logic of talent cultivation models and genuinely consider "how to cross, who will cross, and how to cross" in order to provide a clear and constructive approach for the future prospects of English majors.

2. The conceptual connotation of interdisciplinary talent cultivation

From the perspective of knowledge integration, interdisciplinarity is not a single concept.

Professor Lu Xiaozhong and Professor Li Saipai point out that interdisciplinary integration can be understood as a conceptual spectrum ranging from multidisciplinary cooperation, through cross-disciplinary integration, to transdisciplinary co-creation, a process that reflects a continuum of knowledge integration from a low to a high degree [1]. Specifically: multidisciplinary collaboration is the lowest level of integration, where teachers from different disciplines teach their respective subjects matter around a single theme, with little substantive interaction between disciplines. However, interdisciplinary integration represents a higher level of organic integration, where the knowledge, methods, and theories of different disciplines are combined to form a new cognitive framework, with the boundaries between different discipline. Interdisciplinary integration is the highest form of integration, which not only transcends disciplinary boundaries but also goes beyond academia itself. Furthermore, it incorporates the knowledge of practitioners from the social field into the knowledge production process. Judging from this spectrum, the so-called interdisciplinary training currently offered by most universities remains at the level of multidisciplinary collaboration: English students taking a few business courses is essentially a simple combination of "English and business" rather than true interdisciplinary cultivation. True interdisciplinary training should entail a fundamental shift from "additive thinking" to "integrative thinking."

If interdisciplinary description refers to the state of integrating knowledge, then collaborative innovation reveals the mechanisms that lead to this state. When applied to the field of talent cultivation, interdisciplinary

talent development has undergone a theoretical evolution from interdisciplinary integration to collaborative innovation. This process is characterized by three core features.

2.1. Openness

Openness means break the closed boundary of traditional talent cultivation system. Knowledge fusion is the starting point and foundation for the development of interdisciplinary competence [2]. In specific transformation of education, it is manifested as establishing a cross-disciplinary teaching team and course-selection exchange mechanism. Professor Zhang Dandan and Xue Jin used Beijing University of Science and Technology as an example, explain how linguistic science can break down disciplinary barriers in the construction of new liberal arts, engage in interdisciplinary cross-pollination and integration with cognitive neuroscience and artificial intelligence, and explore integrated training models such as "foreign language + AI" [3]. The requirement for openness necessitates that English majors be able to choose courses such as data science and international relations and that credits earned can be recognized between different programs. It also requires English teachers to collaborate with computer and business school instructors in preparing course materials.

2.2. Complementarity

Complementarity emphasizes the complementary capabilities and resource integration between different entities. The core strengths of English majors lie in language precision understanding, intercultural communication, academic writing, and so on. In contrast, the strengths of other disciplines are their domain-specific knowledge. The combination of these two can lead to cognitive breakthroughs that are unattainable within a single discipline. The irreplaceable advantages of English majors are manifested at three levels: precise language understanding, the ability of enabling the differentiation of subtle semantic differences and pragmatic functions of vocabulary; intercultural communication skills, allowing for the comprehension of communication rules and value assumptions within different cultural contexts; and academic writing and information integration capabilities, enabling the systematic review of literature and the construction of logical arguments. Furthermore, in the context of globalization, professionals in foreign languages need to possess precise language comprehension ability, cross-cultural communication competence, and academic writing and information integration skills. These three competencies collectively constitute the irreplaceable advantages that set their profession apart from others [4].

2.3. Innovativeness

Innovativeness is manifested in the emergence of new teaching formats and the production of new knowledge. For example, the systematic transformation of teaching design and teaching context through the use of digital humanities, AI, and big data technologies represents a new type of teaching format. From the perspective of knowledge innovation, interdisciplinary integration has given rise to new research perspectives and problem-solving consciousness, leading to a form of knowledge production that is neither purely linguistic research nor the knowledge production of research in other disciplines.

3. The core challenge of interdisciplinary talent cultivation in the field of English

3.1. External environment: the double pressure of the impact of AI and upgrading of social needs

"Over a relatively brief period, the rapid development of artificial intelligence has reshaped our perception of traditional concepts that have been with us for decades, some even for centuries. Communication, language, academic writing, translation, and education have not escaped that transformation." [5] In the midst of this technological wave, large Language Models have multiple functions and in recent years, it's widely used in the field of translation which brings great challenges to demand for translation talents, subject of translation teaching, content of translation teaching and methods of translation teaching. The tools like machine translation and ChatGPT are demonstrating increasingly outstanding performance such as basic translation and document writing while traditional jobs that rely on language skills are rapidly decreasing. At the same time, "the English craze" is fading. With the enhancement of English coverage in primary and secondary education and the universal increase of English proficiency of non-English major undergraduates, the competitive advantage of English as a specialized skill has been significantly reduced.

The deeper challenges come from the upgrading of social demands. The education model of traditional English major is hard to satisfy the demands of social development and the social demand for interdisciplinary English talents has become particularly urgent [6]. The essence of the transformation is the upgrading of capability requirements from "language proficiency" to "language empowerment" ---English is not just a purpose but a tool and medium to solve professional questions. The Corporate requirements for talent shift from "Excellent English Ability" to "Using English" to conduct professional communication and solve problems in specific areas.

3.2. Within the discipline: the structural predicament of curriculum homogenization and teacher source homogenization

In many universities, the curriculum for English majors is highly similar, still centering on skill training in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation. This results in a serious lack of breadth of knowledge and depth of thinking among students. Their academic program and courses are only about comprehensive English, English listening, spoken English, English literature and English translation, lacking of distinctive positioning. This kind of curriculum homogenization may students' confusion such as "We have studied English for four years in the university, but it seems we didn't gain much knowledge other than improving our English skills."

The homogeneity of the faculty structure has made this predicament worse. Most English teachers are under literature or linguistics background, lacking of interdisciplinary knowledge base and interdisciplinary teaching ability. When universities plan to offer courses in the "English+International Business" direction, the practical difficulties is:English teachers don't know enough knowledge of commercial business and business teachers don't use English to teach courses. This "disciplinary lock-in effect" phenomenon makes English major hard to break through the path dependence of the traditional talent cultivation model.

3.3. Student development: decline in employment competitiveness and blurred professional identity

According to the *Chinese College Graduates' Employment Report* annually released by the MyCOS Institute, English major has been listed as a "red flag" major for several consecutive years, with persistently low

employment rates and salary levels. The employment predicament faced by English majors has become an issue that cannot be ignored [7]. From the perspective of student development, the predicament faced by English majors is most vividly reflected in the job market. Graduates are highly replaceable, and there is significant internal competition for positions in traditional fields such as translation and education. In emerging fields, simply being proficient in English is no longer sufficient to constitute a core competitive advantage; one can easily be replaced by individuals with a combination of expertise in another field and proficiency in English.

A more profound impact is the blurring of professional identity. Many English majors are perplexed: What exactly are their strengths compared to students from other majors who are also proficient in English? What kind of abilities does an English major actually cultivate? This crisis of identity directly affects students' level of engagement in their studies and their expectations for their future development. The predicament faced by English majors essentially boils down to this: In an era where language skills can be replicated by machines and purely linguistic talents are being squeezed out by individuals with diverse skills, what is the irreplaceable value of a professional like an English major?

3.4. Teaching management: the monolithic evaluation system and rigid inter-departmental barriers

The root of the challenge lies in the institutional level. Nowadays, the disciplinary evaluation system is still too monolithic. Under the social context of digital transformation and spatial intelligence technology are developing rapidly, how to break the barriers between university talent cultivation and actual industry needs has become one of the core issues in higher education reform. If English faculty and business school faculty collaborate to launch an interdisciplinary course, how would the teaching workload calculate? How are interdisciplinary teaching and research achievements recognized in professional title evaluation? The absence of these institutional issues makes interdisciplinary reform face barriers to specific implementation.

The barriers between faculties are equally evident. Between the English Department, The Business and the law department, they lack mechanisms such as mutual course selection, credit recognition, and cross-appointment of teachers. This "striated and segmented" organizational structure creates a fundamental contradiction with the "networked connections" required for interdisciplinary talent cultivation. Interdisciplinary integration is not merely about knowledge synthesis; it also necessitates "breaking down existing knowledge control and establishing new structures."

4. Collaborative innovation: reform pathways for interdisciplinary talent cultivation

Regarding the external environmental shocks, internal disciplinary barriers, student development challenges and institutional obstacles revealed above, unidimensional remedies are unlikely to be effective.

To solve this systemic deadlock, interdisciplinary talent cultivation and collaborative innovation must be achieved. And it is necessary to make coordinated efforts on the four dimensions of openness, complementarity, innovativeness and applicability. The four dimensions support each other, build up layer upon layer and together constitute the systematic approach to cultivating interdisciplinary English majors.

4.1. Openness: break down the wall of faculties and classrooms

The core of reform and opening-up lies in breaking the closed boundaries of traditional talent cultivation system and establish an educational ecosystem involving multiple stakeholders. Course cross-selection and

credit recognition is the primary breakthrough point of the openness. The practice of Gele Academy of Sichuan International Studies University shows that establishing "three-tiered linkage mechanism" featuring "university-level coordination, college integration, and departmental provision" can efficiently achieve the integration of cross-departmental curriculum resources [8]. English major can take a course in Data Science, International Relations, Economics, etc.. And achieve mutual credit recognition to provide institutional guarantees for the construction of the "English + X" knowledge structure. Moreover, the proposal and implementation of virtual teaching and research offices have created a new form of collaborative teaching research and shared construction of teaching resources for grassroots teaching and research offices.

The boundaries of traditional teaching and research offices heavily overlap with their administrative affiliations, resulting in a lack of regular communication mechanisms among faculty members from different departments. Virtual teaching and research offices connect teachers from different disciplines through online platforms to achieve a teaching community with collaborative lesson planning and joint teaching and research.

Integrating real-world business cases into the classroom is an effective way to break down the walls between academia and society. Traditional English teaching materials often use examples that are divorced from real-life contexts and it makes students hard to build the relationship between "learning" and "usage". Introduce real-world business case studies, such as analyzing brand conduct overseas market examples, handling authentic foreign-related legal documents to make students integrate English proficiency with domain knowledge while solving real-world problems.

4.2. Complementarity: build an "English plus X" competency ecosystem

The core of complementarity is to recognize the core advantage of English major and form capability complementarity with other disciplines to realize the synergy effect that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts". The irreplaceable advantages of English major are reflected in the following three aspects: precise language comprehension ability, cross-cultural communication skills, academic writing and information synthesis skills

Integrating these strengths with domain knowledge from other disciplines can generate new points of capability growth. Specifically: "English+Economics/Management" method can cultivate international business talents who are capable of conducting international market analysis and cross-border business negotiations. The "English + Law" program cultivates foreign-related legal professionals capable of handling international legal affairs. The "English + Regional and Country Studies" program cultivates area studies professionals capable of conducting in-depth analysis of specific countries and regions. The "English+Energy/Electric Power" program cultivates international engineering professionals capable of participating in overseas engineering projects.

This complementarity is not a simple stacking of courses, Rather, it is an organic integration of abilities achieved through methods such as project-based learning and case-based teaching. In the practice of North China Electric Power University, The philosophy that "the field guides the discourse, and the discourse serves the field" runs through the entire process. What students receive is not isolated language training, but integrated training that incorporates professional terminology, international rules, and strategic communication. That will make them know how to use professional language to convey technological pattern and learn how to collaborate in a multiple cultural team.

4.3. Innovativeness: create new teaching form and knowledge output

Innovation is manifested as new teaching models fostered by interdisciplinary integration. The study bases on the project is the typical form of interdisciplinary teaching innovation. In English major context, the project

could be designing an English-language overseas publishing plan for a local game company. Students should integrate English competence, cross-cultural knowledge, marketing knowledge to complete this project. This type of project-based learning not only enhances learning motivation but also cultivates complex problem-solving skills.

In addition, virtual simulation has become a typical way technology helps language teaching. Specifically, a virtual simulation experiment is a modern teaching method that utilizes technologies such as virtual reality, multimedia, and human-computer interaction to construct highly realistic virtual experimental environments and objects, enabling learners to conduct experimental operations through human-computer interaction. This technology has brought revolutionary changes to language teaching and stands as a representative innovation in technology-enabled language instruction [9]. For example, North China Electric Power University developed a training system for emergency language services. It uses virtual simulation to recreate real-life situations in overseas projects, covering everything from technical negotiations and handling emergencies to public communication. This effectively solves the problem where what students learn is disconnected from what they actually need to do.

4.4. Applicability: from "studying language" to "using language to solve real-world problems"

The application-oriented transformation is the ultimate goal of interdisciplinary reform, manifesting in a fundamental shift in the training objectives from "studying language" to "using language to solve real-world problems." The Capstone graduation project is a crucial component in implementing an applied-oriented approach. Unlike traditional academic papers, the Capstone project requires students to complete a comprehensive project in a real or simulated context, taking the form of an interdisciplinary research report or a curatorial plan. This design not only tests students' ability to integrate knowledge but also fosters their systematic thinking when dealing with complex issues. Industry-embedded internships serve as a bridge between academia and the workforce. Under an interdisciplinary approach, students should be placed in roles within marketing departments, project teams of international organizations, and other entities of multinational corporations, where they will handle authentic cross-cultural business or public affairs, applying their comprehensive abilities of "English + domain-specific knowledge" in real-world work settings.

In addition, the dual-supervisor system provides institutional support for application-oriented training, in which on-campus English supervisors are responsible for guiding language proficiency, while industry or interdisciplinary supervisors offer domain knowledge and practical experience support. This institutional arrangement ensures that students receive professional guidance in both language competence and domain knowledge.

5. Proposals for building an interdisciplinary practice platform for English majors

5.1. Design philosophy for an interdisciplinary English internship base

In response to the current inadequacy of internship base construction for English majors, this study proposes a systematic conceptual framework for an interdisciplinary internship base for English studies. The construction of internship bases should establish a progressive practical system. Professor Xiang Chengjun proposed a "three-level progressive and continuous internship" system for on-campus training, which covers three levels: language training, business simulation, and productive training. This concept is highly aligned with the needs of building an interdisciplinary internship base for English majors. In terms of hierarchical

dimensions, a progressive system should be established, consisting of cognitive internships, professional internships, and graduation internships. In terms of domain dimensions, science and engineering institutions may focus on international engineering projects and technical document writing, while finance and economics institutions may focus on the marketing departments of multinational corporations and international financial institutions. In terms of integration, we should promote the deep integration of the education chain and the industry chain [10].

Internship bases should not just be "places where students are assigned," but should become platforms for collaborative education between universities and enterprises. Enterprises should participate in curriculum development, provide real-world cases, and assign industry mentors, while schools should offer employee training, language services, and research support to enterprises, thereby forming a symbiotic and mutually beneficial partnership.

5.2. Mechanism for integrating practice base with curriculum

Maximizing the value of internship bases requires an organic connection with the curriculum system. Key mechanisms for achieving this goal include: preparatory courses, which are offered before the internship begins to ensure students possess the foundational knowledge needed for the internship setting; embedded projects, which formalize internship tasks as part of the curriculum, making the internship content an extension and deepening of course assignments; and reflective learning, which requires students to keep internship logs and write case analysis reports, transforming fragmented experiences into systematic cognitive structures.

5.3. Expected improvements in talent development outcomes

Based on the above design, the positive effects of interdisciplinary internship bases on talent development are mainly reflected on three main levels: at the competency level, students comprehensively apply "English + domain knowledge" in real-world work settings, developing the ability to solve complex problems; at the identity level, students witness firsthand the value of "English + X" competencies during their internships, leading to a significant enhancement in their professional identity; at the employment level, students with high-quality internship experience are able to demonstrate their practical experience and problem-solving skills in specific fields during job searches, giving them a marked competitive advantage. Just as Professor Guo Jianru and Professor Zhang Qianqian pointed out, "The quality of postgraduate training bases has a significant impact on the enhancement of professional degree graduate students' competencies and qualities." [11]

6. Conclusion

This study adopts the theoretical perspective of collaborative innovation, systematically examines the reform pathway of interdisciplinary talent cultivation model for English majors. The study draws the following main conclusions. Firstly, the crisis that English major is facing has structural characteristics. The problems like the impact of AI, upgrade of social needs, homogenization of courses, homogenization of teaching staff, decline in employment competitiveness are mutually related. It is impossible for any partial technical reform to completely solve this dilemma. Secondly, collaborative innovation provides theoretical framework for solving this dilemma. The four dimensions—openness, complementarity, innovation, and applicability—support each other and form a complete path for interdisciplinary talent reform. Openness breaks down barriers, complementarity leads to integration, innovation fosters new forms. Anchor the ultimate goal in

practicality—none of the four can be lacking. Thirdly, interdisciplinary reform requires coordinated advancement across four dimensions: curriculum system, teaching staff, practice platforms, and evaluation mechanisms. Curriculum reform is shifting from simple skill training to a broader ability ecosystem. Teacher development reform is moving from working alone to building teaching communities. Practical reform is changing from classroom simulations to real industry involvement. And evaluation reform is turning from focusing on scores to mapping out actual abilities.

Interdisciplinary talent cultivation is the essential path for the transformation and upgrading of the English major. In the long run, only truly achieve the transformation from "language-as-tool view" to "intercultural competence view", The English major can find new growth points in higher education reform and realize true collaboration and innovation.

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