

Research on the Training Model of Interdisciplinary Cross-Border E-Commerce Talents in the Context of New Liberal Arts

Ling Ding

School of Economics, Guangzhou College of Commerce, Guangzhou 510000, China

Abstract

The growth of traditional foreign trade has slowed down, while cross-border e-commerce continues to develop rapidly, becoming a significant force in stabilizing China's foreign trade landscape. Many small and medium-sized foreign trade enterprises are transitioning to cross-border e-commerce, and the rapid development of this sector has generated a substantial demand for talent, posing new requirements for cross-border e-commerce talent cultivation. Based on the concept of New Liberal Arts construction, this paper analyzes the current demand for cross-border e-commerce talent and identifies several challenges faced by universities in talent cultivation, including issues related to professional positioning, curriculum design, teaching and assessment methods, practical training, and the development of professional teaching staff. To address these challenges in the context of New Liberal Arts, the paper proposes strategies such as defining clear professional orientations, emphasizing disciplinary characteristics, breaking down disciplinary boundaries, establishing interdisciplinary integration, innovating teaching methods, adopting flexible assessment approaches, promoting university-enterprise collaboration for co-education, and optimizing "dual-qualified" teaching teams to build a professional faculty.

Keywords

New Liberal Arts, Interdisciplinary, Cross-border E-commerce, Talent Cultivation

1. Introduction

In recent years, domestic scholars have primarily approached research on cross-border e-commerce talent cultivation from perspectives such as "Internet Plus and Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation," "New Business Studies," "Industry-Education Integration," the "OBE (Outcome-Based Education) Concept," and the "Belt and Road Initiative." Wang Rong (2019) argued that the "Belt and Road Initiative" has accelerated the rapid development of cross-border e-commerce, generating significant demand for cross-border e-commerce professionals. Based on an analysis of the current state of cross-border e-commerce development in Hangzhou and the talent needs of cross-border e-commerce enterprises, Wang suggested that universities should actively explore talent cultivation pathways under the new circumstances by focusing on talent cultivation models, university-enterprise cooperation mechanisms, and competency development systems. The aim is to enhance the professional skills and comprehensive abilities of cross-border e-commerce talent and to promote the healthy and rapid development of the cross-border e-commerce industry. [1]

Chen Xin (2020) proposed a talent cultivation pathway for cross-border e-commerce innovation and entrepreneurship under the perspective of "New Business Studies." He suggested fostering innovation through teaching by reforming teaching content, breaking professional silos, and achieving cross-disciplinary integration; promoting entrepreneurship through practice by embedding entrepreneurial elements into practical projects to develop students' interdisciplinary skills in cross-border e-commerce; and encouraging innovation

through competitions by cultivating students' awareness of innovation and entrepreneurship, integrating learning and creation, and fostering university-enterprise-research collaboration. The goal is to identify the common interests of schools and enterprises under the "New Business Studies" concept and achieve deep integration of industry and education. [2]

Jiang Daili (2021), using teaching practices at Nanning Vocational and Technical College as a case study, analyzed the cultivation of entrepreneurial competencies for cross-border e-commerce talent targeting ASEAN markets based on the outcome-oriented principles of the OBE education concept. She proposed a "Foreign Language + Cross-Border E-Commerce" model, the "Six Duals and Six Competencies" cultivation framework, the "Four Integrations and Four Progressions" curriculum system, and a "Curriculum + Project" teaching model. Additionally, she summarized five key implementation steps for talent cultivation: setting educational outcomes, designing curriculum systems, reforming teaching models, fostering university-enterprise collaborative education, and applying diversified and tiered evaluation methods. [3]

Jin Guichao, Lin Hanmi, and Zhu Lina (2022) pointed out that the concept of New Liberal Arts construction has introduced new requirements for cross-border e-commerce talent cultivation and industry-education integration. Using Qianjiang College of Hangzhou Normal University as an example, they explored an integrated four-year, comprehensive industry-education integration model for cross-border e-commerce. Their practice demonstrated that to deepen industry-education integration in the cross-border e-commerce field, it is necessary to maintain consistent cooperative principles at the cognitive level, establish a multi-level and progressive talent cultivation system at the practical level, and expand collaboration areas at the developmental level. Furthermore, a long-term collaboration mechanism should be established, including benefit-sharing mechanisms, project operation mechanisms, and agreement-based constraint mechanisms. [4]

Additionally, Tang Zhiliang (2022) conducted research on the challenges of cross-border e-commerce talent cultivation in Chinese universities under the backdrop of the new industrial revolution. The study revealed that the new industrial revolution has imposed new objective requirements on cross-border e-commerce talent in terms of knowledge structure, skill set, and mindset. However, several significant issues persist in cross-border e-commerce talent cultivation in Chinese universities, such as insufficient conceptual understanding, incomplete talent cultivation programs, a lack of diversity in teaching methods, outdated faculty development, an underdeveloped collaborative education mechanism, and teaching content that does not align with the objective demands of the new industrial revolution. Finally, the study proposed strategies for effective talent cultivation in the context of the new industrial revolution, including institutional support, the development of multi-dimensional collaborative talent cultivation models, the establishment of talent cultivation standards, and the optimization of the competency structure of cross-border e-commerce talent. [5]

In recent years, China's cross-border e-commerce transaction volume has maintained a high growth rate. According to data released by the General Administration of Customs of China, the total value of cross-border e-commerce imports and exports in 2024 reached 2.63 trillion yuan, representing a year-on-year increase of 10.8%. The Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China has also emphasized that "cross-border e-commerce is a vital driving force in international trade." However, behind these tremendous opportunities lies the challenge of a talent shortage in the cross-border e-commerce sector. In August 2018, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued a directive stating that "higher education should strive to develop new engineering disciplines, new medical disciplines, new agricultural disciplines, and new liberal arts" (referred to as the "Four New" initiative), officially introducing the concept of "New Liberal Arts." Wu Yan, Director-General of the Department of Higher Education at the Ministry of Education, pointed out that the construction of New Liberal Arts is a new requirement for the development of philosophy and social sciences with Chinese

characteristics in the new era. It aims to restructure traditional liberal arts disciplines and promote interdisciplinary integration and deep collaboration. Therefore, it is imperative to cultivate interdisciplinary cross-border e-commerce talent under the guidance of the New Liberal Arts framework.

2. The Connotation of the "New Liberal Arts"

"Globally, liberal arts generally refer to the humanities, including literature, history, philosophy, and arts, as well as the social sciences, including law, economics, education, and management, collectively known as the humanities and social sciences." The construction and development of liberal arts embody a nation's cultural depth and serve as a foundational force for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Today, as socialism with Chinese characteristics enters a new era, fostering the development of a strong higher education system has become a new mission. Within this context, the "New Liberal Arts," as one of the initiatives under the "Four New Plans," must adapt to and meet the demands of interdisciplinary integration and the development of the times, a challenge that all universities and educators must address. Therefore, clarifying the "new" connotation of the New Liberal Arts is a critical basis for talent cultivation in this field. The "new" of the New Liberal Arts is reflected, first and foremost, in the breadth of its disciplinary scope. The New Liberal Arts encompass eight disciplinary categories, among which literature, history, and philosophy are considered foundational disciplines, while economics, management, law, education, and arts are classified as applied liberal arts. Consequently, the New Liberal Arts possess a broader disciplinary scope and extension compared to single-discipline programs. Second, the "new" is embodied in the "interdisciplinary integration" of disciplines. The New Liberal Arts advocate for the study of comprehensive problems through the integration of various disciplines, thereby de-emphasizing disciplinary silos. For example, in the field of cross-border e-commerce, professional learning not only requires mastery of basic theories and concepts but also involves knowledge from international economics and trade, marketing, big data, business English, logistics and warehousing management, computer technology, information engineering, visual communication design, and law. This demonstrates the characteristics of interdisciplinary development across multiple fields. Third, the "new" of the New Liberal Arts is manifested in "value creation." The primary orientation of the New Liberal Arts should shift from exploring the regularities of human society to the recreation of social value. In the current era of rapid technological advancements, including the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, and blockchain, new technologies have brought about new development models and industrial forms, which are continuously influencing and transforming modes of production, lifestyles, thought patterns, and value systems in society. Against this backdrop, universities must align talent cultivation with the evolving social environment by making necessary adaptations and transformations in areas such as disciplinary configuration, program design, curriculum development, innovation in teaching models, platform construction, and cultural exchange. [6]

3. The Demand for Interdisciplinary Cross-Border E-Commerce Talent in the Context of the New Liberal Arts

In recent years, the demand for professional talent in cross-border e-commerce has shown a significant shortage. Professional competencies such as trade practices, legal regulations, industry knowledge, marketing literacy, operational skills, and design capabilities are essential for both enterprises and individuals engaged in cross-border e-commerce. In September 2020, the "Standards for Skill Levels and Classification of Cross-Border E-Commerce Practitioners in China" was released, highlighting the growing demand for innovative and interdisciplinary talent in the field of cross-border e-commerce.

3.1. Language and Cultural Competence

In cross-border e-commerce, the parties involved in transactions are often from different countries, leading to differences in language, customs, culture, and values. Therefore, the first essential skill for cross-border e-commerce practitioners is the ability to overcome language barriers. While English remains the dominant language, there is also a growing demand for professionals proficient in less commonly taught languages. Strong foreign language communication skills are a fundamental requirement for engaging in cross-border e-commerce. Additionally, practitioners must understand the cultural backgrounds of various markets and grasp the nuances of linguistic expressions in different countries to facilitate better communication between transaction parties.

3.2. Trade Practices

Cross-border e-commerce transactions are essentially a form of international trade. Practitioners in this field must understand the general processes of international trade, master the relevant operations of trade procedures, and be proficient in the application of trade terms. They must also possess knowledge of international cargo transportation, international settlement, and customs clearance. The study and accumulation of professional knowledge in trade practices form the foundation for successful cross-border e-commerce operations.

3.3. International Marketing

International marketing is an indispensable component of cross-border e-commerce. Practitioners are required to grasp basic marketing theories, understand operational strategies for cross-border e-commerce platform stores, and master the steps involved in pricing strategies, holiday marketing strategies, search engine optimization (SEO) strategies, and techniques for creating popular products through targeted advertising campaigns. Compared to traditional marketing, cross-border e-commerce marketing imposes higher professional requirements on practitioners. They must not only understand theoretical knowledge but also possess practical operational skills and innovative thinking. Furthermore, they need to analyze the consumption characteristics of online shoppers and the motivations of cross-border e-commerce consumers to select appropriate digital marketing strategies.

3.4. Legal and Regulatory Knowledge

The participants involved in cross-border e-commerce operate under diverse legal systems, and the operation and development of cross-border e-commerce are inevitably subject to the regulations and restrictions of various national laws. Understanding the legal frameworks of different market environments and addressing legal issues related to cross-border e-commerce are not only prerequisites for successful transactions but also essential safeguards for the healthy development of the industry. Therefore, familiarity with the legal regulations and their changes in relevant cross-border e-commerce markets is a critical competency for practitioners in this field. Additionally, as cross-border e-commerce continues to develop, global trade rules are also undergoing significant changes. Practitioners must stay informed about updates in international trade policies, regulations, and tariff structures. In particular, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in recent years has underscored the importance of staying up to date on import and export trends to avoid potential legal issues, such as intellectual property infringement, during transactions. Cross-border e-commerce also encompasses professional knowledge in areas such as logistics, warehousing, cultural and social environments, and computer technology. To ensure the smooth cross-border flow of goods, effective collaboration among professionals in various roles is essential. The demand for cross-border e-commerce talent thus reflects characteristics of diversity and interdisciplinarity.

4. Challenges in Cultivating Interdisciplinary Cross-Border E-Commerce Talent in the Context of the New Liberal Arts

4.1. The Need for Clearer Professional Orientation

At present, most universities are still in the process of developing their cross-border e-commerce programs, with only a limited number of institutions having established “cross-border e-commerce” as an independent major. In many cases, cross-border e-commerce courses are merely added as modules within existing disciplines such as international economics and trade, e-commerce, or logistics management, without a clearly defined professional focus. Consequently, students from these programs often have a limited understanding of cross-border e-commerce, as their knowledge is largely confined to the content provided in textbooks tailored to their original disciplines. This indicates that the professional orientation for cultivating talent in cross-border e-commerce still requires further clarification.

4.2. The Need to Overcome Limitations in Professional Learning

In university programs related to cross-border e-commerce, students tend to have a solid grasp of the theoretical knowledge specific to their respective majors. However, their understanding of the professional competencies required for careers in cross-border e-commerce remains limited. For instance, while students majoring in foreign languages may excel in communication skills and overcome language barriers in cross-border transactions, they often lack knowledge of the entire transaction process, including international trade procedures, foreign trade policies and regulations, logistics and warehousing, and the application of information technology. This limited exposure to interdisciplinary knowledge hinders their ability to fully meet the demands of the cross-border e-commerce industry. This issue highlights a significant challenge in cultivating well-rounded talent for the field.

4.3. The Need for More Flexible Teaching and Assessment Methods

In university courses, the predominant teaching method remains the lecture-based approach, which typically involves the use of textbooks, PowerPoint slides, or chalkboard explanations of theoretical content. Even in case studies, the teaching approach is often limited to lecturing. However, in the context of cultivating interdisciplinary talent for cross-border e-commerce, traditional teaching methods fail to align with the goals of fostering practical and innovative skills. Similarly, in terms of assessment, many universities continue to rely on written exams for cross-border e-commerce courses, even when these courses are extensions of existing disciplines. This approach does not effectively evaluate students' practical skills or their ability to innovate, which are essential for success in the field.

4.4. The Need to Strengthen Practical Learning

Cross-border e-commerce is a discipline that integrates theory and practice. Students cannot meet the professional standards required for the industry by relying solely on theoretical knowledge from textbooks. Current teaching models for cross-border e-commerce often combine theoretical instruction with practical training, with the latter typically conducted on platforms such as AliExpress, Amazon, Wish, and Alibaba International. However, the operational processes on these platforms are relatively standardized, and the requirements for contracts and documentation during transactions are often overly formalized. As a result, students lack the ability to solve diverse and complex problems encountered in real-world practices, and their capacity for innovative thinking during practical operations is underdeveloped. This deficiency in practical learning poses a significant obstacle to the cultivation of qualified cross-border e-commerce professionals.

4.5. The Need to Strengthen Professional Faculty Teams

In recent years, university faculty involved in cultivating cross-border e-commerce talent have been continuously exploring and learning new approaches. However, most full-time instructors tend to focus primarily on theoretical teaching and lack relevant industry backgrounds or practical teaching experience. As cross-border e-commerce continues to evolve, many faculty members have actively participated in various training programs, gaining a certain level of understanding of practical cases and operational processes. Nevertheless, they often lack hands-on experience in critical areas such as business operations, store management, cross-border payment systems, marketing management, and data analysis. This deficiency has resulted in a “standardized” teaching model that fails to fully meet the practical demands of the industry. Therefore, universities must make greater efforts to build professional faculty teams specializing in cross-border e-commerce.

5. Recommendations for Cultivating Interdisciplinary Cross-Border E-Commerce Talent in the Context of the New Liberal Arts

5.1. Clarify Professional Orientation and Highlight Program Characteristics

In the current process of cultivating cross-border e-commerce talent at universities, the professional focus is often overly narrow, and merely adding cross-border e-commerce courses to existing programs is insufficient to meet the demands of talent development. To cultivate specialized cross-border e-commerce professionals, universities should engage in thorough planning and evaluation to clarify the professional orientation and establish comprehensive talent training programs. In line with the developmental prospects of the new liberal arts, these programs should incorporate content related to the political, economic, cultural, religious, and geographical characteristics of target trade countries and regions, as well as laws, regulations, and trade practices relevant to cross-border e-commerce. Emphasis should also be placed on international business etiquette and standardized cross-border e-commerce processes to highlight the distinctive features of the program.

5.2. Break Down Disciplinary Barriers and Establish Interdisciplinary Integration

The construction of the new liberal arts emphasizes the integration of science, technology, and the humanities, advocating interdisciplinary collaboration to meet the needs of societal development. The rapid advancement of the internet and information technology has created favorable conditions for cross-border e-commerce. In addition to core subjects such as international trade, foreign languages, logistics management, and law, proficiency in digital technologies is indispensable for cross-border e-commerce education. Integrating digital technology courses with cross-border e-commerce curricula aligns with the interdisciplinary training philosophy of the new liberal arts. In the process of establishing interdisciplinary integration, universities can first reconfigure their talent training programs. While maintaining the core required courses, elective courses can be adjusted to promote diversity and comprehensiveness. For example, in cross-border e-commerce programs, courses such as big data, data analysis, digital technology applications, and computer applications can be added to enhance students' digital technology competencies. Moreover, adopting a “learning through competition” approach aligns with the interdisciplinary focus. Competitions provide a platform for students from different disciplines to collaborate and learn from one another, fostering interdisciplinary knowledge exchange. Through these competitions, students can enhance their professional skills, expand their knowledge base, and improve their ability to integrate theory with practice.

5.3. Innovate Teaching Methods and Adopt Flexible Assessment

Teaching methods should not only focus on how instructors deliver content but also on how classroom activities are designed. In cross-border e-commerce courses, instructors can innovate classroom activities by shifting the focus to student-centered learning while building on theoretical instruction.

Additionally, assessment methods should incorporate practical teaching components. For instance, final assessments could include computer-based exams, course presentations, or data analysis projects, emphasizing the importance and role of practical teaching.

5.4. Strengthen University-Enterprise Collaboration for Joint Talent Development

The cultivation of cross-border e-commerce talent requires close collaboration and mutual support between universities and enterprises. High-quality university-enterprise cooperation projects provide students with practical learning environments, significantly enhancing the overall effectiveness of talent development. Currently, at a micro level, the integration of industry and education, as well as university-enterprise collaboration, has yet to form a fully mature talent development model. Practical learning is a crucial component of cross-border e-commerce talent cultivation. To train interdisciplinary cross-border e-commerce professionals, universities must provide students with adequate practical learning opportunities. In this regard, universities should conduct thorough evaluations of enterprises, establish effective communication channels, and foster partnerships. On the one hand, universities can serve as a long-term talent pipeline for enterprises; on the other hand, enterprises can offer students valuable practical learning opportunities. University-enterprise collaboration can take various forms, such as co-establishing industry-specific colleges, jointly developing cross-border e-commerce training labs, and creating platforms for student innovation and entrepreneurship competitions. These initiatives aim to enhance students' practical skills.

5.5. Optimize “Dual-Qualified” Faculty Teams and Build Professional Teaching Staff

A professional teaching team is a crucial foundation for cultivating cross-border e-commerce talent. Universities should continuously promote faculty training and professional development to improve instructors' ability to integrate theory with practice in their teaching. In early 2019, the State Council issued the Implementation Plan for National Vocational Education Reform, which introduced the “1+X” system, a pilot program combining academic diplomas with multiple vocational skill certificates. Universities should encourage faculty members to actively participate in such training programs, which not only facilitate communication and learning among instructors from different institutions but also enhance instructors' practical skills. Additionally, universities should explore diverse pathways to recruit instructors with industry experience in cross-border e-commerce. By incorporating case-based teaching into the curriculum, these instructors can help students develop stronger analytical skills and a deeper understanding of real-world challenges.

6. Conclusion

In the context of the new liberal arts, new requirements have been proposed for the cultivation models of interdisciplinary cross-border e-commerce talent. Universities should emphasize the “new” characteristics in the talent development process by focusing on precise professional orientation, interdisciplinary integration, and the construction of professional teaching teams. These efforts aim to continuously promote the sustainable development of cross-border e-commerce talent cultivation.

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