

CULTIVATION PATHWAYS FOR INTELLIGENT LANGUAGE SERVICE PROFESSIONALS IN HIGHER VOCATIONAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAMMES — A CASE STUDY OF THE CROSS-BORDER E-COMMERCE INDUSTRY

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Abstract: With the rapid development of AI technology and the rapid growth of the global cross-border e-commerce industry, the traditional foreign language professionals cultivation model is facing severe challenges. In this context, this paper investigates the cultivation pathway for intelligent language service professionals serving the cross-border e-commerce industry, and proposes a new professional cultivation paradigm that is grounded in linguistic competence, enhanced by industry-specific knowledge, and augmented by intelligent technologies. This aims to provide a reference for the transformation and upgrading of foreign language programmes in higher vocational colleges, enabling them to cultivate versatile and applied intelligent language service professionals to meet the needs of the digital economy era.

Keywords: Higher vocational foreign language programmes; Intelligent language service professionals; Cross-border e-commerce; Cultivation pathway

1 INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence is reshaping global industries, including cross-border e-commerce. This transformation is driving a shift in the demand for language professionals—from traditional linguistic skills toward integrated competencies in technology, culture, and business[1]. Against this backdrop, higher vocational foreign language programmes face an urgent need to reform their cultivation models to remain relevant and responsive to industry evolution.

2 THE PRACTICAL DILEMMA: THE DISCONNECTION BETWEEN TRADITIONAL CULTIVATION AND THE DEMANDS OF THE INTELLIGENT ERA

In current higher vocational education, the training of foreign language professionals often remains anchored in conventional language-focused approaches, creating a disconnect from sectors like cross-border e-commerce that demand integrated competencies. This gap between cultivation models and industry needs represents a practical dilemma, mainly reflected in the following three aspects.

2.1 Technical Substitution: The Survival Crisis of General Translation Skills under the Impact of AI

Traditional foreign language education has centered on cultivating general skills in “listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation.” However, with the increasing sophistication of machine translation—particularly neural machine translation—routine and formulaic linguistic tasks are now widely handled by AI tools. Studies indicate that current neural machine translation achieves high-quality output across many language pairs, with accuracy in certain specialized domains approaching that of human translation[2]. If foreign language professionals possess only linguistic skills, lacking the industry-specific knowledge, cultural insight, and critical thinking that AI cannot easily replicate, their core competitiveness will be significantly eroded, leaving them vulnerable to technological marginalization. For vocational college students, skill homogenization with AI severely undermines their employability.

2.2 The Skills Gap: From Isolated Language Proficiency to Complex Industry Needs

In modern service industries, exemplified by cross-border e-commerce, the demand for foreign language professionals extends well beyond linguistic communication. Companies now require “language-plus-industry” competence—proficiency in the linguistic norms and digital vernacular of target markets, the ability to craft culturally resonant localized content, and the capacity to respond swiftly to customer inquiries. However, traditional foreign language curricula remain largely confined to language, literature, or generalized business topics, resulting in a pronounced disconnect from authentic industry scenarios. Consequently, while graduates may possess language skills, they often lack the ability to solve real-world business problems, creating a structural mismatch between talent cultivation and market needs[3].

2.3 Role Ambiguity: The Transformation of Language Competence from a Specialized Skill to a Foundational Utility

In the intelligent era, the nature of linguistic competence is fundamentally redefined. It is no longer viewed as a self-sufficient “specialized skill” capable of securing a stable career but is increasingly regarded as a “foundational skill” or “core literacy” for engaging in international business. Much as computer literacy has become a workplace standard, proficiency in a foreign language is now transforming into a baseline qualification for relevant industries. If educational programmes remain fixated on producing “language-only graduates”, their career trajectories will inevitably narrow. Foreign language must be deeply integrated with a specific professional domain, effecting a decisive shift from “learning the language” to “using the language professionally”.

At present, foreign language programmes in higher vocational colleges are confronting a critical transition. The traditional language-centered cultivation model, propelled by both technological advances and industrial shifts, now reveals a threefold challenge: technological disruption, structural misalignment, and identity ambiguity. Evidence from the cross-border e-commerce industry clearly demonstrates that what the market requires are professionals capable of leveraging language to accomplish specific industry tasks. Consequently, talent cultivation must pivot toward establishing a new paradigm for intelligent language services—one grounded in linguistic competence, structured by industry knowledge, and augmented by intelligent technology—to cultivate versatile professionals with truly irreplaceable value.

3 CORE COMPETENCE REQUIREMENTS FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROFESSIONALS IN CROSS-BORDER E-COMMERCE

The development of the cross-border e-commerce industry does not demand foreign language professionals to transform into all-around operational experts but rather requires them to become the “language-culture-business” hub connecting China’s supply chains with global consumer markets. The new competence requirements represent an expansion and deepening of their existing core foreign language skills, specifically manifested in the following:

3.1 Professionalization and Advancement of Language Competence: From Mastering General Foreign Languages to Serving the Cross-border E-commerce Industry

The primary strength of traditional foreign language professionals lies in their linguistic proficiency, but this ability must be applied with greater precision to serve the cross-border e-commerce industry.

3.1.1 Text generation and optimization competence of cross-border business

This represents the core competence that distinguishes students from those specializing in cross-border e-commerce. While the latter may recognize the importance of copywriting, the former should possess the ability to directly create and optimize high-quality cross-border business content. For instance, when drafting product copy, students can craft product titles, descriptions, and brand narratives that align with the target market’s aesthetic preferences, consumer psychology, and search engine optimization principles. This requires not only grammatical accuracy but also persuasive marketing content that resonates culturally with consumers. When communicating with target customers, students can efficiently handle complex presales inquiries and post-sales email complaints, demonstrating professionalism, a service-oriented mindset, and cross-cultural sensitivity. Effective linguistic communication effectively maintains brand image while enhancing customer satisfaction and repeat purchase rates.

3.1.2 Deep cross-cultural insights and localization competence

Foreign language professionals must transcend surface-level text translation to serve as “cultural advisors” for cross-border business operations teams. They must deeply understand the target market’s social etiquette, values, holiday customs, and even legal environment. They should be able to assess whether product selling points or marketing campaigns conflict with cultural contexts and propose localized adjustments[4]. Additionally, foreign language professionals can lead or participate in the localization of product descriptions, user interfaces, and marketing materials, ensuring that information remains authentic and avoids cultural pitfalls while fostering emotional resonance.

3.2 Contextualization and Specialization of Business Knowledge: From General Principles to Cross-border E-commerce Practice

Business knowledge for foreign language professionals should no longer be confined to courses such as *International Trade Practices*. Instead, it should focus on language applications within cross-border e-commerce scenarios.

3.2.1 The “language services” perspective in cross-border e-commerce business

Unlike students specializing in cross-border e-commerce, students majoring in foreign languages are not required to possess expertise in platform algorithms or logistics optimization. Their essential competence lies in a clear understanding of how specific linguistic skills can be applied to address distinct challenges throughout the business workflow. For instance, during market research, students must collect, interpret, and analyze foreign-language industry reports, user reviews, and social media trends to inform product selection decisions. During customer service, students must comprehend common logistics and payment issues to professionally explain progress updates and address customer concerns.

3.2.2 Foundational understanding of mainstream cross-border e-commerce platforms

Familiarity with the fundamental rules, page structures, and common terminology of mainstream platforms such as Amazon, Alibaba.com, and Temu is not intended to train operators but to better craft listings compliant with platform specifications and understand the systemic context of customer service tickets.

3.3 Empowering Technological Literacy for Human Machine Synergy: Moving Beyond Tool Apprehension

With the swift development of AI technology, foreign language professionals ought to become masterful guides for intelligent tools, rather than passive users or individuals at risk of replacement.

3.3.1 Post-editing and content optimization competence

This constitutes an essential new competence for foreign language professionals. Students must be adept at utilizing machine translation for initial drafts and performing in-depth postediting that refines the text for terminological accuracy, cultural appropriateness, and persuasive impact, thereby elevating the final product to a native-like standard of quality[5].

3.3.2 Data-informed decision-making mindset

Students will be able to interpret basic sales data and sentiment tendencies in user reviews to identify potential issues in product descriptions and customer service dialogs. They can then apply linguistic skills to optimize these elements. For instance, by analyzing negative reviews, they can determine whether the issue stems from a “misunderstanding of product features” or “unclear documentation” and proceed to refine the copy accordingly.

The cross-border e-commerce industry demands a transformation of students majoring in foreign languages from “business students with English proficiency” to “language service specialists proficient in cross-border scenarios”. Their core competitiveness lies in “deeper language application competence” and “more focused cross-cultural business insights”.

4 REFORMING FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROFESSIONAL TRAINING IN HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGES: WITH A FOCUS ON INTELLIGENT LANGUAGE SERVICE COMPETENCIES

In response to these new core competence demands for foreign language professionals in cross-border e-commerce, higher vocational colleges can adopt a reform approach characterized by a focus on language service competencies, tasks driven by typical e-commerce scenarios, and the use of intelligent technologies as efficiency tools.

4.1 Building an Integrated Curricular Module: Language Foundation, Cross-border Scenarios, and Technological Empowerment

4.1.1 Enhancing and upgrading the language foundation module

To move beyond traditional language-focused courses (e.g. *Comprehensive English, Business English, Oral English*), the curriculum should integrate substantial authentic materials from cross-border e-commerce, such as product descriptions, social media ads, and customer service correspondences. Correspondingly, we recommend introducing applied courses such as *Cross-Border E-Commerce English, Intercultural Communication, and Localization Practice* can be introduced, thereby anchoring language acquisition firmly within professional scenarios[6].

4.1.2 Developing a dedicated cross-border e-commerce scenarios module

Distinct from comprehensive programmes in cross-border e-commerce, foreign language programmes can offer microcredentials or a course module in “Language Services for Cross-border E-commerce”. Example courses include *Multilingual Copywriting for E-Commerce Platforms, Customer Relationship Management in Intercultural Contexts, and E-commerce Data Analysis*. The instructional goal is not to train students in operational tasks such as setting ad bids but to develop their ability to apply linguistic expertise within those business processes. For instance, in a course such as *E-commerce Data Analysis*, instructors can guide students to extract insights from reviews and social media data for the purpose of copywriting optimization.

4.1.3 Comprehensively integrating the technology-enabled module

This can be achieved by introducing applied courses such as *Language AI Tools and Postediting Workflows*. The goal is to develop students’ ability to critically evaluate, select, and optimize AI-generated contents, ensuring that they command the technology, not the reverse. Furthermore, even without those applied courses, educators should integrate the use of technological tools across the curriculum. For instance, students can be required to use AI for initial drafts (e.g., market reports, product copy), which must then be substantively refined by human expertise.

4.2 Innovating Pedagogy: Toward a Scenario- and Project-driven Model

4.2.1 Contextual case-based teaching

This approach integrates extensive, deidentified real-world cases into applied courses. Examples include analyzing cultural missteps behind product reviews in North America or drafting Germany-compliant eco-friendly marketing copies for electronics so that students construct knowledge by solving authentic business problems[7].

4.2.2 Project-driven learning

Project-driven learning integrates authentic cross-border e-commerce projects into microcredential modules. For instance, within a “Brand Globalization” project, student teams provide an end-to-end language service package for a local enterprise, covering everything from brand name and slogan translation to product description writing and social

media copy design. In a “Customer Service Optimization” project, they analyze existing email exchanges to identify linguistically or culturally induced communication gaps and then design an improved library of standardized responses. Through such hands-on projects, students experience the end-to-end language service workflow and articulate their professional value within the industry chain.

4.3 Redefining Assessment and Faculty Development: For Effective Reform Implementation

4.3.1 *Outcome-based assessment reform*

An outcome-based assessment mechanism centered on a “language services portfolio” should be established[8]. Such portfolios should include a high-quality localization package, an optimized multilingual knowledge base for customer service, or a targeted portfolio of cross-border marketing copies. This portfolio-based approach provides direct evidence of students’ proficiency in intelligent language services for the cross-border e-commerce industry.

4.3.2 *Shifting faculty roles toward language services mentors*

The professional development of foreign language faculty should be advanced through two parallel strategies: practice-based upskilling and external recruitment. On the one hand, faculty should be required to complete regular industry placements at cross-border e-commerce or language service companies, where they lead or contribute to real projects, thereby evolving into industry-informed educators. On the other hand, higher vocational colleges should actively recruit industry mentors (e.g., localization project managers, overseas marketing directors) via industry-academy initiatives, workshops, and guest lectures, ensuring that the latest market demands are integrated directly into the curriculum.

This approach enables foreign language programmes at higher vocational colleges to secure their core identity as language service providers and establish a distinct niche within the cross-border e-commerce ecosystem. It cultivates a new generation of intelligent language service professionals who, for the AI era, are defined by their ability to retain deep linguistic expertise while mastering the tools to drive industry value.

5 CONCLUSION

Facing profound transformations, the future of higher vocational foreign language programmes hinges on a dual commitment: to preserve and to innovate. They must preserve their core advantage in language and intercultural competence, while innovating how—and how deeply—they integrate with industry. The cultivation of foreign language professionals should follow a reform pathway centered on a paradigm grounded in linguistic competence, structured by industry knowledge, and augmented by intelligent technology. This shifts the aim from producing general “business English graduates” to cultivating precise “intelligent language service professionals” for emerging sectors such as cross-border e-commerce. Such a transformation not only addresses challenges posed by AI but also revitalizes the role of foreign language programmes within vocational education, supplying Chinese enterprises going global with indispensable, practically grounded professionals of linguistic and cultural depth.

COMPETING INTERESTS

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