



From “Language Tool” to “Competence Literacy” Paradigm Transformation of Global Competence Cultivation in University English Majors

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Abstract. Based on a systematic analysis of the cultivation of global competence in educational contexts worldwide, this paper establishes global competence—a comprehensive system encompassing knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values—as the essential theoretical framework for reforming English majors in China. It identifies a critical disconnect between the current homogenous training models, which produce graduates with mere language proficiency, and the sophisticated demands of the global economy, particularly the expansion of emerging sectors like the new energy vehicle industry. The study argues for the integration of the New Liberal Arts initiative, with its core principle of interdisciplinary fusion, as the vital pathway to bridge this gap. It demonstrates how a global competence-oriented model, moving beyond instrumental language training, can cultivate composite talents capable of navigating cross-cultural complexities, applying international rules, and driving international collaboration. The conclusion positions the development of such talents, equipped to support strategic industries going global, as both an educational imperative and a necessary contribution to national strategic goals, thereby aligning talent cultivation with the demands of high-level opening-up.

Keywords: Global Competence; English majors; Emerging industries; talent cultivation

1 Introduction

The deepening advancement of the “Belt and Road” initiative and the widespread dissemination of the vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind have endowed the cultivation of international talents in China with new missions and contemporary significance. As a crucial link in the cooperation between China and the “Belt and Road” Initiative partner countries, the quality of international talents directly impacts the pace of Chinese enterprises’ global expansion and the country’s participation in global governance. The National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan Outline (2010–2020)^[1] explicitly defines the core attributes required of international talents in the new era: “global perspective, familiarity with international

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rules, and the ability to engage in international affairs and competition.” Furthermore, the General Secretary of China has emphasized the need to cultivate more international talents who are “proficient in languages, knowledgeable about specific countries, and specialized in certain fields,” and who can meet the demands of “high-quality development and high-level opening-up.”^[2] These requirements align closely with the competencies emphasized by global competence, such as cross-cultural understanding and the application of international rules. Global competence is a comprehensive system of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. It includes in-depth understanding of global issues and regional cultures, effective communication and collaboration in cross-cultural contexts, the practical ability to solve complex problems in accordance with international rules, and an inclusive attitude that respects diverse civilizations. Against the backdrop of increasingly frequent transnational cooperation under the “Belt and Road” initiative, this comprehensive competence holds significant practical relevance—it serves as a “lubricant” for breaking down cultural barriers and resolving cooperation disputes, a “core engine” for ensuring the efficient progress of international projects and achieving mutual benefit and win-win outcomes, and a “key vehicle” for conveying China’s voice and contributing China’s wisdom to global governance.

The shortcomings in the cultivation of English majors in current Chinese universities are becoming increasingly evident, mainly manifesting in three core aspects. First, the convergence of talent cultivation has led to structural imbalances. Although numerous universities across the country offer English majors and the student population is large, the cultivation models are highly homogenized. As a result, English has been listed as an endangered major for employment in several provinces. Meanwhile, there is a shortage of high-end talent, creating a contradiction of “an oversupply of English majors and a structural shortage of high-end, interdisciplinary talents.” Second, An overemphasis on treating language as merely a set of grammatical rules and vocabulary, rather than as a vehicle for cultural literacy and integration with other disciplines. Many graduates remain merely “English speakers, lacking the ability to combine language proficiency with expertise in specific fields. Third, there are gaps in the knowledge structure. Students often lack both a deep understanding of China’s national conditions and culture, as well as systematic knowledge of the rules and regional cultures of target countries. This makes it difficult to meet the requirements for international talents who are “well-versed in national conditions and international affairs,” often leaving them at a disadvantage in cross-cultural negotiations and participation in international affairs. These shortcomings directly result in a mismatch between English majors and market demands, urgently necessitating educational reform to address the issue.

The proposal and advancement of the New Liberal Arts initiative provide a clear direction and essential pathway for the transformation of talent cultivation in English majors. As a core strategy for the reform of liberal arts education in the era of globalization, informatization, and artificial intelligence, the New Liberal Arts initiative was first introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2018. Its development path has been further clarified through documents such as the New Liberal Arts Construction Declaration and the New Liberal Arts Research and Reform Practice Project Guide^[3]. The core essence of this initiative is to break down disciplinary barriers, promote interdis-

ciplinary integration of “liberal arts + new technologies” and “liberal arts + industries,” and enhance the core competitiveness of liberal arts talents. This strategy aligns closely with the transformation needs of English majors, addressing both the demand for diverse competencies in international talent cultivation and providing methodological support to overcome the shortcomings of traditional cultivation models. Drawing on a systematic analysis of global competence education worldwide and guided by the interdisciplinary principle of New Liberal Arts, this paper argues that cultivating composite English talents—equipped to support the global expansion of emerging industries like new energy vehicles—is not only an imperative for reforming English education but also a requisite for aligning educational reform with national strategic goals.

2 Current Status of Talent Cultivation in Global Competence

2.1 International Context: from Policy-driven to Educational Practice

The educational concept of global competence in the United States has undergone a process from policy guidance to in-depth practice. After World War II, the United States incorporated foreign language education and cross-cultural research into its national strategy through the Fulbright Act of 1946^[4]. In the 1990s, this concept began to be put into practice: in 1994, the American Council on International Intercultural Education (ACIIE) promoted curriculum reform in community colleges and established a cultivation model of “language + culture + international affairs”^[5]; In 1996, ACIIE and the Stanley Foundation clearly defined global competence as the “core mission” of education^[6]; The 1998 report *Education for Global Competence* led Stanford University to collaborate with enterprises in developing the “Global Innovation Lab”, in a view to cultivate practical abilities through project-based learning^[7]. This development procedure of “policy first - curriculum reform - university-enterprise collaboration” reflects that global competence education in the United States is being closely integrated with national competitiveness. Inspired by the practice of the United States, the educational concept of global competence has been gradually adopted by more countries and regions in the 21st century. The Pan-Canadian Global Competence Framework in 2018^[8] launched by Canada and the Global Education Strategy released by Britain in 2023 both incorporate global competence into their national education systems^[9]. The PISA Global Competence Framework jointly released by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and Harvard University in 2018^[10] constructed a four-dimensional evaluation system covering knowledge, skill, attitude, and value, which has been widely adopted in primary and secondary schools in countries such as Germany. However, problems such as Western-centered perspective and uneven distribution of educational resources also exist. For example, the rate of offering global competence courses (12%) in rural high schools in the United States is much lower than (89%) that in private middle schools. Besides, the application of its theoretical framework in non-Western cultures needs to be verified^[11]. How to adjust and optimize the training model of global competence in non-Western cultural environments remains an urgent problem to be solved.

2.2 Domestic Context: Practical Exploration under Policy Guidance

Although research on education of global competence started relatively late in China, it is deepening and forging a development path with Chinese characteristics, driven by national policy support and practical exploration by colleges and universities. In 2014, the Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Comprehensively Deepening Curriculum Reform and Fulfilling the Fundamental Task of Fostering Virtue Through Education started to incorporate the cultivation of international perspectives of students into the their development goals^[12]; The “Double First-Class” Construction Plan of the state lay further emphasis on taking the cultivation of international talents as a strategic goal in 2015^[13]. The Key Competencies for Chinese Students' Development issued in 2016 explicitly listed “global awareness” as an important part of students' key competencies, providing a policy basis for global competence education^[14]. The newly released Outline for Building a Powerful Education Country (2024-2035) in 2024 clearly proposes to “improve the strategic plan for the opening-up of education to the outside world”, emphasizing the cultivation of international talents with global competence through higher education to support the national innovation system and international competitiveness^[15]. Minister of Education Huai Jinping has also stated on many occasions that it is necessary to “cultivate more outstanding talents with an international perspective and global competence to serve the economic and social development of the country and regions”, marking that the concept of global competence has been integrated into the national strategy^[16].

Domestic colleges and universities have become pioneers of innovation in the field of practical exploration of global competence. For Example, Tsinghua University launched the “Global Competence Enhancement Program” in 2016 and put forward the “3+1” model (3-month cross-cultural workshop + 1-month overseas practice), which increased students' cross-cultural sensitivity of participants by 37%^[17]; The “Talent Class for International Organizations” of Shanghai International Studies University adopted practical training such as simulated UN negotiations and case studies on international law, achieving a 68% internship rate in international organizations for graduates of the 2022 cohort^[18]. These explorations reflect the development logic with Chinese characteristics of “Policy Guidance – Curriculum Restructuring – Competence Verification”.

3 The Global Expansion of Emerging Economy Enterprises and Demand for English Talents

China's emerging economies have established dual advantages of “scale and technology” in international competition, a trend notably evident across several strategic emerging industries. Taking the new energy vehicle (NEV) industry as an example, exports reached 1.284 million units in 2024 (data from China Association of Automobile Manufacturers)^[19], maintaining the top global position for consecutive years. Leveraging its differentiated competitiveness in power battery technology (holding over 70% of the global market share) and intelligent connectivity features, the industry is

rapidly expanding in markets such as Europe and Southeast Asia. Similarly, the green energy industry demonstrates strong momentum overseas, with China's wind turbine exports growing by 71.9% in 2024, and photovoltaic product exports exceeding ¥200 billion for four consecutive years ^[20]. These industries are further consolidating their international competitiveness by adopting strategies like localized production to address international trade barriers and supply chain challenges.

As the global expansion of enterprises deepens, structural talent shortages in areas such as cross-cultural communication, international compliance, and standard formulation are becoming increasingly prominent. Specifically, the consolidated advantage of the "New Three" – namely new energy vehicles, lithium batteries, and photovoltaic products – demands professionals who are not only familiar with specialized technical terminology but also possess a deep understanding of destination countries' market access standards, environmental regulations (e.g., battery carbon footprint management), and after-sales technical support processes. Data from Liepin Recruitment shows that 85% of positions related to new energy vehicles require expertise such as power battery testing standards, while only 12% of English major job seekers meet these requirements ^[21]. Simultaneously, the coordinated expansion of the green energy industry has created demand for composite talents who are proficient in technical English and capable of handling international project financing and compliance review.

As the core force cultivating relevant talents, the traditional training model for English majors is largely confined to a language education framework, resulting in a serious mismatch between talent supply and industry demand. Data from the National Advisory Board for Foreign Language Majors in Education indicates that the employment rate for English major graduates in 2024 fell by 12% compared to five years ago, despite growing demand in specialised segments ^[22]. This structural contradiction is further reflected in salary levels: composite positions in emerging industries offer 30%-50% higher salaries than traditional English-related roles, yet experience only one-third of the competition intensity. According to MyCOS'2024 Chinese Undergraduate Employment Report, the proportion of English majors entering the new energy sector (less than 8%) is significantly lower than that of Energy and Power majors (67%) ^[23].

It is noteworthy that diversified industrial practices are generating new job demands. Some universities have begun exploring new training paradigms such as "Foreign Languages + Aviation" and "Foreign Languages + Traditional Chinese Medicine". These practices indicate that the diversified development of emerging economies is directly driving the cultivation of interdisciplinary talents through "English + Specific Industry" models. Consequently, there is an urgent need to deeply integrate the current English major training model with strategic emerging industries. Adopting a global-competence-oriented "English + Major" training approach has become an inevitable choice for the New Liberal Arts construction.

4 Conclusion

Higher education's shift toward connotative development, coupled with rapid technological transformation, presents dual challenges that demand English major programs

address a structural mismatch: traditional language-focused roles are declining, while interdisciplinary professionals remain in short supply. This contradiction is particularly pronounced amid the global expansion of strategic emerging industries such as new energy vehicles and aerospace. These sectors call not for mere linguistic translators, but for foreign language talents who integrate technical literacy, cross-cultural communication proficiency, and the ability to effectively convey China’s perspectives.

Against this backdrop, establishing an educational framework centered on global competence—one that deeply aligns with new economic needs and redefines the value of linguistic skills—has become the key pathway for the transformation of English major programs. Global competence, which encompasses an understanding of global industrial landscapes, cross-cultural collaboration capabilities, and practical execution skills, equips students with the comprehensive literacy required to navigate complex international contexts.

Thus, shifting English major programs from a single-skill training model to an integrated paradigm of “global competence + emerging industries + precision language application” is not only a critical response to employment pressures, but also fundamental to serving national strategic interests and enabling the discipline to achieve high-quality, sustainable development.

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[2] Scientific Research Fund Project of Jincheng College of Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics: Research on the Localized Cultivation Path of "Global Competence" for Private Liberal Arts Majors in Jiangsu Province (XJ2024018);

[3] 2025 Jiangsu Higher Education Teaching Reform Research Project of the Jiangsu Society of Higher Education: Reform and Practice of PMGC Project-Based Teaching for Engineering Majors in Application-Oriented Undergraduate Universities (2025JGYB374).

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