

Innovative Teaching Model and Practice of “Reading, Writing, Thinking, Innovating and Researching” for English Majors under the Background of New Liberal Arts Construction

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[**Abstract**] As with the problems of weak core value education, humanistic concern and value leadership in the teaching practice of English majors, a teaching innovation model that features “reading, writing, thinking, innovating and researching” is constructed. Within the “National Standard”, it explores the system of curriculum construction and teaching quality enhancement, highlighting the content-based education, the typicality of university, the layered quality improvement, and the teaching-learning interaction. Thus, the goals of cultivating core values throughout the curriculum can be realized. In line with the requirements of integration, modernization, adaptation to the Chinese context, and internationalization of the new liberal arts, this model can connect the value leadership of teachers with the value practice of students, integrate the humanity, instrumentality and scientificity in the English-teaching process, and extend the paths and modes of cultivating core values throughout foreign language courses.

[**Key words**] English major; teaching innovation; contemporary China; new liberal arts

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1 Introduction

Against the backdrop of the ongoing development of “Double First-class” initiatives, the Ministry of Education has further called for restructuring academic disciplines and majors, with the goal of establishing 20,000 first-class undergraduate courses and majors. This effort aims to address previous shortcomings characterized by an overemphasis on disciplinary development and evaluation at the expense of professional curriculum construction. In the context of foreign language education in higher education institutions, the Ministry of Education has successively issued the *National Standard for Undergraduate Teaching Quality in Foreign Language Majors* (2018) (hereinafter referred to as the “National Standard”) and the *Teaching Guidelines for Undergraduate Foreign Language Majors in Regular Higher Education Institutions* (2020) (hereinafter referred to as the “Guidelines”). These documents clarify the humanities-oriented nature of foreign language disciplines and their interdisciplinary integration, while charting an overarching path that promotes both core knowledge building and specialized curricular development. However, as a prescriptive, authoritative, and mandatory framework guiding foreign language instruction nationwide, the “National Standard” primarily offer a macro-level reference. At the operational level, individual institutions must still develop concrete, feasible implementation strategies tailored to regional contexts and institutional characteristics. Therefore, English majors should continue to explore an integrated system for major and curriculum development and teaching quality enhancement—one that is grounded in the “National Standard”, content-based, characterized by institutional distinctiveness, structured for tiered improvement, and oriented

toward dynamic teacher–student interaction.

2 Current status of domestic and international research

Against the backdrop of the New Liberal Arts initiative, the discipline and curriculum development of foreign language majors must integrate the “instrumental” and “humanistic” dimensions to constitute an educational endeavor that is rooted in the present and oriented toward the future. Currently, English major education faces a series of challenges and difficulties, primarily manifested in students’ narrow knowledge base, insufficient critical thinking skills, and low efficiency in language instruction. Consequently, students’ overall competence falls short of societal demands, significantly hindering the sustainable development of both the discipline and the students themselves. To address these issues, we must actively respond to the evolving needs of society and the times by shifting pedagogical paradigms in foreign language education. It is imperative to vigorously promote content–based education or content and language integrated learning, effectively combining subject matter with professional skill training. Furthermore, institutions should tap into the unique strengths and developmental potential of local universities, adhere to a demand–driven approach, and dynamically adjust the training schemes for English majors. The “National Standard” has delineated clear requirements for the development of English majors in higher education institutions. English majors are required to proactively align with the needs of socio–economic development, support national strategies, and pursue a quality–led, connotative path of development. Professional development should be advanced under the guidance of diversified cultivation models, with the objective of achieving categorical excellence. In other words, the formulation of talent cultivation schemes for English majors must center on the fundamental task of “fostering virtue through education”. It requires the integration of the “humanistic, instrumental, international, and professional” dimensions while clarifying the distinctive positioning of individual institutions.

Furthermore, while existing studies acknowledge the systemic integrity of foundational English skills and core curricular modules, they pay insufficient attention to the practical issues regarding specific evaluation criteria for major development and quality assessment. Earlier English majors, with their limited responsiveness to social demands, appeared to circumvent the marketization and over–instrumentalization of pedagogy; however, this approach inadvertently resulted in a severe deficiency in students’ practical competencies. Therefore, it is imperative to not only consolidate linguistic proficiency and cross–cultural knowledge, but also adhere to content–based education. This entails comprehensively enhancing students’ humanistic literacy to achieve a balanced, integrative development that harmonizes language competence, liberal education, and professional specialization. Additionally, leveraging students’ proactive role in evaluating major and course quality will lay a solid foundation for their future social integration and career readiness.

Previous research has predominantly examined English majors from the top–down perspective of teachers—focusing on how to design curricula and how to deliver instruction—while largely overlooking the critical question of how students can effectively evaluate major and course quality. Consequently, there has been a strong emphasis on top–down policy guidance, whereas bottom–up feedback mechanisms, student–centered evaluation practices, and pedagogically reciprocal interactions remain underexplored. In implementing the concepts of “New Liberal Arts” and “New Foreign Languages”, and in pioneering first–class disciplines and courses, it is essential to shift the prevailing paradigm away from a sole focus on discipline development and assessment. Instead, institutional priorities must transition from discipline–building to curriculum development, ensuring that the construction of “first–class courses” transcends mere formalism. Moreover, the inherent “monitoring” function within language learning itself necessitates robust quality assurance frameworks to safeguard instructional effectiveness.

To date, scholarly research—both domestic and international—on the discipline and curriculum development of English majors has yielded substantial theoretical and practical findings. However, the majority of these studies have centered on macro–level, programmatic discussions concerning guiding principles and policy frameworks. While rich in overarching directives, macro–descriptions, and theoretical analyses, they are markedly deficient in operational specifics and dynamic empirical applications. Although these studies have clarified the general

objectives for the development of English majors, they fall short in addressing the contextual realities of local universities. Consequently, practical details require further elaboration, and tailored, context – specific implementation protocols remain underdeveloped. From the perspective of the complex dynamic systems theory within constructivist foreign language education, both the scholarly discussion and practical implementation regarding the concrete development and quality enhancement of foundational skills courses and core specialized modules in local universities warrant deeper investigation.

3 Innovative teaching framework of “reading, writing, thinking, innovating, and researching” for English majors

To address the deficiencies in value education, humanistic cultivation, and moral guidance within current English major pedagogy, this study constructs an innovative teaching framework centered on “reading, writing, thinking, innovating, and researching”. The model integrates theme – driven instruction with outcome – based objectives. Grounded in solidifying foundational English literacy, it is guided by the dual aim of enhancing ideological awareness and critical thinking, while targeting innovative inquiry and practical application. This approach ensures the holistic integration of value education throughout the English curriculum. Adopting the content – based education philosophy and adhering to a principle of tiered improvement, the framework implements a grade – specific progression: (1) Freshman Year: Focuses on “reading, writing, (recitation), listening, and speaking”. (2) Sophomore Year: Emphasizes “reading, writing, thinking, and debating”. (3) Junior Year: Centers on “appreciating, criticizing, translating, and expressing”. (4) Senior Year: Prioritizes “exploring, contributing, researching, and innovating”. This “reading, writing, thinking, innovating, and researching” framework establishes a cohesive, vertically aligned developmental model. By taking “reading, writing, thinking, innovating, and researching” as its core objectives, it systematically enhances students’ multidimensional English literacy to bridge cultural and temporal divides. Ultimately, the model aims to optimize talent cultivation philosophies and methodologies, systematically enacting value leadership in English major education.

This study establishes a quality enhancement framework characterized by “diversified cultivation and categorical excellence”. It aims to inspire cross – cultural dialogue between Chinese and Western civilizations while sharpening students’ critical thinking and aesthetic appreciation. A core objective is to bolster students’ awareness and competence in articulating Chinese culture, Chinese wisdom, and the indigenous cultures of Hainan on the global stage. Through curricular interventions, students are guided to narrate their personal stories in English, gradually constructing a “virtuous English narrator” identity. This process equips them with the fundamental capacity to “tell China’s stories well”, thereby elevating their cross – cultural communication consciousness and fostering a sense of pride in facilitating Sino – foreign exchanges.

Strengthening the specialized curriculum system to empower diversified talent cultivation. This innovative model ensures the vertical alignment of foundational language skills courses with core specialization courses. It incorporates collaborative and interactive assessment involving both teachers and students, employing a multi – pronged approach to collectively safeguard the quality improvement of professional courses. Aligned with the objectives outlined in the current training scheme and syllabi, and focusing on cultivating multifaceted literacy skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating) alongside intercultural competence, the curriculum builds upon required language skill modules by establishing four core specialization tracks: English Literature and Culture, English Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, English – Chinese Translation and Communication, and Public Diplomacy and Intercultural Communication. Anchored in the “Understanding Contemporary China” textbook series, the major implements the “Three Entries” initiative (integrating contemporary Chinese themes into textbooks, classrooms, and students’ minds) to optimize relevant required and elective courses. While broadening students’ international horizons, the curriculum deepens their connection to Chinese language and culture. It actively engages with contemporary Chinese issues, explores pathways for enhancing core competencies through interdisciplinary integration, and ultimately forges distinctive disciplinary strengths.

Integrating professional knowledge with innovative application: fostering cross – cultural communication and the

global narrative of China's stories. This component focuses on integrating professional expertise with innovative application, dedicated to advancing cross-cultural communication and the practice of narrating and disseminating China's stories globally. It introduces cutting-edge (entrepreneurial) courses such as Disseminating and Innovating China's Stories, Public Diplomacy and Intercultural Communication, and Advanced Seminars in Humanities and Innovation. Leveraging a series of specialized practicum courses, the major continuously expands the temporal and spatial scope for applying professional knowledge to language initiatives, particularly in external narrative dissemination. The pedagogical approach strives to balance language skill acquisition with cultural knowledge learning. It places significant emphasis on cultivating students' robust competence in both English and Chinese language application, their cross-cultural communicative proficiency, and their ideological awareness coupled with critical thinking. Ultimately, this framework aims to empower students to develop iterative habits of autonomous and lifelong learning.

4 Practical pathways for implementing the “reading, writing, thinking, innovating, and researching” teaching innovation

In implementing innovative pedagogical concepts within specialized courses, we emphasize harnessing the pivotal role of teachers as the primary force in value guidance. Improvements are continuously pursued across multiple dimensions—including teacher performance, curricular content, and instructional methodologies—to refine the efficacy of teaching innovation. During instruction, canonical humanistic themes in texts pertaining to society, history, and philosophy are leveraged to map out a networked schema of ideological and political themes and elements, thereby restructuring content into modular, lecture-based formats. By integrating traditional philological analytical methods, the practice cultivates ideological awareness and critical thinking through close textual reading and appreciation. It ensures a seamless continuum across “learning, competition, and application”, putting ideological and political education into practice across diverse temporal and spatial contexts. Furthermore, the scope of collaborative inquiry between teachers and students is broadened, embedding teachers' value guidance within multifaceted, in-depth assessment processes. This approach culminates in a comprehensive evaluative network that interlinks knowledge acquisition, competency development, and value formation.

4.1 Reconfiguration of curriculum content

This study establishes an integrated ideological and political education system characterized by prominent thematic guidance and the intersection of knowledge acquisition, competency development, literacy cultivation, and value-laden elements. While consolidating students' foundational English language proficiency and multimodal literacy, the curriculum guides them to understand, appreciate and master authentic English modes of thought and expression. Students engage deeply with canonical humanistic works, systematically integrating relevant ideological and political elements to actualize value shaping and moral education. Adhering to a dual commitment to content-based education and enhanced ideological education, the pedagogy seamlessly embeds professional humanistic knowledge with pertinent ideological elements across three stages: critical content analysis, rigorous textual inquiry, and comprehensive applied practice. This approach directs students to grasp the substantive ideas within texts while prompting them to explore related ideological themes and their English expressions. Consequently, it empowers students to articulate phenomena of Chinese society and culture utilizing internationalized English cognitive frameworks and discursive strategies.

By integrating traditional philological analytical methods, this approach emphasizes the infusion of ideological and political resources throughout the entire teaching and learning process. It aims to inspire students' thinking on mutual learning between Chinese and Western cultures, cultivate their capacity for ideological-critical thinking, and implement the principle of value guidance in education. Employing close textual reading, teachers and students collaboratively examine textual structures, key diction, rhetorical devices, and the interplay of linguistic, cultural, and intellectual content. Instruction is tailored to students' cognitive profiles to stimulate and train their ideological awareness and critical discernment. Rooted in Chinese culture and civilization, the curriculum guides students to critically evaluate the cultural and civilizational achievements of English-speaking countries while reflecting on

China's own social, historical, and cultural trajectories. This fosters students' consciousness of cultural mutual learning and civilizational coexistence, enhances their capacity to articulate Chinese civilization in English, and strengthens their expressive proficiency in cross-cultural communication.

4.2 Optimization of teaching model

Embedding the philosophy of "humanistic grounding and ideological education" into teachers' research and teaching practices serves to elevate teachers' awareness and capacity for humanistic English education. Course teachers take responsibility for revising and refining course syllabi, identifying ideological and political themes embedded within specialized humanistic content, and mapping out a systematic network of curricular value elements. This process fosters the "moral and intellectual" growth of teachers and enhances their competence in value education, enabling them to serve as a vital bridging link between knowledge transmission and character building. Ultimately, through teaching by precept and example, teachers fulfill the fundamental mission of "fostering virtue through education".

Integrating ideological awareness into the innovation inquiry process, this initiative reconstructs a model of teacher-student collaboration that fosters reciprocal growth in teaching and learning. It establishes course-specific (or group-based) teaching teams to enhance teachers' research and instructional competence while catalyzing individual professional development. Relying on professional courses and their directions, and teachers' research interests, specialized teams are formed in areas such as "English Reading and Writing", "Intercultural Communication", and "English-Chinese Translation". Internal platforms for pedagogical exchange and seminar discussions are established among teachers teaching the same courses. This not only elevates instructional quality but also serves to build a reserve of qualified teachers for the future. Furthermore, based on the major's foundational knowledge base and core development directions, specialized teaching groups, such as those for "English-Chinese Translation", "British and American Literature", and "Innovation and Entrepreneurship", are organized. This structure ensures that teachers balance the delivery of foundational language skills with specialized knowledge during the teaching process, ultimately achieving reciprocal enhancement between teaching and learning.

This initiative explores diversified instructional organization and pedagogical practices to revitalize teachers' teaching philosophies and leverage the unique strengths of discipline-specific teachers in providing language services. Adhering to the basic principle of "teaching resists rigid formulas, yet demands sound methodology", it encourages teaching teams to decompose course content based on individual teachers' research interests and strengths. By adopting modular unit teaching, the model drives teachers to conduct more comprehensive and in-depth explorations of the humanistic and social dimensions embedded within the curriculum. This approach simultaneously expands avenues for inter-teacher collaboration and promotes mutual professional growth through sustained pedagogical interaction.

This initiative establishes a teaching-learning community characterized by the integrated progression of learning, reflection, and application, alongside coordinated multi-point collaboration. It aims to enhance talent cultivation quality and refine a holistic, whole-person education system that spans the entire educational journey. By aligning teachers' research interests and expertise with thematically diverse course modules, the model bridges the gap between the integration of ideological elements at the unit level and the overarching goals of value education. This approach avoids didacticism detached from textual contexts, instead fostering students' awareness of cultural mutual learning and civilizational coexistence along with their critical discernment. Classroom interactions focus on the collaborative exploration of ideological themes, while extended learning beyond the classroom prompts students to broaden their practical engagement with these values and reflect on their knowledge acquisition process, thereby expanding the scope of application for ideological education. Throughout the training of literacy and cognitive skills, the nurturing of humanistic sensibilities, and the development of cross-cultural criticality, the curriculum systematically enacts the principles of value education and holistic development.

Furthermore, in alignment with the Teaching Guidelines, a curated list of recommended readings for the major

has been compiled, encompassing themes such as canonical humanities texts, specialized knowledge, further education and career planning, and peer experiences. Each semester, multiple sessions of “Undergraduate Supervisor-led Reading & Discussion Salons” are organized and integrated into specialized practical courses, thereby extending the scope of classroom instruction, reflection, and application. To reinforce the continuous development of daily language skills, diagnostic assessments—including English pronunciation evaluations for incoming freshmen and term-based assessments for listening comprehension and vocabulary—are implemented, with results factored into the regular scores of compulsory courses. This mechanism cultivates robust learning habits and enhances the efficacy of professional study. Additionally, students receive structured coaching to participate in professional competitions, social practices, and innovation and entrepreneurship projects at various levels. These initiatives significantly broaden the scope of application for their specialized knowledge.

5 Conclusion

Guided by the educational philosophy of “Humanistic English: Cultivating Global Citizenship Through Cultural Edification”, this paper explores the pedagogical concept and practical pathways of the “reading, writing, thinking, innovating, and researching” model within the context of reforming English majors at local universities. By adhering to teaching practices characterized by tiered improvement and categorical excellence, the model prioritizes the cultivation of students’ robust, multifaceted literacy in both English and Chinese and their intercultural communicative competence. It strengthens foundational skills and knowledge application while extending students’ capacities for cross-cultural critical thinking and innovative inquiry, thereby significantly enhancing their comprehensive English proficiency. This pedagogical innovation establishes a pluralistically integrated, formative, process-oriented evaluation system. Emphasizing individualized student care and high relevance, it balances rigor with flexibility, practically fulfilling teachers’ mandate of exemplary conduct and moral education. Practice indicates that this model synthesizes the collective wisdom of the teaching team and broadens the curricular lens through which foreign language majors engage with contemporary China. It facilitates the adoption of excellence-driven methodologies by both teachers and students, empowering them to express and disseminate Chinese culture through internationalized language.

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