

Innovative Models and Practical Pathways of College Students' Cross-Border Trade from A Cross-Cultural Communication Perspective

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Abstract: With the rapid development of economic globalization and digital trade, cross-border e-commerce has become an important driver of international trade transformation. Supported by innovation and entrepreneurship education, an increasing number of college students are participating in cross-border trade by leveraging their foreign language abilities and digital skills. However, they still face challenges such as insufficient business communication competence, cross-cultural misunderstandings, and weak supply chain management capabilities. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of cross-cultural competence and global vision in cultivating international business talents (Zhao & Liu, 2026; Lu et al., 2026). Based on cross-cultural communication theory and international business communication theory, this paper analyzes the development foundations and major challenges of college students' participation in cross-border trade. It proposes a four-dimensional innovative model including language communication, cultural adaptation, supply chain integration, and market operations. The study suggests that improving business English proficiency, strengthening cross-cultural awareness, optimizing supply chain management, and enhancing overseas market development strategies are essential for improving students' practical capabilities in cross-border trade.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Communication; Cross-Border Trade; College Student Entrepreneurship; International Business Communication

1. Introduction

In the context of the deepening integration of the global economy, the operational modes of international trade are undergoing profound transformations. Particularly, the development of

internet technology and the digital economy has facilitated the gradual transition of traditional trade towards digitization, platformization, and networking. As an emerging form of international trade, cross-border e-commerce has achieved efficient and information-driven trade processes through online trading platforms, digital payments, and intelligent logistics systems. This new trade model not only enhances transaction efficiency but also significantly lowers the barriers to entry for international trade participation. Under this trend, an increasing number of individual entrepreneurs and small-to-medium-sized teams are entering international markets through cross-border e-commerce platforms. Compared with traditional international trade enterprises, these new participants rely more on digital platforms and flexible organizational structures, forming a new form of "micro-globalization." This transformation enables individuals and small teams to connect directly with overseas markets without relying heavily on traditional intermediaries. College students, with their strong learning abilities, innovative consciousness, and foreign language foundations, are gradually becoming an important potential force in the field of cross-border trade.

In recent years, universities have continuously advanced innovation and entrepreneurship education by offering cross-border e-commerce courses, establishing innovation and entrepreneurship practice bases, and initiating school-enterprise cooperation projects, providing students with multiple channels to participate in cross-border trade practices. Some college students have explored cross-border trade entrepreneurial models characterized by "asset-light operations" by integrating resources from domestic manufacturing enterprises and utilizing online platforms to develop overseas clients. Studies on cross-border e-commerce entrepreneurship indicate that university students can effectively participate in international

markets through digital platforms and flexible entrepreneurial models (Luo et al., 2026).

However, compared to mature enterprises, college students still face numerous challenges in cross-border trade practices. Firstly, they lack systematic professional expression skills in international business communication, making it difficult to accurately convey product information and trade terms. Secondly, they have insufficient awareness of cultural differences across countries during cross-cultural exchanges, leading to communication misunderstandings. Thirdly, they lack experience in supply chain management and overseas market development, resulting in low business stability and sustainability. Therefore, researching the development models of college students' cross-border trade from the perspective of cross-cultural communication holds significant theoretical value and practical implications. Based on cross-cultural communication theory and international business communication theory, this paper systematically analyzes the practice of college students' cross-border trade. It summarizes the developmental foundations and real-world issues, proposes an innovative cross-border trade model suitable for college students, and explores corresponding practical pathways for its implementation.

2.Theoretical Foundations and Research Framework

In order to analyze the development model of cross-border trade among college students from a systematic perspective, it is necessary to establish a solid theoretical foundation. Relevant theories in cross-cultural communication and international business communication provide important analytical frameworks for understanding the communication processes, cultural differences, and operational mechanisms involved in cross-border trade activities. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study can more comprehensively examine the challenges faced by college students and explore effective solutions. Therefore, this chapter first introduces the core concepts and theoretical viewpoints related to cross-cultural communication, then discusses the principles of international business communication, and finally constructs a research framework suitable for analyzing the innovative model of cross-border trade among college students.

2.1 Cross-Cultural Communication Theory

Cross-cultural communication refers to the information interaction behavior that occurs during exchanges between individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

In recent years, scholars have emphasized that intercultural communication competence has become a core ability for talents participating in international exchanges and global cooperation (Sun, 2026). Cultural dimension theories proposed by American scholars Edward T. Hall and Geert Hofstede provide important theoretical foundations for cross-cultural research. Hall proposed the concept of high-context culture and low-context culture, emphasizing that communication styles vary significantly across cultures. In high-context cultures such as China and Japan, communication often relies on implicit meanings, contextual cues, and interpersonal relationships. Conversely, in low-context cultures such as the United States and Germany, communication tends to be more explicit, direct, and task-oriented. Hofstede further proposed several cultural dimensions, including power distance, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation. These dimensions help explain differences in business decision-making, negotiation styles, and communication preferences among countries. For instance, individuals from cultures with high power distance tend to respect hierarchical structures and formal communication patterns, while those from low power distance cultures may prefer more egalitarian and informal interactions.

In international trade activities, cross-cultural communication competence encompasses not only language proficiency but also the ability to understand and adapt to cultural differences. Research on business English vocabulary and intercultural communication also highlights that specialized terminology and contextual language use play an important role in international business interaction (Lin, 2026). Misinterpretation of cultural signals may lead to misunderstandings in negotiation, marketing, or customer service. Therefore, developing cross-cultural awareness and adaptability has become a critical competence for participants in global trade.

2.2 International Business Communication Theory

International business communication refers to the information exchange process conducted through language and non-language means during cross-border trade and international business activities. Effective business communication not only facilitates information transmission but also establishes trust relationships and promotes transaction completion. In the digital economy era, international business communication increasingly relies on online platforms and digital tools. Studies suggest that the development of digital economic cooperation and international trade openness has created new communication environments and interaction models for global business activities (Zhu & Wang, 2026).

Business communication typically includes multiple stages such as product introduction, price negotiation, contract confirmation, logistics coordination, and after-sales service. Each stage requires precise language use and professional communication strategies. For example, in quotation emails, it is necessary to clearly specify product specifications, price terms, delivery schedules, and payment conditions. If expressions are unclear or ambiguous, it may lead to misunderstandings, disputes, or even the failure of transactions. Moreover, communication in international trade increasingly occurs through digital channels such as emails, online meetings, and instant messaging platforms. These channels require participants to demonstrate strong written communication skills and the ability to convey professional information concisely and accurately.

2.3 Research Framework

Based on cross-cultural communication theory and international business communication theory, this paper constructs a research framework for an innovative model of college students' cross-border trade, namely, the “language communication—cultural adaptation—supply chain integration—market operations” four-in-one development model. Within this framework, language communication serves as the basic tool for international interaction, cultural adaptation ensures effective cross-cultural exchanges, supply chain integration guarantees stable product delivery and quality, and market operations determine the competitiveness and sustainability of trade

activities. Through the coordinated development of these four dimensions, college students can gradually establish a relatively complete cross-border trade operation system.

3. Realistic Foundations for the Development of College Students' Cross-Border Trade

With the continuous development of the digital economy and international e-commerce platforms, the participation of college students in cross-border trade has gradually shifted from sporadic entrepreneurial attempts to a more systematic development trend. Compared with traditional entrepreneurs, college students possess several unique advantages in knowledge structure, technological adaptability, and innovation awareness. These advantages provide important practical foundations for their engagement in cross-border trade activities. At the same time, the external environment has also created favorable conditions for college students to explore international markets. The development of digital technology, the improvement of China's manufacturing system, and the continuous support of national policies have collectively lowered the threshold for entering the field of international trade. Therefore, analyzing the realistic foundations of college students' participation in cross-border trade is helpful for understanding the feasibility and development potential of this emerging entrepreneurial model.

3.1 Language Competence and Knowledge Structure Advantages

Language competence is one of the most fundamental abilities required in international trade activities. In the context of globalization, English has become the dominant language for international business communication. Most college students have received systematic English education for many years, which provides them with a basic communication foundation when interacting with overseas clients. In addition, students majoring in business English, international trade, e-commerce, and international business usually receive professional training related to international trade practices. Their curriculum often includes courses such as international marketing, business correspondence, cross-cultural communication, and international trade regulations. These courses provide theoretical knowledge that helps students

understand the basic procedures and rules of global trade. Another important advantage lies in the interdisciplinary learning environment within universities. College students often acquire knowledge in various fields, including economics, management, digital technology, and cultural studies. This diversified knowledge structure enables them to analyze international markets from multiple perspectives and adapt more easily to the complex environment of cross-border trade. Moreover, college students generally demonstrate strong learning ability and adaptability when facing new technologies. With the rapid development of digital platforms, new operational tools and marketing methods constantly emerge. Students can quickly learn and apply these tools, which provides them with an advantage in the dynamic environment of digital trade.

3.2 Digital Technology Driving Down Trade Barriers

In addition to language advantages, the rapid development of digital technology has significantly changed the structure of international trade. Traditional international trade usually requires large capital investment, complex distribution channels, and professional intermediary institutions. However, the emergence of cross-border e-commerce platforms has greatly simplified these processes. Digital platforms integrate various functions, including product display, online communication, electronic payment, logistics management, and data analysis.

Entrepreneurs can manage the entire trade process through a single platform, which significantly reduces operational costs and improves efficiency. Recent studies indicate that the integration of artificial intelligence and big data technologies is creating new methods for innovation and entrepreneurship, enabling entrepreneurs to conduct market analysis, customer targeting, and product optimization more efficiently (Shao, 2026).

For college students with limited financial resources, this technological infrastructure creates opportunities to enter global markets. For example, platforms such as Alibaba International Station, Amazon, and eBay provide access to global buyers, enabling sellers to showcase their products to international customers. Meanwhile, digital payment systems such as PayPal and international credit card payments facilitate

secure and efficient financial transactions. These technologies greatly reduce the complexity and risk associated with international trade operations. Social media platforms have also become important marketing channels in cross-border trade. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok allow entrepreneurs to promote products, build brand awareness, and interact directly with overseas consumers. Through targeted advertising and content marketing strategies, entrepreneurs can effectively reach specific customer groups in different regions.

3.3 A Well-Established Domestic Manufacturing System

Another important foundation for the development of cross-border trade among college students is China's well-developed manufacturing system. As one of the world's largest manufacturing centers, China possesses a complete industrial chain covering a wide range of industries, from consumer electronics and household appliances to clothing, toys, and daily necessities. This comprehensive manufacturing ecosystem provides abundant product resources for cross-border trade activities. College students can cooperate with domestic manufacturers through various channels, including online B2B platforms, industrial clusters, and trade exhibitions. By leveraging the production capacity and cost advantages of Chinese factories, student entrepreneurs can supply competitive products to international markets. Furthermore, many manufacturing enterprises are increasingly willing to cooperate with small entrepreneurial teams, including college students. These factories often provide flexible production arrangements such as small-batch manufacturing and customized product development. Such flexibility allows college student entrepreneurs to test market demand with relatively low risk before expanding their business scale. In addition, the improvement of logistics infrastructure in China has also contributed to the efficiency of cross-border trade. International logistics companies and e-commerce fulfillment services enable faster and more reliable delivery of products to overseas customers. These developments further strengthen the feasibility of college students engaging in international trade activities.

3.4 Supportive Policy Environment

Beyond technological and industrial advantages, government policies also play an important role in promoting the development of cross-border trade. In recent years, the Chinese government has introduced a series of supportive policies aimed at encouraging the growth of cross-border e-commerce and youth entrepreneurship. For instance, many cities have established cross-border e-commerce comprehensive pilot zones that provide tax incentives, simplified customs procedures, and logistics support for cross-border businesses. These policies significantly reduce operational barriers for small entrepreneurs and startups. At the same time, universities have actively promoted innovation and entrepreneurship education by establishing business incubation centers, entrepreneurship competitions, and startup funding programs. These initiatives encourage students to transform innovative ideas into practical business projects. Moreover, various training programs and government-supported entrepreneurial platforms provide students with opportunities to learn about international trade rules, digital marketing strategies, and cross-border logistics management. These supportive measures create a favorable ecosystem for college students to explore cross-border trade entrepreneurship.

4. Major Challenges Faced by College Students in Cross-Border Trade

Although college students possess certain advantages when participating in cross-border trade, they also face a series of practical challenges. Compared with experienced enterprises, student entrepreneurs often lack sufficient business experience, industry resources, and professional management capabilities. These limitations may affect the stability and sustainability of their business activities. In addition, cross-border trade involves complex processes including international communication, logistics coordination, market research, and supply chain management. Without systematic training and practical experience, college students may encounter various difficulties during actual operations. Therefore, identifying and analyzing these challenges is essential for improving the effectiveness of cross-border trade practices among college students.

4.1 Inadequate Business English Application

Skills

Although many college students have a good foundation in general English, the language used in international trade is more specialized and professional. Business communication often requires precise terminology, formal expressions, and clear structural organization. Research on business-specific vocabulary in intercultural communication suggests that the accurate use of specialized terms is essential for reducing misunderstandings and improving communication efficiency in international trade (Lin, 2026).

For example, in international trade correspondence, entrepreneurs must accurately describe product specifications, price terms, payment conditions, delivery schedules, and warranty policies. Any ambiguity or misunderstanding in these details may lead to disputes or transaction failures. However, many college students have limited experience in writing professional business emails or preparing formal quotations. Furthermore, oral communication skills are also crucial in international trade activities. Video conferences, online negotiations, and customer service interactions require clear pronunciation, professional vocabulary, and effective communication strategies. Without sufficient practice, students may feel less confident when communicating with international clients. Therefore, improving business English proficiency and professional communication skills is an important task for college students engaged in cross-border trade.

4.2 Communication Barriers Caused by Cross-Cultural Differences

Cross-cultural differences represent another significant challenge in international business activities. Different countries and regions have distinct cultural values, communication styles, and business etiquette. These differences may influence negotiation processes, marketing strategies, and customer relationships. For instance, in Western countries, business communication tends to emphasize efficiency and directness. Clients often expect concise information and quick responses. In contrast, in some Asian or Middle Eastern cultures, relationship building and polite communication play a more important role in business interactions. If college students lack awareness of these cultural differences, they may

unintentionally use inappropriate communication styles. This may lead to misunderstandings, reduced trust, or even the loss of potential business opportunities. Therefore, cultivating cross-cultural communication competence is essential for improving the effectiveness of international business interactions.

4.3 Insufficient Supply Chain Management Experience

Another challenge faced by college student entrepreneurs lies in supply chain management. Cross-border trade requires coordination among multiple stakeholders, including suppliers, logistics providers, and overseas clients. Managing these relationships effectively requires both organizational skills and practical experience. Many college students are unfamiliar with processes such as supplier evaluation, quality inspection, production scheduling, and logistics tracking. As a result, problems such as delayed shipments, inconsistent product quality, or inaccurate inventory management may occur. These operational problems can directly affect customer satisfaction and business reputation. In international trade, maintaining reliability and consistency is crucial for building long-term customer relationships. Therefore, developing basic supply chain management capabilities is an essential step for improving the sustainability of student-led cross-border trade businesses.

4.4 Limited Overseas Market Development Capabilities

Market development is one of the most important factors determining the success of cross-border trade activities. Entrepreneurs must understand consumer preferences, market trends, and competitive environments in different countries. However, many college students lack experience in conducting systematic market research. They may choose products based on personal preferences rather than objective market analysis. As a result, their products may face intense competition or insufficient demand in target markets. In addition, effective marketing strategies are essential for attracting international customers. Without knowledge of digital marketing tools, search engine optimization, and social media promotion strategies, entrepreneurs may struggle to reach potential buyers. Therefore, strengthening market research capability and marketing skills

is crucial for improving the competitiveness of college students in cross-border trade.

5. Innovative Model of Cross-Border Trade from the Perspective of Cross-Cultural Communication

Considering both the opportunities and challenges faced by college students in cross-border trade, it is necessary to establish a systematic development model that can guide their entrepreneurial practices. Based on cross-cultural communication theory and international business communication theory, this paper proposes an integrated development framework. This model emphasizes the coordinated development of four key dimensions: language communication, cultural adaptation, supply chain integration, and market operations. By strengthening these four aspects simultaneously, college students can gradually build a sustainable and competitive cross-border trade system.

5.1 Constructing a Professional Business Communication System

Professional business communication forms the foundation of international trade activities. In order to communicate effectively with overseas clients, college students should develop standardized communication procedures and improve their business writing skills. For instance, business emails should follow a clear structure, including greeting, product introduction, price quotation, and closing remarks. Accurate trade terminology and polite expressions help convey professionalism and build trust with clients. In addition, maintaining timely communication with customers is essential for building long-term relationships. Prompt responses to inquiries and transparent information sharing can significantly improve customer satisfaction.

5.2 Enhancing Cross-Cultural Communication Competence

Beyond language skills, successful international trade also requires a deep understanding of cultural differences. Entrepreneurs should actively learn about the social values, communication habits, and consumption preferences of their target markets. For example, marketing materials should be designed according to the cultural expectations of local consumers. Colors, symbols, and promotional

messages may carry different meanings in different cultures. Adapting marketing strategies to local cultural contexts can improve customer acceptance and brand recognition. Furthermore, demonstrating cultural respect during business negotiations helps build stronger partnerships with international clients.

5.3 Integrating Domestic High-Quality Supply Chain Resources

A reliable supply chain system is essential for ensuring stable product quality and timely delivery. College students should carefully evaluate potential suppliers based on production capacity, quality control standards, and price competitiveness. Establishing long-term partnerships with trustworthy manufacturers can reduce operational risks and improve efficiency. In addition, entrepreneurs should implement basic quality inspection procedures to ensure that products meet international standards. Effective supply chain integration also includes logistics coordination and inventory management, which help maintain smooth business operations.

5.4 Innovating Overseas Market Development Methods

Market development strategies play a crucial role in determining the growth potential of cross-border trade businesses. College students can combine multiple digital marketing channels to expand their international customer base. In the context of digital trade expansion, improving global competence and market adaptability has become an important capability for economic and trade talents (Lu et al., 2026). For instance, cross-border e-commerce platforms provide access to global buyers, while social media marketing helps increase brand visibility. Content marketing, influencer cooperation, and targeted advertising can also improve marketing effectiveness. Additionally, data analysis tools allow entrepreneurs to monitor customer behavior and market trends. By analyzing these data, they can adjust product strategies and marketing approaches to better meet customer needs.

6. Optimization Pathways for College Students' Cross-Border Trade Practices

To further improve the effectiveness of college students' cross-border trade activities, it is necessary to establish comprehensive support

systems involving universities, enterprises, and government institutions. These support mechanisms can provide training, practical opportunities, and policy assistance for student entrepreneurs. Through collaborative efforts among multiple stakeholders, college students can gradually acquire the knowledge, skills, and experience required for successful participation in international trade.

6.1 Improving University Cross-Cultural Business Curricula

Universities play a key role in cultivating talents for cross-border trade. By integrating cross-cultural communication theory with international trade practices, universities can provide students with a solid theoretical foundation. Studies suggest that improving intercultural competence training in college English education can significantly enhance students' ability to participate in global communication and cooperation (Sun, 2026). Teaching methods such as case analysis, simulation exercises, and role-playing negotiations can help students understand real-world business scenarios. These interactive learning approaches enhance students' practical communication skills and problem-solving abilities.

6.2 Constructing School-Enterprise Cooperation Practice Platforms

School-enterprise cooperation provides valuable opportunities for students to participate in authentic business activities. Through internships and collaborative projects, students can gain hands-on experience in market research, product promotion, and customer communication. These experiences help students understand the practical challenges of cross-border trade and develop professional skills that cannot be fully acquired through classroom learning alone.

6.3 Strengthening Digital Trade Competence Training

With the continuous development of digital technology, cross-border trade increasingly relies on data-driven decision-making and online marketing strategies. Therefore, strengthening digital trade competence training is essential for improving students' competitiveness. Training programs should include topics such as cross-border e-commerce platform operation,

digital advertising strategies, search engine optimization, and data analysis techniques. Mastering these skills allows entrepreneurs to make more informed business decisions.

6.4 Cultivating an International Perspective and Professional Ethics

Finally, cultivating an international perspective and strong professional ethics is essential for long-term success in cross-border trade. Entrepreneurs should respect cultural diversity, maintain honesty in business practices, and comply with international trade regulations. An open mindset and a commitment to ethical business conduct not only enhance corporate reputation but also contribute to sustainable international cooperation.

7. Conclusion

With the development of the digital economy and cross-border e-commerce, college students engaging in cross-border trade possess broad development prospects. Leveraging their language advantages and digital technology skills, college students can enter international markets through asset-light operation models and continuously enhance their capabilities through practice. From the perspective of cross-cultural communication, this paper analyzes the developmental foundations and real-world challenges of college students' cross-border trade and constructs an innovative model of “language communication—cultural adaptation—supply chain integration—market operations.” The study suggests that improving business English proficiency, strengthening cross-cultural communication awareness, optimizing supply chain management, and adopting data-driven market development strategies are essential for enhancing the success rate of student-led cross-border trade ventures. In the future, universities should continue to improve their innovation and entrepreneurship education systems and strengthen the construction of cross-border e-commerce practice platforms.

Previous research also indicates that cultivating globally competent talents and strengthening digital trade capabilities are essential for promoting sustainable development in international economic cooperation (Zhao & Liu, 2026; Zhu & Wang, 2026). Meanwhile, governments and enterprises should enhance cooperation to provide more policy support,

training resources, and market opportunities for young entrepreneurs. Through collaborative efforts from universities, governments, and enterprises, more interdisciplinary talents with international vision, professional competence, and innovative spirit can be cultivated, thereby injecting new vitality into the development of cross-border trade and global economic cooperation.

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