

Reconceptualizing Foreign Language-Talent Cultivation in the Era of Digital Intelligence

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Abstract: The advent of the era of digital intelligence, characterized by the proliferation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Large Language Models (LLMs), has fundamentally disrupted traditional paradigms of higher education. For foreign language education, this disruption necessitates a systemic reconceptualization of talent cultivation programs. This paper argues that the traditional, skill-centric model of language instruction is increasingly misaligned with societal demands. To address this structural contradiction, we proposed a comprehensive framework for formulating modern foreign language talent cultivation. Centered on AI empowerment, the framework advocates for a paradigm shift from instrumental rationality to human-machine synergistic literacy. It explores strategies for modular curriculum redesign, interdisciplinary integration under the "New Liberal Arts" philosophy, and the transformation of pedagogical and assessment ecosystems, ultimately aiming to cultivate future talents in the AI era.

Keywords: Foreign Language Education; Talent Cultivation; Reconceptualization

1. Introduction

The landscape of global higher education is currently undergoing a profound transformation driven by the rapid evolution of digital intelligence technologies, and foreign language disciplines also face structural challenges^[1]. In the past, the training of foreign language talents followed the instrumental rationality, taking the cultivation of individual language abilities such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation as the core^[2]. However, with the gradual maturity of neural machine translation and generative AI technology, the basic language decoding and coding work has basically been automated. This kind of technological progress has shaken the foundation

of traditional foreign language education, making the value of a single language ability continue to decline in the labor market^[3].

Relevant literature has shown that there is a serious disconnection between the skill sets currently cultivated by colleges and universities and the comprehensive literacy needed by modern society^[4,5]. Nowadays, employers are increasingly inclined to hire compound talents who not only have foreign language ability but also master professional knowledge and digital literacy. Consequently, partial adjustment of the syllabus can no longer meet the requirements of talent training in the new era. In other words, the talent training urgently needs systematic innovation from concept to architecture. It is commonly agreed that AI should not be seen merely as an external threat or just a teaching aid, but rather as a core driver for development^[1]. Based on literature, this paper reconceptualizes foreign language talent cultivation by proposing a framework that integrates AI empowerment into the curriculum system, and redefines the training objectives, curriculum structure and assessment methods.

2. Paradigm Shift in Cultivation Objectives

The objectives of talent cultivation, serving as the cornerstone in the program, determine the direction of curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, and assessment frameworks. In the era of digital intelligence, the cultivation objectives must definitively prioritize the development of professionals characterized by human-machine synergistic literacy over cultivating language skills^[1]. Traditional foreign language education attaches great importance to instrumental rationality and regards language as a functional carrier for transmitting information^[2]. However, as AI models such as ChatGPT and Deep Seek can undertake routine translation, grammatical error correction, and basic text writing, the comparative advantage of human graduates has gradually shifted to higher-order cognitive ability and complex

emotional intelligence. This shift requires that the cultivation program should reorient from instrumental rationality toward value rationality. Accordingly, the criteria for evaluating foreign language professionals should extend beyond translation accuracy and prioritize those uniquely human capabilities, encompassing cross-cultural empathy, moral judgment, critical thinking, and the capacity to interpret complex global issues.

Besides, the national macro strategies, covering the Belt and Road Initiative, international communication capacity building^[6] agenda, also require the shift of talent cultivation objectives. Research shows that talent cultivation should develop in the direction of deep integration and organic intersection of foreign language, technology and professional fields^[7]. The training objectives need to be oriented to positions such as global governance designers, international communication planners, and digital humanities scholars. Such talents should be equipped with global public opinion analysis competences, enabling them to bridge cultural discounts in cross-border narratives, and articulate nuanced Chinese stories on the world stage. These qualities demand a synergy between linguistic competence and digital literacy.

Thus, the paradigm shift in cultivation objectives entails a fundamental reconceptualization of what constitutes a "compound talent" as mentioned above. The new objectives, therefore, should target roles such as global governance designers, international communication planners, and digital humanities scholars. Such professionals must exhibit human-machine collaborative literacy with which they should be adept at designing precise AI prompts, critically auditing machine-generated content, and ensuring its cultural and ideological appropriateness. Ultimately, this transformation transforms the technological challenges posed by AI into strategic assets for cross-cultural engagement, aligning educational outcomes with both market realities and national aspirations.

3. Structuring the AI-Empowered Curriculum Matrix

To customize the above mention cultivation objectives, the curriculum architecture must transcend rigid disciplinary silos and adopt an integrated, multi-dimensional framework. AI empowers the curriculum matrix, which is in line with the concept of "New Liberal Arts"

construction. The interdisciplinary reform of traditional foreign language majors often simply adds computer and business courses in addition to the main courses of literature and linguistics[8]. In the context of the era of digital intelligence, there are fundamental deficiencies in this superimposed reform system. We should consider two dimensions, both vertical and horizontal, in designing the curriculum matrix. One is to achieve the deep organic integration of foreign language ability, technology application and professional disciplines, and the other is to use AI as a cognitive medium for all curriculum learning and analysis, rather than just a tool.

The vertical axis of this matrix ensures a rigorous, sequential progression of digital intelligence competencies throughout the students' academic lifecycle. In the basic learning period of freshmen and sophomores, digital literacy is regarded as a necessary basic ability, which is as important as basic skills such as reading and writing. All foreign language majors are required to take the core courses of digital literacy. The course content of the basic stage includes the basic principles of natural language processing, corpus linguistics, and simple programming languages such as Python for humanities majors. The vertical cultivation system not only focuses on the technology itself, but also explores the philosophical and ethical issues behind the technology. Students will learn data ethics, algorithm bias, privacy security and other aspects, so as to master the analytical framework for judging the cultural connotation and ideology of big language model training data. When entering the high-level stage of junior and senior, the focus of vertical training will change from basic digital literacy to collaborative application, mainly learning man-in-the-loop workflows, advanced prompt design, and ethical evaluation of machine-generated content. The horizontal axis of the matrix is where the structural reorganization reaches its full potential. Each college does not need to follow the unified literature and linguistics training route, and should shape a distinctive and directional training direction according to its specific academic strengths and regional social and economic needs.

Take Xi'an International Studies University as an example, in the new round of revision of talent cultivation program, they structured the AI-Empowered curriculum matrix following the above dimensions. Aware of the shortcomings of

traditional language programs, XISU has embedded digital intelligence into its cultivation matrix, implementing the "Language + AI + X" model, establishing multiple directions to respond to national strategic demands and the technological trend of the language service industry. Here the "X" refers to professional categories such as global governance, international trade, legal translation, and digital media. Foreign languages and AI are closely linked to knowledge in these fields and cannot be separated. Under this curriculum system, students are not learning these three types of content in isolation, but learning how to use AI to solve complex language problems in various professional fields. This model breaks through the boundaries of traditional foreign language disciplines, establishes an educational ecology that conforms to the development of the industry and can be dynamically updated, which is very consistent with the workflow of the modern industry.

As in the traditional translation major, XISU has set up an "Intelligent Language Services" module, and the teaching focus has completely shifted from manual independent translation exercises to localization engineering, automatic term extraction, corpus construction, and the post-editing process management of machine translation. Students are trained to use advanced computer-aided translation software and large language models to deal with multilingual large-scale commercial projects, so as to make adequate preparations for the actual work of the industry after graduation.

Furthermore, the matrix model extends to geopolitics, international communication and other domains. In the "Language + AI + Area Studies" and international communication modules, students no longer simply learn the language and traditional culture of the target countries, but use tools such as big data analysis, network data capture, and AI sentiment analysis to study and judge regional geopolitical trends and public opinion dynamics. Students leverage generative AI to produce multimedia content and establish cross-cultural narratives, so as to optimize international digital communication strategies and solve the problem of cultural discounts. In order to ensure the implementation of the theory, the curriculum matrix adopts an integration mechanism of production and education. Colleges and universities, head technology enterprises and AI companies jointly

develop courses to ensure that the curriculum can keep up with the rapid rhythm of algorithm technology. Students participate in off-campus internships such as AI data labeling or algorithm-driven global marketing, break through the barriers between theory and industry practice, and finally the ultimate goal of the AI-enabled curriculum matrix.

4. Innovating Pedagogical Ecosystems and Assessment Modalities

A structurally sound curriculum matrix cannot succeed without concurrent, deep-rooted innovations in teaching methodologies and assessment criteria. With the continuous popularization of generative AI, the pedagogical ecosystem needs to achieve major changes. The focus of education should be changed from simple knowledge transmission to knowledge application and critique. Consequently, the role of educators has also undergone great changes. They are no longer just the central repositories and transmitters of linguistic rules and vocabulary knowledge, but also the designers of learning, the facilitators of inquiry and the scaffolders of cognition. This transformation requires colleges and universities to increase investment in teacher training and ensure that teachers have digital literacy, so as to guide students to learn in an AI-assisted learning environment. By offloading routine grammar instruction, vocabulary drills, and basic syntactic correction to adaptive, AI-driven tutoring systems, instructors can reclaim and repurpose highly valuable classroom time. This time must be dedicated to advanced, human-centric academic endeavors that machines cannot replicate, such as Socratic seminars, complex ethical debates, nuanced literary critique, and collaborative, high-order problem-solving exercises.

In addition, cultivation programs should actively introduce various intelligent teaching platforms to establish an immersive learning environment. Colleges and universities can use AI to customize multimodal teaching materials according to students' cognitive pacing and learning shortcomings, so as to effectively achieve hierarchical teaching. In addition to personalized content push, the platform can also combine virtual reality(VR) technology and large language models to simulate highly realistic cross-cultural scenarios. Students can conduct interactive exercises in virtual

diplomatic negotiations, international trade mediations, crisis communication and other scenes. These AI-facilitated simulations can provide an unprecedented volume of practical opportunities, so that students can test their linguistic strategies and cultural adaptability in real time, and bridge the gap between theoretical classroom and practical high-stakes communication.

In tandem with these pedagogical shifts, the formulation of new programs must directly address the glaring inadequacies of traditional evaluation metrics, which are rapidly becoming obsolete. Standardized summative assessment methods such as closed-book translation, discrete-point grammar tests, and conventional essay writing assignments can easily be used to cheat with AI, and such assessments cannot measure the digital intelligence competencies, such as prompt engineering and critical curation, required by contemporary workplaces. In the environment of comprehensive popularization of AI, continuing to use the old assessment model will not only encourage academic dishonesty but also misalign students' learning direction and decouple them from the actual needs of the professional landscape. Therefore, the academic community has reached a consensus that the assessment method must turn to continuous, formative, and process-oriented assessment modalities.

Evaluation criteria must be meticulously redesigned to assess the human-machine collaborative process itself, rather than solely judging the final textual output. The assessment requires students to document their iterative interactions with AI, and evaluate their ability to formulate precise computational prompts, refine inquiries based on initial outputs, and ethically integrate AI tools into their broader research workflows. One of the core dimensions of the scoring standard is the students' ability to think carefully, that is, the capacity to identify, critique and correct cultural prejudices, logical fallacies and factual hallucinations in the content generated by AI. The final comprehensive results need to be evaluated in combination with graduation design, digital work collection, multimodal presentations and other comprehensive results. This kind of comprehensive assessment requires students to integrate high-level foreign language ability, professional knowledge, and digital technology to prove that they can use AI to solve

cross-cultural complex problems.

5. Conclusion

The era of digital intelligence presents a profound challenge to foreign language disciplines, yet it simultaneously offers an unprecedented opportunity for structural and disciplinary renewal. By synthesizing current academic consensus and analyzing empirical industry demands, it is evident that superficial, additive adjustments to existing curricula are entirely inadequate; a comprehensive reconceptualization of talent cultivation programs is an urgent academic imperative. The framework proposed herein emphasizes that AI empowerment must be structurally embedded into cultivation objectives, the curriculum matrix, and pedagogical assessment ecosystems. By shifting the educational focus from instrumental linguistic training to the cultivation of human-machine synergistic literacy, and by embracing deep interdisciplinary integration through models like the "Language + AI + X" matrix demonstrated by Xi'an International Studies University, academic departments can effectively resolve the current supply-demand contradictions in the labor market. Ultimately, the future vitality of foreign language programs will depend entirely on their ability to leverage digital intelligence while rigorously fortifying the critical, cultural, and humanistic core that artificial intelligence cannot replicate.

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