Research on the Teaching Path of "Foreign Language + Tourism" in Universities under the Background of New Liberal Arts

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Abstract: The construction of new liberal arts emphasizes interdisciplinary integration and the cultivation of compound talents, providing new opportunities for the collaborative development of foreign language majors and tourism majors in universities. The "foreign language + tourism" teaching model, by integrating the instrumental nature of language and the applied nature of tourism, aims to cultivate compound talents with both cross-cultural communication skills and practical capabilities in the tourism industry. Based on the background of new liberal arts, this paper analyzes the current status and challenges of "foreign language + tourism" teaching in universities, and proposes specific teaching paths from the dimensions of curriculum system reconstruction, teaching model innovation, faculty team optimization, and evaluation mechanism improvement, aiming to provide a theoretical reference for cultivating high-quality talents adapted to the high-quality development needs of the cultural and tourism industry.

Keywords: Foreign Language + Majors; New liberal arts; Compound talents; Interdisciplinary model; Teaching paths

1. Introduction

In 2020, the Ministry of Education explicitly proposed the strategic initiative of "new liberal arts" construction, calling for breaking traditional disciplinary barriers and promoting the innovative development of liberal arts education, with a focus on nurturing "interdisciplinary and integrated" talents. As an important carrier of cultural heritage and exchange, the tourism industry's international development places higher demands on practitioners' foreign language proficiency (especially cross-cultural communication skills), while foreign language majors have long been characterized by an "emphasis on language tools over application," necessitating enhanced relevance through integration with industry needs. Against this backdrop, the "foreign language + tourism" teaching model has emerged—it not only retains the language foundation advantage of foreign language disciplines but also incorporates diverse knowledge modules such as tourism management, destination marketing, and cultural heritage interpretation. This is a typical practice embodying the "interdisciplinary

integration" philosophy of the new liberal arts [1].

However, current teaching in this field in universities still faces issues such as fragmented curricula, disconnection from practice, and weak faculty, requiring the exploration of scientifically effective teaching paths [2].

2. The connotation of "foreign language + tourism" teaching and its value under the new liberal arts background

2.1. Core connotation

The "foreign language + tourism" model is not a simple superposition of language and tourism knowledge but an in-depth integration aimed at developing students' cross-cultural communication skills and tourism industry application abilities. Specifically, it combines the instrumental nature of foreign languages (e.g., English or other languages) with the applied nature of tourism (e.g., management, service, and cultural exchange), focusing on cultivating talents with: (1) solid foreign language skills (particularly specialized expressions for tourism scenarios); (2) professional knowledge of the tourism industry (e.g., tour guiding, itinerary design, and analysis of international tourists' needs); and (3) cross-cultural understanding and communication skills (e.g., recognizing cultural differences between China and other countries, and accurately conveying destination cultural symbols). Its essence lies in the bidirectional empowerment of "tool-based" (language) and "application-based" (tourism) elements through interdisciplinary integration [3].

2.2. Unique value under the new liberal arts background

The three core characteristics of new liberal arts construction—"interdisciplinary integration," "demand orientation," and "technology empowerment"—align closely with the goals of "foreign language + tourism" teaching. First, the tourism industry, as a composite sector of "culture + service," requires practitioners to not only communicate China's stories effectively in foreign languages (cultural dissemination) but also solve practical problems with professional knowledge (service implementation). This is precisely the advantage of the "foreign language + tourism" interdisciplinary approach. Second, with the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative and the recovery of inbound tourism, the market demand for roles such as "foreign-language-proficient tourism planners," "international tour guides," and "cultural tourism promotion specialists" has surged. This model directly addresses industry pain points, meeting the "demand-oriented" requirements of the new liberal arts. Third, the application of technologies like virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence translation in tourism scenarios demands that teaching incorporate technical tools (e.g., multilingual tour guide simulation systems, tourism big data analysis platforms), further expanding the connotation of "foreign language + tourism" [4].

3. Current status and challenges of "foreign language + tourism" teaching in universities

3.1. Current status: Preliminary exploration but limited integration

In recent years, some universities have introduced courses such as "Tourism English" or "Foreign Language Tour Guide Practices" or added second-language modules to tourism management programs. However, these efforts remain at the "superficial integration" stage [5]: (1) Curriculum design often treats foreign language and tourism content as independent entities (e.g., foreign language courses focus on grammar drills, while tourism courses emphasize theoretical explanations), lacking task-driven designs centered on real tourism scenarios;

(2) Faculty allocation is imbalanced—foreign language teachers generally lack tourism industry experience, and tourism teachers have limited foreign language proficiency, making it difficult to deliver bilingual or fully English-taught courses; (3) Practical components are often superficial—on-campus simulations are limited to basic scenarios (e.g., introducing tourist attractions), while off-campus internships fail to provide exposure to high-level tasks like serving international tourists or planning cultural tourism projects due to insufficient school-enterprise collaboration.

3.2. Challenges: Multiple contradictions constraining development

(1) Disciplinary positioning contradiction: Foreign language majors tend to focus on "academic-oriented" talent cultivation (e.g., linguistics, literature research), while tourism majors lean toward "application-oriented" training (e.g., hotel management, scenic area operations). This divergence leads to ambiguous goals for cultivating "compound" talents [6].

(2) Resource integration contradiction: Foreign language departments and tourism departments are usually under different colleges, lacking top-level design for mechanisms such as cross-curricular course recognition, credit sharing, and joint teaching, making it difficult to form interdisciplinary teaching teams.

(3) Technology adaptation contradiction: Smart tourism (e.g., AI tour guides, multilingual tourism information platforms) demands new technical skills from talents, but current teaching remains dominated by traditional classroom lectures, with limited application of digital tools like virtual simulations or online collaboration platforms.

(4) Evaluation system contradiction: Traditional assessments rely heavily on written exams (language knowledge) or theoretical reports (tourism concepts), failing to comprehensively evaluate core competencies such as cross-cultural communication and on-site tourism scenario adaptability [7].

4. Optimizing teaching paths for "foreign language + tourism" under the new liberal arts background

To address these challenges, universities must adopt a systematic teaching path centered on the "interdisciplinary integration" philosophy of the new liberal arts, focusing on four dimensions: curriculum system, teaching model, faculty team, and evaluation mechanism.

4.1. Reconstructing a "hierarchical, modularly integrated" curriculum system

Curriculum design should follow a logical progression of "foundation building–disciplinary integration–practical innovation," forming composite modules that combine "language + tourism + culture + technology" [8]:

(1) Foundation layer (years 1–2): Focus on language proficiency with courses like "Tourism English Listening and Speaking" and "Introduction to Destination Cultures," emphasizing high-frequency tourism vocabulary (e.g., transportation, accommodation, dining terms), cross-cultural basics (e.g., etiquette differences), and foundational destination knowledge (e.g., world heritage distribution, folk taboos).

(2) Integration layer (year 3): Develop interdisciplinary core courses such as "International Tour Guide Practices" (combining guide scriptwriting, emergency communication, and multilingual explanations), "Cultural Tourism Project Planning" (integrating tourism market analysis and foreign-language promotional copywriting), and "Cultural Heritage Promotion" (training students to tell Chinese intangible cultural heritage stories in foreign languages). These courses should adopt "dual-teacher

instruction" (foreign language teachers focus on expression, tourism teachers on industry logic) and use case studies (e.g., multilingual interpretations of the Mogao Caves, service cases at Shanghai Disneyland) to reinforce application.

(3) Innovation layer (year 4): Offer elective modules (e.g., "Lesser-Taught Languages + Niche Tourism"— Spanish + Latin American cultural tourism, Japanese + onsen tourism) and a graduation project requiring students to create a multilingual promotion plan for an international tourism product or analyze cross-cultural conflicts and solutions in a popular inbound tourism destination, from a global visitor's perspective [9].

4.2. Innovating a "scenario-driven, technology-empowered" teaching model

New liberal arts emphasize student-centered active learning, requiring the creation of diverse teaching scenarios:

(1) Realistic scenario simulation: Establish an "on-campus multilingual tourism service training center" to simulate airport pickups, scenic spot guiding, and complaint handling, where students role-play international tourists (using different languages) and service providers to enhance adaptability. VR technology can recreate sites like the Forbidden City or Lijiang Ancient Town for multilingual interpretation training [10].

(2) Project-based learning: Collaborate with tourism enterprises to assign real-world projects (e.g., designing English promotional brochures for inbound tourism routes, planning Hanfu experience activities for Gen Z foreign tourists). Students work in teams to conduct research, design solutions, and present their work, guided jointly by teachers and corporate mentors, integrating language output, professional knowledge, and practical innovation [11].

(3) Digital tool application: Utilize online platforms (e.g., Moodle) to share global tourism case studies, compare human and machine translations using AI tools, and analyze international tourist behavior preferences with big data software (e.g., Tableau), fostering students' technical adaptability.

4.3. Building a "dual-expertise, cross-disciplinary" faculty team

Faculty is key to successful implementation. Strategies include:

(1) Internal development: Encourage foreign language teachers to take tourism management courses (e.g., obtaining tour guide certifications) and tourism teachers to improve foreign language proficiency (e.g., immersive language training). "Teaching workshops" can facilitate experience-sharing between the two groups (e.g., co-designing lessons on "telling heritage stories in English") [12].

(2) External recruitment: Hire experienced international tour guides and senior executives from tourism enterprises as part-time instructors to teach courses like "Practical International Tourist Services" and "Tourism Market Trends," bringing industry insights (e.g., changes in visa-free policies, smart scenic area needs) into classrooms.

(3) Team collaboration: Form interdisciplinary teaching teams comprising "foreign language teachers + tourism teachers + corporate mentors" to jointly guide complex projects (e.g., studying cultural needs of Belt and Road tourists), creating a closed loop of "language support–professional analysis–practical validation." [13]

4.4. Improving a "multi-stakeholder, competency-oriented" evaluation mechanism

Traditional evaluations fail to reflect the outcomes of compound talent cultivation. A comprehensive system

should combine "process + outcome," "language + application," and "in-school + external" assessments:

(1) Process evaluation: Track student participation in classroom discussions, project practices (e.g., group collaboration, cross-cultural communication), and maintain learning portfolios (e.g., draft guide scripts, tourist feedback, research reports) to document growth.

(2) Outcome evaluation: Use a combination of language tests, professional assessments, and practical presentations. For example, students might deliver a multilingual promotion speech for a cultural heritage site and be evaluated by corporate mentors on professionalism (accuracy), language skills (fluency), and cultural messaging (value alignment).

(3) Third-party evaluation: Involve tourism enterprises and international tourists in assessments (e.g., surveys on students' contributions during internships or evaluations of simulated guiding services), ensuring alignment with industry needs [14].

5. Conclusion

The construction of new liberal arts offers significant opportunities for the teaching of "foreign language + tourism" in universities. By reconstructing interdisciplinary curricula, innovating scenario-based teaching models, building cross-disciplinary faculty teams, and refining multi-dimensional evaluation mechanisms, universities can effectively address issues like fragmented curricula and disconnection from practice, cultivating compound talents proficient in both foreign languages and tourism industry operations. Future efforts should further explore the deeper integration of "foreign language + tourism + technology" to support the high-quality international development of China's cultural and tourism industry.

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