

# A Study on Developing Cross-cultural Business Communication Competence: An Integrated Course-competition Approach

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## ABSTRACT

Cultivating cross-cultural business communication competence is crucial for professionals in international economics and trade. To address the common disconnect between theory and practice in university courses, this paper constructs a four-phase integrated teaching model ("Objective-Process-Evaluation-Sublimation") based on Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and experiential learning theories. This "course-competition integration" model incorporates high-level academic competitions into the curriculum, achieving a reconstruction of teaching content, creation of simulated scenarios, implementation of diversified assessment, and sublimation of practical cognition. Teaching practice demonstrates that this approach effectively stimulates students' initiative and significantly enhances their competencies in cross-cultural communication, teamwork, and innovative problem-solving, thus providing a valuable paradigm for cultivating applied international trade talents.

## KEYWORDS

Course-competition integration; Cross-cultural business communication; Cultivation model; OBE; Teaching reform

## 1 Introduction

Amidst globalization and digital transformation, cross-cultural business communication competence has become indispensable for international business professionals. However, university curricula in this field face three major challenges: disconnection between teaching content and practical applications, ineffective student engagement through traditional pedagogy, and inadequate assessment methods for comprehensive competency evaluation. Existing studies confirm these issues, with Wang (2020) identifying an overemphasis on theoretical knowledge and Li (2022) demonstrating how the lack of authentic learning environments hinders competency development. Despite recognizing these challenges, the field lacks systematic solutions.

The integration of courses and competitions offers promising avenues to address these gaps. While studies by Zhang (2021) and Chen (2023) confirm that academic competitions enhance students' practical abilities, current research predominantly focuses on their motivational function, with limited exploration of comprehensive curriculum integration mechanisms. This study therefore develops a systematic "course-competition integration" framework that deeply incorporates high-level academic competitions into the curriculum system to effectively bridge theory and practice.

## 2 Theoretical Foundation and Model Construction

This research develops a spiral-progressive "Four-Stage Integrated" pedagogical model to bridge the theory-practice gap prevalent in conventional instruction. The framework's architecture is underpinned by two foundational educational theories: Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and Experiential Learning Theory.

The OBE paradigm establishes a backward-design approach, mandating precise alignment between curricular objectives and competency requirements derived from high-level academic competitions. Concurrently, Experiential Learning Theory shapes the model's dynamic implementation through its cyclical process of hands-on experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active application.

Anchored in academic competitions, the framework facilitates profound integration between theoretical knowledge and practical training across four interconnected phases. Its innovative core lies in leveraging competition projects as authentic learning platforms, enabling students to achieve synergistic development of knowledge acquisition, skill cultivation, and literacy enhancement. Each phase distinctly manifests the theoretical foundations: OBE principles guide the objective-content integration, while experiential learning mechanisms drive the process-method implementation, evaluation-feedback mechanisms, and summary-sublimation stages.

The iterative architecture ensures continuous refinement of teaching effectiveness while fostering progressive advancement in student competencies. This theoretical foundation guarantees both precision in instructional design and efficacy in practical execution, establishing a scholarly basis for cultivating students' cross-cultural business communication proficiency.

## 2.1 A Competency-Oriented Framework for Objective-Content Integration

Guided by the principles of Outcome-Based Education, this stage aims to closely align teaching content with practical needs through systematic curriculum restructuring. The implementation begins with a deep deconstruction of the scoring criteria from high-level academic competitions, such as the National College Students' Business Elite Challenge International Trade Competition and the "FLTRP-GUOCAI Cup" International Communication Capacity Short Video Competition. Using the Delphi expert consultation method, the teaching team identifies specific competency requirements corresponding to each competition module. For instance, the "Exhibition Planning" module is broken down into 12 core competencies, including market analysis, booth design, and product presentation, while the "Business Negotiation" module is refined into 8 key indicators, such as strategy formulation, cross-cultural communication, and conflict resolution. These competencies are precisely mapped to course teaching objectives through a competency matrix, forming a clear blueprint for competency development.

In terms of curriculum content restructuring, the traditional chapter-based structure is replaced with eight teaching modules—including "Cross-cultural Brand Communication," "International Business Negotiation," and "Cross-border E-commerce Operations"—developed based on the systematic approach to work processes. Each module follows a four-phase instructional design: "theoretical foundation, case analysis, practical simulation, and reflective improvement." Taking the "Cross-cultural Brand Communication" module as an example, students complete an entire project process encompassing target market cultural analysis, brand localization strategy development, cross-cultural advertising creative design, and marketing effectiveness evaluation, thereby achieving the application and transformation of theoretical knowledge through authentic task-driven learning.

To ensure the relevance and practicality of the curriculum, a curriculum development committee composed of industry experts, competition judges, and academic faculty is established. This committee regularly updates competency mappings and teaching content each semester based on industry trends and competition rule changes. Additionally, a digital teaching resource package—including micro-lecture videos, case studies, and practical guides—is developed to support personalized and in-depth student learning. This dynamically adjusted curriculum system ensures that teaching activities remain synchronized with industry practices, effectively addressing the disconnection between teaching content and practical needs.

## 2.2 Process-Method Integration: Designing Immersive Learning Environments

This stage translates experiential learning theory into concrete teaching practice by constructing a highly simulated business environment. Through the innovative "simulated corporation system," classes are reorganized into multiple fully-structured "trading companies." Under instructor guidance, each company establishes functional departments including marketing, international operations, and management. Student rotation through these positions provides comprehensive exposure to diverse professional responsibilities, simulating authentic corporate operations while cultivating teamwork and professional literacy.

Project-based learning is fully implemented using competition projects from the National College Student Business Elite Challenge as practical carriers. Students execute complete business processes from market research to operational implementation—for instance, managing cross-border e-commerce stores from establishment to overseas promotion—gaining hands-on international trade experience. VR simulation technology enhances authenticity through scenarios including international exhibitions, business negotiations, and overseas warehouse management.

Digital tool integration represents another critical feature: Zoom and Teams facilitate cross-cultural negotiations across time zones, Miro supports online collaboration, while Canva and Premiere enable professional-standard visual presentations. These tools replicate contemporary workplace environments while developing digital-era communication competencies.

Educators' roles transform fundamentally from knowledge transmitters to learning designers, resource providers, and process facilitators. Providing personalized guidance based on project progression, instructors help students theorize practical experience. Industry mentors further strengthen authenticity through case studies and on-site coaching. This multi-agent guidance system effectively integrates theoretical and practical training.

## 2.3 An Assessment Framework for Integrated Evaluation and Feedback

This stage aims to establish a scientific multi-dimensional evaluation system, shifting the focus of teaching assessment from outcome-based to process-oriented approaches. A four-dimensional evaluation mechanism incorporates professional instructors, industry mentors, peer assessment, and self-evaluation. Instructors emphasize the depth and innovation of theoretical knowledge application, industry mentors focus on the practicality and commercial value of solutions, peer evaluation assesses collaborative contributions, and self-evaluation promotes the development of

metacognitive skills. This multi-source evaluation network ensures comprehensive and objective assessment results.

In terms of assessment tools, specialized rubrics were developed for different teaching phases. For example, the Cross-Cultural Business Negotiation Evaluation Rubric includes four first-level indicators and twelve second-level indicators, each with detailed behavioral descriptors and a five-point scoring system. The cultural awareness dimension examines students' understanding and respect for their counterparts' cultural backgrounds; the communication strategy dimension focuses on logical expression and cultural adaptability; the negotiation skills dimension assesses abilities in deadlock resolution and innovative problem-solving. These rubrics not only serve as assessment tools but also provide clear guidance for student learning.

The innovation in the evaluation process lies in the implementation of a formative assessment mechanism. Multiple evaluation points are embedded within each teaching unit, enabling timely feedback to help students adjust their learning strategies. For instance, in business negotiation projects, three rounds of simulated negotiations are conducted, each followed by in-depth debriefing sessions based on the rubrics, allowing students to clearly identify areas for improvement. Additionally, an e-portfolio system is introduced to comprehensively document student performance across all stages, facilitating longitudinal tracking of progress. This process-oriented approach transforms students from passive recipients of evaluation to active seekers of improvement, effectively leveraging assessment to enhance learning.

Furthermore, a comprehensive mechanism for utilizing evaluation results has been established. Assessment data inform personalized learning recommendations, providing targeted training resources to address individual weaknesses. Meanwhile, big data analysis identifies common challenges in teaching, offering evidence for instructional refinement. This closed-loop "evaluate-feedback-improve" system makes teaching assessment a driving force for continuous enhancement of educational quality.

#### **2.4 Summary-Sublimation Integration: Achieving Knowledge Internalization and Transfer**

This stage focuses on deep transformation of learning outcomes and optimization of cognitive structures. Following competition projects, systematic reflection activities are organized using a three-tier progressive model: individual, group, and class-wide. Students first write individual reflection reports analyzing key decisions and their decision-making processes; then participate in group discussions to deepen understanding through multi-perspective exchanges; finally engage in class-wide sharing sessions where instructors provide theoretical elevation and summative comments. This structured reflection process effectively promotes the transformation of perceptual experience into rational cognition.

For outcome transformation, a comprehensive case development mechanism is established. Outstanding competition entries are converted into teaching cases, including complete project documentation, process videos, and reflection reports, forming a rich teaching resource library. These authentic, student-generated cases demonstrate significant positive effects in subsequent teaching due to their relevance and practical value. Additionally, students are encouraged to further incubate competition outcomes into entrepreneurial projects or academic papers, achieving multidimensional transformation of learning results. In recent years, multiple competition solutions have been adopted by enterprises, and several students have published high-quality academic papers based on their competition experiences.

To promote long-term knowledge retention and application, a sustained tracking and guidance mechanism was established. A graduate information database tracks post-graduation development, assessing the application of acquired knowledge in professional practice. Furthermore, outstanding alumni are invited to share workplace experiences, enhancing current students' motivation and direction through real-world cases. This long-term tracking mechanism from academic to professional development not only provides valuable feedback for curriculum improvement but also fosters a culture of continuous learning and inheritance.

The model achieves a complete teaching closed-loop through organic connectivity and cyclical improvement across its four stages. Practice demonstrates that this competition-driven, competency-focused, and continuously improved teaching approach effectively stimulates student initiative, significantly enhances cross-cultural business communication competence, and provides an effective pathway for cultivating innovative talents adapted to the new era of international business.

### **3 Innovative Features of the Model**

Through two iterative teaching cycles (2022-2023), this cultivation model demonstrated significant effectiveness in a business school setting. Implementation followed a phased "pilot-summary-scale" approach, incorporating tiered student support and comprehensive process documentation through video recordings and learning portfolios.

Evaluation data reveal substantial improvements: classroom participation increased from 65% to over 90%; core competency scores rose by an average of 30%; and competition performance showed marked enhancement in both award quantity and level. Qualitative evidence further indicates strengthened learning motivation, practical capabilities,

and cross-cultural confidence.

While results confirm the model's effectiveness in bridging theory-practice gaps, reflection identified three improvement priorities: enhanced teacher training, expanded practical resources, and a more systematic competency assessment framework. These findings provide clear direction for future refinements while affirming the model's value in developing profession-ready graduates.

#### 4 Teaching Implementation and Effectiveness Evaluation

Through two rounds of teaching practice (the initial round from September 2022 to January 2023 focused on model construction and debugging, and the second round from March to July 2023 emphasized refinement and optimization), this cultivation pathway has achieved significant results in the School of Business at a participating university. The implementation adhered to a gradual advancement strategy, following a "pilot-summary-promotion" path to ensure both model maturity and scalability. The approach emphasized personalized support, providing tiered guidance based on students' foundational differences, and utilized comprehensive process documentation through video recordings and learning logs to establish a solid foundation for effectiveness analysis.

Effectiveness analysis demonstrates the pathway's positive impact at both quantitative and qualitative levels. Quantitatively, classroom participation rates increased from 65% to over 90%, while post-test scores for core competencies such as cross-cultural sensitivity and communication effectiveness showed an average improvement of 30% compared to pre-test scores. Competition awards also significantly increased in both quantity and level. Qualitatively, analysis reveals substantial enhancement in students' learning motivation, practical abilities, and confidence in cross-cultural scenarios.

Reflection on the practice process identified areas for improvement, including the need to enhance teacher training, expand practical training resources, and further systematize the competency evaluation framework. These findings provide clear direction for subsequent optimization efforts. The study confirms that the model effectively addresses the theory-practice disconnect in traditional teaching methods while significantly developing students' professional competencies.

#### 5 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has developed and validated a "Four-Stage Integrated" course-competition cultivation model, demonstrating its effectiveness in enhancing students' cross-cultural business communication competence. The model achieves organic theory-practice integration through systematic design, utilizes competition projects as carriers for knowledge application, ensures continuous teaching improvement through a four-stage cyclical mechanism, and promotes teacher-student role transformation through innovative pedagogical approaches.

Based on practical reflection, four recommendations are proposed for future teaching reform: strengthening faculty development to enhance practical guidance capabilities, increasing resource investment to improve practical training conditions, deepening industry-academia collaboration to develop authentic project cases, and establishing long-term tracking mechanisms to assess graduate development. The study's innovative contribution lies in transforming the course-competition integration concept into an operational systematic model, providing a practical pathway for related curriculum reforms. Future research will focus on deeper integration of digital teaching means and further refinement of personalized learning support systems.

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