

## *Original Paper*

# Digital Reform of International Business Majors in the Context of the Digital Economy in Higher Education Institutions

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### ***Abstract***

*With the development of the digital economy, the global demand for international business professionals with digital skills is also increasing, which poses new requirements for the education of international business majors in higher education institutions. This paper summarizes the main models and existing problems of international business education in China at present. Taking the digital reform of the International Business major at Anhui University of Finance and Economics as an example, the new model of digital education is discussed from the perspectives of training objectives, practical teaching, and faculty team, and suggestions are put forward.*

### ***Keywords***

*Digital Economy, International Business Major, Digital Transformation, Higher Education*

## **1. Introduction**

The flourishing digital economy, propelled by big data and artificial intelligence, has ushered in revolutionary transformations across societal, economic, and cultural domains. The advent of digital technology has ignited seismic changes in various industries, subsequently presenting novel demands and challenges for the education of international business. The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, has underscored the indispensable role of digital education (Sangra et al., 2023). Echoing the directive from the 20th National Congress to "advance the digitalization of education," the integration of digitalization in higher education transcends the constraints of traditional classroom instruction, facilitating the dissemination of premium educational resources and evolving the conventional educational paradigm. The "New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan," as promulgated by China's State Council, underscores the imperative of leveraging intelligent technology to expedite the evolution of talent development models and pedagogical strategies.

For the international business discipline, the infusion of digital technology heralds expansive

opportunities for interdisciplinary convergence with fields such as supply chain management, logistics, and e-commerce. It not only bolsters students' practical skills but also equips international business professionals to confront the challenges of globalization. Concurrently, digital trade, exemplified by cross-border e-commerce, is swiftly ascending as a novel paradigm of global commerce, exerting a profound influence on the processes of international business, supply chain stewardship, and transaction mechanisms. To encapsulate, a profound deliberation on the emergent challenges, opportunities, and avenues engendered by digitalization for the pedagogy of international business is of paramount importance for the forthcoming trajectory of educational development (Dziubaniuk et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, the nurturing of digital competencies among students specializing in international business within China currently lags. For example, the curriculum is devoid of computer-related courses, and marketing courses fail to provide comprehensive coverage of global digital marketing and big data marketing. Similarly, cross-border e-commerce courses are deficient in content pertaining to practical applications. Regarding faculty composition, there is a notable scarcity of educators endowed with expertise in business big data analysis and big data marketing. Moreover, there is a dearth of pertinent practical training in experimental and hands-on teaching. Consequently, the cultivation of talent for the international business field necessitates a strategic pivot towards digitalization, augmenting students' digital proficiencies to accommodate the emergent exigencies of the professional sphere (Cliff & Assiouras, 2023).

## **2. The Existing Problems in Digital Teaching Reform**

### *2.1 Training Objectives*

The rapid advancement of digital technology is reshaping traditional business models and altering the ways in which enterprises acquire and process information (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2021). The philosophy and objectives of cultivating international business talent are facing new challenges, and the connection between international business talent and the business capability demands of the digital economy era has become extremely significant.

Firstly, it is essential to cultivate students' ability to process business big data. In the digital economy, data has ascended as a key element of production. Traditional analytics tools are often inadequate for managing the vast volumes of big data. The convergence of "Artificial Intelligence and Algorithms" is emerging as the predominant force in data analysis. Consequently, the innovation of novel computational methodologies and software is poised to establish fresh demands for the skill sets of international business professionals in this digital epoch.

Secondly, it is crucial to develop students' capabilities in managing business organizations. Artificial intelligence is increasingly instrumental in achieving corporate management decisions through the manipulation and interpretation of extensive data sets. This paradigm introduces a greater degree of informational complexity and uncertainty compared to traditional decision-making processes. Thus, in

the digital economy, it is imperative for international business professionals to precisely manage the allocation of internal enterprise resources, thereby enhancing the efficiency of business organizations amidst a dynamic and intricate commercial landscape (Truss & Anderson, 2023).

Thirdly, fostering students' innovative abilities is imperative. Traditional education in international business has often relied on standardized, procedural assessments to gauge students' mastery of professional knowledge, with a focus on elevating their expertise. In the digital economy, intelligent technologies have simplified access to knowledge and information. The integration and processing of this knowledge, along with the innovative capacity to incorporate AI into business activities, represent new criteria for the development of international business professionals. However, current educational practices in international business have yet to fully embrace these elements as foundational educational goals.

## *2.2 Curriculum System*

The existing curriculum for the international business major has yet to align with the pace of contemporary development, presenting as somewhat antiquated. It predominantly features a foundation in academic courses and conventional management subjects, with a notable absence of instruction in computer basics, business data analysis, and other data-related theoretical knowledge. There is also a shortage of practical courses focusing on data manipulation, analysis, and processing techniques. In the face of the digital economy's swift advancement, data has emerged as a pivotal asset in corporate competition and a cornerstone for decision-making. Consequently, the curriculum for the international business major ought to prioritize the enhancement of students' digital competencies (Zhang & Yu, 2023).

In 2020, directives were issued by the Ministry of Education, the National Development and Reform Commission, and the Ministry of Finance regarding the "promotion of interdisciplinary integration and the accelerated cultivation of graduate students in the field of artificial intelligence within 'Double First-Class' universities." These guidelines highlighted the current deficiency in deep cross-disciplinary integration within academic structures, as well as a dearth of leading talents, innovative teams, and platforms for interdisciplinary innovation. "Cross-boundary integration" stands as a defining characteristic of the educational system in the digital economy era, manifesting in the international business major through a curriculum that intertwines "International Business with Artificial Intelligence" and "International Business with the Digital Economy." Nonetheless, the curriculum in Chinese universities for the international business major predominantly clings to traditional models, including courses such as International Marketing, International Business Management, and International Business Negotiation. While these courses lay the foundational theoretical groundwork for the field of international business and encompass essential knowledge for professionals, they are being challenged by the evolving landscape.

The progression of artificial intelligence continues to disrupt conventional business operations, and the traditional curriculum for international business does not suffice to meet the evolving demands for

multidisciplinary "cross-boundary integration." Hence, the curriculum for international business in the digital economy must emphasize the profound integration of interdisciplinary knowledge. It should include courses on the digital economy and the application of artificial intelligence, fortifying students' understanding of data mining and analysis methodologies. This approach aims to develop students' capacity to adeptly utilize digital and intelligent technologies in expanding international business endeavors, thereby ensuring their readiness to thrive in the novel facets of international business activities within the digital economy era.

### *2.3 Teaching Staff*

In the digital economy era, intelligent technologies are accelerating the development of smart education. The construction of an intelligent educational ecosystem sets higher standards for the digital literacy of the teaching staff (Cervera et al., 2016; Keshavarz & Ghoneim, 2021). In traditional teaching models, teachers have played the leading role in knowledge transfer, imparting knowledge to students through classroom lectures and case analyses. However, the empowerment of digital intelligence is gradually transforming the role of teachers.

On one hand, the advent of artificial intelligence technology not only enriches the existing knowledge base but can also rapidly generate new knowledge from it by simulating human neural networks. On the other hand, artificial intelligence can tailor learning objectives, content, and sequence to the individual needs of students, while assisting teachers in providing personalized evaluation and feedback, thus forming a personalized teaching approach for students.

Therefore, as intelligent technology is integrated into the international business knowledge system, the capacity of artificial intelligence in learning and creating knowledge will surpass that of teachers, becoming the disseminator, bearer, and creator of knowledge in the teaching process. Both teachers and students will evolve into nodes within a knowledge network. At this point, teachers transition from the traditional role of "dominator" to that of a "facilitator," leveraging artificial intelligence to continuously enhance students' self-directed learning and creative abilities.

Consequently, the digital literacy of the teaching staff is crucial for implementing intelligent educational teaching and promoting professional development among teachers. It requires educators to understand and master the basic knowledge of artificial intelligence technology and its educational applications, fully leveraging the "human-machine collaboration" effect in the teaching process (Revuelta-Domínguez et al., 2022).

## **3. Practice of Digital Teaching of Anhui University of Finance and Economics**

### *3.1 Optimize Training Programs*

The School of International Economics and Trade at Anhui University of Finance and Economics (AUFE) has refined its International Business curriculum to embody a holistic approach to education. The program is designed to nurture individuals who embody virtue, intellect, physical prowess, aesthetic appreciation, and a robust work ethic. These individuals are equipped to thrive in the evolving

landscape of socialism with Chinese characteristics, adept in modern information technology, and with a comprehensive grasp of the foundational theories of economics and management, alongside specialized knowledge and skills in international business.

Graduates are envisioned to excel in roles within government, corporate, and institutional settings, particularly in the realms of international trade and investment. The program sets forth a clear vision for its graduates, aiming to achieve the following milestones approximately five years post-graduation:

Objective 1: To have a firm grasp of the core theories in modern economics and management, coupled with specialized expertise in international business.

Objective 2: To possess a global outlook, enabling effective management within the sectors of international investment and trade.

Objective 3: To be in sync with the developmental imperatives of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the contemporary era, showcasing capabilities in international market expansion, negotiation, business operations, and embodying a spirit of innovation, entrepreneurial drive, competitive collaboration, and adept communication skills.

Objective 4: To uphold high standards of professional ethics and foster a collaborative team spirit.

Objective 5: To cultivate a capacity for self-directed learning and an innovative mindset.

In pursuit of these objectives, the curriculum incorporates a blend of courses that bridge the gap between traditional business theory and cutting-edge digital technologies. This includes "Basic Computer Application," database management, Python programming, cross-border e-commerce practices, hands-on international trade operations, market research and forecasting, digital trade, data mining, and advanced business analytics. The integration of these elements ensures that students are not only well-versed in theoretical knowledge but also proficient in the digital tools that define modern commerce.

### *3.2 Strengthen Practical Teaching*

AUFE implements practical learning courses every semester, encouraging students to take advantage of their winter and summer vacations to conduct "professional surveys and internship activities." Students utilize library resources, online materials, online interviews with professionals, virtual simulation project internships, or other channels to complete professional surveys and internships, and submit their findings and results in the "Study Easy" college student internship data submission module.

In terms of internships, they mainly include on-site internships, simulated internships, and virtual internships. On-site internships refer to practical teaching activities carried out in real work environments. Simulated internships are practical teaching activities conducted in realistic environments such as "mock courtrooms." Virtual internships are practical teaching activities conducted in virtual work scenarios constructed using information technology and virtual simulation methods.

Furthermore, AUFE has established a cooperative platform between enterprises and the school, providing graduates with corporate mentors to assist them in writing their graduation theses.

### *3.3 Optimize the Teaching Staff*

The faculty team is the safeguard for the implementation of digital teaching reform. AUFE, by establishing the Hefei Advanced Research Institute, has created a platform for teachers from different majors, disciplines, and schools to exchange and learn from each other, cultivating a core group of teachers who are proficient in digital software and have a solid foundation in economic and management theories.

AUFE drives the development of teaching through scientific research innovation, achieving the integration of "teaching and learning, learning and application"; teaching and learning benefit each other, and research nourishes teaching, effectively improving the teaching team's level in interdisciplinary and digital teaching. At the same time, the School of International Economics and Trade, leveraging the platform of AUFE's Hefei Advanced Research Institute, explores the reform of talent recruitment system, providing a foundation for the reform of digital teaching.

## **4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

With the development of the digital economy, contemporary university education has an increasing demand for the application of digital technology. Without digital reform in university education, it is impossible to ensure that students can cope with the challenges brought by future digital and information technology. Although China has started to pay attention to digital reform in university education, there is still much room for improvement. We propose the following suggestions:

### *4.1 Tailoring Cultivation Programs from the Perspective of Demand*

In the current digital context, nurturing versatile talents skilled in digital trade and economy has become a vital mission within higher education. However, existing talent cultivation programs have certain deficiencies, primarily characterized by a disconnect between educational objectives and industry needs, as well as a lag in the teaching system. Therefore, to achieve an organic integration of digital trade talent cultivation with industry demands, the following aspects should be given close attention:

Firstly, in response to the rapid development of the digital trade field, academic education should closely align with industry trends to adjust the goals and programs for talent cultivation.

Secondly, it is recommended to collaborate with industry experts to establish skill standards for digital trade talents, ensuring that curriculum content is in sync with actual business needs. Additionally, schools should actively optimize educational resources and enhance the digital teaching capabilities of the faculty, providing students with a more practical and application-oriented teaching environment and faculty support.

Lastly, it is necessary to establish a comprehensive system for cultivating digital trade talents that integrates knowledge from various disciplines, is multi-leveled and all-encompassing. This system should integrate practical abilities and innovative awareness into the teaching process, enabling students to better adapt to the development requirements of the digital trade and economy industry.

#### *4.2 Enhancing Curriculum Design and Incorporating Digital Teaching Modules*

To align with the evolving demands of the digital era in international trade, the curriculum for international trade majors must undergo comprehensive revision and enhancement. Initially, new courses should be introduced, such as digital trade, cross-border e-commerce platform management, and big data analysis, to ensure that students acquire the core knowledge and skills essential for digital commerce. Traditional course content must also be updated promptly, covering topics like the transformation of import and export customs declaration methods and the application of single-window systems, to keep students informed about the latest industry developments.

Furthermore, there should be an emphasis on students' capability development. Measures such as adopting high-quality textbooks, revising the syllabus and assessment plans, and updating the case resource library should be taken to provide students with extensive learning materials and practical information on digital trade. During the teaching process, a focus should be placed on cultivating students' proficiency in the operation of digital trade platforms, enabling them to understand and address the actual challenges of digital transformation in foreign trade enterprises and the evolution of import and export business processes, thereby achieving a comprehensive enhancement of their abilities.

In addition, the sharing of high-quality educational resources among universities should be promoted, and training models should be optimized. General education courses involving multiple disciplines, such as the application of digital media technology, big data analysis, and cloud computing, should be introduced. The goal is to comprehensively improve students' digital literacy and skill levels, equipping them with the integrated capabilities needed to adapt to the changes in international trade within the context of digitalization.

#### *4.3 Building New Practice Teaching Methods and the Rational Use of Corporate Platforms*

Under the backdrop of digitalization, the cultivation of international trade talents should focus on the practice of cross-border e-commerce, while integrating various practical methods to enhance students' comprehensive abilities. Firstly, in terms of practical course settings, there should be an increased introduction of cross-border e-commerce training software, and the training content should be continuously updated in line with real business scenarios. This ensures that students can effectively apply theoretical knowledge to practical operations, thereby developing their practical skills in cross-border e-commerce.

Secondly, the construction of off-campus practice bases and cooperation with enterprises should be further strengthened. In conjunction with the digital transformation of enterprises, leveraging digital platforms to provide cutting-edge digital resources and market-oriented practical opportunities for university discipline development and talent cultivation can enhance the effectiveness of practical training.

Additionally, organizing on-campus practical combat training, providing entrepreneurial practice platforms, and inviting industry professionals as mentors to assist students in solving real-world

problems will ultimately enhance their ability to tackle complex issues. To foster a teaching environment that integrates digital trade practices, universities should actively build interdisciplinary and inter-professional practice platforms. This promotes the cross-fertilization of knowledge across different fields and improves students' abilities to apply knowledge comprehensively to solve practical problems.

At the same time, it is necessary to regularly survey the needs of employers and make precise adjustments to the content of practical teaching. Collaborating with local international trade associations and incubators can provide more practical opportunities and platforms for students.

#### *4.4 Strengthening Faculty Development and Building a High-Quality Teaching Team*

In the context of digitalization, the construction of a teaching faculty for international trade majors has become particularly crucial. To keep pace with the trend of digital development, a series of effective measures should be taken to enhance the professional quality and teaching capabilities of teachers. Firstly, teachers' academic accomplishments and practical experience can be continuously improved through academic exchanges and industry training, updating their knowledge structures and deepening their understanding of digital trade practices. Secondly, establishing industry-academia collaboration mechanisms to attract professionals from the business world to participate in teaching activities can help fill the gap in practical experience in the field of digital trade within the existing faculty.

Additionally, introducing a modular teaching model allows for the coordination of teachers from different disciplines to build an efficient teaching team, providing specialized and personalized teaching services to meet the growing academic needs of students. Lastly, establishing and improving a comprehensive teacher evaluation and incentive mechanism can stimulate teachers' enthusiasm for teaching and awareness of innovation, promoting the continuous growth and development of the teaching staff.

The organic integration of these measures can effectively enhance the overall level of the international trade faculty, providing strong support for the cultivation of versatile talents who can adapt to the development needs of international trade in the context of digitalization.

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