

Research on cultivating applied foreign language talents under the background of the Belt and Road

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Abstract: Starting from the opportunities and challenges brought by the Belt and Road, this paper analyzes the current problems in cultivating international foreign language talents, and puts forward the strategies to improve the training of applied talents with high English proficiency, aiming to cultivate high-quality foreign language professionals with international vision, patriotism, and innovative spirit.

Key words: the Belt and Road; applied foreign language talents; training mode

1 Introduction

Since 2013, cooperation initiatives have been proposed to build the "New Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road", which aim to promote peaceful development and develop economic cooperation with countries along the belt by following the historical symbols of the ancient silk road, thereby building a community of shared interests, destiny and responsibility with political mutual trust, economic integration, and cultural tolerance. Over the past decade, China has signed more than 200 cooperation documents on Belt and Road with more than 150 countries and 32 international organizations. Therefore, the demand gap for applied foreign language talents is also increasing, which puts forward new requirements for the structure, competence and quality of applied foreign language talents.

2 The profound significance of innovating the mode of talent cultivation

Talents are the base and key to the construction of the Belt and Road. There are significantly political, economic and cultural differences between countries along the belt, which not only demands strong professional and technical skills, but also requires employees to be proficient in one or more foreign languages and familiar with the dynamic situation of countries along the belt. In this context, Chinese universities, especially foreign language universities, should constantly improve the talent training mode and quality to provide the country with international applied talents that serve the strategy of the Belt and Road Initiative [1].

This paper tries to build a new applied foreign language talent cultivation mechanism based on the actual situation of talent cultivation in colleges and universities and in combination with the talent needs of the Belt and Road Initiative. This will not only enable colleges and universities to cultivate more application-oriented foreign language talents to meet the needs of the Belt and Road development, but also serve as an opportunity to explore the construction of other majors in colleges and universities to build a more perfect talent training model, which will fundamentally trigger the transformation

of college education and teaching model.

3 The current problems in cultivating international foreign language talents

In the context of the Belt and Road strategy, China is still short of high-quality international foreign language talents, and there are still some problems in the process of talent training.

3.1 Insufficient scientific guidance and lack of targeted training

The applied foreign language talents required by the Belt and Road Initiative should not only have solid language skills, but also have cross-cultural communication competence because each of the country has its own customs and cultural traditions. Applied foreign language talents need to understand their cultural traditions, customs, historical evolution, ethnic preferences, etc. However, in terms of actual curriculum design, it is still influenced by exam-oriented teaching practice, with a focus on imparting language knowledge and failing to evaluate students in diversified ways. Consequently, students are relatively less critical and innovative in speculating complex international phenomena and affairs. Besides, the accuracy and standardization of language use in international communication cannot be improved as well.

3.2 Structural imbalance of applied foreign language talents

As a large country, China started relatively early in the setting of major, enrolment and training mode of minor languages. Especially after the Belt and Road Initiative was launched, many universities took advantage of this trend and established a considerable number of minor language majors. However, it is not easy to standardize a major from research to establishment, and then to graduates' employment. A few universities lack rigorous argumentation and research, which leads to corresponding problems. At the micro level, college students who major in minor languages have difficulty in employment due to unscientific establishment of majors. At the macro level, it has caused a structural imbalance of minor language talents nationwide, mainly reflected in the uneven distribution and unreasonable layout of minor language professionals [2].

3.3 Incomplete practical foreign language teaching

The premier attribute of foreign language talents is practicality, which is also the greatest demand for talent cultivation in universities. Extensive and repeated practical training is essential for foreign language learning. Many universities have not created simulated or authentic language environments in the cultivation of foreign language talents, resulting in unsatisfactory outcomes in practical teaching. On the other hand, the imperfect practical teaching is reflected in the shortage of an effective evaluation system for teaching practice, which makes teachers and students lack the initiative and motivation to strengthen practical teaching and learning. Over time, this not only affects students' language acquisition, but also restricts their innovation and entrepreneurship.

3.4 The urgent need to improve the level of language teaching staff

Many universities lack the overall goal and specific procedures for the internationalization of their teaching staff, and focus on introducing a few scholars with overseas study experience, neglecting the international training and cultivation of their own teachers, resulting in uneven levels of internationalization among teachers. Except for commonly used foreign languages such as English, Russian, and Japanese, other minor language majors are restricted by the relatively limited teaching staff in China, which results in a lag in the construction of teaching staff compared to disciplinary development.

4 Strategies for innovatively cultivating applied foreign language talents

To provide sufficient foreign language talents for the effective implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, colleges and universities are bound to reform their own deficiencies and innovate the foreign language talent training model.

4.1 Deepen teaching reform and achieve the integration of industry and education

There is growing recognition of application-oriented talents combined with finance and trade, foreign affairs and diplomacy, electronic communication, and other fields. Therefore, it is indispensable to constantly promote and deepen the reform of foreign language education and teaching [3]. Firstly, language learning should be combined with practical applications. Good communication skills are the fundamental goal and prerequisite of foreign language teaching, and attention should be paid to cultivating students' ability to use language. Plus, opportunities to interact with native speakers should be created. The difference between foreign language teaching and other majors lies in the need to strengthen communication and interaction. However, in actual teaching, there is relatively little effective communication. Insufficient language atmosphere and thinking in mother tongue can affect learners' basic language judgments, thus reducing learning effectiveness. Schools should carry out long-term communication projects in a planned way, and consciously create a more authentic language environment, aiming to improve the actual communicative competence of foreign language talents.

4.2 Optimize curriculum design to cultivate applied language talents

Foreign language colleges should increase cross-cultural communication courses in the process of cultivating talents, such as speech skills, film and television appreciation, cultural comparison, national society and culture, diplomatic history, etc., to cultivate students' cross-cultural communication awareness and improve their comprehensive language application ability. In the meantime, universities should attach importance to international curriculum design, encourage students to actively learn about international rules, customs, and laws, as well as being aware of the values, language rules, behavioral norms, and communication strategies formed in different cultural backgrounds [4].

At the same time, application-oriented international talents also need to be familiar with traditional Chinese culture, adhere to the position of Chinese culture in foreign exchanges, and help other countries understand the breadth, profoundness, and connotation of Chinese culture. This is beneficial for subsequent exchanges and cooperation between China and other countries.

4.3 Strengthen the construction of application-oriented teaching staff

To cultivate high-quality talents, there is an urgent need of building a structurally reasonable, and distinctive dual-teacher teaching staff. Teachers should be encouraged to participate in various academic conferences and lectures, actively apply for various projects and topics at all levels. This can promote academic exchange and experience sharing, which is conducive to teaching practice and talent cultivation. Moreover, teaching teams can be established based on various teaching competitions and course research, and the various educational research activities can promote the reform of teaching content and methods, as well as the development of teaching resources. The team members should dedicate more to the construction of golden course and the construction of case study, and combine language teaching and internship with social and economic development, as well as guiding students to engage in innovative practice.

5 Conclusion

As for innovating the training mode of applied foreign language talents, the Belt and Road is both an opportunity and a challenge. Based on the actual needs of foreign language talents in countries along the belt, colleges and universities should take measures such as rational layout of professional settings and talent training structure, deepening teaching reform, optimizing curriculum settings, building a high-quality teaching team, and increasing the proportion of practical skills in talent training to provide solid talent support for the implementation of the Belt and Road.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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