

# Research on Cultivation Path of Cross-cultural Communication Competence in English Education in Hainan Free Trade Port

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**Abstract:** With the continuous advancement of the Hainan Free Trade Port (hereinafter referred to as “HFTP”) development, international exchanges within the region have become increasingly frequent. As the global lingua franca, English has emerged as the core bridge connecting Hainan with global resources and facilitating cross-cultural collaboration. Cross-cultural communication competence, as an indispensable core competency in English education, directly impacts users’ ability to communicate smoothly in multicultural contexts and effectively avoid cultural friction. It also serves as a key factor in cultivating international talents and enhancing the region’s soft power in opening up to the world. This paper explores specific cultivation methods for cross-cultural communication competence in HFTP English education through five critical dimensions: curriculum system restructuring, innovative teaching models, faculty team development, practical platform construction, and evaluation system optimization. The research provides actionable references for reforming English education in HFTP, aiming to establish Hainan as a global talent cultivation hub and promote high-quality development of regional cross-cultural exchanges and cooperation.

**Keywords:** Hainan Free Trade Port; English education; intercultural communication competence; cultivation pathways; international talent development

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## 1. Introduction

By the end of 2025, the full island customs operation of Hainan Free Trade Port will be officially implemented, marking this significant milestone as Hainan Free Trade Port enters a new phase of comprehensive and high-level opening-up. As a frontline platform for China’s opening-up and a crucial node in the Belt and Road Initiative, Hainan Free Trade Port is gradually evolving into a global hub for investment, trade, and cultural exchange. An increasing number of foreigners, multinational corporations, and international organizations are establishing presence in Hainan, with cross-cultural communication scenarios becoming increasingly diverse, encompassing key areas such as business negotiations, tourism services, academic exchanges, and government coordination. English, as the most widely used language tool in international communication, directly impacts the quality of talent cultivation for Hainan Free Trade Port’s

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internationalization efforts. Cross-cultural communication competence, an indispensable core component of English education, serves as the key to breaking down cultural barriers and achieving efficient communication. Cross-cultural communication competence refers to an individual's ability to accurately understand linguistic habits, values, thought patterns, and behavioral norms across different cultural contexts, flexibly apply acquired language knowledge and communication skills to facilitate effective information transmission and emotional exchange, while respecting cultural differences and mitigating potential conflicts<sup>[1]</sup>. This competence primarily encompasses four aspects: cultural cognition, language proficiency, cross-cultural adaptability, and communication flexibility. With the continuous development of Hainan Free Trade Port, the demand for English professionals has evolved from merely "speaking English" to "conducting cross-cultural communication in English." The traditional English education model, which emphasizes grammar over communication and knowledge over literacy, can no longer meet the practical needs of free trade port construction.

## **2. Practical Significance of Cultivating Intercultural Communication Competence in English Education at Hainan Free Trade Port**

The development of Hainan Free Trade Port requires a substantial pool of international talents with global vision, English proficiency, and cross-cultural communication skills. These professionals must not only master solid English language skills but also demonstrate strong intercultural competence. As a cornerstone of international talent cultivation, English education aims to develop students' cross-cultural communication abilities. By integrating cross-cultural teaching elements into English instruction, students can gain insights into the cultural characteristics, values, and communication norms of different countries. This approach enhances their intercultural awareness and communication skills, enabling them to adapt effectively to various international scenarios. Such talents will showcase the high professional standards of Hainan Free Trade Port professionals in global collaborations and exchanges, thereby providing a robust talent foundation for the port to attract global resources and foster international cooperation.

The construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port cannot be achieved without in-depth cooperation and exchanges with countries around the world, and intercultural communication competence serves as the prerequisite and foundation for cross-cultural collaboration. Emphasizing the cultivation of students' intercultural communication skills in English education can help them establish the concepts of intercultural equality and inclusiveness, learn to respect differences between cultures, and flexibly use English for cross-cultural communication, thereby promoting in-depth cooperation between the Hainan Free Trade Port and countries worldwide in various fields such as economy, culture, education, and tourism. In 2026, the first stop of the "Global Dissemination Plan of Chinese Culture" was implemented in the Hainan Free Trade Port, recruiting "Chinese Culture Ambassadors" to enable participants to tell China's stories and promote Hainan's unique culture in international languages. The implementation of this initiative further highlights the crucial supporting role of intercultural communication competence in cross-cultural exchanges within the Hainan Free Trade Port, with English education serving as the core channel for nurturing such cross-cultural communication talents.

## **3. Pathways for Cultivating Intercultural Communication Competence in English Education at Hainan Free Trade Port**

### **3.1. Restructuring the curriculum system and integrating cross-cultural teaching content**

The curriculum system serves as the foundation for cultivating intercultural communication competence. English education in Hainan Free Trade Port must move beyond traditional exam-oriented frameworks, aligning with the practical needs of free trade port development. It requires reconstructing an English curriculum system that integrates international standards, local context, and practical applicability, while systematically incorporating intercultural teaching content<sup>[2]</sup>.

During primary and secondary education, teachers should strategically adjust curriculum content by reducing

excessive grammar and vocabulary instruction while incorporating cross-cultural communication modules. Textbook developers should create English materials that integrate Hainan's local culture with global perspectives, featuring authentic intercultural dialogue scenarios and short passages. This approach helps students understand cultural customs, values, and communication norms across nations while developing skills to showcase Hainan's unique culture in English – achieving the dual goals of “internationalizing local culture and localizing global perspectives.” For example, English classes could introduce cultural expressions related to Hainan's Li ethnic group and maritime heritage, guiding students to communicate Hainan's distinctive culture to international audiences. Simultaneously, introducing cultural elements from countries closely collaborating with Hainan Free Trade Port (such as Europe, America, and Southeast Asia) helps students recognize cross-cultural differences. Schools may also offer elective courses like “Cultural Analysis of English-Speaking Countries” and “Cross-Cultural Communication Etiquette” to expand students' intercultural knowledge base.

During the higher education phase, universities should optimize curriculum design to establish a composite course system integrating “General English + Professional English + Intercultural Communication.” General English courses should incorporate intercultural communication modules, focusing on developing students' oral communication skills and cross-cultural adaptability. Professional English programs should integrate cultural-specific content tailored to different disciplines: tourism English majors should include intercultural tourism service communication modules, business English programs should incorporate cross-cultural negotiation strategies, and medical English programs should address intercultural healthcare communication needs, closely aligning with the industrial demands of Hainan Free Trade Port. Hainan University has cultivated high-end translation professionals by strengthening legal English instruction and incorporating cross-cultural legal communication elements to meet the port's international legal requirements, successfully training versatile translation talents that exemplify an exemplary educational model worthy of broader adoption. Additionally, universities should offer compulsory and elective courses such as “Intercultural Communication Studies” and “International Business Etiquette” to systematically teach theoretical frameworks and practical techniques, thereby enhancing students' cross-cultural awareness and communication competencies.

### **3.2. Innovating teaching models to enhance interactivity and practicality**

The innovation of teaching mode is the key to cultivate students' intercultural communication ability. The English education in Hainan Free Trade Port should break the traditional single teaching mode, construct interactive, practical and situational teaching mode, and enhance the interest and effectiveness of teaching.

Teachers should transform their pedagogical philosophy by shifting from being mere “knowledge transmitters” to becoming “guides and facilitators of student learning.” They should enhance classroom interactions and encourage active student participation. For instance, in cross-cultural education, teachers can organize group discussions to explore cultural differences and share insights on intercultural communication. Role-playing activities simulating real-world scenarios like business negotiations, tourism services, and academic exchanges allow students to hone language expression skills and communication techniques through immersive practice. The “Four Deep” classroom model implemented at Hainan High School employs in-depth design and practical implementation, establishing a three-stage six-step learning pathway: “Learning comprehension → Application practice → Transfer innovation.” This approach guides students from language imitation to conceptual expression, significantly improving their intercultural communication competence. Such an effective model can be widely adopted across schools in the Hainan Free Trade Port region.

Teachers can utilize multimedia and online platforms to showcase cultural documentaries, films, and TV clips from English-speaking countries, enabling students to gain firsthand insights into the unique cultural characteristics and social contexts of different nations. By leveraging online communication platforms, educators can facilitate virtual exchanges between students and international peers, allowing learners to enhance their cross-cultural communication skills through authentic interactions. Additionally, adopting the flipped classroom model—where students independently study cross-cultural knowledge before class and engage in focused discussions and practical exercises during sessions—can significantly improve teaching effectiveness. Furthermore, drawing inspiration from Peking University's “English

Academic Writing” workshop, teachers may employ hands-on exercises and one-on-one mentoring to strengthen students’ cross-cultural language proficiency<sup>[3]</sup>.

### **3.3. Strengthening Faculty Development and Enhancing Intercultural Teaching Competence**

Faculty development is pivotal to enhancing the quality of intercultural communication competence cultivation. The Hainan Free Trade Port should intensify efforts in building an English teaching faculty by employing various approaches such as training, recruitment, and exchange programs to improve educators’ intercultural teaching capabilities and professional competencies<sup>[4]</sup>.

Schools should establish a systematic teacher training system, regularly organizing English teachers to participate in cross-cultural communication training programs. They should invite domestic and international experts and scholars in the field of cross-cultural communication to deliver lectures, imparting theories and techniques of cross-cultural teaching to help educators expand their cross-cultural knowledge base and enhance their teaching capabilities. Education authorities should collaborate with universities and research institutions to implement targeted training programs, focusing on developing teachers’ skills in cross-cultural instructional design, situational simulation teaching, and practical cross-cultural communication. The Free Trade Port High-end Translation Talent Development Seminar hosted by Hainan University brought together renowned domestic and international experts, providing a platform for professional exchange and learning among educators. Such initiatives should be institutionalized and conducted on a regular basis.

Schools should intensify efforts to recruit English teachers with international exchange experience and strong cross-cultural teaching skills, particularly those with a “English + major” interdisciplinary background, to strengthen the faculty. Simultaneously, schools should encourage partnerships with foreign institutions and organize overseas exchanges and advanced studies for English teachers, enabling them to immerse themselves in diverse cultural environments and accumulate cross-cultural communication experience, which can then be integrated into teaching practices. Additionally, establishing a teacher exchange mechanism should be prioritized, organizing inter-school exchanges and collaborative research activities among English teachers from different institutions to share cross-cultural teaching experiences and promote collective professional growth. Furthermore, teachers should be encouraged to participate in cross-cultural research projects to enhance their research capabilities in this field and drive improvements in cross-cultural teaching quality.

### **3.4. Establishing a practice platform to promote the integration of theory and practice**

Practice is an important way to cultivate intercultural communication ability. Hainan Free Trade Port should integrate the resources of school, society and enterprise, build a diversified intercultural communication practice platform, and promote the deep integration of students’ theoretical knowledge and practical application.

At the institutional level, universities should enhance on-campus practical platforms by organizing diverse intercultural communication activities. For instance, hosting events like English Culture Festivals, Cross-Cultural Communication Competitions, and English Speech Contests provides students with opportunities to showcase their talents and hone communication skills. Establishing campus English corners with participation from foreign teachers and international students enables learners to improve cross-cultural competence through daily interactions. Organizing intercultural research projects—such as studies on cultural differences across nations or the current state of cross-cultural exchanges in Hainan Free Trade Port—helps students develop both cognitive understanding and practical abilities. Hainan Medical University exemplifies this approach by organizing students to participate in the National College Intercultural Competency Competition, where scenario-based performances and case analyses are used to enhance intercultural communication skills. This competition-driven learning model is highly recommended for broader adoption.

At the societal level, enhanced collaboration between schools, enterprises, communities, and international organizations should be prioritized to establish off-campus practice platforms. Schools can partner with multinational corporations, international hotels, tourist attractions, and global convention centers in Hainan Free Trade Port to provide

internship opportunities, enabling students to develop cross-cultural communication skills through real-world work environments. Community partnerships should organize English volunteer programs to assist foreign residents with language support while improving participants' intercultural competence. Collaborations with international organizations and overseas institutions should facilitate global exchange programs and study tours, allowing students to engage with authentic cross-cultural scenarios and accumulate practical experience. Additionally, platforms like the "Global Dissemination Plan for Chinese Culture" should be leveraged to involve students in cultural promotion activities, showcasing Hainan Free Trade Port to the world through English to enhance cross-cultural communication capabilities. Drawing inspiration from Hainan's "Free Trade Port Foreign Language Service Team" model, student volunteers could be deployed to provide translation services at airports, hospitals, and other venues to enrich practical experiences.

### **3.5. Optimize the evaluation system and strengthen the orientation of intercultural competence**

The optimization of the evaluation system is an important guarantee to promote the cultivation of intercultural communication ability. The English education in Hainan Free Trade Port should break the limitation of the test-oriented evaluation, construct a scientific, comprehensive and targeted evaluation system, and strengthen the evaluation orientation of intercultural communication ability<sup>[5]</sup>.

Educational institutions should refine assessment frameworks by incorporating intercultural communication competence into the core criteria for English proficiency evaluation. K-12 English assessments should emphasize oral communication skills and cross-cultural adaptability while reducing overemphasis on basic knowledge tests. Higher education evaluations must align with the distinct characteristics of general and specialized English programs, integrating intercultural competence, verbal expression proficiency, and practical application skills to holistically assess students' comprehensive competencies. The evaluation framework should encompass four key dimensions: cultural literacy, language application proficiency, cross-cultural adaptation capabilities, and communicative flexibility, ensuring both comprehensiveness and targeted effectiveness in student assessment<sup>[6]</sup>.

Innovate evaluation methods by adopting diversified assessment approaches that move beyond traditional written exams and teacher-centered evaluation models. Integrate multiple evaluation methods including self-assessment, peer evaluation, teacher feedback, and workplace assessments to comprehensively and objectively reflect students' intercultural communication competencies. Combine formative and summative evaluations to focus on learning processes and practical performance, encouraging active participation in cross-cultural communication activities. Implement scenario-based assessments that simulate authentic intercultural communication contexts to evaluate students' communicative skills and adaptability. For instance, oral assessment tasks should include cross-cultural communication scenarios requiring students to address real-world communication challenges from diverse cultural perspectives. Establish a feedback mechanism to promptly share evaluation results with both students and teachers, helping learners identify areas for improvement while enabling educators to refine teaching strategies and enhance instructional quality.

## **4. Conclusion**

The comprehensive opening-up of Hainan Free Trade Port has raised higher demands for cultivating intercultural communication competence in English education. As a core competency for international talents in Hainan Free Trade Port, the quality of intercultural communication training directly impacts the region's talent development standards and its soft power in opening-up. Moving forward, English education in Hainan Free Trade Port should continue to deepen reforms, refine training pathways for intercultural communication skills, and adapt strategies to meet new challenges and demands arising from free trade port development. It is essential to balance localization with internationalization, integrate theory with practice, and strive to cultivate a cohort of globally competent professionals with strong intercultural communication capabilities. These efforts will provide solid talent support for the high-quality development of Hainan Free Trade Port, positioning it as a vital gateway for China's opening-up and a global hub for cross-cultural exchange.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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