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Constructing an English Competence Development System for International Talents from the Perspective of Digital Learning Ecology

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Abstract: With the rapid development of digital technologies and the acceleration of global economic integration, the cultivation of international talents has become a critical objective for higher education systems worldwide. In the specific context of the Hainan Free Trade Port, the demand for international professionals equipped with strong English competence and advanced intercultural communication abilities has increased significantly. However, traditional language education models often focus predominantly on classroom-based instruction, thereby failing to fully utilize modern digital technologies and expansive global learning environments. From the perspective of digital learning ecology, this paper explores the comprehensive construction of an English competence development system tailored for international talents. Drawing upon learning ecology theory, digital education research, and global competence frameworks, the study proposes a robust conceptual model that seamlessly integrates digital learning environments, educational institutions, technological platforms, and international communication practices. The proposed framework strongly emphasizes the dynamic interaction between learners, digital technologies, and social learning environments in shaping sustainable English competence development. Furthermore, the paper discusses the strategic construction of a digital learning ecosystem that supports the cultivation of English proficiency through targeted curriculum reform, technology-enhanced learning environments, international collaboration platforms, and deep industry-education integration. Ultimately, this study contributes to theoretical discussions on language education in the digital era and provides actionable, practical implications for the development of innovative international talent training systems within the Hainan Free Trade Port and beyond.

Keywords: digital learning; learning ecology; english competence; talent cultivation; language education; higher education

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1. Introduction

Globalization and digital transformation have significantly altered the dynamics of international communication, economic collaboration, and cultural exchange. As interactions increasingly cross national borders, the development of individuals capable of engaging effectively in global communication has become a critical focus for higher education systems worldwide. Among the various skills required for international engagement, proficiency in English holds particular importance due to its status as a widely used global language. This underscores the necessity for educational systems to prioritize English language training as a foundational element of preparing students for global participation [1].

In recent years, scholars have highlighted that language competence extends beyond mere linguistic knowledge to encompass the ability to communicate effectively across diverse cultural and contextual settings. This broader perspective emphasizes the importance of intercultural communication skills, global awareness, and the ability to leverage digital technologies for collaborative and effective communication. Such an

understanding of language competence aligns with the demands of an interconnected world, where individuals must navigate complex cultural and technological landscapes to achieve meaningful interactions [1].

The establishment of the Hainan Free Trade Port represents a strategic initiative aimed at enhancing China's integration into global economic networks. As a hub for international trade, tourism, and technological innovation, the Free Trade Port necessitates a workforce equipped to engage with global partners and contribute to international knowledge exchange [2]. This has placed a significant emphasis on the cultivation of professionals with advanced English proficiency, as well as the ability to operate effectively in multicultural and multilingual environments. Educational institutions in the region are therefore tasked with developing programs that align with these strategic objectives, ensuring that graduates are prepared to meet the demands of a globalized economy.

Traditional English education models in many contexts continue to rely heavily on teacher-centered methodologies and examination-focused practices [3]. These approaches often prioritize the acquisition of grammar and reading comprehension skills while neglecting the development of practical communication abilities, intercultural competence, and digital literacy. Consequently, learners may achieve a theoretical understanding of the language but struggle to apply it effectively in real-world international scenarios. This disconnect highlights the need for a paradigm shift in language education, moving towards more holistic and application-oriented teaching methods that better prepare students for global engagement.

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has revolutionized the ways in which knowledge is created, shared, and accessed. Online learning platforms, artificial intelligence tools, and global communication networks have expanded the possibilities for language learning beyond traditional classroom settings. These technological innovations have paved the way for new educational paradigms that emphasize flexibility, collaboration, and personalization. By leveraging these tools, educators can create dynamic learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of students, fostering both linguistic and technological competencies essential for success in a digital age [2].

The concept of learning ecology offers a valuable framework for understanding language acquisition as a dynamic process embedded within complex networks of interactions [3]. This perspective views language learning as occurring within an ecosystem that includes educational institutions, technological tools, and social communication contexts. By adopting this holistic approach, educators and policymakers can design learning environments that integrate these elements, creating a supportive ecosystem that promotes both linguistic and intercultural development. Such an approach recognizes the interconnected nature of modern education and the need to prepare learners for multifaceted global challenges.

This study seeks to examine the development of an English competence framework for international talents through the lens of digital learning ecology. By synthesizing insights from theories of learning ecology, research on digital education, and studies on international talent cultivation, the study proposes a conceptual model for constructing a digital learning ecosystem. This ecosystem is designed to support the development of English proficiency in alignment with the strategic objectives of the Hainan Free Trade Port. The proposed framework aims to address existing gaps in traditional education models, offering innovative solutions that leverage digital tools and intercultural strategies to prepare learners for global engagement [4].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Language Competence and Communicative Competence

Research on language competence has undergone significant evolution over the past several decades. Early approaches to language teaching primarily emphasized grammar translation methods and the structural aspects of language, focusing on the rules and

forms that govern linguistic systems. However, as the field progressed, scholars began to advocate for a broader understanding of language competence, one that encompasses not only the mastery of grammatical structures but also the ability to effectively use language in real-world communication scenarios [1]. This shift marked a pivotal moment in language education, as it highlighted the importance of practical language use over rote memorization of rules. The recognition of this broader perspective has since influenced the development of more dynamic and interactive teaching methodologies aimed at fostering practical communication skills in learners.

The introduction of the concept of communicative competence represented a transformative step in the study of language learning. This concept underscored the idea that successful language acquisition involves more than just grammatical accuracy; it also requires the ability to use language appropriately within various social and cultural contexts. Building on this foundation, a comprehensive model of communicative competence was proposed, which includes several key components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Each of these components addresses a specific aspect of language use, ranging from the accurate application of grammar to the ability to navigate social norms, construct coherent discourse, and employ strategies to overcome communication challenges. This holistic framework has become a cornerstone in understanding the multifaceted nature of language learning and its practical applications.

These theoretical advancements have significantly influenced the direction of language education, shifting its focus from a narrow emphasis on linguistic knowledge to a broader emphasis on communicative abilities. In contemporary research on language education, the concept of communicative competence continues to play a central role in shaping how language learning outcomes are understood and assessed. This paradigm shift has led to the development of teaching practices that prioritize real-world communication skills, encouraging learners to engage in meaningful interactions and apply their language knowledge in diverse contexts. By emphasizing the practical use of language, modern educational approaches aim to equip learners with the tools they need to navigate complex social and professional environments effectively [5]. This focus on communication has not only enriched the field of language education but also aligned it more closely with the needs of a globalized world.

2.2. Learning Ecology in Education

The concept of learning ecology originates from the study of educational systems and the environments in which learning occurs. It refers to a dynamic network of activities, resources, relationships, and contexts that collectively foster learning across various settings. This approach underscores the idea that learning is not confined to formal classroom environments but extends into informal spaces, digital platforms, and social communities. By recognizing the diverse contexts in which learning takes place, the concept of learning ecology provides a holistic framework for understanding how individuals acquire knowledge and skills in an interconnected world. This perspective is particularly relevant in today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, where learners engage with a wide array of tools and environments to enhance their learning experiences.

Learning ecology theory emphasizes the interconnected and multifaceted nature of learning environments. In the context of digital learning ecosystems, learners interact with a variety of resources, tools, and communities that collectively shape their educational journeys. These ecosystems are characterized by the integration of formal and informal learning opportunities, enabling individuals to access knowledge through diverse channels. For instance, digital platforms provide learners with access to interactive content, collaborative tools, and global communities, fostering a more personalized and engaging learning experience [6, 7]. This theoretical framework has been instrumental in advancing research on technology-enhanced learning, offering insights into how digital tools and environments can be leveraged to support lifelong learning and adaptability in an increasingly complex world.

2.3. Digital Technologies and Language Learning

Digital technologies have greatly transformed the landscape of language learning by offering a wide range of tools and resources that enhance the learning experience. Online platforms provide learners with access to diverse and authentic language materials, enabling them to engage with content that reflects real-world usage. Multimedia resources, such as videos, audio recordings, and interactive exercises, cater to various learning styles and help reinforce language skills in a dynamic manner. Additionally, virtual communication tools, including video conferencing and messaging applications, facilitate direct interaction with speakers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds [8]. These tools not only improve language proficiency but also foster cross-cultural understanding, which is essential in today's interconnected world. By leveraging these technologies, learners can immerse themselves in authentic language environments, practice in real-time, and develop a deeper appreciation for the cultural nuances embedded in language use.

The integration of digital technologies into language learning has been recognized for its ability to create meaningful and engaging learning experiences. These technologies enable learners to participate in authentic communication scenarios, which are crucial for developing practical language skills. Collaborative tools, such as shared documents and discussion forums, encourage group work and the co-construction of knowledge, fostering a sense of community among learners. Furthermore, digital learning environments support learner autonomy by allowing individuals to tailor their learning paths according to their specific needs and goals. Personalized learning experiences are made possible through adaptive technologies that adjust content and difficulty levels based on the learner's progress [4]. This flexibility empowers learners to take control of their education, making the process more effective and enjoyable. Overall, digital tools not only enhance language acquisition but also promote independent and lifelong learning habits.

2.4. International Talent Development

The concept of international talent development has become a focal point in higher education research, reflecting the growing importance of equipping individuals with the skills necessary to thrive in an interconnected world. International talents are broadly characterized by their ability to adopt global perspectives, engage in effective intercultural communication, and navigate complex international professional environments. These attributes are increasingly recognized as essential for addressing the challenges posed by globalization and fostering innovation across diverse sectors. By cultivating such competencies, higher education institutions contribute to the creation of a workforce capable of driving sustainable development and international collaboration [9].

Higher education institutions are progressively integrating internationalization strategies into their academic frameworks to prepare students for active participation in global knowledge economies. These strategies encompass a wide range of initiatives, including international exchange programs that expose students to diverse cultural and professional contexts, multilingual education that enhances linguistic proficiency and adaptability, and cross-cultural training programs that foster understanding and collaboration across different cultural backgrounds. By embedding these elements into their curricula, institutions aim to develop graduates who are not only academically proficient but also equipped with the practical skills and cultural awareness required to excel in international environments. Such efforts underscore the critical role of education in shaping globally competent professionals capable of addressing complex global challenges.

3. Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical foundation of this study integrates three essential perspectives: learning ecology theory, digital education theory, and international talent development theory. These perspectives collectively provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing

the multifaceted nature of English competence development in modern educational contexts [3].

Learning ecology theory offers a conceptual lens for understanding learning as a dynamic and interconnected process. It emphasizes the importance of interactions between learners and their environments, including educational institutions, technological tools, and broader social contexts. This perspective underscores that learning outcomes are not isolated phenomena but are shaped by the complex relationships and systems in which learners are embedded. By examining these interactions, researchers can better understand how various factors contribute to the development of language skills and other competencies [10].

Digital education theory highlights the transformative impact of technology on educational practices. It explores how digital tools enable innovative learning methods, such as virtual collaboration, adaptive learning platforms, and access to global knowledge networks. These advancements facilitate more flexible and personalized learning experiences, allowing learners to engage with content in ways that suit their individual needs and preferences. Furthermore, the integration of technology into education fosters opportunities for learners to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are essential for navigating the complexities of the modern world.

International talent development theory focuses on the cultivation of global competencies, intercultural communication skills, and professional abilities necessary for thriving in globalized knowledge economies. It emphasizes the role of language proficiency as a foundational element in achieving these competencies. By developing strong language skills, learners can enhance their ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries, collaborate in diverse professional settings, and access international opportunities [1]. This theory provides valuable insights into the strategic importance of language education in preparing individuals for global participation.

By synthesizing these theoretical perspectives, this study conceptualizes English competence development as a dynamic process within a digital learning ecosystem. This ecosystem connects learners, educational institutions, technological infrastructures, and global communication environments, creating a holistic framework for understanding language acquisition. The integration of these elements highlights the interplay between individual learning experiences and broader systemic factors, offering a nuanced approach to examining how English proficiency evolves in response to technological and societal changes.

4. Digital Learning Ecology Framework

From the perspective of digital learning ecology, the development of English competence among international talents can be understood as a dynamic and multifaceted process. This process is shaped by the continuous interactions among various elements within a learning ecosystem, which collectively contribute to the enhancement of linguistic and intercultural abilities. The framework emphasizes the interconnected nature of these elements, highlighting the importance of adaptive learning strategies and collaborative environments in fostering effective language acquisition and communication skills (As shown in Figure 1).

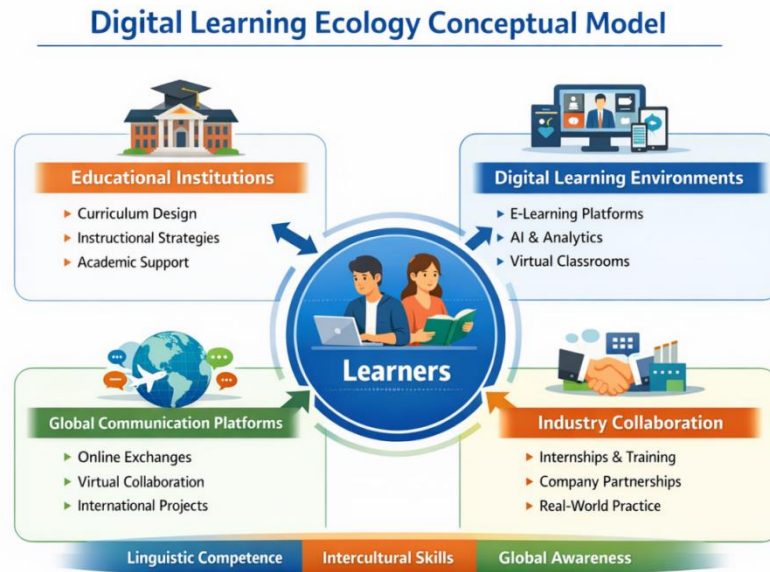


Figure 1. Digital Learning Ecology Conceptual Model

Learners occupy a central and pivotal position within this ecosystem, serving as active participants whose experiences are shaped by diverse interactions. Their engagement with digital technologies, social learning communities, and educational institutions plays a crucial role in their overall development. By utilizing digital resources and communication platforms, learners gain access to a wide array of linguistic and cultural information, which enriches their understanding and broadens their perspectives. This dynamic interaction fosters not only language proficiency but also the ability to navigate complex intercultural contexts effectively.

Educational institutions act as foundational nodes within the learning ecosystem, providing structured environments and professional guidance essential for language development. Universities, in particular, play a significant role in designing comprehensive curricula that address the diverse needs of learners. They organize targeted learning activities and offer tailored support to help learners build linguistic competence and intercultural communication skills. These institutions also serve as platforms for fostering collaboration and innovation, enabling learners to engage in meaningful academic and cultural exchanges [11, 12].

Digital technologies constitute a critical infrastructure within the learning ecosystem, facilitating both language acquisition and global communication. Tools such as online learning platforms, language learning applications, and artificial intelligence systems provide learners with access to authentic language materials and interactive opportunities. These technologies enable learners to connect with speakers from various cultural backgrounds, thereby enhancing their practical communication skills and cultural understanding [13]. The integration of advanced digital tools into the learning process ensures that learners can adapt to the evolving demands of global communication.

Global communication environments offer invaluable opportunities for learners to apply their language skills in practical, real-world contexts. Participation in international projects, academic exchanges, and online communities allows learners to refine their communication abilities while gaining deeper insights into intercultural dynamics [14]. These experiences not only enhance linguistic proficiency but also cultivate a sense of global citizenship and awareness. By engaging in diverse communication scenarios, learners develop the adaptability and confidence needed to thrive in increasingly interconnected environments.

5. Construction of the English Competence Development System

Based on the digital learning ecology framework discussed earlier, the development of English competence among international talents necessitates the establishment of a systematic and integrated training system. This system should transcend traditional classroom-based instruction and incorporate diverse learning environments and institutional mechanisms. In the era of globalization and digital transformation, cultivating English competence must be approached as a multidimensional process. This involves curriculum innovation, the development of digital learning infrastructures, the creation of international communication platforms, and fostering collaborative partnerships between educational institutions and industry to ensure a holistic approach to language education [3].

Within the framework of a digital learning ecology, educational institutions remain pivotal in the competence development system [15]. Universities play a fundamental role in designing structured learning experiences that enable students to acquire both linguistic proficiency and intercultural communication skills. Language curricula should evolve beyond traditional grammar-focused instruction to adopt communicative and task-based methodologies that emphasize practical language use. Task-based language learning engages students in meaningful communication activities that replicate authentic social and professional scenarios. Through collaborative discussions, problem-solving exercises, and project-based assignments, learners can develop the ability to use English effectively in real-world contexts, thereby enhancing their overall language proficiency and adaptability.

The integration of digital learning environments is a critical component in constructing a modern English competence development system. Digital technologies have revolutionized access to learning resources and created new opportunities for interactive and personalized language education. Online learning platforms, multimedia tools, and artificial intelligence-driven tutoring systems enable learners to engage in flexible and adaptive learning experiences that extend beyond the physical classroom. For instance, intelligent language learning systems can analyze learners' performance data and provide tailored feedback to support individualized learning pathways. These technologies not only enhance learning efficiency but also foster learner autonomy, encouraging self-regulated learning and continuous skill development.

Digital learning environments also facilitate participation in global communication networks. Through online discussion forums, virtual classrooms, and international collaborative platforms, students can interact with peers and experts from diverse cultural backgrounds. These interactions offer valuable opportunities for practicing English communication while simultaneously developing intercultural awareness. Technology-mediated communication enhances language learning by exposing learners to authentic language input and a variety of cultural perspectives. Consequently, integrating digital communication tools into language education is an essential step toward cultivating talents who are globally competent and capable of navigating multicultural environments effectively [16].

Another essential element of the English competence development system is the creation of international communication platforms. Authentic communication experiences are vital for transforming linguistic knowledge into practical communication skills. Educational institutions should prioritize opportunities for students to engage in international exchanges, collaborative research projects, and global academic networks. Participation in international conferences, exchange programs, and online intercultural dialogue activities allows learners to confront real-world communication challenges and develop strategies for effective cross-cultural interaction. These experiences are instrumental in preparing students for the demands of global communication and professional collaboration.

In the context of the Hainan Free Trade Port, the establishment of international communication platforms holds particular significance. As the region continues to attract international enterprises and professionals, universities and training institutions can collaborate with global organizations to create cross-border communication opportunities

for students. These initiatives may include virtual exchange programs, joint research projects, and collaborative innovation activities involving participants from various countries. Such efforts not only enhance language competence but also foster global perspectives and intercultural communication skills, which are essential for thriving in an increasingly interconnected world [17].

Collaboration between universities and industry is another crucial factor in constructing an effective English competence development system. Partnerships between educational institutions and industry ensure that language education programs align closely with the requirements of international professional environments. Many global professions demand employees who can communicate proficiently in English while working within multicultural teams. Therefore, language training should incorporate professional communication scenarios that mirror real-world workplace situations, enabling students to develop practical skills that are directly applicable to their future careers.

Internship programs and cooperative education initiatives provide invaluable opportunities for students to apply their English skills in professional settings. By working in multinational companies, international organizations, or global research institutions, students gain firsthand experience in international communication and professional collaboration. These experiences not only enhance linguistic competence but also cultivate professional communication skills, cultural adaptability, and global awareness. Such practical exposure is essential for preparing students to meet the challenges of working in diverse and dynamic international environments.

An equally important dimension of the competence development system is fostering a supportive learning culture that promotes continuous learning and global engagement. In a digital learning ecology, learners are active participants in the construction of knowledge rather than passive recipients. Educational institutions should cultivate learning communities where students collaborate with peers, educators, and external experts to solve problems and share knowledge. These communities enhance learner motivation and create dynamic environments that support ongoing competence development, encouraging students to pursue lifelong learning and adapt to evolving global demands.

Policy support and institutional governance also play a significant role in shaping the development of digital learning ecosystems. Governments and educational authorities can drive innovation in language education by facilitating the integration of digital technologies, promoting international collaboration, and allocating funding for educational research and development. In the context of the Hainan Free Trade Port, policy initiatives aimed at advancing international education and attracting global talent can create favorable conditions for the development of innovative language education models. These policies ensure that educational institutions have the resources and support needed to implement cutting-edge approaches to language training.

The construction of an English competence development system for international talents requires the integration of multiple elements within a digital learning ecosystem [2, 18]. Educational institutions provide structured learning environments, digital technologies expand learning opportunities, international communication platforms offer authentic interaction contexts, and industry collaboration connects language learning with professional practice. By coordinating these elements effectively, it is possible to establish a comprehensive system that supports the cultivation of internationally competitive talents, equipping them with the skills needed to excel in global contexts.

This system reflects the dynamic evolution of language education in the digital era. As global communication increasingly relies on digital technologies and cross-cultural collaboration, language education must adapt by incorporating innovative teaching methodologies and learning environments. By constructing a digital learning ecology that integrates institutional, technological, and social resources, educational institutions can create effective pathways for developing English competence among international talents. This approach is particularly relevant in the context of the Hainan Free Trade Port, where

fostering globally competent individuals is essential for supporting regional and international development [6].

6. Conclusion

In the era of globalization and digital transformation, cultivating international talents necessitates innovative and adaptive approaches to language education. The development of English competence is not merely an isolated academic endeavor but a dynamic process influenced by the interplay of learners, educational institutions, digital technologies, and the broader global communication landscape. By leveraging digital learning ecology, educators and policymakers can create environments that foster interactive and immersive language acquisition experiences. Such ecosystems enable learners to engage with diverse linguistic and cultural contexts, preparing them to navigate the complexities of international communication and collaboration effectively. Furthermore, the integration of digital tools and platforms into language education provides opportunities for personalized learning, real-time feedback, and enhanced accessibility, ensuring that learners from varied backgrounds can achieve their full potential.

This study introduces a conceptual framework aimed at constructing an English competence development system tailored for international talents within the unique context of the Hainan Free Trade Port. The framework underscores the critical role of digital learning environments, global communication opportunities, and industry partnerships in shaping effective language education strategies. By aligning educational practices with the demands of international trade and collaboration, this approach seeks to equip learners with the skills necessary to thrive in a competitive global economy. Future research should delve deeper into empirical methods for assessing the impact of digital learning ecosystems on language proficiency and explore the transformative potential of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and learning analytics, in optimizing educational outcomes. Additionally, investigating the scalability and adaptability of such frameworks across diverse cultural and economic settings could provide valuable insights into their broader applicability and effectiveness.

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