

Research on the Cultivation Path of Intercultural Communicative Competence in Cruise English from the Perspective of Industry-Education Integration

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Abstract: *Against the backdrop of the full recovery of the international cruise industry and the profound restructuring of competency requirements for shipboard positions, cruise English instruction must break away from the long-standing cultivation pattern that prioritizes discrete language skills over authentic communicative performance. Adopting the perspective of industry-education integration, this paper first deconstructs the core components of intercultural communicative competence demanded by cruise service positions, and then systematically constructs a cultivation path along three dimensions: multi-stakeholder collaborative governance, the formation of a structured teaching team, and the reform of key teaching elements. On this basis, a quality assurance mechanism that integrates language proficiency, cultural cognition and service norms is proposed. The study argues that only by embedding authentic occupational scenarios, industrial standards and enterprise resources into the entire training process can colleges produce cruise English professionals who are both linguistically competent and culturally adaptive. The findings offer a theoretical reference and practical implications for maritime and tourism colleges seeking to innovate their models of English talent cultivation.*

Keywords: Industry-education integration; Cruise English; Intercultural communicative competence; Talent cultivation; Collaborative education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the cruise sector has evolved from a niche branch of maritime transport into one of the most globalized service industries in the world. A single large vessel may carry crew members of more than forty nationalities while receiving passengers from virtually every continent, which means that language onboard is never merely a channel for transferring information. It is the medium through which safety instructions are delivered, disputes are mediated, and service value is ultimately created. For Chinese maritime and tourism colleges, cultivating cruise English professionals who can communicate appropriately and effectively across cultural boundaries has therefore become an urgent educational task. This urgency is reinforced at the policy level: in recent years, China has successively issued national documents that elevate industry-education integration from a school-level cooperation initiative to a state strategy for the reform of vocational education, requiring that the boundary between campuses and enterprises be substantially opened [1].

The reality of cruise English teaching, however, remains sobering. Constrained by the traditional paradigm of foreign language instruction, many programs still organize their courses around grammar explanation, vocabulary accumulation and test-oriented training, while the communicative events that actually define shipboard work—handling a complaint from an elderly European passenger, coordinating a cabin turnaround with colleagues from Southeast Asia, or briefing a multilingual tour group before a shore excursion—are only superficially rehearsed through scripted dialogues. Students who achieve respectable scores in standardized language examinations frequently prove unable to manage the pragmatic, paralinguistic and affective demands of real intercultural encounters. Decades of research on intercultural communicative competence have repeatedly demonstrated that linguistic accuracy by itself does not guarantee communicative success in multicultural workplaces [2]; what matters is the capacity to interpret unfamiliar behavior, negotiate meaning across value systems, and adjust one's own performance in real time.

Against this background, the present paper addresses a deceptively simple question: how should colleges reorganize the cultivation of cruise English so that intercultural communicative competence is produced rather than merely preached? Existing studies have examined cruise English curriculum design, crew training models and school-enterprise cooperation separately, but an integrated account that links industrial change, governance

mechanisms, teaching team structure and classroom-level reform remains scarce. Drawing on the logic of industry-education integration, the paper proceeds in six steps. Section 1 reconstructs the cultivation logic and objectives in light of industrial transformation. Section 2 designs a multi-stakeholder collaborative governance structure. Section 3 discusses the formation of a structured, dual-qualified teaching team. Section 4 proposes concrete reform paths for key teaching elements. Section 5 summarizes the distinctive innovations of the model and its quality assurance mechanism, and Section 6 concludes with limitations and directions for future research.

2. CULTIVATION LOGIC AND GOAL RECONSTRUCTION UNDER INDUSTRIAL CHANGE

2.1 Recovery of the International Cruise Industry and Evolving Competency Demands of Crew Positions

The international cruise industry has completed a remarkable rebound from the disruption caused by the pandemic. Industry statistics indicate that global cruise passenger volume not only returned to its pre-2020 level but has continued to expand, with ocean-going capacity growing steadily as a new generation of mega-ships enters service [3]. The Chinese market, after a period of suspension, has likewise restarted: domestically operated large cruise ships have begun home-port operations in Shanghai, Tianjin and other coastal cities, while international cruise corporations have resumed or increased their deployment in Asia. This recovery is not a simple restoration of the old order. The composition of passengers has become younger and more geographically diverse, digital check-in and smart cabin systems have reshaped front-line workflows, and cruise companies are competing less on hardware than on the perceived quality of service encounters.

These changes translate directly into new competency demands for shipboard positions. Global maritime manpower analyses have long warned of structural shortages of qualified crew, and the service-oriented expansion of the cruise fleet has intensified competition for personnel who combine maritime professionalism with hospitality skills [4]. For positions such as guest services officer, front desk associate, dining room steward and shore excursion staff, the occupational core is no longer the recitation of standard sentences but the management of expectations of culturally heterogeneous guests under time pressure and public scrutiny. Employers increasingly expect new hires to switch registers between formal safety language and warm conversational English, to recognize culturally specific taboos before they become complaints, and to cooperate smoothly with colleagues whose first language, work habits and hierarchy preferences differ from their own. The implication for colleges is clear: cruise English can no longer be taught as a branch of general English with maritime vocabulary attached; it must be reconstructed as training in intercultural occupational communication.

2.2 Deconstructing the Components of Intercultural Communicative Competence for Cruise Service Positions

To make the training target operational, the notion of intercultural communicative competence must be decomposed in a way that reflects shipboard reality. The classic formulation of intercultural communicative competence distinguishes attitudes of curiosity and openness, knowledge of social groups and their practices, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness [5]. Translated into the cruise workplace, this framework yields five interlocking components. The first is occupational language proficiency: command of maritime and hospitality registers, including standardized safety communication and the formulaic yet flexible language of guest service. The second is cultural cognition: working knowledge of the values, religious practices, dietary customs, holidays and conversational taboos of the principal passenger source markets and of the major crew-supplying countries. The third is pragmatic and nonverbal adaptability: the ability to adjust directness, politeness strategies, proxemics, eye contact and turn-taking to the interlocutor's cultural expectations.

The fourth component is affective labor and conflict mediation: cruise service is emotional work performed in confined spaces over long contracts, and crew members must defuse frustration—often expressed through a language the guest does not fully command—without escalating it. The fifth component is professional identity and intercultural ethics: respect for passenger privacy, resistance to stereotyping, and a stable sense of self that can represent Chinese service culture confidently while accommodating difference. Empirical studies in hospitality contexts have shown that front-line employees' intercultural sensitivity correlates significantly with guest satisfaction and service recovery outcomes [6], which confirms that these components are not decorative additions to language teaching but the very substance of cruise English competence.

2.3 Repositioning Talent Cultivation Goals Driven by Industry-Education Integration

Once the competence structure is clarified, the cultivation goal must be repositioned. The traditional objective—producing graduates who are good at English and willing to work at sea—should be replaced by a three-tier outcome system. At the foundational tier lies certified language and maritime-safety competence; at the intermediate tier lies occupational communication competence, namely the ability to complete the full chain of service tasks in English; at the advanced tier lies intercultural adaptability and sustainable career development, including the potential to grow into supervisory roles in multinational crews. This repositioning follows the logic of outcome-based education, in which curriculum, teaching and assessment are all reverse-designed from clearly stated graduate outcomes [7]. Crucially, industry-education integration changes who defines the outcomes: they are no longer written by language teachers alone but are jointly formulated with cruise operators, manning agencies and industry associations, anchored in enterprise service standards, and reviewed annually so that the training target moves in step with the industry rather than lagging behind it.

3. CONSTRUCTION OF MULTI-STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE AND EDUCATION MECHANISMS

3.1 Establishing a Collaborative Governance Structure among Colleges, Shipping Enterprises and Industry Organizations

Cruise English competence is produced at the intersection of language education, maritime regulation and hospitality service, and no single institution commands all the resources that its cultivation requires. The theory of collaborative governance suggests that when problems cut across organizational boundaries, durable solutions emerge from structured arrangements in which public and private actors share information, discretion and responsibility [8]. Applying this insight, colleges should establish a cruise English education council that brings together the maritime or tourism college, cruise operators and crew manning agencies, port and terminal enterprises, industry associations, and—where relevant—maritime safety authorities. The council should hold genuine decision-making power over program standards, practical training arrangements and quality evaluation, rather than serving as a ceremonial advisory board. Within such a structure, the college contributes pedagogical expertise and stable teaching organization, enterprises contribute authentic scenarios, service standards and employment channels, and industry organizations contribute norms, accreditation and third-party oversight. The boundary of responsibility is thus redrawn from a bilateral school-enterprise contract into a network in which each actor governs what it knows best.

3.2 Improving Order-Based Training and Joint School-Enterprise Education Mechanisms

Order-based training—named classes co-run with a specific cruise operator or manning agency—remains the most direct instrument for aligning supply with demand. Under this arrangement, enrollment, curriculum delivery, shipboard internship and employment are bundled into a single jointly managed pipeline, and students are socialized into the culture and standards of the partner enterprise from their first semester. Research on school-enterprise cooperation in vocational education indicates that order-based programs significantly improve the match between graduate competence and job requirements, although they carry the risk of narrowing students' adaptability to a single employer [9]. To capture the benefits while containing the risk, programs should adopt a broad-base-plus-directional-module structure: all students complete a common core of maritime English, intercultural communication and service fundamentals, after which directional modules tailored to the partner enterprise's brand standards are layered on top. Joint education must also be contractualized in detail—specifying each party's investment in facilities, faculty time, internship positions and safety liability—so that cooperation survives personnel changes on either side.

3.3 Establishing a Task-Oriented Operation System with Clearly Defined Responsibilities

Collaboration fails most often not at the level of intention but at the level of routine operation. A task-oriented operation system is therefore needed, in which the annual work of the program is decomposed into a project list—curriculum revision, case-library updating, internship placement, teacher shipboard practice, student recruitment events—with each project assigned an owner, a timeline, required resources and acceptance criteria. A joint teaching affairs office, staffed by college administrators and enterprise training managers, should coordinate the list through regular meetings and a shared data platform covering student progress, internship performance and employment outcomes. Responsibility matrices make visible who decides, who executes, who must be consulted

and who is informed, preventing the common pathology in which everything is jointly owned and therefore owned by nobody. Risk allocation and exit clauses, including provisions for fluctuations in cruise industry hiring, should be written into the cooperation agreement so that the mechanism is resilient to the business cycle.

3.4 Optimizing Incentive Safeguards and Two-Way Faculty Mobility Mechanisms

No governance structure will function sustainably unless the individuals who animate it are properly motivated. On the enterprise side, compensation for industry mentors should be standardized and visible, and their teaching contributions should count toward professional advancement within the company; outstanding mentors may be awarded adjunct titles by the college, which carries reputational value. On the college side, teachers' enterprise practice, development of enterprise-commissioned courses and supervision of shipboard internships must be recognized in workload accounting, performance appraisal and promotion criteria, rather than treated as voluntary extra labor. Funding should be pooled from three sources: special funds from the college, sponsorship or equipment donation from enterprises, and government subsidies attached to industry-education integration projects. Two-way mobility—enterprise personnel teaching on campus and college teachers practicing onboard—should be institutionalized with fixed quotas per semester, so that the exchange of people becomes a routine channel for the exchange of knowledge.

4. FORMATION OF A STRUCTURED TEACHING TEAM AND DEVELOPMENT OF DUAL-QUALIFIED TEACHERS

4.1 Forming Mixed Teams on the Principle of Interdisciplinary and Cross-Position Collaboration

The competence structure outlined above exceeds what any single group of English teachers can deliver. The teaching team should therefore be deliberately mixed along two axes. The disciplinary axis brings together teachers of English language and literature, maritime studies, tourism and hospitality management, and cross-cultural psychology, so that language, professional knowledge and cultural theory inform one another. The positional axis brings together college teachers, enterprise trainers, former senior crew members such as pursers or guest services managers, and student affairs counselors who accompany students through the emotional transitions of shipboard internship. A reasonable structural ratio might reserve roughly half of the teaching capacity for full-time college teachers and half for enterprise and international mentors, with the exact proportion adjusted to program size. Team culture matters as much as headcount: regular joint lesson preparation, co-teaching and mutual classroom observation turn a roster of individuals into a functioning team.

4.2 Establishing School-Enterprise Dual Leaders and an International Industry Mentor Mechanism

A mixed team requires dual leadership. The academic leader, normally a senior college teacher, is responsible for curricular coherence, pedagogical quality and research output; the industrial leader, ideally a senior cruise company trainer, human resources manager or former hotel director, is responsible for the currency of occupational standards, the supply of authentic cases and access to internships. The two leaders should share authority over key decisions, embodying in miniature the governance principle of the whole program. Beyond them, an international industry mentor mechanism should be built: foreign officers, port agents and overseas hospitality educators are engaged through guest lectures, online co-teaching and remote internship supervision. Selection standards for mentors must cover not only professional seniority but also teaching aptitude and intercultural openness, since a technically excellent expert who cannot explain or empathize adds little to student learning.

4.3 Optimizing the Structure of English Teachers and Industry Mentors by Functional Modules

Team composition should follow function rather than administrative convenience. Four functional modules can be distinguished. The language foundation module—pronunciation, grammar in use, listening and speaking for maritime contexts—is led by college English teachers. The occupational scenario module—guest services, front desk, dining and housekeeping communication—is led by dual-qualified teachers who possess both teaching credentials and shipboard experience. The shipboard practice module—pre-departure preparation, internship supervision and post-internship debriefing—is led by enterprise mentors. The cultural expansion module—cross-cultural communication theory, passenger source-market studies and Chinese culture presentation in English—is co-taught by college teachers and international experts. Mapping people to modules clarifies responsibility boundaries, prevents both gaps and unproductive overlaps, and gives each team member a legible territory for

professional growth.

4.4 Creating a Tiered, Progressive Path for Teachers' Enterprise Practice and International Rotation

Dual qualification cannot be conferred by a certificate; it must be built through staged experience. A three-tier development path is proposed. Novice teachers begin with short-term exposure: visits to home ports and cruise terminals, teaching practice on training vessels, and shadowing of enterprise trainers. Intermediate teachers undertake substantive practice—sailing on short voyages as observers or trainee staff, or serving fixed terms in manning agencies—accompanied by a reflective portfolio that converts experience into teachable material. Advanced teachers are eligible for international rotation: a semester aboard an international vessel, an exchange with an overseas maritime or hospitality college, or participation in cruise company training programs abroad. Research on vocational teacher development consistently shows that sustained, structured enterprise practice is the decisive factor in building dual-qualified capacity [10]; sporadic visits produce anecdotes, while only embedded practice produces transferable occupational knowledge. Each tier should conclude with certification that feeds into promotion, making the path a career ladder rather than an administrative chore.

4.5 Strengthening Professional Ethics, Occupational Literacy and Intercultural Ethical Awareness

The authority of teachers over future crew members carries ethical weight. Professional ethics for the cruise English team has three layers. The first is general teaching ethics: diligence, fairness in evaluation and genuine care for students. The second is maritime occupational ethics: uncompromising commitment to safety culture, confidentiality of passenger information and respect for the chain of command at sea. The third is intercultural ethical awareness: teachers must model resistance to stereotyping, treat all cultures represented in the classroom and the crew with equal respect, and handle culturally charged cases with sensitivity. These requirements should be embedded in teacher induction, annual evaluation and case-based collective reflection, so that ethical awareness is cultivated through practice rather than announced through slogans.

5. IMPLEMENTATION PATHS FOR THE REFORM OF KEY TEACHING ELEMENTS

5.1 Reconstructing the Cruise English Curriculum System on the Basis of the Job Task Chain

Curriculum reconstruction should begin not from the discipline catalog but from the job task chain. Task analysis of the principal cruise service positions—guest services, front desk, dining service, housekeeping coordination, entertainment hosting and shore excursion guiding—yields a recurrent communicative chain: embarkation greeting and orientation, information inquiry and request handling, upselling and explanation of onboard services, complaint reception and service recovery, emergency assistance and safety instruction, and finally farewell and feedback collection. Each link of the chain is mapped to a course module that integrates the language forms, cultural knowledge and service procedures the task demands. The modules are then sequenced into a progressive matrix, from simulated low-stakes tasks in the first year to authentic, enterprise-evaluated tasks in the final year. Certificate requirements—maritime basic safety training, crew documentation and recognized English proficiency benchmarks—are embedded into the matrix rather than pursued as parallel tracks, so that the curriculum itself constitutes the pathway to employability.

5.2 Building On-Campus and Off-Campus Dual Bases and Immersive Language Practice Scenarios

Intercultural communicative competence is situational by nature; it cannot be fully rehearsed in a conventional classroom. Programs should therefore construct dual bases. The on-campus base is a simulation center reproducing the key communicative spaces of a vessel—a reception desk, a cabin corridor, a dining area—equipped for role rotation among students, recorded performance and immediate feedback. The off-campus base network comprises cruise terminals, manning agencies, port service companies and, where agreements permit, actual vessels in port or on short voyages. Immersion is the operative principle: students perform complete service episodes under realistic time pressure, with interlocutors who respond unpredictably, including international students or foreign staff playing passenger roles. Situated learning theory holds that knowledge is most robustly acquired in authentic contexts of practice, where competence and context co-constitute each other [11]; the dual-base design operationalizes this principle while containing its cost and safety constraints.

5.3 Empowering Innovation in Intercultural Communication Teaching through Digital Intelligence

Technologies

Digital intelligence technologies remove two long-standing constraints of cruise English teaching: the scarcity of authentic interlocutors and the impossibility of rehearsing rare but critical events. Virtual reality simulation can place students inside a multicultural service scenario—a crowded embarkation hall, a dissatisfied passenger at the front desk—and require real-time spoken response, with the system varying the interlocutor's accent, emotional state and cultural background. AI-based speech assessment provides immediate, fine-grained feedback on intelligibility, fluency and pragmatic appropriateness, while a corpus of authentic cruise service English, compiled with enterprise partners from anonymized service records, grounds teaching materials in real usage rather than textbook invention. Learning analytics dashboards allow teachers to track each student's trajectory across repeated scenario performances and to assign targeted remediation. The guiding principle is that technology must serve communicative authenticity: a virtual passenger who behaves like a cooperative classmate teaches nothing, so scenario design and enterprise data, not the hardware, determine training value.

5.4 Driving Project-Based Teaching with Authentic Cases from International Routes

Project-based teaching supplies the organizational form that binds curriculum, bases and technology together. A case library should be co-built with partner enterprises, collecting authentic—suitably anonymized—incidents from international routes: a dispute over dietary requirements in the main dining room, a medical emergency announcement to a multilingual passenger body, a shore excursion briefing for guests with conflicting expectations. Typical projects ask students to design a culturally responsive shore-excursion briefing, to mediate a simulated service dispute, or to produce a bilingual safety communication plan for a specific itinerary. Each project follows a fixed cycle: task release with enterprise standards attached, group collaboration with defined roles, production of a deliverable judged against shipboard criteria, and review by enterprise mentors alongside teachers. Evidence from project-based learning research indicates that authentic tasks with real evaluative stakes substantially enhance transfer of learning to the workplace [12], which is precisely the outcome cruise English education must achieve.

5.5 Establishing a Multi-Stakeholder, Whole-Process Evidence-Based Evaluation Mechanism

Evaluation completes the reform loop. The mechanism should be multi-stakeholder: teachers assess language and pedagogical outcomes, enterprise mentors assess occupational performance, peers and the students themselves contribute to assessing collaboration and self-directed growth, and platform analytics contribute objective behavioral data. It should also be whole-process: diagnostic assessment at entry, formative assessment across every scenario performance and project milestone, summative assessment aligned with the three-tier outcome system, and post-graduation tracking through employer feedback. All assessment rests on an evidence chain—recorded performances, project artifacts, internship logs and supervisor reports—rather than on a single paper examination. Rubrics are decomposed from the five competence components of Section 1.2, so that evaluation continuously tells students not merely how well they speak English but how well they communicate across cultures in a cruise service context.

6. DISTINCTIVE INNOVATIONS OF THE CULTIVATION MODEL AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

6.1 Integrating Language Competence, Cultural Cognition and Service Norms in Collaborative Education

The first distinctive feature of the model is that the three strands of cruise English education—language competence, cultural cognition and service norms—are integrated rather than pursued in parallel courses that never meet. Every teaching unit is designed to deliver all three simultaneously: a complaint-handling lesson teaches the pragmatic forms of apology and explanation, the cultural expectations that shape what counts as a complaint, and the service protocol that governs compensation and escalation. Integration extends to values education: students learn to present Chinese culture confidently in English—an increasingly expected part of premium cruise service for international guests—while approaching other cultures with informed respect. Collaborative education here means that the college, the enterprise and the wider industry jointly own this integrated objective, each contributing the strand it knows best.

6.2 Supporting Intercultural Scenario Simulation Training through Virtual-Real Integrated Platforms

The second feature is a virtual-real integrated training platform. Its design logic is complementary allocation: virtual simulation handles high-cost, low-frequency or high-risk communicative events—emergency announcements, aggressive passenger behavior, culturally sensitive incidents—where real rehearsal is impractical, while real bases handle routine, high-frequency service episodes where physical presence, authentic props and genuine human unpredictability are irreplaceable. Data interconnection between the two sides allows a student's virtual training record to inform placement and task assignment in real practice, and problems observed in real internships to be fed back into the virtual scenario library. A standing mechanism with partner enterprises keeps scenarios current, since the communicative texture of cruise service changes with routes, passenger demographics and company policy.

6.3 Promoting the Coordinated Development of International Exchange, Enterprise Practice and Social Service

The third feature is the coordination of three outward-facing activities that are usually run separately. International exchange—student visits and joint courses with overseas maritime or hospitality colleges, and participation in international maritime youth events—widens students' cultural exposure. Enterprise practice deepens their occupational competence. Social service—language volunteering at cruise home ports, reception support for international maritime conferences, and multilingual services for the local cruise economy—converts competence into public value while strengthening students' professional identity and employability. When deliberately scheduled as successive stages of one developmental sequence, the three activities reinforce one another: exchange raises intercultural awareness, practice consolidates occupational skills, and social service tests both in unscripted public settings.

6.4 Establishing a Traceable and Verifiable Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement Mechanism

Innovation without assurance degenerates into improvisation. The program's quality mechanism therefore operates on traceability: every competence claim in a student's profile is linked to evidence—performances, artifacts, mentor evaluations—that can be inspected and re-verified. Standards alignment is audited annually against enterprise service standards and relevant maritime training requirements. A graduate tracer system collects employment and career-progression data, feeding an annual quality report that is reviewed by the governance council. Improvement follows the plan-do-check-act cycle: identified gaps generate concrete revision tasks—curriculum adjustment, scenario renewal, teacher redeployment—which enter the project list of Section 2.3 and are checked at the next cycle. Third-party evaluation by industry organizations provides external calibration, guarding against the grade inflation and self-congratulation to which closed systems are prone.

7. CONCLUSION

The recovery and transformation of the international cruise industry have raised the bar for shipboard communicative competence, while the national strategy of industry-education integration has supplied the institutional opportunity to meet it. This paper has argued that cultivating intercultural communicative competence in cruise English requires more than curriculum tinkering: it requires a reconstructed three-tier training goal anchored in a five-component competence structure, a multi-stakeholder governance system that gives enterprises and industry organizations real authority, a mixed and dual-qualified teaching team developed through tiered enterprise practice, and classroom-level reform that rebuilds the curriculum on the job task chain, immerses students in dual-base and virtual-real scenarios, drives learning through authentic route cases, and evaluates it through a whole-process evidence chain. Quality assurance closes the loop by making every competence claim traceable and every improvement verifiable.

The study has limitations that point toward future work. The proposed model is constructed theoretically and from documented practice patterns; its effectiveness must be tested empirically through longitudinal tracking of graduate performance onboard and comparative study across colleges with different depths of enterprise partnership. The dynamics of the cruise labor market—fluctuating hiring, route redeployment and evolving passenger demographics—also require the model's mechanisms to be stress-tested over full business cycles. Future research should therefore combine the framework presented here with quantitative evaluation designs, so that the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence in cruise English can move from a well-argued proposition to a measured and continuously improving practice.

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