

Construction of an Interdisciplinary “Foreign Language + Business” Micro-Major Curriculum System: An OBE-Based Modular Design

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of China’s “Double Thousand” initiative and the New Liberal Arts reform, micro-majors offer foreign-language programs at business universities a practical vehicle for cultivating interdisciplinary “foreign language + business” talent, with the curriculum system at the core of construction. Guided by Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) and drawing on 253 valid questionnaires from students at Wuhan Business University, this study reverse-designs a micro-major curriculum system. The survey shows that students prioritize alignment with career plans (72.3%) and complementarity with their major (61.7%), and prefer enterprise-based practical training (68.0%) and project-based learning (56.5%); “International Economic and Trade Rules and Legal Translation” records the highest enrollment intention. Accordingly, the study constructs a modular curriculum system integrating four competence modules (language proficiency, business literacy, practical skills, digital literacy) across three progressive levels (general foundation, professional core, practical extension), and proposes implementation arrangements featuring modular combination, project-based teaching, and scenario-based practice, together with supporting safeguards for similar institutions.

Keywords: “Double Thousand” initiative; Micro-major; Industry-education integration; Interdisciplinary talent cultivation; Curriculum system

Online publication: June 26, 2026

1. Introduction

In March 2025, China’s Ministry of Education launched the “Double Thousand” initiative, which promotes the establishment of 1,000 micro-majors and 1,000 vocational training courses at universities nationwide, targeting fields with urgent talent demand ^[1]. Researchers have noted that, from the perspective of education supply-side reform, the initiative answers structural labor-market demand with flexible, short-cycle training

provision^[2]. Together with national plans calling for a better alignment between talent cultivation and the needs of economic and social development, and with the New Liberal Arts reform that encourages cross-disciplinary integration, micro-majors are moving from spontaneous experimentation to scaled, standardized construction.

Foreign-language programs at business universities face four interlocking difficulties: a mismatch between training and market demand, as the traditional “pure language” model fails emerging fields such as cross-border e-commerce and brand internationalization; disciplinary barriers between foreign languages and business subjects; shallow industry-education cooperation; and weakening graduate competitiveness built on a single language skill. The micro-major, characterized by its small scale, interdisciplinary nature, and strong application orientation, offers a practical entry point for addressing these difficulties.

Among all elements of micro-major construction, the curriculum system is the pivot connecting training objectives with teaching implementation. In practice, however, some micro-major curricula remain a simple juxtaposition of language and business courses. The root cause is the lack of systematic design that starts from authentic demand and targets competence outcomes. Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), which advocates reverse design from intended learning outcomes, fits this demand-driven logic. Drawing on an empirical survey of students at Wuhan Business University, this study addresses three questions: What are the characteristics of target students’ learning demands? How should the curriculum be reverse-designed from these demands? And how can modular, project-based teaching be implemented on the ground?

2. Literature review and theoretical basis

2.1. Research on micro-majors and micro-credentials

Chinese research on micro-majors has grown rapidly in recent years. Qin and Chen clarified the conceptual features and development strategies of micro-major education, identifying its defining attributes as “small and refined, flexible, and interdisciplinary”^[3]. Huang elaborated the construction mechanism and promotion path of micro-majors in the digital-intelligence era^[4]. Regarding application-oriented universities, Huang and Xue explored construction paths under the New Liberal Arts^[5], and Liu et al. examined construction models based on industry-education integration^[6]. At the curriculum level, studies have proposed schemes for domain-specific micro-majors such as intelligent construction^[7], and some scholars have surveyed students’ willingness to enroll in micro-majors and its influencing factors^[8].

The international counterpart of the micro-major is the micro-credential. In 2022, UNESCO advanced a common definition of micro-credentials^[9], and the European Commission adopted a Council Recommendation establishing standard elements, quality principles, and recognition mechanisms^[10]. International practice commonly features co-developed curricula, modular teaching, and stackable, transferable outcomes. However, these experiences are embedded in institutional environments that differ considerably from China’s in credit systems, qualification frameworks, and school–enterprise relations, and dedicated research on the foreign-language–business intersection remains scarce; localization is therefore required.

2.2. OBE and its implications for curriculum design

OBE takes students’ learning outcomes as its logical starting point and follows the principle of “reverse design and forward implementation”: intended outcomes are specified first, and the curriculum, teaching,

and assessment are then designed backward from them. Li et al. demonstrated how this concept guides teaching reform through a hierarchical mapping from training objectives to graduation requirements and then to curricula and teaching processes^[11]. OBE is intrinsically consistent with micro-major construction: a micro-major targets a well-defined occupational field and competence gap, so its curriculum naturally takes job competence as its origin; and its short, modular form requires every course to make a clear, assessable contribution to competence outcomes. Introducing OBE helps avoid curricular juxtaposition and ensures that interdisciplinary integration is implemented at the level of competence indicators.

2.3. Research gaps

Three gaps remain in existing research. First, curricular research on the specific “foreign language + business” combination is almost absent. Second, curriculum design is mostly “forward-supplied” from disciplinary logic, lacking empirical evidence on the authentic demands of students and the job competences required by enterprises. Third, the mapping chain connecting demand surveys, competence indicators, and curriculum modules has not been articulated. This study addresses these gaps by supplying demand-side evidence and by using OBE to connect the reverse-design chain of “demand–competence–curriculum”.

3. Needs analysis: An empirical survey of student demand

3.1. Survey design

The research team conducted a questionnaire survey on micro-major enrollment intentions among students at Wuhan Business University from September 23 to 26, 2025, collecting 253 valid responses. The anonymous questionnaire covered demographic information, career plans, awareness of the micro-major model, selection factors, acceptable program length, preferred delivery modes, enrollment intentions toward ten proposed micro-majors, and open-ended suggestions. In the sample, 79.4% of respondents were female; freshmen and sophomores together accounted for 96.0%; and students majoring in management (44.3%) and economics (19.0%) formed the largest groups, broadly matching the potential audience of foreign-language micro-majors. The aggregated data constitute the demand-side basis for the reverse curriculum design.

3.2. Motivations: Dominated by career orientation and complementarity

Among the priority factors for choosing a micro-major (multiple choices allowed), “alignment with career plans” ranked first at 72.3%, followed by “complementary value to the major” (61.7%) and “course practicality and practice opportunities” (58.5%) (**Table 1**). Students’ motivations are thus highly pragmatic: a micro-major must point to identifiable occupational scenarios while remedying the competence gaps of the major. Notably, 40.3% of respondents listed “local industrial demand in Wuhan” as a consideration, indicating that regional industrial endowments have become an important frame through which students evaluate micro-majors; this provides direct justification for aligning the curriculum with local industries.

Table 1. Priority factors in choosing a micro-major (multiple choices, N=253)

Priority factor	Responses	Percentage (%)	Rank
Alignment with career plans	183	72.3	1
Complementary value to the major	156	61.7	2
Course practicality and practice opportunities	148	58.5	3

Priority factor	Responses	Percentage (%)	Rank
Local industrial demand in Wuhan	102	40.3	4
Faculty strength and teaching resources	98	38.7	5
Class scheduling	87	34.4	6

3.3. Preferred delivery modes: Practical training and project-based learning

Preferences for delivery modes (multiple choices allowed) are topped by “enterprise-based practical training” at 68.0%, followed by “offline theory plus case-based teaching” (62.5%) and “project-based learning” (56.5%) (Table 2). As to program length, 41.5% prefer “7–12 months (semester-based, interleaved with major courses)”, 30.8% choose “3–6 months (short and intensive)”, and 24.5% favor flexible adjustment. These preferences point clearly to “learning by doing”: the curriculum must substantially increase the share of practical teaching, carry competence training through authentic projects and scenarios, and combine a semester-based structure with short intensive options.

Table 2. Preferred delivery modes (multiple choices, N=253)

Delivery mode	Responses	Percentage (%)	Rank
Enterprise-based practical training	172	68.0	1
Offline theory plus case-based teaching	158	62.5	2
Project-based learning	143	56.5	3
Live online teaching	102	40.3	4
Lectures by industry experts	87	34.4	5

3.4. Enrollment intentions: Trade rules, e-commerce, and local industries lead

Enrollment intentions toward the ten proposed micro-majors (combining “very willing” and “willing”) show that “International Economic and Trade Rules and Legal Translation” (34.4%), “Cross-Border E-Commerce and Regional Language Services” (32.4%), and “New Energy Vehicle Internationalization and Multilingual Services” (30.8%) rank as the top three (Table 3). Intentions differ by disciplinary background: management students favor the cross-border e-commerce track (37.5%), economics students the trade-rules track (43.8%), and engineering students the new energy vehicle track (34.8%). In addition, 66.4% of respondents reported having no foundation in a less commonly taught language but a willingness to learn one, and open-ended feedback proposed tracks in languages such as Japanese and German as well as in “language intelligence and technology application”. The curriculum should therefore organize high-intention tracks as elective packages, reserve articulation channels for zero-beginner learners, and remain open to language–technology integration.

Table 3. Enrollment intentions toward the proposed micro-majors (N=253)

Proposed micro-major	Intending	Percentage (%)	Rank
International Economic and Trade Rules and Legal Translation	87	34.4	1
Cross-Border E-Commerce and Regional Language Services	82	32.4	2
New Energy Vehicle Internationalization and Multilingual Services	78	30.8	3
International Communication and Brand Promotion	75	29.6	4
International Communication and Intercultural Communication	71	28.1	5
Language Services for International Cooperation	68	26.9	6

Proposed micro-major	Intending	Percentage (%)	Rank
Area Studies and Global Competence	65	25.7	7
Sister-City Exchange and Urban Culture Communication	62	24.5	8
International Audiovisual Translation	58	22.9	9
Mutual Learning among Civilizations and International Education Cooperation	55	21.7	10

3.5. From demand to competence: graduation requirements

The survey also shows that 61.7% of respondents “have only heard of the concept” of a micro-major, so an awareness barrier objectively exists. Synthesizing the demand profile with enterprises’ requirements for “foreign language + business” talent, this study condenses the graduation requirements into four core competences: language application (communication, translation, and correspondence in international business scenarios); business practice (participating in international trade, cross-border e-commerce, and digital marketing processes); intercultural practice (solving problems in authentic tasks such as brand internationalization and market development); and digital-tool competence (using AI translation tools, business data analysis, and digital marketing platforms). These competences form the “target” of the reverse design, to which every course and teaching activity must make an assessable contribution.

4. Constructing the curriculum system

4.1. Overall architecture

Following the OBE principle of reverse design, the curriculum integrates four modules—language proficiency, business literacy, practical skills, and digital literacy—into a “four-in-one” structure organized across three progressive levels: general foundation, professional core, and practical extension. The general foundation level serves all enrolled students and connects language with business fundamentals; the professional core level is organized into elective track packages for differentiated training; and the practical extension level delivers integrated competence outcomes through authentic projects and workplace placements. The three levels are articulated rather than parallel: each presupposes the outcomes of the previous one, and competence indicators are decomposed level by level. The total load is recommended at 12–16 credits over one academic year (7–12 months), echoing students’ mainstream preference for program length.

4.2. Four competence modules

The language proficiency module strengthens core English skills and integrates intercultural and international communication competence, with zero-beginner electives in Japanese and German responding to students’ interest in additional languages; it breaks away from general-purpose English by taking the international business register as its content thread. The business literacy module covers international trade practice, cross-border e-commerce operation, digital marketing strategy, business etiquette, and international economic and trade rules, co-developed by language teachers, business-school teachers, and enterprise mentors; it follows the principle of “sufficient and useful”, focusing on practical knowledge frequently used in international positions, and is delivered bilingually or in English wherever feasible so that business content doubles as language-learning material.

The practical skills module targets authentic tasks such as brand internationalization, business

negotiation, and international market development in project-based course form, serving as the terminal module for integrated competence output. The digital literacy module incorporates AI translation tools, business data analysis, and digital marketing platforms, preparing students for the intelligent transformation of the language-service industry. The four modules interlock through shared project tasks, so that language learning and business learning achieve substantive integration in the course of solving authentic problems (Table 4).

Table 4. Curriculum scheme of the “foreign language + business” micro-major

Level	Module	Representative courses	Credits/nature
General foundation	Language proficiency	Comprehensive Business English; Business English Listening and Speaking; Intercultural Communication	4 / required
General foundation	Business literacy	Introduction to International Trade Practice; Introduction to International Business	2 / required
Professional core	Business literacy	Cross-Border E-Commerce Operation; Digital Marketing Strategy; International Economic and Trade Rules and Legal Translation (taken within an elective track)	4 / restricted elective
Professional core	Digital literacy	Application of AI Translation Tools; Foundations of Business Data Analysis	2 / restricted elective
Practical extension	Practical skills	Brand Internationalization Project Practicum; Cross-Border E-Commerce Operation Practice; Enterprise Placement	4 / required

4.3. Elective tracks and modular combination

To balance scaled construction with personalized learning, the professional core level is organized into elective track packages according to the high-intention directions identified in the survey. The first phase offers three packages—“Cross-Border E-Commerce and Regional Language Services”, “International Economic and Trade Rules and Legal Translation”, and “New Energy Vehicle Internationalization and Multilingual Services”—corresponding respectively to e-commerce enterprises, foreign-related legal and compliance positions, and the overseas divisions of local automakers; other tracks are held in reserve and offered on a rolling basis. Each package consists of two to three articulated courses, from which students choose after completing the general foundation level; modules are relatively independent yet interconnected, allowing personalized combination, and the differentiated track preferences across disciplinary categories (see Section 3.4) provide the demand basis for such streamed training.

5. Teaching Implementation in Authentic Scenarios

5.1. Project-based teaching: bringing real enterprise projects into class

Responding to the 56.5% preference for project-based learning, the practical extension level adopts project-based teaching throughout. A project repository co-built with language-service and cross-border e-commerce enterprises transforms authentic tasks—designing international brand promotion plans, operating cross-border online stores, and reviewing foreign-trade contracts—into course projects, which student teams complete under the joint guidance of university teachers and enterprise mentors; deliverables are evaluated directly by the enterprises. Because each project mobilizes language proficiency, business literacy, and digital tools simultaneously, it acts as a natural adhesive for the four modules.

5.2. Scenario-based practice: co-built training platforms

Responding to the strong preference for enterprise-based training (68.0%), the curriculum makes the enterprise placement a required component: students undertake workplace placements in cross-border e-commerce companies and foreign-affairs organizations through a co-built industry-education training base, while on-campus facilities combine virtual simulation with authentic scenarios to simulate cross-border negotiation and overseas marketing. Placements operate under a dual-supervisor system, with performance jointly assessed by the university and the enterprise; assessment criteria are negotiated in advance and cover task completion, professional conduct, and communication quality.

5.3. Blended teaching and flexible scheduling

Implementation is anchored in offline theory plus case-based teaching (echoing the 62.5% preference), supplemented by live online sessions and self-directed study of digital resources. Classes are scheduled mainly on weekends and evenings during semesters, with short intensive modules in vacations, accommodating both the 7–12-month and 3–6-month preferences, while module retakes and cross-term enrollment remain available to students who need flexible pacing.

5.4. Credentialing and credit recognition

Sustainable development of the micro-major depends on standardized credentialing. Drawing on the international experience of stackable and transferable micro-credentials, each module specifies explicit learning outcomes and assessment standards; students who complete the required credits receive a completion certificate stating the modules taken and the competences targeted, strengthening its signaling function in the job market. Meanwhile, the mutual recognition of micro-major credits and major elective credits should be promoted, and enterprise training outcomes and discipline-competition awards may be recognized toward module exemption, creating an articulated accumulation pathway linking the micro-major, the major, and further learning.

6. Challenges and countermeasures

Four implementation challenges deserve attention. First, disciplinary barriers and faculty constraints: language teachers generally lack hands-on business experience, while business courses are difficult to deliver in a foreign language. The countermeasure is a tripartite teaching team of university teachers, enterprise mentors, and industry experts, with course development counted in both parties' appraisal and incentive systems. Second, time conflicts with the major: the curriculum should remain modular and short-cycle, with the total credits within what major studies can absorb. Third, insufficient student awareness: information sessions, social-media outreach, and showcases of outstanding learners are needed to convert awareness into enrollment. Fourth, absent quality assurance: completion must not substitute for evaluation; a process-monitoring mechanism and a pluralistic evaluation system combining student, teacher, and enterprise evaluation should feed results back into curricular optimization, a topic for the team's follow-up research. Finally, sustainable operation requires stable incentive and cost-sharing arrangements between the university and partner enterprises, so that cooperation rests on institutional commitment rather than personal ties.

7. Conclusion

Using OBE to connect the reverse-design chain of “demand–competence–curriculum”, this study has constructed a four-in-one, three-level curriculum system for an interdisciplinary “foreign language + business” micro-major on the basis of 253 questionnaires, and has proposed project-based, scenario-based, and blended implementation arrangements. The central conclusion is that such a curriculum cannot be a simple juxtaposition of language and business courses; only by taking authentic demand as the origin, competence outcomes as the target, and modular combination plus authentic projects as the vehicle can substantive integration occur. For business universities, a foreign-language micro-major is not merely a self-rescue measure for the language program but a lever for institution-wide curricular reform and deeper industry-education integration. The study is limited by its sample of mainly junior students at one university, and the curriculum’s effectiveness awaits verification through pilot implementation, which a follow-up action-research evaluation will address.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding

2026 project of the National Business Education Research Program (15th Five-Year Plan): “Foreign-Language Micro-Major Construction at Business Universities under the ‘Double Thousand’ Initiative” (Project No.: SKJYKT-2605219)

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