

Three-Stage Restructuring of Law Courses for Competency Supply-Demand Alignment

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Abstract: Currently, China's legal education faces the severe challenge of students' difficulty in finding employment, with the core issue lying in the structural imbalance between talent supply and professional demand. This imbalance primarily stems from the disconnect between knowledge transmission and the development of professional competencies within the traditional legal curriculum system, leading to a supply-side failure. To effectively address this dilemma, the study proposes establishing a competency-based teaching reform approach and applies the competency supply-demand matching theory to conduct an in-depth analysis of the shortcomings in traditional curricula across three dimensions: objectives, content, and methods. Building on this, the study develops a three-stage restructuring model aimed at systematically enhancing the core competitiveness of legal graduates to meet the demands of the new era for legal professionals.

Key words: Legal curriculum reform; Employment red card; Competency supply-demand matching; Three-stage restructuring; Competency-based teaching

I. Introduction: Educational Attribution of the Red Card Crisis

The red card crisis in China's legal education stems from the structural disconnect between its traditional talent cultivation model and the demands for legal professionals in the digital economy era. This disconnect manifests as a profound contradiction between the educational supply side and vocational demand side: curriculum objectives fail to keep pace with industrial upgrades, teaching content is detached from judicial and practical contexts, and evaluation mechanisms deviate from the requirements of actual competencies—all contributing to a systemic crisis of supply-side failure in legal education (Qiao, 2025). To address this challenge, drawing on the theory of capability supply-demand matching, legal education urgently requires supply-side structural reform. This necessitates the establishment of a dynamic closed-loop system: market capability demand → curriculum goal setting → teaching implementation → evaluation feedback (Mitra & Gupta, 2019). This reform direction aligns closely with the strategy of innovating talent cultivation models and enhancing quality, as emphasized in the current Double First-Class initiative in higher education (Li, 2025). Especially in the context of the digital economy, the cultivation of legal professionals should break down traditional disciplinary barriers and strengthen the development of interdisciplinary legal talents to meet society's urgent demand for such professionals (Nath et al., 2025). This study aims to establish a three-stage restructuring framework centered on the occupational competency atlas, facilitating the strategic transformation

of legal education from a traditional professional qualification training institution to a hub for legal innovation.

II. Analysis of the Dilemma – The Three-Dimensional Competency Gap

2.1 Target Layer Fault: Structural Mismatch Between Supply and Demand

The current China legal education system faces the challenge of structural mismatch between supply and demand in the context of the digital economy, which is primarily manifested in two dimensions: knowledge provision and competency development. The underlying cause of this mismatch lies in the institutional inertia in the setting of legal education objectives, which fails to effectively address the demands of digital transformation for emerging competencies. Systematic adjustments through top-level design are urgently needed.

Regarding the knowledge supply dimension, first, the proportion of traditional core courses is excessively high (according to 2024 survey data from the Legal Education Guidance Committee, such courses account for 78%). While this ensures students acquire fundamental legal knowledge, its disproportionately high share limits the integration of emerging knowledge in the rapidly evolving digital economy era. Second, coverage of cutting-edge digital economy courses remains insufficient. In stark contrast to the high proportion of traditional courses, only 21.3% of courses—such as data compliance and algorithm governance—are dedicated to frontier topics in the digital economy. This indicates that students gain severely inadequate exposure to legal knowledge closely related to the digital economy during their studies, making it difficult for them to address complex legal challenges posed by emerging technologies like Internet 3.0.

The rigidity of this curriculum system creates a pronounced spatiotemporal gap between the rapid update cycle of legal knowledge and the swift evolution of legal technology. When graduates enter the labor market, they often face challenges such as outdated knowledge reserves and insufficient adaptability, making it difficult for them to meet the new demands of the digital economy for specialized legal professionals. In the context of digital transformation, enterprises' demand for talents with emerging skills—such as digital literacy, data analysis capabilities, and information security knowledge—is growing steadily. However, higher education institutions face challenges in addressing these evolving needs, potentially leading to a disconnect between educational offerings and industry requirements (Rikala et al., 2024). This further exacerbates the structural contradictions in talent cultivation for higher education within the context of the digital economy (Qiao, 2025).

Regarding the dimension of competency provision, practical teaching resources are excessively focused on cultivating litigation skills, accounting for as high as 73.4%. Although litigation skills are an indispensable component of legal education, this overemphasis results in

insufficient development of competencies in other critical legal service domains. Currently, industry demand for non-litigation service professionals (such as compliance, risk management, and negotiation specialists) continues to rise, while in the international legal field, there is a shortage of approximately 124,000 professional lawyers. This highlights a significant gap in legal education's capacity to cultivate talent that meets the diverse needs of the legal service market. In the context of the digital economy, the talent cultivation system must be optimized to adapt to evolving societal demands (He et al., 2025).

The root cause of this structural mismatch lies in the institutional inertia inherent in the design of legal education objectives. For decades, legal education has relied on a static framework, equating the breadth of departmental legal knowledge with the alignment of competencies to dynamic market demands. This approach fails to adequately address the emerging capabilities required by digital transformation, such as cross-border digital governance and algorithmic regulation.

2.2 The Conflict Between Disciplinary Barriers and Interdisciplinary Integration

Current legal education faces a discontinuity in curriculum content caused by disciplinary barriers and conflicts arising from interdisciplinary integration, posing a significant challenge to cultivating interdisciplinary legal professionals capable of meeting the demands of emerging legal domains. Traditional legal courses have long been constrained by disciplinary centrism, resulting in interdisciplinary courses—such as those integrating law with technology or law with finance—being marginalized within the curriculum framework (Nath et al., 2025). This limitation results in a lack of practical feedback mechanisms in legal education, delayed updates to textbook content, and particularly inadequate case selections that fail to keep pace with technological advancements, making it difficult to effectively address the new demands placed on legal professionals in the digital economy era (Li, 2025).

The essence of disciplinary fragmentation lies in the conflict between the knowledge production system and the increasingly complex reality (Rikala et al., 2024). Taking the integration of law and artificial intelligence as an example, significant differences exist between the two fields in terms of terminological systems, methodologies, and value objectives, which severely hinder the effective integration and application of interdisciplinary knowledge. Furthermore, the fragmented disciplinary resources within higher education institutions and the gaps in faculty competence regarding interdisciplinary knowledge further exacerbate the challenges in implementing interdisciplinary curricula (Li, 2025). Current textbooks commonly suffer from both outdated frameworks and irrelevant case studies, directly resulting in a severe

shortage of interdisciplinary legal professionals that fails to meet society's urgent demand for individuals with both legal expertise and proficiency in emerging technologies.

2.3 Methodological Discontinuity: The Gap Between Theoretical Transmission and Competency Development

The essence of the methodological layer fault lies in the divergence between the teaching implementation mechanism and the principles governing capability development. Current legal case teaching excessively relies on post-facto analysis of adjudicated cases, neglecting the simulation and experiential engagement with real-time commercial dispute resolution processes. This teaching approach hinders students' ability to conduct legal reasoning and decision-making in dynamic, complex real-world scenarios, leading to a decline in their legal reasoning skills and a lack of cognitive interaction through physical practice. Experimental data indicate that traditional case teaching significantly reduces prefrontal cortex activation in students compared to practical simulation (Nath et al., 2025), demonstrating that passive learning modes result in low cognitive engagement and impede the development of deep understanding and application capabilities.

Technological disconnection constitutes another critical factor exacerbating the methodological gaps in legal education. This is manifested specifically in the absence of legal technology tools during instruction and the lack of stress tests simulating real-world scenarios in mock trials. With the rapid advancement of the digital economy, the application of legal technology tools—such as AI-assisted adjudication systems and electronic evidence analysis platforms—has become increasingly prevalent in legal practice. However, current legal education has failed to integrate these tools into curricula promptly, resulting in students' insufficient understanding and operational proficiency with intelligent judicial technologies. Furthermore, traditional mock trials often fail to replicate the high degree of uncertainty and psychological stress inherent in real litigation contexts, leaving students lacking the necessary psychological resilience and adaptability when confronting intelligent judicial systems and complex digital legal environments in the future (Nath et al., 2025).

The three-dimensional competency gap in legal education essentially reflects a cross-sectional manifestation of a shared systemic issue: inaccurate goal-setting (what to teach) leads to an imbalance in content provision (what to learn), ultimately resulting in ineffective methodological transformation (how to learn). At its core, this represents a systemic obstruction in the educational mechanism's transition from knowledge delivery to competency cultivation. At the goal level, institutional inertia confines traditional core courses within theoretical frameworks while cutting-edge courses like data compliance receive insufficient coverage, creating a generational disconnect between talent development and digital economy demands. At the content

level, path dependence exacerbates disciplinary silos, with textbooks limited to conceptual analysis and lacking methodologies for deriving practical rules from real-world scenarios like Internet 3.0 intellectual property disputes, thereby undermining the competencies required for interdisciplinary professionals. At the methodological level, embodied cognition fractures case-based teaching, while dual disengagement from legal technology tools leaves students functionally impaired in digital legal contexts. Only by reconstructing these three dimensions—goal realignment, content decontextualization, and methodological embodiment—can we resolve the institutional mismatch between competency supply and demand underlying this systemic flaw.

III. Path to Breakthrough – The Three-Stage Reconstruction Model

The integration of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) principles with Tyler's Curriculum Theory represents a profound dual shift in educational philosophy, providing a clear pathway for redefining educational values (Zhang et al., 2020). This convergence emphasizes transitioning from the traditional teacher-centered and knowledge transmission approach to a student-centered and outcomes-oriented model, while shifting from single-discipline knowledge coverage to the development of multidimensional professional competencies. The combination of OBE and Tyler's Curriculum Theory achieves a fundamental transformation in educational philosophy—from an input-oriented to an outcomes-oriented approach. Traditional education focuses primarily on content delivery, class hour allocation, and teacher instruction, whereas OBE centers its attention on the specific abilities and achievements students demonstrate upon completing their learning. As a classic theory of curriculum design, Tyler's Curriculum Theory fundamentally emphasizes goal orientation, selection of learning experiences, organization of learning activities, and evaluation of learning outcomes. When combined, the goal-setting of the Tyler Principle—particularly the establishment of clear, measurable learning outcomes—provides a robust framework for outcome-based education, transforming instruction from mere knowledge accumulation to a focus on tangible enhancement of student competencies, such as project outcomes or professional competencies (Mitra & Gupta, 2019).

This integration facilitates the realignment of educational value frameworks from a subject knowledge-centered approach to one focused on professional competencies and societal needs. In the context of the digital economy, societal demands for talent have become increasingly diverse and specialized, requiring higher education to cultivate professionals capable of actively addressing external challenges (Yuan & Wang, 2021). Traditional curriculum systems often overemphasize the completeness of theoretical knowledge while neglecting alignment with real-world professional contexts. Outcome-based education mandates that curriculum design first defines the professional competencies and qualities learners should possess upon graduation, then

inversely determines course content and teaching methodologies accordingly. The experiential organizational principles of Tyler's Theory—such as vertical integration and horizontal articulation—transform course content from isolated disciplinary knowledge points into an integrated, coherent curriculum chain and cross-domain modules centered around specific professional competency requirements (Jing, 2012). This design enables students to effectively internalize the knowledge, skills, and competencies they acquire, ultimately transforming them into practical operational abilities in future workplaces, thereby achieving a shift from covering disciplinary knowledge to developing professional competencies (Mitra & Gupta, 2019). The essence of this integration lies in repositioning the educational value framework: transitioning from subject knowledge coverage to professional competency development, and shifting the focus from teacher-centered to student-centered approaches.

3.1 First Level: Reconstruction of the Basic Capability Layer

3.1.1 Revising Course Objectives (Construction of Professional Competency Map)

To meet the demands of the new era for cultivating legal professionals, traditional legal education must shift from a knowledge-modular approach to a training model centered on legal professional competencies (Undefined et al., 2020). Guided by the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) philosophy, this model reverse-engineers the core competency framework for legal practice to establish a comprehensive professional competency map that fully addresses the requirements of grassroots legal positions (Hort & Hogan, 1988). This framework integrates practical skills such as legal search, contract review, and evidence visualization into a coherent competency chain—identification of dispute points → legal argumentation → document generation—thereby transcending the limitations of traditional disciplinary boundaries (Arora, 2025).

The Legal Professional Competency Map adopts a three-dimensional collaborative framework (see Table 1), systematically integrating knowledge, thinking, and practical skills:

1. Legal Knowledge Dimension: This dimension encompasses core competency elements such as legal search, statutory interpretation, and case analysis (Dan et al., 2023). Through compulsory courses like Legal Document Retrieval, it aims to establish a standardized knowledge application system and enhance students' ability to accurately identify and apply legal provisions.

2. Legal Thinking Dimension: This dimension focuses on identifying key issues in disputes, constructing argumentative logic, and designing defense strategies. For example, the Simulated Court Practice program under the Central South University of Economics and Law employs a unilateral evidence construction experiment, providing only unilateral evidence in an adversarial setting to systematically enhance students' foundational skills in identifying disputed issues and

constructing legal argument frameworks (Minghui, 2009). Empirical studies indicate that this approach improves the completeness of legal arguments in simulated commercial arbitration cases by 52%.

3. Legal Practice Dimension: This dimension encompasses key competencies such as contract drafting and review, evidence visualization, and litigation document generation (Rasti et al., 2024). The Lawyer Practical Skills course closely integrates theoretical knowledge with judicial practice scenarios, enabling the transformation of theoretical knowledge into practical operational capabilities (Babacan & Babacan, 2015).

Table 1 Three-Dimensional Framework of the Legal Professional Competency Map

dimension	Competency Element	Course Vehicle	train objective
legal knowledge	Legal search, interpretation of legal provisions, case analysis	Legal Document Retrieval	Accurate identification and applicable legal basis
legal thinking	Identification of the disputed issues and construction of the argumentative logic	Simulated Courtroom Training	Enhance the completeness of legal arguments and the ability to design strategies
legal practice	Contract drafting, evidence visualization, document generation	Practical Legal Skills	Transforming theoretical concepts into practical applications

This course design incorporates six core practical skills—legal retrieval, contract review, evidence visualization, and others—into the mandatory modules, in response to the Ministry of Education's reform requirements for strengthening practical teaching (Srebrodolsky & Popovich, 2019). This establishes a closed-loop system comprising competency chain—curriculum cluster—empirical validation, driving the transformation of legal education from traditional knowledge transmission to a comprehensive paradigm focused on cultivating professional competencies (Shan, 2013). This competency-oriented approach emphasizes developing students' ability to solve practical problems, holding profound significance for building an efficient legal talent cultivation system that meets societal needs (Khodaev, 2021).

3.1.2 Upgrade of Teaching Methods (Dual-Teacher Collaborative Mechanism)

Enhancing teaching methodologies to support the dual-teacher collaboration mechanism, particularly in legal education, represents a key direction for current educational reform. This approach integrates theoretical instruction with practical skills training, aiming to cultivate legal professionals better aligned with industry demands.

The dual-teacher collaboration mechanism effectively bridges the gap between theory and practice in legal education. In-house faculty play an irreplaceable role in imparting theoretical knowledge and regulatory analysis frameworks (Wang, 2020). For example, the theory of claim rights and the principle of liability attribution constitute the core of legal thinking. Instructors can systematically explain these concepts, their constituent elements, applicable conditions, and their specific applications across various legal relationships, helping students build a solid theoretical

foundation (Undefined & Shumeiko, 2025). This includes conducting in-depth analyses of the legislative intent behind legal provisions, interpretation methods, and controversies among different legal doctrines, thereby providing students with a comprehensive and rigorous framework of legal knowledge.

Meanwhile, guidance from industry experts such as lawyers in practical skills training is crucial. They can integrate legal theory with real-world cases, guiding students through advanced practical exercises like contract negotiation simulations and the application of evidence visualization techniques. For instance, in contract negotiations, lawyers can share authentic negotiation strategies, risk mitigation techniques, and how to apply legal knowledge to address unexpected situations (Nath et al., 2025). In evidence visualization, they teach students how to use modern technology to present complex evidence chains in a clear and intuitive manner, which is vital for court debates and case analysis. This hands-on approach enables students to transform abstract legal concepts into actionable practical skills, enhancing their ability to resolve real-world legal challenges.

The value of dual-teacher collaboration extends beyond resource optimization, establishing an immediate closed-loop system of theoretical instruction – practical feedback – dynamic adjustment: campus faculty enhance teaching content—including case identification methodologies and regulatory change early-warning mechanisms—based on common practical shortcomings identified by industry experts such as lawyers (e.g., gaps in legal research); meanwhile, legal professionals leverage theoretical frameworks to correct training biases (e.g., improving the logical rigor of evidence chain construction), guiding students to transition from passive knowledge acquisition to active solution development. This mechanism redefines the competency foundation of the legal profession, ensuring that talent cultivation precisely meets the demands of the New Liberal Arts initiative for interdisciplinary legal professionals who excel in both ethics and legal expertise while integrating technical proficiency with legal literacy.

3.2 Second Order: Reconstruction of the Composite Capability Layer

To address the shortage of interdisciplinary talents caused by discipline-centric limitations, establishing a dynamic interdisciplinary curriculum system has become particularly crucial. At its core, this system builds upon bridging table technologies while focusing on key competencies such as digital rule of law and global governance. By integrating practical courses—including Data Security Law compliance procedures and RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) dispute resolution mechanisms—it aims to meet corporate demands for talent in ESG (environmental, social, and governance) and international arbitration fields. Additionally, the curriculum emphasizes the development of modular teaching materials, with quarterly updates

(including modules on metaverse property rights and cross-border arbitration clauses) to ensure knowledge remains current and responsive to rapidly evolving legal and technological landscapes (Welgemoed & Lerm, 2024).

3.2.1 Application of Bridge Table Technology

By incorporating bridge table technology, this curriculum system effectively connects knowledge points and skill requirements across different disciplines, breaking down traditional disciplinary barriers and enabling horizontal knowledge integration. This methodological innovation transforms course content from mere knowledge accumulation into an organic, cohesive whole, enhancing students' ability to comprehensively apply multidisciplinary knowledge to solve complex problems. Compared to traditional teaching methods, this integrated approach better cultivates students' practical skills in effective client communication, particularly when handling complex international legal matters (Welgemoed & Lerm, 2024).

3.2.2 Core Competency Anchoring

The framework explicitly focuses on two core competencies— digital rule of law and global governance, directly addressing the pressing societal demand for legal professionals. In the context of the digital economy and globalization, legal practitioners must not only master traditional legal knowledge but also possess the ability to address interdisciplinary issues involving digital technologies and law, as well as participate in international rule-making and dispute resolution. For instance, digital copyright legislation has been integrated into legal education to address current challenges, aligning with the system's emphasis on cultivating digital rule of law capabilities (Nath et al., 2025).

3.2.3 modular textbooks and knowledge iteration mechanism

The design of modular textbooks and their quarterly update mechanism represent a significant breakthrough in textbook content management. Traditional textbooks often lag in updates and struggle to keep pace with legal and practical developments. In contrast, the flexibility of modular textbooks and their frequent knowledge updates (such as the addition of modules on metaverse property rights and cross-border arbitration clauses) ensure that course content remains up-to-date and cutting-edge—a critical advantage in the legal field, where legal provisions and judicial practices are constantly evolving. This design enables both instructors and students to access the latest information promptly, maintaining the freshness of their knowledge.

The design of this curriculum system aims to cultivate students' meta-capability in extracting practical rules, not only aligning with the Ministry of Education's policy orientation of breaking down disciplinary barriers but also matching the competency progression path of the

Three-Staircase Experiment. Through this educational model, students will better meet the current and future demands of the legal services market for interdisciplinary, high-quality professionals, particularly in emerging fields such as digital rule of law and global governance. This approach significantly enhances students' digital competency and promotes improvements in educational quality through systematic reforms and effective strategies (Hirsch & Rubach, 2024).

3.3 Third Level: Reengineering the Practical Competence Layer

The restructuring of practical competencies in legal education is a multidimensional and systematic endeavor. Its core lies in establishing four authenticity teaching scenarios, deepening industry-education integration, and reforming evaluation mechanisms to address the legal profession's growing complexity and digital transformation demands. Currently, the rapid advancement of legal artificial intelligence and legal technology is profoundly transforming the training models for legal professionals, driving the education sector to explore more efficient and practice-oriented teaching methods (Salmerón-Manzano, 2021).

The restructuring of the practical competency dimension in legal education must be driven by two core elements: the creation of four authentic teaching scenarios and the reform of evaluation mechanisms.

3.3.1 Creation of the Four Truths Teaching Scenario

Practical Teaching Empowered by Legal Technology. The Four Truths teaching scenario emphasizes authenticity, process orientation, problem-driven learning, and comprehensive evaluation. Built upon a legal technology laboratory that integrates large AI models (such as DeepSeek), it simulates corporate compliance scenarios and enables the application of real-world tools for contract review and electronic evidence analysis (Zhou et al., 2024). This approach allows students to apply advanced technologies to solve practical legal problems in environments closely resembling real-world working conditions.

3.3.2 Reform of the Evaluation Mechanism

Aligning Dynamic Competency Profiling with Professional Certification. Traditional evaluation systems fail to comprehensively reflect students' practical competencies. Therefore, the reform should prioritize assessing practical skills and overall competence, with a focus on timed legal document drafting and cross-cultural negotiation simulations—these tasks should carry greater weight in evaluations to emphasize the development of hands-on capabilities. Legal document drafting is a fundamental skill for lawyers, while cross-cultural negotiation proficiency is particularly critical in a globalized context. Through trial simulations and product incubation assessments, dynamic competency profiles are generated, fostering embodied learning of digital

legal literacy. This approach shifts the evaluation focus from mere knowledge acquisition to emphasizing the transformation of knowledge into practical skills and students' adaptability in digital environments.

Establish a conversion pathway linking course credits, internship certification, and professional qualifications to meet the requirement of deepening industry-education integration outlined in the Opinions on Strengthening Legal Education in the New Era. This ensures that students' learning outcomes directly align with career development pathways, effectively addressing the imbalance between the supply and demand of legal professionals. The cultivation of such professional competencies constitutes the core of legal education in the new era (Lin et al., 2018).

Conclusion

The three-stage restructuring of legal education is a systematic reform aimed at enhancing the quality of legal talent cultivation. Its core lies in shifting from the traditional discipline-centered educational model to a competency-centered approach, and transforming the theoretical closed loop into an open demand-driven framework to meet the needs of modern national governance and global legal competition. This restructuring represents not only a technical innovation but also a return to the philosophical essence of legal education—shifting from cultivating knowledge containers to shaping legal practitioners, profoundly echoing President Xi Jinping's assertion that the legal discipline is highly practical. The reform of legal education must be situated within the context of modern national governance and global competition for legal discourse power, leveraging digital technologies as an engine to establish an integrated smart education ecosystem that combines virtual and physical dimensions. The three-stage restructuring of legal education is by no means a piecemeal patch but a fundamental overhaul of China's legal talent supply system. It redefines educational priorities through a competency-centered approach, responds to national needs through open collaboration, and embraces global governance transformations amid the digital revolution. This systemic transformation thoroughly embodies President Xi Jinping's observation that without effective legal talent cultivation, comprehensive rule of law cannot be achieved, providing decisive momentum for China's ambitious goal of becoming a leading educational and legal power by 2035.

Author Profile

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