Original Paper

Research on Business English Course Construction in Application-oriented Colleges under the Background of Cross Border E-commerce

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Abstract

With the rapid development of cross border E-commerce, more and more attention is being paid to business English in Chinese students' employment, students are required to not only have good basic language skills, but also considerable professional knowledge and practical ability in business English. This paper explores the development of business English course in application-oriented colleges by reading and analyzing relative online and offline literature and further puts forward ways to improve the teaching from both theoretical and practical perspectives by conducting questionnaires and interviews. Taken Chongqing College of Mobile Communication as an example, this paper analyzes the current situation of business English course in application-oriented colleges, point out the existing problems, and put forward corresponding solutions, so as to improve the teaching efficiency of business English course and give implications to the further development of ESP courses.

Keywords

cross border E-commerce, business English course, implications, ESP

1. Introduction

As a new mode of international trade, cross-border e-commerce enjoys the advantages of flexibility, convenience, few intermediate links and high transaction efficiency. It has shown great potential and become a new engine for stabilizing foreign trade growth and promoting economic development. The development of cross-border e-commerce has given rise to a large number of new types of occupational positions, such as live broadcasting, digital marketing, overseas warehouse management and localized operations. So the demand for cross-border e-commerce talents from these new occupational job groups

has shown explosive growth, and puts forward new requirements on the knowledge structure, skill level and professionalism for students.

Cross-border e-commerce refers to the international commercial activity in which transactions are conducted by means of e-commerce between transacting entities in different border territories. In the process, online ordering, payment, delivery of goods through cross-border logistics, customs clearance and final delivery are done to complete the transaction. Language is one of the basic skills when conducting business activities among different countries, and how to cultivate talents with certain knowledge of business English needed by society has become a heated topic. Besides, the development of cross-border e-commerce has given rise to a large demand for applied business English talents. The demand for talents in the market has put forward higher requirements for the teaching of business English in colleges, which not only requires students to have good basic language skills, but also considerable professional knowledge and practical ability in business English. Teachers' teaching level and ability directly affect the quality of students' learning, and further affect high-quality talents forested by colleges for the society, so it is urgent to improve the teaching level and skills of English teachers.

This paper is to analyze the problems in the construction of Business English course in application-oriented colleges under the background of cross-border e-commerce, and put forward ways to strengthen the teachers' teaching, enhance the cooperation between schools and enterprises, promote the on-campus simulation training, actively participate in on-the-job training, and encourage further study to carry out the regular and continuous knowledge learning, so as to improve business English students' learning and practical ability and give implications to the further development of ESP courses.

2. The Demand for Cross-border E-commerce Talents

In 2019 nine new additions are added to the profession, among which cross-border e-commerce is included. For cross-border e-commerce talents, it is necessary to have expertise in four areas, including international economics and trade, business foreign language skills, e-commerce platform operation skills, and comprehensive vocational skills (He, 2018). Diversified cross-border e-commerce cities have unique advantages, however, there are also some problems, for example, the development of e-commerce industry shows diversification and high elimination rate, which requires talents to have sufficient experience and innovation ability. Survey found that most e-commerce enterprises attach importance to the staff's English level, especially writing ability and oral communication, in addition, e-commerce enterprises need employees to grasp the consumption habits and cultural customs of foreign customers, own some cross-cultural communication skills, be familiar with the international trade business, international logistics operations, cross-border e-commerce platforms and customer service business. These demands have provided a direction for colleges to cultivate talents with both theoretical and practical abilities. Application-orientated colleges aim to cultivate talents with profound knowledge and comprehensive skills to serve the needs of local economic and social development, so they focus on practice and application, and actively advocate the teaching concept of learning by applying.

123

3. Business English Course Construction in Application-oriented Colleges

With the development of global information and cultural diversification, language service has become a productive practice in the process of national modernization, and play an important role in national economic, political and cultural construction (Wang, 2022). Application has been included as an important type in the establishment of colleges, and newly built ordinary colleges has been encouraged to transform into the application-oriented type and actively focus on the cultivation of applied talents needed by society. The transformation and development of colleges need dual-quality English teachers who have both theoretical knowledge and practical skills so as to further cultivate talents with practical business English knowledge.

Business English course is is guided by the theory of applied linguistics, centred on business knowledge and involves many disciplines such as economics, management, cross-culture communication and so on (Wang, 2020). As an important branch of ESP, Business English has developed into a relatively independent discipline in developed countries and achievements have been made in terms of pedagogy, teaching materials and teachers. In the late 1980s, Business English was developed into an independent discipline in China. At present, with the improvement of economic strength, business English is playing an increasingly important role in international business activities, and the teaching and research of business English is also receiving more and more attention. It is estimated that more than eight hundred colleges and universities have offered business English majors or courses, cultivating a large number of talents for international business and trade.

With the transformation of economic structure, the society needs more and more talents who know a certain amount of business English. However, according to the survey, there are still some obstacles in the process of cultivating business English talents, for example, from the teachers' perspective, there are problems such as the lack of on-the-job experience, the lack of comprehensive understanding of the related fields, teaching language itself, neglecting business practice and so on; from students' perspective, some students have little interest in learning, no strong motivation, insufficient input and little output, lack of initiative. Besides, many students can only understand some business English terminology after completing the course, but can not put what they have learned into practice, which is far from becoming the excellent composite business talents needed by society.

4. Problems in the Construction of Business English Course

Chongqing College of Mobile Communication is an application-oriented university that provides students with general English teaching in the first and second year to learn the basics of English language, and ESP courses related to their majors in the third and fourth year to apply professional English knowledge in real work. ESP courses cultivate students' ability to use English to communicate in a certain working environment. It focuses on learners' needs, emphasizes the authenticity of teaching content and learning tasks, highlights the integration of teaching and doing, and closely focuses on students' vocational needs.

Business English course emphasizes the combination of language and business, focusing on the enhancement of English language skills and practical business knowledge, aiming to cultivate talents who are capable of competent business management, marketing, communication and planning in the industry. On the one hand, business English teaching should improve students' language knowledge. On the other hand, it is supposed to emphasize the practicality of learning, help students learn by doing, and improve students' international business communication and cross-cultural communication skills. All these put forward higher requirements for business English teachers, through questionnaires and in-depth interviews with students and teachers, it is found that there are still some problems in business English course:

4.1 Lack of Business English Teaching Experience

Many business English teachers are traditional language teachers without business knowledge, not to mention the experience of working in enterprises. Although they have good knowledge of English language skills, they lack practical training in business English, and most of them learn business-related knowledge while teaching, so it is difficult for them to understand specific problems related to business, and sometimes they can only teach in a rigid way. Besides, due to teachers' lack of practical experience in business English, it is very difficult for teachers to combine language skills with business activities, instead, they favor one or the other or only the learning of the surface, resulting in the fact that students only learn something superficial and can not connect what they have learned in class with real work practice in the end.

What's more, some teachers neglect to explain the business cultural background and only explain the English language itself, which leads to the result that students feel unfamiliar with the business environment when they are employed, and need more time to adapt to work. Moreover, the traditional business English teaching environment is limited to the textbook and the teacher's explanation in the classroom, and the students' ability to apply their knowledge into actual business work is relatively poor.

4.2 Insufficient School-enterprise Cooperation

School-enterprise cooperation is a good way to apply theory into practice. Teachers can learn deeply and use the experience of on-the-job training while teaching, so as to help students understand the needs of employers and be clear about their own study goals and methods. However, in real situation, the teachers do not want to participate in the job training because of the low salary, heavy teaching workload and high pressure. Besides, most enterprises do not believe in the practical ability of teachers and are not willing to let teachers really participate in work, so that the teachers are not really integrated into the operation of the enterprises and just go through the motions superficially.

In addition, from the students' perspective, there are few internship opportunities for students to apply their business English knowledge into real work, which leads to the fact that students can not participate in school-enterprise cooperation and use their business English, and it is difficult for them to appreciate the knowledge and attain achievement of learning. So it is essential for teachers to carry out market-oriented or problem-solving based practical training teaching models, so as to guide and encourage

125

students to engage in skill competitions and internships and cultivate composite talents to meet market demands.

4.3 Lack of Motivation

As a practical course, Business English course requires teachers to have not only language skills but also practical experience in business, which in turn makes teachers stressed. On the one hand, teachers need to actively prepare for the lessons, master the knowledge of Business English in the textbook and teach students in an appropriate way. On the other hand, they need to participate in the professional training in summer holiday, winter holiday or during the weekends, so as to understand and appreciate the actual use of business English knowledge. Compared with other teachers, business English teachers need to spend more time, energy and money constantly participating in different training to improve themselves. But at present, most schools do not have encouragement for business English teachers materially or spiritually, which leads to the consequence that some teachers are reluctant to teach business English courses.

For the students, as the course is arranged in the third or fourth year when they have to prepare for job-hunting or post graduate study, survey shows that students just take business English as a course to get credit and help them to graduate. As a consequence, a large number of students haven't realized the practical importance of business English, and they have no incentive to learn actively. Besides, it is found that the traditional teacher-centred teaching mode adopted in business English course focus on English knowledge instead of business practice, and can not effectively stimulate students' independent learning, innovation and communication ability for most students just passively accept knowledge without learning motivation.

4.4 Students' Low Learning Engagement in Digital Teaching Resources

Learning engagement refers to the extent to which students are actively involved in learning activities (Heflin, Shewmaker, & Nguyen, 2017) and can reflect students' initiative, motivation and effort and has a direct impact on their learning outcomes (Chi & Wylie, 2014). Fredricks et al. (2004) proposed that learning engagement consists of behavioral, cognitive and affective engagement. Behavioral engagement is manifested in the learners' participation, persistence and effort in a task; cognitive engagement is related to the learners' cognitive and cognitive strategies, involving deep processing, self-monitoring and self-regulation strategies; and affective engagement refers to the individual's affective response during the learning process, which is the interest, recognition, sense of value and sense of belonging and so on. Digital teaching resources refer to the digital information that can provide services for education and teaching, which include slides, projections, audio, video, digital teaching materials, electronic lesson plans, Internet teaching resources such as MOOC and micro-classes. The appropriate use of these teaching resources is an effective way to further extend the depth and breadth of teaching and learning.

 With the continuous development of information technology in education, paper-based teaching materials can no longer meet the requirements of teaching, and digital teaching resources are constantly developing. The appropriate use of these teaching resources is an effective way to further expand the

depth and breadth of teaching. However, research has found that most teachers and students fail to make good use of digital resources, the problems of "resource-rich" digital teaching resources and lack of learner engagement need to be solved urgently.

5. Strategies for the Construction of Better Business English Courses

In order to enhance teaching efficiency and cultivate better business English talents, it is necessary to take some measures.

5.1 Encourage Multi-disciplinary Research

Teachers are the organizers and guides in the teaching process, and only when the quality of teachers is improved can they further promote teaching, so as to better serve thousands of students and achieve the goal of cultivating talents needed by the country.

In terms of teaching, it is necessary to strengthen the dual-quality teacher team construction, build a teaching community, and implement the policy in which experienced teachers help new teachers so as to pass on teaching experience and promote mutual learning and common progress (Zhang, 2019). In addition, it is advised to organize demonstration or open classes, carry out collective lesson preparation activities and encourage teachers to participate in teaching competitions so as to promote teaching ability and improve teaching efficiency. What's more, teachers are encouraged to participate in professional academic seminars and inter-school exchanges, and write comprehensive report after learning to improve teaching and research level.

Moreover, it is beneficial for business English teachers to take advantage of the school's business courses and try to attain appropriate qualifications and certificates. For example, if one of the school's special courses is e-commerce, business English teachers can choose to listen to this course to expand relative knowledge and try to get the Business English Certificate if possible. In addition, communication and cooperation between business English teachers and teachers of professional courses should be strengthened so that teachers specializing in business and teachers of foreign languages can promote each other and make progress together.

5.2 Promote on-campus Simulation Training

Actively promote school-enterprise cooperation, and carry out the go out and bring in policy. On the one hand, encourage business English teachers to go out to the enterprise and carry out relative project research so as to put the theory into practice and obtain teaching materials and practical experience. Teachers are advised to actively go to the industry to research and truly understand specific requirements of emerging occupations for talents so as to improve the curriculum and teaching content in time, make the major truly correspond to occupations, focus on the cultivation of students' working ability and make students adapt to the new needs of occupational development. On the other hand, bring in some outstanding management personnel who can give lectures to share with business English teachers and students what kind of talents are needed by the society from the perspective of the enterprise, thus helping teachers and students to further develop corresponding capabilities on campus.

127

Unlike engineering majors, it is difficult to arrange relative in-depth internships for business English students, so in the teaching process, teachers are advised to make effective use of classroom practice platform, for example, some website resources, and guide students to conduct international trade operation simulation, which can not only help students understand knowledge better, but also allow them to attain a sense of achievement. In addition, it is advised to make use of school's computer room, conduct systematic teaching design in the simulation, and create a variety of business scenarios so as to help students master language knowledge and business skills flexibly. In the process of guiding students to solve practical business problems, teachers need to improve students' critical thinking and business communication skills so as to effectively improve students' business vocational ability. In addition, the curriculum should emphasize the training of basic professional skills and help students understand the whole process of business operation which include marketing, negotiation, import and export.

5.3 Expand Teaching and Learning Platforms

It is beneficial to strengthen the construction of teaching organizations, improve teachers' teaching and research ability, and create a community of teachers' teaching and learning development. Since lots of colleges have set up business English majors, the establishment of virtual research environment is conducive to strengthen cross-major, cross-school and cross-regional teaching and research exchanges, and it can promote co-construction and sharing.

The rise of Internet+education and the development of MOOC provide various learning resources for business English students. Students should not limit their learning to textbook, but utilize network to actively learn, accumulate materials and apply them to real work so as to make learning rich and practical. In addition, the evaluation mechanism should be improved to on the one hand actively cultivate dual-quality teachers and on the other hand give incentives to outstanding business English students. It is suggested that colleges should formulate a scientific teacher and student development plan, and make use of on-the-job training, domestic and international training and academic exchanges, enterprise practice and other ways to help both teachers and students strengthen practical ability.

5.4 Focus on Students' Needs

In recent years, language service vocational industry has been greatly promoted, but language service capacity is still in its infancy, and there are such phenomena as weak awareness of language service, incomplete language service system, insufficient and unbalanced cultivation and reserve of language talents. It has become imperative to strengthen language services, enhance language service capacity and continuously promote language localization services. Through questionnaires and in-depth interviews, it is found that most students have few opportunities to apply English in workplace internships and hope to improve spoken English related to their major. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate students' and society needs, combine students' interests with employment skills, and choose contents commonly used in employment when teaching. In this way, students will be stimulated to learn more knowledge they need.

General English courses can not fully meet students' employment needs, and ESP courses which have a certain impact on the career development is imperative. Students need to learn English courses related to their majors to improve their listening, speaking and reading skills, and the curriculum of English courses should pay more attention to the practicality of language, not only explain language skills, but also focus on the application of language in real use. It is suggested that in the teaching process, students should be taken as the center, and teachers should often go into the students to understand their needs, make personalized teaching plans, attract students' attention, lead students to apply what they have learned into use, highlight the practicality of the courses, promote the service of language, and make the learning of English in line with society. The student-centered teaching method can promote students' learning, discover the needs of senior students, connect school education with the needs of society, promote learning to use, and help students to find a good job. In this way, students can adapt to the workplace better, which is conducive to the development of society.

5.5 Improve Students' Learning Engagement

Learning engagement refers to the psychological investment and effort made by learners in learning, understanding or mastering knowledge and skills (Newmann, 1992). It is an important indicator to evaluate the learning process, predict academic achievement and influence students' future development. It is found that students in application-oriented colleges, especially the juniors and seniors are often reluctant to study hard in class, how to improve students' learning engagement is an emergent issue.

According to in-depth interviews with students, it is suggested that teachers should choose practical teaching content and create role play activities to arouse students' interest and motivation. Besides, it is essential to create real language learning environment in which students can apply what they learned in class into practice, interact actively with others and attain a sense of achievement in the use of learning. What's more, survey shows that timely assessment and feedback on students' performance contribute to classroom learning enthusiasm and learning efficiency. It is suggested that modern technology like Rain classroom should be used in real class teaching so as to help students concentrate on what they are learning, arouse students interest in class and enhance the connection between teachers and students. Moreover, teachers are supposed to explore a variety of teaching methods, for example task-based teaching method, to facilitate students' independent learning, enhance simulation training of relevant professional knowledge, and improve students' learning engagement.

The overall assessment is advised to divide into final examination score and daily performance grade. Students' daily performance grades are supposed to emphasize students' participation in group activities and extracurricular practice. With students' evaluation as the main focus and teachers' evaluation as the supplement, it highlights the students' independent evaluation ability and ensures all the activities are effectively evaluated with students' self-assessment, student-student mutual evaluation and teachers' evaluation. Besides, the final examination questions of business English are set in close connection with the themes of each unit and to help students to pass English proficiency tests. Moreover, it is suggested

to combine the assessment methods with English competitions and vocational certificates, so as to guide students to obtain certificates and abilities that can help them find a good job in the future.

6. Conclusion

Application-oriented colleges is to cultivate talents needed by the society, so the courses should match the vocational requirements, strengthen the integration of industry and education, and help students understand the needs of industries and enterprises in advance. By analyzing the problems in the construction of Business English course, this paper puts forward five suggestions to improve business English students' learning and practical ability and give implications to the further development of ESP courses. Further studies are advised to focus on empirical researches about how to improve students' learning engagement in more ESP courses.

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