

The Present Situation And Teaching Strategy of University Business English Teaching

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ABSTRACT

The aim of Business English Teaching is to develop professionals adept in fluent English communication, global perspectives, cross-cultural competence, and business interaction expertise. Nevertheless, contemporary Business English instruction encounters challenges such as a focus on textbook-centric teaching, insufficient attention to business culture and etiquette, inadequate cross-cultural training, and a deficiency in traditional cultural preservation. To tackle these issues, this paper suggests: Enhancing cross-cultural awareness; Improving business culture and etiquette education; Merging language fundamentals with practical business operations training; Innovating teaching methodologies; Encouraging students to read Anglo-American literary works; Utilizing "Internet+" technologies to continuously innovate teaching models.

KEYWORDS

Business English; Current situation analysis; Teaching strategies

1 Introduction

Business English teaching in China originated following the founding of the People's Republic and experienced rapid growth after the 1980s. By the end of 2023, over 400 universities nationwide had introduced Business English as a major. With the progression of globalization and the intensification of international trade, there has been a notable shortage of professionals adept in international commerce. Despite the long-standing presence of Business English education in China, the conventional teaching approach has resulted in a disconnect between the knowledge students gain and the skills demanded by their future careers. This misalignment has led to diminished teaching efficacy and a squander of specialized educational resources. This paper examines several prevalent issues within current Business English instruction and suggests corresponding remedies, which are of practical importance for the future of Business English education.

2 The concept of business English teaching

Business English education stands apart from traditional English instruction due to its unique features. It emphasizes practicality and professionalism, combining business knowledge, cross-cultural communication skills, and humanistic literacy through English as a medium. This approach not only fosters professional skills but also serves as a form of cultural engagement. Business English acts as a universal language within specific business contexts, intertwined with specialized knowledge and tailored to particular commercial activities.

From an academic standpoint, Business English has distinct characteristics that set it apart from General English (EGP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It also differs from other linguistic disciplines, such as linguistics, British-American literature, and translation studies, as well as from related business fields like economics and management. Given its multidisciplinary nature, Business English majors must navigate three primary challenges—linguistic differences between Chinese and English, cultural gaps between China and other countries, and the fundamental professional knowledge and skills necessary for business operations—to develop the interdisciplinary competencies crucial for this field.

3 Educational objectives of business English teaching

The newly issued "Guidelines for Undergraduate Teaching in Business English" have charted the course for the development of business language programs in the new era, outlining the talent cultivation objectives for the Business English major. The Business English major aims to cultivate internationally competent professionals with solid English language fundamentals and relevant business knowledge, possessing strong humanistic literacy, China sentiment, and a global vision. These professionals should be familiar with theoretical knowledge in literature, economics, management, and law, master the basic theories and practices of international business, and demonstrate strong cross-cultural competence, business communication skills, and entrepreneurial capabilities. They should be able to adapt to the needs of national and local economic and social development, as well as international exchanges and cooperation, and

proficiently use English in international business, international trade, international accounting, international finance, cross-border e-commerce, and other foreign-related fields.

While emphasizing the importance of solid foreign language proficiency, the "Guidelines" clearly delineate the professional knowledge and skills that Business English students should acquire. The aim is to cultivate high-quality international talents equipped with a global perspective, a grasp of international rules, proficiency in foreign languages, and expertise in cross-border negotiations and communication. Additionally, emphasis should be placed on fostering students' cooperative spirit, innovative thinking, entrepreneurial awareness, disciplinary literacy, professional ethics, business ethics, and social responsibility.

4 Problems existing in current business English teaching

Currently, there are several issues in the teaching of business English, including an overreliance on textbook-based instruction, a weak emphasis on business culture and etiquette education, insufficient cross-cultural training, and a lack of integration and advancement of traditional culture, all of which require resolution.

4.1 Textbook-based teaching

Traditional Business English primarily relies on classroom instruction, focusing on textbook knowledge. There is limited interaction between teachers and students, and students lack practical experience. The learning of professional terms, such as foreign trade documents, import/export documents, and foreign trade letters, is confined to studying templates without engaging in actual document preparation or real-time communication. This results in Business English majors facing unemployment upon graduation. Moreover, there is a problem of "mute English" in China's Business English teaching. Coupled with the influence of the traditional exam-oriented education system, which prioritizes scores, teaching focuses solely on students' written expression abilities while neglecting the cultivation of their practical application skills and the ability to use English for interpersonal communication. Additionally, traditional Business English teaching materials are all written by Chinese authors, lacking the study of original English works.

4.2 Weak awareness of business culture and etiquette education

Business etiquette refers to the behavioral norms for interacting with others in professional settings, guided by social cultural standards and industry conventions through courteous, respectful, and appropriate communication. Proper application of business etiquette can establish a positive corporate image, strengthen business relationships, and enhance personal professional reputation and competitiveness. Due to differences in cultural backgrounds between Eastern and Western societies, business cultures vary significantly across nations. The core focus of Business English education lies in appropriately using English for commercial communication. Language and cultural elements are two crucial components of Business English. Current teaching practices often lack the cultivation of business culture and etiquette, making it challenging for students to overcome cultural barriers in professional interactions. This deficiency may lead to cultural conflicts and ultimately result in failed business engagements.

4.3 The absence of cross-cultural training

Language and culture are inherently interconnected. As a vital component of culture, language shapes human cognitive frameworks and represents humanity's collective creation of material and spiritual wealth. It reflects people's cognitive attitudes toward the objective world.[4] As the economy continues to develop, global connections have become increasingly intertwined. Cultural, economic, and political exchanges facilitated through language have emerged as a trend in social development, one that has been accelerated by digitalization and informatization. Developing cross-cultural communication skills is not only an urgent necessity for the socio-economic development of our time but also an intrinsic aspect of China's cultural dissemination efforts. Universities, as incubators for talent, have college students as the main agents of cross-cultural communication. Yet, traditional Business English teaching models often overlook the cultivation of students' cross-cultural awareness, leading to a lack of sensitivity to cultural differences in actual international trade interactions.

In contemporary university Business English education, there is a significant disparity between students' grasp of linguistic forms and their communicative abilities. This is primarily evidenced by their inability to understand the cultural connotations within language structures, which often results in pragmatic failures. Such failures in cross-cultural communication are deemed unacceptable. Violations of cultural norms carry more weight than mere linguistic mistakes. Therefore, fostering students' cultural awareness of the languages they study has become a critical area of research in foreign language teaching. The incorporation of English cultural elements into language instruction now serves as a key indicator distinguishing between traditional and modern approaches to foreign language education.

4.4 The lack of inheritance and development of traditional culture

Language serves as a representation of culture, and thus, language learning should emphasize the preservation and

advancement of cultural heritage. In current business English education, there is an insufficient focus on traditional culture, resulting in a phenomenon known as "China cultural aphasia." This situation is detrimental to the cultivation of students' cross-cultural awareness and hampers the development of cultural confidence necessary for future national business interactions and negotiations. The "Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)" stipulates that cultural awareness should embody the value orientation of core competencies. It reflects an understanding of both Chinese and foreign cultures, an appreciation for excellent cultures, and encompasses students' cross-cultural cognition, attitudes, and behavioral choices in the new era. Cultural awareness stands as a core competency within the English discipline, necessitating that students improve their capacity to comprehend and dissect cultural elements during their English studies. This involves developing profound cultural insight, adopting a broader cultural perspective, and fostering a sense of cross-cultural international communication. At present, university English textbooks infrequently integrate aspects of China's traditional culture into their content, and such cultural heritage is seldom addressed in the teaching curriculum.

5 Analysis of business English teaching strategies

To address the existing challenges in business English instruction, the following teaching strategies can be implemented: Cultivating cross-cultural awareness; Developing business culture and etiquette; Integrating language fundamentals with practical business training; Innovating teaching methodologies; Encouraging students to read English and American literary works; Leveraging "Internet+" technologies to continuously innovate teaching models.

5.1 Cultivating cross-cultural awareness

Language acts as both a means of communication and a repository of culture. Grasping the cross-cultural disparities within linguistic systems is essential for becoming proficient in foreign languages and for effective cross-cultural dialogue. Proficiency in English intercultural communication necessitates not only an understanding of English grammar and vocabulary but also an awareness of the cultural nuances of English-speaking countries and a command of key communication skills. Traditional Business English teaching focuses on the acquisition of knowledge through comprehension, application, and transfer, often overlooking the development of cultural awareness and reducing opportunities for cultural immersion. An effective Business English education should impart not only linguistic knowledge but also foster cultural sensitivity and self-awareness among students, nurturing their cultural consciousness and literacy. Students must acquire cultural knowledge, develop cultural awareness, and cultivate discernment, identity, and value-driven behaviors. Distinct from general English education, Business English emphasizes practical application within international trade. It goes beyond solid language skills to prioritize the development of multicultural awareness, cross-cultural communication abilities, and proficiency in various business cultures and etiquette. This approach encourages students to conduct fair negotiations, understand cross-cultural perspectives, and embrace cultural integration. By proactively addressing potential conflicts, it helps overcome communication barriers, prevent cultural clashes, and facilitate successful international trade. The teaching of Business English in colleges and universities should not only focus on knowledge of English grammar but also incorporate cross-cultural teaching based on the cultural differences between China and the West. This approach aims to deepen students' understanding of Chinese and Western cultures and improve their cultural literacy, enabling students to flexibly navigate various cross-cultural communication situations.

Firstly, we should incorporate a wealth of cultural elements into our teaching, as cultural diversity is prevalent across various regions and ethnic groups, each with its own distinct heritage. In Business English education, instructors can integrate cultural background materials, real-world case studies, and multimedia resources. Educators should guide students in conducting cultural comparisons at appropriate junctures, encouraging them to adopt an open perspective to understand and embrace the differences between new cultural elements and traditional practices. This method aids students in comprehending and experiencing the linguistic, customary, value-based, and social nuances of different countries and regions, thereby enhancing their intercultural communication awareness. Ultimately, this nurtures students' capacity to fully understand and tackle challenges in cross-cultural communication.

Simultaneously, during the compilation of textbooks, in addition to organizing professional knowledge, emphasis should be placed on the cultivation of students' critical thinking skills, aesthetic appreciation, and cross-cultural communication skills. The textbooks should not only reflect the practicality of language as a tool but also possess the aesthetic value of cultural appreciation. Furthermore, the essence of China's traditional culture should be integrated, as it is rich in content, with various social customs, cultural values, social etiquette, and norms serving as valuable teaching resources for Business English instruction.

A range of themed educational activities can also be organized, such as tea ceremonies, calligraphy, and painting. Chinese culture possesses a unique allure, and many international friends are profoundly impressed by traditional Chinese handicrafts. Some of these traditional crafts have even become official state gifts for international exchanges. By

exploring traditional culture, students can uncover more topics for future international interactions, thereby fostering mutual understanding and cultural exchange.

5.2 Emphasizing the cultivation of business culture and etiquette

When introducing Eastern and Western etiquette, it is essential to go beyond describing specific behaviors and guide students to understand cultural differences in social norms, fostering appreciation for multiculturalism. For instance, Chinese culture values respect for elders through expressions like "the older the ginger, the spicier it gets" and "old age brings vigor," while American culture tends to prioritize youth and often holds biases against older adults, as seen in the saying "you can't teach an old dog new tricks." In business English, some translations may appear literal but carry vastly different meanings, highlighting linguistic and cultural variations. When conducting business with international counterparts, one must adhere to the principle of "adapting to local customs" by employing appropriate communication styles based on cultural norms. For example, Brazilians are typically outgoing and casual, often greeting with a friendly shoulder pat, requiring reciprocal warmth in conversation. In contrast, British culture emphasizes gentlemanly conduct, demanding a composed and reserved demeanor throughout interactions.

To accurately recognize and comprehend the distinct languages and behaviors of other cultures, and to become acquainted with the customary communication styles in business interactions, one can prevent the imposition of Chinese cultural habits into cross-cultural communication and ensure appropriate business communication behaviors. Instructors should emphasize cross-cultural practical training during the teaching of business English, employing various activities and practical methods to cultivate students' awareness of business culture. For instance, a blend of video learning and role-playing can be utilized, where students observe authentic videos of business interactions and negotiations, and then participate in role-playing exercises through group collaboration to recreate these scenarios, establishing a cultural ambiance for international business communication. This approach enables students to experience problem-solving in diverse settings and enhances their awareness of business culture and etiquette through immersive experiences.

5.3 Integrating language fundamentals with business practice training.

Business English professionals must master not only core competencies in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation but also practical foreign trade skills, including marketing strategies, negotiation techniques, contract drafting, and compliance with international business regulations. At the operational level, students' proficiency in Business English serves as a foundational tool that requires both mastery and practical application. Higher education programs should focus on enhancing language proficiency while cultivating real-world business application skills, helping students identify appropriate contexts and methods for utilizing various Business English knowledge.

5.4 Innovative approaches to business english instruction

Traditional business English education predominantly relies on lecture-based methods, leaving students in a passive learning environment with insufficient practical application. The essence of business English instruction lies in emphasizing practicality and professional relevance. In international business interactions, communication transcends mere language exchange—it involves the exchange of cultural awareness, attitudes, and behavioral norms. To address the limitations of conventional teaching approaches, the following innovative methodologies can be implemented:

5.4.1 Project-Based Learning (PBL)

Business English knowledge is seamlessly integrated into project-based components. For example, in practical training courses, the creation of import-export documentation serves as a concrete application. By embedding English proficiency assessments into routine evaluations, students can effectively master business English expressions and operational conventions. This approach enhances workplace application capabilities and significantly improves practical foreign trade competencies.

5.4.2 The Situational teaching method

Emphasizes creating authentic scenarios to simulate cross-cultural communication, enabling students to apply their acquired knowledge in practice. Language learning involves not only the study of fundamentals and rules but also the influence of environmental contexts. Through situational teaching, students are provided with near-realistic language environments that help them clarify the application scenarios of different vocabulary, sentence structures, and grammatical rules. This approach allows them to understand the specific meanings of various expressions within English cultural contexts, addressing the shortcomings of traditional English education that overemphasizes reading and writing while neglecting listening and speaking.

5.4.3 The flipped classroom

It referred to as the inverted classroom, is an innovative teaching model that involves teachers creating or selecting

micro-lecture videos for students to watch and study at home or during breaks. In the classroom, teachers and students collaborate to explore and interact, which facilitates knowledge internalization. In Business English instruction, educators can adopt this approach by providing micro-lecture videos, enabling students to preview and learn key concepts beforehand. The classroom then shifts from knowledge delivery to hands-on application through group discussions and practical tasks such as document preparation and import/export quotation calculations, thereby developing students' practical operational skills.

5.5 Leveraging "internet+" technology to drive continuous innovation in teaching models

The advent of the information age has fostered the emergence of a new "Internet+ " educational ecosystem. The organic integration of internet technology and education has propelled reforms and innovations in traditional teaching methodologies. The widespread adoption and deepening application of internet technologies have provided technical support for the development and innovation of Business English teaching models, making "Internet+ Business English Education" both feasible and inevitable. The "Internet+ " paradigm has dismantled knowledge monopolies, breaking down barriers in closed educational systems.

Artificial intelligence technology endows computers with remarkable cognitive capabilities, allowing them to engage in human-like reasoning and play a significant role in teaching. Integrating AI-powered human-machine dialogue technology into Business English instruction enables the simulation of authentic business communication and negotiation scenarios. This immersive approach allows students to apply their acquired knowledge in realistic contexts while dynamically adjusting their language and behaviors through real-time interaction. Through simulation-based teaching, students gain hands-on experience in practical workflows across international trade, finance, accounting, marketing, and e-commerce. Practical training content aligns with professional qualification requirements, incorporating knowledge and skills from vocational certifications such as CATTI, ACCA, CIMA, and CFA.

6 Conclusion

To continuously enhance the quality of Business English education, we must urgently cultivate professionals who are internationally competent and essential for national socio-economic development and global business expansion. As a business discipline centered on foreign trade, Business English education should not only impart linguistic expertise but also include cultural, customary, and regulatory knowledge of the target countries. Business culture profoundly influences operational efficiency, necessitating the development of interdisciplinary talents with professional language proficiency and cross-cultural communication capabilities to drive the internationalization of global trade activities.

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