

A Study on the Application of Project-Driven Teaching Method in Business English Correspondence Course

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ABSTRACT

Against increasingly frequent global economic and trade activities, business English correspondence is the most fundamental and crucial communication tool in international business interactions. The effectiveness of its instruction directly impacts the quality of talent cultivation in university business English programs, and project-driven teaching methods prove to be a practical learning approach. Based on this, this paper explores how to apply the project-driven teaching method to business English correspondence course. It aims to construct a new teaching model centered on students, driven by authentic tasks, and oriented toward competency enhancement, thereby effectively improving students' comprehensive professional abilities.

KEYWORDS

Project-driven teaching method; Business English correspondence; Foreign trade process; University-enterprise collaboration

1 Introduction

Business English correspondence serves as a common medium for commercial information exchange. Against increasingly frequent trade interactions, its role in maintaining trade relationships and showcasing corporate image has become increasingly prominent. Business English correspondence course occupies a central position within university curricula for business English, international trade, and related disciplines. Teaching effectiveness in these course correlates positively with students' employability in foreign trade positions. Current practices reveal that most instructors focus on analyzing email frameworks and mimicking formal expressions to help students master basic grammar and structural organization. However, this approach often disconnects from actual foreign trade operations, leaving students ill-equipped to respond promptly to correspondence containing substantial business information. Project-driven teaching methodology, a project-centered approach integrating instruction with practical implementation, effectively addresses the shortcomings of traditional teaching that disconnects from real-world business processes. Based on this, this paper explores specific application pathways for project-driven teaching in this course, aiming to link English instruction with practical business operations closely. This approach seeks to cultivate more application-oriented talents for industry development and contribute to the sector's advancement.

2 Project-driven teaching method and theoretical overview of business English correspondence course

2.1 Core essence of project-driven teaching method

Project-driven teaching is an instructional approach that structures the learning process around concrete, complete "projects." It drives students to actively learn, explore, and practice by addressing the practical demands of completing these projects. When students must research materials, study theories, experiment with methods, and overcome challenges to accomplish a real and meaningful task, they gain the most profound and enduring understanding. Simultaneously, this method emphasizes the importance of "collaboration". In most professional settings, a lone individual can accomplish virtually no significant task. Thus, this approach requires students to work in teams to jointly discuss project plans, divide tasks, and ultimately complete and integrate their work into a final report. Through collaboration, students learn to leverage their strengths and develop the ability to listen to teammates' perspectives, compromise, and strive toward shared goals. Furthermore, the project-driven teaching method emphasizes the integrity and comprehensiveness of the learning process ^[1]. In the context of foreign trade correspondence, students must first conduct market research to understand the industry landscape of the target country; they need to learn marketing knowledge to identify product selling points; and they must apply cross-cultural communication principles to adjust the tone and content of their letters. This process organically integrates language learning, business knowledge, market insight, and communication skills.

2.2 The professional nature and instructional objectives of business English correspondence course

The content taught in business English correspondence course aligns with corporate needs, aiming to meet the operational requirements of sectors such as foreign trade, cross-border e-commerce, and international logistics. A letter or correspondence serves a clear and specific commercial purpose in the real business world. It comes in various forms, including "development letters", "inquiry letters", and "counter-offer letters", each with distinct functional objectives and

structural requirements that must adhere to corresponding conventions. Students learning to compose these communications are learning how to execute business tasks through written language effectively. Every sentence pattern and term connects to tangible commercial interests and professional responsibilities. Furthermore, as a bridge for cross-cultural business communication, correspondence writing requires understanding and respecting different countries' business etiquette, communication styles, and value systems^[2]. In teaching, instructors must cultivate students' audience awareness, teaching them to adjust the tone, wording, and content organization of correspondence based on the characteristics of the recipient. The primary pedagogical goal is to enable students to learn and practice in scenarios that resemble real-world work environments. Teaching should extensively utilize authentic corporate case studies, complete historical email chains, and simulated business scenarios as instructional materials. This allows students to intuitively grasp the professional standards of exemplary correspondence while learning from problematic examples. Given the rapidly changing business landscape, the curriculum must also help students develop a mental framework for quickly analyzing the core intent of an incoming letter. They should learn to select appropriate communication strategies based on their current negotiating position and the relationship between parties. Additionally, they must master effective communication techniques to resolve misunderstandings and disputes, thereby defusing crises.

3 Project-driven instructional design for business English correspondence course

3.1 Project themes and task breakdown based on the full foreign trade process

When designing the instructional framework for business English correspondence course, the entire workflow of a foreign trade representative should be simulated—from client acquisition to order fulfillment and post-order follow-up. This enables students to grasp the role and function of each correspondence within the broader trade process. Working in groups, students must utilize online resources to identify overseas buyers and retailers interested in outdoor furniture. They should research these potential clients' company backgrounds, core business scopes, existing product lines, and purchasing habits to cultivate market awareness and information filtering skills. Subsequently, students must apply their correspondence knowledge to craft opening lines that capture the recipient's attention, skillfully highlight product advantages, and express cooperation intent. Instructors should require students to draft the body of the letter and create an eye-catching subject line. Other groups acting as clients will then provide simulated responses based on the letter quality^[3]. When "clients" send specific product inquiries, students must accurately extract requirements regarding product specifications, quantities, packaging, target prices, etc., from the client's correspondence. They then draft a detailed offer letter requesting confirmation. Through this "business transaction" process, students naturally master and apply correspondence as a practical tool.

3.2 Project scenarios and resource development aligned with corporate needs

Different regions in China possess distinct trade industry clusters. For instance, the Yangtze River Delta excels in electronics and machinery manufacturing, while the Pearl River Delta boasts deep-rooted expertise in light industrial products, fashion, household goods, and toys. Therefore, course design should consider local characteristics and conditions to create more immersive student project scenarios. Taking cross-border apparel trade as an example, instructors could set up scenarios such as resolving consumer complaints regarding fabric composition and pilling quality issues. Students receive a customer complaint letter containing images and expressing dissatisfaction. They must first master professional fabric terminology, then identify the root cause using product information provided by the company." Subsequently, they draft a response letter including a sincere acknowledgment and apology for the issue, an analysis of the problem's origin, and a specific solution^[3]. Regarding resource development, schools should invite senior business managers and foreign trade supervisors from companies to share real-world case studies encountered in their work. Through in-depth analysis of these emails, students can learn what types of correspondence facilitate orders and what expressions may cause misunderstandings. This enables targeted adjustments in subsequent student correspondence writing, significantly enhancing professionalism and credibility.

3.3 Project implementation and guidance framework focused on competency development

Within a class, some students possess extensive English vocabulary and solid grammar skills, and they produce well-structured, logically coherent writing. Yet, they lack sufficient understanding of international trade processes and specialized knowledge. Others have accumulated substantial business knowledge—such as trade terms, payment methods, and cargo transportation—but struggle with English expression and writing proficiency. Instructors can implement heterogeneous grouping in business English correspondence course to address this. Students with complementary strengths are assigned to the same group: those with strong business fundamentals draft commercial clauses in emails, ensuring the accuracy and appropriateness of pricing, payment, shipping, and delivery terms. Students with stronger English proficiency should refine vocabulary and phrasing, while those with well-rounded skills should primarily manage task coordination and final integration. Instructors should monitor each group's progress. If a group encounters a deadlock, timely intervention is needed—guiding them through questioning and prompting to consult relevant reference materials and explore solutions from multiple angles. This process helps unlock students' potential

while fostering teamwork and problem-solving skills.

4 Support mechanisms for implementing project-driven teaching methodology

4.1 Establishing a collaborative teaching resource support system between schools and enterprises

Collaboration between educational institutions and enterprises is essential for the project-driven teaching methodology to take root and yield tangible results in business English correspondence course. At the start of each semester, the course teaching team convenes a project design workshop with representative partner foreign trade enterprises. During these sessions, university faculty present the framework for the semester's planned teaching projects. At the same time, corporate representatives—including key personnel and department managers—offer insights and suggestions based on the latest challenges and developments encountered on the front lines^[4]. These professionals move between student groups in the classroom, listening to discussions, reviewing draft correspondence, and offering practical, business-oriented feedback and revisions. This approach enables students to master business correspondence writing techniques while gradually developing industry-aligned thinking patterns. A project outcome conversion mechanism should be established to recommend outstanding student projects to partner enterprises formally. When a company adopts a solution for its practical value, the school should grant the student team and instructor honorary recognition or material incentives. This approach stimulates student enthusiasm and a sense of accomplishment while allowing enterprises to tangibly experience the benefits of industry-academia collaboration tangibly, fostering greater willingness for long-term, in-depth support of teaching initiatives.

4.2 Strengthening the development of dual-qualified faculty

Implementing project-driven teaching methods in business English correspondence course also requires enhanced faculty development. Institutions can establish agreements with multiple stable partner enterprises to provide teachers with on-the-job training opportunities. Each instructor teaching business English correspondence must complete at least one month of full-time corporate practice per term. This hands-on experience teaches them how to manage customer information using CRM systems in real business scenarios, identify and respond to valuable inquiries, and handle the entire correspondence workflow—from inquiries and quotations to order processing and follow-ups. Upon returning to the classroom, they can provide more targeted guidance to help students draft professional and effective business correspondence^[5]. The experiences and case studies teachers bring back from corporate placements are invaluable. This knowledge must be consolidated, shared, and updated. To this end, the school can organize monthly business English correspondence teaching seminars. Teachers with corporate placement experience can share their observations, reflections, and authentic case studies collected during their placements. Teachers are also encouraged to compile typical correspondence scenarios encountered during their placements into documents for the teaching team to share and discuss. Additionally, institutions should invite educational technology and methodology experts to guide instructors in scientifically designing project briefs and establishing clear, effective assessment rubrics. This support will help teachers proficiently master and confidently apply student-centered teaching approaches, thereby cultivating more professionals equipped to meet the demands of the foreign trade industry.

5 Conclusion

In summary, shifting from traditional teaching models centered on writing styles and linguistic points to project-based teaching centered on the complete foreign trade process can effectively bridge the gap between theory and practice. This approach significantly enhances students' business correspondence writing and communication skills while cultivating comprehensive professional competencies in analyzing problems, solving issues, and collaborating within foreign trade operations. Future research may explore integrating emerging elements such as AI-assisted writing tools and social media communication into project designs to continuously refine teaching methodologies continuously, thereby better aligning with the foreign trade industry's demand for versatile professionals.

About the Author

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