

# On the Teaching Model Innovation and Content Optimization in Business English Teaching

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**Abstract** Based on the Content-based Instruction (CBI), the integration of language and content learning, this paper, taking undergraduate students from both English and Economic Management majors as the research object, explores the innovation of teaching model and content optimization in Business English teaching from the perspectives of professional knowledge and practice. It holds that the interdisciplinary study of foreign languages and professional knowledge are the trends in the cultivation of the talents required in the international markets. The innovation of teaching model and content optimization in Business English teaching in colleges and universities are the realization of the transformation of the cultivation pattern from the knowledge-oriented to interdisciplinary one and thus achieves the goal of cultivating diversified innovative talents.

**Key words** Content-based instruction (CBI); Business english; Content optimization; Model innovation

## 1 Introduction

With economic globalization, more and more multinational corporations pour into China and the internationalization of domestic enterprises is increasing. Talented young people, who have not only solid English professional knowledge and international business practices, but also are proficient in international economic trade rules and the operation modes of international enterprises are needed by the market. Business English, as a comprehensive course closely related to business, develops on the basis of language course (English) and business course (business) with overlapping and interdisciplinary characteristics. Then how to construct a new teaching model of Business English and how to further optimize content system so as to integrate the English course and business one is a complex and tough problem to be solved. The paper aims at deepening the reform of teaching model and course content, perfecting the Business English teaching model to cultivate international business talents.

## 2 Optimization of Teaching Models in Business English

### 2.1 Theoretical basis of optimization of teaching models in business English

CBI has received increasing attention in the language world since 1980s. This teaching approach, with its theoretical foundations deriving from cognitive learning theory and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is called content-based instruction, CBI in short. CBI is “an approach to second language teaching in which teaching is organized around the content or information that students will acquire, rather than around a linguistic or other type of syllabus” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In other words, CBI involves integrating the learning of language with the learning of content simultaneously; here, content typically means academic subject matter such as math, science, or social studies. In CBI, the language is utilized as the medium for teaching subject content (Mohan, 1986). The language learning objectives are achieved through content learning. Mohan (1986) indicates that the goal of integration in CBI is both language and content learning. Content-based classrooms are not merely places where learners learn a language but places where they gain an education. The benefits of learning language through professional content are evident in learners’ language and content acquisition.

Professor Liu Runqing (1999) predicts that in colleges and universities in China, the English teaching of senior students will transfer from language skill based teaching to content based teaching. Two points are explained: First, language is a symbol system, the depth and aesthetics of which derives from the content it carries; Second, Humans are intelligent animals. They will feel hungry when their intelligence is insufficient. So in his opinion, language is always a shell, communication cannot be carried on without content and connotation.

The advantage of CBI lies in its close integration between language form, function and meaning. The strengthened motivation and increased interests of the students ensure the classroom activities requiring higher cognition, thus enriching the cognitive development of students. The proposal of the CBI approach is no doubt of great enlightenment and help in finding a meeting point between language

teaching and professional content teaching.

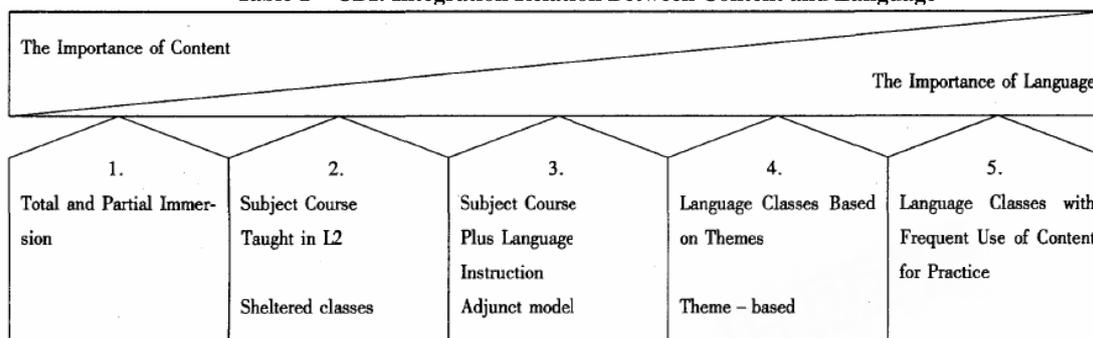
## 2.2 CBI models and teaching approaches in Business English

### 2.2.1 CBI approach

Business English is a course closely related to business, which belongs to English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It is a comprehensive course with the characteristics of overlapping developed from language courses like English and business courses like business. CBI is an approach which integrates completely the theme content or academic content with language teaching activities in second language teaching. Under this approach, the focus of study for students is to acquire information through second language and develop language skills during the process (Brinton et al, 1989). This means that within certain foreign language teaching or second language teaching scope, it is possible to integrate language with themes or the tasks of certain courses in other subjects. The idea popular in the world of teaching model innovation provides us with the meeting point between professional content teaching and language teaching, which is beneficial to the cultivation of fully developed interdisciplinary talents in foreign language teaching.

Though referred to as a kind of integration of language and content approach, CBI generates more concrete models to different understanding of the so-called "CONTENT". Met (1999) classifies it into five models, making the relationship between language and content obviously presented, as can be seen in Table 1. In the diagram, the left and right parts represent two extremes: the left side is content-oriented teaching; while the right side is language-oriented teaching. The weight of the content decreases while that of language increases. The following are the five models:

**Table 1 CBI: Integration Relation Between Content and Language**



#### (1) Total and partial immersion

Total and partial immersion model holds that with second language as a medium language, students can study formal regular school curriculum. This pattern is content-oriented; little explicit instruction is given in the foreign language teaching although it aims at enhancing students' familiarity of foreign (second) language. The validity depends on students' mastery of the content.

#### (2) Subject course taught in L2

This model is also called sheltered content instruction. It uses a content curriculum adapted to accommodate students' limited proficiency in the language instruction, aiming at different language learners. Instructors adapt teaching text or teaching task and use different media to make teaching accessible to students.

#### (3) Subject course plus language instruction

This model is also called adjunct language instruction, positioned in the middle of the diagram, which indicates the equal importance of language learning and content learning. It emphasizes the parallel development of both professional content and language skill development. The rationale behind this model is that the linked courses will assist students in developing academic coping strategies and cognitive skills that will transfer from one discipline to another. This model integrates the language teaching with the academic language demands placed on students in their other university courses.

#### (4) Language classes based on themes

Theme-based language instruction model is developed around selected topics or themes drawn from content area. Materials in theme-based language instruction are usually teacher-generated or adapted from outside sources. The goal is to help language learners in developing general academic language skills through interesting and relevant content.

#### (5) Language classes with frequent use of content for practice

This model is obviously language-oriented teaching, of which language teaching is primary and

content the second. It is similar to traditional language teaching method.

According to the classification and characteristics of CBI models, the teaching model innovation involved in the present paper belongs to model 3.

### 2.2.2 Teaching model of Business English course

This paper will realize optimization of the teaching model for two kinds of undergraduates according to CBI Model 3. First, for students of language majors: they are encouraged to participate in social practice and minor in the core courses of international business and trade, cultivated to develop the potential research ability and inspired to do more creative thinking. Second, for students of economics and management majors: they are encouraged to take core courses of language so as to enhance English skills in international business management.

For students of language majors: the learners of Business English in colleges and universities in China are almost the students of Business English major, who are neither students majoring in business nor students with a lot of working experience, accordingly we should take these two aspects into consideration when optimizing the curriculum model, thus achieving the goal of the cultivation of interdisciplinary talented people with English+X (X refers to any other subject). The specific practices are: while stressing the language ability of English, increase the basic courses in business in Grade One and Grade Two. And in Grade Three and Grade Four, much emphasis is given to the professional curriculum of Business English so as to improve their business practice ability. In addition to some basic English courses and some core business courses such as Business English Reading, Business English Writing, Business English Translation and International Exchange of Business Culture, courses like International Trade Theory and Practice, International Marketing, International Business Communication, International Business Law, International Relation, and International Investment and Cooperation should also be offered based on the development characteristics of a certain discipline. Only by stuffing the so-called empty shell of language knowledge with professional contents and meanings, can we cultivate the much-needed professionals proficient in foreign language.

For students of economics and management major: students in this major are usually offered the basic college English, while the knowledge of English related to their major are ignored, let alone the practice in listening and speaking. So a new model of the combination between professional studies and language learning should be adopted in Business English teaching. And the specific practices are: increasing the study of basic English listening and speaking ability appropriately in Grade One and Grade Two while emphasizing the cultivation of the ability in certain specific field; and in Grade Three and Grade Four, more attention is paid to the learning of Business English practice, such as Business English Writing, Business English Reading, Translation Theory and Practice of Business English, Business English Interpretation, Business English Simultaneous Interpretation to achieve the goal of interdisciplinary talent training of professional knowledge+ English knowledge.

Designed to strengthen graduates' ability and competitiveness, the teaching model integrating English and international business can metalize the knowledge of English and the theory and practice of international business, which not only embodies outward oriented and the interdisciplinary characteristics of Business English, but also reflects the characteristics of subject overlapping and inter-discipline.

## 3 Content Optimization of Business English Teaching

Since the fundamental objective of this study is to cultivate all-rounded senior inter-disciplinary business talents, as one of the key parts of the study, content optimization of Business English teaching is to be discussed. This paper argues that the training system of senior inter-disciplinary business talents should be based on rich subject foundations. While focusing on the increasing in international trade, business communication, marketing planning, market research and other basic business skills, the innovative training methods of Business English listening and speaking, business writing, business reading and other knowledge connected with language should also be developed.

### 3.1 Principles and methods of content optimization in business English teaching

To build a scientific and rational system of Business English courses, the study and training of language, business knowledge and business skills are supposed to be integrated. Therefore, teaching contents optimization of Business English is vital for senior business inter-disciplinary talents training. Business English practical teaching is just the key to integrating the related knowledge and promoting the harmonious development of all skills. It is also the key to highlighting the advantages of inter-disciplinary talents and enhancing the competitiveness of graduates. Through designing various

teaching modules such as modules of business skills, of business communication and of professional content, the combination of theory and practice of Business English course can be accomplished.

During the pre-teaching session, the curriculum group decides teaching modules and teaching tasks and develops lesson plans in accordance with the overall capacity design, the main point of which is professional capability training. During the implementation of curriculum, the teaching procedures should be rationally designed. The whole teaching process should be project-oriented and task-driven. Theory teaching should focus on ability, while practice teaching should focus on knowledge in order to achieve the integration of theory and practice of teaching. 1

### 3.1.1 Target-orientation principle

The selection of teaching contents, in accordance with the requirements of related industries and enterprises, must be market-oriented. These series of courses focus on the requirements of comprehensive capabilities needed by the foreign business posts. The contents should cover a wide range of inputs from the training of communicative and operational skills in business activities to linguistic knowledge and information concerning business traveling, market brand-building, accounting, trade services, etc. contained in foreign trades and business affairs. By introducing other related academic knowledge into the curriculum, such as international trade practices, correspondence, students' ability in applying English to business communication can be greatly improved.

### 3.1.2 Applicability principle

Textbooks, supplementary teaching materials and the corresponding online courses should be adopted to develop students' comprehensive ability. The class training should focus on the knowledge and capability objectives with increased proportion of practice training. Simulated mode and authentic situation mode should be adopted to help students' finish post-school simulation of different business activities. The main training methods include the group work, panel discussion training, laboratory training and personal online English writing training. The practice content reflects a structure system easy to operate, which conforms to the target of the cultivation of the talents. And in the students "outside practice" session, much guidance is needed to assist students in on-site activities so as to improve their understanding of the practical application of the theoretical knowledge.

## 3.2 Design of business English course

The selection and organization of the course content is the most important part of curriculum design. Besides English language and literature, the course also includes all business-related areas, such as economy, trade, finance, accounting, investment, transportation, law, business management and culture. Based on traditional training of linguistic competence and basic business techniques, the current business English courses pay much attention to knowledge courses of international business, such as International Trade and Settlement, International Financial, Business Contract, and International Commercial Law as well as some culture courses. Therefore, in terms of the content of Business English course, appropriate outline framework can be selected to design teaching modules to make the teaching concept applicable to students. In the design of Business English course, comprehensive use of various teaching methods, such as grammar translation method, scenario approach, cognitive approach, communicative approach, task-based teaching, role play, case method, simulation teaching practice and business training should be taken in consideration

In order to achieve the training objectives and to upgrade the ability structure, Business English curriculum must be adjusted in some course contents. The curriculum can be divided into three parts: basic major course, professional courses and optional professional courses.

(1) Basic course: Basic Course is the cornerstone of Business English. It focuses on language ability, highlights the application and practice, and strengthens the students' ability of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation. The basic goal is that students must develop qualified linguistic competence.

(2) Required Professional Course: This section focuses on international business, which is the core part of business practice and skills the course should act as a bridge between basic course section and optional professional courses. Main courses include Business Communication, International Business, Business Correspondence, Import and Export, International Business Contracts and WTO Rules.

(3) Optional Professional Courses: Courses of this section covers wide areas and is rich in content. The main purpose is to provide students with more space for optional courses. In this section, students are supposed to select as many courses as possible based on their plan for the future employment.

## 3.3 Innovation of practice teaching in Business English

To innovate practice teaching of business English, practical courses and training programs should be accurately designed with the training objectives and training content clearly defined. In addition, the

suitable training methods and means should be applied to centralize and concrete the practice courses, making it colorful.

The session of practice teaching should adhere to three principles to ensure the effectiveness of teaching practice: 1) Principle of Orientation is to determine the overall framework of practical teaching system and specific skills training program with the characteristics of the students' the knowledge and capability in future professions 2) Principle of Practicability is that the teachers design the systematical plan of practice teaching, skills assessment system and protection mechanism according to the social needs and market needs. 3) Principle of Integration is the combination of theoretical teaching and practical teaching, language skills and business skills.

Professional practice course is planned to meet the requirements of students' professional ability and to highlight the training of key skills. It stresses the interface among different courses. In this case, some business skill-oriented courses are to be offered, such as Business Negotiation Training, Business Correspondence Training, Import and Export Document, E-commerce Training and so on. Meanwhile, courses like Business English Negotiation, Business English Drafting and other training courses are also designed to meet the needs of personnel of various kinds in business.

Business English Teaching has the characteristics of strong practicability. A qualified business English teaching material should have its focuses on the content with such practicability. In terms of content organization, much attention should be paid to the integration of situational teaching, functional language teaching, simulation teaching, case study teaching. As for classroom organization, it can take multiple forms like group discussion, pair work, and inter-evaluation, etc. to develop students' awareness of creative thinking, authority challenging, team spirit, cooperation and problem solving ability so as to strengthen their training of creative ability.

#### 4 Conclusions

The reform of foreign language teaching and cultivation of interdisciplinary talents calls for an innovative teaching model. Content-based Instruction (CBI), with its revolutionary teaching ideas to integrate the learning of language with professional content, will undoubtedly undergo the grading process from immaturity to perfection. The teaching model innovation and content optimization in Business English teaching is a complex system project, which bears the duty to cultivate interdisciplinary business talents adaptable to the needs of social development. Therefore, it is necessary to optimize the content in Business English teaching on the one hand, and work out some innovative teaching models on the other hand in order to cultivate interdisciplinary talents with both solid foundation in English and some business knowledge. As a trend in the future Business English teaching, the teaching model innovation and content optimization will be a challenging work, which will attract more and more attentions from researchers.

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