

An Approach to College-Enterprise Cooperative Education Mode of Local Undergraduate Colleges

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Abstract—As English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Business English attaches great importance to students' hands-on abilities. Located in economically under-developed cities, many local undergraduate colleges have limited opportunities of developing hands-on knowledge of business English for students. Therefore, college-enterprise cooperative education mode is designed to help local undergraduate colleges overcome regional limits and cooperate with enterprises in economically developed areas. As such, business English students at local undergraduate colleges will give full play to the practicality of business English in their college studies by effectively integrating theory and practice. In order to cope with potential difficulties caused by the college-enterprise cooperative education mode, local undergraduate colleges should upgrade the structure of their teaching staff and talent training programs to ensure the sustainable success of the college-enterprise cooperative education mode.

Keywords—*Business English; Local undergraduate colleges; College-enterprise cooperative education*

I. INTRODUCTION TO COOPERATION BETWEEN COLLEGES AND ENTERPRISES

As an English for Special Purposes (ESP), Business English was approved by the Ministry of Education for trial introduction in 2006, and was officially listed in the Undergraduate Majors Catalog for Regular Colleges and Universities in 2012 (Jiao Gao [2012] 9). As an ESP major, Business English pays due attention to students' hands-on abilities, advanced courses shall be combined with the actual business operation so as to consolidate students' knowledge of business English [1]. As the academic level of teachers in local undergraduate colleges is usually weak and the language proficiency of their students is relatively weak, Business English as a major set up in local undergraduate colleges shall endeavor to train students' English language skills and help them master relevant fundamental theories and professional knowledge such as linguistics, economics, management, law (international commercial law), etc. As such, business English students may be familiar with the general rules and practices of international business and acquire English application ability and business operation ability [2]. The mission of Business English as a major is to hone students' hands-on abilities and to help Business English graduates effectively serve the local business-related industries.

To this end, local undergraduate colleges have been advised to join hands with enterprises of related business industries to develop a new educational mode for training Business English talents. Local undergraduate colleges can set up off-campus practice bases with the help of enterprises to provide practice opportunities for students majoring in business English; meanwhile, enterprises can use the practice bases as a platform for the selection of outstanding technical talents in advance.

Based on the close cooperation between local undergraduate colleges and enterprises, the education mode for Business English taps into the real or simulated foreign trade working scenarios. The purpose is to help students use business English theories and business knowledge under real or simulated business conditions and to achieve effective, down-to-earth combination of work and learning.

According to the mode of cooperation, the cooperation between local undergraduate colleges and enterprises can be roughly classified into four types [3]. The first type is enterprises on campus: enterprises build some of their production lines in local colleges and universities to assist colleges implement the combination of work and learning. The second type is college students entering enterprises: college students walk out of the ivory tower of academic studies for internships at enterprises. The college-enterprise cooperation education mode usually consists of several stages (fundamental theoretical courses on campus plus hands-on training in enterprises). The third type is interaction between colleges and enterprises: enterprises provide practice bases, participate in the development of related teaching plans of Business English, and send their own professionals to participate in on-campus teaching activities, whereas colleges provide theoretical training for the employees of enterprises. In this way, colleges and enterprises can truly arrive at a win-win solution for talents training. The fourth type is "bespoke" education (also known as "customized talent training"): in accordance with the requirements of enterprises, local undergraduate colleges work with enterprises to formulate specific talent training programs. Enterprises sign employment contracts with students in advance, then jointly carry out teaching activities both on campus and in enterprises; students who have completed such training will work for the contracted enterprises after graduation. Each of the four cooperation modes has its own advantages. Colleges often adopt the mode that best suits their own characteristics, including education purpose, status quo of

teaching, and the overall learning and hands-on abilities of students. For higher vocational colleges, the first type and the fourth type may be preferable; for local undergraduate colleges, however, the second type and the third type may seem more attractive.

II. TACTICS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COOPERATIVE EDUCATION BETWEEN COLLEGES AND ENTERPRISES

After deciding on the appropriate educational mode, the implementation of college-enterprise cooperation for Business English shall be carried out in aspects such as teaching staff, courses, and teaching methods. Taking Huaihua University, a local undergraduate university in Hunan Province, as an example, this paper probes into the implementation strategies of the cooperative education mode for Business English as a Major. As far as teachers are concerned, Huaihua University emphasizes the structural optimization of the teaching staff and the reform of teachers training, aiming to develop a Business English teachers' team made up of teachers with high professional titles and high educational background, profound professional knowledge and rich hands-on business experiences. In five years' time, senior teachers of this team shall account for about 50%, including 1-2 professors, 4-5 associate professors, and 3-4 teachers with doctoral degrees. With a view to boosting teachers' hands-on capabilities, all teachers of Business English will enter enterprises for hands-on business experiences. Over 70% of the Business English teachers will have double professional qualifications through the regularization of teachers' participation in corporate training and the institutionalization of teachers' further education in enterprises.

As far as curriculum designing and curriculum reforms are concerned, Huaihua University aims at improving students' knowledge, capabilities and quality by means of developing high-quality teaching materials and courses. According to the development needs of enterprises, a "2+1+1" teaching model will be implemented. The traditional four-year on-campus undergraduate studies will be changed to the "2+1+1" teaching mode, that is, 2 years of fundamental theoretic coursework on campus, 1 year of professional coursework and 1 year of hands-on training in enterprises. Meanwhile, the focus will fall on students' solid English proficiency and wide range of business knowledge.

It is advisable that ad hoc training programs be designed in accordance with the latest development trends of related business sectors such as trade, tourism, and exhibition. New content of related industries and enterprises shall be incorporated into course syllabuses and classroom teaching. A series of professional textbooks shall be compiled jointly with cooperative enterprises so that the teaching content will fully reflect the new developments and new requirements of related business sectors.

As far as teaching methods are concerned, local undergraduate colleges are supposed to take hands-on practice as the guidance, take occupational requirements as the goal, and take the training of advanced business talents as the core when they carry out reforms of teaching methods for Business English. Such reforms shall focus on improving students'

comprehensive literacy and capabilities to apply theoretical knowledge in practice. Based on the educational framework of "the English language plus specialized knowledge and skills", the content of teaching shall incorporate both theoretical knowledge and hands-on training, emphasize group learning among students, and enhance students' consciousness and ability of autonomous learning. Through case studies, practical research, simulated training and other teaching activities will be conducted to develop students' professional and hands-on capabilities and innovative awareness, and thus to achieve a close link between theoretical teaching and practical teaching. Teaching methods shall be diversified, using modern information and multimedia technologies, integrating teaching resources with the aid of micro-course teaching, creating conducive learning environments in which teachers and students respect and appreciate each other and exchange thoughts on an equal basis.

III. MAJOR ISSUES AND THEIR SOLUTIONS IN COOPERATIVE EDUCATION BETWEEN LOCAL UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGES AND ENTERPRISES

Compared with key universities affiliated to the Ministry of Education that are usually located in capital cities in eastern and southern China, local undergraduate colleges are often located in remote northern and western areas, with much less access to big commercial and technological companies, as is the case with Huaihua University. Business English, as a new ESP major, pays more attention to students' hands-on capabilities. As a result, local undergraduate colleges are more likely to encounter difficulties in the process of implementing the cooperative education mode between colleges and enterprises, and these difficulties often result in less than satisfactory effects and even total failures in the implementation of college-enterprise cooperative education.

A. Further education of existing teaching staff

New majors call for new teachers. However, the existing teachers of Business English are mostly language teachers and this will pose difficulties for teachers of this kind in teaching Business English courses. How to help such language teachers successfully switch to Business English teaching is a big ask for college-enterprise cooperation. Of course, the employment of new teachers with business background is a good choice. In view of the fact that business teachers usually have less than sufficient English proficiency and that Business English as a Major is based on English knowledge and skills, it is would be advisable for local undergraduate colleges to encourage existing language teachers to become Business English teachers. In light of the stark shortage of Business English teachers, local undergraduate colleges shall formulate and implement some kind of "Teaching Talent Training Project" for Business English, featuring multi-channel, multi-level, all-directional training for Business English teachers.

An effective incentive mechanism can be set up to encourage teachers' lifelong studies. Teachers shall be sent to domestic and overseas colleges/universities that are strong in Business English for further studies on a regular basis. Appropriate incentives can be taken to encourage teachers to improve their educational background and to obtain high

professional titles. In a good team of Business English teachers, teachers with senior professional titles (associate professors and professors) shall account for at least 50% and teachers with double qualification shall account for 70% or more.

One important factor for the healthy development of Business English as a Major is to boost the introduction of talents and to strengthen teachers' teaching abilities and scientific research abilities. The introduction of high-level teaching staff can broaden the academic horizons and promote academic exchanges.

Another important factor is to push ahead with the training of teachers with double qualifications. To this end, a certain number of teachers shall be sent to enterprises to improve their overall practical proficiency in such business sectors as foreign trade, tourism and exhibition.

Meanwhile, to further improve the college-enterprise cooperative education mode and to achieve better interaction between local undergraduate colleges and enterprises, a suitable mechanism shall be explored to allow entrepreneurs to work as part-time lecturers at colleges and the collaboration between colleges and enterprises shall be promoted for better teaching skills and resources for Business English.

B. Career-related risks for "bespoke" Business English students

The "bespoke" educational mode has been considered a good way to bring together the complementary advantages of colleges and enterprises. In line with the specific requirements of enterprises, local undergraduate colleges and enterprises usually join hands in designing educational programs for Business English students. Enterprises usually sign employment contracts with students in advance so that students from the above-mentioned educational programs will directly enter the contracted enterprises after graduation. In this way, enterprises can lock in "customized" talents in advance, whereas colleges don't have to worry about the employment of their graduates which has been one of the key assessment indicators for undergraduate education.

Here comes the question: Is the "bespoke" educational mode the best for college-enterprise cooperation education? In actual fact, this may be a moot point. One of the major pitfalls of the "bespoke" educational mode is that graduates' business skills are often limited to what are required by the contracted enterprises at a certain time. Once the students leave their predetermined working environments, for whatever reason, it will be difficult to exert their Business English skills elsewhere and thus they may not be regarded as qualified "professionals". If predetermined business environments change and layoffs occur, re-employment of such "bespoke" graduates may face unemployment unless they manage to re-train themselves as generalists.

In order to solve this problem, colleges and universities shall strictly follow the standard of "solid foundation and big caliber" when it comes to designing theoretical courses, and shall not blindly agree in deference to the "customization" intention of enterprises. For Business English students, "solid foundation and big caliber" would mean good English

proficiency which is also the cornerstone for the development of Business English as a major. Huaihua University, for instance, is currently abiding by the "solid foundation and big caliber" standard. As mentioned above, the "2+1+1" teaching mode has been implemented. The 2 years of fundamental theoretic coursework on campus focuses on laying a good foundation of solid English proficiency and a wide range of business knowledge. Courses dedicated to basic English skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation have been given priority. In addition, courses featuring language analysis, including English grammar, linguistics, lexicology, and English literature, are also recognized as compulsory courses. All these courses aim to help students lay a solid foundation of English knowledge and pave a good way for Business English graduates' career development.

C. Challenges and their solutions in the evaluation of students' performance

College-enterprise cooperative education is usually carried out over several stages which mainly include the on-campus stage and the internship stage. The practice of students entering enterprises for hands-on work experience has now become an integral part of their learning activities. Such a new education mode has given rise to new challenges to the evaluation of students' performance in certain Business English courses.

To achieve both objectivity and comprehensiveness in the evaluation of students' performance, the evaluation model for some Business English courses shall adapt to the changes in teaching methods and learning methods in college-enterprise cooperative education. Apparently, the traditional summative evaluation model alone is not effective enough for the hands-on training courses conducted in enterprises. As such, the formative evaluation model should be introduced in combination with the traditional summative mode. Hands-on trainers (tutors) can evaluate students' performance according to the progress and completion of their hands-on tasks, and the results shall be regarded as an important part of the formative evaluation for hands-on training courses. Meanwhile, hands-on trainers (tutors) are supposed to give timely feedback regarding students' hands-on capabilities to help students improve their performance. As such, a productive spiral cycle will be formed for the learning process which is composed of the following steps: specifying goals of teaching and learning, identifying gaps/snags, taking action to narrow the gaps, and achieving goals of teaching and learning"[4]. If the hands-on training courses have corresponding theoretical courses on campus, hands-on trainers (tutors) shall also take into account the summative evaluation of the theoretical courses for optimal evaluation results.

IV. PROSPECTS FOR COOPERATIVE EDUCATION BETWEEN LOCAL UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGES AND ENTERPRISES

Local undergraduate colleges are often located in rather remote areas where economic developments are less than advanced. This in turn has largely reduced the opportunities for local colleges' Business English students to serve local economies. Through the above-discussed college-enterprise cooperative education mode, local colleges can overcome regional limitations and join hands with enterprises from the

economically developed regions. As a result, Business English students can bring into play their hands-on business capabilities. They can timely apply their theoretical knowledge of Business English gained on campus to hands-on training courses in enterprises, thus achieving an effective combination of theory and practice. For local undergraduate colleges, the blueprint and mission of the cooperative education mode for Business English students lie in helping students lay a solid “generalist” foundation through on-campus theoretical courses and helping students scale the “specialist” peak. For enterprises, the college-enterprise cooperative education mode can provide them with good backup talent resources and help them keep abreast of the latest developments in Business English theories from the higher education world on a regular basis, which in turn will be conducive to their long-term development.

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