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# Business English Teaching Strategies Based on Content and Language Integrated Learning Theory

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**Abstract:** With the development of economy, business English talents are increasingly being needed in China, but the effectiveness of the training of business English students is not optimistic. How to cultivate the combination of “business” and “English” talents is an urgent problem to be solved in the field of business English education. This paper proposes some strategies of business English teaching based on the theory of language and content integration: to promote English learning with professional subject knowledge; to create an authentic language environment to help students construct the meaning of knowledge; to introduce communicative approach and collaborative learning into the classroom; and to put emphasis on cultivating cross-cultural awareness of the students. This paper tries to conclude that business English teachers should recognize the distinctive features of business English teaching, integrate the language and content, and then adopt targeted teaching strategies so as to get the aims of better promoting the effectiveness of business English teaching and optimizing the training of business English talents.

**Keywords:** Teaching Strategy, Language and Content Integration, Authentic Language Environment, Communicative Approach, Collaborative Learning, Cross-cultural Awareness

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## 1. Introduction

With the rapid development of economy, the importance of business English in foreign trade activities in China is more prominent. Business majors were set up in different levels and types of universities to meet the needs of social economics for compound English talents. However, the quality of the training of business English is not optimistic. It is mainly reflected in the following aspects: at present, both the international market and domestic market are rapidly developing with each passing day. However, the cultivation of business English talents in universities is relatively lagging, and this has become a normal phenomenon. [1] The choice between the students in the “ideal job position” and the position required by the employer is quite different. [2] On the one hand, it is difficult for graduates to find their favorite jobs; on the other hand, it is difficult for employers to recruit talents that meet the requirements of enterprises. The language application ability, self-learning ability and personal professional quality of graduates can basically meet the needs of enterprises, which is a small gap. The gap in business

practice skills is the biggest. Some graduates can't meet the requirements of the company. Students should have relevant work or practical experience and basic professional business skills. In addition, graduates' cross-cultural communication skills and critical thinking and innovative abilities, especially cross-cultural communication skills cannot meet the corporate expectations. [3] After graduation students have TEM-4 or TEM-8 certificates (Certificate of Test for English Majors in China) which can demonstrate their English language proficiency, but they still could not effectively communicate with foreign businessmen; at the same time, students also have professional certificates such as BEC certificates and merchandiser certificates that can reflect their business professional knowledge and abilities, but they have little knowledge of the actual work truth, many of them don't have sufficient skills to meet the needs of business jobs; and many of them lack the knowledge of economy, trade, management, finance, etc. which actually are necessary for international trade practitioners. The students have completed English and many professional courses and have passed the tests, but their ability to conduct business in English in the business

environment is not satisfactory. The theoretical knowledge they have learned is only on paper. [4]

These phenomena reveal many problems in the current teaching process of cultivating business English talents: problems with curriculum, problems with teachers, problems with teaching strategies, and problems with students. Among these problems, the problem of teaching strategy is particularly prominent. Should business English teaching be focused on language or on business content? What teaching strategies should be used? These problems need to be solved urgently. It deserves our deep thought.

## 2. Content and Language Integrated Learning Theory

The first concept of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is put forward by the Finnish scholar David Marsh, who believes in the word "content" in CLIL terms indicates a non-language subject while the word "Language" refers to a second language or a foreign language other than the mother tongue. The above two aspects are equally important. They are two dimensions that are inseparable and mutually reinforcing. The foreign language is both the goal of learning and the tool of learning, and the professional knowledge becomes the "context" soil for foreign language learning. [5]

CLIL is based on the teaching of the content of one subject, allowing students to use the target language as a tool to explore knowledge, internalize the content of the course, and improve the language ability of the target language and finally get result of killing two birds with one stone.

Coyle, a well-known linguist at the University of Edinburgh in the UK, believes that CLIL is a teaching model which focuses on content-driven and competence-based, and the "integration" here indicates not only the integration of language and content but the integration of language and cognition, language and communication, and language and culture. [6]

### 2.1. The Integration of Language and Content

Content is the professional knowledge of a particular discipline. Mastering the content of the course is the starting point of CLIL learning, which is distinguished from the language-centered teaching method.

Language is a kind of symbiosis between the form of expression and the content. This symbiotic relationship requires the learners to concentrate on how to better use foreign language as a medium to acquire the subject knowledge, rather than simply focusing on how to acquire the foreign language itself.

CLIL believes that the integration between language and subject has established the most ideal foreign language learning conditions, which makes the teaching focus shift from the purely learning language itself to learning the language through learning subject knowledge. The integration of language and content is to establish the explicit relationship

between language skills and the subject knowledge, emphasize the need to use language as a means of learning, and attach importance to the subject knowledge as a role to create a real communicative context during the language learning. That is to say, language is a knowledgeable language, and knowledge is a linguistic knowledge, which is focused both on form and on meaning.

Therefore, the current language-centered teaching model should be transitioned to a language and content dual-centered model as soon as possible in order to optimize the business English teaching. This would be the focus of business English major teaching reform.

### 2.2. The Integration of Language and Cognition

The results of cognitive science research show that the intellectual activities of human beings are the result of a combination of content and process which include: learning and thinking, communication, knowledge acquisition, problem solving, etc. [7]. The development of language, cognition and social awareness among preschool and younger students is simultaneous [8]. Therefore, as a kind of intellectual activity, second language learning requires a combination of language skills and knowledge content to effectively improve language skills in the process of learning knowledge content.

Creating a context suitable for learners' current cognitive level is the focus on CLIL. It is driven by subject content and challenges learners' cognitive abilities. It helps them to use non-native language to add, correct, reorganize and master the professional knowledge. The content of subject knowledge promotes the matching and transformation of cognitive ability and expressive ability.

### 2.3. The Integration of Language and Communication

Communication becomes an intermediary for content transfer, cognitive development, and cultural communication. [6] CLIL draws on the advantages of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which allows students to actively participate in classroom tasks in the learning process, build professional knowledge with foreign language carriers, and exercise language in specific subject contexts.

### 2.4. The Integration of Language and Culture

Language is a tool of communication and a carrier of different cultures. Although traditional business English teaching involves language differences, it has neglected the transfer of cultural knowledge in business English due to excessive emphasis on the input of business knowledge, which has led to the failure of many business communications to a certain extent [9]. In intercultural communication, language communication is superficial; while cultural collision is deep and fundamental. Words and sentences are not only restricted by language rules but also influenced by culture. The integration of language and culture means that teachers should pay attention to cultivating students' cultural awareness in the context of internationalization, treating

multicultural phenomena with inclusive and critical thoughts, interpreting differences in national cultures, reflecting on their own values and improving intercultural communication skills.

### **3. The Goals of Business English Professional Talent Training**

Business English includes two aspects of the language and professional business knowledge. On the language level, business English is the language used by people who are engaged in or will be engaged in the business environment. From a business perspective, business involves the relevant knowledge of economy, trade, management, marketing, finance, accounting, business law and etc. Business English is not a simple mixture of "business" and "English", but a deep integration of the two.

In order to improve the quality of business personnel training, the "National Standard for the Business English Professional Undergraduate Teaching Quality" is formulated by the English Professional Subcommittee of the Foreign Language and Literature Professional Teaching Steering Committee of the Ministry of Education in China. This standard is the module for the teaching of business English. It is setting the benchmark for the establishment and development of the national business English major: Business English major has three characteristics of internationalization, compound and application. It aims to cultivate English and business-oriented composite talents who not only have basic English skills, but master linguistics, economics, international trade, business management, marketing, finance, business law and other relevant theoretical knowledge and are familiar with the rules of international business, have strong intercultural communication skills and high humanistic quality and are capable of using talents in the international environment. It aims to develop high-level business talents with excellent language skills, complete business knowledge, and interdisciplinary, cross-border and cross-cultural literacy. [10] This is in line with the teaching philosophy of CLIL theory.

### **4. Teaching Strategy Based on the Theory of Language and Content Integration**

#### ***4.1. Promote English Learning with Professional Subject Knowledge***

The research found that language learning is most effective when people learn language in order to communicate in meaningful social situations. In social life, people use language to exchange information, express emotions and desires. In the school environment, various activities and what happens at school are the main content of their communication. Therefore, the content of each subject offered by the school provides effective foreign language learning content for foreign language or second language teaching, and also provides a meaningful basis for language learning.

Of course, learning English through business content does

not mean that the basic skills training of English is not important. The efficiency of business English learning is inseparable from a solid language foundation. [11] The integration of language and content means that the teacher in the class can let the students master the basic knowledge of English through the specific business content in the teaching, and vice versa, they can better develop the professional knowledge through the language skills training.

Using professional subject knowledge to drive English learning, combining language learning with content learning can help students learn and recognize these language use functions that reflect different subject content, and abide by these language usage rules in communication.

#### ***4.2. Create an Authentic Language Environment to Help Students Construct the Meaning of Knowledge***

Constructivism believes that the construction of knowledge loses its authenticity and meanings to learners if it leaves its environment. Situation is an important factor in English teaching, which directly affects the effect of English teaching. If students want to develop communicative competence, teachers must set up a situation so that learners can transform and reorganize the original cognitive structure to achieve the meaning of new knowledge. For example, the "business simulation company" is a good way to teach students in the real business environment. That is to say, give the students the imaginary funds and goods, let them form a simulation company. They can freely choose trading activities and locations in a specific economic environment. Through simulated business activities, students complete single-job and multi-job rotation training based on business processes so that their comprehensive vocational skills are fully exercised [12].

In addition, the authentic environment can provide a context to the learners. Through a way of contextualized teaching, students' imagination can be stimulated. Learners can use relevant experience to understand new knowledge they have learned.

For example, a teacher can design a product promotion meeting and ask for students to participate in it. Students can use their own products to promote, so that they not only use the business English knowledge they have learned, but also exercise their language practical ability. Second, teachers should pay attention to cultivating students' innovative thinking and ability. Develop students' innovative thinking and abilities by creating an environment and conducting group competitions. It is necessary to break through the closed state of the original subject curriculum as much as possible, and let the students actively explore themselves in an open and dynamic environment to stimulate the initiative and creativity of students. The context of constructivism must be created according to the students' knowledge structure and teaching objectives in order to stimulate students' interest and improve the teaching effect. The materials used should be a blend of old and new, combined with written knowledge and practical application.

### 4.3. Introduce Communicative Approach and Collaborative Learning into the Classroom

The constructivist learning theory emphasizes the importance of collaboration and conversation between teachers and students. They claim teachers should encourage students to use the language knowledge they have learned in a specific communicational situation [13]. It is believed that language should serve communicative activities, and the purpose of language teaching is to develop students' ability to communicate in the language. The teaching process of communicative teaching emphasizes the fluency of language, while relatively neglecting the accuracy of language, that is, teachers should encourage students to use language to communicate, instead of correcting students' language errors, such as phonetic intonation, grammar, vocabulary use, and etc. Communicative law is mainly based on communicative activities. The specific classroom activities mainly include conversation partner activities, group activities, role-playing and interviews. [14] For example, students are divided into groups of 3 to 5 people to discuss a topic, such as the topic "How to operate a community convenience store?" Students need to determine the goods or services they provide, prices, customers, sales channels, funding sources, etc. Through group discussions, students combine their own entrepreneurial knowledge, inspire each other, and accumulate relevant business knowledge in the process of English communication. This process not only enhances the students' language communication skills, but also strengthens their teamwork spirit. Students discuss and communicate under the guidance of teachers. Through group discussions, they can solve problems in a collaborative way. During the discussion, students experienced a process of questioning, exploration and judgment which turn their thoughts into a practical project. Through this way of interpersonal collaboration, learners can use the necessary learning materials to gain knowledge.

### 4.4. Put Emphasis on Cultivating Students' Cross-Cultural Awareness

As the main implementers of cross-cultural knowledge in business English teaching, teachers must have a comprehensive understanding of Chinese and Western cultural concepts and knowledge and their mutual correlations. [15] Business English teachers should implement their teaching based on the cultivation of intercultural communication skills. During the course of teaching, teachers should pay attention to the cultural content in combination with the actual teaching content, and convey the business communication etiquette to students to explore different business values and negotiation styles. At the same time, teachers should share with the students the western cultural factors involved in the social situation combined with the real business situation in the form of language and non-verbal communication. Teachers should help students improve the correctness of language forms and the appropriateness of their applications, and enhance their cross-cultural sensitivity and awareness.

## 5. Conclusion

In short, the business English language has its own distinctive features, which brings certain difficulties to teaching and learning. Business English teachers should recognize its distinctive features, clarify the strengths and shortcomings of different kinds of teaching activities, integrate the language and content, and then adopt targeted teaching strategies. Besides, the development of teachers themselves and the current rapidly developing technology should also be considered. And students are also an aspect which worth paying attention to. Students are encouraged to participate in some diversified classroom activities so that teachers can better promote the effectiveness of business English teaching.

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