

Exploration on the Project-Practical-Training-Week Model in Application-oriented Universities: a Case Study of Business English Major*

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Abstract—Practical training is an important way to reflect the characteristics of talent cultivation in application-oriented universities. And Project-Practical-Training-Week (PPTW) is an innovative model of centralized practical training through which students can systematically learn, practice, and quickly master the practical and professional skills closely-related to their majors within a specific time frame. The article takes the PPTWs carried out by Business English Major, Xiamen Huaxia University, as an example to construct and interpret its connotation, principles, implementation, effects and profound consideration.

Keywords—application-oriented universities; practical training; business English; centralized practice

I. INTRODUCTION

The application-oriented universities lay great emphasis on the word "application" in order to meet the talents needs of economic and social development since the international higher education sectors have gradually formed a new trend, which is to attach great importance to practical training and strengthen the cultivation of applied talents. In recent years, many universities in China have also paid attention to the upgrade of the practice environment in the exploration of education and teaching reform, because people have become more and more aware that practical teaching is an important part of cultivating students' innovative ability and a key approach to improve students' sustainable ability.

Then how to embody and "incarnate" the word "application"? The answer lies in practical teaching, the core part of curriculum design of all application-oriented universities. Only by reforming the education mode and teaching management system will positive results be achieved. These years Xiamen Huaxia University has devoted itself to the construction of practical training reform. The innovative centralized practice model, i.e. the Project-Practical-Training-Week model, received popular recognition by teachers and students upon its launching. This article intends to take the design and implementation of PPTWs carried out by Business English Major as an example to explore the connotation, principles, effects and

inspirations especially.

II. CONNOTATION OF THE PPTW MODEL

The National Standard of Teaching Quality for Business English Majors, the top-level design of Business English Majors, sets a benchmark for the establishment and development of Business English major in China: Business English major has three main characteristics: international, compound and practical. It aims at cultivating students with solid mastery of basic language skills, strong intercultural communicative competence and knowledge of linguistics, economics, international trade, business management, marketing, finance, business law, etc., familiar with the general rules of international business, and to be proficient in using English in the international environment to engage in business as the applied compound talents.

In fact, Brieger (1997: 5) had already proposed that the content of Business English mainly includes three sections: language knowledge, communication skills, and professional content. Among them, applied linguistics can provide strong theoretical support for the language knowledge section, cross-cultural communication and cross-cultural management aim at effective communication and can support the communication skills section while disciplines such as international business and international trade can provide a broad platform for the professional content sector.

Business English is a highly practical specialty. Whether it can effectively link up the learning of business theory knowledge and the training of business operation skills and language expression ability is of great importance to the realization of the goal of cultivating business English professionals with multiple talents. Practical training is the key link of the integration of language and business, knowledge and skills. Li Gang (2014: 77) found that the main problems in the practical training of Business English major at present include: unclear understanding of the practical teaching objectives, unsystematic teaching content, unclear evaluation criteria for teaching effectiveness, and the lack of quality and quantity of practical bases both inside and outside the universities. To some extent, the teaching of this major is still influenced by the traditional teaching mode. At the same time, the educational institutions and teachers do not attach enough importance to practical teaching. As a

*Fund: This paper is sponsored by Xiamen Education Bureau, "13th Five-year Plan" 2017 Project (1732) and Fujian Undergraduate Teaching Reform Project (Project No.: FBJS 20190260).

result, graduates' professional ability is not strong enough to meet the requirements of employers.

In order to cope with this problem, the Business English major of Xiamen Huaxia University designs and implements an innovative and centralized practice mode, which takes the professional projects as chief sources and takes the completion of specific practical tasks as the basis of assessment within one or two weeks.

III. PRINCIPLES OF THE PPTW MODEL

A. Principle of Practicality

Business English teaching has always been guided by the basic policy of "giving priority to practicality and making adequate use of it", aiming at cultivating students' communicative competence and highlighting the practicability and pertinence of teaching content. Therefore, the design of PPTW must pay attention to the practicability of teaching content, and develop the teaching content system with the post demand as the main line.

B. Principle of Systematization

In addition to highlighting the different roles and characteristics of each training module, the practical teaching must also pay attention to the interconnection of each training module. Business English practical training can be divided into two stages: English stage (language competence) and business stage (operation skills). The teaching content of these two stages should be naturally connected in order to make all PPTW training contents to form an organic whole.

C. Principle of Professionalization

Application-oriented undergraduate colleges and universities shoulder the mission of training skilled personnel for service and management front-line needs. Therefore, in business English teaching, it is necessary to combine students' basic language competence with the cultivation of practical posts' business competence, so as to improve their professionalism. Thus, according to different occupational positions, PPTW should set up relevant occupational scenarios, and use simulated or real work scenarios to cultivate students' overall quality in an all-round way.

D. Principle of Operability

The practical teaching of application-oriented colleges and universities is supported by modern educational technology. It is a must to arrange the training contents reasonably, equip the corresponding software and hardware, make the training tasks operable, and facilitate the smooth progress of classroom teaching and extracurricular self-directed learning.

The above principles are based on the reform of practical training in applied undergraduate colleges and universities, and are also the basis for the design of this innovative centralized PPTW model.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PPTW MODEL

The innovative centralized PPTW model is positioned in the practical operation of Business-English related topics,

which enables students to complete systematic training in a relatively short time, and to cultivate students' professional quality and comprehensive ability.

A. Ensuring the Concentration and Compactness of Time and Space as Far as Possible

In terms of time arrangement, all the contents of the project training week are condensed into one week, and students should complete the whole project in five days. All the other courses are paused or postponed so that students can be more involved in training. Time is usually chosen for the first week of school. On the one hand, the interesting nature of the project week can enable students to make a good transition between holidays and courses; on the other hand, students can be asked to make preparations in the summer or winter holidays. At the end of each semester, the teacher team will publicize the PPTW to the students so that they can understand the training content of the next semester and prepare for it. Spatially, students are encouraged to go out of the classroom and enter relevant enterprises, so that students can have more opportunities to practice and truly achieve the ultimate goal of training practical talents.

B. Ensuring the Multi-level Structure of Teachers and the Conformity of Teaching Materials as Far as Possible

In terms of teachers' arrangement, it's a good way to mobilize high-quality teachers' resources both inside and outside the school. For example, in "Business English Cross-border E-commerce Practice Training", the eBay Director in Fujian was invited to introduce the operation and skills of eBay platform; in "Business English Translation Practice Training", the senior translators from Fujian Eagle Translation Service Co., Ltd. were invited to explain the characteristics and translation skills of Business English. In the selection of textbooks, the traditional publications are abandoned. Per the students' characteristics and training objectives, the teachers themselves compile the training manual. It is convenient for students to understand the operation requirements and methods of the project week at any time.

C. Ensuring the Improvement of Students' Comprehensive Ability in Training Purpose

The practical training focuses on, but is not limited to, the cultivation of English skills. It is based on the improvement of students' comprehensive quality and devotes itself to cultivating talents for business English related posts. Therefore, it aims at students' learning level, knowledge structure, professional characteristics and employment needs. Special topics such as "Business English Cross-border E-commerce", "Business English International Trade Negotiation", "Business English Career Planning", and "Business English Translation" are selected to comprehensively improve students' English skills and professional competence. Meanwhile, some projects try to combine scientific research and exploration in practice. For example, "Business English Translation Training" encourages students to summarize, write, modify and even publish their translation experiences and difficulties so that

they can try the whole process and learn the methods of translation research.

D. Ensuring Innovation in Teaching and Assessment Methods

We try to organize the classroom in many ways, get rid of the traditional teacher monologue, and give students more autonomous rights. For example, in "Business English International Trade Negotiation Training" there are several necessary and optional parts with specified tasks for students to choose according to their interests and expertise. And in terms of assessment methods, the traditional ways of students' answering questions and teachers' correcting papers are changed by giving more evaluation rights to students. For example, the group leader's evaluation of the group members is an important indicator of the group members' performance, while the group leader's evaluation is completed by the group members together, and each other fills in the comments. In this way, students' cooperation spirit, leadership and organizational ability etc. can be exercised. Some of the training also takes the form of stage presentation. For example, in the "English Film Dubbing Training", students' presentation style and overall organization are important parts of the evaluation.

V. EFFECTS OF THE PPTW MODEL

Through a week of training, it can be obviously find that students' spiritual outlook and team spirit have been improved. Students get along more harmoniously. The better implementation effect of Project Week gives great inspiration to teachers in the training mode and plays a driving role in improving the teaching system.

A. Students' Interest in Learning Has Been Enhanced Through Various Training Methods and Contents

The relaxed and lively form of project training week can quickly attract students' attention, enhance students' participation, and maximize students' interest in learning. Through the form of simulation, each project carries out different forms of training according to students' language level, projects' characteristics and requirements. For example, the project "English Speech and Debate Practice" takes the form of organizing students to make impromptu speeches, prepared speeches and debate competitions.

B. Students' Professional Literacy Has Been Improved Through the Training of Business English Related Projects

Business English Project Training Week is based on promoting the combination of theory and practice, so that students can get in touch with practical skills more quickly and master theoretical knowledge more profoundly. "Business English Tour Guide Project Practice" introduces scenic spots through project orientation, theoretical teaching, case analysis, video viewing, simulation of English tour guide, and solves various problems in the tour so as to successfully complete the tour guide task. In practice, students' confidence in English learning should be improved: learn to use English to solve problems and improve fun. "Business English Career Planning" guides

students to consult a large number of business English related materials and job needs and to determine the direction of development from the perspective of their own interests and abilities. For freshmen or sophomores, the students' professional wishes in the training manual can even be used as a basis for future professional diversion intentions. After the training, the survey also found that 48.6% of the students re-examine and plan their career goals.

C. The Training Curriculum System Tends to Be Further Improved Through Many Explorations

Through a lot of different attempts and then gradually the PPTW has initially formed a training system with the project training bases as the platform, the project training manual as the blueprint, and the project training instructors as the core. The sequence of the projects has been carefully considered. Considering the particularity of the Business English major and the insufficient recognition of cross-border e-commerce, which is one of the major employment directions of our students, a training week of cross-border e-commerce related platforms was designed specifically. Through lectures, students' understanding of cross-border e-commerce was deepened and their hands-on ability was trained through practice. The project design of "Business English Tour Guide Training" focuses on the lively atmosphere of the task. In the form of tours, students can all go on stage to perform and show their psychological quality and comprehensive ability. "Career Project" focuses on tapping students' inherent potential, grasping students' development trend and willingness psychologically, enabling students to set a clearer goal. Also this project triggers them to start thinking about their own future career, to summarize their strengths and weaknesses, and more firmly embark on the career development path of their own will.

Through the training inside and outside the classroom, students' comprehensive quality has been improved. Through various training projects with different contents and distinct characteristics, students' potentials can be stimulated from different angles and their qualities can be improved in many ways. The training weeks change the perspective of business English students' demand for knowledge and turn knowledge and skills into their actual ability. Practice enables students to experience the needs of the industry, clear learning objectives and employment direction.

VI. CONSIDERATION OF THE PPTW MODEL

The practical project training weeks have basically formed a systematic model, but in the implementation stage, there may still be some problems or regrets. In order to achieve better effects of PPTW, the following aspects need special attention:

A. Scientifically Standardized Scoring Methods Should Be Explored in Performance Evaluation

It will be hard to achieve fairness if the evaluation relies entirely on students' independent scoring. On the one hand, the scores are given according to the contribution degree of the team members. Because of the difference of the evaluation criteria of each group leader, the final scores of each group are quite different. On the other hand, because it

is the group leader who evaluates the contribution degree, some of them are sophisticated, and they often fail to score fairly, which may eventually lead to little score difference between students who work hard in the group and those who are lazy bones. Therefore, while empowering students with rights, some rules should be set to restrict them, so as to prevent the occurrence of random and humane scoring. Some parts even can use the way of public scoring. For example, teachers and classmates from other departments can be invited to participate in the exhibition of "Business English Tour Guides", the performers and hosts can be anonymously voted on. Or the whole exhibition process can be videotaped and uploaded to the Internet. Votes will be scored throughout the whole university to form a student-led, public-participated, teachers-monitored performance evaluation model.

B. The Training Time Should Be Set According to the Characteristics of Each Project

Due to the limitation of conditions, all training in the specific project must be completed within one week. However, for some projects, the limited time of five days is not enough for students to fully integrate into them. For example, in the "Business English Cross-Border E-Commerce Practice Training", our students really sell on the platform for a short time. But due to the time constraints, the data of each sector is not full of authenticity and persuasion. Therefore, according to the characteristics of the project, this limitation can be broke through and extend the time to two weeks or even one month. In order not to affect the running of other courses, the first week can be designed as a start-up and the follow-up can be integrated with other courses, so that students can make full use of their spare time. Or according to the characteristics of every project, the model of small project week can be adopted, i.e., three or two days to complete one task, in order to ensure that students can get better results in the training.

C. The Implementation of the PPTW Should Work Hand in Hand with the Related Enterprises

Due to the limitation of time and resources, the elements of school-enterprise cooperation have not been fully embodied in the training. Although some famous business people were invited to give guidance and lectures, they failed to achieve more in-depth cooperation between schools and enterprises, such as letting students enter the enterprise and truly understanding the practical processes. In addition, due to the shortage of teachers in application-oriented colleges and universities it's hard to give students more tracking and care. And because of time constraints, business people are unable to follow up and guide students. However, in practice, the advantages of school-enterprise cooperation are indispensable and should be more fully demonstrated. More entrepreneurs should be invited to participate in it, as instructors or judges, to guide and evaluate students from a practical point of view. If conditions permit, students had better go "deep" into the enterprise whose working environment can make students' vocational skills better trained. At the same time, the actual needs of jobs can also promote schools to form more applicable teaching evaluation

standards. Of course, economic interests are one of the greatest driving forces for enterprises to participate in school-enterprise cooperation. Effective participation of enterprises will also bring many benefits to themselves, such as the discovery of talents and operation trainees.

VII. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of the processes and effects of the implementation of the PPTWs, this innovative centralized practice form is an effective training model, which plays a good role in promoting students' comprehensive quality and fairly promotes the cultivation of applied talents. However, it should be pointed out that for students of different types of institutions, different majors and different educational backgrounds, the PPTW model also needs to be based on their professional status and characteristics of design and implementation. The PPTW model also should be constantly polished and perfected amid reform.

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