

Applying PBL Teaching Model in College Business English Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Traditional education methods have been difficult to meet the needs of students and society for business English talents. As a new teaching approach, Problem-Based Learning (PBL) has been widely studied and applied to the medical field. Based on the review of previous studies, this paper analyses the advantages of PBL teaching. It explores the feasibility of the PBL model in business English teaching in China from two aspects: needs and significance. Due to the principles and characteristics of PBL, it can cover the shortage of traditional teaching, improve the language ability of business English talents and cultivate their capacity to deal with international affairs. The implication of this paper is to provide direction for the reform of college business English teaching and present some valuable information for future research in this field.

Keywords: *PBL teaching model, Business English, Teaching and Learning*

1. INTRODUCTION

Under the background of economic globalization and the Belt and Road policy, China's bilateral and multilateral trade is developed [1]. Moreover, this has prompted the increasing needs of Business English talent (BE talent) for the whole society. In tandem, the national standard on the Business-English teaching quality of higher education, released by The Ministry of Education, states clearly that business English major aims to cultivate specific interdisciplinary and applied-type talents who will handle affairs in international business [2]. However, traditional education--Lecture-Based Learning (LBL) is a kind of teacher-centred, student-passively accepted teaching model that are not welcomed by most students [3]. It is hard to approach the requirement to cultivate BE talent.

Till now, a large number of studies of applying PBL teaching model focus more on the medical area while less on business English. Therefore, there is still a research gap in it.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the application of the PBL teaching method in business English teaching and its practical significance. Also, it is noticeable to point out some problems when putting the PBL model in practice.

2. THE OVERVIEW OF PBL TEACHING MODEL

PBL is a student-centred teaching model in which students learn knowledge and cultivate abilities by active group cooperating or projects solving in an authentic teaching context. At first, the PBL teaching method was applied to the medical field. Later, because of its novelty and advance, the PBL teaching model has now been widely adopted to other fields.

2.1. The Principles of PBL Teaching Model

There are several basic principles that the PBL teaching model follows: problem-oriented or project-oriented, student-centred, authenticity, interdisciplinary learning, group corporation, etc.

2.2 Comparing PBL and LBL

Compared with the traditional teaching model Lecture-Based Learning (LBL), the PBL teaching model is more suitable to cultivate learners' abilities. The traditional teaching model Lecture-Based Learning (LBL) takes teachers as the centre, which focuses on lectures, and adopts large-class teaching [3]. Usually, students accept knowledge passively, which is not conducive to mobilizing students' enthusiasm. In addition, since the

class is teacher-centred, students have less opportunity for self-expression and self-development. It is also difficult to train students' independent thinking and transferred learning abilities [3].

In order to cover LBL's shortage, the PBL teaching method has developed. The PBL teaching model can better conform to the trend of times, stimulate the initiative and improve the comprehensive quality of students [3]. Therefore, with the help of PBL teaching method, students are able to make better use of knowledge and form good habits in an authentic situation.

The PBL teaching model has substantial application value especially for business English, which belongs to the area of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) related to a specific profession, subject, or purposes with clear goals, strong pertinence, and high practical value.

2.3. Similarities and Differences of Problem-Based Learning and Project-Based Learning

Generally, the PBL teaching model is divided into "Problem-Based Learning" and "Project-Based Learning". Both have similarities but also have their characteristics. On the one hand, "Problem-Based Learning" and "Project-Based Learning" have the same acronym (both are PBL), and both rely on constructivism [4]. On the other hand, the two PBL teaching models differ from many aspects, such as origin, application, process, presenting form.

Due to the differences, Problem-Based Learning is often applied to the theoretical learning stage, while Project-Based Learning is suitable for further research and practical output stage.

2.3.1. Problem-Based Learning

American psychiatrist Professor Barrows firstly established Problem-Based Learning at McMaster University in Canada in 1969 [5]. Typically, this model is used in theoretical knowledge learning to help learners better master the subject. Problem-Based Learning focuses on problem-solving, which means students ponder on problem-solving methods in an authentic context. These questions, usually provided by teachers, are primarily real and semi-open questions. Driven by the problem, students form a group to deeply understand and integrate the problem's knowledge. As the problems are solved step by step, students' understanding of knowledge is also gradually formed. Finally, each group will report on the research and the solution to the problem. The overall implementation process of Problem-Based Learning can be briefly summarized as establishing a group, setting up a new problem, collecting evidence to solve the problem, group reporting, and reflection [6].

2.3.2 Project-Based Learning

The origin of Project-Based Learning can be traced back to "learning by doing" advocated by the famous educator Prof. John Dewey [6]. This model recommends students achieve learning goals by completing some complex and challenging projects [4]. Based on the theoretical knowledge that students have learned, they use existing information technology and work in a group to analyse and research the project and finally form a result. And most learning results are presented in materialized forms, such as posters, models and research reports. Project-Based Learning is usually used in the practice stage, focusing on applying the theoretical knowledge in real life or work scenes and emphasizing students' practical abilities. Due to the authenticity and complexity of the project, students need to invest more time and learn more about the application of theories in practice. Therefore, while doing real projects, students also strengthen their understandings and applications of theories and improve their abilities in all aspects. The overall implementation process can be briefly summarized as project design, introduction, task implementation, stage summary, and achievement evaluation.

3. THE APPLICATION OF THE PBL TEACHING MODEL IN BUSINESS ENGLISH TEACHING

3.1. The Needs of Applying PBL in Business English Teaching

The principle and ideal teaching results of the PBL teaching method in cultivating students' ability are consistent with the objectives of business English majors in cultivating business English talents. Moreover, business English students also highly expect a changing teaching method.

Next, the author will analyse applying the PBL teaching model in Business English teaching from roughly two aspects.

3.1.1 Requirements of Business English Talent

3.1.1.1. National Standard of China

The National Criterion of Teaching Quality for BA Program in Business English (NCTQPBE), issued by the Ministry of Education of China, puts forward three goals from the shallower to the deeper for the training of business English talents.

The first goal is to cultivate the ability of how to use business discourse [2]. Unlike General English, Business English does not only focus on the language system but also emphasizes the relationships between language and business context. Business English has strong practicality

and pertinence in both oral and written expressions, which are reflected in some introductory courses such as Business English Writing, Business English Interpretation, and Business English Reading.

The second goal is to cultivate the ability of how to engage in international business in English [2]. At this stage, students begin to learn business knowledge at a higher level systematically. Correspondingly, the professional disciplines also focus more on business and highlight cross-disciplinary features, such as economics, management and international business law.

The third goal is to cultivate the ability of how to conduct research on the international business environment [2]. Business English majors place great emphasis on practical aspects. Therefore, students need to use what they have learned to explore the actual business situation. In summary, the first two goals lean toward students' mastery and understandings of theoretical knowledge: starting from business-oriented language essential learning gradually to in-depth learning of professional business knowledge. The third goal is biased towards students' practical application ability.

In view of the above three goals, teachers can use the PBL teaching model to develop business English teaching. The Problem-Based Learning method will be adopted to the theoretical teaching stage, where students understand and master theoretical knowledge by exploring related problems and analysing real cases. After students lay the foundation, teachers can apply Project-Based Learning to carry out project research, business training and help students strengthen the application of theoretical knowledge. Compared with LBL, which teachers teach and students passively accept, PBL's principles of student-centred, authenticity, interdisciplinary, etc., are more conducive to cultivating a compound and applied BE talent.

3.1.1.2. Requirements of Employers

In addition, according to Shi, employers also attach great importance to the professional qualities of business English talents, such as knowledge and capacities of solving actual business problems, cross-cultural awareness, and cooperation ability [1]. This means that schools need to pay more attention to developing students' practical ability to solve problems in teaching, providing more practice opportunities for students, and exercising their resilience in real business situations. The application of the PBL teaching mode can impart theoretical knowledge, furthermore, can strengthen students' practical application ability of theory and train students' competence in all aspects. Its teaching principles and results can meet the training objectives and employers' needs for business English talents.

3.1.2 Students' Opinions for Business English Teaching

As the centre of teaching, students' opinions on teaching are also critical significant. According to Wang, for the answer to the question "What is your favourite business English teaching model", students have a unique preference for "case analysis" (66.4%) [8]. In contrast, the traditional model of "translation and sentence pattern", "vocabulary practice" are less selected (10.7% and 7.5% respectively).

In the design process of PBL, it is often necessary to explore the problem or project in combination with the actual situation. "Case analysis" is one of the methods to achieve it and one of the teaching models that students like. Students hope to understand and digest business knowledge through business examples. Through the study and research of problems and projects, students' enthusiasm for the subject will also be greatly stimulated, which is more conducive to the formation of students' lifelong learning thought.

3.2. The Significances of Applying PBL in Business English Teaching

The benefits of applying PBL in business English teaching are bidirectional, which can cultivate students' abilities. Meanwhile, it imperceptibly improves teachers' quality.

3.2.1 For Students

For students, the benefits of applying PBL teaching model are intuitive.

Firstly, it is helpful for students to form long-term memory of knowledge. The analysis and exploration of specific business issues and projects determines that students need to read some literature on related topics and pay attention to understanding the connotations behind them.

Secondly, it is conducive to converting students' learning habits, from passive acceptance to autonomous learning, from isolated individual learning to group cooperation. At the same time, PBL learning method is favourable to cultivating students' cooperative ability, communicative ability and self-management ability. Commercial and trading knowledge usually changes as the global environment changes. Only if BE talents master the capacity to self-study and cooperate and communicate with others can they solve complicated business problems and situations smoothly and successfully.

Thirdly, it is conducive to cultivating students' critical thinking and creative ability. PBL teaching mode abandons the short-sight search for quick success and instant benefits. Instead, it pays much attention to

cultivating students' innovative consciousness and creative ability [7]. In PBL mode, the classroom atmosphere is democratic, and the error tolerance rate is high, which both allow students to put forward their ideas with great passions. The PBL teaching model is more conducive to their divergent thinking on practical business problems to put forward more diversified schemes for business English students. Compared with other majors, business English majors are more international-oriented and exposed to more information. If students lack critical thinking, their effects on knowledge selection, understanding, and evaluation will be greatly reduced. They will also feel difficult to distinguish the favourable or unfavourable factors in actual business.

3.2.2 For Teachers

Teaching and learning are mutually reinforcing. In the PBL learning model, teachers are the planners, organizers, resource-providers, promoters, facilitators, and assessors [9]. In addition, BE is a highly interdisciplinary subject. Teachers should not only have corresponding educational concepts and practical abilities, but also master professional knowledge in business. In order to achieve the expected effect of PBL teaching, teachers will continuously improve their teaching level, increase knowledge reserves. Only in this way can the above roles be well played by teachers in the teaching process and help students better solve their confusion. At the same time, with the deepening of teaching, teachers can excavate more teaching innovation aspects. Teachers can also strengthen their application and thinking ability of modern information technology when providing students with problems or project situations and solving doubts.

3.3. Noticeable Problems in Applying PBL Model

In the process of the PBL teaching, there are often some problems that need teachers, students, and schools to work together to avoid and solve.

Firstly, the implementation process only focuses on formality and just blindly emphasizes independent inquiry [7]. Group discussions and independent learning are mere formalities or blindly emphasize group discussions without teachers inducting relevant fundamental theories, thus ignoring the guiding role of textbooks. In the process of teaching, teachers should deal with the relationship between independent learning, group cooperation, and class managements.

Secondly, the role of teachers is not in place. As far as teachers are concerned, the PBL teaching model requires them to be transformed from "providers of knowledge" to "facilitators of learning" [8]. If teachers are still accustomed to dominating the student's inquiry

process or ultimately allowing students to explore independently without providing any guidance, the teaching effect of PBL will deviate from its teaching philosophy.

Additionally, the design of PBL problems or projects lacks students' perspective and authenticity through real problem situations, learning materials, and learning process [9]. Authenticity is critical in Business English teaching design. Problem sets cannot correctly match students' cognitive level, which will discourage students' interests. Therefore, when designing teaching problems, teachers need to consider students' cognitive level, practical ability, actual situation, and other factors.

Finally, students' awareness of autonomous learning needs to be strengthened, and the existing teaching evaluation system is not conducive to PBL teaching. The education model experienced by Chinese students for a long time is passive learning, which is very dependent on teachers. In addition, due to the overall orientation of the university evaluation system, students' learning motivation mainly comes from some outside factors (e.g., social status, salary). In contrast, PBL learning mostly depends on students' internal motivation of "curiosity of knowledge." The existing evaluation system is not conducive to implementing PBL teaching to a certain extent.

4. CONCLUSION

In this review, the author mainly analyses the feasibility of the PBL teaching model in business English teaching. PBL model provides a new method for business English teaching and talent training, which is of great significance.

The paper is divided into two parts. The first part mainly reviews the characteristics of the PBL teaching mode, its comparison with the traditional LBL teaching model, and the similarities and differences between Problem-Based Learning and Project-Based Learning. According to their differences, two PBL models (Problem-Based Learning and Project-Based Learning) can be used respectively at the theoretical learning stage and the practical stage. The second part focuses on the application of the PBL teaching model in business English teaching. From the perspective of national standards, social needs, and students, the author makes a demand analysis on the application of PBL in business English teaching. Subsequently, the author further analysed the significance of the PBL teaching model to the cultivation of business English talents and its influence on the improvement of teachers' abilities. Finally, the author emphasizes some problems that should be paid attention to in the implementation of the PBL teaching model.

The significance of this study is to explore the influence of PBL teaching model on business English

teaching in Chinese universities and its effectiveness in enriching the skills and abilities of business English talents. This paper also provides some references for improving business English teaching quality in China colleges and universities and presents valuable directions for future research.

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