A Role-Integrated Project-Based Teaching Model for EFL Writing: A Case Study of Business English Writing

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Abstract. This paper proposes a role-integrated project-based teaching model for EFL writing, focusing on business English correspondence. It identifies common issues in traditional teaching, such as the gap between theory and practice and shallow single-scenario simulations. The model addresses these issues by structuring the entire business letter-writing process as a unified project. This process ranges from writing initial development letters to handling post-sales complaint letters. Students take on different roles (e.g., sales representative, customer service clerk) to complete each stage, integrating client acquisition, contract negotiation, and after-sales management into a unified framework. The model sets up two student groups as trading partners for interactive correspondence, with cross-cultural elements embedded in tasks. Results from the qualitative study indicate that this model supports the development of students' business writing skills, cross-cultural communication abilities, and teamwork competence in real-world business contexts.

Keywords: Role-Integrated Teaching, Project-Based Learning, Business English Writing, Cross-Cultural Communication

1 Introduction

With the rapid expansion of international business, proficiency in business English correspondence writing has become a core skill for effective professional communication. However, traditional teaching approaches often rely on a single, standardized scenario for practice. These methods tend to overemphasize grammatical accuracy and format, while neglecting the practical application of writing skills and students' engagement. As a result, there is a clear gap between classroom learning and real business needs. Students often lack the ability to adjust their writing to different business situations. In addition, teacher-centered methods limit students' initiative, cultural awareness, and collaborative skills.

To address these issues, this study introduces a role-integrated project-based teaching model. Within simulated trade scenarios, students in small teams are assigned different roles, including business representative, document specialist, customer service clerk, and team leader. Each role is tasked with specific responsibilities aligned with real-world trade operations. Groups interact as trading partners, exchanging

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business letters that integrate cross-cultural communication tasks. This interactive approach moves beyond the constraints of traditional instruction. It allows students to explore multiple dimensions of business communication, enhancing students' writing proficiency while fostering professional awareness, teamwork, and global perspective, offering a practical teaching model for business English writing.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Project-Based Learning in EFL Teaching

Blumenfeld (2000) defines PBL as a student-driven instructional approach rooted in authentic problem-solving, aligning with your emphasis on student-centered learning and real-world applications[2]. This approach is based on social constructivism and combines ideas like situated learning, which means learning should happen in real-life situations, and social interaction, which focuses on how working together helps people understand things. It also uses cognitive tools, such as apps or problem-solving steps, to help learners think and organize tasks. By bringing these ideas together, it forms a teaching model where knowledge is built through practical activities, teamwork, and helpful tools.

In EFL teaching, project-based learning engages students in authentic, real- world problem-solving experiences. This approach enables students to apply language skills in practical contexts, enhancing not only their language skills but also career skills like adaptability, collaboration, problem-solving, and communication.

A study by Samarji and Sabbah (2024) investigated its application in an intensive - English course at a private Lebanese university. They found that as students actively engaged in meaningful, creative projects, their attitudes towards L2 learning improved. This implies that project-based learning can effectively alleviate psychological barriers in EFL learning[5]. Cahyono et al. (2024) conducted a meta-analysis which revealed that project-based learning had a significant positive effect size in EFL/ESL writing[3]. Wang (2022) delved into the effects of technology-mediated task-based language teaching in an EFL writing course. This research highlights the potential of integrating technology into project-based language learning, suggesting that it can further optimize the learning experience and writing outcomes in EFL classrooms[6].

2.2 Role-Playing in EFL Teaching

Role-playing is an effective teaching method that can create real-world learning situations. Research demonstrates that role-playing enhances linguistic skills like fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary mastery and affective outcomes.

Bakhshayesh (2023) states one of the practical techniques that teachers use to increase students' motivation and promote their speaking skills is role-playing. This didactic strategy goes beyond developing speaking and fluency. It allows students to take various roles, more precisely, to perform different identities when solving problems, allowing them to get out of the box and think creatively[1]. Elouali, F. Z. (2023)

emphasizes that role-playing helps learners to reflect on specific problems and pushes them to find solutions creatively[4].

However, previous research on role-playing in EFL teaching has predominantly centered around oral communication, and often focus on simple scenario simulation. Building on the existing research, this study explores deeper into business English correspondence writing to develop a more comprehensive and practical role-based collaborative teaching model.

3 Design and Implementation of the Role-Integrated Project-Based Teaching Model

The business English correspondence course aims to train students in drafting professional business letters for international trade. The process generally unfolds in several stages. First comes customer acquisition, such as drafting prospecting letters to reach out to potential clients. Next is responding to inquiries, where replies are crafted for clients' product questions. Then comes preparing quotations, which involves detailing price offers in formal letters. After that is contract negotiation, where amendment proposals are exchanged between parties. Order confirmation follows, finalizing the purchase agreements. Post-contract stages include notifying clients about shipments, such as advising them on delivery schedules. There is also preparing payment documentation, like issuing invoices and payment requests. Finally, after-sales communication involves handling complaint letters or warranty claims. This workflow requires students to master a range of business letters, from initial outreach to post-transaction correspondence, mirroring real-world foreign trade practices.

This training is achieved through a structured approach that divides students into small teams, with each member assuming one of the four roles: business representative, document specialist, after-sales specialist or team leader. The role-integrated project-based teaching model uses role rotation and stage-specific tasks to immerse students in the full process of trade correspondence.

The model is implemented in four key stages: preparation, simulation, collaboration, and reflection. To demonstrate how it works, the development and inquiry letter communication process for exporting Chinese cultural pattern T-shirts from a small Chinese clothing company to European market serves as an integrated example.

3.1 Preparation: Knowledge Introduction and Role Allocation

In the first stage, students build a foundation of knowledge. Teachers provide scaffolding on relevant topics, including the formats for development and inquiry letters, common phrases used in these letters, and key trade terms like bulk order and sample. Students also study how to adapt their messages to different cultures. They analyze what European consumers think about Chinese cultural elements, such as traditional red paper-cut motifs and Peking opera mask, and then learn how to link these elements to the values that matter to European buyers.

After completing this phase, students are grouped into small teams. Each member gets a role with specific tasks. Business representatives are responsible for writing development letters, highlighting the cultural value of the products to attract European retailers. Document specialists prepare detailed product information and draft quotations, to make sure all data about the products, such as fabric type, size options, and certifications, is accurate and clear. Team leaders ensure that tasks are completed on time and review the drafts for consistency.

3.2 Simulation: Scenario Simulation and Practical Exercises

In the simulation stage, groups take on the roles of exporters and importers. One group acts as Chinese exporters, while another acts as European importers. The process starts when exporters' business representatives send development letters. These letters tell the cultural stories behind the T-shirts and explain why the products are valuable. For instance, "Our Chinese knot T-shirts combine traditional art with modern fashion, making them perfect for European customers who appreciate unique designs."

In response, importers' document specialists send inquiry letters. These letters ask important questions about price, order quantity, delivery time, and product certifications.

3.3 Collaboration: Cross-Group Collaboration and Peer Feedback

Once the simulation letters are written, groups exchange their work for peer evaluation. They use a set of standard criteria to assess each other's letters: language accuracy, checking for grammar mistakes, correct spelling of trade terms, and proper sentence structure; cultural appeal, seeing if the letters effectively highlight the cultural uniqueness of the products and connect with European consumers' interests; and role performance, evaluating how well each role fulfilled its duties, such as whether business representatives wrote persuasive letters or document specialists asked clear, relevant questions.

Teachers then address common problems. They point out issues like misusing trade terms or failing to follow European business etiquette. Students discuss these problems together and work on improving their letters based on the feedback they receive.

3.4 Reflection: Reflective Evaluation and Competency Reinforcement

In the final stage, students reflect on their performance. For instance, a business representative might realize the cultural meaning of certain designs was not well-explained and plan to add more details in future letters to help European buyers understand better. A document specialist might realize that the inquiry letter lacked clear details on currency and trade terms, and plan to improve accuracy in future drafts.

Teachers also provide feedback, evaluating both individual student performance in roles and overall group collaboration. Students collect their revised letters, self-reflection notes, and peer reviews in a portfolio. This portfolio demonstrates their

progress and helps them recognize growth in writing business English letters and cross-cultural communication.

Role rotation is implemented for subsequent writing tasks. Business representatives who previously focused on attracting clients with persuasive language can step into the shoes of document specialists, learning to handle detailed product information and quotations, while document specialists can take on the role of team leaders, developing their management and review skills. At later stages, especially when dealing with service-related issues, students can rotate into the role of after-sales specialists. This rotation ensures that students gain a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of trade letter drafting.

4 Conclusion

The role-integrated project-based teaching model adopted in the Business English Correspondence course offers a practical and engaging approach to improving students' professional writing and cross-cultural communication skills. By assigning students to specific roles and guiding them through realistic trade communication scenarios, the model bridges the gap between classroom learning and real-world business needs.

This structured and immersive approach enhances students' ability to draft business letters suited to real-world professional situations, strengthens their cross-cultural awareness, and cultivates essential soft skills such as collaboration, problem-solving, and adaptability. Role rotation further ensures that students gain a comprehensive understanding of different tasks and perspectives within international trade correspondence, from client engagement to document preparation and customer service. Effects achieved from classroom implementation suggests that the model significantly improves student engagement, writing proficiency, and teamwork effectiveness.

To expand the impact of this teaching model, integration with AI technologies is recommended. For instance, AI-powered language analysis tools can provide instant feedback on letter writing, helping students improve grammar, vocabulary usage, and rhetorical appropriateness. Additionally, data analytic tools can help teachers track student progress more accurately, identify common challenges, and customize teaching strategies accordingly.

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