

# Study of the Application of the Task-based Approach of the Module of Foreign Trade Negotiation----Take Claim Negotiation for Example

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## Abstract

Based on the analysis of Task-based Teaching Approach and its practice in Module of Foreign Trade Negotiation in vocational colleges, this paper aims to explore an effective teaching method to improve the enthusiasm of the students and enhance their trade negotiation abilities in English with practical example of the application in claim negotiation.

**Keywords:** Task-based Approach, foreign trade negotiation, claim negotiation, application and practice

## 1. Introduction

Along with the fast pace of export-oriented economic growth in China, more and more Chinese enterprises begin to realize that international trade negotiation plays an important role in doing business with their counterparts outside China. Therefore, for vocational college graduates majoring in international trade, one of their key professional competences is to improve their international trade negotiation capability. However, there is a considerable gap between the actual needs and students' real negotiation ability. In most vocational colleges, tradition-

al teaching measures have been taken on module of Foreign Trade Negotiation, which are lack of specific negotiations products, specific negotiation strategies and proper negotiation expressions. In order to arouse students' interest and improve their negotiation ability effectively, I tried to introduce task-based teaching method into teaching practice. Students are grouped fulfill the tasks. Real exporting commodities are introduced into the class as a carrier for negotiations, heated discussion between students are guided and situational practice in which one student acts as the seller and the other acts as the buyer in foreign trade context are frequently used. Years of teaching experience proves that the experiential learning method does inspire students' learning enthusiasm and sharpen their negotiation capability to a certain extent.

## 2. Task-based Teaching Approach and its actual application in module of Foreign Trade Negotiation

### 2.1. Task-based Teaching Approach and its Characteristics

Task-based teaching methods is a teaching method which is based on actual task and is accomplished by arousing students'

interest so as to achieve a flexible and proper use of knowledge as well as competences. Therefore, its essence is student-centered and "learning by doing." Task-based teaching methods advocates providing students with various learning opportunities and encouraging students to participate in tasks, which leads to an overall improvement of students' comprehensive abilities and qualities.

Task-based teaching approaches have clear objectives emphasizing on how to complete task effectively. In designing teaching tasks, situational teaching is considered before because students, the subject of learning, are more interested in learning environment which is more closely connected with real scene. Only through practical experience such as their independent works and heated discussions can students master relative knowledge and complete tasks at last. This kind of learning process will greatly help students to develop self-learning ability.

The great difference between traditional teaching approaches and task-based approaches is the role of teacher. The teacher is not supposed to offer students with fish but to teach them how to fish. Students will learn how to solve problems under difference circumstance by themselves and truly master the skills. In task-based approaches, teachers will act as task designer, task organizer, supervisor as well as evaluators and sometimes even as the participants if needed.

## **2.2. Application of Task-based teaching methods to module of Foreign Trade Negotiation**

Nowadays, more and more teachers come to realize that task-based approaches have many strong points to arouse students' interests by stating clear teaching objectives in advance, transforming the role of teachers and students and create a real circumstance for students to experience by themselves. What's more, this ap-

proach was strongly promoted to fulfill new English curriculum standard by the Ministry of Education in China in Nov, 2011.

Foreign trade negotiation is a complicated communication activity whose backgrounds are quite flexible. Experimental task-based approaches is worthwhile to be used in this module as the teacher is aimed to help students to grasp the way of fishing instead of offering them with fish directly. This module is designed by three parts, preparation stage, specific negotiation stage and practice stage. Firstly, students will be grouped by 5 students and are required to select a certain exporting products for negotiation. The product will serve as a vivid a teaching carrier which deepens the negotiations. Specific negotiation links are designed based on the real foreign trade negotiation process such as price negotiation, payment negotiation, packing negotiation, shipment negotiation, insurance negotiation, signing a contract, fulfilling a contract, claim negotiation. In this stage, cases as well as useful words, expressions and strategies will be introduced. Finally, typical negotiation situations such as fair, airport, company, factory, dinner either by face to face or by telephone are designed which cover an overall exporting process.

Therefore, practical talents can be developed by task-based teaching methods as it can stimulate students' interest, extend negotiation strategy by discussion and enhance the ability of English conversation by completing a specific task. All in all, task-based teaching methods may lay a solid foundation for the transition of the students to successful salesmen.

### **3. Practice of the Task-based Approach to the module of Foreign Trade Negotiation---Taking Claim Negotiation for Example**

Claims negotiation is an important part of business negotiation which emerges between the seller and the buyer on dealing with the claims. No matter how carefully two negotiation parties execute their respective tasks, there are always a variety of reasons which can cause damage. The party who suffers from losses will certainly lodge a claim for compensation. Successful claim negotiations can maintain and even expand trade relations. However, if it is handled carelessly, it might lead to the end of trade relations. Owing to the importance of claims negotiation, this article will take claim negotiation as an example to explore teaching practice in the course of trade negotiation by task-based approaches.

#### **3.1. Practice steps**

Task-based approaches follow certain stages: pre-task (task design), task execution (planning and report) and task evaluation (analysis and practice). Pre-task includes introduction of course, previous preparation and new knowledge learning. The task can be accomplished mainly by discussion and negotiation practices in which one student acts as the buyer and the other as the seller which helps to cultivate innovation capacity, negotiating skills and language ability. A comprehensive and thoughtful evaluation of task takes both group and individual performance into consideration from the perspectives from both the teachers as well as students.

#### **3.2. Practice process**

In task designing step, based on own experience as a salesman and cooperation with trading company, typical cases are carefully selected to help students to give a general idea of the context and under-

stand clearly about their tasks. For example, the course can be introduced by questions in terms of claim negotiation such as "In usual practice of foreign trade, what kind of problems may lead to claim? In case of discrepancies of quality or quantity in consignments and contract, what should the buyer do? What kind of evidences should be included before lodging claim against your counterpart? If you (as a seller) agree with the claim amount, which way will you choose to pay the claim amount?" Secondly, students are supposed to do pre-tasks. In that stage, students should learn the basic process and expose the possible reason of claim. What's more, expressions such as "lodge a claim, identify reasons, propose a solution, accept a claim and reject a claim" will be discussed and emphasized. Then, typical cases will be introduced which show how experienced salesmen settle claim negotiation successfully.

After the above preparation, students will work in groups to implement the task. According to given background, they will decide their negotiation strategies and begin to design the dialogues in English from the perspective of their business role, such as the buyer, the seller, or engineer from factories. For example Mr. Itoh, a Japanese businessman, filed a claim against Ningbo Textiles Imp. & Exp Corp for 100% cotton pajamas. He complained that some of the goods reached to them were of varied coloring. Mr. Wang, a sales manager of Ningbo Textiles Imp. & Exp. Corporation is authorized to take up the matter.

In this step, students are encouraged to think independently, then, they are urged to express their ideas to their counterpart. They are encouraged to discuss in English but partly in Chinese is also allowed just to arouse their interest because most of students are not good at oral English. At that time, teacher can work as guide to propose good solution.

After the Students have determined their negotiation strategy, two members of the group will act as the negotiator and begin their dialogue in English. One will record it and the other observes their negotiation from three aspects: negotiation contents, negotiation manner and English expressions. When the practice is over, they are supposed to point out all the mistakes and make amendment accordingly. At that time, teachers should pay great attention to group discussion to make sure everyone of the group take part in the activity and especially urge those who are not so active to contribute to their group work.

It is also necessary that the teacher randomly select one or two groups to make presentation of their task. During their presentation, PPT is required so that all the students can catch up with what's been said. What's more, photos can be taken on spot so that the negotiation manner can be studied later and the relative presentation can be recorded for listening over and over during valuation process.

Valuation of task aims to takes both individual and group performance into consideration from the perspectives from both the teachers as well as students. Students can compare their own performance with that of the others and then make the conclusion whose strategy is better, who can express their ideas more freely and whose business manner is more properly. Students can benefit from the presentation of the group work, and little by little, they are supposed to deal with very flexible questions happened in real business background and thus to improve their real capability to solve problems.

### **3.3. Practical Effect Evaluation**

After several rounds of teaching practice, it is considered that task-based approach can lead to better results in teaching module of Foreign Trade Negotiations. Task-based teaching method is different

from traditional ones in the following respects: Firstly, it is centered on students rather than teacher. Students can understand more if they take part in negotiation acting as a buyer or a seller. The discussion among group can help students to learn how to communicate with each other and the presentation before students is a good chance for them to practice both English and courage.

Secondly, in working out the task, a specific commodity is used to deepen negotiation, which will not only enrich product knowledge but also make negotiation more vivid and more realistic. Even when they are dealing with different merchandize after their graduation from vocational colleges, they can handle it confidently because they have learned the way of finding out the ways acceptable to both parties.

Thirdly, according to the feedbacks from students especially from students who had experienced summer practices in foreign trade companies, they are more interested in realistic tasks designed from foreign trade negotiation. Especially through working out the negotiation, student can not only learn negotiation strategy but also explore different kinds of solution. For example, in negotiating claim amount, different strategies such as conditioned concession strategy, limited authority strategy, competing strategy, ultimatum strategy can be used and a number of solution are recommended: defective goods can be returned back to the seller with freight collect; it can be re-sold to other customers as second hand goods; the buyer can make a sorting or re-working while the seller takes care of its charge; make replacement free of charge; or just throw them away.

All in all, task-based approaches not only stimulate the students' interest in learning but also guide the students to think and communicate actively, seek so-

lutions and express themselves more eagerly.

#### 4. Conclusion:

Therefore, in order to fulfill one or multi-tasks closely related with real and flexible foreign trade negotiation, the students are guided to discuss and exchange their viewpoints with group members, choose negotiation strategies by joint efforts, then act as the buyer and the seller and practice trade negotiation in English. While executing the tasks, their interests are aroused, their self-learning abilities are developed, their application capabilities such as negotiating skills, business manners and Business English can be sharpened to a certain extent which contribute to their group spirit and help them to be a successful salesman. Therefore, it is worthwhile to focus more on students and try task-based teaching method in module of Foreign Trade Negotiation.

#### 5. References

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