

Cultivation of Double-professionally-titled Business English Teachers under PCK Theory

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Abstract: Against the current background of “one belt, one road” initiative, demand for business English professionals is growing faster. However, due to the separation of the subject education and teacher professional instruction, business English major is facing such a problem: English teachers have no commercial background; business teachers have no language teaching ability. Enhancing teacher’s professional quality and cultivating double-professionally-titled teachers has become an urgent issue. The article tries to write from the current status of business English teaching at colleges and universities based on the PCK theory raised by American educator Shulman, and puts forward several possible paths for future business English teaching reform with “six combinations”.

1. Introduction

Business English is an interdisciplinary subject that combines both English language and business knowledge. The language is just a tool. The mission of business English teacher is to use this tool and his own teaching methods to convey practical knowledge in the business field to students. However, the current Business English majors, whether in a full-time undergraduate or higher vocational colleges, face such a problem: English teachers do not have a business background, business teachers do not have a language teaching background.

Most of the business English teachers graduated from pure language majors (Zhao, 2012). They have a wealth of English language knowledge, but lack systematic and adequate business background knowledge; they have no corporate industry background and practical experience; they never attend any real negotiations, but self-learned some theoretical pieces. Some business English teachers graduated from majors in international trade, business, accounting, etc., but their English are relatively weak. It is difficult for them to teach business-related knowledge in English, so a considerable number of them use Chinese to teach (Li, 2013).

For a long time, the professionalization of teaching has not been fully recognized. The separation of subject education and teacher professional instruction has brought many disadvantages to the cultivation of teachers. Moreover, the path of teacher development is very limited. The whole teaching is out of touch with specific practice, and it is inevitable that many difficulties will be encountered in the process. “Double-professionally-titled” teachers, teachers with excellent English, solid professional knowledge and practical experience in business, are extremely scarce.

2. Purpose and significance

The author wants to analyze the current situation of business English major teachers from the PCK perspective and raise some ways to cultivate double-professionally-titled teachers. Specifically, teachers should not only focus on the teaching material itself; there are many other factors they have to consider, such as the student information and teaching situation, etc. Once the PCK theory was put forward during the early 80s of 20th century, it immediately attracted the attention of the American education community. This concept reflects the uniqueness of the teacher profession and serves as the professional standards of subject teachers and the important basis for designing teacher education curriculum guides.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 PCK

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) refers to the teacher's representation of the professional subject knowledge he has as a student's easy-to-understand knowledge. It involves using the best way of expressing thoughts, the most useful analogies, examples, graphical, explanatory and demonstration methods that are easy for students to understand. It is a special integration of teachers' individual teaching experience, subject content knowledge and education background (Liao, 2005).

PCK was first proposed by American educator Schulman in 1986. The background was aimed at the deficiency of the American teacher qualification system at that time when the subject knowledge was mostly memorizing some facts, teaching knowledge only involves preparing teaching plans and evaluations, identifying individual differences of students, classroom management and education policies, etc., without seeing any framework of the discipline.

“However, subject issues are important for teaching, such as how teachers' understanding of disciplines affects their teaching quality, how teachers translate their subject knowledge into a form that students can understand, how teachers deal with problematic subject materials, and how to use their own disciplinary knowledge to generate interpretations and representations (Liao, 2005).”

Shulman (1986)) tried to re-emphasize the importance of subject knowledge in teaching in the teacher qualification system, of which he believes that PCK is at the core. It is specifically expressed by teachers knowing what to teach and how to teach, and knowing the difficulty of students. It also includes strategies for how teachers can correct misunderstandings, how students can organize their expressions to suit different interests, abilities, and backgrounds, and how teachers can help or guide students to understand content in a meaningful way. (Liao, 2005).

Two elements are at the core of PCK: one is the presentation of subject content knowledge, and the other is the understanding of concepts and specific learning difficulties (Dong, 2008). In 1990, PL Grossman specifically analyzed the subject teaching knowledge into four parts: the subjective view of a subject, the knowledge of the students for easy understanding and misunderstanding of specific learning content, knowledge of the organization and structure of specific learning content in both horizontal and vertical directions, as well as knowledge of strategies that present specific learning content to different students.

3.2 PCK & Business English

Around 1995, PCK was introduced to Taiwan. After 2005, it began to attract the attention of the mainland education academic circles. But so far, the study of PCK in mainland academic circles still only stays at the level of general theoretical interpretation, and rarely goes into specific disciplines. Scholars such as Cochran have pointed out: “The difference between teachers and biologists, historians, writers and educational researchers is not in the quality and quantity of their expertise, but in how they organize and use knowledge (Dong, 2008). PCK is a unique teaching experience for teachers. The special integration of the subject content and pedagogy in the unique field of teachers is a specific form of teacher's own understanding of the profession.

As a business English teacher, he/she should have a unique business English PCK, including subject content knowledge, pedagogy knowledge, knowledge about students and knowledge about learning situations. Specific to the teaching knowledge, it includes the purpose and requirements of business English teaching, teachers' understanding of teaching objectives, which will determine their teaching practice orientation; students' subject understanding and demand; subject teaching strategy knowledge, specifically refers to teachers based on subject knowledge, specific teaching content, evaluation and judgment of the effectiveness of specific teaching strategies; knowledge of courses and specific curriculum planning under the overall training objectives. PCK is a key element in connection with teaching purposes and specific curriculum teaching practices.

3.3 PCK & Double-professional-title

The UNESCO once proposed “five factors and one formula” for the quality of foreign language

teaching, which is compatible with the PCK theory. These five factors are: the policy of foreign language teaching in the country, the source and quality of students, the quality of teaching materials, the teaching environment and conditions, and the quality of teachers; One formula is: teaching quality = [students (1 point) + teaching materials (2 points) + environment (4 points) + teaching methods (3 points)] × teacher. The formula shows: the greater the score of teacher's quality, the larger the product will be, and then the quality of teaching is higher. To be a double-professionally-titled teacher, the professional qualities must be possessed, which include moral quality, knowledge structure, psychological quality and ability. The improvement of teachers' quality is the first condition and effective guarantee for the implementation of quality education.

4. Methodology

The paper interviews 50 Business English teachers from 6 universities and colleges in Shandong province by sending out questionnaires online. There are some open questions, and they can write down their answers with suggestions or advice.

- 1) What are your undergraduate and postgraduate majors?
- 2) Have you ever attended any business-related courses before?
- 3) How old are you now and how long time have you been in teaching profession?
- 4) Have you ever worked in any company?
- 5) Do you have any vocational certificates?
- 6) Do you have the chance to do some enterprise practice?
- 7) Does your school provide you the chance to go further professional study?
- 8) How will you teach the professional business knowledge in English?
- 9) Do you support International Trade to be taught in Chinese?
- 10) Do you think pure language teachers can also teach professional business courses? How?
- 11) What do you think is the best way for English teachers to teach business knowledge?
- 12) Do you think the teaching facilities in your university should be improved and how?
- 13) What courses do you offer to BE major students in your college/university?
- 14) Do you think English teachers and business teachers can work together and benefit each other ?
- 15) Do you think students from English major and business-related major can cooperate?
- 16) What about school-enterprise cooperation? How?

5. Results

5.1 Data analysis

During the study, 50 questionnaires have been sent out and all collected back. Of the 50 business English teachers, 80% of them are not from business English majors (only 10 teachers are); however, 32% of those non-business-English-majors have learned business-related courses, like BEC, marketing, management, etc, 20% of them have worked (or part-time) in a company and known some practical business knowledge; 46% (23) of the 50 teachers have got certificates like BEC, customs clearance, foreign trade accounting, documentary secretary, etc.

44% of the teachers say they need to do a lot of self-study before they enter into the classroom and they need to get some professional training; and 24% teachers mention that their universities will offer them chances to take part in some training courses; 30% teachers think it will be a new mode for teachers and students from different majors to cooperate as helpmates, but specific channels need to be explored; 94% agree that some simulation training rooms and applications should be established and installed for students to use and practice, while the other 3 teachers think it is useless to use that rooms or apps, for they are not even real; courses opened in business English major are almost the same, which is consistent with the national standards.

Based on all the data I collected back, it can be said that business English teaching largely stays in the language-based business teaching of theoretical indoctrination and paper talk. Basically, it is

“inefficient or even ineffective teaching.” Effective teaching should be the specific progress or development that the students receive after a period of teaching. Whether the student has the expected progress or development is a measure and indicator of effective teaching.

5.2 Six Combinations

How to build a double-skilled business English teacher team and enhance the teacher's effective teaching ability is a major problem to be solved. Based on the data analyzed above, the path of cultivation of double-professionally-titled business English teachers are raised as follows.

5.2.1 School-enterprise cooperation

Enterprise education should not be narrowly understood as funding for the establishment of schools. It should also include participation in the education and teaching process, such as participating in the formulation of talent training programs, accepting student internships, dispatching technical personnel to teach practical training, etc. Social forces need to be guided to participate in the teaching process and jointly develop educational resources. The coordination of school and enterprise should be strengthened. Specialized majors should closely cooperate with industry, and research institutes to cultivate technical and practical personnel for the society.

5.2.2 Inter-disciplinary Teachers Cooperation

Establish cross-disciplinary research groups within departments, such as “business negotiation group”, “business correspondence group”, “international trade group”, by combining both language and business teachers, and conducting regular project exchange meetings. Mutual help and mutual learning, language teachers supplement theory and practical experience, business teachers enrich and improve language level. Teachers from both sides can attend lectures, concentrate on lectures, and even use “double-teachers” to teach to make up for the inadequacy of language teachers' business knowledge and the inflexibility of business teachers' language.

5.2.3 Inter-disciplinary Students Cooperation

Business English students can form an inter-disciplinary learning partner in conjunction with international trade students to achieve “one-on-one” mutual help to solve problems such as inadequate classroom learning, in-depth theoretical knowledge, and unsatisfactory practical teaching. This can mobilize each other to learn enthusiastically and promote mutual development. Moreover, students can try to open stores together, to experience electronic operations such as Taobao and eBay, and familiarize themselves with the operation status of network companies.

5.2.4 Contextualized Teaching Classroom

Currently, business English teaching is set in the general language classroom or a common one. That is, teach without a situation; students can only rely on their imagination to do some “practical work”. Therefore, the students are not enthusiastic, which in the long run, result in non-ideal effect. Therefore, teaching should be combined with the situation to further break the boundaries of the classroom, in order to achieve the goal of maximizing the learning effect of students.

5.2.5 Practical Training Software

Many software companies or publishers are trying to cooperate with schools to develop training software that can be used in specific teaching, to help teachers reduce teaching pressure, improve teaching methods, and facilitate students to understand specific industry situations as early as possible. Useful training software are needed, such as Shige SimTrade foreign trade internship platform, Yixue 3D simulation business English training system, business communication and public relations etiquette training system.

5.2.6 Assessment Methods

The assessment method of talents should not only focus on formative evaluation and summative evaluation; the proportion of skills testing need to be highlighted. “Double certificate” system of

academic certificates and vocational certificates have to be actively promoted. Carry out a pilot program of modern apprenticeship system for joint enrollment and training between schools and enterprises. Develop vocational skill competitions and promote innovation in talent training models. Increase the proportion of internship training in teaching and strengthen its evaluation mode. Establish a system of credit accumulation and conversion, and promote the mutual recognition.

6. Conclusion

Business English is a branch of English for Specific Purposes with a history of only 40 years, and there is still a long way to go. According to PCK theory, as a professional business English teacher, “effective teaching” should be based on basic language knowledge, professional business subject knowledge, and rich teaching methods and skills, under the guidance of specific course teaching objectives. It involves improving students' interest and motivation in learning, expressing various business knowledge into systematic, logical and convenient representation through English language, adopting a teaching method that students can easily accept and absorb, and deliver practical information to students. All these require teachers to be “double-professionally-titled”.

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