

# *How to Teach Business English More Productively from the Perspective of New Liberal Arts and Sociology*

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**Abstract:** This essay first briefly introduces the development of New Liberal Arts, and makes a retrospection of the theory and practice of Business English Teaching in China. Under the current Chinese economic and cultural condition and situation, it's significant to become aware of the existing problems in teaching and researching, which have hindered the cultivation of Business English talents. In this essay, these problems are neatly pointed out in the current school education under the background of New Liberal Arts. How to solve these problems and how to teach Business English more effectively? In the essay the author concludes the observations and reflections on Business English teaching at the national colleges and universities. Based on continuous research and study, advices and methods are provided with hopes to better cultivate high qualified talents in Business English, and therefore to satisfy the requirements of Chinese economic and social development.

## 1. Brief Introduction of New Liberal Arts

### 1.1 The Significance of Putting Forward the Concept of New Liberal Arts in Chinese Education

Nowadays, new technologies and information contribute to the rise of new industries, businesses and models. The economies, technologies and cultures of every country become more dependent on each other and more integrated than ever before globally. Under this context, the companies in almost every country have the increasingly higher requirements for the employees and professional talents with integrated knowledge. In 2018, Hiram College firstly brought up the concept of New Liberal Arts Design model, which represented the birth of it. This concept points out that traditional subjects need to be restructured, that is to integrate liberal arts with science or technology. To put it in more detail, for students of philosophy, language, literature etc. which traditionally belong to Liberal Arts, they can exert themselves best in future posts if they have acquired the related knowledge in new science and technology, and vice versa. In this way, the talents with intergraded knowledge, or compound talents are produced. China has been involved in international business in record wider and deeper ways, but the working stuff that are equipped with integrated knowledge

seem in serious short. Therefore, to promote the cultivation of such talents, Chinese Education Department issued documents or files for the high-level colleges or universities in recent years. In 2019, the Chinese Education Department firstly put forward the importance of New Liberal Arts in home education, and highlighted the functions of compound talents on economic and cultural development. The document Chinese Education modernization 2035 says that in the year of 2035, a modern educational system will have been constructed, in which all the Chinese people will get a chance to have life-long education, and a new layout will be formed when all the citizens in society will get involved in the education management, and there will be an obvious strengthening in competitiveness. The source of strengthening in competitiveness is from compound knowledge and skills from vocational education and talents cultivation.

## **1.2 Differences from the Traditional Concept of Liberal Arts**

The system of Arts and Science in China was built on the base of western countries' academic division, which became the framework of Chinese subjects both in educating students and researching work. Its traits are the detailed classification of subjects, and what's more, these subjects are of independence from each other. It can't be denied that this framework has greatly promoted the academic development and flourish in education, science and technology in China. However, this classification and independence have become so strong that inevitably they lead to a fact that the talents lack integrated knowledge or skill, because they are educated and trained in a specific area as students. The other result is the evaluation standards are made by the western system rather than by Chinese, in other words, China lacks enough power of discourse in assessing. Besides these, under the political, cultural and economic conditions of present China, another disadvantage of traditional Liberal Arts is the hinder for further development of Chinese academy and technology. For most of the new inventions, including concepts, businesses, technologies, modes are created by the integration of subjects and supports of technology.

Therefore building New Liberal Arts has become critical not only to reinforce the Chinese confidence and the power of discourse, but also to speed up the new inventions in ideas, concepts, technologies and sciences.

## **2. Development of Business English Teaching in Theory and Practice**

### **2.1 Background of Establishment of the Major of Business English**

At present, the talents majored in English Literature obviously can't meet the requirements of the business world, and instead, the talents majored in Business English are becoming more welcomed by the companies. In the year of 2007, the major of Business English was firstly established with the approval from the Ministry of Education of China. To the year of 2020, nearly 415 colleges or universities have offered the major of Business English for students to choose. Besides as a major, some other schools offer Business English as a course for their students of non-English majors, for example Tourism and Hospitality, Finance and Trade etc. Practically, it has been proved that these graduates have been playing huge roles in every section in the process of Chinese social and economic development, from international business, trade, imports and exports, to international tourism, banking etc.

### **2.2 Theoretical and Practical Development of Business English Teaching**

The major of Business English has formed its quality standard after the teaching practice of nearly 20 years. In the year of 2015, the Ministry of Education of China issued National Standards for the Bachelors of Business English. It clearly formulates the talents orientation, qualification, course system, teaching evaluation, teachers' standards, teaching conditions, quality guarantee and exam items, which provide the guidelines for the constructing of the major of Business English. It points out that the orientation for Business English talents should highlight on the characteristics of internalization, combination and application in order to catch the trends of the world economy and satisfy the needs of further opening-up of Chinese economy. Therefore, besides obtaining the profound language skills, the Business English graduates should learn more in the fields of economics, management, sales, negotiation, E-business, etc, should get to know about the international business rules and regulations, the laws and practices, customs and practices in some related countries.

Professor Wang Lifei writes in his paper that it's of great significance to keep discussing about the direction of the major of Business English for greater challenges than ever since and after have been put to students of Business English, teachers, as well as school's administrative departments, text-book editors because of this new direction.

### **3. Problems Encountered in Business English Teaching**

The following problems to be discussed are based on the writer's long time teaching and research work.

#### **3.1 School- Enterprise Cooperation is Not Close Enough**

What is the purpose of going to college? Most students will answer they pursue education for good employments in companies, top or just common, banks, or local governments. This means the college should clearly know companies' requirements for talents? It's agreed that colleges or universities were not ivory towers as they used to be. However, the wall, tangible or not tangible, separates teachers and students from the outside worlds more or less. In the recent decades, the social companies develop dramatically in technologies and products, in contrast, the schools lag behind. Their graduates frequently complain they don't obtain much from their college study, the bosses find their theories, experimental models or operational skills can't serve the company well enough. The root for this problem is school-enterprise don't co-operate closely enough. The teachers are confined with their majors or subjects; Today's schools seem to put more constraints on their teachers, the breakthrough seems difficult. More often some contradictions exist between encouraging teachers to work part time in companies to know about the latest business and discouraging teachers to do so by the rules and regulations placed on teachers made by the administrative department. And for the companies, the problem is they put the profit first; they don't seem to welcome the teachers to work part time so much because they don't want to train a staff who will definitely leave the post when she or he has got sufficient working experience. Thus, everybody knows that school-enterprise does need to co-operate closely, however, in reality, the situation is not as satisfying as it is supposed to be.

Of course, the School- Enterprise Cooperation is far beyond sending teachers to companies. In fact, every stages of Business English teaching need this cooperation, from the employment market research at the very start to the internship planning to the certifying of graduation qualifications. And they are going to be discussed in later part.

### 3.2 School Course System Is Limited to Some Degree

For Business English majors, Language ability is the core ability designed by the curriculum, together with some other core courses on business. For example, the Negotiation in the International Business, Practice of International Trade. After twenty years' development, the course structure of Business English has become complete and almost perfect for cultivating high qualified graduates, who are better welcomed in the employment market than graduates with the single language or business background.

Innovation of new technologies has led to a lot of changes in business. For example, life-cycles of products become shorter and shorter, new business modes have been created in recent decades, and especially the change of payment mode and sales channel. Accordingly, the ways of promotion are changing accordingly. But at colleges, all seem more or less limited from course curriculums, course structures, to typical teaching cases, teaching modes. Take the newest way of promotion, live-stream marketing as an example, it has become the important marketing methods in this year because of the covid-2019, but it will not be introduced to students at class for the time being.

The other limit exists in supporting and following courses on management, trade, business, negotiation, marketing etc which are designed to help students to learn the business English more efficiently. However, there are researches showing many Business English graduates change the directions in their master or doctor periods for they think they don't acquire knowledge or skills as much as needed, this proves the course system for the business English majors is very limited to meet the need of company.

### 3.3 Faculty Doesn't Have Enough Related Working Background

The short history of Business English major is the reason for the lack of professional knowledge and experience for the teachers, who have admitted that their single background of language or business can't make their teaching more productively and effectively. Therefore, cross-disciplinary has become the tendency. This places the new demand on teachers who need to be proficient in trade, finance, product and market at the same course teaching. It proves that graduates who are proficient both in speaking a foreign language and knowledgeable in international laws and good at negotiation are in great need right now in China.

For most teachers, what is needed most in current Business English teaching is the working experience. As for the academic background, most English teachers are majored in British or American literature, so they are more capable of teaching the course on language or literature. Even though they are diligent and keep learning to take the responsibility of teaching business or finance, obviously their classes are not as productive as those of the professional teachers with business academic background. What makes situation worse is the lack of communication between them. This may bring about the result that some content is repeatedly taught, or some not taught by any teacher.

### 3.4 Text-Books are Outdated

Text-books are the carrier, what content to be taught, who is to be taught, and how to teach are the considerations in editing a textbook. In the present Chinese economic and social situation, teaching materials become more important than ever before. In order to continue to build China into the biggest economy internationally or to meet the individual's future needs, great sense of mission, and high quality of businessman or mindset of an entrepreneur, proficient skills of business dealing

must be highlighted. Only with these obtained, can the graduates work effectively in international companies, cooperate well in the team, compete capably in the foreign affairs dealings.

The above is the cultivation direction for the Business English majors. Apparently, most textbooks for Business English students should fasten the steps towards this direction. The writer concludes problems as follows. The most obvious one is the textbooks are more or less outdated because of the edition time. The selected company cases in the textbooks may not be the best for the time being. In the textbooks for Chinese colleges, the benchmark companies are mostly American, European, Japan or Career ones. Actually in recent years, many Chinese national companies have strived to reach the top companies in the world, their management strategies and company cultures are as excellent and influential as the foreign ones. Therefore, the writer thinks that more Chinese top companies should be edited into the textbooks, which is also a good way to spread Chinese culture and help foreigners to know more about modern China.

## **4. Solutions**

At present China is facing the great challenges and opportunities in communicating and trading with foreign countries, thus the talents with highly- prized qualities of compound knowledge are in great need. The following in this essay are solutions to the above problems.

### **4.1 Build a Cross-disciplinary Faculty Team**

At the current education environment, most teachers' academic backgrounds can't support them sufficiently to teach high-quality business courses dependently, because present academic classification obviously results in their academic tunnel vision. How to firstly provide students with compound teachers? The practical thing is the boundaries among colleges and universities, among teaching departments should be broken down. Teachers are given more inside chances to share, communicate, and teach to their greatest potential with the biggest support from one another. In this way supplement will be made to the weak sector in their academic background. For the Business English majors, language proficiency plays critical role in the major study. Then how to reach balance between language ability and major study? Next is a probably a choice, language teachers take the responsibility to lay profound proficient language foundation for students during the first and second year, and during the third and fourth year, the professional talents with education overseas take the task of the academic teaching for the bilingual courses or purely English courses.

The reforms of class organization and activities inside classrooms are always necessary in class forms, modes, styles and methods. For example, different parts of a course can be taught by a combination of professionals or experts from different fields which they are good at respectively, while traditional classroom has only one teacher standing in the platform. In this way students benefit the most from every one of them. The combination of teaching staff means the allocation of funds in teaching and research will be combined too, which used to be provided for separate academic branches. The related school policies should be also made or changed more effectively and wisely.

### **4.2 Strengthen the Co-operation between Schools and Enterprises**

In view of the features of openness and practicality of Business English, school management sectors should do more besides building a Cross-disciplinary Faculty Team. The alliance made between schools and enterprises have been proved to be quite helpful, and it needs to be

strengthening so school professors and business professionals have channels to exchange and learn from each other. On the one hand, the policies should be made to encourage or require teachers to go out of the ivory tower and into the social business, where teachers will have chances to know the business trend. Then the teaching contents will follow the social needs closely. On the other hand, the businesses should initiatively take the social responsibility and send their backbones to teach or give lectures for students. Undoubtedly, this is double win. Surely both sides should take issues of time and salary into consideration. The equivalences should be made for the teachers and experts from the companies.

The advantages of the alliance made by the colleges or universities are not confined to the convenient exchange of the newest information or trends as written above. Actually schools and business companies need to start cooperation from the very beginning. For detailed illustration of their cooperation, the whole procedure are as follows, from the research work at the early stage, the course structure building, orientation for the fresher, time allocation between the portions of theory and practice classes, to the academic staff arrangement, graduation paper or report to the latest cases in the business. And what brings better effects is the cooperation should be done effectively not only between schools and companies, also student's credit acknowledgement between the schools, departments, class groups, and courses. Students should be given more choice in the courses select and credits earning. Gap year is quite beneficial; because through the field work in the companies one year, students will have clearer awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, thus know their future directions. To sum up, strengthening the co-operation between school and enterprise broadly and deeply is definitely the prior solution.

#### **4.3 Innovate Class Teaching Models and Methods**

Besides strengthening the operation between schools and businesses, further changes and innovations should be made in the courses teaching and classes organization. Many experts call on that the boundaries between the Liberal and Science should be put an end right now, instead, cooperation and integration should be done in providing courses, organizing activities and structuring classes. For a long time, Chinese college students think they belong to some department or major; however, a mixture of the Liberal and Science will be more helpful to their academic study. Thus, here are the higher requirements for the Business English teachers. Despite the disadvantages these teachers have in their work, they have made great efforts in innovative teaching and practicing. Many teaching modes and methods are found in their classes. Business situation simulation, virtual projects or cases' study, face-to-face interviews all prove to be appropriate methods in building students' comprehensive quality in business. Take one of the writer's assignments given to students as an example; students are divided into the imports and exports sides at the very beginning of the semester. During the whole semester, both sides carry on the task of the two companies, with the help or guidance of the teachers or the parents or relatives who own businesses, from researching market, finding the partners, promoting products, to meeting arrangement, serving the customers, negotiating price. Though students and teachers meet many problems and difficulties in the operating process, the simulated practical experiences are valuable for them, and the outcome is productive.

#### **4.4 Focus More on Practice and Internship than Paper Exams**

Right now, the paper exams are still the most popular form for Business English courses at most colleges, just as other theoretical courses. Considering its practicality, obviously the paper forms

seem too limited to reflect student's business potential. So, more flexible forms should be adopted to test students. For example, practice and internship weigh more than paper exams in the following sections of customers reception, telephone communication, negotiation, product display. Presentations, video shooting, recording, participating in some related competitions are all activities warmly welcomed by today's students. What's to be pointed out is the colleges should have the generosity to accept the failure of these new forms and tries, because innovation means failure to some extent.

#### 4.5 Integrate Chinese Cultures and Cases

Textbooks are the carriers of the knowledge and information. The traits of Business English determine the contents of its textbooks should be selected or written or edited by experts from several professional fields. Thus, the latest business information, modes, cases and operations will take the place of the outdated. In recent decades, many Chinese bench-marker companies get the reputation worldwide, so their management experience and business standard established are acknowledged internationally. These Chinese company cases will develop and promote students' mindset of entrepreneurship in their careers. And in the cases of handling the cross-cultural problems, teachers should put the same weight between foreign and Chinese companies, for many Chinese stories and wisdoms are worth spreading to the world.

#### 5. Conclusion

Business English graduates have made tremendous contributions in every aspect of Chinese economic and social development. At the same time, some problems have appeared in the Business English teaching and practicing. It's critical to provide solutions under the background of Liberal Arts in China. The cooperation of colleges with companies, the integration among departments, campus, regions is the most effective solutions. For better involvement in international business activities, the schools, companies and governments of different levels need to work closely so as to cultivate talents of Business English with world vision.

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