



Business English Practice Teaching Conforming to Chinese Students' Expectations

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Received 21 May 2013; accepted 16 August 2013

Abstract

By means of quantitative and qualitative analysis, this paper examines business English practice teaching that conforms to Chinese students' expectations. 386 students majoring in business English participated in a questionnaire and interview. Statistical analysis revealed that business English practice teaching that most conforms to students' expectations are the methods, means and curriculum. On the other hand, teaching conditions, teachers' competence of guidance, content organization and practice cannot meet students' needs. The results indicate that Chinese teachers of business English are not sufficiently and practically competent, practice conditions prove to be unfavorable and that the practice of curriculum is irrelevant to job market. In addition, objectives of practice teaching and curriculum design, which is followed by teachers' competence, account most for teaching effect. Accordingly it is essential that teachers' professional practice competence should be developed and authentic business teaching environment be created so as to improve the quality and effect of the current business English practice teaching in China.

Key words: Business English; Practice teaching; Students' expectations

YU Min (2013). Business English Practice Teaching Conforming to Chinese Students' Expectations. *Canadian Social Science*, 9(5), 46-52. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/j.css.1923669720130905.2804>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.css.1923669720130905.2804>.

INTRODUCTION

Business English (BE), as combination of the concept business and English, is a practical and composite inter discipline composed of linguistics and international business, a variation of the English language's important social function and a branch of English for special purposes (ESP) (Chen, 2010). Besides linguistics and literature, business English involves various aspects of business activities, including being competent to display and sell products as well as make business negotiation in fluent English, translate or interpret business materials and contracts of all kinds and write various business documents, etc. (Cai, 2010; Gu, 2010; Wang, 2012; Xü, 2011; Yang, 2010; Zhang, 2013; Zhao, 2012). When talking about the teaching of ESP, Robinson (1980) pointed out that language teaching itself was not an end to ESP and that its real purpose was to realize a determined goal with the help of the English language. Hence the prominent characteristics and quality of business English lie in its practical stages of practice teaching, professional features of job position, social practice and competence-basedness.

In recent years, in the speciality construction and reform of BE, many universities have highlighted the social and economic needs of BE, made plans for personnel training, deconstructed and reconstructed curriculum system, explored practice teaching modes and reformed the curriculum contents, which are all associated with enterprises (Chen, 2010; Ma, 2010; Wang, 2009). In addition, based upon competence-based education (CBE) or learning theory of constructivism and cognitive linguistics, researchers have made relevant researches with regard to the practice teaching system, modes and curriculum construction and thus are supposed to have provided some specific theoretical guidance and principles for BE (Wang & Tian, 2010). Nevertheless, the previous researches were all made from the perspectives of inferences based on linguistic and cognitive theory,

the comparisons between experiences of running schools from other countries and the analysis of systematic working process. Sun (2008), Yan & Tang (2012), from the perspective of ESP students' demand theory, analysed curriculum and practice teaching of BE merely at the theoretical level, and his results appeared not convincing, as he failed to provide quantitative and qualitative analyses.

This paper aims to examine students' views of BE practice teaching in China by means of questionnaire and interview so as to provide implications and suggestions for the current BE practice teaching in China.

1. RESEARCH DESIGN

1.1 Questions

This study employed semi-closed questionnaire, intending to create concept and theory-based model of students' expectations. The researcher analysed the pretest in terms of validity and reliability, selected items that matched the concept and theoretical components so as to construct the questionnaire aiming to investigate BE majors' expectations for BE practice teaching, make a descriptive and frequency analysis of the questionnaire and interview, summarize the status quo and urgent problems in the eyes of students and propose effective solutions and strategies according to the results of regression analysis.

1.2 Method

With the help of relevant literature, interviews with both students and teachers and open questionnaire related to students' view of BE practice teaching, the researcher searched the key words, made scientific comparisons and contrast and constructed valid and reliable questionnaire. Besides, she employed statistical software PASW18.0 and analysed the pretest, revised and formed the questionnaire, made a sample investigation and interview so as to get to know the BE majors' view of practice teaching in the field.

1.3 Analysis of Pretest

The questionnaire used for the pretest consisted of two parts, namely personal information such as the name of participant's specific university, sex, grade and items about students' expectations of practice teaching, composed of 39 positive options from 11 to 39 with five-point Likert scale. The more the value, the more students approved of the item described. Students of BE majors from four universities were chosen to be issued 149 questionnaire and 145 of them were returned and proved to be valid.

The researcher calculated the total scores of each participant, chose the highest 27% and the lowest 27% as high or low score group, with the two groups as

independent variables and all the items as dependent variables. Independent sample T-test indicated that there were significant differences between the two groups with regard to all the items ($P = 0.000 < 0.001$). Then principle component analysis and maximum variance rotation were employed. Bartlett test result is $\chi^2 = 2762.360$, $df = 741$, $P < 0.001$, indicating significant differences and that there were mutual factors among correlation matrix, which means suitable for factor analysis. In addition, $KMO = 0.834$ also proved it. In the screen plot, starting with the eight factor, the slope tends to be flat or even, revealing that seven factors can account for the information in the questionnaire. Hence to ensure the construct validity of statistical analysis, the factor number among eigenvalues greater than 1 after limited rotation is seven and can explained 54.973% variance in all.

According to the result of factor analysis and the items that each factor is composed of, the seven factors were named "environment and conditions for practice teaching", "objectives and curriculum for practice teaching", "teachers' competence and attitude", "means and methods for practice teaching", "content organization and realization", "evaluation for practice teaching" & "teaching effect for practice teaching". To examine the reliability of the questionnaire and its factors, *Cronbach's alpha* was computed. Result indicated that the coefficient of internal consistency is 0.896. The coefficients for all the factors are more than 0.70, except the item "evaluation for practice teaching" (0.682), which means that homogeneity reliability of the questionnaire is high enough and the questionnaire itself is reliable and stable with 7 dimensions and 39 items.

1.4 Participants

The participants were 386 students majoring in BE from four universities in Hubei province, China, 89 of them were males and 297 females. 372 questionnaires (96.4%) were returned and 348 (90.02%) were valid.

2. RESULTS

2.1 General Analysis of Students' Expectations for BE Practice Teaching

Descriptive statistical analysis of the multiple-dimensions in the questionnaire indicate that the general conformity is at the intermediate level (Table 1). In other words, students' satisfaction with BE practice teaching is just so so. And among the seven dimensions there is no one which exactly accords with students' expectations. The dimension of highest level is "methods and means for practice teaching" with mean value of 3.3226 only. In addition, "environment and conditions for practice teaching" is below the average level.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Seven Dimensions

No.	Dimensions	N	Mean	SD	Rank
4	Methods and means for practice teaching	348	3.3236	0.54708	1
2	Objectives & curriculum for practice teaching	348	3.1994	0.47098	2
6	Evaluation for practice teaching	348	3.1625	0.47113	3
7	Teaching effect for practice teaching	348	3.0996	0.56485	4
5	Content organization & realization	348	3.0754	0.52587	5
3	Teachers' competence & attitude	348	3.0535	0.42873	6
1	Environment & conditions for practice teaching	348	2.7837	0.56159	7

2.2 Dimension Analysis of Students' Expectations for BE Practice Teaching

The options in the Likert-scale range from A to E, meaning strongly disagree, disagree, medium, agree and strongly agree. In this study the total percentage of “strongly disagree” and “disagree” is greater than that of “agree” and “strongly agree”, namely the inconformity of items and their corresponding dimensions are considered as the focus of BE majors' expectations for practice teaching and the difference value between inconformity and conformity is defined as “gap”. For the sake of analysis and discussions, only the items with the maximum and minimum gaps are listed in Table 2 after frequency statistics of all dimensions are technically processed.

From Table 1 it can be clearly seen that all of the items in “objectives & curriculum for practice teaching”, “methods and means for practice teaching” and “evaluation for practice teaching” mostly coincide with students' expectations. In their view, the objectives for BE practice teaching are reasonable and the selection of teaching contents also appropriate. In addition, teachers in charge of practice teaching are competent

enough to properly employ various teaching methods and means, use procedural evaluative criteria and assess students' competence according to their products. None of the items in the dimension of “environment & conditions for practice teaching” conforms to students' expectations, especially the outside-campus practice opportunities provided by the university authorities, and enterprises' participation in the practice teaching are far from students' expectations. From the dimension of “teachers' competence & attitude”, it can be seen that BE teachers for practice teaching have a good command of business knowledge and that their classroom performance accord with students' expectations. Nevertheless, in the practice teaching teachers' guidance or direction ability proves to be comparatively insufficient and there exist some drawbacks in the administration of checking. The dimension of “content organization & realization” indicates that the authorities attach great importance to students' integrated use of linguistic competence and business skills, but fail to meet job market's practical needs at this level, thus there might be some gap between “content organization & realization” and students' expectations.

Table 2
Frequency Statistics of Seven Dimensions (D = dimensions)

D	Items	Strongly disagree%	Disagree%	Medium%	Agree%	Strongly agree%	Gap
1	Lots of practice opportunities from off-campus bases	10.1	41.6	33.8	12.1	2.3	37.3
	Enterprise evaluation & feedback objective & timely	2.6	25.3	50.0	20.1	2.0	5.8
2	Obvious are the objectives of English communication and business operation.	2.0	17.0	55.7	22.7	2.6	-6.3
	Specific practice and regular post practice	2.0	14.4	42.2	38.5	2.9	25
	Advice teachers have rich experience of business enterprise.	2.9	30.3	48.1	15.5	3.2	14.5
3	Teachers for practice teaching have a good command of business knowledge.	1.7	13.3	43.8	37.8	3.5	-26.3
	“Doing while learning & learning while doing” highlight students' position as subjects.	1.4	16.1	53.7	25.6	3.2	-11.3
4	Multi-dimension teaching means are appropriately employed.	2.6	7.2	33.3	47.1	9.8	-47.1
5	Business skill operation can splice practical work flow and enterprise project.	3.7	29.3	45.4	20.7	0.9	11.4
	Teaching stresses the integrated use of linguistic competence and business skills.	1.7	10.9	40.8	41.1	5.5	-34
	Eevaluation criteria for practice teaching are objective.	2.9	20.0	49.0	26.1	2.0	-5.2
6	Achievements are quantitatively evaluated & products only are displayed; little written work is done.	2.0	15.6	55.6	24.2	2.6	-9.2

2.3 Factor analysis of Teaching Effect

To get to know more about the status quo of BE practice teaching, there is a need to make a factor analysis of teaching effect and find out the underlying causes. The researcher calculated the total scores of the 6 dimensions “environment & conditions for practice teaching”, “objectives & curriculum for practice teaching”, “teachers’ competence & attitude”, “methods and means for practice teaching”, “content organization & realization” and “evaluation for practice teaching” for each participant, chose the top 27% as high score group and the bottom 27% as low score group, “teaching effect for practice teaching” as dependent variable. Result of one-way ANOVA indicated that there were significant differences between the two groups ($P = 0.000 < 0.001$) and that the six factors exerted influential effect upon practice teaching. Based upon the above result, correlation analysis was made to find out how the six factors were related to the teaching effect for practice teaching. Table 3 obviously revealed that the correlation between them was extremely significant.

Multiple linear regression analysis was made with the 6 factors as independent variables and the “teaching effect for practice teaching” as dependent one. It was

found that simply 4 of them (“objectives & curriculum for practice teaching”, “teachers’ competence & attitude”, “methods and means for practice teaching” and “content organization & realization”) entered the regression model (Table 4).

Based on the result in Table 4, path graph was created for the linear relations among the 4 factors. Summary statement for multiple regression test result was indicated in Table 5.

Let’s look at the correlation between “objectives & curriculum for practice teaching”, “teachers’ competence & attitude”, “methods and means for practice teaching” and “teaching effect for practice teaching”. The multiple correlation coefficient R is 0.621, coefficient of determination R^2 is 0.386, adjusted R^2 0.378 and standard error of estimate for regression model’s mean square error 0.412, respectively accounted for 26.3%, 9.3%, 1.4% and 1.6% of variances. Hence it can be concluded that “objectives & curriculum for practice teaching” explain the greatest amount of variance, followed by “teachers’ competence & attitude”, indicating that these two factors are the most significant ones that influence “teaching effect for practice teaching” and ought to be paid great attention in the reform of practice teaching.

Table 3
Correlation Matrix Between the 6 Factors and the Teaching Effect for Practice Teaching

	Environment & conditions	Objectives & curriculum	Teachers’ competence & attitude	Methods and means	Content organization & realization	Evaluation
Environment & conditions	1					
Objectives & curriculum	0.335***	1				
Teachers’ competence & attitude	0.353***	0.439***	1			
Methods and means	0.468***	0.492***	0.364***	1		
Content organization & realization	0.409***	0.384***	0.364***	0.2963***	1	
Evaluation for practice teaching	0.295***	0.487***	0.342***	0.280***	0.181**	1
Teaching effect for practice teaching	0.314***	0.513***	0.499***	0.405***	0.401***	0.311***

** $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.001$

Table 4
Regressin Analysis Result

Dimension	Model	B	SE	Standard coefficient	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Teaching effect for practice teaching	Constant	0.474	0.192		2.465	0.014		
	Objectives & curriculum	0.264	0.058	0.249	4.518	0.000	0.590	1.694
	Teachers’ competence & attitude	0.350	0.058	0.292	6.014	0.000	0.759	1.317
	Methods and means	0.130	0.047	0.136	2.75	0.006	0.730	1.369
	Content organization & realization	0.132	0.045	0.142	2.892	0.004	0.742	1.347

Table 5
Summary Statement for Regression Model

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	SE	R ² revised	F revised
1	0.513 ^a	0.263	0.261	0.450	0.263	123.657
2	0.597 ^b	0.356	0.353	0.420	0.093	49.940
3	0.610 ^c	0.372	0.367	0.416	0.016	8.568
4	0.621 ^d	0.386	0.378	0.412	0.014	7.563

3. DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

3.1 Problems in the Practice Teaching of Business English

a. Conditions for BE practice teaching at the four universities turn out to be unitary and insufficient enterprise participation is involved. Firstly, from the lack of off-campus practice teaching bases, few opportunities can be provided for students to work on regular posts. For instance, for the item of "lots of practice opportunities from off-campus bases", 51.7% of the students chose "disagree" and 33.8 % chose "medium", indicating that participants were not satisfied with the off-campus opportunities for practice teaching provided by the universities authorities. Off-campus practice teaching has been an important means through which majors of business English practice their own professional skills, but in reality many students failed to be offered such opportunities, which in due course of time may exert negative impact upon their command of professional skills and even survival competence in future job market. Thus special attention should be paid to the current conditions for BE practice teaching. Secondly, part-time faculty from enterprises are expected to be in charge of students' practice teaching. The fact is that there seem to be too few of part-time faculty, who do not work long enough for students to have frequent contact with these teachers with rich practice experiences. Besides, too few opportunities are supplied. 56.4% of the students do not think that part-time faculty from enterprises undertake half of the practice teaching courses.

In recent years, in the course of speciality construction and reform, emphasis has been laid on the connection between universities and enterprises. However, from the results of questionnaire it can be obviously seen that as far as the speciality of business English is concerned, cooperation between universities and enterprises does not go well, especially in the provision of practice posts for students of BE and the participation of enterprises in the practice teaching. No beneficial backwash effect has been achieved up to now.

b. Teachers fail to have strong foundation in practice skills and administration of assessment is neglected. It is true that teachers of business English has a good command of business professional knowledge. Nevertheless, as advice teachers for practice teaching, their knowledge structure seems to be unbalanced. As for the item "advice teachers have rich experience of business enterprise", 33.2% of the students do not agree, and 48.1% choose the option "medium". It can be seen clearly that most Chinese teachers of business English used to teach the English language only with limited working experience or practical operation competence in international trade, finance and marketing (Zhao, 2012). They have to learn while teaching. Because of

the teachers' comparative incompetence of organization and guidance, administration and evaluation of students' practice abilities turn out to be less than objective or scientific. Hence merely 27.5% of the students agree that teachers in charge of BE practice teaching are responsible and capable of guidance, administration and assessment.

c. Contents for practice teaching pay too much attention to theory and are separated from practice. As a rule, teaching contents are determined according to teaching objectives. In current study, training courses with regard to linguistic competence and business skills in some degree do not coincide with practical professional requirements. 27.7% of the participants do not agree that "training contents at the linguistic level are closely associated with requirements of business professional posts", and 51.7% chose the option "medium". At the same time, 21.6% assume that "business skill operation is able to comply with practical business procedures and enterprise projects". Although all the four universities have attached great importance to the occupation and practicality of practice teaching, the arrangement of classroom practice teaching remains to be traditional to a great extent. In the interview after the questionnaire, some students proposed that teachers were on the whole good at explaining the professional theoretical knowledge but failed to pay sufficient attention to business skill operations and that many teachers simply informed students of how to do it in the classroom instead of offering practical illustration for practice teaching. In recent years, theoretical education ideal based upon the combination of working and learning has become the guidance one for human resources training model and the current curriculum construction and reform. Therefore enterprises' practical needs have been indeed taken into account with regard to the development of course system and design of objectives & curriculum for practice teaching. The format of the system proves to be comparatively complete, teaching objectives & curriculum arrangement appropriate ($M = 3.1994$), and the organization pattern for practice teaching has been optimized. However, there is still much room for improvement. In other words, the realization of contents teaching does not exactly comply with the objectives and design and deviates from the original connotation of practice.

3.2 Suggestions for BE Practice Teaching

A. It is essential that teachers in charge of BE practice teaching improve their practice competence. Results of statistical analysis indicated that the general effects of business English practice teaching are intermediate (of medium level). The two norms "the business English practice skills obtained at school can meet the needs of practical work" ($M = 3.08$) and "they have developed students' competence of starting their own business" ($M = 2.94$) which most directly test practice teaching are found

to be at the bottom of the 9 criteria, suggesting that there is further need for students' practical skills learnt in the classroom to be connected with working needs. According to the regression analysis of influence factors, to improve the practice teaching effect, more attention are to be paid to the four factors, including "objectives & curriculum", "teachers' competence & attitude", "methods & means" and "content organization & realization for practice teaching", among which "objectives & curriculum" exert the greatest influence upon the effect of practice teaching ($r = 0.513^{***}$), followed by "teachers' competence & attitude" ($r = 0.499^{**}$). Results of questionnaire and interview also revealed that objectives & curriculum for practice teaching of BE have gradually become mature after years of hard work. The result that training courses for linguistic and BE skills do not exactly conform to the practical professional requirements is due to teachers' insufficient competence in practice teaching. Therefore the greatest obstacle that affect the quality and effect of BE practice teaching should be teachers comprehensive qualities.

Whether practice teaching can be effective mainly depends on instructors' professional practice qualities. Teachers in charge of business English are not only supposed to have a good command of EFL listening, speaking, reading and writing, but also be well aware of the environment in which business English is used, the needs which linguistic skills can meet with in such circumstances and high proficiency of BE practice competence (Wang, 2009). See to it that teachers make clear of the theories with regard to software office, information search, business negotiation, document processing, e-commerce platform for practical operation, customs declaration & commodity inspection, cancel after verification drawback and freight management. In addition, they have to put practice teaching in place and play the roles of experienced "businessmen" in the classroom (Liang, 2006). To improve BE teachers' competence in practice teaching, it is suggested to make full use of the on-campus teachers as well as the off-campus enterprises and social resources. Besides, it proves to be good policy for teachers to have in-service training, post-practice, get certificates related to their specialities and participate in the specific operating process and practice activities for foreign trade enterprises. On the other hand, part-time faculty of high proficiency are needed and advisers with rich experiences and solid theory foundation of basic skills are to be invited to guide practice teaching. In a word, it is essential to reconstruct teachers, improve their competence in practice teaching so as to meet the needs of the actual business English practice teaching.

B. Authentic teaching environments are to be created so as to ensure the quality of BE practice teaching. The current on-campus practice for BE is done inside in

the simulation environment. Such simulation training provides students with multiple software simulations and make up for the unicity of the off-campus practice base, which may offer students authentic working practice and obviously reveal their competence in the combination of theory with practice. Thus it is essential to integrate on-campus and off-campus practice, not only create perfect on-campus teaching environments but also strengthen cooperations between universities and enterprises, set up a series of sturdy and effective off-campus practice teaching bases.

There is no doubt that foreign trade enterprises and business companies from off-campus practice bases are in most cases professional. Most of them deal with singlet type of products and are merely able to provide at most two or three practice posts, reluctant to admit groups of students for practical training. In addition, due to the reasons of business secrets, it is usually difficult for students to get to the essence of operation in their practice posts and time and space are both limited. With the rapid development and application of e-commerce and internet trade, the traditional on-campus simulation training and post-practice cannot satisfy students' needs for practical skill training. Hence the school authorities are suggested to look for new breakthrough and carriers for school-enterprise cooperation with regard to environment and conditions that comply with authentic business practice. In addition, they have to improve practice teaching by introducing enterprises into schools, setting up the operation model of combining teaching process with business trade enterprises, and relying on internet trade platform and the introduced foreign trade enterprises, which can not only train teachers' practical speciality competence, but also ensure that linguistic training courses are as close to business posts as possible and that business skill operation accords with practical work flow and enterprise project so as to improve the quality and effect of business English practice teaching.

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