



Reflection into China's Business English Teaching Practices Based on GDUFS Graduates' Employment Status

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Abstract

GDUFS, as one of China's top three foreign language universities with the longest history in business English teaching, has accumulated over 20-year experiences in this discipline. This research reflects into its business English teaching practices based on its graduates' employment status in recent years, and concludes that the students of business English major tend to have higher level of employment status than those of other majors, and their employers are more likely to be consultancy MNCs, commercial banks and other firms. It is suggested that new efforts for reform should be made in disciplinary development, teaching development, curriculum designs and teaching methods.

Keywords: Business English, Teaching reform, Reflection

1. Introduction

Business English has been generally defined by Chinese scholars as a cross-discipline science combining the application of English linguistics and cross-culture communication in the context of business management. Currently in China, there are at least 800 higher education institutions where business English is taught as a major or a course, among which three universities including Guangdong University of Foreign Studies in Guangdong, University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, and Shanghai Foreign Trade Institute in Shanghai are in their pioneering position of the whole nation.

Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, abbreviated as GDUFS, is one of China's top three foreign language universities with the longest history in business English teaching practices, and has accumulated over 20-year experiences in this discipline. In 2001, four undergraduate programs were set up to take advantage of its multi-skilled teaching staff and to cultivate its students with multi-skills in both English language and business knowledge through four specific programs such as business management, international trade, international finance and international economic law. Ever since then, its graduates of business English major has become the most-welcome students by the society and recruiting organizations.

In 2007, as the first move of the whole country, the State Council and the National Ministry of Education approved GDUFS' application for independently setting up the second-level discipline of business English with both undergraduate and postgraduate programs in the university, which places GDUFS in the leading position of the whole nation in terms of business English development.

Apparently, GDUFS' current success in business English teaching practices must have some underlying reasons or advantages. The paper will make a detailed analysis of its employment status and causes in order to summarize some beneficial experiences for reference and to achieve some enlightenment to the reformation of business English teaching practices in the whole country or even in the whole world.

2. Employment status

Based on the author's survey, GDUFS' graduates each year have been warmly welcome and highly recognized by the society and employers. And the employment level (namely well-known firms and high-pay job positions) of its students

tends to be higher and higher as well. This can be illustrated through the following two factor analysis:

Ratio of employment

According to the data announced by GDUFS in 2008, the employment ratio of the graduates of business English major from its School of English for International Business in the past five years between 2004 and 2008 respectively reaches 99.1%, 99.5%, 100%, 100% and 100%, which exceeds that of the graduates of all other majors in the university. And such a high ratio of graduate employment is even much higher than that of any other universities in Guangdong province and even the whole country.

Direction of employment

Still according to the data announced by GDUFS in 2008, employers of the graduates of business English major are more likely to be well-established foreign consultancy service companies, commercial banks, airline companies, government agencies, and other firms, etc. And these firms or agencies are usually this type of organizations that are considered to those usually offering better employment conditions and pay benefits to their employees. This can be illustrated by the following figure (Refer to Figure 1).

Insert Table 1 Here

From Figure 1, it is clearly seen that among GDUFS' 373 graduates of business English major that have been employed, in 2008, there are 141 people who have been recruited by well-known and well-established domestic and international organizations which usually offer admirable good pay and fringe benefits in China. In addition, there are also a large number of graduates of business English obtaining offers to further study master or doctor programs in Beijing University, Fudan University, Nankai University, and famous foreign institutions.

Compared with graduates of other majors, this employment status is much better. Taking the four famous consultancy service corporations and their recruitment of business English major students as an example, they have only recruited about 100 employees from GDUFS' graduates of all majors in 2008. However, the 52 graduates of business English major recruited account for over 50%, demonstrating students of business English major have been highly recognized and preferred by these world-famous MNCs.

3. Cause analysis

The reasons why the students of business English major are so socially acceptable these years may be explained as follows:

3.1 Bilingual Teaching mode

It can be seen from the curriculum design that nearly all courses for business English major in GDUFS are taught with bilingual languages or even only in English. The so-called bilingual teaching mode for business English major refers to the teaching of business management courses with both English and Chinese languages at the same time, but of course, with priority given to the usage of English language in the teaching practices. In other word, this mode of teaching, from the perspective of students, may be defined as a method of learning a certain business management course with original English teaching materials taught by the teacher in both English and Chinese, and with class discussions, assignments, presentations, examinations and dissertations done by the student in English. This mode of teaching can not only enhance the students' practical ability of English language, but also strengthen their knowledge base for contemporary business management theories and practices in the world today.

3.2 Unique teaching staff

The teachers teaching business English in GDUFS are unique ones because they usually possess two degrees. One is a degree in foreign language and literature, and the other is a degree in business management, economics or law, etc., so they are multi-skilled professors who are not only proficient in English language but also knowledgeable in a certain aspect of business management. And what is more important is that over 80% of these teachers have been awarded with master or doctor degrees by universities in UK, US, Australia, and other Western countries. What's more, quite a number of these teachers have working experiences in businesses or other economic areas. It is this kind of unique teaching staff that enables the bilingual teaching mode for business English major to be smoothly executed in GDUFS.

3.3 Outstanding student capacity

3.3.1 Proficiency of English language

Through the medium of business management courses to learn English language in bilingual languages, the students of business English major are more in a better position to master more useful and practical terms and expressions. And what they learn in classes is more related to their daily economic and social life so that their attitude and motivation of study can be stimulated more actively. As a result, their learning results are generally better than students of other foreign language majors. Their proficiency of English language can be evidenced with the comparison of the recent years' pass rates of TEM Band 8 (China's Test for English Major, representing China's highest level of English ability

for English major students) of the whole nation's universities, and even of the whole university of GDUFs. Let's take the data of TEM pass rates between 2005 and 2008 as an example (Refer Figure 2). From this figure, we can draw a basic conclusion that in terms of TEM Band 8 pass rates at an average, the students of business English major in GDUFs have been higher than those of other English language majors within the same university, and have been even much higher than those of English language majors in the whole country's universities.

Insert Table 2 Here

3.3.2 Advantage of comprehensive knowledge

In addition to their better mastering of English language, the students of business English major are advantageous in terms of their comprehensive knowledge. They have learned a series of business management courses Contemporary Business, Economics, Trade Theory and Practice, International Finance, International Business Law, Cross-cultural Communication, etc., and have participated in a series of internship or social activities such as Canteen Fair and volunteer activities. They are not only proficient in English language but also familiar with business management theories and practices so they are a mixed type of talent with comprehensive knowledge and multi-skills that can more satisfy the need of enterprises participating in the global market. That's the reason why these students are so acceptable by employers and so adaptable in modern society.

In summary, the practice of business English teaching in GDUFs has been proven to be successful as a result of teaching mode, teacher advantage and student capacity, which deserves doing some reflection into them in order to promote the sound development of this emerging cross-discipline in China and even in other countries.

4. Implications

In conclusion, the above discussion of business English teaching practices in GDUFs has at least triggered our thinking in the following areas:

Firstly, the bilingual or pure-English-taught teaching mode for business management courses of business English major in GDUFs is so far a very successful one based on employment status and student performance, therefore, it is of realistic importance for universities in China and even in the whole world to together promote the development of this emerging cross-discipline so as to benefit the whole world society.

Secondly, the development of multi-skilled teaching staff is the very foundation or prerequisite for the successful implementation of this mode of business English teaching. It is thus argued that those universities that want to promote business English teaching mode should first develop a multi-skilled teaching force not only proficient in English language but also familiar with a certain field of business management theories or practices. Their staff training and developing strategies should target at satisfying this very need of multi-skilled teachers or talents.

Thirdly, the cultivation of outstanding student capacity by means of business English curriculum designs and teaching materials implies that the emphasis of teaching should be placed on the development of students' comprehensive knowledge and wide social adaptability, which means that due to business employers' preference to sound comprehensive knowledge base of a student in recruitment of employees, for instance, a student of business English major in international finance may be more likely to be recruited by a government agency rather than a commercial bank, a student of business English major (in international finance, trade, law, or whatever specific direction) should not strictly limit his or her study of the specific courses required for that specific discipline, but should widen his or her knowledge base of business management and strengthen his or her practical application ability of English language in the context of international business environment.

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Table 1. Employment Distribution of GDUFS' graduates of business English major in May, 2008

Series No.	Name of Employer	Number of employment
1	Pricewatercooper and other three world-famous consultancy corporations	52
2	State-owned commercial banks, foreign-invested commercial banks and other banks	51
3	P&G, Marski and other famous-brand companies	24
4	China Mobile and Southern China Airline	14
5	Foreign trade firms and any other small-and-medium size organizations	232

Table 2. Comparison of TEM Band 8 Pass Rates at an Average

Test Year	Type of English Language Major	Pass Rate
2005	Students of Business English Major in GDUFS	92.05%
	Students of Other English Language Majors in GDUFS	87.79%
	Students of English language majors in the whole country's universities	60.00%
2006	Students of Business English Major in GDUFS	92.06%
	Students of Other English Language Majors in GDUFS	80.14%
	Students of English language majors in the whole country's universities	54.17%
2007	Students of Business English Major in GDUFS	90.78%
	Students of Other English Language Majors in GDUFS	87.89%
	Students of English language majors in the whole country's universities	47.30%
2008	Students of Business English Major in GDUFS	96.07%
	Students of Other English Language Majors in GDUFS	90.02%
	Students of English language majors in the whole country's universities	45.28%