

An Empirical Study on the Distinctive Teaching Mode and Practice of International Business Innovation Class in GDUFS

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Abstract

Accommodating to the development of globalization, China witnesses a mounting demand for international business talents who are proficient in both foreign languages and business knowledge and adept at international cooperation and competition in business context. In order to meet this need, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, taking advantage of its resources in foreign languages and outstanding professional teachers, made a breakthrough in multidisciplinary teaching reform and took initiative to set up the program of International Business Innovation Class in autumn, 2010. In July 2014, it has delivered its first batch of graduates. Hence, it is of great significance to conduct relevant investigations on the teaching mode and practice timely so as to obtain data for assessing its teaching effectiveness and students' satisfaction. Based on empirical study, this paper evaluates three factors: learners' recognition, features and problems of this program, which aims at identifying existing problems in practical teaching, improving teaching quality and students' satisfaction and proposing feasible suggestions to address them. In a broader context, it attempts to provide a quotable paradigm for similar innovation programs or similar institutions' internationalization.

Keywords: Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS), international business innovation class, distinctive teaching mode and practice, empirical study

1. Introduction

Economic globalization not only propels human resources, capital, goods, services and information to achieve cross-border flows, but also promotes the internationalization of higher education whose ultimate goal is to realize talent training internationalization. Training a large number of international creative talents are the requirements of developing the society and knowledge-based economy and seizing the historic opportunity (Wang & Zhu, 2004). Accommodating to the development of globalization and transformation of regional economic development in our country, China witnesses an unabated but increasing demand for international versatile business talents with a good command of foreign languages, professional knowledge and skills of business trade, competition and cooperation. To meet this demand, many colleges and universities have carried out exploration and practice in reforming business talent training mode.

As southern China's largest gathering of foreign talents, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, taking full advantages of its advantages in foreign languages and outstanding professional teachers, has made a material breakthrough in interdisciplinary education reform. In practical teaching, GDUFS took initiatives to establish an international business innovation class so as to achieve in-depth integration of international business major and business English major in autumn of 2010. Students of this program are selected the second time from the freshmen at the beginning of the first semester by examinations. Such programme has been favored by majority of students and parents. In July 2014, it has delivered its first batch of graduates. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to implement relevant studies on the teaching mode and practice of this reform at this critical moment so as to assess its strengths and weaknesses.

Talent training is realized in the process of teaching while the quality of education is embodied by the curriculum structure and teaching content. Cultivating international business professionals cannot be achieved without the support and implementation of international teaching curriculum, teaching management, teaching team, teaching

methods, teaching practice and teaching concepts. Hence, based on empirical study, this paper focuses on evaluating and analyzing learners' satisfaction, features and problems of distinctive teaching mode and practice of international business innovation class in GDUFS so as to identify existing problems in practical teaching, improving teaching quality, students' satisfaction and proposing innovative and feasible suggestions to address them. In a broader context, it attempts to provide a quotable paradigm for similar innovation programs or similar institutions' internationalization.

To realize the research purposes, three research questions were formulated as follows:

Research Question 1: To what extent, are students from international business innovation class in GDUFS satisfied with the effectiveness of current teaching mode and practice?

Research Question 2: What do they think are features and problems of this program?

Research Question 3: What solutions should be taken to solve problems identified in the program?

2. Related Work

2.1 Definition of Teaching Mode

Currently, scholars still hold controversial views on the definition of teaching mode, but most of them mainly cite the following definition: teaching model is a relatively stable, systematic and theoretical teaching paradigm that is under the guidance of certain teaching ideas and respecting a certain topic about teaching activities. Teaching mode includes the following components: teaching ideas, teaching objectives, teaching methods, teaching process, teaching environment, teaching criteria and teaching evaluation (Wang, 2008). Meanwhile, the practice of teaching mode actually needs the support of teaching team.

To be specific, as for international business innovation class in GDUFS, this program is under the guidance of such teaching idea and objective: emphasis on the integration of both professional English proficiency and skillful competence of business communication and cooperation. With regard to the teaching methods, it implements the form of "English Immersion". In terms of teaching process, it stimulates both students' self-regulatory learning and research capability, which contributes to transform students into independent business talents with critical thinking pattern. Besides, in order to provide students with international business experience, this program offers them plenty of internship opportunities. Moreover, this program also features its need-based credit management, effective evaluation system and double-bachelor degree. In brief, all these components construct the teaching mode and practice of international business innovation class in GDUFS and are also included as variables in the investigation.

2.2 Relevant Researches

With the accelerating pace of higher education's internationalization, the competition among colleges and universities is more and more fierce. They are pushed to explore and reform existing teaching mode so as to keep pace with higher education's internationalization. In such context, international teaching mode has also been given great attention to in the academia. Existing researches from home and abroad provide supporting evidence for the background and necessity of higher education's internationalization while some scholars focus on innovation of teaching mode since the quality of education is embodied by teaching mode. Johnnchan (2015) mentioned that higher education systems around the world were undergoing fundamental change and reform due to external pressures-including internationalization of higher education. Craft, Hall, and Costello (2014) suggested that teachers' passion towards the courses is the significant engine in driving the innovation of teaching mode. Deng (2006) conducted a qualitative study on teaching mode of home and abroad and held the view that it was essential to realize internationalization of teaching objective, teaching content and teaching method and cultivate innovative and internationalized talents with high-tech knowledge and skills since such practice contributes to China's accommodation with the tendency of higher education's internationalization. Xiao and Wang (2007) analyzed the advantages and problems of current English teaching mode applied by colleges and universities in home and abroad.

With the rapid development of business English program, more and more scholars focus on the study of its teaching mode. Hu (2002) divided international business English teaching mode into three types: "English +International Business", "International Business+ English" and "International Business \cap English". Zhu (2005) conducted an empirical study on the English immersion teaching model in business English major and put forward with some feasible suggestions to improve this model in practice. Cao (2008) discussed the distinctive features in business English teaching and found the drawbacks in the traditional teaching model. On this basis, she proposes a new model of teaching business English-scenario-simulation teaching model. Dong and Liu (2015) emphasized the importance of cross-cultural communication in internationalization of business English

teaching mode.

Besides, there are researches focusing on international business program. Guo (2008), taking international business program as an example, summarized and evaluated the English immersion teaching model in practice. Tang, Huang and Cai (2012) explored internationalization of curriculum construction in “international business (bilingual)” in terms of teaching content, teaching resources, teaching approaches and methods, teaching team and teaching researching. However, no researches on the teaching mode in GDUFs’s international business innovation class can be found. The teaching mode of this program is similar to “International Business \cap English” model but distinguishes itself from business English major and traditional international business major. To be specific, international business courses are given in the form of English immersion, which makes it possible for students to have a good command of both business knowledge and English proficiency. If teaching plan is reasonably arranged, students can be delivered double-bachelor degrees—Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Management.

Based on the literature review, it can be found that there is a paucity of academic researches in the following two aspects: 1) Studies on internationalization of teaching mode in higher education are mainly conducted by a qualitative method and lack empirical investigation that can provide paradigm for the establishment, assessment and modification of internationalized teaching mode; 2) Although there are already plenty of researches on teaching mode of international business major and business English major, there is still a gap to be filled in researches directly related to the theory and practice of teaching mode of “international business innovative class” since such program distinguishes itself from traditional international business major and business English major. Therefore, this study takes international business innovative class in GDUFs as an example to conduct a quantitative study on evaluating the effectiveness of its teaching mode in practical teaching in terms of the following six dimensions: international curriculum construction, teaching team, teaching methods, teaching management, teaching practice and teaching mode.

3. Method

3.1 Research Paradigm

According to the different stances behind ontology, epistemology and methodology, the paradigms of social research can be divided into four categories: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages. According to its research purpose, this paper chooses positivism.

3.2 Sampling

The subjects are students of “international business innovation class” in GDUFs. One hundred and eleven subjects completed the questionnaire. The effective rate of questionnaires was 74%. Among them, one subjects volunteered to participate in an in-depth interview. Although there are only 111 subjects are included, the results are representative since there are only about 224 students from international business innovative class with 56 students in each grade, which means that this study has sampled approximately 50% of the population. After data collection, the demographic information of the samples is as follows.

Table 1. Demographic data of the samples

	Gender		Grade			
	Males	Females	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
Subjects	18	93	44	38	29	0
%	16.2	83.8	39.6	34.2	26.1	0

As can be seen from Table 1, 83.8% (n = 93) were female participants while 16.2% (n = 18) were male. Most of them were freshmen (39.6%), sophomores (34.2%) and juniors (26.1%) and no subjects are seniors. Furthermore, the gender proportion of male and female subjects is 6:31, which is related to the fact that GDUFs belongs to the category of foreign language universities.

3.3 Data Analysis

Research materials are obtained by questionnaire investigation, structural interview and literature analysis. SPSS20.0 statistical software is used in this paper for data analysis. Frequency analysis, cross-table analysis and Chi-Square tests are conducted so as to identify and interpret the problems of this program. Besides, in-depth

interviews are also implemented to address the existing problems.

4. Results and Discussion

Based on the results of SPSS20.0, this section analyzes and evaluates students' satisfaction towards the teaching model and practice of this program. Besides, referring to the answers in the open-ended questions and in-depth interview, it discusses the distinctive features of the teaching model. Finally, it reveals the existing problems of this program and proposes certain feasible suggestions. The following tables and figures are the results of frequency analysis, cross-table analysis and Chi-Square tests.

4.1 Frequency Analysis of Each Variable

In this section, frequency analysis is conducted to present the subjects' satisfaction of the distinctive teaching mode of international business innovation class in GDUFS (See Figure 1) and the corresponding features (See Figure 2) and problems (See Figure 3) of this mode.

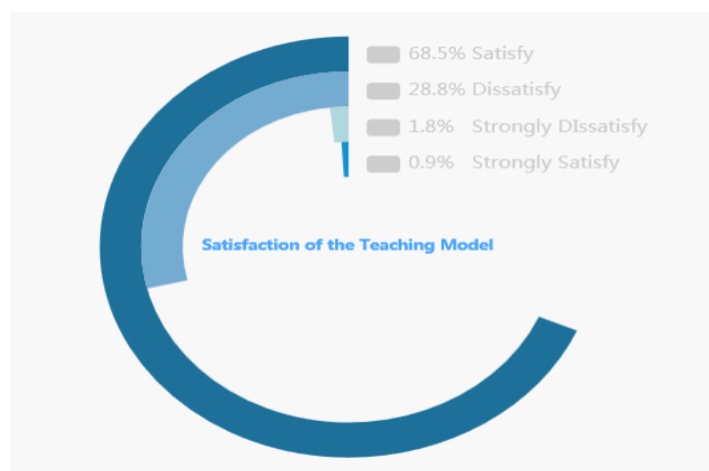


Figure 1. Subjects' satisfaction of the teaching mode

As is illustrated in Figure 1, 69.4% of subjects are satisfied with the current teaching model and practice while 30.6% of them hold the opposite view, which manifests that such teaching model and practice are generally recognized by the students of this program but some issues still need to be improved. In reference to the questionnaires and interview, they reveal that the reason that makes the subjects most satisfactory lies in the outstanding and excellent teaching staff. When being asked the following question: what aspects in practical teaching make you satisfied most? The interviewee answers it as illustrated in Extract 1.

Extract 1: *I think that I am lucky to be in this program. Here I make friends who share common interest in international business. What impressed me most, I would like to say, is my exceptional teachers. Most of them are both proficient in English and business knowledge. Moreover, they are good at lead us to think from a global perspective. Anyway, I think my teachers help a lot in my learning process.*

Other factors also play an important role in influencing subjects' satisfaction including "English immersion teaching model", "favorable university policies for this program", "relatively flexible credit and length of education management system (for example, optional courses can be based on students' interest rather than compulsory categories)", "introduction of textbook of original version", "internationalized courses and distinctive courses (such as golf courses, lectures about red wine and so on)". In addition, the reasons why subjects are dissatisfied with the teaching model lie in the following aspects: no essential differences between this program and other programs while only much more stressful courses and overwhelming study burden; lack of internship opportunity; lack of guidance of supervisors. However, supervisors do play a significant role in such program whose objective is to cultivate intellectual elites. Under-graduate mentorship contributes to embody quality of elite education and is an important model and system in cultivating versatile, personalized and innovative talents (Wu, 2010). Hence, to promote the effectiveness of this program, harmonious mentorship can be a quite important factor.

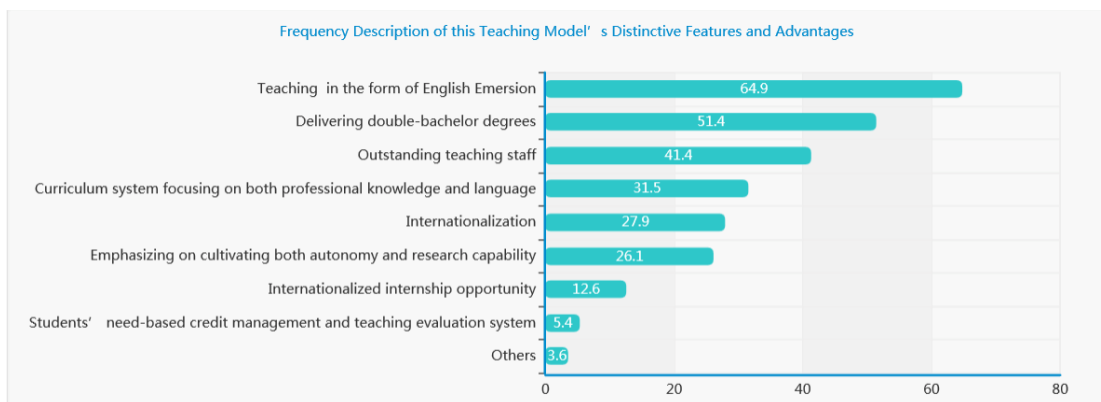


Figure 2. Frequency descriptions of distinctive features and advantages of this teaching model

As is illustrated in Figure 2, the distinctive features and advantages are ranked in the order of highlight: teaching in the form of English immersion (=64.9%), delivering double-bachelor degrees (=51.4%), outstanding teaching staff (=41.4%), curriculum system focusing on both professional knowledge and language (=31.5%), internationalization (=27.9%), emphasizing on cultivating both autonomy and research capability (=26.1%), reasonable internationalized courses (=12.6%), internationalized internship opportunities(=12.6%), students' need-based credit management and teaching evaluation system(=5.4%). It can be found that teaching in the form of English immersion is this program's most distinctive feature, which conforms to the university-running idea of fostering business talents with global view and intercultural communication skill in our university. Besides, delivering double-bachelor degrees is another important feature of this teaching model. For one thing, it is one of the driving forces that attract freshmen. For another thing, it makes it possible for the implementation of "international business ∩ English model". In the meanwhile, outstanding teaching staffs also provide support for fostering innovative business professionals with global views. With regard to the left five features listed in Figure 2, they are far from the distinctive advantages of this teaching model.

Moreover, an issue that should be given special attention to lies in the puzzle from the undergraduates of grade 2012. They are concerned about whether they will be delivered double-bachelor degrees due to the effect of national education policy change. Therefore, respecting this issue, timely and precise communication between the under-graduate and the university are needed so as to consolidate the effectiveness of education.

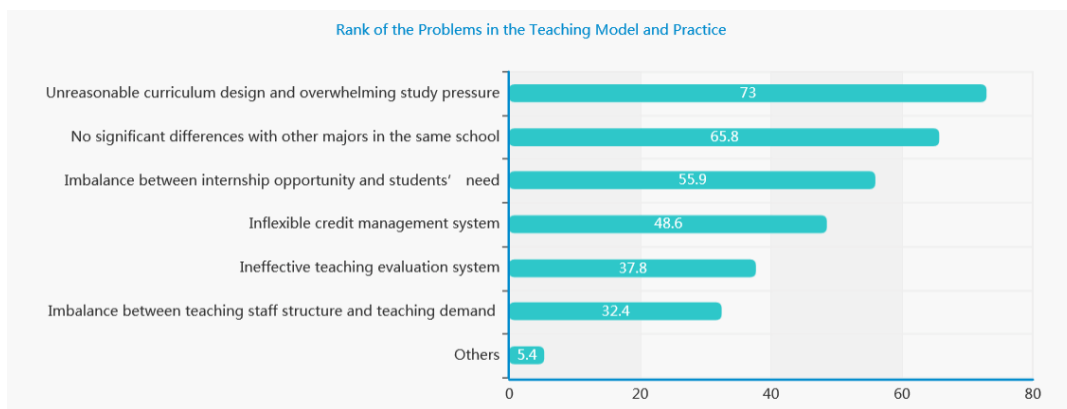


Figure 3. Rank of the problems in the teaching mode and practice

As is illustrated in Figure 3, the problems of the teaching mode and practice are ranked in the order of seriousness: unreasonable curriculum design and overwhelming study pressure (=73%), no significant differences with other majors in the same school (=65.8%), imbalance between internship opportunity and students' need (=55.9%), inflexible credit management system (=48.6%), ineffective teaching evaluation system (=37.8%) and imbalance between teaching staff structure and teaching demand (=32.4%). No significant differences with other majors in the same school but overwhelming study pressure and lack of high-quality

internship opportunity are the most obvious problems that make students strongly dissatisfied. Overwhelming study pressure restrict students' individual arrangement of learning time, which puts them at the passive place and restricts their possibility to foster innovative thinking and discernment. Moreover, they are dissatisfied with the quantity and quality of the internship opportunities offered by the university. What they desire more is the opportunity to have a deeper insight into the enterprises' culture and management and suchlike rather than internship within the campus or going to the Canton fair.

4.2 Cross-table Analysis and Chi-Square Tests

The output result from SPSS shows that there is significant difference in perception of this teaching mode's distinctive features and advantages in terms of different genders and grades. However, there is no significant difference in subjects' attitude toward the problems of teaching model in terms of grade (Pearson Chi-Square=10.787, sig.=0.547) and gender (Pearson Chi-Square=5.209, sig.=0.517). For the limited space, here just report the variables that have significant differences.

As is illustrated in Table 2, the value of Pearson Chi-Square is 47.406 and the value of significance is 0.000, which manifests that there is significant difference between female subjects and male subjects' attitude toward the features of this teaching model. To be specific, female subjects regard "teaching in the form of English immersion (65.5%)", "delivering double-bachelor degrees (=55.9%)" and "outstanding staff (44.1%)" as the main features and advantages of this mode while male subjects think that "internationalization (=66.7%)", "teaching in the form of English immersion (61.1%)" and "emphasizing on cultivating both autonomy and research capability (=38.9%)" are the distinctive features of the teaching model. Such phenomenon may be explained by the differences in female and male subjects' different learning needs.

Table 2. Features of the teaching model*genders crosstabulation

Features ^a	Percent	
	Females	Males
Internationalization	20.4	66.7
Teaching in the form of English Immersion	65.6	61.1
Delivering double-bachelor degrees	55.9	27.8
Curriculum system focusing on both professional knowledge and language	34.4	16.7
Internationalized internship opportunity	10.7	22.2
Emphasizing on cultivating both autonomy and research capability	23.6	38.9
Outstanding teaching staff	44.1	27.8
Students' need-based credit management and teaching evaluation system	5.4	5.6
Others	4.3	0

Pearson Chi-Square=47.406^b, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)=0.000.

Percentages and totals are based on respondents.

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

b. 7 cells (38.9%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .46.

As is illustrated in Table 3, the value of Pearson Chi-Square is 31.553 and the value of significance is 0.011, which manifests that there is significant difference in subjects' attitude toward the features of teaching model in terms of grades. As for freshmen and sophomores, their views towards the advantages of the teaching model are similar. They put "teaching in the form of English immersion", "delivering double-bachelor degree" and "outstanding staff" in the first place. As for juniors, they emphasize "internationalization" rather than "outstanding staff" which may be explained by the different needs of students from higher grade and lower grade. Lower grade students may need more teaching staff's guidance while higher ones need more for broadening horizon.

Table 3. Features of the distinctive teaching model*grades crosstabulation

Feature of the Teaching Model ^a	Percent of Different Grades		
	1 st Year	2 nd Year	3 rd Year
Internationalization	20.5	15.8	51.2
Teaching in the form of English Immersion	72.7	50	72.4
Delivering double-bachelor degrees	56.8	36.8	62.1
Curriculum system focusing on both professional knowledge and language	38.6	27.3	20.7
Internationalized internship opportunity	11.4	18.4	6.9
Emphasizing on cultivating both autonomy and research capability	20.5	31.6	27.6
Outstanding teaching staff	54.5	47.4	13.8
Students' need-based credit management and teaching evaluation system	6.8	5.3	3.4
Others	6.8	2.6	0

Pearson Chi-Square=31.553^b, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)=0.011.

Percentages and totals are based on respondents.

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

b. 8 cells (29.6%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .99.

5. Conclusions

Under the pressure of economic globalization and instability, many colleges and universities are urged to promote internationalization of higher education. Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, taking full advantage of its strength in foreign language and prominent teaching staff, has established an international business innovation class which is representative in its international teaching mode. Given the existing deficiency in empirical studies on teaching mode and practice of international business innovation class which is a distinctive paradigm of university's efforts in realizing internationalization of higher education, it is of great practical significance to conduct a quantitative research on evaluating and analyzing learners' satisfaction, features and problems of distinctive teaching mode and practice of international business innovation class in GDUFS, which is guided by three research questions. On the one hand, it quantitatively evaluates students' satisfaction and identified features and problems of this teaching mode, which contributes to the improvement and modification of teaching mode in this program of GDUFS and similar programs in other institutions. In a broader sense, this study presents a quotable paradigm for internationalization of higher education.

In reference to results of questionnaire and interview, this study provides insights into distinctive teaching model and practice of "international business innovation class" in at least three ways. First, students of this program are generally satisfied with its teaching model and practice (Research Question 1). Second, the most distinctive features of this program lie in "teaching in the form of English immersion", "delivering double-bachelor degrees" and "outstanding teaching staff". Moreover, there is significant difference in distinctive features and advantages in terms of different genders and grades. Third, the most obvious problems in the teaching model lie in "unreasonable curriculum design and overwhelming study pressure", "no significant differences with other majors in the same school" and "imbalance between internship opportunity and students' need" (Research Question 2).

Finally, this paper proposes some feasible suggestions for reference: 1) The differences between this program and other majors should not only lie in the number of credits but the structure of curriculum and credit design. For example, classic module of arts should not be compulsory but optional and other professional courses should be given more autonomy. In this way, it can not only reduce students' learning pressure but also offer them more time to be critical thinking and innovative learning. Besides, it helps to enhance students' breadth and depth of knowledge learning, which is important in realizing innovation education. 2) The university should improve the quality of internship opportunity that allows students to put their theories into practice. Embedded learning system is far from enough. 3) Increase the proportion of teaching staff with both good language and professional

knowledge and skills by helping the existing teaching staff's transformation from language teachers into business English teachers, which can be realized by teaching development.4) As for English immersion model, its application should be based on students' needs, capability and the courses' difficulty degree. For example, when the terminologies of the course are too difficulty, certain Chinese can be used in the class for effective teaching.5) Improve the system of supervisor management and teaching evaluation so as to timely address existing problems. A harmonious mentorship enhances the interaction between students and supervisors, which is a good way for teachers to understand students'specific needs of gender and grade differences while a scientific evaluation system helps to monitor the effectiveness of teaching mode. Although the suggestions above are all based on GDUFS' experience, it can provide some enlightenments for similar innovation classes in the university and other institutions with similar programs.

However, the research still has some limitations as follows. First, samples from seniors or graduates of this program were not included in the investigation, which may help to link the effectiveness of internationalization of teaching mode with market demand for intellectual international business talents. In later study, researchers may also include these two groups. Second, all the findings and suggestions are limited to the teaching mode of international business innovation class in GDUFS. Hence, for further study, comparative study on teaching mode in similar programs in GDUFS or other universities can be conducted.

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