

# An Analysis of the Development Path of Business English Teachers in Local Institutions of China

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## Abstract

The application-oriented development of local institutions has become a trend. Business English, with its “compound and cross-disciplinary” characteristics and the development of local economy have put forward higher requirements for the development of business English teachers in local institutions. This paper surveys and analyzes the current situation and development bottleneck of business English teachers in local institutions of China, and puts forward the development path of business English teachers from four aspects. It aims to provide reference for the construction of business English teaching faculty and the construction of business English discipline.

**Key words:** local institutions of China, business English teacher, development path

## 1. Introduction

Since the Ministry of Education approved the University of International Business and Economics to establish the first business English undergraduate major in 2007, there are 251 colleges and universities in China which have set up business English undergraduate major by 2015, with the enrollment of about 25,000 students each year, and the yearly growth rate is approximately 30 colleges and universities with 3,000 students. In a short period of ten years, business English major, because of its accurate position—to cultivate international, compound and application-oriented talents, has conformed to the needs of economic and social development, showing a strong momentum of development and unlimited potential.

In 2015, the Ministry of Education clearly pointed out that the institution education should really turn to serve the local economic and social development, to the integration of industry and education and the integration of institution-enterprise cooperation, to cultivate the application-oriented talents, and to enhance students’ ability to start employment in order to comprehensively improve the ability of institutions to serve regional economic and social development and innovation-driven development. In such a background of increasingly frequent international economic trade and educational reform, as an institutional powerhouse to serve regional economy, the business English major of local institutions will face more opportunities and challenges. The business English major of local institutions is often born out of the traditional English major, with some common problems such as weak background, short history, poor experience and inadequate faculties, which makes the professional development of teachers facing great bottlenecks and challenges. Therefore, it is imperative to explore the professional development path of business English teachers in local institutions to improve the construction of disciplines and faculties.

## 2. The Status Quo of Business English Teachers in Local Institutions and the Bottleneck of Teachers’ Development

Local institutions are provincial colleges and universities, most of which rely on local financial support. There are about 2,500 ordinary colleges and universities in China which are financially supported by local administrative departments. As the main part of China’s higher education system, local colleges and universities mainly aim at serving the regional economic and social development. They focus on training local high-quality talents. According to the teaching ideas in the new era of Ministry of Education as well as their own school orientation, many local institutions in recent years have established business English major relying on English

major. Because of a late start, subject construction is not perfect, and there are some common problems with teacher structure and teacher's development in these institutions.

Guo (2011) did a survey in 33 local Institutions which have Business English majors. From the survey we get to know that the average age of these teachers is 33 years old, 78% of these teachers have a master's degree or above. Among them only 24.6% are of the business orientation education background, 34.6% have business-related practical experience; 69.4% of the teachers believe that the weakest matter is the lack of business practice experience, 97.2% of teachers believe that there is a need to train the business English teachers. Wang (2012) conducted a survey on the professional development of business English teachers in four local colleges and universities in Nanyang City, Henan Province from the perspective of current situation of teachers, professional development needs and development methods. The results showed that the number of teachers in business English was insufficient; The percentage of teachers with high academic background is low, and the percentage of teachers with "English + business" background is generally low, which is only 13.60%. Most of the business English teachers in local Institutions are those who were ordinary English teachers or international trade teachers. Most of the former ones have no systematic study on Business, who are entirely relying on the teacher's own understanding of the new business knowledge. And those who graduated majoring in international trade are relatively weak with their English. It is difficult for them to skillfully teach professional knowledge in English. Therefore many of them have to teach in Chinese. Zhang (2014) did a research in Zunyi Medical College which started enrollment in 2012 on their Business English major. The average age of the professional faculty is 28 years old. The team is rather young, and they have few teachers with senior titles. Their basic understanding of business knowledge is merely paper talk because of their lack of experience in using English in practical work. There is also another survey (Xia, 2015) that shows in institutions with Business English majors, most of the Business English teachers are originally purely academic teachers in English. Although they have solid English language skills, the general weakness is that they have not learned business knowledge specifically and systematically, nor have engaged in business experience. They have very little understanding of the practical business environment of applying business English.

On the basis of these previous researches, the author did some research on business English teachers' current situation and their development in her local institution - Leshan Normal University. In 2013, the business English undergraduate major was approved by the Ministry of Education. In 2014, it started to enroll undergraduate students of Business English. Among three local institutions in Leshan city, it is the only one that has business English major. So far, there are only 163 students in three different grades in total. The scale is still very small and the school is still in the initial stage of exploration. There are 15 teachers in total who are teaching Business English, among which there are 14 with graduate degrees, 3 with studying experience abroad. The average age of teachers is 35 years old, among which there are 2 professors, 3 associate professors, 8 lecturers and 2 junior lecturers. The structure of age and academic titles seem reasonable, but the professional background is seriously unbalanced. Most of the teachers' own educational background is English language and literature, foreign linguistics and applied linguistics, who mainly undertake basic language courses and humanistic quality courses; there is only 20% with "English + business" professional background and none with business background. The proportion of teachers with foreign and corporate working experience is only 13.3%. This leads to such a result, that is, teachers have to be "borrowed" from other departments to teach courses such as international trade, e-commerce, international payment, economic management, etc.

Unbalanced teacher structure leads to professional development falling in trouble and bottlenecks, mainly embodied in terms of individuals, team and its organization (Xia, 2015). From individual point of view, the vast majority of business English teachers have not received a systematic business English education or training. It is a "forced" type of transition. The lack of interest and curiosity in the field of business, as well as the serious lack of professional knowledge are shocks to teachers' self-confidence. This leads to the increase of the difficulty of self-transition. From the team point of view, the unreasonable allocation of language teachers and professional teachers does not meet the requirements of the interdisciplinary development of business English. The two types of teachers are lack of the sharing, communication and cooperation of the interdisciplinary teaching and research, nor can they form a reasonable teaching echelon or compound teaching staff. From the organizational point of view, business English teachers take the business English course teaching mostly out of obedience to the arrangement of college or the department, which sometimes is beyond them. Meanwhile, supporting training mechanism and incentive measures of the institution have not kept up with it. The result is that the teachers are struggling to cope with heavy teaching tasks, thus have no time to invest in their professional development. Professional training for teachers of the local institutions is also lack of long-term planning and safeguard mechanism. To promote the professional development of business English teachers is the urgent task of the

overall development of business English Education. Due to its own reasons, the development of business English teachers in local institutions is more urgent. This is a prerequisite for the development of qualified business English talents, and the fundamental guarantee for the development of business English. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to actively explore the development path of business English teachers in local institutions.

### **3. The Development Path of Business English Teachers in Local Institutions**

Zhu (2015), taking Guangdong University of Foreign Studies as an example, puts forward the development of business English teachers in the following six ways: resource reallocation, talent recruitment, staff transformation, teacher training, enterprise cooperation, research team-working, which is instructive. However, local institutions, different from the colleges and universities directly under the Ministry of Education, often lack of strong academic platform and financial resources to support. Therefore, how to start from their own school situation, combined with professional positioning and school characteristics to explore the development path of business English teachers in local institutions is very necessary and important.

#### *3.1 Teachers' Professional Development Path Based on Self-development and Multi-Training*

Self-development is teachers promote their own professional development through constant self-learning and reflection action. In view of local institutions' business English teachers structure, self-learning is one of the important ways of business English teachers to make up for the lack of business knowledge structure. According to their own knowledge structure, their qualification, or their own interests, business English teachers can establish learning objectives, select the learning content, develop a learning plan to meet the needs of self-learning activities and evaluate whether they achieve the purpose of learning and to establish new learning objectives. Business English teaching's reflective action can use English teaching reflective methods for reference. There are methods which help to find problems of business English teaching such as recording, video recording, collecting classroom teaching samples, analyzing, reflecting and evaluating samples, so that teachers can identify problems and put forward targeted solutions, develop and implement a teaching program to solve the problems. Through reflection action, business English teachers can adjust and optimize their teaching behaviors. (Bao, 2011)

While teachers take the initiative to promote their own development, colleges and universities should provide a wide range of multi-training opportunities for business English teachers according to different ages, academic levels and demands. First of all, local institutions should provide more school-based and inter-school training opportunities for the young teachers, such as fully using resources in related colleges and selecting some of the young teachers to take some off-the-job training in some first-class universities specializing in business English. They can study intensively in some targeted courses. Secondly, to encourage the key teachers to work and study at the same time. They can study through both online and offline courses. Thirdly, if conditions permit, local institutions can choose and send some key teachers to study and research abroad, to learn foreign advanced vocational education experience. Moreover, teachers should be encouraged to study for master's or doctoral degree in the field of business to enhance their own qualifications and optimize the structure of teachers. Fourthly, in addition to "send out", "invite in" form should also be considered. Some trade experts, financial authorities, marketing experts should be regularly invited to do relevant reports or lectures to train the teachers professional knowledge.

#### *3.2 The Development Path of "Double-qualified Teachers" Based on the Practice of School-Enterprise*

Dudley-Evens and St John (1998) pointed out that "Business English teachers need to have knowledge of communication in business context and some theoretical knowledge of business management". In 1995, "double-qualified teachers" concept was clearly put forward, which coincided the development and construction of business English professional teachers team. The compound and practicality of business English major have determined the business English faculty should be characterized by "double-qualified teachers". In 2013, the Ministry of Education put forward the requirement to strengthen the construction of the "double-qualified teachers" in the Guidance on the Transformation and Development of Local Colleges.

Business English teachers should not only have a higher language level, but also have the relevant business expertise and related business experience, which is the so called "double-qualified teachers". The professional practice of combining school and enterprise is an important way to realize the "double-qualified teachers". Through training inside and outside schools, business English teachers can get more professional knowledge reserves and higher teaching literacy, but at the same time, business English teachers also need to go out of the school to the enterprise to practice. Through the form of employment, post work and other forms, teachers can go to all types of foreign enterprises, engaging in export sales, business assistants, foreign trade agents, customs agents, merchandiser, documentary and other practical work to broaden the vision of teachers, improve their

business knowledge structure and enrich their practice experience. At the same time, teachers can also understand the direction of business needs of the talent through their own practice, so that they can adjust the school curriculum and teaching content for the purpose of training qualified employees for companies (Wang & Yuan, 2014).

### *3.3 Teaching and Research Development Path Based on the Cooperation of Professional Team of Teachers*

Freeman in 1989 proposed that teacher's professional development was essentially achieved through the exchange of views, sharing of feelings, stimulating ideas, discussion and communication. The quality of the relationships between teachers is the key to professional growth. Bao (2011) pointed out that the group co-development is very consistent with the current status of business English teachers. Peer cooperation can not only help teachers find effective ways to deal with their problems in business English teaching, to bridge the lack of professional knowledge structure, to accelerate the improvement of teachers' teaching skills and professional ability, but also help promote the improvement of business English teachers' professional beliefs.

In teaching cooperation, we should build a course group as a unit of professional teaching team. Teachers of basic language courses, professional core courses and specialized courses can form a fixed course teaching team. Teachers of the same team can analyze students' needs, exchange teaching ideas and methods, develop syllabus and prepare lessons together. Besides, they can design teaching activities and test evaluation, share teaching courseware and materials. In practical teaching, they can learn from the experience of teaching through mutual help of "observing lessons", reflect on the teaching behavior, promote the improvement of teaching methods, and form the business English teaching paradigm. Local institutions can strengthen the exchange of learning between different course groups through teaching and research activities and teaching workshops. They can also encourage teachers to develop and compile high quality textbooks, lectures and tutoring materials for business English. In the academic research cooperation, they can strengthen business English academic echelon construction, select higher titles and highly educated teachers to be academic leaders so as to lead everyone to declare subject, to carry out empirical research, to form academic research teams and create strong academic atmosphere.

### *3.4 Teachers' Sustainable Development Path Based on Policy Guarantee-Incentive Mechanism*

The professional development of teachers is a long and arduous task. Only a sound and effective system can make its development sustainable, stable, healthy and rapid (Li, 2004). In order to promote the professional development of teachers, we should establish a guarantee mechanism which includes organizational, institutional, material and concept levels. (Lin & Liu, 2012). Because of its late start, the weak professional foundation and the inadequate discipline construction, the educational and administrative departments always pay little attention to the business English majors in local colleges and universities. In addition, the foreign language teachers' teaching task is heavy, and the academic research status is low, thus lead to their disadvantaged position in the teacher groups. Only by constantly improving the education policy guarantee and incentive mechanism can we effectively promote the comprehensive and sustainable development of business English teachers in professional knowledge, teaching skills, practical ability and scientific research ability. On the one hand, local institutions should increase the financial investment and material security of the construction of business English disciplines, and organize the teachers in batches to well-known domestic foreign business English colleges and universities and enterprises to carry out relevant courses and practice. Also, they can give some preferential policies in the teaching tasks and treatment allocation, so that teachers can fully devote in the transformation development. On the other hand, local institutions should start from the actual situation of the school, and strive to build a scientific and rational "double-qualified teachers" incentive and evaluation system. They can also encourage teachers to obtain BEC (Cambridge Business English Certificate), foreign trade clerk certificate, customs certificate and other related professional certificates through self-study and training, and give them policy support in academic title promotion; teachers of English language and literature should be encouraged to apply for doctoral degree in international trade and economic management to improve their knowledge structure; teachers are also encouraged to actively participate in school-enterprise cooperation and development projects and innovative business practices projects.

## **4. Conclusion**

As a compound interdisciplinary, Business English has broad prospects for development, but the key lies in the development of teachers. Local institutions should proceed from their own reality, to conduct a comprehensive study of business English majors, and actively explore the effective path of the development of professional teachers. They should take the initiative to adapt to the development of business English teaching needs, and finally achieve both the teacher development and discipline development. At the same time, through the

establishment of long-term mechanism which provides guarantee for the professional development of teachers in policy and system, the stability and sustainability of the development of business English teachers thus can be achieved.

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