

# Study on Business English Practical Teaching from the Perspective of Economics of Language

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## Abstract

The theory of Economics of Language holds that the relationship of language learning and language application is just like investment and benefit. Business English teaching is an investment that can bring economic benefits, so we should try to get a higher return with a lower cost. With an analysis of economic value of business English practical teaching, this paper puts forward some principles and strategies for business English practical teaching. Optimizing the allocation of education resources and establishing a practical teaching system highlighting both language skills and business practice can maximize the economic benefit of Business English education.

## Keywords

Business English, Practical Teaching, Economics of Language

## 1. Introduction

With the globalization of the world economy, international business activities have become increasingly frequent. Business English talents with both international trade expertise and English language proficiency have become an urgent need. But there are some problems of the cultivation of Business English talents. For example, the curriculums do not meet the career need; teachers pay so much attention to language training instead of practice that the students are much more competent in language skills than in business skills. Therefore, it is of vital practical significance for Chinese universities to cultivate effectively more high-quality application-oriented talents who are capable of serving the society and the economy professionally. And the focus of Business English teaching reform should be on the practical teaching.

Economics of Language Theory holds that the relationship of language learn-

ing and language use is just like investment and benefit. The theory has an important enlightenment on Business English teaching reform. Business English education is an investment that can bring economic benefits; therefore Business English teaching should try to get a higher return with a lower cost. Optimizing the allocation of education resources and establishing a practical teaching system highlighting language skills and business expertise can maximize the economic value of Business English teaching. This paper analyzes the specific economic value of business English practical teaching, and puts forward some principles for business English practical teaching based on Economics of Language and some strategies for optimizing business English practical teaching.

This paper consists of six chapters. Chapter one is a brief introduction. Chapter two is the literature review. Chapter three is a benefit analysis of business English practical teaching. Chapter four puts forward three principles of business English practical teaching based on Economics of Language. Chapter five proposes the objectives and three strategies for optimizing business English practical teaching. Chapter six makes a conclusion that the economic value of business English and the economic benefit of business English education will be maximized when a business English practical teaching system is established through integrated practical teaching, business internship, comprehensive foreign trade practice and enterprise practice.

## 2. Literature Review

Economics of Language is a new interdisciplinary subject that crosses pedagogy, linguistics and economics. It is a new rational thinking mode in the field of humanities. It examines linguistics with the theories and methods of economics, and has injected new vitality into the study of linguistics. American economist Jacob Marschak first proposed the concept of Economics of Language in 1965, and explained the economic nature of language. Jacob points out that language, as an indispensable tool in economic activities, has the economic characteristics of value, utility, cost and benefit (Marschak, 1965). He holds that language itself is a kind of human capital, foreign language learning is an economic investment in human capital production. The economic utility of a language depends on how well it is used in different markets (Marschak, 1965). Canadian economics Francois Vaillancourt elaborated the basic theory of Economics of Language in a more systematic way, marking the final formation of this discipline (Vaillancourt, 1989). Francois Grin further put forward the theoretical economic category of Economics of Language (Grin, 1996). Rubinstein made a systematical argument of the economics of language and the language of economics (Rubinstein, 2000). It is widely believed that the use of language can produce network effects, which is an important aspect of economic benefits of language. Increasing language input can improve labor productivity. The economic value of language is also affected by the relationship between market supply and demand. Generally speaking, the more experienced and skilled in language the employees,

the higher their value.

In China, there have been more and more researches on English education based on Economics of Language since Ziran He first introduced the theory of Economics of Language in 1997. Hong Zhou (2000) discussed the economic value of foreign language education from the perspective of Economics of Language, and the guiding significance of the theory in foreign language education reform. Ya Wu (2004) conducted a demand theory research of business English talents cultivation mode and business English curriculum. Zaishu Mo (2006) analyzed the fundamental assumption, major content and method of the research of Business English education. Xiaobin Cai (2009) explored the relationship between business English education and regional economic development. Jing Liao (2009) tried to find an effective practical teaching system for vocational college business English education. Peng Zhang (2011) studied the economic value of Business English based on Economics of Language. Xiaoying Yan (2013) studied the construction and development of business English education and teaching from the perspective of Economics of Language. Linlin Zou (2018) explored the business English talent cultivation mode in the aspects of resetting curriculum system, updating teaching methods and training business teachers from the perspective of Economics of Language. These studies have achieved some initial results, but the research on practical teaching of Business English is little and not systematic.

### **3. Benefit Analysis of Business English Practical Teaching**

Economics of Language holds that language has economic characteristics: value, utility, cost and benefit. Based on Economics of Language, optimizing business English practical teaching can increase the employment competitiveness of business English talents as well as the economic value of Business English teaching.

#### **3.1. Raising the Benefit of Talent Cultivation**

Optimizing Business English practical teaching will raise the benefit of Business English talent cultivation. Firstly, it can raise the benefit of the students. In the process of practical teaching, students have more opportunities to improve their practical business skills as well as their language communication skills, which increases their popularity with the enterprises. Secondly, it can raise the benefit of enterprises. The intern students who have practiced in enterprises are more likely to adapt to the position requirements. After the internship, enterprises can directly hire the excellent students, which will reduce their recruitment cost. Thirdly, it's more convenient for colleges to learn about the changing needs of the talent market and improve the rationality of their majors building.

#### **3.2. Reducing the Cost of Talent Cultivation**

Optimizing Business English practical teaching will reduce the cost of Business

English talent cultivation. Firstly, it can reduce the cost of learning for students. Internship in enterprises will enable students to acquire professional skills required for positions in a cheap or even free way. Secondly, it can reduce the cost of enterprises. Hiring directly the excellent students after the internship will save the time and cost of new staff training. Thirdly, it can reduce the cost of school teaching. Internship in enterprises can reduce the workload of school theoretical teaching as well as the cost of teaching.

### **3.3. Benefiting the Development of Universities and Majors**

“One Belt And One Road” strategy has opened a new era for Chinese enterprises to go global. In such a trend of economic development, a large number of professionals with both excellent English communication skills and proficient business practice skills are needed. Optimizing practical teaching will improve the employment competitiveness of Business English students and the development of universities and Business English major.

## **4. Principles of Business English Practical Teaching Based on Economics of Language**

Based on Economics of Language, the economic value of language goes high or low with the impact of market supply and demand. The economic value of business English lies in the employer’s demand of business English talents and the employee’s own level of language skills and business expertise. Generally speaking, the higher the level, the higher the popularity and the economic value. Therefore, business English professionals should not only master solid English language knowledge and skills, but also have good business knowledge and skills. The development of business English practical teaching must meet the need of the market and follow the three principles: focus on the cultivation of students’ language application ability, focus on the cultivation of students’ business practice skills, and focus on the cultivation of students’ combination of business and language.

### **4.1. Focus on Students’ Language Application Ability**

Business English teaching should pay more attention to the cultivation of students’ language application ability required in professional positions, including listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating. In classroom teaching, teachers should carry out various training activities according to the actual work, set up business environment for students to stimulate the real scenario, strengthen the practice of students’ language skills, improve students’ application ability, and enable students to better assume the responsibilities of the future job.

### **4.2. Focus on Students’ Business Practice Skills**

The cultivation of students’ business practice skills requires universities to analyze the demand of the enterprises and the characteristics of the industry, which

means a close connection of universities and enterprises. However, many universities doesn't have a close relationship with enterprises. The practical teaching in Business English mainly focuses on classroom teaching. Teachers lack adequate knowledge of business practice. As a result, there is a big gap between teaching and practice. Students cannot do the real work immediately after graduation, and they stay incompetent until they work for a while for the employer or receive a professional training from the employer. Therefore, teachers should go to work and research in enterprises and improve their own business ability. On the basis of understanding the operation and core tasks of the enterprises, teachers will be able to design reasonable practical teaching. Moreover, teachers should take full advantage of the internship and training bases inside and outside the universities to create more practical environment and opportunities for students to improve their business practice ability and position adaptability.

#### **4.3. Focus on the Combination of Business Practice and Language Skills**

Business English teaching should have a clear training direction, strengthen the combination of basic knowledge and application skills, and focus on cultivation of both language skills and business skills. Business communication ability, business knowledge and comprehensive skills are the basic elements of business English talents. Among these elements, the most important ones in business English practical teaching are business communication ability and practical operation ability. So the key to improve students' comprehensive quality and practical ability is to emphasize practical teaching and skill training (Cao, 2013). It's required that universities provide students with practical professional knowledge through building a reasonable curriculum system and highlighting professional characteristics. Only by combining the cultivation of language skills and business skills can universities improve the teaching effect and promote students' competitiveness for employment.

### **5. Strategies of Business English Practical Teaching Based on Economics of Language**

Business English is of great economic value. The practical teaching of business English should enhance the English language level of students and improve their practical business ability. Through scientific and standardized practical teaching, the potential value of business English itself can be better translated into long-term economic benefits and returns. The practical teaching of business English should focus on ability, and be realized through integrated teaching of business practice, foreign trade practice, position practice and other practical teaching forms.

#### **5.1. Objectives of Business English Practical Teaching**

There are four levels of objectives for business English practical teaching to achieve.

1) English language application ability is the first basic ability of business English students. It should be cultivated through integrated practical training of Listening, Cross-cultural Communication, Audio-visual Speaking, Translation, Interpretation, Writing and other courses.

2) Foreign trade practice ability is the second basic ability of business English students, including foreign trade post cognition, foreign trade documents making, customs declaration & commodity inspection and so on. It should be cultivated through integrated practical training of International Trade, Import-export Business Process, Business Negotiation, Business Correspondence and other courses.

3) Cross-cultural communicative competence is the third basic ability of business English students, including cross-cultural communication etiquette, ability to deal with cultural differences in business negotiations and so on. It should be cultivated through integrated practical training of Business Etiquette and British and American Culture, or through holding extracurricular British and American culture experience activities.

4) Comprehensive ability of vocational post is the fourth basic ability of business English students and the most directly reflected ability when entering a workplace. It should be cultivated through business practice, in-post internship, enterprise workstation, startup studio, on-campus and off-campus practice bases and so on. Students with these four abilities will be high-qualified inter-disciplinary and application-oriented talents that meet the market demand.

## 5.2. Strategies for Achieving the Objectives

In order to achieve these objectives, appropriate strategies must be adopted. It is feasible to establish a three-dimensional business English practical teaching system, including individual skill training, comprehensive skill training and enterprise practice. This system conforms to the law of teaching of cognitive practice, post practice and in-post practice, and embodies the attributes of economic value, utility, cost and benefit.

### 1) Individual skill training

It's found that those who have been trained in a certain language are more likely to acquire another language or skill (Zhang, 2016). The first step of business English practical teaching is to cultivate students' basic language skills and business practice skills via individual skill training.

For the cultivation of students' basic language skills, individual skill training contains classroom integrated practical training and extracurricular activities. The integrated practical training of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating means an integrated training of a particular skill for one or two weeks after learning the related courses. For example, Cross-cultural Communication course should be arranged for one week or two weeks each semester to train students' oral skills for oral competitions or the Canton fair. The integrated oral training should be provided by foreign teachers or oral English teachers of our school. We can also invite enterprise experts experienced in Canton fair or

various exhibitions to give lectures or a training for a couple of days. In this way, students can get familiar with the oral skills required by various exhibitions and foreign trade business. Moreover, the cultivation of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating can be realized in extracurricular activities. Teachers should actively arrange such activities as oral contest, speech contest, dubbing contest, reading contest, translation contest, writing contest and drama contest to stimulate students' interest in learning English and improve their English expression ability.

For the cultivation of students' business practice ability, individual skill training also contains classroom integrated practical training and extracurricular activities. The abilities of foreign trade post cognition, foreign trade documents making, business correspondence writing and customs declaration & commodity inspection can be cultivated through integrated practical training of International Trade, Import-export Business Process, Business Negotiation, Business Correspondence and other courses. They can also be cultivated through various contests. Teachers should encourage and guide students to take part in such activities as Practice for Operational Competence in International Business, foreign trade skills competition, freight forwarder and customs clearance platform training, document filling competition, document review competition and so on.

Familiarizing students with the individual skills required by the post will reduce the cost of enterprise post training and maximize the benefit of business English teaching.

### 2) Comprehensive skill training

To cultivate students' foreign trade practice ability, cross-cultural communication competence and the comprehensive ability of vocational post, universities should provide them with opportunities of stimulation training and on-site business practice. On campus, it's a must to set up such training rooms as negotiation training room, scenario simulation training room, document training room and comprehensive business training room to provide students with training places. It's also necessary to construct campus productive training base, cross-border e-commerce entrepreneurship base and school-enterprise studio to give students more on-site training. Through these on-campus training platforms, students complete foreign trade business, win real orders and realize their self-value. Off campus, students improve their English language competence, get familiar with foreign trade business workflow, understand the enterprise post setting and post capacity requirements, and lay a solid foundation for employment through practice in Canton fairs, expos and enterprise workstations. In this way, the cost of enterprise post training will be reduced and the benefit of enterprise recruitment and college business English teaching will be maximized.

### 3) Enterprise practice

At present, internship for business English students is comparatively scattered. Each enterprise only allow several students to practice in their company at the same time. So if there are 90 graduates in a grade, they will be scattered in



dozens of different companies. It's very difficult for universities to manage the enterprise practice, and the practical teaching effect is not satisfactory. To optimizing practical teaching management and maximizing its effectiveness, we should strengthen school-enterprise cooperation and build training bases outside the university. First, universities and enterprises should cooperate to develop the curriculum standards of practical teaching. Universities should renew and program their teaching procedure based on business workflow, design the teaching scenarios and tasks according to real work scenes and tasks, arrange the teaching content with real materials and cases from front-line positions of enterprises. What's more, universities should reinforce the cooperation with business industry or trade associations under the win-win guidance of mutual benefit, complementary advantages and common progress. Universities and colleges should actively contact with enterprises and government organizations, take full advantage of various resources, and actively provide internship opportunities for students. A special fund should be established for the construction of off-campus practice teaching bases. An alumni association should be set up to facilitate the signing of the internship base agreement between universities and enterprises or government organizations. It's boring for students to acquire knowledge of international business via books. Whereas it's more acceptable and effective for them to learn through on-site practice.

From the perspective of Economics of Language, the university-enterprise cooperation and further deepening of business English practical teaching is the key to solve the problem of practical teaching merely being a form.

## 6. Conclusion

With the enlightenment of Economics of Language, optimizing business English practical teaching can increase the employment competitiveness of business English talents as well as the economic value of Business English teaching. Business English education combines the cultivation of English language ability and business practice competence. A business English practical teaching system should be established through integrated practical teaching, business internship, comprehensive foreign trade practice and enterprise practice. In this way, the economic value of business English and the economic benefit of business English education will be maximized. Although this paper has achieved some initial results, it still has some limitations. Further research on detailed system analysis for the value, utility, cost and benefit of Business English is needed.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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