

## AN ANALYSIS OF INTEGRATION OF BUSINESS CONTENT AND SKILLS IN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC ACADEMIC PURPOSES (ESAP) COURSE AT A HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGE VIA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING (CLIL) PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

*Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) theory emphasizes the mutually integrated and symbiotic relations between language and disciplinary knowledge. Based on this perspective, this study analyses the “Double Focus” teaching mode implementation that combined business knowledge with English language skills. This is implemented in a Business English course at higher vocational college to enable talent cultivation focus to shift to the internalization of business knowledge while continuing to improve English proficiency. The “Double Focus” teaching strategy adapted authentic business tasks simulation and practice from actual Foreign Reception Training Course like airport pick-up task via a plan, do, check, action (PDCA) approach. This study found that the integrative element promoted better association between language and business knowledge, raise awareness of using English in situational contexts and foster effective internalization of content knowledge among students. The successful implementation of such integrated CLIL can serve as a reference for the cultivation of language as well as business skills among undergraduates of English at higher vocational colleges.*

**Keywords:** CLIL, English and business integration ability, foreign reception practical training

### INTRODUCTION

As a special purpose English, business English covers both language and business fields. Therefore, the talent training of business English major should be a kind of interdisciplinary knowledge and ability training. Business English education involves many levels from graduate students, undergraduate students to colleges and technical secondary schools, and the orientation and training mode of business English talents training at different levels has always been one of the hot topics in academic circles. The education of business English majors should first determine whether to focus on the study of English language knowledge or business knowledge. Zou Yong (2011) pointed out that at present, the curriculum of Business English programmes in China mostly adopts the combined model of Business English language, English language and Business Knowledge. The core concept of language integration is students' comprehensive mastery

of English knowledge and Business knowledge and abilities. This is not the sole target of the orientation of knowledge and skills training for Business English majors at higher vocational colleges, but also the requirements of future jobs for graduates' professional ability. Brewster (2004) sees content-based language teaching or similarly known as content and language integrated learning (CLIL) or cross curricular language learning as a means to ensure students remain motivated and challenged.

However, there are some problems in the implementation of talent development and training, such as the combination of language and business courses is not widespread enough, paying attention to the cultivation of language ability and ignoring the training of business skills and so on. Facing this problem in the cultivation of Business English Majors in higher vocational colleges, this study will explore it from the perspective of practice combined with specific courses. According to Nahmias (2010) who focuses on adolescent literacy and the integration of content approach in teaching Students' limited prior knowledge of content-specific concepts can pose a significant barrier to their ability to learn from content area texts. For example, research demonstrates that students learn and retain concepts better if those concepts are connected to their prior knowledge from both inside and outside of school. Eichorn (2010) posits that assessing the impact of this interdisciplinary approach requires continuous and substantive monitoring. Ahmad, Sayadi, Danuri and Ismail (2021) highlighted that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the managing of English courses offered at universities requires a multi-dimensional approach due to the dynamic nature of the English language, diverse learners' profile, the contextualisations and the challenges that come with them.

Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) propagated by linguist David Marsh (1994) based on communicative competence theory and functional linguistics theory. He believes that content and language are two interrelated and mutually reinforcing aspects with equal importance. The theory comprise the "double focus" teaching mode on subject knowledge and language skills via the integration of elements such as language, subject matter, cognition, communication, and culture. Wu Caifen (2018) applied this theory to the construction of the curriculum for Business English programme and drew the framework of CLIL for its comprehensive teaching system. She pointed out that the symbiotic relationship between language and content requires learners to acquire subject knowledge through foreign language, rather than simply focusing on how to acquire language. The focus of teaching has also shifted from simply learning the language itself to learning the language through learning subject knowledge. The concept of "language business integration" points out the direction for the exploration of talent development and training for Business English course students at higher vocational colleges. School-based case studies and language and business integration project by Li Guiyun (2016) provides a reference for Business English course educators to realize the importance of the organic integration of English language and business

knowledge to fosters the cultivation of integrated Business English abilities.

Concario (2011) highlighted two fundamental premises in CLIL. They are 1) people learn a language better when it is used as a means to acquire other type of information or knowledge and 2) this process actually reflects better the reasons why learners study it. The association of language and specific content provides opportunities to learn in context and allows students to explore their previous knowledge to a greater extent. Yan and Mingyou (2018) conducted three cycles of action research on the application of content and language integrated teaching for College English and found that the teaching content should meet the cognitive level of students and supplemented by progressive teaching tasks. The teaching tasks must also be based on the subject content and language objectives as well as taught according to students' aptitude. CLIL model is expected to stimulate learning autonomy and strengthen students' thinking consciousness. Li Ping (2017) discovers that the training program based on CLIL is significantly effective in helping students learn English knowledge, improve cross-cultural communication ability and apply business knowledge and etiquette.

Mou Weiwei. (2020) innovatively applied CLIL mode for the course of business etiquette culture by integrating online teaching software and indicated that this teaching model provides a real context for language learning and through the mutual support of subject knowledge and language learning the purpose of promoting both is achieved. It was also found that CLIL teaching mode has the potential to stimulate students' learning enthusiasm and cultivate their critical thinking ability.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Starting from the teaching concept of content and language integration, the author explores the vocational skills training of language quotient integration of business English Majors in Higher Vocational Colleges from a practical perspective. Relying on the practical Training Course of Foreign Affairs Reception, the author cultivates students' vocational skills of language quotient integration, so that they can acquire business knowledge in the process of language learning and improve their language ability in the application of business knowledge. Several steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness of data elicitation on the purposive sampling of the Business English students and results verification. The survey questionnaire items were piloted and improved for clarity and reliability and the interviews were verbatimly transcribed and coded where emerging themes from the codes were listed down and synthesized (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Foreign Affairs Reception Training Course Background

The Foreign Affairs Reception Training Course is one of the training programs for China's government and corporate agency staff as well as foreign participants, done on Vocational Colleges campuses via seminar and short courses mode for over a decade. The project relies on the foreign aid training base of China vocational education .This has enable the campus management and the English Language Department to make full use of this available unique training resources to benefit students of Business English major.

## Training Content, Delivery and Assessment

The training content is based on the Al Jazeera training course, comprising eight tasks like reception, preparation, welcoming foreign guests, visiting campus, dealing with emergencies, experiencing campus culture, foreign guests' Chinese display, classroom teaching duty and farewell. Under the guidance of teachers, each task is completed by students in groups based on the PDCA (plan do check action) training process flow. Before the training, professional trainers and Vocational College teachers jointly discuss and formulate the teaching plan, and determine the training and teaching objectives, corresponding training tasks and training assessment methods;. Students are divided into groups according to their specific tasks (reception group and classroom group) as the teachers provide real-time guidance, point out problems existing in students' work and guide students to summarize any failure and give solutions (action). The training assessment which comprise formative assessment (40%) and summative assessment (60%) is implemented by the trainers and teachers. Formative assessment covers attendance (10%), paired foreign guest evaluation (20%), practical effect of 8 tasks (40%) and written summary of practical training (30%). The final assessment shows the working process and summarizes the outcomes for the group report.

## Sample of CLIL Based Work Tasks

The Foreign Affairs Reception Training Program covers eight content tasks from reception preparation to welcoming foreign guests. This study highlights airport pick-up task as an example to analyze the language and business knowledge and skills required to complete the business tasks in order to highlight the language ability integration mechanism embodied in the work task. The task of airport pick-up here takes the receptionist's arrival at the airport as the working background and English as the working language, covering four working steps: confirming the customer's identity, introducing and greeting, talking about the journey and accompanying to the hotel. English knowledge and skills involved in the work process are reported below;

### STEP1. Identifying clients

*E.g. Miss Jones? Yes, I'm Rander Jones from Florida garment treatment*

The corresponding **Business Knowledge 1** is to actively inquire and determine the customer's identity.

### STEP 2. Introduction and greeting

*E.g. My name is Linhua. I'm the sales manager with Baiyun sweaters. How do you do, Ms Jones. How do you do, it's very nice of you to come to meet me.*

The corresponding to **Business Knowledge 2** is to actively introduce yourself and others.

### STEP3. Talk about flight

*E.g. How was your flight, Miss Jones? Very nice*

The corresponding **Business Knowledge 3** is to inquire about the journey to show concern.

### STEP4. Accompany clients to hotel

The corresponding **Business Knowledge 4** is to prepare a car to pick up customers to check in at the hotel.

### Sample of Double Focus Teaching Mode

The work tasks in the training project adopt the double focus teaching mode, that is, focus on business knowledge and English knowledge at the same time, so as to realize the integration of language and business content. To complete the task of airport pick-up, we need to master and apply the business knowledge of 10 tasks namely *identity confirmation - self introduction - using honorific name - warm greetings - introducing Secretary - giving flowers - helping with luggage - chatting - wishes - accompanying to the hotel*.

However, in face-to-face communication with foreign guests, it is necessary to use English to represent these ten business links, that is, to apply the English knowledge of the corresponding ten links. *Starting from asking Miss Jones, introduce myself to my name is... - call each other with honorifics... Ms Jones? - How do you do? - May I introduce... - the flowers are for you - let me help you with luggage - chat with customers to show concern for first visit to China? - Have a pleasant stay - drive you to the hotel.*

### Business English Undergraduates Responses and Feedback

After the training, the author organized students to investigate the training effect through interviews, questionnaires, seminars and other forms, and did relevant research. The results show that the vast majority (83.5% - 90%) of students agree that they have achieved the established curriculum teaching objectives in terms of knowledge, ability

and quality. The research takes knowledge objectives, ability objectives and quality objectives as the three research dimensions. The proportion of students who agree to achieve the corresponding objectives is 100%, 95.78% and 94.36% respectively. They have increased their vocabulary in terms of knowledge, Understand foreign culture and etiquette. In terms of ability, it improves undergraduates' English communication ability and presentation ability. While for overall quality improvement, they learned to actively seek solutions to problems and improve their self-confidence.

Based on the responses and feedback during the post knowledge and skill requirements of Business English graduates at the polytechnic as case-site, a number of essential components such as English knowledge, business knowledge, English proficiency skills, international business skills, high culture quality and foreign quality were highlighted and recommended. This is consistent with the results of study on post professional ability of Business English undergraduates at a Higher Vocational Colleges conducted by Li Guiyun (2016).

### DISCUSSION

In the dual focus teaching mode of integrating business knowledge and language skills in the training project attention is also paid to the integration of language and cognition. This is done by creating a context suitable for students' current cognitive level, and by challenging their cognitive ability. The trainers and teachers guide students to find problems, analyze problems and solve problems. This promotes the transformation of students' cognitive ability and ability to express. This initiative by the author as language educator at the case study site reflects the findings by Ahmad, Muhammad, Izzuan and Ismail (2019) study where lecturers demonstrated empathy by continuously planning and

ensuring that their ESAP course delivery and assessment processes follow a balance content ratio between present academic needs and future workplace needs of the students. As the programme structure reaches towards the final semesters all six lecturers highlighted the need for their learners to be exposed to more authentic workplace language and communication, regardless via the formal level three ESAP course or via other less formal self-learning modes like MOOCs, short courses, talks, online webinars, finishing-school training sessions and so on.

This personal initiative by the language educators in this present study is also consistent with the second language acquisition I + 1 language input hypothesis by Krashen (1983) who believes that language acquisition is possible only when foreign language learners are exposed to a large number of "comprehensible inputs". The comprehensible language input here is consistent with the context that teachers create suitable for students' current cognitive level in the "double focus" teaching mode. Teachers show pictures of the International Airport and play pick-up videos to let students immerse themselves and enter the role, and acquire pick-up knowledge and skills through rehearsal - imitating samples - modifying pick-up dialogue, so as to realize the integration of language and cognition.

In the implementation of the "double focus" teaching mode of the training project, the learning of English knowledge and ability has become one of the elements of business knowledge and ability learning, which cultivates the students' communicative ability to exchange business knowledge in English and realizes the integration of language and communication. To receive visiting foreign guests and customers at the International Airport and communicate business in English reflects cross-cultural communication. Mastering cultural differences is the key to the success or failure of cross-cultural communication. Murray-Harvey et. al. (2004) state that the content-based infusion approach, which is related to the constructivist's principles of teaching and learning will ensure a successful learning outcome of the target content, and at same time foster development of generic skills such as higher order thinking skills, problem-solving skills, teamwork skills, communication skills, time management skills and information skills.

The training process of the typical task of "airport pick-up" in the training project reflects the core characteristics of business content and language integrated teaching. Business and English are two aspects that are interrelated and promote each other in the training process, and have the same important position. The core problem that teachers and students should consider and train in the training process is how to use English as a tool to complete the task of airport pick-up. The training process essentially highlights the "double focus" teaching mode that pays equal attention to and fully integrates English skills, business knowledge, cognition, communication and culture. Qin Lili, et al. (2021) investigated the internalization of students' content knowledge and language rules in CLIL mode by applying the framework of socio-cultural theory and proved quantitatively that this mode can help increase the internalization of both students' content knowledge and language knowledge.

In the implementation of the training project, the language educators pay attention to business etiquette, use of honorific names, warm greetings between individuals, giving flowers, helping carry luggage, expressing good wishes and other tasks are permeated

with cultural factors of respecting customers and greetings from both sides. Language and culture permeate and interweave with each other, realizing complete integration. Ahmad, Sayadi, Danuri and Ismail (2021) believe that case studies on language educators' initiative can offer useful insights and strategies into the running of ESAP courses and assessments for specific fields like vocational as the educators' knowledge, awareness, command of subject matter, experience in curriculum matters and pedagogical knowledge strongly influence their views and best practices at their respective institution.

## CONCLUSION

The CLIL theory emphasizes the integration between content and language, which are two inseparable dimensions that mutually reinforcing the whole. In teaching practices, it is manifested as the "double focus" mode, which integrates four aspects such as language and content, cognition, communication and culture. Due to this important feature, this CLIL must be implemented throughout the whole process of talent development and training of Business English undergraduates at higher vocational colleges. This findings from this present study shows that this approach is helpful in developing high-quality versatile talents among undergraduates of Business English major in higher vocational colleges. However, this study is limited to one professional practice course. To build the whole business English curriculum system based on the integration of English language and business content in order to cultivate the language quotient integration ability of business English Majors in higher vocational colleges is the direction of my colleagues in this research direction in the future.

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