

## The Application of PBL Teaching Methodology in College Business English Teaching

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### Abstract

As an ESP (English for Specific Purposes) course, Business English aims to cultivate high-quality multi-talented graduates with professional business knowledge and language proficiency. PBL (Problem-based learning) teaching methodology is one style which fits with the constructivist learning theory and teaching principles very well and is of great value in business English teaching. This thesis first introduces the core principles and significance of PBL and then how to apply the PBL in business English teaching is mainly discussed.

**Key words:** PBL; Business English; Teaching and Learning

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### INTRODUCTION

With the development of globalization and the deepening of the reform policy in China, the demand of professional business English talents is increasing sharply in recent years, which calls for the reform of traditional ways of business English teaching. Business English was originally developed overseas from the Oil Crisis in the early 1970s but it didn't draw much attention in China until 1990s. In 1998, the International Business English Research Committee of China was established, which marked the foundation of business English course

construction. Business English was firstly approved and established as a major in the University of International Business and Economics by the Ministry of Education in China in 2007 and it has been flourishing all over China in the last ten years. There are nearly 270 colleges in China which has enrolled undergraduates in Business English major in 2016. How to improve business English teaching and construction in college effectively is one of the chief concerns for the teachers and researchers.

The aim of the education of business English talents is to cultivate specific applied-type talents with broad international horizon who are equipped with solid foundation of language capability, related knowledge of business and cross-cultural communication competence and other related professional skills so as to fit to the requirement of the economy globalization. Applied-type BE talents are asked for urgently, however, the traditional English teaching cannot meet the requests of the new circumstance. It is of great significance to optimize the business English teaching and find some new approaches in business English teaching.

PBL (Problem Based Learning) is the teaching approach based on problems solving. It was firstly established by American professor Howard Barrows in 1969, based on the theory of information processing psychology and cognitive psychology. This approach emphasizes the students-centered class teaching strategy, setting students to the authentic situation with tasks and problems while students are encouraged to analyze and solve the problems through autonomic learning and group discussion. PBL approach has been widely adopted in college teaching, especially in medical schools. Most researches of this approach are concentrated in the courses of medical or nursing while little attention and researches has been put to the English language teaching, much less to business English teaching.

The business English teaching emphasizes the practical use of language and the competence to solve the problems

of international business activities. Compared to the traditional English teaching style which students always have to acquire the knowledge passively, PBL tries to create authentic situation of language use so as to facilitate students to learn actively and constructively. It is helpful to motivate the students' interests of learning uttermost through group tasks, collaborative learning and autonomic learning and eventually stimulate the application of language competence and business knowledge. What's more, PBL approach can also train and cultivate multiple capacities of students such as the language communication skills, reasoning, summarizing, inductive and conductive learning ability, information processing, autonomic learning and lifelong learning skills, etc..

## 1. OVERVIEWS OF PBL

### 1.1 Principles and Features of PBL

(a) Students-centered and autonomic learning is the foundation of PBL implement. The representative Rogers (1969) came up with the ideology of education which regards the human as the center of teaching and learning, emphasizing the learner's active and autonomic involvement in learning. The launching of the learning environment is to stimulate learners more proactive, exploring, cooperative and introspective so that it can promote meaningful learning. Roger's theory has been acknowledged and widely applied in modern education. PBL approach, developed from humanistic theory, focus on the constructive learning and suggests students should keep thinking and try to explore the solutions to the problems raised in authentic situations. The relationship between teacher and students is also changed. The students take the leading cognitive role in the process of problem solving while the teacher turns into the facilitator and assistant of teaching process who offers instruction and help to the students and also takes the responsibility to the question design. Teaching material is no longer restricted within the textbook, and students can collect, search and process relative information on their own so as to realize the meaningful construction of knowledge on the condition that the students' initiative spirit and enthusiasm have been motivated uttermost.

(b) Problems-solving is the core and source of PBL. The guiding principle of PBL is to realize meaningful construction of knowledge through the problem-solving by the students. The problems should be carefully designed by the teacher before the class and then be solved by students independently or collaboratively under the instructions of teacher. The quality of problem design has decisive impact on the tasks and all the class activities focus on the problem solving. Generally speaking, the problems should be open and referential questions without fixed answer which expect students to

offer creative answer based on their interpretation and exploration of the material. It is much more beneficial if the problems are inspiring and challenging or even if they are controversial to further discussion. Apart from the solving of predesigned problems by the teacher, the students are also encouraged to find and raise new problems by their own in the process of problems solving.

(c) Collaborative and situational learning are the main patterns of PBL. In PBL model, the successful solving of problems depends on the collaboration of learning groups rather than on the individual work. Learning group is the chief organization of learning in which every team member must take certain responsibility and accomplish certain tasks, and all the members negotiate with each other, encourage each other and cooperate with each other so as to fulfill the task for the same goal. Under such circumstances, the team spirit is greatly enhanced and it is beneficial for students from different levels and different backgrounds to analyze the problems from different perspective. Situational learning is also beneficial for students to apply what they have learned into practice. The authentic and diversified situational setting is preferred in PBL.

(d) Multi-evaluation and dynamic teaching is the basis of PBL. Compared with the traditional classroom teaching style, PBL model is a dynamic process in which the teacher design the problems and students probe the problems and try to solve the problem through reflections and then find new problems to be solved. Therefore, the problems probe and reflection is not a one-way teaching and accepting process but a dynamic circle. The evaluation is also all-around including the teacher's evaluation and students' self-evaluation during the whole learning process.

### 1.2 The Significance of PBL in Business English Teaching

(a) PBL helps to improve the comprehensive language communication. The basic requirement of collaborative learning is the ability to listen and communication which can be cultivated in PBL process. As for the language learner, abundant comprehensive language input is available and effective language output can be produced in discussion. Peer correction during the discussion can lower the anxiety of language use. What's more, since business English teaching highlights the practice and application of business knowledge, PBL can contribute to the motivating the students to acquire the relative knowledge of business and cultural backgrounds through various channels, thus to satisfy the needs of international business activities.

(b) PBL can help to build the team spirit. One of the core principles in doing business is team-work. During the process of problem solving, each team member must

bear the responsibility to cooperate with each other, thus the community spirit is highly developed in the task accomplishment.

(c) PBL can facilitate the students' ability of information processing. With the fast development of globalization and information explosion nowadays, it is far from enough to master certain language skills and some basic business knowledge. Modern business activities require the skills to search and process the useful information rapidly and efficiently which could be a life-long learning ability. The collaboration in PBL in business teaching can maximize the use of such ability and different ideas from different minds could be acquired through discussion.

(d) PBL can help to cultivate the spirit of innovation. PBL encourage students to propose creative hypothesis and try to offer various ways to solve the problem from different perspective through different approaches, thus inspire the innovation and initiative of students tremendously.

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## 2. THE APPLICATION OF TBL IN BUSINESS ENGLISH TEACHING

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### 2.1 The Design of Problems

Problems design is the key to the successful PBL. In business English teaching, the problems should be raised based on teaching object, and specific business practice should be taken into consideration. The difficulty of problems should be a little bit higher than the present level of learners, intriguing students' further exploration and discussion. Most problems or questions should be open or referential and focus on the promotion of students' reasoning. It is better to increase the ratio of referential question to evoke the students' interest in language communication and inspire creative thinking. Meanwhile, questioning from students is a good move to interactive class activities. Improvement of students' ability is realized during the process of discussion and probe. Teacher's instruction and guiding should be available and students' cooperation is essential. The main role of teacher is not to "offer the best answer" but to "raise good questions".

For example, when teaching lesson 4 "investment", a text from the *"Business English—a Comprehensive Course"* published by Higher Education Press in China, some questions are supposed to be designed before the class for the Chinese students do not have much knowledge about investment. Some questions like "What is an investment? Can you name some types of investment?" can lead students to have a general understanding about the investment. Then based on the basic knowledge on investment and finance, further discussion can be done from different perspective to find

the solution, with regard to the questions like "Why should people make investment? How to control and deal with risks?" Students are also encouraged to share their own perception and experiences on specific investment. After discussion and sharing, students may have deeper understanding on the present situation of investment, then the teacher arrange the group task for the students, such as "Suppose you are a manager of a company, compose an investment proposal to invite investors to invest in your company." Students are required to cooperate with each other to plan a detailed business proposal and simulate the real investment situation to accomplish the feasibility study. At the end of the class, each group will have to report and present their proposal and the best feasibility report will be rewarded. This is a complete and complicated procedure which involves detailed practice on business investment. Each member bears the responsibility to improve and perfect the proposal from every step. During this process, the language capacity is largely improved and the practical business knowledge can be acquired through meaningful learning.

### 2.2 Group Discussion

The key to group study is collaboration. Students can be divided into several groups with a leader, responsible for the coordinate of the whole group. The leader must ensure each member to undertake the due obligation to contribute to the task. The teacher offers guiding and helps while observing the group discussion. Meaning negotiation is also necessary in questioning and respond

### 2.3 Evaluation

Evaluation involves in both teacher's evaluation and student's self-evaluation during the whole process and after the task accomplishment as well. The teacher is expected to offer evaluation according to the performance during the problem-solving and it's better to give positive feedback immediately. Various methods of evaluation could be adopted to enlighten new ideas or discussion for the future explore. Meanwhile, students also do the evaluation and reflection based on their own behavior. "problem-discussion-evaluation" is a dynamic circulation all through the PBL.

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## CONCLUSION

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Business English, as a course of ESP, aims to cultivate highly qualified applied interdisciplinary talents. The application of PBL in business English teaching will greatly arouse the interests of students learning and facilitate the internalization of what they learn from problem solving. It is of great significance to introduce and apply PBL in business English teaching and this thesis aims to put forward some ideas which may be helpful to the business English teaching in China. Due to

the limitations of the author's ability, the present study on PBL in business English teaching is far from complete and more efforts and research are required and deserved in this field.

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