AMERICAN RESEARCH JOURNALS
An Academic Publishing House

Research Article	Open Access

A Case Study of Business Correspondence English Curriculum Standard Development under the Guidance of ESP Theories

Wang Zhaohui, Jia Liping

Chengdu Textile College, China

joycesunshine11@hotmail.com

Abstract: Based on the need analysis and learning-centered theories of ESP, this paper illustrates the development and construction of curriculum standard for the course, Business Correspondence English, with emphasis on such aspects as the course nature, objectives, content construction, and teaching implementation. Hopefully it will throw light on the development of other courses, and offer reference on how to make the course more practical and occupation-oriented.

Key words: Esp, Business Correspondence English, Curriculum Standard

INTRODUCTION

Business Correspondence is an indispensable communication tool in international business. Combining professional knowledge of foreign trade with English language skills, the course, Business Corresspondance English aims to foster students' English communication skills for doing foreign trade. According to a follow-up survey on graduates majoring in International Trade, Business English, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Marketing, etc., Business Correspondence English is one of the most practical courses for their work after graduation. Therefore, it is self-evident that the development of this course has played an important role in nurturing relevant talents. However, we found a worrying problem from the survey on graduates and the interviews with enterprises: almost all respondents think that, to a certain degree, what they have learnd from the course, business correspondence teaching does not fit in with real-life use, which has more or less affected graduates' job adaptability. Therefore, curriculum-relevant reform is imperative, among which research on curriculum standards has vital significance to promote the reform of higher vocational education.

According to China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) full-text database, researches on business correspondence mainly focus on the language (vocabulary, pragmatics, and translation), style (writing skills and principles), and teaching (pedagogy, textbook, teaching situation and problems at present, teaching reform), etc; few touches upon curriculum standard (only 2 articles published between 2009 and 2015). Therefore, this paper focuses on the construction of curriculum standard , and puts forward some suggestions based on related ESP theories and curriculum standard development practices of Business Correspondence English.

DEFINITIONS OF CURRICULUM STANDARDS

Curriculum standard refers to the overall design for a particular course. Acording to the definition in Education Dictionary (Gu Mingyuan, Vol. I) , curriculum standard is an outlining document that determines the level and structure of a course during a certain learning period (Zhong J. Z, & Li G. X. 2012:7-9). Based on all kinds of literatures, curriculum standard is the specific description of expected course learning achievement, and specific indicator of course teaching quality. It is the basis and guideline for course management, teaching content and textbook compilation, teaching and learning methods, evaluation and examination.

Curriculum standard also elaborates basic curriculum concepts from the perspective of students and encourages students to accumulate while learning. Curriculum standards' focus on students coincides with the concept of need-oriented and learning-centered ESP curriculum.Their ultimate purpose is to satisfy the students' needs for self and career development.

DEVELOPMENT OF CURRICULUM STANDARD FOR BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE ENGLISH

Need Analysis-Based Curriculum Objectives and Learning Areas

Need Analysis Theory

Business Correspondence English is one of the core courses for Business English major, and business English is a branch of English for Special Purposes (ESP). Therefore researches on it can follow the theoretical framework of ESP. ESP researchers generally believe that ESP courses can be deemed effective only if it is based on Need Analysis Theory and on Curriculum Theory (Wang Zhaohui, 2007).

In respect of ESP Need Analysis theory, there are different definitions of "Need" in academic circles. Personally ideal Need Analysis should be a combination of Learning Need Analysis and Target Need Analysis. The key to Need Analysis for the course of Business Correspondence English is to find out the gap between students' existing foreign trade business knowledge, English skills and their expectation and professional demand, making it the basis for developing curriculum standard and avoiding the blindness in the process of development.

Learning Objectives

ESP-Based Curriculum Need Analysis theory requires learning need and target need analysis prior to determining curriculum objectives. Considering that the learning need analysis is a mature practice among teachers, this paper focuses on the practices of target need analysis. To some degree, objectives of this course equal to the requirements of a related working positions. So to what positions business correspondence writing knowledge and skills is necessary? What are job requirements for the employees? According to the requirements of curriculum standard, the learning objectives shall not just be limited to knowledge and skills acquisition. Instead, they can be defined in three dimensions: knowledge and skills, process and method, emotion and attitude. And the objectives of these dimensions can be determined with the help of information and data acquired through the following channels:

- Annual China's Talent Blue Book and Employment Blue Book on Chinese University College Graduates;
- Job descriptions on required skills and capabilities in recruitment advertisement (foreign trade sales, merchandiser, documentation specialist, customs declarer, inspection declarer, forwarder agent);
- Requirements for international business talents in international professional certificate examinations (BEC, CNBET, Foreign Trade Merchandise Qualification Examination, Customs Declarer Qualification Examination, Merchandiser qualification examination, TOEIC etc.) ;
- Graduates job distribution of related majors (Business English, International Trade, Secretary of Foreign affairs, Marketing);
- Human resource departments and its web-sites of export-oriented enterprises, authorities and agencies of foreign trade, financial institutions, and customs, etc. ;
- Information on industry development trends that is released on websites of local commercial authorities, foreign trade associations, and chambers of commerce, etc;

Based on Need Analysis from the above mentioned channels, the research group in Chengdu Textile College worked out learning objectives of Business Correspondence English in the following Table .

Clearly, learning objectives described in curriculum standard not just focus on language and foreign trade knowledge and skills, but also the use of information technology in foreign trade practice to obtain information and broaden horizon in order to develop capabilities to identify and solve problems in the working process.

Table1. *Learning Objective of English for Business correspondence*

| Objectives	Curriculum Standard
Professional Competence	1. Master the format, features and principles of business correspondence English; 2. Be familiar with the basic processes of foreign trade, grasp basic knowledge of each step and able to independently complete tasks through correspondence (e.g. establishing business relations, inquiry, offer, sales promotion, counter-offer, delivery, shipment, insurance, complaint, claim, dispute, etc.); 3. Be effective in communication, negotiation, and transaction with correspondence; 4. Be skilled in correspondences translating.
Working Skills	1. Be able to use computer and internet for business correspondence and communication; 2. Be familiar with E-mail management software, such as Outlook, Foxmail, Hotmail, etc. to send and receive emails effectively; 3. Have good command of Microsoft Office, Photoshop and other office softwares; 4. Use of all kinds of office equipment skillfully; 5. Obtain and process information efficiently.
Social Ability	1. Have good and strong language competency, and be good at people skills; 2. Have cross-cultural competence; 3. Be cooperative; 4. Be able to analyze and solve problems; 5. Be dedicated and innovative.

Learning Areas

Course learning areas are to deal with the parts of learning contents, experience and practice to achieve learning objectives of the course. After clearly defining what objectives students should reach after a period of study, stress can be put on the contents which would contribute to achieve these goals. When determining the learning field of the course, Business Correspondence English, we'd better consider what foreign trade scenarios, typical work processes and tasks in business correspondence are necessary for students to acquire work-related capabilities.

The ultimate goal of the course is to promote students' professional capabilities in foreign trading. And professional capability can be tested by different professional tasks and the working process itself (Jiang Daiyuan, 2008). The learning field of Business Correspondence English should reflect the job responsibilities in foreign trade industry and incorporate the main procedures of transaction into scenarios by following the working process. In this way, students can acquire professional capabilities by completing a series of typical tasks in the learning scenarios, which contains the main procedures of foreign trading.

With survey and research on foreign trade process and years of teaching eperience, we have divided process-based learning areas of Business Correspondence English into the following modules and workflows in Figure 1.

From Figure 1, we can see that the learning content under curriculum standard breaks the traditional teaching syllabus' knowledge system and theoretical framework. Meanwhile, learning contents and modules are based on and determined by the work processes.

**Fig1** *Workflows of Foreign Trade*
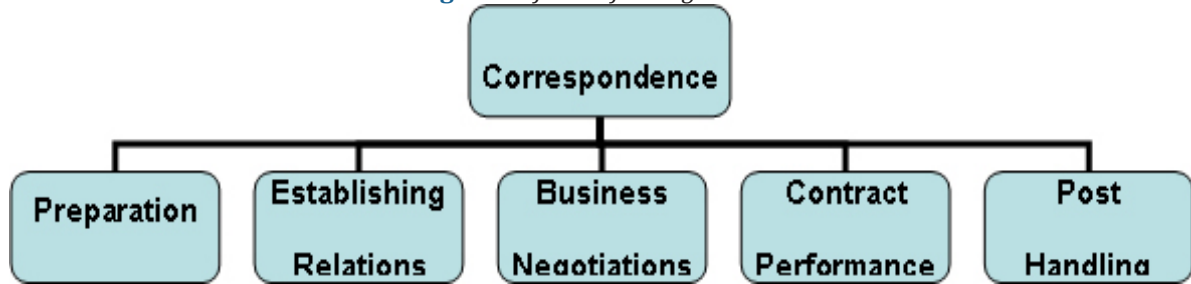
Suggestions for learning-centered teaching

Learning-centered Teaching Design

After identifying the learning objectives and learning field, the next step is to define how to teach. Teaching effect depends largely on the implementation of its design. Among ESP-based teaching design methods, there is one called Learning-Centered Instructional Design, which is based on constructivist learning theory, and which attaches great importance to "scenario" in teaching, so as to stimulate learners' initiative and constructivity in the learning process.

Learning Task Design

The curriculum for vocational education has demanding requirements for practice. According to 2014 Chengdu Textile College Graduates' Employment Annual Report provided by a third party MyCOS, a survey was conducted among graduates on what improvement in teaching they are expecting. 22% of respondents think teaching content is out of date or not practical; 46% of respondents show strong desire for more opportunities to apply what they have learned in class. Their suggestions for improvement in teaching are illustrated in Figure 2.

Fig2 *Percentage of graduates in the year of 2014 who think internship and practice shall be enhanced*
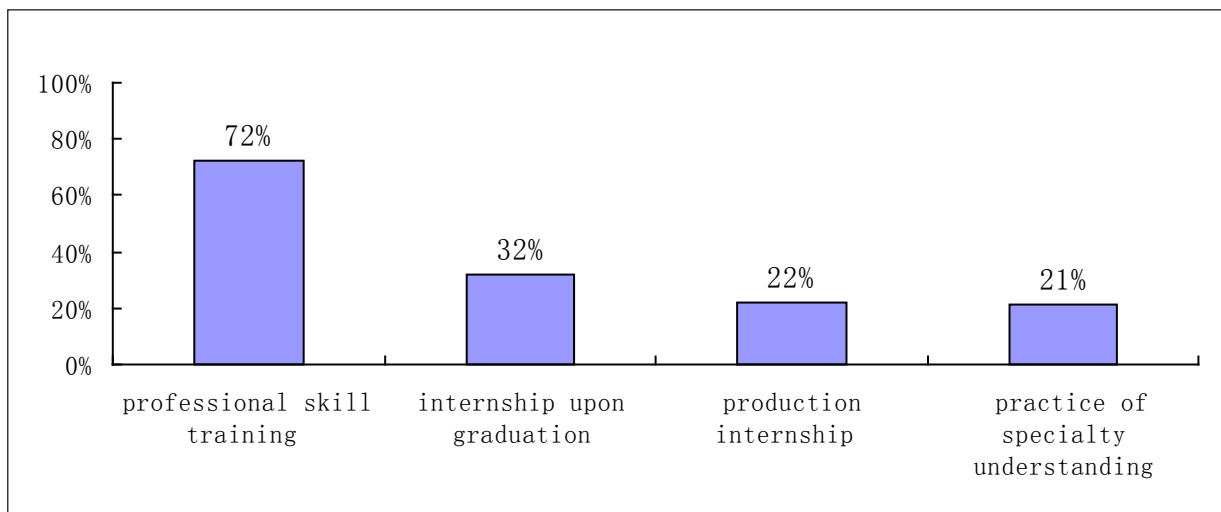
Obviously, students have a strong demand for skills training from their major courses, and the traditional teaching is far from meeting their requirements. Learning-centered teaching design focuses on the students' learning process and experience. So, workplace task design is of great importance, for in the process of accomplishing the tasks, students really learn something they are expected to learn. For instance, in the step of " establishing business relations", student's task is far more than writing correspondence. On the contrary, associated tasks,

such as the use of B2B international on-line e-commerce platform, information search, customer identification and consultation etc. are to be designed in order that the tasks are closer to the real ones at workplace.

 In view that most foreign trade transactions are completed by communication between trading partners via correspondence, it is advisable to pair the students up randomly at every beginning of the course learning so that the pair can play the roles of buyer and the seller respectively in the following activities. After learning the basic knowledge of business correspondence writing, each pair can write and reply at each step of trading procedure. Both the pair and teacher can spot the mistakes in their writing and then correct by themselves or with the help of the teacher. Thus, learning tasks can be combined systematically with real ones from working processes of the foreign trade and gradually the learners 'job skills are surely to be improved. However, before conducting a task, scenario design is the key. The authenticity of both process and tasks should be attached great importance to.

In addition, the tasks can come from a joint project of universities and the enterprises. For instance, those major-relevant enterprises can be reached for their product information. In course learning, students can choose a certain item from enterprises' product catalogs as their own foreign trade product. Then the following activities such as inquiry, quotation, packing, insurance etc. shall be centered on this particular product, which makes the task more authentic. At the same time, it will help to arouse the students' interest in learning, enhance their capacity in collecting information and increase their social abilities in problem solving.

Learning Resource Database Construction

The social multi-dimension needs for talents have undoubtedly led to a fundamental change on the structure of learning resources, and textbook is far from satisfaction in terms of the knowledge updating. Therefore, it is essential to construct learning resource database for students. According to the nature and objectives of this course and learning-centered teaching theory, the curriculum resource database should have the following features such as modernity, authenticity, instrumentality, and comprehensiveness, with its focus on the learning process, autonomous learning and personality development.

Firstly, as the global trade becomes more and more competitive and people are pursuing efficiency, international practices, general rules, procedures in foreign trade are also constantly changing. Accordingly, curriculum content and resources should also respond to these changes by pouring into new content, such as International Commercial Terms (Incoterms 2010) and Uniform Customs and Practice for Documentary Credits (UCP600), updated industry information and policies, etc., acess the web pages of related industries, associations, foreign trade companies, so as to enhance students' professional and comprehensive capabilities.

Secondly, a large number of authentic materials and cases should be collected from foreign-related enterprises and business community for the construction of the resource database, such as real copies of business correspondences, with which students can get some perceptual knowledge and are expected to adapt to the working situation shortly.

Thirdly, with people's growing dependence on information technology, social networks and professional software, a convenient and environment-friendly working style has already penetrated into each process of foreign trade. Paperless trade and electronic documentation have become more and more popular. As a result, the course, Business Correspondence English, shall develop along with computer science. The foreign trade professionals shall be familiar and skilled with diverse uses of the Internet and E-mail, E-mail management software, network video, multimedia, e-commerce platforms (such as Wechat, Facebook, QQ, ICQ MSN, SKYPE, BBS, B2B) . The curriculum resources should involve the above-mentioned tools, aiming to cultivate students' communicative abilities, so as to improve their work efficiency.

The course, Business Correspondence English, of course, not merely aims at training students' writing skills, as no one can draft and reply a business correspondence flexibly and effectively with little business knowledge. Therefore, curriculum resources shall be of comprehensiveness, including basic knowledge on import and export trade, international laws, international quarantine, accounting, finance, cross-cultural communication, international freight, insurancec and business negotiation and document retrieval skills, etc., in order to enhance students' all-round capacities.

CONCLUSION

Need analysis will be dynamic in response to changes in social demand for talent, related industrial provisions, and trade rules. Curriculum standard, therefore, should be the "barometer" of these changes. It shall constantly follow changes in international business, and be updated and improved in a timely manner in line with the industrial changes and development. Only in this way can it play its due role of guiding teaching and nurturing talents. Attention was seldom given to "Green Trade" years ago while constructing curriculum standards; but now with the promulgation of SA8000 (Social Accountability 8000, the first international code of ethics aiming to ensure that products from suppliers can meet the social responsibility standards), shall this be incorporated into curriculum standard when assessing students' social capabilities?

Compared with syllabus adopted in the past, the present curriculum standard is student-focused, paying more attention to how to achieve the learning gaols. However, teachers still play guiding role when it comes to task design and learning scenarios creating. The course, Business Correspondence English, is of strong comprehensiveness, covering language knowledge, knowledge of cross-cultural communication, marketing, and public relations, foreign trade practice and the information technology as well. So this course is not only demanding for students, but also challenging for teachers. Actually, teachers are advisable to build interdisciplinary capacity with intricate knowledge structure. Moreover, teachers must find their way to be more professional with in-depth understanding of industrial development, and rich working experience in foreign trade companies. Teachers also are encouraged for lifelong learning to ensure the course's relevance to the current practice, and constantly master and apply the latest information technology achievements, continuously employ most-updated factors into the course. Therefore, students' learning will be more relevant to their future job career, and the students themselves are expected to become real professionals in international business. With these objectives achieved, the development of the curriculum standard of Business Correspondence English can truly play its core role in the course development.

REFERENCES

2014 Chengdu Textile College Graduates' Employment Annual Report, MyCOS.

Ellis, M., & Johnson, C. (2002).Teaching Business English. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Gu, Z. Z. (2010). Instructional design of ESP curriculum a constructivist perspective. Unpublished Ph D. dissertation, Shanghai International Studies University.

Jiang D. Y. (2003). Learning field' curriculum: concepts, characters and issues——the consideration on the great curriculum reform of vocational schools in Germany. Studies in Foreign Education, 1, 26-30.

Jiang D. Y. (2008). Vocational education: qualification and capability. Chinese Vocational and Technical Education, 13, 1-13.

Liu S., & Niu C. L. (2011). Working process systematization curriculum development research report—foreign trade correspondence course as an example. China Electric Power Education, 34, 101-102.

Ni W. Q. (2009). The innovation of teaching mode and methods for foreign trade English correspondence. Journal of Zhejiang Shuren University, 3, 91-94.

Shi L. F. (2000). Curriculum theory—curriculum basis, principle and problem. Beijing: Educational Science Publishing House.

The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2006). The several opinions on improving roundly the instruction quality of higher vocational education.

Wang W. W. (2010). Analysis of the new characteristics of international business correspondence course. Journal of Jixi University, 2, 17-18.

Wang Z. H. (2007). Study on the Existing Problems and Solutions of the Business English Curriculum Design in Chengdu Textile College. Unpublished Master dissertation. Southwest University.

Weng C. Y. (2012). On reform of higher vocation foreign trade English correspondence textbook. Journal of Zhejiang Business Technology Institute, 3, 88-91.

Yan J. B., & Cai Z. C.(2011). On course standard development of foreign correspondence. Journal of Jixi University, 8, 21-24.

Yang C. X. (2010). Current situation and countermeasures of foreign trade correspondence teaching in vocational colleges. China Adults Education, 14, 154-155.

Zhao Z. Q. (2008). The understanding of learning field curriculum. Vocational & Technical Education Forum, 8, 1-3.

Zhong J. Z., & Li G. X. (2012). Thoughts on the shift from syllabus to curriculum standard. Communication of Vocational Education, 3, 7-9.