

## On Construction of Faculty Team of Cross-border E-commerce for the Business English Undergraduate Program: A Case Study of Xinhua College of Sun Yat-sen University

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**[Abstract]** The on-line silk road developed along with the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative. The establishment of bonded areas of various localities has further promoted the rapid development of cross-border e-commerce in China, which particularly has injected new vigor to the conventional manufacturing industry in Dongguan. However, the lack of cross-border e-commerce talents has aroused the concerns of business enterprises as well as universities. A stable and high-quality cross-border e-commerce faculty is a prerequisite for cultivating talents qualified for current society. Taking Business English Undergraduate Program of Xinhua College of Sun Yat-sen University as an example, this paper analyzes the status quo of the cross-border e-commerce faculty in terms of their teaching and scientific research abilities. Based on the analysis, the paper suggests that linguistic teachers should be aware of crisis and realize self-upgrading through communication with teachers of other majors and experts from enterprises, and that universities should formulate strategies to strengthen cooperation with enterprises in order to develop a qualified faculty of cross-border e-commerce.

**[Keywords]** cross-border e-commerce, school-enterprise cooperation, teaching capability, research capability

### Introduction

In 2008, a world-wide financial crisis changed the layout of world economy, as well as the foreign trade status of Dongguan as “One of the World’s Largest Manufacturing Centers” and “World’s Largest Manufacturing Base for Export Products”. With the coming of “Tide of Bankruptcy”, the overall profits of manufacturing industry shrink and the year-on-year growth of economy slows down. Dongguan is trying to elbow through a “Bottleneck”. In recent years, the cross-border e-commerce (hereinafter referred to as the “Cross-border E-commerce”) has shown great potentials of development due to the growth of mobile intelligent terminals, the popularity of internet and the convenience of payment. According to Business Department of Dongguan, the volume of cross-border e-commerce reached 14.3billion RMB, an increase of 680% (Nanfang Daily, 2018).

Liu Zhuo, Secretary-General of Dongguan Industry and Business Development Association comments that the current universities can hardly train qualified talents for Cross-border E-commerce enterprises; meanwhile, the local owners of foreign trade enterprises have a tendency to employ graduates from second-tier universities or third-tier colleges with geographical limitations, since students at that level of education are more contented, stable and willing to start their career step by step (Song, 2017). According to *Report on Cross-border E-commerce Talents in China* (2017), enterprises with more foreign trade are in greater need of talents with comprehensive capabilities such as foreign languages and platforms. For

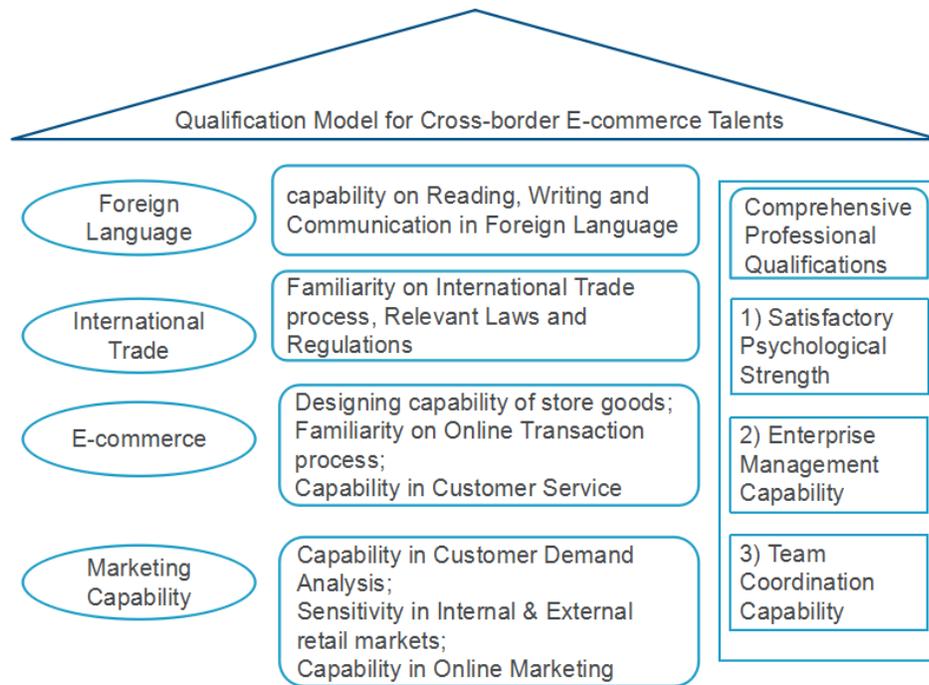
enterprises whose foreign trade accounts for over 60%, 62.5% of such enterprises put great importance on foreign language capabilities and 42.0% on talents with comprehensive capabilities. Foreign languages are especially important in cross-border e-commerce. The Xinhua College of Sun Yat-sen University, as an independent college, is located in Machong of Dongguan and shall make full use of its geographical advantages and its strengths of foreign language to seize the opportunity to train more talents in cross-border e-commerce.

Professional education is indispensable for training qualified cross-border e-commerce talents. Roger (2004), an American educator, believes that the design of discipline shall be matched with and supported by teachers once it meets social or market demand. It is impossible to train students required in markets through divisions of discipline in a university if the teacher is of no market awareness.

By considering the actual needs of enterprises in Dongguan and the requirements as prescribed in *National Standards for Undergraduate Teaching Quality of Business English Major in Institutions of Higher Learning*, the ideal faculty team of cross-border e-commerce in Business English Major shall include those with educational background either in linguistics or business disciplines or those with industrial experience, with a proportion of these three kinds of people at about 6:3:1 (Chen and Wang, 2009). In China, there is few relevant study over business English teachers and even less research in teachers for cross-border e-commerce. Search results of “Cross-border E-commerce Teachers” on cnki.net only include 49 essays, all of which were published during the period of 2015 to 2017. Since 2015, based on the design of discipline for cross-border e-commerce talents, the Xinhua College of Sun Yat-sen University has started the construction of such faculty team and achieved preliminary results while still facing tremendous challenges. This study is mainly about three aspects, i.e. the status quo of teachers of cross-border e-commerce in business English major, the problems to be solved and the model for future development.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Su Man (2015) randomly selected 50 cross-border e-commerce enterprises for investigation (see Table 1), and provided that talents in such area shall possess capacity of foreign languages, international trade, e-commerce and market promotion. And enterprises prioritize on their communication ability, familiarity of online transactions, capability of reading and writing in foreign languages and online marketing. The training of talents relies on professional teaching of teachers. Therefore, the cross-border e-commerce teachers shall have a mastery of foreign languages and knowledge and skills in international trade, e-commerce and market promotion.



*Figure 1. Qualification Model for Cross-border E-commerce Talents*

Guo Guihang and Li Dan (2015) provided qualifications of teachers in Business English major, i.e. professional concept, professional knowledge, business knowledge and professional expertise (see Table 2).

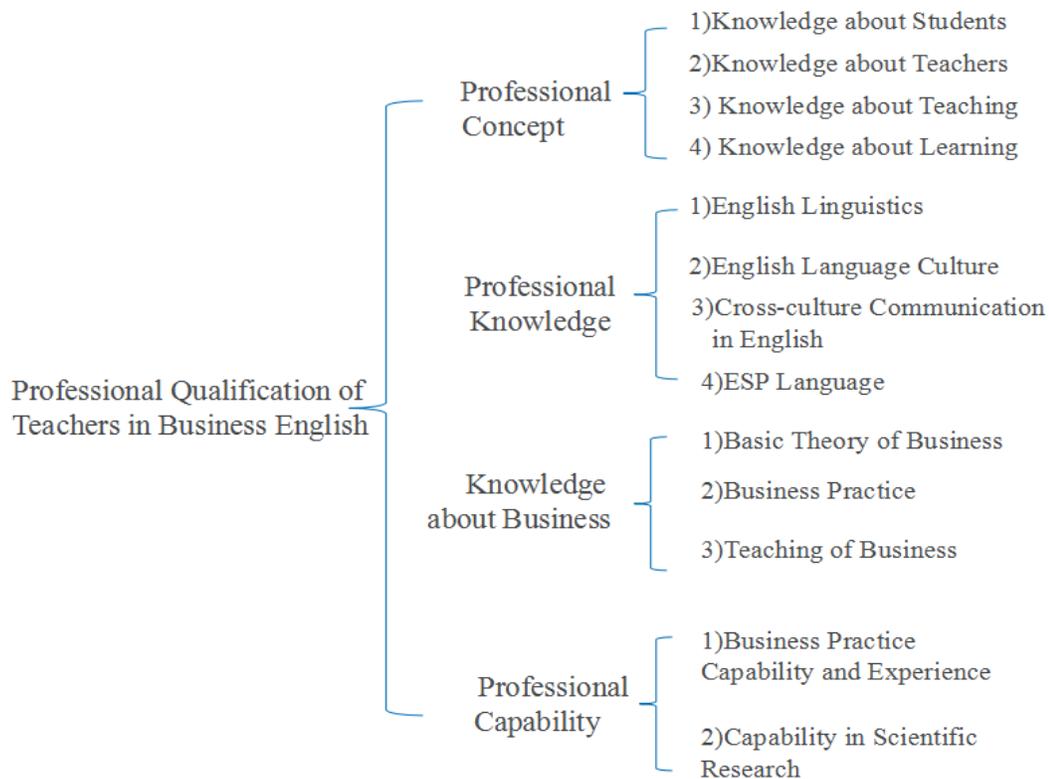


Figure 2. Professional Qualification of Teachers in Business English

Considering the demand for training professional talents of cross-border e-commerce and the fundamental quality of teachers in Business English, the authors believe that a teacher in e-commerce shall possess the following features: 1) the teachers in Cross-border E-commerce Programs (e.g. Market Promotion, E-commerce, International Trade and etc.) shall have educational background in excellent foreign universities and a powerful capability in bilingual or English-only teaching; 2) the teachers in English (linguistics and culture) shall have rich experience in English teaching and sufficient knowledge about cross-border e-commerce, and the teachers in practice programs shall have rich experience in cross-border e-commerce.

### Status Quo of Cross-border E-commerce Faculty in Business English Major

#### *Fundamental Information*

At present, we have 35 teachers for Business English Department, the proportion of male and female teachers is 17% and 83%. Teachers above 50 years old account for 8.6%, and teachers with Master degree or above account for 100%. Three of them have professorship and linguistic background; the lecturers account for 34% and the assistant 57.1%. Teachers with overseas learning experience and Master degree of Economy and Management account for 17%; those with undergraduate degree in Business English and Master degree in English in foreign countries account for 22.8%; those with only language and culture educational background account for 60%; three teachers enjoy practical experience in cross-border e-commerce, accounting for 8.6%. In line with the qualification of cross-border e-commerce talents summarized and collected by Su Man, the teachers shall have knowledge of foreign languages, international

trade, e-commerce and market promotion. Currently, 17% of our teachers in Business English major enjoy education background of international trade and market promotion, 8.6% are familiar with platform operation and sensitive to markets. What is lacking is the capability of designing goods in e-commerce stores, which is now being solved through optional courses taught by teachers from other departments.

### ***Teaching Capability***

Currently, our department, in light of the demand for talents in cross-border e-commerce, has designed such programs as Practice and Communication in Cross-border E-commerce, Online Marketing, Consumer Psychology, International Commercial Law, Correspondence, International Business Negotiation, Cross-cultural Communication and Etiquette, Photography and Image Editing. Guo Guihang and Li Dan (2015) believe that teachers of Business English shall have the following knowledge about business, including fundamental theoretical knowledge of business, practical knowledge of business and teaching methods. Currently, among all our teachers of cross-border e-commerce in Business English department, 17% of them are awarded with Master degree in Economy and Management and are able to interact with students in class by citing real-world cases. The teachers shall be able to explain the theory in classes while referring to practice in cross-border e-commerce, thus realizing a more vivid and direct results and promoting the combination of theory and practice. Some of our teachers, though having Master Degree in Economy and Management, have insufficient experience in cross-border e-commerce.

Their capability in terms of business practice shall be enhanced in order to strengthen students' comprehensive ability and competitiveness. Meanwhile, as an independent secondary university, the students suffer from relatively unsatisfactory capability in English language. In 2015, only 43% Business English majors passed TEM-4, which makes it difficult to promote English-only or bilingual teaching. Then, teachers are required to have sufficient teaching methods to explain business subjects while practicing students' language skills in an effort to realize teaching goals with suitable learning methods and materials and keep improving teaching capability.

### ***Capability of Scientific Research***

Guo Guihang and Li Dan (2015) believe that the professional expertise of Business English teachers shall include the practical experience and research capability in business. Among all our teachers in Business English major, 8.6% have practical experience, 11.4% have experience in management of national trade. Teachers with such experience can better design tasks of practice, help more team members to participate and cultivate their team-teaching awareness. They provide active guidance for students in the National Business English Contest and have received preliminary results. However, their researchability is still insufficient. Though we have pacesetter in this regard, they emphasize more on the application of languages in business environment and lack experience in practice of business. Teachers with linguistic background are weak in business and are focusing more on literature and languages. At the same time, teachers with business background are incapable in terms of academic research. Up until now, there are only 2 papers about cross-border e-commerce published by our teachers.

## **Suggestions for Improving Qualification of Teachers of Cross-border E-commerce in Business English Undergraduate Program**

We have many young teachers with weak academic research ability and heavy teaching workload. On average, they spend 16 hours on classroom teaching. Therefore, apart from their own efforts, various relevant policies of our university shall be established to effectively improve their teaching and scientific research capabilities.

***The Linguistic Teachers being aware of crisis and realizing self-upgrading***

Teachers with only linguistic background must be aware of crisis in an effort to cope with the pressure and impetus created in the process of self-transformation and self-improvement. Now, such teachers are being threatened considering the demand of social enterprises and the universities. Many universities have started to squeeze English programs from 8 to 4 credits, cutting demand for such teachers. Many professions are now opening unique English programs by taking advantage of their own faculty resources. These teachers have systematic business knowledge, the overseas experience or opportunity of learning English on the job, so, their capability in bilingual teaching is gradually improved. They have more potentials compared with those linguistic teachers who have no knowledge about business. All these factors result in a shrink of demand for linguistic teachers. The linguistic teachers must be aware that they will lose jobs if they do not upgrade their knowledge.

***Integration of Resources, Communication of Teachers from Various Universities***

Teachers in foreign language colleges, international trade and management colleges can communicate with each other and learn from each other. Colleges can encourage teachers of foreign language to participate programs of international trade and management on a regular basis by the way of converting certain amount of teaching hours. Therefore, linguistic teachers can obtain some business knowledge in a relatively short period of time. The business programs in college of foreign languages and the bilingual teaching programs in college of international trade and management can be jointly completed by two teachers from different colleges, from which the linguistic teachers can learn some professional knowledge of business, enrich their ways of teaching and give insight to scientific research.

***Stipulating Favorable Policies to Train Young Teachers as Planned***

The most convenient way to settle the problem of teachers with double qualifications and double degrees is to recruit teachers by following National Standards of Teaching Quality for Undergraduate Business English Majors. But, talents with such capability are reluctant to be a teacher due to unsatisfactory remuneration. Even though there are some who are willing to stay, they have more chances to hop jobs. But, the stability of the faculty is quite important to the development of a major. Therefore, training of existing teachers shall be emphasized. Though it is hard to receive results in short term, they are more loyal to university and the cycle of return is longer.

The university shall stipulate plans for sending key linguistic teachers to other countries for training in order to help them learn more authentic language and better understand culture of target countries. TCL's acquisition with THOMSON company of France ending with failure, and Lenovo's acquisition with IBM of America in 2005 developing prosperously prove that culture is crucial in the process of Merger and Acquisition of enterprises, particularly cultural shocks in overseas investment that mainly result from difference in culture and communication. Similar problems are common also in the development cross-border e-commerce. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the culture of target countries. The language is a media of culture, which means the teachers in conventional language teaching may enhance their study in cultures. Previously, the cross-culture teaching is mainly about daily communication instead of business communication. Therefore, the gap in this regard is huge.

The plan for visiting scholars and exchange programs shall be stipulated. *The Foreign Language Teaching And Research Press* and *Foreign Language Education Press* will organize high level training class of business English each year, and the universities shall dispatch key young teachers to participate the training. Every year, the Ministry of Education will determine the numbers of visiting scholars and the universities shall work out relevant policies to encourage teachers to apply to study in other universities as visiting scholars. For example, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies will invite some visiting scholars majoring in business English, and the headquarter of Sun Yat-sen University will also invite many visiting scholars majoring in economy and trade. The visiting by scholars to nearby

universities will not halt the normal teaching and will not affect the welfares of teachers, which is a win-win selection. Through mutual visits, the advanced teaching methods are introduced and the corresponding professional knowledge is learned.

### ***Strengthening Cooperation between Universities and Enterprises***

The incentive mechanism shall be established to encourage teachers (both teachers of linguistic programs and those with business background) to go out and cooperate with enterprises. Now, Machong of Dongguan as China's largest e-commerce base has attracted JD and Alibaba. Currently, we have five practice bases of cross-border e-commerce for our students majoring in Business English, and we have reached agreement with Guangdong Cross-border E-commerce Co., Ltd. to organize "Customized Classes" and will send 1 to 2 teachers to learn on site for one month. We cooperate with Shenzhen Puty Science and Technology Co., Ltd. and send 3 to 4 teachers to participate into the training program of "Cross-border E-commerce Communication" on a regular basis. We cooperate with Dongguan Deyongjia Textile & Garment Co., Ltd. to organize training programs in which our teachers are responsible for the training of business correspondence, negotiation and international etiquette. The teachers can collect the first hand information and apply them into their teaching. Each year, we will send 3 to 4 teachers for training. Such teachers are highly appraised by enterprises. Their programs, e.g. Business Writing, Cross-culture Etiquette, have been chosen among top ten most popular programs by our students. Our teachers, through taking posts in enterprises, receiving training and lecturing the training, accumulated much experience and materials for scientific research in this process, thus enriching the resources of cross-border e-commerce teaching and improving their scientific and research capability.

### **Conclusion**

Therefore, a stable and quality faculty of cross-border e-commerce in Business English Department is required to train talents with good employability to meet social demand. With regard to the academic background of our teachers in cross-border e-commerce, young teachers account for a majority part of all faculty. They lack scientific and research capability and suffer from insufficient teaching experience. Therefore, we must rely on well-known universities in Guangdong, e.g. Guangdong University of Foreign Studies and Sun Yat-sen University, to train teachers with double degrees or rich teaching experience. And, we need to select our key teachers to receive training overseas and cultivate their cross-culture awareness of linguistic teachers to facilitate their better application of learning into their business English teaching. We must hold the chance of booming development of e-commerce in Dongguan and take full use of the advantages of Machong as China's largest e-commerce base to train qualified cross-border E-commerce teachers through comprehensive cooperation between universities and enterprises.

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