



Strategies for Business English Teachers' Professional Development

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Abstract

Business English teachers' development is pivotal to the quality of business English teaching and the long-term development of business English program. This study aims to pin down the most important qualities of a business English teacher from students' perspective and the status quo of business English teachers' quality through questionnaire survey, then put forward strategies for business English teachers' professional development. Through analyzing the results of our survey, we found that a business English teacher should be a versatile and applied talent who possesses excellent language competence, teaching competence, research competence as well as extensive business knowledge. Currently, there is room for business English teachers to improve in the aspects of business knowledge, teaching competence and research competence. Based on our survey results, we put forward strategies for professional development of business English teachers from the aspect of external support from education department and universities and the aspect of personal effort.

Keywords: business English teacher, professional development, strategies

INTRODUCTION

With economic globalization, China carries out economic exchange with other countries in the world more frequently and more closely. Talents who are conversant with business and fluent in English play an important role in facilitating the carrying out of international economic activities. Thus the business English program, which aims to cultivate such kind of adaptable and versatile talents, has developed rapidly over the past few decades. The development strategy of New Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road has brought new opportunities as well as challenges for the development of business English program. Since the establishment of business English program in 2006, 206 universities or colleges in China have successively established business English program (Zhong et al, 2015). With the opening of business English program in universities and colleges in China, scholars attach great importance to

business English teaching and the development of this program (Wang & Li, 2013). Problems in teaching method, textbook compilation, course design and teacher development of business English program need to be solved. The quality of business English teachers not only influences the quality of business English students, but also influence the achievement of the training objectives of business English program (Wang & Zhang, 2011). Hence, this paper probes into problems in business English teacher development. We try to find out the most important qualities a business English teacher should possess from students' perspective as well as the quality gap between present business English teachers and ideal business English teachers and put forward strategies on business English teacher development bases on the status quo of the quality of business English teachers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Positioning business English discipline and business English program

Business English is a sub-branch of English for special purpose (henceforth ESP), belonging to applied linguistics. Business English is an inter-discipline of English and business, studying the application characteristics of English in international business (Wang & Li, 2011). According to the connotation of business English discipline, the position of business English program is to cultivate versatile and practical talents who possess English language knowledge, global vision as well as international business expertise and master theoretical knowledge of relevant disciplines such as economics, management and law. They should be talents with high intercultural communicative competence as well as humanistic quality and be able to engage in work of business, trade, management and finance with English (Wang & Li, 2011). The disciplinary connotation and program position of business English determine the differences between business English teaching and general English teaching. Business English teaching possesses its own features in cultivation objectives, curriculum design, teaching method and assessment mechanism, etc. (Zhu, 2010). Thus business English teachers who directly influence the effectiveness of business English teaching should possess certain capability and quality conforming to the characteristics of business English program.

Business English teachers

Business English teachers play rather diversified roles in business English teaching that Swales (1985) prefers to use the term "practitioner" rather than "teacher" to refer to them, because business English teachers are not only general language teachers, but also material providers, syllabus designers, evaluators, etc. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1983) holds that a successful business English teacher should be competent for five kinds of roles: English teacher, collaborator, course designer & material provider, researcher and evaluator. And in the book *Teaching Business English*, Ellis and Johnson (2002) firstly point out that a business English teacher is a language teacher, then they elaborate the qualities a business English teacher should possess from the perspectives of personal skills, acquiring the resources and knowledge. The above discussions about

business English teachers shed some light on study of business English teachers in China, but they are too general and abstract to satisfy our study on specific requirement for business English teacher in China. Based on the national condition in China and the rapid development of Business English program in China, in this study, we carry out questionnaire survey about the capability and quality of business English teachers in China, aiming to summarize the qualities a business English teacher should possess.

Precious studies on foreign language teachers

It is the British teacher education expert Wallace (1991) who first introduces the concept of reflective teaching into foreign language teacher education, putting forward the reflective practice model of the professional development of foreign language teachers. The core mechanism of reflective practice model is the alternate practice of teaching practice and teachers' reflection. The interaction of theoretical knowledge and experiential knowledge promotes the professional development of foreign language teachers (Meng, 2011). Specific approaches of reflective teaching include writing teaching diary, carrying out classroom observation, watching teaching video and carrying out action research, etc. These different approaches of reflective teaching play an important role in improving foreign language teachers' teaching practice and professional development. As we have mentioned above, business English teacher is also a language teacher, thus developing methods for foreign language teachers have some reference for business English teachers' development.

Quality requirement for business English teachers and quality status of business English teachers in China

In order to put forward reasonable strategies for business English teachers' professional development, we carry out questionnaire survey to pin down qualities a business English teacher should possess from business learners' perspective and the current situation of business English teachers' qualities. Then, based on the survey result, we put forward strategies for professional development of business English teachers.

Introduction to the questionnaire

According to Ellis and Johnson (2002), a business English teacher is firstly a language teacher. Therefore, a business English teacher should possess the teaching competence, research competence that any teacher should have and the basic knowledge of business English discipline, including foreign language, foreign culture as well as foreign literature, which a foreign language teacher should have. Besides, a business English teacher is an ESP teacher, which determines that a business English teacher should possess the specialized knowledge of business English discipline, namely business knowledge, which general English teachers do not have to possess. Based on the analyses above, questions about the language competence, business knowledge, research competence and teaching competence are included in our questionnaire. Our questionnaire can be divided into two parts. Question 1-8 belong to Part 1, designed to

pin down the qualities a business English teacher should have from business English learners' perspective. Questions 9-15 belong to Part 2, designed to find out the quality gap between current business English teachers and ideal business English teachers. Question 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 are multiple choice. In Question 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15, respondents can choose only one answer, while in Question 1, 6 and 9, respondents can choose more than one answer. In question 2, 3 and 4, respondents should rank the four choices according to their importance. The respondents of our survey are 50 students randomly chosen from School of English for International Business in Guangdong Universities of Foreign Studies. We distributed 50 questionnaires and get 48 valid questionnaires (Two of them are invalid because respondents did not finish the questionnaire).

RESULTS

Quality requirement for business English teachers

Question 1 in our questionnaire aims to pin down the overall quality of a business English teacher. Respondents can choose more than one option from the five choices: excellent language competence, extensive business knowledge, good teaching method, excellent research competence and passion for teaching to tell investigators what quality a business English teacher should have. From the survey result, we find that the option of business knowledge was chosen most frequently and the option of teaching method took the second place, which is followed by language competence and passion for teaching. At the same time some students hold that a business English teacher should possess research competence.

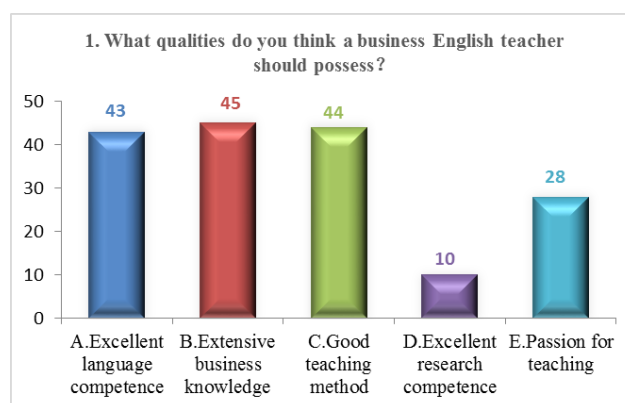


Figure 1. Qualities business English teachers should possess

Question 2 and 3 are designed to investigate the basic knowledge and specialized knowledge of business English discipline that a business English teacher should possess. Respondents are asked to rank the aspects about basic knowledge and specialized knowledge in order of importance. The survey results are shown in the following table.

Table 1. Statistical results of Question 2 and 3

Importance level	1	2	3	4
Knowledge				
Basic knowledge	Communication skills	English culture	Grammar and semantics	Pronunciation and intonation
Specialized knowledge	Rich experience in business practice	Extensive business knowledge	Excel in a certain business field	Frontier business research

As for basic knowledge of business discipline a business English teacher should acquire, most students (28% of the students surveyed) believe that communication skills of a business English teacher is most important and foreign language culture takes the second place, which suggests that business English learners attach great importance to business English teachers' communication skills because business English learning is to acquire business knowledge through communication with business English teacher in business English class. Hence, business English teachers must have a good command of spoken and written English to show the instrumental nature of English. Besides, international business is a kind of cross-cultural communication, master of English culture can help business English learners understand cross-cultural phenomenon in international business activities. Thus a business English teacher should have a good command of English language culture to help business English learners to remove doubts in cross-culture learning.

As for specialized knowledge of business English discipline, business English learners regard rich experience in business practice as the most important aspect. Among the 48 respondents, 22 of them hold that rich experience in business practice is most important for a business English teacher, which suggest that business English is a discipline with strong practicableness and applicability and in business teaching, business English teacher should pay more attention to the application of English in business activities. Extensive business knowledge ranks only after rich experience in business practice and students did not attach much importance to excellence in a certain business field and frontier business research, implying that business English teaching is a kind of language teaching integrated with business knowledge in nature. Consequently, in business English teaching, cultivation of ability apply language is the first teaching task and it is not necessary for business English teacher to elaborately impart knowledge in certain business field, which can be imparted in an introductory way.

The core of business English program is neither English nor business. Instead, the core of business English program is a special register of English (Zhang, 2014). Hence, business English teaching is different from general English teaching, owning its own teaching methods and teaching materials, which requires that business English teaching should conform to characteristics of business English program to better achieve teaching effect. We design 5 questions (Question 4-8) to investigate business English teacher's teaching competence and passion for teaching.

Question 4 is designed to investigate business English teachers' skill of explaining. Respondents are asked to rank the options in order of importance. Survey result shows that 63% of the respondents believe that enlightening teaching is most important in business English class. That is to say, business English teacher should pay attention to nurturing students' knowledge application ability and inspiring their creative potential. And 50% of the respondents hold that practical teaching takes the second place, which shows that business English teaching should combine with business practice, making students learn in practice and practice in learning.

Table 2. Statistical results of Question 4

Number Choice	Importance level	1	2	3	4
A. Informative		10(21%)	7(15%)	8(17%)	23(48%)
B. Empirical		4(8%)	10(21%)	21(44%)	13(27%)
C. Enlightening		30(63%)	8(17%)	7(15%)	3(6%)
D. Practical		4(8%)	24(50%)	12(25%)	8(17%)

Question 5 is about teaching materials selection. In our survey, 65% of the students hold that besides adopting assigning textbook, business English teacher should adopt other teaching material in accordance with students' need, which requires that business English teacher be able to grasp students' need and choose teaching material properly.

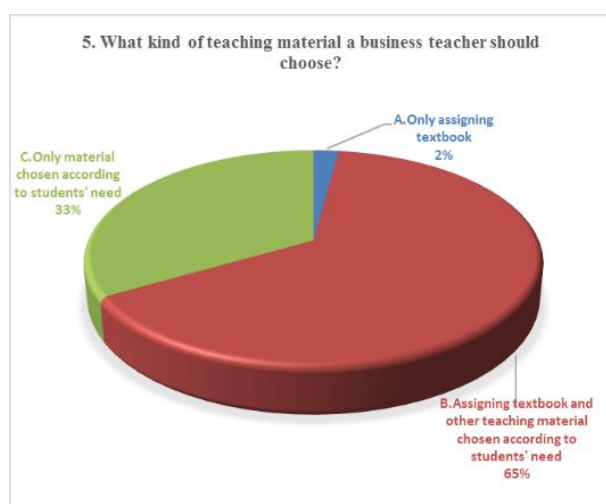


Figure 2. Pie chart of teaching material selection

With regard to model of business English teaching, 78% of the respondents prefer interactive discussion between teacher and students or case study, which is determined by the practicableness and applicability of business English program and conforms to the survey result of Question 4 that practical teaching is important in business English class. Business English students hope to apply what they have learned in practice and enhance what they have learned.

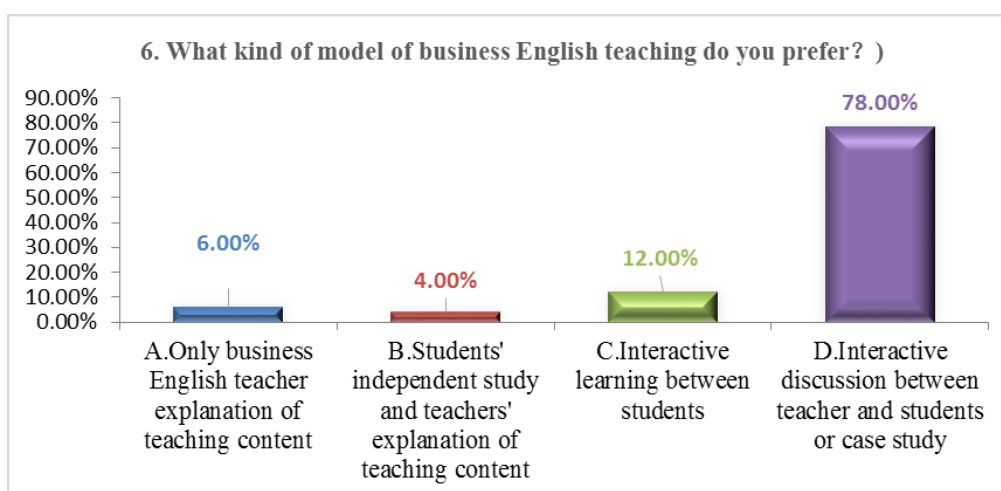


Figure 3. Model of teaching a business English teacher should adopt

As for the personality of a business English teacher, 79% of the respondents prefer teachers who are humorous, which is consistent with the survey result of Question 8 that all business English students surveyed prefer relaxing classroom atmosphere, because business English teacher's humor can create relaxing classroom atmosphere and achieve better teaching effect.

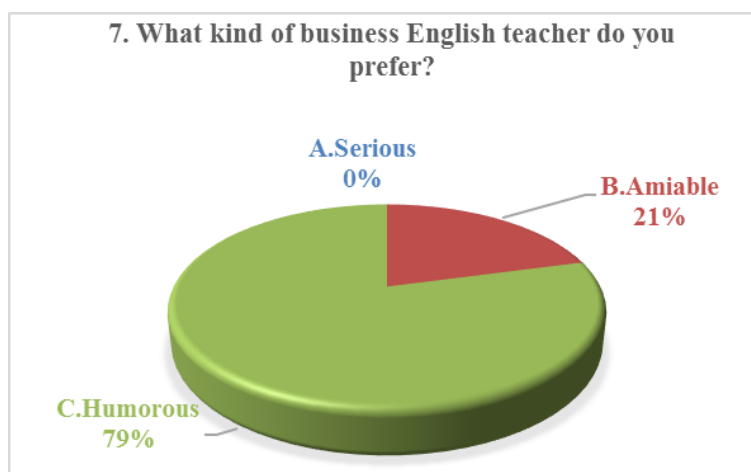


Figure 4. Pie chart about personality of teachers that students prefer

Quality status of business English teachers

The second part (Question 9-15) of our questionnaire is designed to investigate the quality status of business English teachers. Question 9 is designed to find out shortcomings that business English teachers have currently. Respondents can choose more than one option for this question. Numbers of students who believe that at present business English teachers should improve in the aspects of teaching method, business knowledge, research competence, language competence and others are 22 (46%), 21(44%), 8(17%), 1(2%) and 3(6%). We try to analyze what caused this quality status in the following paragraphs.

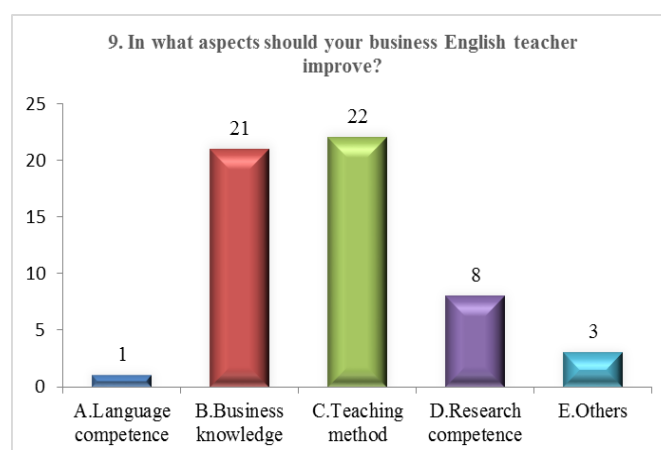


Figure 5. Quality status of business English teachers

First and foremost, reasons for the survey result that 46% of the students surveyed deem that currently business English teacher should improve in the aspect of teaching method can be summarized in the following 3 aspects:

First, currently, business English teachers do not adopt the teaching model of interactive discussion between teacher and students or case study. At present, business English teachers mainly adopt the teaching approach of explaining the teaching content by himself/herself and seldom discuss with students because in Question 12, 58% of the respondents point out that their teachers adopt the teaching approach of explaining the teaching content by himself/herself. Correspondently, in the satisfaction survey of model of teaching (Question 13), 46% of the students surveyed are not satisfied with current model of teaching.

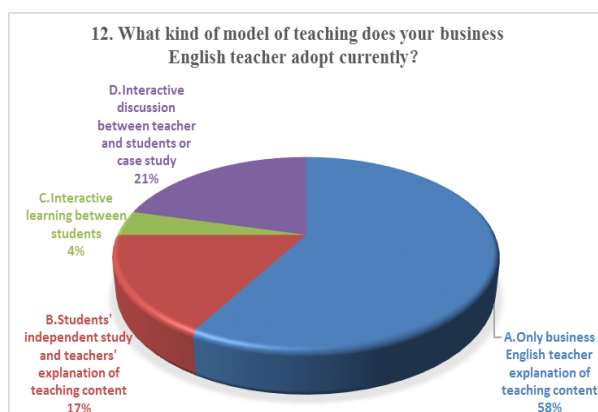


Figure 6. Result of teaching model survey

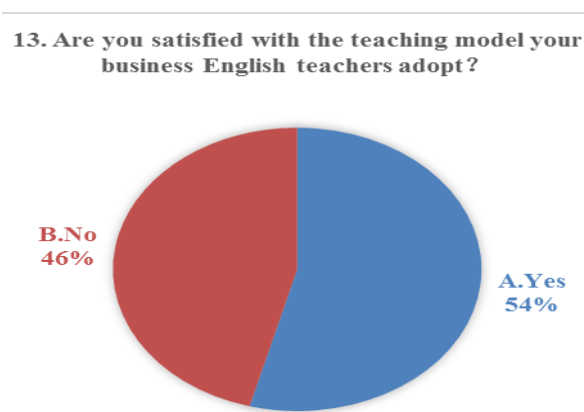


Figure 7. Satisfaction survey of model of teaching

Second, there is room for business English teachers to improve in teaching material selection. 23 of the 48 respondents are not satisfied with the teaching materials their teachers adopt. Through further analysis of the questionnaires, we find that 16 of 23 students who are not satisfied with teaching materials respond that their teacher only use assigning textbook. Since business English is a discipline with short history in China, the quality of textbooks published needs to be improved. Hence, in business English

teaching, business English teachers should choose some other teaching materials to enrich their teaching content instead of only using assigning textbook.

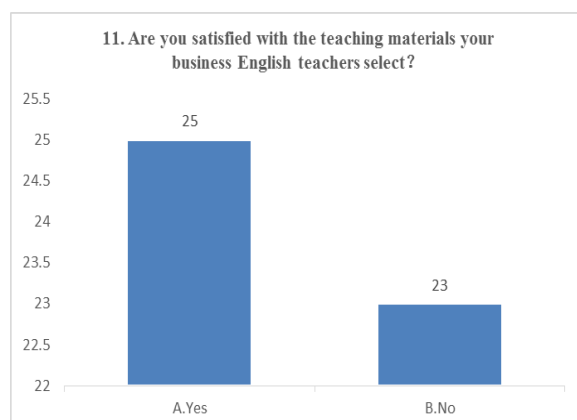


Figure 8. Satisfaction survey of teaching materials

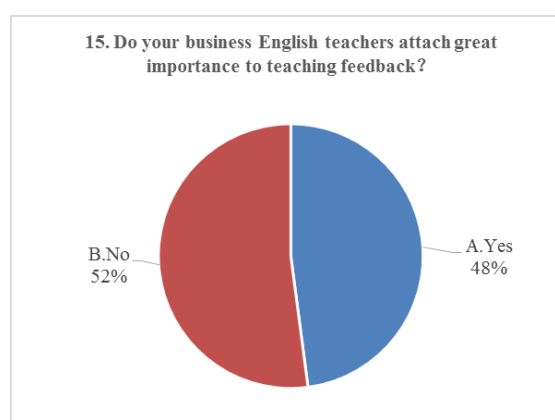


Figure 9. Result of teaching feedback survey

Third, at present, business English teacher do not pay attention to teaching feedback. 52% of the students surveyed responded their teacher do not pay attention to teaching feedback. Teaching feedback can help teacher know their teaching effect and find out teaching problems in time so as to adjust their teaching approach to improve their teaching. Thus, Business English teachers should pay attention to teaching feedback in future teaching practice. Then, reason for the survey result that 44% of the respondents hold that their business English teachers should enhance their business knowledge is because the major of most business English teachers is English. They has not received systematic learning of business or taken part in business practice. Thus business English teachers should enhance their business knowledge.

As for the research competence of business English teachers, 17% of the respondents hold that their business English teachers should improve their research competence. Business English teachers should have certain research competence thus they can integrate teaching with research. Business English teachers should sum up experience in teaching and apply their experience in teaching so as to continually improve their teaching. And only 2% of the respondents think their English teachers should improve their language skills, which can be explained by the fact that most business English teachers' major is English. Generally speaking, currently, students are satisfied with the teaching effect. While 33% of the students are still not satisfied with current business English teaching. Therefore, business English teacher should improve their teaching competence as well as research competence and accumulate business knowledge.

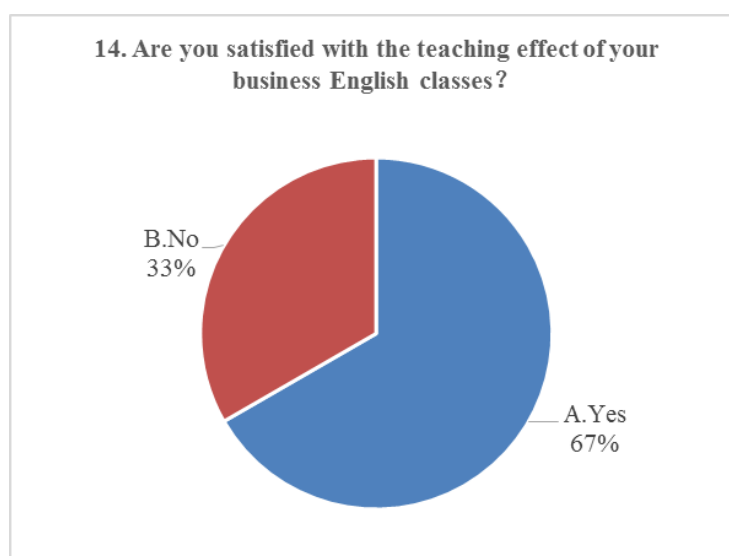


Figure 10. Satisfaction survey of teaching effect

DISCUSSION

From the above analyses of our survey results, we find that a business English teacher should possess excellent language competence, teaching competence, research competence and extensive business knowledge. In the aspect of language competence, besides having a good command of pronunciation, intonation, grammar and semantics of English, business English teacher should pay more attention to communication skills and English culture. In respect of teaching skills, business English teacher should adopt such teaching approach as case study which conforms to the characteristics of business English program. Business English teacher differ from general English teacher because they should carry out need analysis of business English learners and choose teaching materials based on students' need. In addition, they should pay attention to teaching feedback to adjust their teaching plan. As for research competence, business English teacher should integrate teaching practice with research to improve their teaching effect. Business English program is a program with dual core: the core of language and the core of business (Zhang, 2014). Hence business English teacher should possess extensive business knowledge and take part in business practice positively to accumulate business experience. Based on our survey results, business English teacher should improve themselves in the following aspects: teaching competence (teaching approach, teaching material selection and teaching feedback, etc.), business knowledge and research competence.

Strategies for professional development of business English teacher

Based on the qualities a business English teacher should possess as well as the gap between current business English teacher and ideal business English teacher that we summarize in Section 3, we will put forward strategies for professional development of business English teachers from the aspects of external support and personal effort in this section.

External support

External support for professional development of business English teacher refers to support from education department and universities. Education department can support professional development of business English teachers from the perspectives of policy and finance. At the same time, universities should provide business English teachers with training opportunities and opportunities of business practice. First, universities should provide business English teachers with enough training opportunities because there are some advantages of teacher training. Business English teachers are trainees with working experience and clear learning target (Ellis & Johnson, 2002). They participate in teacher training with strong motivation, aiming to solve problems in their teaching, thus they can achieve better learning effect. Apart from providing training opportunities, universities should pay attention to training quality. Before training, universities should analyze the learning needs of business English teachers in order to identify business English teachers' learning need comprehensively and make the training content is what business English teachers need, thus avoiding the waste of money and teachers' time. Second, universities should offer business practice opportunities to business English teachers. Universities can cooperate with corporations and appoint some business English teachers to work in cooperative companies. Thus business English teachers can take part in business practice to accumulate business knowledge. From the analyses above, external support can help business English teachers improve in the aspects of teaching competence and business knowledge.

Personal effort

External support plays an important role in professional development of business English teachers; however, personal effort is the decisive factor of business English teachers' professional development, just as Zeichner and Liston (1996) point out in their paper that no external limit is strong enough to make a business English teacher to lose the capacity of self-development.

We hold that business English teachers can adopt Wallace's reflective practice model of professional development model (Wallace, 1991). In this model, reflection and practice are two important methods for business English teachers' professional development, both of which are in a continuous circle in the process of business English teacher's professional development. Practice in this model refers to the approach business English teachers adopt to facilitate reflection in the process of business English teaching. It is the base of reflection and provides the material needed in reflection. Only in teaching practice, business English teacher can identified the problems and glean the data for analyses of the problems. Meanwhile, only in teaching practice, can business English teachers apply the result of their reflection and check whether decisions that they have made on necessary changes are effective for further improvement. Reflection refers to business English teachers' critical thinking of their teaching process. Business English teachers evaluate all the teaching elements: teaching method, syllabus, teaching materials, teaching techniques and classroom management, etc., analyze the problem

and make decision on necessary change for further development. Dewey (1938) believes that critical reflection is the most important quality a teacher should have. Teachers who can carry out reflective teaching is a person who can evaluate the originality, purpose and result of his/her work at all level (Richards & Nunan, 2000).

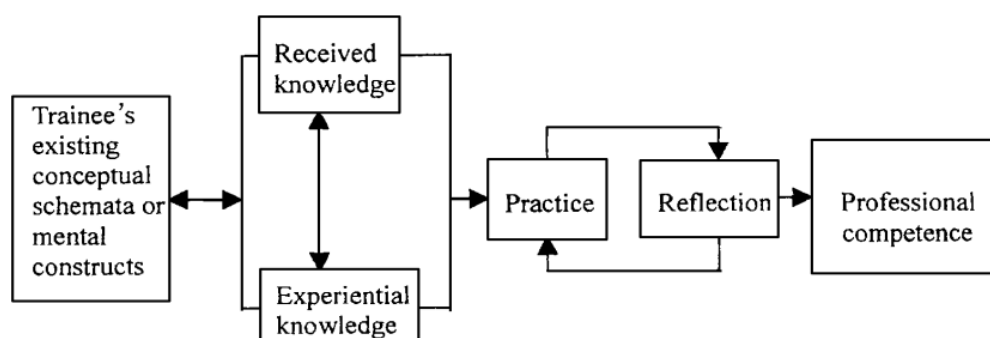


Figure 11. Reflective practice model of professional development (Wallace, 1991)

Gan (2000) points out the common approaches for reflective teaching are writing teaching diary, classroom observation, watching teaching video and action research, etc. We will elaborate these approaches in the following paragraphs.

Writing teaching diary can make business English teachers introspect the teaching details that day. When writing teaching diary, business English teachers should ask themselves these questions: what things I did well and could do better in today's business English teaching and why? How can I improve next time? When introspect teaching details, business English teachers will find the problems in their teaching and their efforts to solve these problems will improve teaching quality and promote profession development of themselves. One thing business English teacher should pay attention to is that teaching diary is a reflective summary of teaching practice, which aims to solve teaching problems, instead of a running tally of teaching process (Jarvis, 1992).

Classroom observation refers to that a business English teacher takes part in other business English teacher's class to observe and record such teaching details as whether all the students participate in class activities and whether the instruction given by the teacher is clear. After class, business English teacher who observes the class should communicate with the business English teacher who gives the lecture to figure out the advantages as well as disadvantages of the class and find out solutions to teaching problems together. Classroom observation can help business English teachers to improve both their teaching competence and research competence.

Laycock and Bunnag (1991) believe "true self-awareness comprises the capacity to perceive and articulate what takes place in one's lesson, and then to interpret and reflect on it". Watching and analyzing a business English teacher's own teaching video or the teaching video of other business English teachers' is an important way to raise a business English teacher's self-awareness (Gao & Wang, 2002). Business English teaching videos can present the whole teaching process and promote a business English

teacher' reflection on his/her teaching. Business English teacher can get inspiration and enlightenment from other business English teacher's teaching video and discover what should be improved in their own teaching. Compared with teaching diary, teaching video can make a business English teacher know his/her own teaching behavior directly.

Action research is any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers, principles, school counselors, or other stakeholders in the teaching/learning environment, to gather information about the ways that their particular schools operate, how they teach and how well their students learn (Millis, 2006). Different from other experimental study on teaching reform, action research is always in small scale, usually in a class. The object of action research can be any question that arises in the process of business English teaching, such as whether the teaching material is suitable or not, how to attract students' attention and stimulate their learning interest, etc. Business English teachers can do action research alone or cooperate with other business English teacher. Action research in business English teaching mainly consists of four steps: identifying problems, drawing up a plan to carry out the research, action and observation, and research report writing. Action research plays an important role in a business English teacher's professional development, which can make a business English teacher become a "teacher as researcher".

Based on the analyses above, Wallace's reflective practice model can improve a business English teacher's teaching competence and research competence.

CONCLUSION

Though questionnaire survey, we find that from students' perspective, a business English teacher should be an inter-disciplinary and applied talent who possess excellent English application ability, teaching competence, research competence and extensive business knowledge. As the same time, survey results also show that business English teacher should improve themselves in the aspect of business knowledge, teaching competence and research competence. Based on these survey results, we put forward strategies for business English teachers' professional development from the perspectives of external support and personal efforts. As for external support, universities can provide business English teachers with training opportunities and opportunities of business practice to help business English teachers overcome shortcomings in the aspects of teaching competence and business knowledge. With respect to personal effort, business English teachers can apply Wallace's reflective practice model. Under this model, business English teachers can improve their teaching competence as well as research competence through writing teaching diary, classroom observation, watching teaching video and action research. Thus our paper is of significance for professional development of business English teachers in China. However, there are some limitations of our paper. For example, the sample size and range of sample collection of study is small. In future study, we will enlarge sample size and carry questionnaire survey in more regions to make our study can better enrich study of professional development of business English teachers.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

1. What qualities do you think a business English teacher should possess ? (You can choose more than one option.)
 - A. Excellent language competence
 - B. Extensive business knowledge
 - C. Good teaching method
 - D. Excellent research competence
 - E. Passion for teaching

2. Which aspect of the basic knowledge of business English discipline do you think is more important for a business English teacher? (Please rank the four options in order of importance and put the most important one at the first place.)
 - A. Pronunciation and intonation
 - B. Grammar and semantics
 - C. Communication skills
 - D. English culture

3. Which aspect of the specialized knowledge of business English discipline do you think is more important for a business English teacher? (Please rank the four options in order of importance and put the most important one at the first place.)
 - A. Rich experience in business practice
 - B. Extensive business knowledge
 - C. Extensive business knowledge
 - D. Frontier business research

4. What kind of teaching is more important in business English class? (Please rank the four options in order of importance and put the most important one at the first place.)
 - A. Informative teaching
 - B. Empirical teaching
 - C. Enlightening teaching
 - D. Practical teaching

5. What kind of teaching material a business teacher should choose?
 - A. Only assigning textbook
 - B. Assigning textbook and other teaching material chosen according to students' need
 - C. Only material chosen according to students' need

6. What kind of model of business English teaching do you prefer ? (You can choose more than one option.)
 - A. Only business English teacher explanation of teaching content
 - B. Students' independent study and teachers' explanation of teaching content
 - C. Interactive learning between students

D. Interactive discussion between teacher and students or case study

7. What kind of business English teacher do you prefer?

A. Serious B. Amiable C. Humorous

8. What kind of classroom atmosphere do you prefer?

A. Relaxing

B. Serious

9. In what aspects should your business English teacher improve? (You can choose more than one option.)

A. Language competence

B. Business knowledge

C. Teaching method

D. Research competence

E. Others

10. What kind of teaching material do your business English teachers adopt currently?

A. Only assigning textbook

B. Assigning textbook and other teaching material chosen according to students' need

C. Only material chosen according to students' need

11. Are you satisfied with the teaching materials your business English teachers select?

A. Yes B. No

12. What kind of model of teaching does your business English teacher adopt currently?

A. Only business English teacher explanation of teaching content

B. Students' independent study and teachers' explanation of teaching content

C. Interactive learning between students

D. Interactive discussion between teacher and students or case study

13. Are you satisfied with the teaching model your business English teachers adopt?

A. Yes B. No

14. Are you satisfied with the teaching effect of your business English classes?

A. Yes B. No

15. Do your business English teachers attach great importance to teaching feedback?

A. Yes B. No