

The application of PBL teaching method in the course of International Business Law for Business English majors

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Abstract: PBL is a kind of “problem-based learning” mode, which is mainly to let teachers guide students to find and solve problems independently. For business English major, the course “International Business Law” has an important position, but there are still difficulties in the teaching of the course, including the students’ weak professional foundation, low interest in business law knowledge, and the content absorption is not effectively obtained. Therefore, based on the characteristics and advantages of PBL and the characteristics of business English majors, this paper analyzes the three major processes of PBL teaching method in the classroom of International Business Law, and concludes that PBL teaching method has more advantages than the traditional teaching method and it can optimize the teaching of International Business Law.

Key words: PBL teaching method; International commercial law; Business English

PBL teaching method is short for Problem-Based Learning, which is an autonomous learning model of “problem-based learning” or “problem-oriented learning”^[1]. PBL teaching method can help students improve their independent study and research through self-study, group cooperation, research and other ways, and cultivate their ability to solve problems. It is a new teaching method and teaching concept to develop students’ comprehensive thinking ability. International Business Law is one of the compulsory courses for business English majors, which is of great teaching significance from the aspects of course nature and teaching content. However, at present, there are many problems in the teaching of International Business Law for Business English majors from the aspects of students, teachers, teaching models and assessment methods. Therefore, the application of PBL teaching method can help improve students’ learning efficiency, improve the teaching of International Business Law, and help get rid of the adverse effects of the traditional fixed teaching model.

1. Difficulties in the teaching of International Business Law for Business English majors

(1) Weak professional knowledge of students

First of all, students majoring in business English are weak in legal English. Before that, through the study of the previous courses, students have formed a relatively professional English foundation and improved the relevant listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities, but students are still mainly concentrated on language skills and usage. Although the learning of these language courses will involve some business situations and corpus, students are still not skilled enough in understanding and using English in the field of business law. In addition, they have not systematically learned the basic knowledge of the business law, such as two major legal systems or civil and commercial law, and they were not required in studying relevant legal knowledge in previous semesters. The setting of curriculum is inconsistent so that student’ legal foundation is weak, and the efficiency of learning and absorbing professional knowledge is low. In short, it is difficult for students to understand professional legal concepts, theories and cases in business, let alone carrying out relevant practices in class.

(2) Low study subjectivity of students

The course “International Business Law” is usually offered in the fifth semester of Business English majors. It is usually taught in English or bilingually, so it requires students to have a high professional English foundation. In addition, the difficulties to learn law knowledge itself require students who are non-law majors to take more time to absorb it. Therefore, the high requirements lead to the weak subjectivity of students majoring in Business English and inactive participation in class. Moreover, due to the limit of time they spend in this course after class, the quality of preview and review by students is not as expected which poses more difficulties for them to improve the business legal knowledge.

(3) Monotonous teaching organization

Nowadays, for the business English majors, the teaching of International Business Law is still teacher-led and focuses on theoretical knowledge. From the perspective of the whole teaching process, the teaching organization is relatively single, and the knowledge accepted by the students is also limited. This traditional teaching mode ignores the importance of practical exercises. although some teachers will bring case study in the teaching process, it is still teacher-led, leaving less space and time for students to understand and think, and the teaching effect is not very obvious.

(4) The dilemma of assessment method

The assessment of International Business Law is relatively simple, and the bilingual or English-taught format requires the examination to adopt all-English questions in principle, which demands a high level of comprehension and response from students. Moreover, the types of questions in the examination remain unchanged including multiple choice questions, judgment questions, case analysis questions, etc. Besides, the unsatisfactory practical training results in the high reliance on exam papers for student evaluation, with little basis for the rest of the assessment, ignoring the role of formative assessment.

2. Advantages of PBL teaching method

(1) Improving students' learning ability

PBL teaching method focuses on making students become the main body of the class. It can not only grasp the progress of the class through problems and projects, but also allow students to actively participate in the class activities and give full play to their initiative and creativity, which is conducive to the real understanding and mastering of knowledge and the cultivation of various abilities. PBL teaching method also requires students to use information technology skills in the learning process by independently searching for relevant materials, selecting information, evaluating information, and solving problems through the acquired information. In this process, students' literature retrieval ability is improved, and a natural language environment has been created since students obtain business law information through reading. Students who read a large amount of legal literature can not only absorb more specialized knowledge on their own, but also enhance their legal English.

(2) Improving students' initiative

The characteristic of the traditional teaching method is that the teacher teaches and the students listen to the lecture. But PBL teaching method focuses on proposing the "problem", let students take the initiative to find problems, and independently analyze and solve the problem, which promotes the students with weak legal foundation to change from passive learning to active learning, from blind to purposeful exploration of content. After solving the problem, students will also have confidence and a sense of achievement, which can better enhance the initiative of students for course learning and form a critical thinking. PBL is a "student-centered" approach that encourages students to integrate new and old knowledge and apply it to problem solving through active discovery learning^[2]. This not only promotes the initiative and motivation of students, but also helps students improve their thinking ability and gradually become independent thinkers.

(3) Improving the team spirit

PBL teaching also emphasizes cooperative learning. Students work in small groups to provide insights, share information, express ideas, and help each other to continuously improve their knowledge system. International Business Law is a difficult course for non-law students, and sometimes it is difficult for them to deeply understand part of the knowledge by individual efforts alone. Therefore, according to the characteristics of PBL, group activities in class and continued sharing of views after class can more effectively promote students' learning of relevant legal knowledge.

3. Application of PBL teaching method in the course of International Business Law

PBL teaching focuses on the learning process as well as the methods and results of problem solving. According to the advantages and characteristics of PBL as well as the dilemma and actual situation of teaching International Business Law for Business English majors, the application process of PBL teaching method is divided into the following stages:

(1) Preparation stage

In the preparation stage, teachers need to make their teaching objectives clear and master the important and difficult points of each lesson. In the process of lesson preparation, teachers should set up different tasks according to their teaching objectives, and guide students in the form of small groups to discover problems, put forward argumentative hypotheses, think together and mobilize learning enthusiasm.

Before class, teachers can group students according to their level, specialty and task type on a voluntary basis, and assign roles to each student in the group, such as searching for materials, analyzing materials, translating and proofreading materials, multimedia production, group spokesman and group leader^[3]. In this way, students can form a more profound spirit of cooperation, help each other, supervise each other, and better promote the implementation of the follow-up courses. After the teacher explains part of the knowledge, students should also begin to understand and analyze the problem, and collect information with the help of different means for preview.

In the course of International Business Law, students should not only understand legal concepts, but also learn to analyze different cases in order to learn the knowledge content of the course well. However, for Business English majors without a foundation in law, they need to do their homework in advance in order to absorb and apply the knowledge. For example, in the chapter of the United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods (CISG), the teaching goal is to enable students to improve their ability to read legal English texts, grasp the main points of knowledge and cultivate legal thinking. In this process, teachers can try their best to guide students into the right track of cooperation, and recommend some pre-class literature or articles on relevant topics. "Offer" and "acceptance" are the focus of this chapter. In the past semester, business English major students have not been exposed to this concept, so in class, students can collect and analyze some information about "offer" and "acceptance" through group discussion, study them by themselves, and at the same time raise some difficult questions or problems.

(2) Implementation stage

By collecting and reading materials in advance, students should have a better understanding of the key concepts of the course chapters. Under the guidance of PBL teaching method, students can show the results of group discussion before class in class, so as to keep their enthusiasm for learning and obtain some different opinions and feedback from other groups.

After the presentation, teachers can teach according to the content of this chapter, appropriately combining with real cases, and guide students to think about the question: What elements are essential for a valid offer? Does a reward constitute an offer? How can you tell the difference between an offer and a joke? Teacher should ask students these questions one after another, guide the students to solve the

problem, and help them analyze how to make decision on the case. In this process, teachers should give students enough time to think, and encourage them to adopt divergent and critical thinking, so that students can analyze, understand and compare the cases according to the existing materials and knowledge, and finally form a unified opinion on the cases in the group.

PBL teaching method emphasizes “learning by doing”, in which students are assigned tasks and then discuss them together in a group to help each other. During this period, students will naturally realize the part of their knowledge that they are deficient in, and will seek help themselves to find ways to solve the problem and promote the learning efficiency, so that students can understand the important and difficult points of business law by themselves and the group’s efforts, construct a more complete knowledge system, and gradually cultivate self-confidence in learning international business law.

In addition, in the process of sorting out knowledge points, teachers should also consider the current knowledge mastery level of students majoring in business English, and combine the teaching objectives to design projects that are more suitable for students’ ability in the real classroom environment, so as to realize the interspersed teaching of knowledge content^[4]. If students encounter difficulties in the process of problem discussion, teachers should also provide students with support, such as channels to find recommended materials, theoretical support needed for case solving, and so on. At the same time, teachers should also allow students to develop their strengths and avoid their weaknesses. Although business English majors have a weak legal foundation, they have strong oral expression ability and performance ability. Therefore, in the course of teaching International Business Law, students shouldn’t keep reading relevant domestic and foreign legal documents only, which will undermine their self-confidence and enthusiasm. Instead, the students in the group can properly present the results of research and discussion. There are many ways to show the results, including making speeches or brief reports in class, or sharing the group’s mind map on the online platform, which can let students give full play to their strengths.

In this chapter, according to the important and difficult points of teaching, the teacher can guide the students to summarize the constituent elements, effectiveness, elimination, lateness and withdrawal of the offer and commitment after understanding each key point, and make a mind map. Based on the understanding and analysis of the cases and the summary of the knowledge points, it not only exercises the students’ ability of independent learning and team cooperation, but also effectively consolidates the knowledge learned to achieve the teaching effect and purpose.

After class, students should also complete the homework assigned by the teacher to consolidate what they have learned. Teachers should reflect and summarize the students’ overall performance or individual and group tasks in each class, including the completion of classroom quizzes and written assignments, and adjust the teaching plan in a timely manner^[5].

(3) Summary stage

Students should summarize and evaluate themselves after presenting their results, and they should know which parts of the presentation they have done well, and what content has been overlooked. The teacher should also help the students review what problems the group has encountered in the process of solving problems, and the ways to solve them, and reflect on the whole learning process in the continuous questioning. At the same time, other groups in the class can also evaluate each other according to the expression, completeness, quality, quantity and value of the content presented by the group. Student evaluation is mutually beneficial. Groups can observe and learn from each other and make progress together, which also helps students improve their logical and critical thinking and makes it easier to check and remedy of deficiencies in the future.

Teacher evaluation is also an indispensable part which should involve two parts. One is to evaluate objectively and fairly the performance of students in the whole process, especially in class, and the progress they have made in learning should also be considered. Second is to objectively and fairly evaluate the overall cooperation and presentation of the group to give students a formative evaluation. All of these evaluations should be taken into account, including mid-term and final grades as the basis for the overall grade.

4. PBL teaching effect and reflection

Compared with the traditional teaching method, PBL teaching method can indeed enable students to better absorb more professional knowledge of business law, and train them to think about every problem, and constantly improve their understanding of the subject in the process of solving problems. In this kind of teaching process, students improve their legal thinking, cooperation ability, learning ability and English level, and also gain more diversified and comprehensive evaluation and feedback, which is conducive to maintaining students’ learning motivation. At the same time, PBL also has higher and updated requirements for teachers, who need to constantly modify the teaching design, enrich their professional knowledge and skills, and have certain information literacy. In class, they should always pay attention to the performance of the group, grasp and update the learning characteristics of the students, help the group cooperation work smoothly, and achieve the final teaching goal.

However, the implementation process of PBL takes a long time. If students are given time to discuss and demonstrate each problem or case, the teaching time of International Business Law is far from enough, and the key points and difficulties of teaching may not be clearly distinguished. At the same time, to achieve an excellent commercial law classroom, it is not enough to rely on the efforts of the teacher alone, but also need the support of the teaching and research team, share excellent teaching resources, update the international cases related to commercial law, pool the wisdom, learn from each other and promote the growth of teachers.

5. Conclusion

According to the above analysis, the teaching process of International Business Law for business English majors is mainly divided

into three parts: preparation, implementation and summary. In the preparation stage, the teacher should make the teaching goal clear, divide students into groups, assign the role of the students, and the students should start to collect the relevant content and materials; In the implementation stage, the teacher should guide the students to find and analyze the problems, and the students should solve the project problems and show the team results; In the summary stage, students' reflection and evaluation are necessary, and teachers' evaluation should also be comprehensive, objective and fair. However, in the practical application of PBL teaching method, there are still some parts that need continuous improvement, such as the conflict between teaching time and students' discussion, and the need for collaborative development of teaching and research teams. These problems need to explore better solutions in the future teaching practice.

All in all, PBL teaching method helps students to improve their professional legal English skills, broaden their knowledge of business law, and cultivate the ability of independent learning and solving practical problems, as well as the ability of teamwork and organization and coordination^[6]. Even if they encounter unfamiliar knowledge, they can solve it through effective methods and get solutions. Undeniably, under PBL teaching method, teachers should constantly play their role to guide students, give support when appropriate, and optimize their teaching at the same time, so as to achieve a good performance in the course of International Business Law.

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