

Effective Measures Taken in Pedagogical Practice of Graduation Thesis for Business English Majors at a Private University in China

Hongwei JU

South Shida Rd, Limin Economic Development Zone, Hulan District, Harbin, China

Abstract: The pedagogical practice of Graduation Thesis for Business English Majors (BEMs) is challenging for both private university teachers and students in China. On the one hand, demotivated BEMs in private universities lack academic written English skills, genre-based writing strategies, and research abilities. On the other hand, most private university teachers lack experience in practical writing taxonomy for business-related project papers. The study identifies several effective measures implemented at Heilongjiang University of Foreign Language Studies (HUFLS) to support both teachers and students in the pedagogical practice of Graduation Thesis for Business English Majors. These measures include teacher training in writing taxonomy, revisions to teaching and learning syllabus, the development of templates for genre-based texts, and the incorporation of questionnaire and interview research practices. In the 2022 and 2023 autumn semesters, 24 teachers, as well as 265 and 170 students, respectively, participated. The results show promise in aligning with pedagogical practice objectives of the Graduation Thesis Course (GTC) for Business English disciplinary development. However, further studies are required to delve deeper into questions such as the selection of topic areas for BEMs to write about and the inclusion of other forms of student work, etc.

Keywords: Pedagogical Practice; Graduation Thesis; Business English Major; Private University

1 Introduction

In Business English education, Scholar Han Yang believes that GTC serves as a cornerstone, introducing the standards and necessary skills of systematical writing and providing students with a platform to apply their theoretical knowledge and practical skills to address real-world challenges innovatively. The topics of the graduation thesis should meet the disciplinary learning objectives and the disciplinary talent quality specifications of higher education. Students' scientific research paper should meet the academic norms. Various writing genres are encouraged to be chosen according to students' academic research interests such as business practice reports, etc. (Teaching Guidance Subcommittee, 2020)

However, there is inadequate reference or guidance from private universities for GTC pedagogical practice especially in BEM. Only 28 online courses can be found from China University MOOC related to graduation thesis but not solely for BEMs. Consequently, HUFLS business English teachers explore several effective pedagogical practice measures based on their students' learning capacities.

2 Effective Measures Taken in Pedagogical Practice of Graduation Thesis

2.1 Teacher Training in Writing Taxonomy

Research by Philip Nathan proves that the writing taxonomy for BEM can be different from a linguistic major is well-founded. For example, business students, within single programmes, generate an extensive range of written genres which can include essays of various types, case critiques, financial analyses and reports, project proposals, dissertations and case reports amongst others. Therefore, HUFLS organised a teacher training for 24 thesis instructors in the autumn semester of 2022, discussing and identifying two categories of writing to be applied in pedagogical practice, namely academic and practical writing. Academic writing refers to the traditional thesis papers; whereas practical writing means business project paper, i.e., genre-based writing such as business plans, marketing plans, management plans, business research reports, business case analysis reports, and other business-related texts like graduation internship report.

2.2 Revisions to Teaching and Learning Syllabus

After teacher training, GTC teaching and learning syllabus are revised. Apart from the traditional academic research paper writing, non-academic business research text writing, known as practical writing or graduation project design is added to the syllabus.

The teaching-learning topics are revised as follows: introduction (of the GTC), choosing a subject, finding out resources, developing an outline, drafting the paper (these topics make up the academic writing module: 3 weeks); business plan, marketing plan, management plan, business research report, business case analysis, graduation internship report (theses topics comprise the practical writing module: 3 weeks), reducing the citation ratio, doing the typography, preparing for oral defence, in-class final exam (these topics form the last module: 2 weeks).

The course has been revamped to include 16 lessons within the initial 8 weeks of semester 7, marking the first half of the concluding year of study. This revised structure contrasts with the previous format, which spanned 16 weeks and encompassed 32 lessons. This change is due to "less class hours have been given to the teaching of writing for college students of non-English major." (Zou, 2022)

To motivate BEMs at HUFLS, in the new syllabus, the teaching and learning activities are designed to include before-/during/-after class activities because Researcher Zhang Rui finds that the flipped classroom can fully develop students' independent learning abilities

so as to understand the knowledge points. Thus, the teaching and learning activities HUFLS teachers and students can choose from the following list (Table 1) according to the topics of each lesson.

Table 1 Teaching and Learning Activities

Stages	Teaching activities	Learning activities
Before-class	1 set a quiz/discussion/practical task: check students' existing knowledge of the topic 2 give assignment	1 sit the quiz, engage in the tasks 2 complete assignments: individual/pair/group work
During-class	1 ask thought-provoking questions, showing a relevant video or image, or sharing a one's anecdote related to the topic; 2 clearly communicate the learning objectives or outcomes; 3 address gaps: case studies 4 summarise key points learned	1 understand what to learn and achieve; 2 participate in all class activities, individual/pair/group work, discussion, presentation, and problem-solving activities; 3 actively engage in case studies
After-class	evaluation: quiz, project, presentation, feedback	further learn in the gap areas

In the amended syllabus, the GTC pedagogical practice is assessed by a combined evaluation method of formative assessment and summative assessment. The final grades reflects the GTC pedagogical practice expectations which are described in the teaching goals: namely: a) being able to choose a topic based on their own interests; b) differentiating the writing genres of business plans, marketing plans, management plans, business research reports, business case analysis, and graduation internship reports through completing the outlines of them; c) following the classroom discipline, completing in and off class learning tasks, and using various resources and technologies for self-learning and improvement of technological literacy by submitting a thesis outline for the final oral test; d) judging whether students can independently and honestly complete the graduation thesis after the course ends through the final oral test.

The formative assessment is shown by daily performance 100 marks folded to 60% of the final total scores and the summative assessment refers to the final oral test 100 marks weighed into 40% of the final. The combined final five grades include: Exceptional (90-100%), Excellent (80-89%), Fair (70-79%), Pass (60-69%) and Fail (59%-).

2.3 Development of Templates for Genre-based Texts

Academic writing is a highly challenging form of language production which tests a learner to the limit of their abilities. (O'Leary & Steinkrauss, 2024) While the majority has no idea of the structure of an English composition (Zou, 2022), which is the circumstance for BEMs in HUFLS. It is common knowledge that students with a major in economics or business should study business language and vocabulary. To strengthen the interface between research and pedagogy in business English, HUFLS business English teachers develop writing templates for the BEMs structuring the outlines for the different genres. (see Table 2)

Table 2 Main Structure of the Template for Different Thesis Writing Genres

Academic Writing	Business Plan	Marketing Plan	Management Plan
Introduction	1 Executive Summary	1 Executive Summary	1 Executive Summary
1 Literature Review	2 Industry Background	2 Market Situation	2 Performance Objectives
2 Methodology	3 Marketing Plan	3 Objectives and Issues	3 Organisational Structure
3 Findings and Results	4 Management Summary	4 Marketing Strategy	4 Progress and Control
4 Discussion	5 Operations Plan	5 Implementation Plan	5 Possible Issues
Conclusion	6 Financial Plan		6 Solutions
Bibliography	7 Risk Assessment		
Acknowledgments	8 Exit Strategy		
Case Study	Internship Report	Business Research Report	
1 Case Description	Introduction	1 Research Background	
2 Case Analysis	1 Description of the Employer	2 Research Plan	
3 Suggestions	2 Application of Skills Learned at School	3 Research Findings and Results	
4 Feasibility	3 Internship Performance Review	4 Discussion	
5 Discussion	Conclusion	5 Developments and Forecasts	

The writing templates help students structure their academic and non-academic thesis outlines and specifies the main writing sections. From 256 and 170 students thesis outlines, it can be seen that they complete their thesis without digression. The language production and vocabulary are professional.

2.4 Incorporation of Questionnaire and Interview Research Practices

Data collection is a critical step in the research process that requires attention. Questionnaire is one choice to collect data. When it

comes to data analysis, interviews are the most commonly used and effective method. (Hu et al, 2019) Consequently, teachers propose these two research methods when students are unable to utilize any study strategies. This is the incorporation of questionnaire and interview research practices to the pedagogical practice of GTC.

2.5 Results of the Measures Taken in Pedagogical Practice

Students GTC final results shown in Figure 1-2 indicate the measures taken in GTC Pedagogical Practice for 265 students of Grade 2019 and 170 of 2020 in 2022 and 2023 autumn semesters are effective and promising.

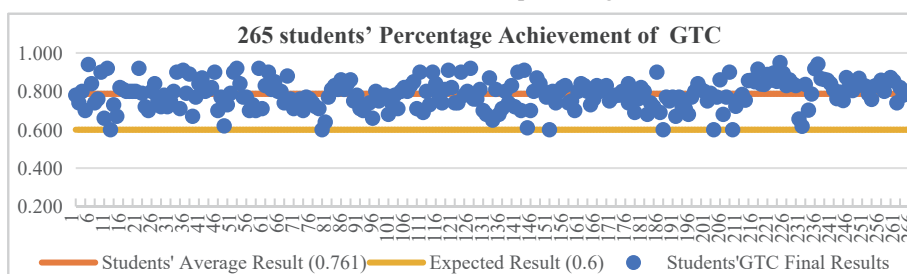


Figure 1 265 Students' Percentage Achievement of GTC

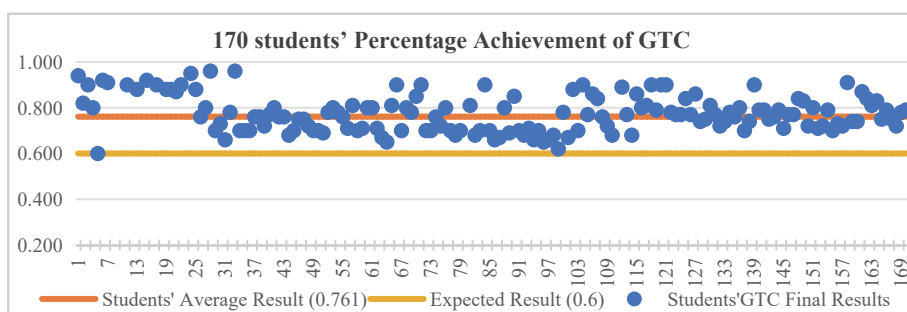


Figure 2 170 Students' Percentage Achievement of GTC

The measures are effective can also be proved by the feedback of the internal and external thesis title supervision by experts. See samples listed in Table 3 showing students' abilities in choosing and refining a thesis subject.

Table 3 Students' Thesis Titles and the Refined after Supervision

Students' Thesis Titles	Refined Thesis Titles after Supervision
A Comparative Study of Chinese-English Taboos in Cross-Cultural Communication	Research on English Language Taboos of Cross-Cultural Communication Between Chinese and American Business Contract Negotiators
To Explore How to Improve the Negotiation Level of Chinese Enterprises in Sino-US Business Negotiations	Research on Effective Strategies for Chinese Entrepreneurs in the Sino-American Business Negotiation Simulations in Class
A Study on the Naming of Business English News	Study on Nominalisation of Business English News Headlines
Marketing Plan of Panzhihua Mango	Marketing Plan for Selling "Panzhihua" Branded Mango in Harbin
A Study of the Pragmatic Meaning of Passive Voice in Sino-American Business Letters	Study on the Pragmatic Meaning of Passive Voice in Sino-American Business Letters
A Case Analysis in Graded Service of Shanghai Kanglaide Hotel	Case Study on Service Grading of Shanghai Conrad Hotel
"HIU Skateboard Club" Business Plan	Business Plan for a Student-Run On-Campus "HIU Skateboard Club"

3 Discussion

These effective measures taken in the Pedagogical Practice of GTC by BEM at HUFLS can only represent a small private university. From internal and external feedback, especially from students' academic papers' and their non-academic writing texts', the results are promising because no thesis is marked "disqualified" or "fail" by the internal and external experts.

While, some BEM teachers and students in HUFLS still argue: Is it true that academic writing for BEMs must cover both "business" and "English" domains simultaneously? Can students add any other forms of work which can be equivalent to a thesis? Should AI tool (Hutson, 2021) assisted writing be encouraged to be rightfully used when BEMs write their graduation thesis?

4 Conclusion

The effective measures taken in Pedagogical Practice GTC do help BEM teachers to improve the actual teaching and learning. More than 90% of 265 and 170 students' graduation thesis and their viva are qualified.

The teacher training identifies the particular writing genres; revisions to teaching and learning syllabus motives students to make contributions in and after class, the development of templates for genre-based texts gives students a mind-map when writing their paper, and the incorporation of questionnaire and interview research practices offers them the basic research methods.

However, BEM teachers and students in HUFLS still need to work hard on finding out answers to the questions in the discussion part. Some teachers need to make up for the lack of work experience. Students need to improve their language and research competence.

References

- [1]Fan, Wen. (2022). Thinking on the Practical Education of Business English Major in the New Application-Oriented Undergraduate Universities under the Perspective of the Integration of Industry and Education. *Think Tank Era*, 12: P204-207.
- [2]Hu, L., Cui, L., & Luo, S. (2019). How to Conduct Interviews and Questionnaire Surveys in Data Collection. *Finance and Behavior: Journal of Hangzhou Financial Training Institute* (8), P30-32.
- [3]Hutson, Mathew. (2021). Robo-Writers: The Rise and Risks of Language-Generating AI. *Nature*, 591(7848), 22-25. Q1. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-021-00530-0>.
- [4]Liang, Tingting. (2022). Research and Practice of CSCL Teaching Mode of Business English Major in Universities under the Background of Intelligent Education. *Chinese Journal of Multimedia and Network Teaching (Mid-Month Journal)*,8:P66-69.
- [5]Li, Guiyun. (2023). Exploration of the Practical Teaching Mode of "One Core, Four Integration and Five Platforms" in Higher Vocational Business English Major. *Journal of Xiangyang Vocational and Technical College*, 22.6: P57-61.
- [6]O'Leary, John A., & Steinkrauss, Rasmus. (2022) Syntactic and lexical complexity in L2 English academic writing: Development and competition. *Ampersand*, 9(none), 100096. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amper.2022.100096>.
- [7]Tao, Xiao.(2022). Problems and Improvement Measures in College Business English Practice Teaching.*Journal of Heilongjiang Teacher Development College*, 41.2 P144-146.
- [8]Teaching Guidance Sub-Committee for Business English Major. (2020). *Teaching Guide for Foreign Language and Literature Major in Regular Higher Education Institutions*. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- [9]Zhou, Hong.(2022). Reform and Innovation of Practical Teaching of Business English Major under the Background of Application Transformation. *People of the Times*, (27): P214-216.

Hongwei JU: Department of European Language Studies, Heilongjiang International University.