

An Integrated Approach to Syllabus Design for Business Chinese

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Abstract : International businesses prefer to hire people who speak more than one language. With the booming of China's market, industries and trade, business leaders are looking for people who can speak Chinese and operate successfully in a Chinese cultural context, and therefore an increasing number of tertiary students choose a Business Chinese (BC) course. As a result, BC syllabus design is urgently needed. What business knowledge should be included in China's context? What aspects of BC culture should be included? How much Chinese language should be introduced to conduct business in China? With these research questions, this research explores a syllabus design that integrates the three aspects of subject knowledge of business in communication, business practice including the procedure of and strategies for communicating business in practice and language skills including the disciplinary and professional contexts in which linguistic choices are made. After literature review and consultancy with China-related business professionals, senior staff from business schools and representatives of students, the authors of this paper, together with language tutors drafted a syllabus based on the integrated approach to include subject knowledge, business practice and language skills. Due to the nature of this research which requires trial/test and detailed description for each correction, qualitative methods are adopted. Two in-depth focus group interviews (with 2 staff and 4 students in each group), and 18 individual interviews (8 staff and 10 students) were conducted. QDA was used for systematizing, organizing, and analysing qualitative data. It was discovered that the business knowledge related to a Chinese cultural context, including face value, networking skills, strategic plans for signing a contract, marketing, sales, and after-sale service, should be introduced through lectures and seminars; business practice could be implemented by students setting up their own companies, virtual or real; and language skills would be trained via writing business messages and presenting their companies in fairs and exhibitions. After a longitudinal study of trials and amendments for three years from 2013 to 2016, the syllabus was approved by staff and students and the university. Students appreciated the syllabus, as they could apply the subject knowledge into practice by using it in their own companies and Chinese language was used throughout the process. The syllabus is now ready to be used in universities offering BC, and the designing process can be applied to other new courses as well.

Keywords : business Chinese, syllabus design, business knowledge, language skills

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