

Exploration of Challenges and Strategies in Teaching Business English Translation in Higher Vocational Education

Wen Deng, Liping Jia*, Pei Li

Chengdu Textile College, Sichuan, China

* Corresponding Author

Abstract

This study utilizes a literature review to offer comprehensive insights into the challenges in teaching Business English translation in higher vocational education. It identifies key challenges, including students' weak English foundations (e.g., limited vocabulary, poor grammar, and over-reliance on AI tools), monotonous teaching models (e.g., outdated methods and insufficient cross-cultural training), and the disconnection between textbooks and market demands (e.g., theoretical focus and lack of practical relevance). To address these issues, four strategies are proposed: 1) stratified teaching, involving dynamic grouping and micro-class/flipped classroom models to cater to diverse proficiency levels; 2) project-driven learning integrated with competitions, such as real-world translation projects and certification-aligned curricula; 3) technology empowerment, leveraging translation tools (e.g., Trados, VR) and industry collaboration to bridge skill gaps; and 4) diverse evaluation systems, combining process-oriented assessments and feedback loops for continuous improvement. These strategies aim to enhance teaching quality, foster practical competence, and align education with industry needs, ultimately cultivating translators capable of thriving in global business environments.

Keywords

Business English translation, higher vocational education, teaching strategies, stratified teaching, technology integration.

1. Introduction

In the context of globalization, business English translation serves as a tool for effective international business communication. Its significance within higher vocational education is thus undeniable. However, the pedagogical landscape of business English translation in vocational settings is characterized by a complex array of challenges that demand scholarly attention and innovative solutions. This paper will explore those challenges and propose some solutions for them.

2. Challenges in Business English Translation Teaching

2.1. Insufficient English Foundations and Diminished Learning Motivation

A primary impediment to effective instruction is the frequently inadequate English language proficiency of students entering vocational programs. These students often struggle with both the breadth and depth of their English vocabulary, impeding their ability to establish a firm foundation for advanced knowledge acquisition. Empirical evidence suggests that students in vocational colleges may exhibit weaknesses across several fundamental linguistic domains, including limited vocabulary, an underdeveloped grasp of grammar, and deficits in written and oral communication skills. Moreover, they may present a narrower scope of general knowledge

and varying degrees of cross-cultural awareness (Duan, 2022). In addition, research indicates that vocational business English students often demonstrate weaker learning aptitudes, possess only average English foundations, and exhibit relatively short attention spans (Zhang, 2024). Deficiencies in grammatical knowledge frequently manifest as fundamental errors in translation at the sentence and paragraph levels.

As a result, students may find it difficult to achieve a nuanced and in-depth understanding of source texts, resulting in translations that are either inaccurate or excessively literal, failing to capture the intended meaning and stylistic nuances. This issue is further compounded by a lack of appreciation for the long-term value and relevance of business English proficiency. Lacking clearly defined goals and a broader understanding of the role of business English in their future careers, students may demonstrate diminished motivation, insufficient investment in their English language studies, and a general lack of enthusiasm for learning (Hu, 2024). Furthermore, their limited foundational skills often deter participation in enriching extracurricular activities such as translation competitions e.g., Business English Translation Test (BETT), the Midwest Foreign Language Translation Competition, or China Accreditation Test for Translators and Interpreters (CATTI), thereby hindering opportunities for practical skill development. The readily availability of online translation software and AI tools may also inadvertently foster over-reliance and discourage the development of independent critical thinking skills, which are essential for success in this field.

2.2. Ineffective Pedagogical Models

The dominance of standardized teaching approaches represents another significant challenge in higher vocational education. Inflexible curricula and large classes can neglect the varied educational requirements of students, causing disparities in academic achievement and hindering efforts to tailor learning experiences to individual needs. (Jing, 2022). Traditional didactic methods, where students passively receive information, can stifle student engagement and reduce overall teaching effectiveness. Research has highlighted the monotonous nature of many higher vocational business English translation courses, characterized by uninspired classroom instruction that disregards individualized learning preferences, resulting in poor student involvement and suboptimal learning outcomes (Cui, 2019). Similarly, scholars have argued that the continued reliance on traditional teaching methods, with limited student participation, negatively impacts engagement and undermines the overall efficacy of instruction (Gao, 2021).

Moreover, outdated teaching methodologies and resources can hinder students' progress. Students may be relegated to engaging in rote translation exercises using teacher-provided materials, with few opportunities for realistic simulation that reflects the complexities of real-world professional demands. In addition, many students struggle to utilize industry-standard translation software or to integrate AI tools effectively into their workflow, hindering their ability to achieve optimal translation efficiency. A further challenge lies in the lack of cross-cultural awareness and specialized knowledge among some business English instructors. As some researchers suggest, instructors with limited cross-cultural understanding may inadvertently overlook the significance of cultural context in effective communication, leaving students ill-prepared to navigate the nuances of diverse cultural settings in professional environments (Hu, 2024).

As noted by Niu (2024), some translation education programs may fail to adequately emphasize the practical application of translation principles, leaving students unprepared to appreciate the subtleties and distinctions between English and Chinese cultures. This can result in unresolved cultural barriers in business English translation, thereby limiting the holistic development of vocational students and their readiness for the global marketplace.

2.3. Textbooks Disconnected from Market Demands

The absence of relevant and engaging textbook content constitutes an additional impediment to effective instruction. Studies indicate that many textbooks designed for higher vocational business English translation courses lack practicality and fail to capture students' interest (Zhang, 2024). The content is often static and excessively formulaic, focusing on routine language comparisons and translation techniques, with insufficient attention paid to real-world applications and emerging trends in the business and translation sectors (Wang & Wei, 2022). Furthermore, it has been observed that higher vocational college textbooks frequently prioritize theoretical knowledge over practical application. Translation materials may be overly complex, misaligned with students' fields of study, or irrelevant to their actual professional needs, rendering them ineffective for pedagogical purposes (Duan, 2022).

Therefore, this article aims to address the gaps in the literature and to identify and explore effective strategies for teaching business English translation to vocational students. It is hoped that by addressing these concerns, it will be possible to improve the quality of vocational business English translation education by offering practical methods and actionable recommendations for instructors.

3. Teaching Strategies

To address the aforementioned challenges and enhance the efficacy of business English translation instruction in higher vocational education, this article proposes the following evidence-based pedagogical strategies.

3.1. Implementing Tiered Instruction

This strategy centers on the principle of differentiated instruction, acknowledging the heterogeneity of students' English language proficiency levels.

Diagnostic Assessment and Dynamic Grouping: A "diagnostic assessment + semester ability assessment" mechanism should be implemented to create personalized language profiles based on students' initial English proficiency levels. These profiles, derived from entrance diagnostic tests, will facilitate dynamic grouping, with student levels adjusted each semester based on periodic performance evaluations.

Differentiated Learning Objectives: Students should be divided into "Foundation," "Improvement," and "Intensive" classes based on their English proficiency (encompassing vocabulary, grammatical competence, and translation skills). Differentiated learning objectives should then be established for each tier. For example, the "Foundation" class may focus on strengthening basic English vocabulary and foundational business vocabulary (e.g., trade terms, basic sentence structures), while the "Improvement" class emphasizes accurate vocabulary and sentence usage. The "Intensive" class may focus on advanced translation training using industry-specific texts (e.g., textiles, international trade, international business documents). This approach recognizes that the stratification of teaching methods can lead to differentiation, influencing students' self-confidence and, in turn, affecting their motivation to engage in the learning process (Zhao, 2023). It also aligns with research highlighting stratified teaching as an effective method to teach students in accordance with their individual abilities (Shi et al., 2020).

Micro-Class + Flipped Classroom Model: Introduce a "micro-class + flipped classroom" model, creating micro-class resources or leveraging MOOC platforms for translation teaching (Jing, 2022). Allow students to autonomously choose what to watch after class, satisfying different learning needs (Duan, 2022). During class, students discuss and correct grammar difficulties and practical translations in groups, with teachers providing real-time guidance and assistance. Microteaching can provide focused skill-building practice for ESL/TESOL candidates, fostering reflective and confident language teaching abilities (Monika & Suganthan, 2023). Furthermore,

implementing micro-classes can broaden students' global perspectives, refresh teaching methodologies, and enhance overall teaching effectiveness (Lu, 2021).

3.2. Integrating Project-Based Learning and Competitive Activities

This strategy focuses on experiential learning and fosters practical skills by incorporating real-world tasks and interactive competitive activities.

Contextualized Learning Through Business Scenarios: Integrate authentic business scenarios into translation instruction using a variety of multimedia resources including images, music, videos, and film clips. This approach aims to improve students' comprehension, recognition, and appreciation of effective translation practices, facilitating in-depth discussions and practical applications (Shu, 2022).

Real-World Translation Projects: Implement real translation projects in the classroom through collaborations with cross-border e-commerce companies, foreign trade organizations, and school-enterprise partnerships. These projects should expose students to a variety of business translation tasks, such as translating company profiles, advertising promotions, menus, and exhibition product descriptions. To simulate professional translation workflows, implement a "translation workshop" system, assigning students roles such as project managers, translators, and proofreaders. By working collaboratively in these simulated environments, students can strengthen their sense of responsibility, develop teamwork skills, and cultivate comprehensive translation competencies relevant to professional settings.

Course-Certification-Competition Integration: Implement a "course-certification-competition integration" model. Higher vocational colleges should follow the "course-certification integration" requirement for English translation teaching to lay the foundation for students' English translation literacy. Teachers should master the direction and changes in higher vocational Business English assessment around CATI 3, BETT, "1+X" certificate exams, and English translation competitions, and integrate these exams and competitions into teaching content. For instance, teachers design a progressive system of "classroom micro-projects - semester comprehensive projects - enterprise real projects" based on BETT competition standards; convert national business English competition questions into classroom teaching cases, such as localizing cross-border e-commerce product descriptions and translating international arbitration documents.

Incentivizing Participation Through a Competition Points System: Establish a "competition scores system" to motivate student participation in translation competitions. Competition scores could be converted into course credits or scholarship points. Publicly showcasing exemplary translations in classes, colleges, or schools can further stimulate student engagement and motivation.

3.3. Leveraging Technology and Industry-Education Collaboration

This strategy highlights the importance of integrating technology and fostering partnerships between educational institutions and industry stakeholders to enhance learning and equip students with necessary skills to meet the challenges of the contemporary work environment.

AI-Assisted Translation Training: Integrate AI-assisted translation tools into the curriculum. Offer specialized training in "human-machine collaborative translation," focusing on the operation of computer-assisted translation tools such as Trados. Combine these tools with AI-powered platforms such as DeepSeek and ChatGPT for editing and proofreading. Train students in essential skills such as terminology database construction, translation memory application, and post-editing techniques. For example, use Trados to process long business texts, comparing machine translation with human translation to optimize efficiency. This approach aligns with findings indicating that AI-assisted translation can reduce translation time, improve quality, and decrease cognitive load (Shokoohifar, 2024).

Virtual Reality (VR) and "Internet+" Teaching: Leverage virtual reality (VR) and "Internet+" teaching methodologies to create highly simulated business environments. Teachers can develop 3D scenarios such as international conferences, business negotiations, contract signings, and simulated cross-border e-commerce customer service interactions. Students can then practice their translation skills in these immersive virtual environments, allowing them to more intuitively experience and address the complexities and challenges of real-world work. This approach addresses the limitations of single scenarios in traditional teaching. VR technology creates vivid situations, constructs immersive learning environments, visualizes abstract knowledge, innovates educational approaches, and assessment methods (Pan et al., 2021).

3.4. Implementing Diverse Evaluation Methods and Continuous Improvement Mechanisms

This strategy underscores the importance of comprehensive assessment and ongoing efforts to refine teaching practices based on feedback and data analysis.

Diverse Evaluation Methods: Implement diverse evaluation methods to provide a holistic assessment of student learning. Teachers should evaluate not only project outcomes but also the learning process itself (Duan, 2022). A composite evaluation system combining "enterprise project scores + competition performance + classroom performance + peer evaluation + final exams" can be used to assess students' translation vocabulary usage, sentence usage, and text translation accuracy, highlighting their overall translation performance and comprehensive practical abilities. Effective language assessment plays a crucial role in ensuring students acquire linguistic competence necessary for success in a globally interconnected world (Winna1 & Sabarun, 2023).

Teaching Quality Feedback Loop: Establish a robust teaching quality feedback loop to facilitate continuous improvement. Learning data should be collected through platforms such as Superstar Learning, combined with feedback from enterprise mentors, and used to adjust the teaching focus of business English translation courses on an annual basis. Feedback is essential for teaching and learning English, promoting language acquisition and facilitating learners' linguistic competence development (O'ktamova, 2023).

4. Conclusion

The exploration of Business English translation teaching in higher vocational education reveals persistent challenges rooted in students' linguistic limitations, outdated pedagogical approaches, and curriculum-market misalignment. To address these issues, the proposed strategies emphasize adaptability, practicality, and innovation. Stratified teaching ensures tailored instruction for students at different proficiency levels, while project-driven learning and competition integration bridge classroom training with real-world demands. The incorporation of AI tools, VR simulations, and industry collaboration equips students with technical and cross-cultural skills critical to modern translation tasks. Furthermore, diversified assessments and feedback mechanisms enable continuous refinement of teaching practices. Moving forward, sustained collaboration between educators and industries, coupled with dynamic curriculum updates, is essential to ensure graduates meet evolving market requirements. By adopting these strategies, higher vocational institutions can transform translation education into a responsive, student-centered system that cultivates linguistically adept and professionally agile translators, ready to contribute to global business communication.

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