

# Bookless approach to teaching Business English: Project based learning and ICT

## 問題解決学習（PBL）を扱ったノンテキスト科目の実践例

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**要旨：**本文では問題解決学習（PBL）を扱ったノンテキスト科目の実践例を報告する。本学では第二外国語の英語学習（ESL）クラスでビジネスを教える科目「ビジネス英語」をこれまで教科書を扱うことがあり、学生に合うものが非常に難しい課題であった。そのため教科書の使用をやめ、より実践的に英語が使える問題解決学習を取り入れ学生の取り組みを調べた。問題解決学習の中にはICT教育の様々な工夫を取り入れた実践例もあげる。この科目で教科書を用いない方法におけるメリットとデメリットを調べまとめることが目的である。

**Keywords：** Business English, project based learning, English

### Introduction

We have been offering the Introduction to Business English class to the students of IPU for three semesters and it attracts students who are interested in the business profile. The goal is to offer students basic business skills which will help them for the future.

IPU has 3 different level of Business English classes.

While teaching Business English level 1 we realized that the current text books were inappropriate for the students. Therefore we decided to teacher this class without the support of a text book.

The goal of this paper is to describe the positive and negative aspects of not using textbook for the Business level 1 class. We approached this challenge with an emphasis on basic educational principles: student centered, project based learning and active learning.

### Text book and the problem with textbooks

For the first semester of 2015, we offered Business level 1 class without a textbook. This experience proved a challenge and success with the student.

During the second semester (2016), we offered Business II using the Communication Spotlight Business 1 book published by ABAX. The book turned out to be inappropriate for the higher level students. While the book offered a well thought out structure, the level was to easy.

The Spotlight book has 12 units: *Introducing people, describing companies, having a phone conversations, describing occupations, describing time and schedules, making small talks, working with large numbers, describing past work, explaining procedures, describing location, describing food and describing future plans.*

The section on listening proved to be unuseful for most students.

The students were frustrated by the low level

of the textbook. While a class level might not be evenly distributed, it's really hard to improve on uninteresting material in the first place.

Some students appreciated the structure and the predictability of the book, most of them agreed that buying the book had been a waste of money.

It's important to remember that when we ask the students to buy a book, it is our responsibility to use the book to the fullest.

On the other hand, for the Business English level 3 class, we found a book well adapted to our students who are trying to improve their TOEIC scores. The *Global Business Trends* book which presents 15 different countries was a good platform and offered us a chance to actualise the content.

### **Picking a book for Business level 1**

When it came to pick a book for business level 1 class, the choices were not adapted to the low level of English of some of our students. With the different options of business book we had, it felt like we trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. None of the textbooks available seem to be a perfect match for our immediate need.

### **General goal of the business class.**

The goal of this new class is for the students to learn more about the world of business while they improving their overall English level.

### **Underlying goal**

Give the student a glimpse of the entrepreneurial mindset and encourage their creativity. Students can very easily be passive in the traditional classroom and by getting them to be active, they become active in their learning experience. We hope that the students will be able to make better inform decisions about what they want to do in the future.

### **Setting up the goals for this new business class**

It was explained to all the students why no text book would be used in class. The framework of the class was clearly laid out and the students were told that we expect them to be active in class and participate.

Setting up the expectations right from the start is essential and will only result in the students being more active.

The class is built for scaffolding and the students were told that each task was connected to one and another with an increased difficulty factor.

### **Step 1: Pick your leader presentation**

In order to break the ice, we introduced some famous business leader to the students.

Secondly, we give the students a structure list of world leader by presenting them with the Forbe Magazine annual list of billionaires <sup>1</sup>. The list was projected on the screen and the students were encouraged to consult the list on their smartphones. The students were asked to pick one leader which they found interesting and introduce their pick to the rest of the class.

This first presentation went really well. The students were enthusiastic about the task and the foreign students were encourage to introduce business leaders from their own country.

This activity offers the students to work with people from different countries.

### **Step 2: Sectors of the economy**

We introduced the basic concepts of the different sectors of the economy. We covered this topic with a presentation where we described each sector. This general introduction aims at sparking interest or reinforcing prior interest.

By introducing these sectors, we encouraged the students to think about which sector they prefer.

In Murakami Sensei class, the students made a presentation on the sector they were interested in. This is an essential step in broadening the student's knowledge of the different sectors of the economy. Most students don't understand the basic structures of the economy and this knowledge is an essential building block for anybody interested in working in the world of business.

We hope that this will trigger the curiosity of the students and hopefully, they might discover an affinity toward a sector that haven't previously knew anything about.

### **Step 3: CV and defining self skills**

Once the students know which sector they are interested in. Practiced writing an American/Canadian type CV.

The American CV is different from the typical Japanese CV and requires the students to list their own skills. Defining their own skills proved to be difficult for most of the students, yet it is an essential part of planning for the future. This exercise raises the self awareness of which skills are needed for a particular goal.

### **Step 4: Cover letter**

The cover letter is the first impression which the student will make with a potential employer. This exercise while difficult helps the students to understand the importance of writing a great letter and understanding all the rules.

The cover letter in this class was written by hand for the sake of simplicity, but it would be advisable in the future to get the students to type their letters.

The exercise proved to be too difficult for the lower level students, but we believe that it is a great

incentive for them to improve their written English skills since they were not judge too harshly for their mistakes. It was made clear to the students that making mistakes were OK during this activity.

### **Step 5: Poster session**

The student were asked to prepare a poster for a business they would like to launch. They could work in small groups and had the choice between selling a service or a specific product.

The poster is a simple way to get the student to think outside the classroom. We did not expect the poster to be perfect presentations and the students were left with the freedom of picking up their own projects.

The students were ask to draw a poster by hand. The idea is to keep the whole project simple so the students are not distracted with technology. Despite being told to do it on paper, some students insisted on making a digital presentation.

The poster is just one step toward the final presentation and a tool for the students to realize the possibilities of the world of business.

The students presented multiple projects; motorbike, dandelion tea, coffee shop, multiple coffee shop, etc.

Most of the students kept their presentation under 2 min which was the minimum.

The English level of the students was too low for them to do a self reflection or a self evaluation, but this good be a good exercise for the future.

### **Step 6: Introducing the concept of entrepreneurship and crowdsourcing**

Many of our students expressed the desire of starting their own business, but most of them don't seem to understand which first step to take.

I presented the students with the article *Is Japan*

*Too Scared to Succeed*<sup>2</sup> which was published on the Bloomberg website on October 31st, 2016. The article paints a dim portrait of entrepreneurship in Japan. According to Michael Schuman, the amount of venture capital deal in Japan is very low when compared to other countries. Businessmen in Japan value security over creativity.

The conclusion is that Japan need to strive toward a more entrepreneurial mindset and this is exactly what we ask our students to do.

Financing is a major hurdle for young entrepreneur and since Japan banking system is not favorable to risk, I introduce the concept of crowdsourcing as a way to circumvent this hindrance.

We presented crowdsourcing tools like Kickstarter and Indiegogo to the students with the hope that it would spark their creativity.

#### **Introduction to ICT tools for business**

ICT has an essential role in educating the students about business. We introduced the students to basic Google for Business tools which included Doc and Slides. The main idea is for them to understand the collaborative nature of these tools which lets them work on the same project with their own device.

The cover letter template given to the student came from the template gallery available on the Doc application.

For the final presentation, we asked the student to use Google Slide instead of Microsoft Powerpoint. Google Slide has proven to be an amazing tool to teach student to better collaborate with each other.

Depending on the level of the students, the level of ICT integration could be considerably increased.

#### **Final presentation**

The final presentation is the culmination of the whole

semester. For this presentation, the students were asked to form small groups of 3 to 4 students.

The final presentation is set up like a presentation in front of some powerful investors. Drawing a parallel with real world situation is a constant reminder that they could also be in the same position one day.

The students prepared a powerpoint and presented their business project. They had to imagine that they were presenting in front of investors.

For their presentation, they had to cover what was needed to start their business.

- Basic concept
- What service or product do they want to sell?
- Where will they sell?
- Who are their customer?
- What are the steps needed to set up the business?
- How much money do they need?
- How will they promote their product?

By answering most of these questions, they were able to practice their English in a practical and concrete manner.

#### **Active learning approach**

Active learning is the new buzz word in education and it has been a priority for IPU teachers to introduce active learning into their teaching practice. The goal of active learning in the classroom are somehow compatible with the skills needed for conducting business in the real world. This convergence between the real world and theory seem to justify a different approach to teaching business English.

#### **Advantages of this approach**

1- This type of class can easily be adapted to the level of the students.

From semester to semester, we often get different

level of students. By not using a book, we can be highly adaptable to their level and needs.

2- Increase the engagement of the student in the class by let them participate.

An active classroom is an engaged classroom. The dynamic of the classroom was positive and encouraged collaboration and creativity.

3- Follows news and world events more closely than any book available.

Being current is a major attraction for the students. The class makes much more sense when you are talking about something the students can relate to. In an international classroom, we were able to adapt the content to business news related to their native countries.

4- Scalable

This approach can be adapted to other level of Business English. The project based nature of this class is only limited to the time available for the students to do their presentation. In the future, the problem of time could be solve by students submitting a video instead of presenting in front of the class.

#### **Disadvantages of this approach**

1- Difficulty of implementation in a class with very big gap in the language skills of the students.

Despite this gap, it was still possible to pair students with different language skills, therefore encouraging lower level students to go over their fear of presenting in English. The higher level students were in a position to help the lower level students.

2- More work and preparation for the teachers.

The teacher in this situation bears the burden of coming up with all the content. Depending on the

personal business knowledge of the teacher, it might be difficult for two teachers to offer the same class.

#### **How to scale this and use this approach in the future**

The approach taken in this class has shown adaptability and the potential to be applied more widely.

We are not excluding teaching with the aid of textbooks since we have been using Global Business Trends published by Nan' un-do with success. This text books focuses on business in numerous countries.

Despite being appreciated by the students, the books still needs to be supported by the teacher in order to give further contextual informations to the students. Students need to be able to put each countries on the map, understand a bit of history in order to fully appreciate each lesson.

The perfect book doesn't seem to exist, but it is important to set up clear educational goals and targets for our students.

The goals and targets will need to be evaluated and adjusted for each groups of students.

#### **Conclusion**

Teaching without a book is often difficult, but when done properly, is a great learning experience both for the teacher and the student. It's a journey taken together where the role of the teacher is to guide the teacher is more to guide than to simply lecture. This approach clearly fits into the actual educational priorities of creating an active classroom where we prioritize critical thinking and creativity.

This bookless approach will require to be well documented in order to improve from semester to semester. Once the structure is well documented, it will be possible to share with other teachers who might be less familiar with this approach.

Flexibility and adaptability will remain the strongest point to this bookless approach and we hope that many teachers will adopt this approach and share with us their best practices.

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<sup>1</sup> “The World’s Billionaires - Forbes.” 1 Mar. 2016, <http://www.forbes.com/billionaires/>. Accessed 1 Feb. 2017.

<sup>2</sup> “Is Japan Too Scared to Succeed? - Bloomberg View.” 31 Oct. 2016, <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2016-10-31/japan-may-be-too-scared-of-failure-to-succeed>. Accessed 1 Feb. 2017.