

Research on Teaching Reform of International Trade Documentation Based on Application Ability Training

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Abstract

As an important professional course for international trade major in university, international trade documentation is characterized by operation and strong practicability. However, traditional teaching of this course pays more attention to theory than practice, while ignoring developing application ability of students. Which cause the students' actual operation ability cannot be improved, and appears to be at a loss of what to do when facing to the English documents and international customs. According to the practical teaching of this course, based on the students' application ability, some useful teaching reform have been analyzed in this paper, including teaching contents, teaching methods, teaching means and teaching practice.

Key words: International trade documentation; Application ability; Teaching reform

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INTRODUCTION

According to the prediction of Chinese custom, there is a need for additional 500,000 foreign trade talents in the

future 5 years in China, which makes shortage of foreign trade talents. In international trade, professional vouching clerks are needed to deal with all kinds of documents and certificates, so international business vouching clerks must be employed in many import and export companies. It can thus be predicted that professional international business vouching clerk will become a popular occupation. In recent years, with the development of China's foreign trade, international trade documentation has been a special course on university curriculum or treated as the key content in the relevant trading practice course. However, there are still many problems existing in the teaching of the course international trade documentation although certain experience has been achieved. Teachers must pay attention that, the theory and classroom teaching are more emphasized so that the participation and operation ability of students are ignored; there is no bilingual teaching with both English and Chinese of documentation course in some universities, which makes it difficult to achieve good teaching effect. Therefore, an in-depth teaching reform research must be carried out in the course of international trade documentation in order to achieve the purpose of training international talents with application ability.

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TEACHING REFORM IN THE COURSE OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE DOCUMENTATION

In international trade transactions, begin from trade negotiations, concluding of a contract to the payment settlement, every link cannot do without documentation work. Therefore, “international trade documentation” is a major course of the major international economy and trade. It is also a senior practical course with obvious operational characteristics, which is an extension of the relevant courses “international settlement”, and

“international trade practice”, the students learning in this course are required to have certain professional foundation. The aim of this course is to cultivate students’ specialized personnel with basic knowledge of foreign trade documents, familiar with documents operation and management, proficient in foreign trade documentation skills. It can be reflected from the rise of various documentation examination and training that making documents is an important job in trading transactions. So the importance of the course international trade documentation is self-evident.

As a highly practical course, the exploration of teaching reform on international trade documentation has great significance for the achievement of the course goal. The curriculum should pay more attention to the integration of knowledge teaching and practice teaching, making the learners masters the latest development and changes of import and export trade. Through the learning of this course, the students can associate the trading theory and documents skills with the requirements of trading informationization after China’s accession into WTO. In particular, electronic data interchange and electronic commerce have developed in the field of international trade nowadays, so the standard document format has been commonly used during the procedure of transactions. Nearly all the transmission and processing of documents would be fulfilled by computer. Mastering the skills of making and examine business documents can promote the documentation deal of our country acting on international convention, in order to lay a good foundation for guiding enterprises to seek new survival and developing space in the intense international competition.

2. PROBLEMS EXISTING IN THE TRADITIONAL METHODS OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE DOCUMENTATION TEACHING

2.1 Value Teaching Theory Over Practice

Through the study of the course international trade documentation, eventually the students are required to master the operation process of foreign trade documentation and all kinds of foreign trade documents making methods and documentation skills.

The students should have the ability to make and examine the international trade documents correctly according to the relevant requirements of trade contracts and credit, and also transfer the documents according to the relevant business rules. It requires the students to examine the letter of credit and amend the credit, make sure to know the procedure of amendment among banks. Students are enable to make and examine commercial invoice, customs invoice, warehouse list, packing list complying with the relevant clauses of contract and letter

of credit; make and examine shipping documents like shipping order, mate’s receipt and bill of lading according to shipping clauses of letter of credit and contract; make and examine insurance policy or certificate according to insurance clauses of letter of credit and contract; make and examine declaration document and the entry and exit goods inspection instructions according commercial invoice and packing list; go through export exchange income formalities, make and apply for the certificate of origin or GSP Form A, make and examining the bill of exchange; and finally present the documents package to the designated bank in order to get the banking settlement. Sometimes other methods of payment may be used, such as collection or remittance, so the students are required to be familiar with the documents transactions under every procedure of settlement.

Influenced by the traditional teaching methods, most current international trade documentation courses utilize a “Three section type” teaching mode. This traditional teaching mode focuses on sharing information in a formulaic, systematic way, building a base of theoretical knowledge for the student, but neglecting the practical training necessary to allow students to apply the information and to effectively solve problems using that knowledge. It’s easy to cause the students “have grandiose aims but puny abilities”, setting the student up for failure when asked to implement and act upon their training in a career setting. Consequently, this teaching mode cannot adapt to the shifting demands of the job market.

2.2 Value Teaching Over Students’ Participation

With classroom time mostly occupied by lecture, it is difficult for an instructor to determine whether students comprehend the material. As a result, courses are reduced to students taking verbatim notes and regurgitating the material on tests which must closely mirror the information given. Deviating from the information as presented in lecture results in poor grades, as students have memorized the material, not the meaning.

Except when training stenographers, this cycle of instruction fails the student, creating excellent documentation of course material but destroying intelligence, inquisition and enthusiasm.

This type of learning can be particularly detrimental when an understanding of the reason and meaning for certain information is required in different situations, but the information is identically labeled in differing scenarios. For example, when working with a Commercial Invoice, Packing List, Bill of Lading, Insurance Policy, Certificate of Origin and other documents, all have a “DESCRIPTION OF GOODS” column, but the focus of various document versions are different. The commercial invoice emphasizes consistency with the Letter of credit (L/C) in the description of goods, the packing list emphasizes the description of each packaging unit, bills of lading and insurance only need to general explain of goods, and the certificate of origin describes goods based

upon the country of origin. That these details differ is very difficult to truly grasp with rote learning, but are quickly understood when used to complete actual documentation as part of a practical exercise.

2.3 Value Chinese Language Over Bilingual Education

In today's international marketplace, most the documents related to business and trade are written in English (and, in those where a Chinese or other language translation is provided, the English version often is the controlling language), so practitioners proficient in professional English are highly valued in the marketplace. Effective students must be able to read English-language contracts, letter(s) of credit and the relevant international conventions fluently. Mastery of these documentation skills rest upon on good English language skills, yet too many colleges and universities neglect to include bilingual teaching as a fundamental part of their international trade curriculum. Some teachers use Chinese translation of textbooks and the student who is producing documents also references a Chinese translation, making it difficult for them to actually interact with wholly English-language documents. In practice job, all the documents should be finished in the English context; the conversion from Chinese explaining to English operation would make students feel rather non-acceptable. Unfamiliarity with many of basic credit terms and documents increases the degree of difficulty in real work. Differences in the actual document being completed and the translation available can also lead to important terms being neglected and ignored. For international conventions referenced in the textbook, the teachers often just explain the meaning in the teaching materials, but not the international customs itself, which causes the students only to know the book request but not the real meaning of the rules when facing practical problems. Of course the students will not refer to relevant conventions in their own initiative without teachers' instructions.

2.4 Value Occupational Certificate Over Operational Ability

Currently, due to the rise of domestic qualification examinations, many international trade documents courses in colleges and universities focus only on "teaching to the test", that is, preparing students for a single exam. Course teaching plans and arrangements are completely aimed at the examination syllabus. This devalues the benefit of a college education, which should teach students to use and apply knowledge in many different situations, and turns the course into nothing that could not be accomplished with one good test prep book. This method of teaching harms students who need more than to simply pass a test in order to find career success. This failure can be easily seen when examining students who have earned certificates but who struggle with actual producing the documents necessary for their day-to-day work because

they are unable to adapt to the requirements of any situation which does not immediately match with the training they have received.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REFORM OF TEACHING IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE DOCUMENTATION

3.1 Update and Improve Both the Teaching Contents and Methods

Due to the closely contact of the course of international trade documents and international trade practice activities, practical document knowledge and operation skills are constantly changing. Teaching must follow this reality, allowing practical, skills-oriented, constantly updated instruction. Outdated content not necessary to an understanding of the history of international trade should be eliminated in order to stimulate students' interest in learning. For example, in explaining the auditing credit principle, teachers should focus on "complying presentation" which has a new interpretation. "UCP600" stipulates what is "complying presentation", and refines the requirement of documents are in conformity with the credit for "single in line, just in line, the documents", and stress that it should match with the terms and conditions of the credit, practice clause applicable and international standard banking practice. The spirit of "UCP500" is "the documents, it may not do not coincide with each other", while in the "UCP600" section L4, paragraph D, documents are not required to be identical, only that they "must not conflict with" (conflict with what? explain). This is more embodies the tendency of standard for examination of documents individually than the past which says that (something is missing here) "not inconsistent with" between the documents.

For example, in "UCP600" terms, it refines the refusal of several document processing options, including clauses which have always been highly controversial, "After the refusal, if a bank receives a waiver of discrepancies from the applicant notice, may release the documents." In practice, banks often been identified that protest is invalid because it indicated to "seek a waiver of discrepancies on the imported one single" in the notice of dishonor. "UCP600" put such terms into the reasonable range which is conform with the development of the actual business, reducing the possibility of the resulting disputes, and it is expected to shorten the time involved in dealing with documents containing discrepancies. Therefore, the teaching process should especially pay attention to these new rules and changes, by comparing the old and new versions to deepen students' understanding of producing relevant documentation; ensuring operational practice can keep up with the reform and the continual changes

to avoid teaching students' outdated information and practices which could be harmful in a commercial setting.

3.2 Use Experiential Teaching to Simulate Practice, Cultivating Students' Practical Ability

The course "International trade documentation" itself is a very practical, operational curriculum. How to make the students feel the real situation of foreign trade practice from the abstract text books constitutes an important issue to think about in teaching reform. To establish a comprehensive three-dimensional simulation practice teaching platform, internal simulation training and extracurricular practice can be combined.

First of all, the teacher should combine theory with practice in class teaching in order to enable the students to have a good understand of every step in international trade documentation, make sure the students can identify various types of documents, master the standard format of all the international trade documents. By making different kinds of documents, the students can have a good in-class simulated operation training focusing on the single link of documents deal. At the same time, it must be ensured that plenty of latest documents can be supplied to the students in class, such as invoice, draft, letter of credit, collection order, sales contract, sales confirmation, etc., to make students truly feel the actual operation of document service. Secondly, the proportion of simulation training courses should be increased. The latest international trade documentation simulated system can be introduced into university for opening experimental lessons to international majors. By using the basic information and data provided in the system, the students can learn through hands-on training how to prepare the various documents that required in international trade according to letter of credit or contract, such as to make a full set of documents including contract, commercial invoice, packing list, marine bill of lading, insurance policy, certificate of origin and so on. In addition, with the prompt of system, the students can do a role-simulating experiment to experience the whole process of import and export transaction, with making documents required according to the result of a deal. During the experimental class, the students can be more familiar with the procedure of international trade transactions and documents deal.

What's more, external resources which can help to establish internship and training bases should be used fully. These bases can provide a real platform for the students to have a short-term training about international trade documentation service. Through the practical operation of international trade documentation and related activities, and finishing all kinds of documents required for practical business independently, the necessary practical experience can be accumulated.

3.3 Increase the Proportion of Bilingual Teaching

International trade documentation is a very foreign-related curriculum; a good foundation of business English is

necessarily required. The documents required in foreign trade business are made out in English, the blanks must be filled in English standardly and the clauses involved should be expressed with professional terms. Therefore, in the process of teaching this course, the method of bilingual teaching should be used with part of the contents taught all in English.

Firstly, the teacher should use the advantage of language as much as possible, expressing the relevant professional terms, business documents, main clauses of contract in English. In that case, the reading comprehension and expression ability of students can be improved when learning professional knowledge. Secondly, the section of reading international convention should be added. Under bilingual teaching, the students are asked to read and discuss international convention related to international trade documentation in teams, such as "UCP600", "ISBP", and "URC522", etc.. During this section, the students' understanding of international trade customs can be enhanced, rather than simply recite the knowledge from books. At the same time in the teaching of simulating practice, English operation and English documentation should be fully used, which can enable students to contact with plenty of real English credits and documents, understand and be familiar with the entire procedures of filling and preparation English documents, then the students can adapt to the international business environment even more.

3.4 Take Courageous Reform in Contents and Modes of Examination

The reform of examination should comply with the reform of teaching methods, the traditional method of theory examination should be changed into combination of theory test and practical operation test, with open book is allowed. For the practical part, students are required to make site operation on analog specific business, the guide teacher's performance evaluation based on the completion of the business. Bilingual questions should be used in the final examination; the ratio of English cannot be less than 60%. In the actual business simulative examination, the mode of all English documents operation should be used. Then an organic integration of bilingual teaching and examination can be fulfilled.

3.5 Strengthen the Construction of "Double Capability" Teachers

In order to promote the teaching reform of the documentation course furthermore, to ensure the strength of teachers, the construction "double capability" teachers should be strengthened. Currently, most of the university teachers are from college to college, they only have the professional knowledge of international trade, but are lack of the experience of international trade practice and documentation deals. For the target that the cultivation of foreign trade professions should adapt the needs of

market, teachers undertaking documentation teaching should have rich practical experience. Therefore teachers in colleges and universities should be encouraged to go to import and export companies or banks and other units for on-site training in holiday, accumulating relevant experience of documentation, training “double capability” quality, establishing “double capability” teaching teams.

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