

Exploring the "Class-Enterprise Cooperation" Training Mode for International Economics and Trade Undergraduate Students: a case study in Wenzhou University

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Abstract

After years of curriculum development for the undergraduate majoring in International economic and trade, Wenzhou University has achieved some success in professional trainings as well as industrial practice. However, with the rapid pace of the economic and job market development, there is a growing demand for application-oriented university graduates. This articles takes "Class-Enterprise Cooperation" Training Mode in the curriculum development of Oujiang College, Wenzhou University as an example to explore the application-oriented university training model. The practical meaning of the "Class-enterprise cooperation" is examined and how this new teaching and training model would promote the undergraduate program reform is explored.

Keywords: Class-Enterprise Cooperation, practice and teaching

1 International Economics and Trade curriculum development status quo

The economic globalization keeps adding new knowledge and practices into the curriculum for the students majoring in international economics and trade. Both the theories and the practices have been changed in the recent years. With China's accession to the WTO, as well as with other economic and trade bodies, the domestic business schools have set up a school specializing in international economics and trade. But, the demand for well-trained undergraduates has not been met. For example, in Zhejiang province of China, only around 30% of the graduates of International Economics and Trade major have started their professional career with a international trade related job. From another point of view, more than 35% of the demand from the foreign trade enterprises still hasn't be met. There is a clear unbalanced supply and demand of graduates from international trade related majors and even seasonal unemployment, structural unemployment, and even technical unemployment. The basic reason of this phenomenon is that the curriculum develop in colleges and universities still has many problems. In recent years, different colleges and universities are working to meet the social development demand and quality education requirement. More specifically, the educational process should inspire students, help them to be more self-reliant and innovative, rather than just force them to pass the examinations. For example, students should have the ability to deal with different problems under various scenarios. All of these targets already help the universities effectively improved the their curriculum but at the same time, some very fatal problems still exist.

1. Objectives of training and teaching are not clear enough. The typical training target "Being application-oriented" is just relative. In the actual training practice, the teachers may concentrate too much on teaching the theories and the graduates of major may do not have enough specific business skills. As a local private colleges, the training standard of Oujiang College should concentrate on training students for theoretical knowledge and problem solving-ability. The students should not only have enough understanding of a specific theory, but also should have the capacity to performance real business operations, communicate with different people, and develop innovative and implement business strategy. The student should be evaluated by their overall ability, instead of their skills to pass the exams.
2. Unbalanced curriculum design. The existing curriculum emphasizes too much on the theory courses but does not pay not enough attention on the practice courses in the major. Take the case in some universities for example, the students majoring International Economics and Trade need to learn the theoretical courses like the Classic Economics, Monetary and Banking Policy, Public Finance. But the practice courses such as international trade practices, international business communication skills, international balance, international commercial law, trading system simulation are still not well developed. This unbalanced curriculum should be improved.

3. Lack of practice training. Internships and other practice opportunities are very important. However, the universities may still spend enough attention. Usually, the practice section is divided into two parts: First, business simulation combined with classroom teaching, and concentrated internship. Compared with theoretical courses, the practical courses of many universities are still under-developed. In our survey, we found that the existing education system should concentrate more on the practice curriculum.
4. The inexperienced instructors The instructors of the International Economics and Trade students should have master's degree or above with a solid theoretical foundation in economics. However, most of the instructors do not have enough real international trade experience. The teaching methods developed by the instructors cannot fully help to integrate the theories and specific business practice.
5. Neglecting the non-intellectual factors. Students majoring in International Economics and Trade should have a global focus and a good understanding of the complex international environment, and geographical and cultural differences. To meet these requirements, the students of the major should both have a solid knowledge foundation as well as a flexible and open mind. They should be able to communicate across languages and cultures.
6. Emphasizing too much on instructing. Many scholars have already pointed out this drawbacks in the education system. However, the instructors still believe that the theoretical teaching and learning are most importance, ignoring the students' independent initiative. There is no feedback mechanism in the curriculum to examine the real capacity of the students.

2. The "Class-Enterprise Cooperation" Training and Practice Patterns

The Class-Enterprise corporate training mode refers the new teaching model derived from the school-enterprise cooperation model. This new model integrate teaching and students' learning initiative. It is regarded as the most suitable curriculum model so far.

(1) The Model:

"Class-enterprise cooperation" practice teaching mode is also known as "Enterprise Class Management" model, which is managing the class based on enterprise management practice. The class should have a general manager, deputy general manager, business developers and other positions. The class will collaborate as a whole with a specific enterprise to promote a product. The class will follow a self-financing system. Each employee is a corporate shareholder and enjoy the year-end bonus. This mechanism will help the students to integrate the business theories with the real practices. College offers the class offices and the enterprise will provide office equipment and establish training sites. Meanwhile, the college would hire instructors with rich business experience both from the academia and the industry which ensure the quality of teaching.

(2) Case study of the model: LW Firm

One of the most recent practice in Wenzhou University is that the No.3-2008 Class from Oujiang College collaborated with Wenzhou Jiada International Trade Corporation. As the pilot class within the entire Oujiang college, all the students raised the initial capital to collaborate with Jiada International Trade Corporation and established a trading firm called Little Wen Businessman Trading (LW for short). More specifically,

The LW primarily focuses on eyewear products in the international market, via its own e-commerce platform. All the 58 students from the class invested on this start-up and they finally raised around 18,000 USD. The class leader invested the largest amount, around 1,500 USD. The Oujiang College and Wenzhou City provided the business office and helped the students set-up the firm with Business Development unit, Design unit, Finance Unit, etc. The class elected their own directors of different units. According to the student's class schedule, each unit of the company will arrange one student stay on duty each day to keep the business continuity. Meanwhile, to strengthen students' professional skills, the college hired extracurricular class teacher to provide technical guidance and international trade advisory service. The college also supports the class with academic instructors with solid practical skills.

The LW firm set up its long term and short term goals. The short term goals: Keep the company running through the entire international trade process and have stable customers and suppliers. The class hopes to

break-even within 1 year. The long term goals: achieve at least 3 million USD annual sales within 3-5 years and to be a solid international trade company with a rigorous structure. The company also developed its own culture, "Pursue of efficiency and being detail-orientation," and its CSR statement "community, environment and employees caring". The process helped the students re-examination their understanding of basic theories from the textbooks. Under the strong support from the college, the students have developed solid business practice skills. This class have graduated for more than 2 years so far. The percentage of the students from the class chose to be international trade practitioners is higher than their counterparts from other classes by 11.5%. At the same time, the percentage of choosing working in start-up is higher than 10%, comparing to students from other classes.

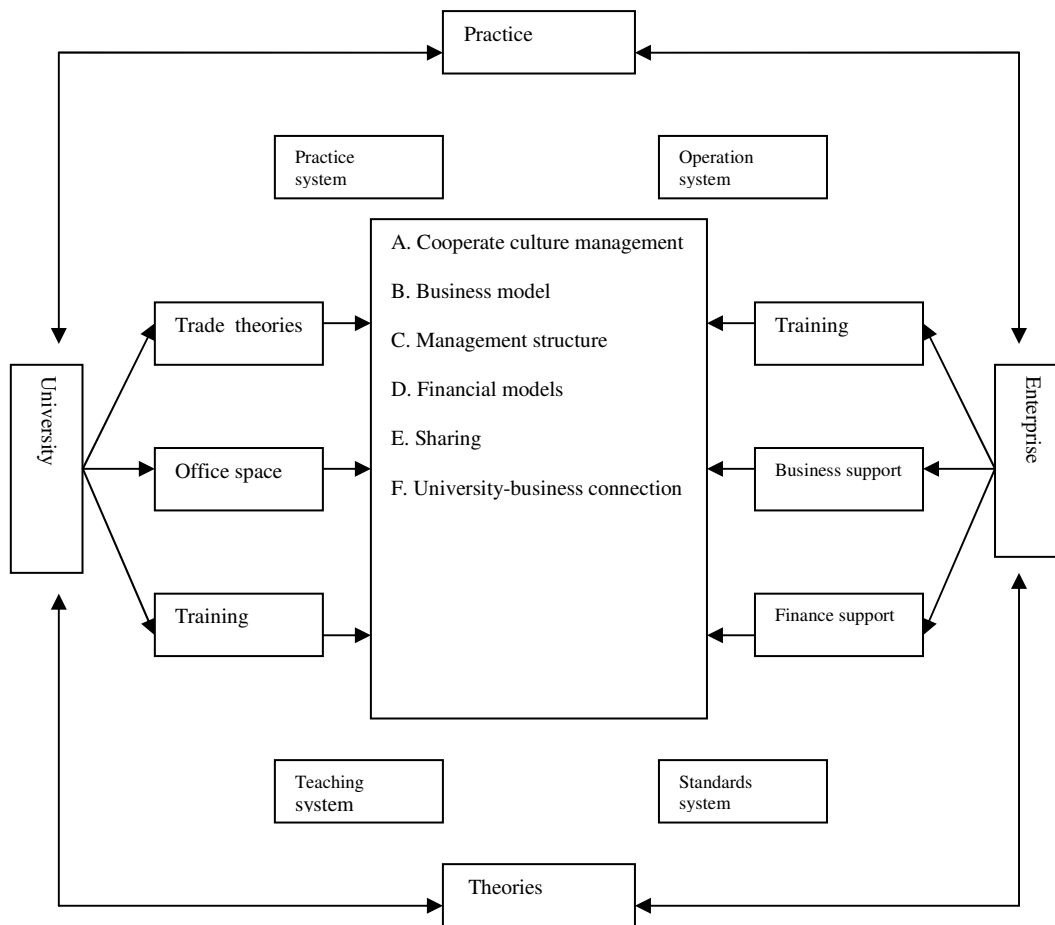


Figure 1: Class-Enterprise Training Schematics

(3) Case study of the model: Wenzhou Metal Hardware Studio

Wenzhou Metal Hardware Studio was set up by the No.2-2009 Class from Oujiang College. Their products concentrates on metal hardware parts for different manufactures and it's supported by Wenzhou Sipai Corporation and Zhejiang Yongjialimei Corporation. More specifically,

Everyone in the team provided initial capital investment for the studio. They gathered product information and performed market survey. They found the fact that the hardware products have a relatively lower price and a higher and increasing exporting volume. Wenzhou metal hardware industry also has a stronger competitiveness comparing with other provinces in China. They have visited several key manufactures in

Wenzhou and investigated the potential vendors based on their productivity, certifications and products specifications.

To determine the target market, they have carried out survey and analysis with different methods. The studio determined that its target market is Southeast Asia (for pilot scale verification), South America (Brazil is a huge market), Africa (massive constructions and large growth potential), Europe and America (the largest market for China exports)The studio worked closely with a hardware factory in Yongjia Oubei, which can provide similar product with a much lower prices. The factory can also provide samples according to customer requirements.

Since its inception, the instructors for the studio's have extensive foreign trade experience and guided the students in the studio intensively. At this moment, the studio is about to move the Cultural and Creative Industry Park, in Wenzhou City and is expected to achieve sales revenue of one million / year, with a net profit rate around 5%.The percentage of the students from the class chose to be international trade practitioners is higher than their counterparts from other classes by 15.5%. At the same time, the percentage of choosing working in start-up is higher than 10%, comparing to students from other classes. We also performed data comparison with the parallel classes. The students under this new model have a higher job adaptation rate by 67.5% comparing with students from other classes. They also have a much solid career goal comparing with other students.

3. Effects and implications "Class-Enterprise Cooperation" training mode

International economic and trade major has a strong practicality and applicability. The theories in the classroom should also be application-oriented and the students are required practice the theories in specific business projects. Because of this, the two cases we have discussed in this study are not only a pilot training experiment in Oujiang College, Wenzhou University, but also an attempt to reform the entire curriculum in the China education sector.

After a year of trial and practice, the students in the two cases we investigated have established the companies with a clear business model and architecture. They also achieved their original business objectives and developed the plans for the next year. The students in the two case agreed that they have a much better understanding of the trade theories by running the two companies. Especially during their preparation of contract documents, they have learned to coordinate customer and supplier relationships.

Also, in their search for potential customers, they also met many spamming inquires and they have developed their skills to distinguish the real customers from massive emails. In addition, the international exhibition they have attended spanned their views. The students have also developed solid enterprise cooperation and communicated skills in the trading process. To summarize the merits of "Class-Enterprise Cooperation" model

- (1) The new model benefits the students by helping them practice the theories they have learned from the books. The "class-enterprise cooperation" model gives the students to run a business as owners of business, rather than observers. This understanding and recognizing process will help them adapt themselves into the society faster. At the same time, through this school investment opportunity, they not only can build up their portfolio, but also develop their working experience and job hunting competitiveness.
- (2) The model will help the students have a better sense of learning new things. Because of the effect exam-oriented education, some college students are extreme impulsive and lack of confidence. The model helps the students to understand that the process of hard work is essential in running a successful business. It promotes moral cultivation and helps students grow up healthily.
- (3) The model strengthen the student's practice abilities. The instructors usually can give students guidance in the process and practical evaluation of their performance, which in return will trigger their creativity. Students are more likely to find their insufficiencies and strengthen self-cultivation.
- (4) The model will help to build the team spirit of students/The two cases we investigated are founded by teams of students. All the membership of the two teams have performed very well and collaborated with each other actively. The leaders in team also coordinated the collaboration structure of the teams so they can achieve the complementarity. The learning process also helped the students to develop the ability to work independently.

- (5) The model strengthen the collaborations between colleges and industries. This is an important effects besides the four points mentioned above. Promoting "Class-Enterprise management" on campus is a new attempt and is a new social practice exploring college education. And it does not exclude or replace other modes. All the 44 cases we have developed are related to the majors of the students. The long-term engagement of students and instructors, not only to provide students with the theory with practice exercise platform, but also enterprises to train the reserve personnel. The model can be run in parallel with other teaching models.

4, Outlook of the "Class Enterprise Cooperation" model

"Dare to be" is the essential entrepreneurial spirit of Wenzhou businessman. The model we have developed in Oujiang College is another explanation of the Wenzhou entrepreneurial spirit. It fosters entrepreneurship awareness of college students. The students' practice in the new model helps to integrate Wenzhou entrepreneurial resources, support the college's entrepreneurship education, and promote the regional economy in Wenzhou. Motivating talents and support the regional economy development is also the ultimate goal of Oujiang College in Wenzhou University.

The "Class-Enterprise" model we have developed in Oujiang College, Wenzhou University is breaking the old rigid class management and teaching methods. It introduced a new enterprise management model that allows students to manage themselves. The classes we have developed are running independently and created a new model of combining the international trade theories and business practice. The model has a solid integration with the students' majors and helped the students to adapt into society. The model is a contemporary educational innovation mode and an early exposure to student self-management in International Trade major. The success of the pilot projects we have experienced will be promoted in other majors of different universities in Wenzhou. The various companies the students formed are evidence of the integration of educational and enterprise resources. The instructions and the training received by the students will help them digest the theories from the textbook, share the experience of running a good business and accept failures. The model is still in the exploration stage. More theoretical studies and empirical analysis should be carried out in the direction.

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