Chapter 12
Hospitality and Business English Teaching Reform:
In Search of Quality Communication and Professional Excellence

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the theoretical and practical guidelines concerning Hospitality and Business English (HBE) education of Beijing Hospitality Institute (BHI) with a particular emphasis on the conceptual framework and an innovative Learner-Centered Approach resulting from the HBE teaching and learning reform program. The rationale of this research is grounded on the constructivist theory and its fundamental ideas; a mixed research method was employed to carry out the empirical research on the captioned reform; the findings of this study revealed that the ongoing reform has turned out to be on the right track, which is closely associated with the specific needs of the hospitality industry, and specifically relating to its growth. Future research directions are also indicated at the end of the chapter with a focus on the implications of the newly established Center of Experiential Learning for HBE of BHI – a new and innovative learning platform that enables hospitality management students to acquire more hands-on knowledge and job-related skills in the competence-based areas of Business English Communication.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, research studies and professional experience in the hospitality business clearly indicate that perceptions of hotel service quality are increasingly being determined by the quality of the guest's experience during the relatively brief face-to-face interaction with service staff in service encounters, a tendency that is particularly the case in the context of up-market hospitality establishments (Leung & Lo, 1996). In other words, the ever-changing hospitality industry yearns for "a personal touch". This new "human face" of the hospitality industry is best seen in the professional excellence of passionate and flexible employees.

At the outset, Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL) realized the importance of excellence and has offered university-level education of hospitality management for ambitious students seeking top careers in the international hospitality industry. This belief that professional excellence is the result of combining skills and knowledge, with passion and human relationships, has remained the cornerstone of EHL educational philosophy.

Beijing Hospitality Institute (BHI) is an EHL-certified hospitality institute. The program in BHI follows the educational philosophy of EHL—a balance of the science and the art of learning. It is the mission of ESP instructors to facilitate them in achieving professional excellence in English. In BHI, over the years, we have worked at the forefront of formulating Hospitality and Business English Teaching Reform programs, involving a number of courses (Business English for Hospitality, Practical English Writing, Cross-cultural Communication at Work, etc.), and put them into practice based on the BHI's learning philosophy of practice-based approach and learning for application.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Constructivist Learning and Teaching

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in the field of constructivism. The constructivist perspective posits that knowledge is not passively received from the world or from authoritative sources but constructed by individuals or groups making sense of their experiential worlds (Maclellan and Soden, 2004). As a theory, constructivism proposes that learning is neither a stimulus-response phenomenon nor a passive process of receiving knowledge; instead, as an adaptive activity requiring building conceptual structures and self-regulation through reflection and abstraction (Lambert et al. 1995; Maclellan and Soden 2004; Glasersfeld 1995; Yilmaz, 2008). It sets concept development and "deep" understanding, rather than behaviors or skills, through "authentic" tasks, as the goal of instruction (Fosnot, 1996).

Fosnot (1996) also suggests that several general principles of the constructivist view of learning can be applied to educational practices (Yilmaz, 2008):

- Learning is not the result of development; learning is development. It requires active thinking and invention on the learner's part. Instructors should thus allow learners to raise their own questions, and solve them to generate "deep" understanding.
- "Errors" should be perceived as a learning process and therefore not minimized or avoided. Challenging, open-ended investigations in realistic contexts will allow learners to explore and generate many possibilities, whether affirming or contradictory.

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