

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Application of PBL Combined with Case Method in the Business Translation Course

Received: 15 May 2025; Revised: 03 January 2026; Published: 05 April 2026

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Abstract:

The case method in business translation possesses unique educational characteristics in cultivating students' independent thinking and application of English proficiency. However, current business translation education in China faces the challenges of constructing timely and comprehensive case database for education purposes. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of integrating the case method with the Project-Based Learning (PBL) model in business translation education. Through the detailed analysis using the case of “the Boom in Generative Artificial Intelligence” in business translation, this study demonstrates that applying the case method based on the PBL model can effectively address the issues of timeliness and the development of case database in business translation courses.

Keywords: case method, PBL, business translation, curriculum design

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of contemporary economic globalization and rapid advancements in information technology, business translation education is increasingly gaining prominence. Business translation students should be high-level and versatile interpreters and translators with outstanding academic potential, meeting the demands of national development. They should be competent in providing translation services for foreign economic and trade departments and multinational corporations, as well as engaging in business translation teaching, practice and research in colleges, universities or scientific research institutions (Mo, 2013: 41). The case method, as a significant



pedagogical approach, has been employed in business translation education. It is feasible to apply the case method to the teaching of business English translation, because this method analyzes specific problems through typical cases, which is crucial to familiarizing oneself with the textual environment of business translation. As discussed in Xie (2020: 133), by trying to use the theory of case teaching method to guide the teaching of business English, focusing on the practical application ability of business translation, and constantly summarizing and improving it, high-quality students can be cultivated in line with both the teaching objectives and the market requirements. However, despite the considerable scholarly research on business translation case study teaching both in China and internationally, critical issues remain in teaching practice, such as the poor timeliness of cases (Li, 2023:195) and inadequate development of case databases (Yao, 2023: 76), which impair its effectiveness in business translation courses. To address these two main issues, this study introduces the PBL model into a business translation course that incorporates the case method.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Case method in translation education

The case method originated from Harvard Business School and has been synonymous with MBA education at Harvard Business School for over a century. Since the 1980s, China has introduced this teaching method, which involves the use of real-world business scenarios to develop problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision-making skills in students. The case method is widely recognized for its ability to simulate real-world business environments, allowing students to experiment with managerial tasks in a safe and dynamic setting (Gonglewski & Helm, 2010: 19).

Since the twentieth century, foreign scholars have conducted in-depth research on the case method in business translation education. For instance, Grosse (1988: 131) defined case studies as descriptions of problems or decisions faced by company managers. Hsu (2016: 95) studied the effectiveness of Harvard Business School's case method in business communication in English. Strelchonok (2018: 790) introduced the results of implementing the case method in business translation classes for undergraduate students at RISEBA University of Business, Arts and Technology.

In China, the case method has been widely used in teaching, with a focus on developing students' practical language skills and business knowledge. For example, the case method has been employed in marketing courses to enhance students' ability to analyze and solve real-world business problems (Dai & Cai, 2017: 24). Qi (2020: 78) believed that case study tasks could promote the acquisition of professional vocabulary and effectively stimulate students' interest in learning. Currently, there are textbooks published applying the case method in interpreting teaching - "Application of case method in MTI Interpreting Teaching: Theory, Practice, and Reflection."

Although the case method is widely recognized in China and internationally, its application in business translation courses still faces certain limitations. Therefore, more attention and effort are needed to fully tap the potential of the case teaching method in business translation courses.



2.2 Status quo of business translation course

The case method in the business translation course faces challenges of timeliness and the construction of robust case databases. These issues hinder the effectiveness of the method, which relies on real-world scenarios to enhance students' practical skills. Addressing these challenges is crucial for improving the overall learning experience.

2.2.1 Timeliness

Before exploring the application value and research foundation of the case method in translation education, it is necessary to focus on its current implementation in the specific context of business translation courses.

The timeliness of case materials is a crucial factor in ensuring their relevance to contemporary business practices and translation proficiency, which in turn is vital for achieving effective learning outcomes in a business translation course. In case method, the use of up-to-date and contextually relevant cases plays a central role in providing students with the opportunity to engage with current, real-world issues, fostering the development of practical and applicable translation skills (Wang et al., 2014: 40). However, a significant challenge inherent in the case teaching method lies in the difficulty of maintaining the timeliness of case studies. The preparation of case materials requires substantial time and effort from educators, as it involves comprehensive research and in-depth writing to create cases that align with the course objectives. As a result, there is often a lag between the development of case studies and their eventual integration into the curriculum, leading to the use of outdated cases that may no longer accurately reflect the fast-evolving landscape of business translation (Liu et al., 2018: 202). Using outdated cases can lead to a disconnect from current industry practices, ultimately hindering the development of skills that are relevant and applicable to the present-day professional environment. As Liu et al. (2018: 203) noted, the creation of up-to-date case material is essential to ensure that case-based teaching methods remain aligned with the rapidly changing field of business translation, thus enabling students to stay well-prepared for the demands of the profession. Therefore, regular updates to case materials are critical to keep students engaged with contemporary challenges and in enhancing the overall effectiveness of case-based learning in the business translation curriculum.

2.2.2 Case database development

Another significant issue facing the business translation courses is the inadequacy of case database development, which limits the scope of learning opportunities available to students. As Kazimova (2023: 2) noted, a restricted selection of cases often constrains students' ability to engage with a broad range of translation challenges, impeding their ability to gain a comprehensive perspective on the field. Building a comprehensive case database demands considerable resources and long-term collaboration among educators. They need to systematically collect, organize and update cases, which should cover various business environments, practices and translation requirements. According to Wang (2016: 140), such collaboration is essential for creating a dynamic and relevant collection of cases that can effectively support the evolving needs of the curriculum. However, as highlighted by Yao (2023: 76), the development of a robust case database remains insufficient, particularly in the context of business translation. While the importance of using real, practical cases in case-based instruction is recognized



by some scholars, the actual construction of a comprehensive case database is still at its nascent stages. Despite the growing recognition of the significance of case studies in translation pedagogy, much of the existing research on case-based teaching remains theoretical, with limited progress in the actual development and implementation of a diverse case database. While a few small-scale case databases have been established, their impact is often limited due to their reliance on individual educators to collect and prepare case materials. As a result, these case databases typically suffer from issues like limited applicability and reach, making them less effective in providing a broad and representative set of scenarios for students to engage with.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is primarily based on two key instructional approaches: the case method and the PBL model.

3.1 Case method

The case method is a teaching approach that involves the use of real or hypothetical business scenarios to facilitate active learning. Students are presented with cases that require analysis, discussion, and problem-solving, mirroring real-world business challenges. This method is particularly effective in business translation courses as it allows students to apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations.

The features of the case method include real-world relevance, active learning, and an interdisciplinary approach. The first feature of the case method is its focus on real-world relevance. Cases often reflect current business practices, trends, and challenges, which allows students to immerse themselves in authentic, contemporary scenarios. According to Kazimova (2023: 2), this exposure to real business contexts not only makes learning more engaging but also enhances its relevance. When students engage with cases reflecting real industry scenarios, they gain an in-depth understanding of the complexities and subtleties of business environments. This equips them with the knowledge and skills required to thrive in a globalized market. Active learning is the second feature of the case method. Unlike traditional lecture-based instruction, which often prioritizes passive reception of information, the case method encourages students to actively participate in their learning process. Students are required to analyze cases, engage in discussions, and propose potential solutions, which fosters critical thinking and the development of problem-solving skills. Samsudin (2022: 26) emphasizes that this active engagement not only enhances students' analytical capabilities but also promotes collaboration, as students often work in groups to discuss cases and share perspectives. The third feature of the case method is its interdisciplinary approach. Business translation inherently involves a variety of fields, including marketing, finance, international relations, and communication. The case method integrates these diverse domains by presenting cases that involve multiple facets of business. Xie (2020: 123) noted that such cases provided students with the opportunity to develop a holistic understanding of business translation and required them to consider various aspects of the business world in their analysis and problem-solving.



3.2 PBL model

PBL is a student-centered teaching method that encourages students to learn and explore knowledge by solving real-world problems. It is a problem-centered teaching strategy that was first proposed by Christopher Langdell, the former dean of Harvard Law School, as early as 1870, emphasizing “learning through problem-solving”. This teaching strategy of “addressing problems and exploring solutions” has attracted widespread attention in the global educational community (Barrows, 1986: 481; Hmelo-Silver, 2004: 235). Today, PBL has become a teaching method with significant influence across multiple disciplines and has been widely applied in educational practice.

PBL revolves around a specific learning project, utilizing optimized learning resources to acquire comprehensive and concrete knowledge through practical experience, internalization, and exploration of innovation (Gao&Tao, 2009: 92). Teachers, students, and all individuals involved in the activity collaborate to form a “community of learning” (Liu&Zhong, 2002: 19). In this context, teachers no longer merely provide knowledge but serve as facilitators of problem posing, learning guides, and evaluators. In China, PBL has been actively applied in various disciplines and courses, resulting in increased interest and enthusiasm for learning, consolidation of basic knowledge and application abilities, as well as the cultivation of students’ autonomy in learning, interdisciplinary integration, and practical application skills.

In the classic PBL model, students first encounter an open-ended problem and then form groups to address it through research, discussion, and collaboration. The role of the teacher is to act as a guide and resource provider, assisting students in navigating the problem-solving process. Li and Du (2014: 57) divided PBL model into three phases: (1) preparation: the teacher introduces PBL learning characteristics and evaluation criteria, the teacher introduces the project, the students plan the project, the teacher advises the students on their plans, and the students revise their plans; (2) implementation: the students research the project, and complete the project; (3) evaluation: the students present the results of the project, teachers and students evaluate the project.

3.3 PBL-case method integration

Combining case method with PBL into the traditional business translation course offers a practical solution to the challenges of developing timely case databases.

The two major challenges (timeliness of cases and construction of case databases) stem from the fact that the typical teaching process of the traditional case method follows a teacher-led, static delivery model. This process presents three core problems: First, case development is dominated solely by individual teachers. Due to teachers’ limited time and restricted information channels, the frequency of case updates is relatively low. It is difficult to keep up with the rapid changes in the business field. Second, cases are in a static and rigid form. Once case materials are compiled, they are not updated, failing to reflect the subsequent development of events or changes in translation needs brought about by new policies and technologies. Third, case reusability is poor. Due to the lack of standardized archiving and update mechanisms, most cases are only stored in teachers’ personal documents, making it difficult to form a shareable and iterable case resource pool.



PBL emphasizes problem-solving through engagement with real-time, authentic issues. The core mechanism of the PBL model in addressing the issues of timeliness and small case database can be summarized as follows: PBL-driven real-time data collection → students' generation of standardized "case packages" → archiving and storage of case packages → dynamic update and reuse of the case database. This approach inherently resolves the timeliness issue of traditional case materials, as each project is anchored in contemporary events and practices.

Moreover, this integrated approach transforms students from passive consumers of static case studies into active contributors to a dynamic case ecosystem. Each PBL activity becomes a living case: students collect materials, analyze context, document their translation decisions, and reflect on the outcomes. These student-generated cases can then be archived, peer-reviewed, and reused, contributing to a continuously expanding and evolving case database.

In this hybrid model, the case method provides the analytical framework and structure, while PBL injects flexibility, timeliness, and sustainability into the learning process. Together, they form a complementary instructional strategy that not only enhances learning outcomes but also systematically addresses the core limitations of traditional case-based pedagogy.

4. Application of PBL Combined with Case Method in the Business Translation Course

4.1 Instructional design

Firstly, the PBL model emphasizes the exploration of real-world, complex problems within a defined period. In the context of business translation courses, they include taxation, corporate business models, and market strategies, ensuring that the projects align with both the educational objectives of business translation courses and real-world market practices. By addressing these issues, students can gain a deeper understanding of specialized knowledge in the business field while simultaneously enhancing their practical translation skills.

Secondly, PBL promotes collaborative learning, where students are divided into groups to engage in discussions, research, develop solutions, and present their findings. Through ongoing inquiry, students can continuously improve their information gathering, analytical, and integration abilities.

Moreover, PBL underscores the public presentation of project outcomes. In the context of business translation education, students can showcase their project results through oral presentations or written reports to their peers and instructors.

Based on the aforementioned teaching approach and considering the characteristics of business translation courses, this study organizes the learning process into three stages: preparation, implementation, and evaluation, based on the PBL framework. This structure guides students in testing and refining their ideas, allowing them to build a bridge between new and existing knowledge, thereby deepening their understanding of the new concepts. It also emphasizes collaborative learning as a means of enhancing students' understanding of concepts and knowledge construction. Finally, a collaborative evaluation system involving both students and instructors is implemented to organize and balance various forms of assessment. The specific details are shown in Figure 1 below:



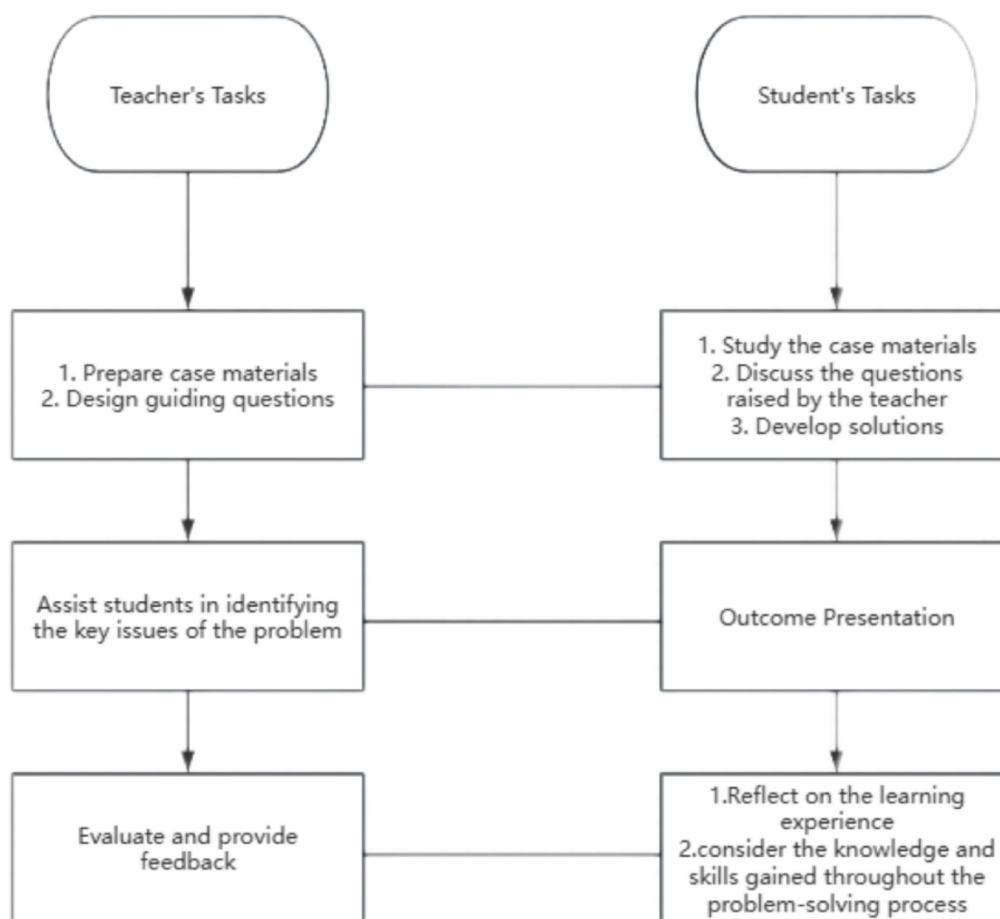


Figure 1. The Design of Case Method in Business Translation Courses within the PBL Framework

Preparation stage: firstly, the teacher's task is to prepare case materials and design guiding questions. To address the issues of timeliness and case database construction, teachers should introduce cases from the current business environment to enhance timeliness. Selected cases should possess characteristics such as problem orientation, typicality, authenticity, relevance, and systematicity (Feng&Miao, 2009: 29) to facilitate the construction of a translation case library. Secondly, students' tasks include reading case materials, discussing questions posed by the teacher, and developing solutions. After the formation of student groups, students should discuss the background information and problems involved in the current case, conduct in-depth investigations based on existing data and resources, and attempt to find the latest development trends and solutions in the current business field.

Implementation stage: firstly, the teacher's task is to guide students to understand the key points of the problem. Through analyzing these cases, students can better understand the latest business challenges and their existing solutions. At the same time, the teacher can guide students to use theoretical frameworks to better understand the business challenges involved in the case and propose relevant solutions of their own. Secondly, students' task is to present their outcomes. In the PBL model, the outcome presentation stage is a key link to optimizing the timeliness of case teaching methods, with emphasis on the latest information and insights gained during the investigation process. This requires students to base their presentations on the latest business development trends and technological

advancements. Furthermore, by utilizing current business news, industry research reports, and professional journals, students can better understand the business environment involved in the case and obtain accurate translation of relevant terms. Additionally, students can incorporate the latest business practices and strategies adopted by similar companies in real cases into their presentations, demonstrating their understanding and application abilities of the most effective practices in the current business environment. Finally, students should compile a list of bilingual terms accumulated in this case to facilitate the construction of a translation case database.

Evaluation stage: firstly, the teacher's task is to evaluate and provide feedback. Teachers can employ comprehensive assessment methods to ensure that students have acquired sufficient knowledge during the integration of the PBL model with the case method. Teachers need to collect and compile lists of terms to confirm the accuracy of relevant term translations. When selecting the next case, teachers need to collect cases related to and similar to the current case, linking each case to achieve the construction of a complete translation case library. Secondly, the students' task is to summarize their learning experiences and reflect on the knowledge and skills gained during the problem-solving process. Students should summarize the specific business domain knowledge learned during the case analysis process, including but not limited to translation of relevant terms and business background, emphasizing how to extract key information from the case and grasp the context. Summarize the experience of compiling and using English-Chinese business translation term lists, including how to accurately use and explain professional terms in translation, and improve the group's term list by combining with the lists of other groups.

4.2 Case Study

This study uses “the Boom in Generative Artificial Intelligence” as a case for classroom teaching design. The content primarily covers the underlying company business models, market strategies, and the learning of AI-related terminology, all completed within one class session. This session enabled students to grasp the case's business context and compile a Chinese-English bilingual glossary of terms in the relevant field.

- (1) Preparation Stage: The teacher introduced the project, created the context, posed questions, and asked students to work in groups to answer the following questions:

Why has Generative AI rapidly gained phenomenally widespread popularity? What are its business model and market strategy? How can this phenomenon be described and analyzed through business translation? What are the key terminology pairs (Chinese-English) that should be mastered in relation to this field?

The students studied case materials, discussed questions posed by the teacher, and developed solutions. Students carried out in-depth research, such as visiting relevant companies, interviewing industry experts or users, and collecting market research data to illustrate the application and impact of Generative AI in the business environment. Additionally, students wrote business analysis reports, analyzing the business model, market strategy, and industry competition in the Generative AI case. They provided their own opinions and suggestions, offering specific solutions to the business



challenges and opportunities in this case, thereby demonstrating their analytical and problem-solving abilities in business issues.

(2) Implementation Stage: The teacher guided students to understand the key points of the problem. When analyzing the market strategy, business model, and reasons for the popularity of Generative AI, attention was paid to its technological innovation and performance advantages, openness and customizability, user experience, and usability. Understanding Generative AI's business model — whether it adopts a subscription model, pay-per-use model, or other charging methods — was crucial for understanding its profit model. Students also researched Generative AI's strategies in market promotion and publicity, including marketing activities, partnerships, and social media promotion. When describing and analyzing this phenomenon in English, students focused on the use of professional terminology and the support of data and facts.

The students presented their outcomes. Analyzing Generative AI's business model revealed that it was initially conceived as a research tool aimed at providing an interactive modeling tool for researchers and developers. With its immense potential, Generative AI was gradually and widely applied in various business fields, including customer service and content creation. For example, OpenAI launched ChatGPT's API services to make it easier for businesses and developers to integrate and use. Students proposed the challenges and opportunities: Generative AI presents significant employment challenges to professionals and English major students, and students addressed how English majors should view and utilize Generative AI, providing concrete solutions. Meanwhile, students systematically accumulated business translation-related vocabulary with the help of foreign media's in-depth reporting on Generative AI. For example, drawing on an article titled "Machine Learnings" published by The Economist on February 4, 2023, which discussed the potential of ChatGPT to challenge the status of traditional search engines, students compiled business translation term lists, including but not limited to those shown in Figure 2.

English	Chinese	Definition
search engines	搜索引擎	用于互联网上检索信息的软件工具
market capitalisation	市值	表示公司股票的总市场价值
revenues	收入	企业或政府从其业务活动中获得的款项
consumer application	消费者应用	针对终端用户的软件或服务产品
monetisation	货币化	将某事物转化为收益的方法或策略
monopoly economics	垄断经济学	描述一个市场由单一供应商独占的经济环境
advertising business	广告业务	专注于为各类产品或服务提供广告宣传的行业

Figure 2. Business Translation Term List

(3) Evaluation Stage: The teacher evaluated and provided feedback. After the case presentation, students and teachers discussed the teaching effectiveness of this case, evaluating students' performance in English expression, problem analysis, teamwork, and term list compilation. When selecting the next business case for later courses, teachers selected cases related to "generative artificial intelligence" to facilitate the construction of a business translation case database.



The students summarized their learning experiences and reflected on the knowledge and skills acquired during the problem-solving process. From this case, students gained rich professional knowledge covering multiple fields such as computer science, artificial intelligence, natural language processing, and business management. The case cultivated students' interdisciplinary thinking and comprehensive analytical abilities, providing a solid foundation for their future career development. Finally, students improved their own term lists through mutual learning with other groups.

4.3 Effectiveness evaluation

The integrated model of “PBL + case method” remains at the stage of theoretical design and single-case demonstration. It has not yet been validated through large-scale teaching practice, nor does it have quantitative empirical data to support the actual effectiveness of case timeliness and enhanced case database development. Future research is proposed as follows:

(1) Research Design

Participants: Junior students majoring in business translation from two universities will be selected as participants, divided into an experimental group (n=60) and a control group (n=60). The experimental group adopts the “PBL + case method”, while the control group uses the traditional case method.

Experimental Duration: One semester (16 weeks, 2 class hours per week, totaling 32 class hours), focusing on two core modules: “Cross-border E-commerce Translation” and “FinTech Translation”.

(2) Data Collection Methods

Translation Competence Indicators: At the initial and final stages of the experiment, the same business translation test papers (including three types of texts: corporate annual report abstracts, product manuals, and business negotiation dialogues, with a total score of 100) are distributed to students in both groups. Three sub-indicators will be measured: “terminology accuracy rate”, “reasonableness of sentence structure conversion”, and “degree of business logic restoration” (with weights of 30%, 35%, and 35% respectively).

Case Database Development Indicators: Record the number of valid cases generated by the experimental group within 16 weeks (subject to peer review and teacher verification), the types of business fields covered by the cases, and the reuse rate of students' terminology lists.

Learning satisfaction questionnaire: A scale-based questionnaire will be distributed at the end of the experiment, and the average scores of students in both groups were calculated.

In-depth Interviews: Ten students and two course instructors will be randomly selected from the experimental group for semi-structured interviews. The interview topics included “Problems in PBL Collaboration”, “Impact of Case Generation on Translation Competence”, and “Case Database Usage Experience”. Each interview will last 30 minutes, and will be audio-recorded in full, and transcribed into text.

Reflection Reports and Teaching Logs: Weekly learning reflection reports of students in the experimental group and teaching logs of instructors will be collected. Key themes such as



“Breakthroughs in Translation Difficulties” and “Suggestions for Case Database Development” will be extracted.

(3) Data Statistics and Analysis Methods

Examine and compare the differences between the experimental group and the control group in terms of “total scores and sub-indicators of translation tests” and “learning satisfaction questionnaire scores”. Analyze the case database development indicators through descriptive statistics to verify the improvement effects of “case timeliness” and “case database comprehensiveness”. Code the interview texts, reflection reports, and teaching logs, refine core themes, and form triangulation verification with quantitative data.

(4) Research Output Objectives

Verify the effectiveness of the “PBL + case method” in improving students’ business translation competence and enhancing case database development. Develop a promotable “Case Generation - Archiving - Reuse” operation manual, clarifying case field standards and review processes. Propose optimization for this teaching model to provide empirical support for the subsequent reform of business translation courses.

5. Conclusion

The use of case method in translation teaching has always been of concern, and its application faces challenges such as timeliness and inadequate case database construction. To address the current issues in the application of case teaching methods in China, this study uses the PBL model in the business translation course, combining it with the case of “Surge of Generative Artificial Intelligence” to propose a case method based on the PBL model.

In teaching business translation, the PBL model can stimulate students’ interest in learning, cultivate critical thinking and teamwork skills, and help students better solve practical business problems. Applying the combination of the case method and the PBL model to business translation teaching may prove to be a promising approach to alleviating the aforementioned problems, thereby improving students’ comprehensive abilities and application capabilities.

Through the discussion in this study, it is hoped that a more practical and effective teaching mode can be provided for business translation teaching, enhancing students’ comprehensive abilities and competitiveness in the business field. The shortcomings of this study lie in proposing a theoretical model without extensive practice. Future research can further focus on effectiveness evaluation and continuous optimization in teaching practice.

Declarations and Acknowledgment:

This work is supported by the Young Scholar Academic Team Project of Minzu University of China (Project Number: 2024QNYL22).



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