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Effective is Workplace *English for Occupational Purposes (EOP)* Training?

Case Studies of Corporate Programs in Mainland China

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Biodata

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Abstract

Workplace *English for occupational purposes (EOP)* training programs represent corporate investment in language skills enhancement, which is perceived by employers as essential for corporate business globalization. However, there has been a paucity of empirical research on the evaluation of such programs. This study focuses on the effectiveness of *EOP* programs in the workplace offered in mainland China. The key research questions are “how effective are *EOP* training programs in preparing employees for global business communication in the Chinese workplace context?” and “what factors contribute to or hinder the effectiveness of these training programs?”. Based on a synthesis of existing theories and evaluation models, a framework for evaluating *EOP* programs in the workplace is constructed. Using qualitative case studies of two programs in mainland China, the study applies the evaluation framework to investigate their effectiveness. The study results show that *EOP* training programs are effective in preparing employees for business communication immediately after the course ends. The self-assessment results have demonstrated that graduates of the two programs reached an intermediary level of language competence. Substantial long-term progress is rarely to be identified as there are many factors which can influence effectiveness of workplace communicative competence development such as the language environment, the class size and the learner’s commitment in the learning process. There have been individual success cases in which the training participants excelled in business communication job performance.

Keywords: Workplace, *English for occupational purposes*, training effectiveness, case study, corporate program, mainland China

1. Introduction

To facilitate business globalization in mainland China, companies have invested in employee *English for occupational purposes (EOP)* programs in the form of onsite classroom-based training, offsite institution-based training, and alternative methods such as e-learning and blended learning modes. The programs are based on needs analysis surveys conducted by global language training providers (EF Education First 2012; Global English 2012; Ipsos MORI 2009). However, little is known about the effectiveness of such workplace English training programs, especially in the Chinese context. Issues such as the short-term and long-term benefits of workplace English training programs, and the factors that contribute to those benefits form the focus of this study.

In the area of second language curriculum, program evaluation is defined as ‘the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of a curriculum, and assess its effectiveness and efficiency, as well as the participants’ attitudes within the context of the particular institutions involved’ (Brown 1989: 235). This definition of evaluation applies to *EOP* programs in the workplace. It collects and analyzes relevant and comprehensive information, assesses their effectiveness and impact on the workplace and the individuals participating in the programs. However, in the *English for Specific Purposes (ESP)* literature, there has been shortage of research on program evaluation (Gillet and Wray 2006; Cheng 2006). Research is ‘limited on empirical investigation into the effectiveness of *ESP* teaching’ (Johns and Dudley-Evans 1991; Master 2005 in Basturkmen 2010, p. 9). A recent study is by Tsou and Chen (2014: 39), which developed a program evaluation framework based on Hutchinson and Waters’ 1987 model and the comprehensive framework for foreign language (FL) program evaluation. This program evaluation framework was applied in an undergraduate *ESP* program in a Taiwanese university. Nevertheless, an evaluation framework for the Chinese workplace context has yet to be developed. One aim of this study is addressing this gap.

2. Theoretical framework

2.2 Previous studies on workplace language training program evaluation

Earlier work on *ESP* course evaluation laid the foundation for developing a workplace *EOP* training program evaluation framework for the Chinese workplace context. Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 152 - 156) indicated that course evaluation is concerned with what should be evaluated (whether the

course fulfills learner needs and whether there is any fault in the course design in ‘syllabus, materials, teaching and learning techniques, the testing procedure, the logistic/administrative arrangements and the course evaluation system’), how an *ESP* course can be evaluated (using data from test results, questionnaires, discussions, interviews and informal methods), who should be involved in the evaluation (such as *ESP* teachers, learners and course sponsors), and when evaluation should take place (early in the course, at regular intervals, at the end of the course or after the course).

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998: 128 - 131) argued that evaluation can be both qualitative and quantitative in nature. At different times, evaluation can focus on aspects such as the learning resources, the classroom activities, the out-of-class support, the course design, teaching methodologies and the role of assessment. For example, in a workplace communication program preparing immigrants for employment, the program evaluation can take the form of evaluation questionnaires, a formal evaluation of teaching and the course, informal debriefing meeting at the end of each course with feedback from teachers, workplace consultants and managers, and a survey of the employment outcomes (Riddiford 2011: 79). In another study in New Zealand, program success has been evaluated by comparing participants’ performance in the classroom and workplace through such methods as interviews, journal entries, observations, focus group discussions, meeting in the workplace and reports from employers. These comprehensive methods can provide an in-depth record of the participants’ progress in the learning process, thereby clearly indicating the degree of effectiveness of the program (Marra, Holmes and Riddiford 2011: 98).

2.3 Creating an evaluation framework for workplace English training programs in China

To create an evaluation framework for this study, reference was made to a number of existing frameworks, which were then synthesized and adapted to meet the features of the Chinese context. In the area of evaluating training program effectiveness, a model designed by Kirkpatrick includes four levels: ‘reaction, knowledge, behavior, and results’; this model, adapted for use in both corporate and higher-education settings (Smidt, Balandin, Sigafoos & Reed 2009; Praslova 2010; Fitzpatrick, Sanders and Worthen 2004: 492) is applicable in the workplace *EOP* program evaluation context. In addition, the evaluation model in Adamson and Morris (2007: 277) particularly addresses the effectiveness of course design, the course delivery process, the learning

outcomes and the 'long-term effects'. Relevant data related to the training program can be gathered for analysis and evaluation of the program effectiveness. Moreover, as the workplace *EOP* training programs under study aimed at offering a learning-centered curriculum, the integrated evaluation framework (Hubball and Burt 2004: 54) for this type of program is relevant because it specifically analyzes the learning context by gathering data about student needs, resources, organizational structures in the areas of assessment, planning and programming.

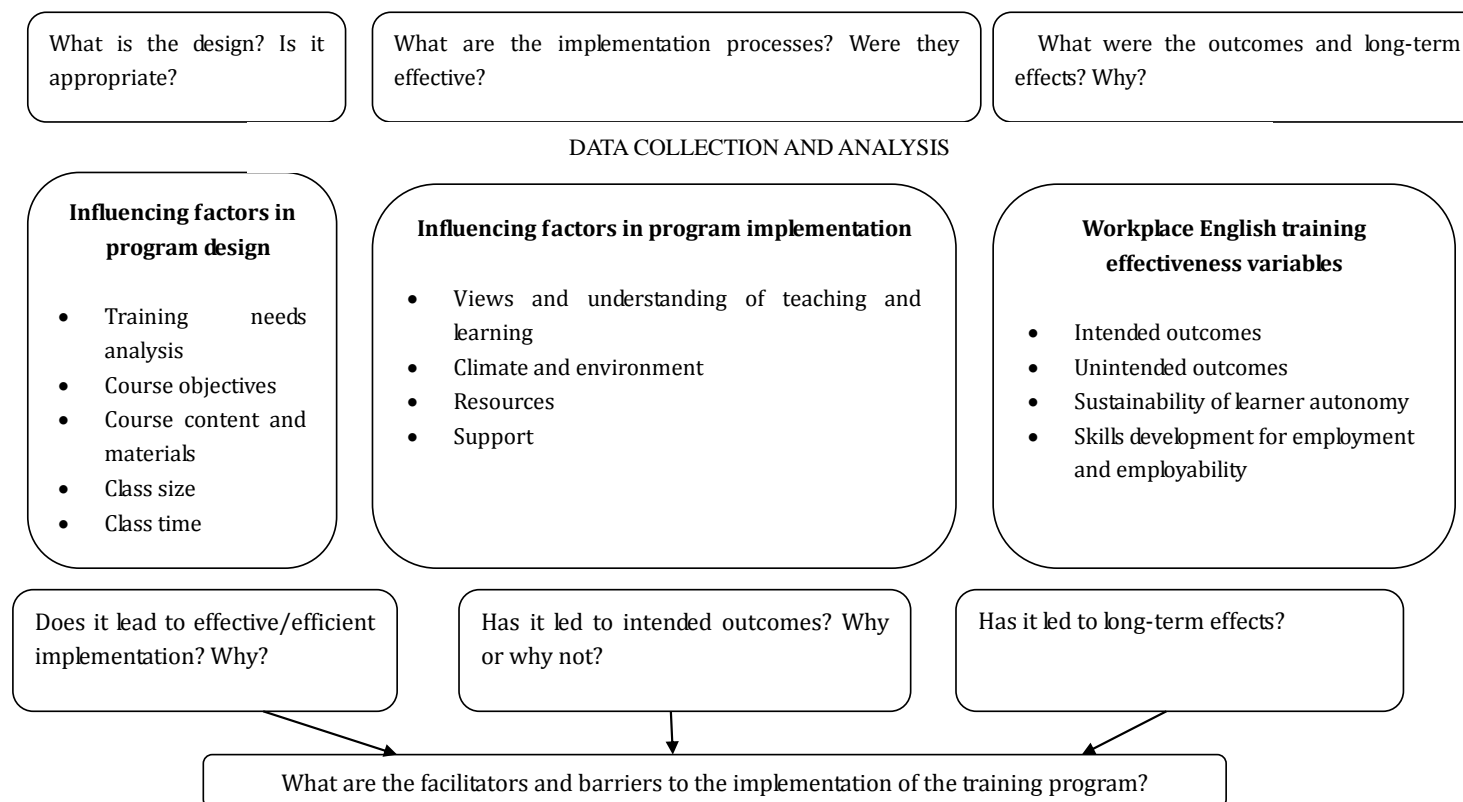
Based on these evaluation models and *ESP* theories, an evaluation framework (see **Figure 1**) was constructed to investigate the effectiveness of workplace *EOP* training in the Chinese context. The information relevant to program design (training needs analysis, course content and material, class size, class time), program implementation (views and understanding of teaching and learning, climate and environment, resources and support), workplace *EOP* training effectiveness (intended outcomes, unintended outcomes, sustainability of learner autonomy, skills development for employment and employability) collected from different workplace *EOP* training programs provides answers to the questions in the evaluative framework.

2.4 Research questions

Based on the constructed evaluation framework, this study addresses the following two main research questions:

- (1) How effective are *EOP* training programs in preparing employees for global business communication in the Chinese workplace context?
- (2) What factors contribute to or hinder the effectiveness of *EOP* training programs in the Chinese workplace context?

Figure 1: Evaluation framework for EOP training programs in the Chinese workplace



3. The present study

3.1 Research design and methods

This study comprises qualitative case studies of two workplace *EOP* training programs. To prescribe whether workplace *EOP* training is effective and appropriate should be context dependent. Therefore, it is necessary to select cases in which ‘information is obtained at various circumstances’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 230). By consulting the evaluation framework, the factors of teachers, students, curriculum and vocational context and their immediate and potential impact on the program learning outcomes and the business are explored.

The location of case studies is in Wuxi, in the eastern part of mainland China. Wuxi was selected as the research site because international business communication activities are common there and many workplace *EOP* training programs are conducted, particularly in companies receiving foreign investment. The case studies selected are typical of workplace *EOP* programs in the Chinese context.

3.2 Choice of case companies

Case study 1: **A private international machinery trading company in Wuxi** needed workplace *EOP* training because the mechanical engineers were due to participate in machinery training in the USA for which the medium of instruction was English. The role of the trainer was to help the engineers as well as the General Manager, Customer Service Representative and Accountant to enhance their business English oral and written communicative competence in the space of two months..

Case study 2: **A Sino-Italian joint venture dishwasher manufacturer in Wuxi** required annual *EOP* training for three months. The General Manager was Italian and had difficulty communicating with his subordinates, whose English he found incomprehensible. The training program was conducted with all office staff responsible for global communication activities in the departments of sales, accounting, quality control, human resources, and production. Their general English proficiency was at an intermediate standard. The overall aim of the programs was enhancing the effectiveness of the company’s operations in China.

3.3 Case study research process

Research was conducted on all of the training participants, with the General Manager and Human Resources Officer as decision-makers. One of the authors (Jenny Xie) was the sole workplace trainer. The process for the case research was developed from the *EOP* case research instruments designed by Kim (2008: 143-155), Ellis and Johnson (2002: p. 84-85), Frendo (2008: 18-30) and Friedenberg, Kennedy, Lomperis, Martin, and Westerfield (2003: 51-58).

Interviews based on the interview questions were used to gather views about the learning outcomes of workplace English programs and the extent of the contributions that they make to global business communicative competence development. The interviews produced in-depth information regarding learning outcomes and whether the workplace English training and learning programs could truly enhance employees' business communication performance. They also helped to indicate the extent to which on-the-job autonomous learning could ensure the sustainability of workplace *EOP* training and learning activities. Altogether there were 11 case study participants (referred to by pseudonyms) involved in eight individual and face-to-face semi-structured qualitative interviews as well as one written reply. The interviews were conducted in Chinese, and were later transcribed and translated into English.

Trainer's reflections focus on the workplace *EOP* program development and implementation process, the perceptions of training program effectiveness and the factors which may contribute to or hinder the program development and implementation. This reflection serves as the trainer's insider view which may not be accessible otherwise to external program reviewers.

Participant observation (Lynch 1996: 121), based on field note guidelines, were used to capture workplace communication needs, on-the-job and in-class training performance and after-class activities to ascertain the extent to which the *EOP* acquired in the program could make real changes to international business communication activities.

Documentary analysis has been conducted to analyze the course materials used for the workplace *EOP* training program. The documents include lesson plans, audio and video resources, media programs, textbooks, and handouts, along with the feedback from the training participants regarding their effectiveness in improving business communicative competence development.

3.4 Data analysis

The qualitative data analysis involving the findings from the training program observation field

notes, interview transcripts, trainer self-report, and documentary analysis were analyzed thematically based on the constructed evaluation framework in **Figure 1**. A case context analysis was also conducted in the dimensions of climate and environment, resources, support and sustainability of learner autonomy, to facilitate the understanding of how the contextual factors impact upon the effectiveness of employee communicative competence development.

4. Findings of the case studies

Case Study 1: workplace English training in a machinery production and trading company

4.1 Training needs analysis

Training needs analysis is crucial in deciding the training content in mainly written and oral communication skills development and course objective. Specific training needs and requirements are gathered usually before the course commence, which is good for the ongoing curriculum development. In this case study, before the training started, an interview was conducted with the General Manager to discuss the course objectives, course content and materials. As a result, it was determined that the training participants would be the general manager, mechanical engineer, customer service officer and accountant, who form a multi-functional team. The General Manager, customer service officer and accountant had particular needs to improve their telephone and presentation skills. The mechanical engineers needed to improve their English writing, reading and listening skills, for occupational purposes. All of the participants required good oral communication skills for receiving overseas clients. The General Manager wanted the learning content to be tailor-made and the training mode to be a mixture of formal and informal methods.

4.2 Course objective

After the training needs analysis talk with Stephen, the General Manager, the course objective was fixed as the development of *EOP* competence with an emphasis on its application in daily business. The training level was pitched at upper-intermediate.

4.3 Course content and materials

The course integrated learning materials in *Industry Matters* (Michler and Welt 2009) and *Passages*

– *Cambridge International English Course 4* (Richards and Sandy 2003) with the application of *EOP* skills in the participants' daily workplace situation. The course textbooks were supplemented by tailor-made spoken and written English exercises. *Industry Matters* has 10 teaching units, covering the following topics: a company visit, travel arrangements, telephone calls, meetings, presentations, a marketing campaign, production, contracts, and dealing with problems. Stephen felt the textbooks of *Industry Matter* and *Cambridge New Interchange 4* were adequate for the program:

Actually every textbook is quite useful. The content is not necessarily relevant, but the sentence structure or vocabulary can be used sooner or later. (Stephen)

Moreover, Stephen called for the addition of specific professional vocabulary 'encountered in product promotion materials and customer emails' to the program materials. The supplementary spoken and written practice materials proved to be effective in improving employees' practical oral and written communication skills. Moreover, Bill, a mechanical engineer, thought that the email and note-writing tasks for each session were especially helpful.

4.4 Class size

This case study program was conducted with four group members. The trainer felt quite comfortable with the group setting and had adequate chance to enable inner group communication to enhance communicative competence development.

Stephen considered '1 teacher, 3-4 students' as the most efficient compare to 'one teacher to more than 10, 20 or 30 students, within 45 minutes'. But Stephen thought one-on-one teaching was the most efficient. Helena, Accountant of the company agreed by preferring the small group tutorial, to focus the instructor's energy. Moreover, Laura Customer Service Representative of the company favored a 'one-on-one full English tutorial', rather than the small group format.

4.5 Class time

This corporate program ran from February 2010 to May 2010, with a total of 18 hours. The class time is every Saturday morning for six continual weeks. Training participants sometimes had to work on Saturdays. They were satisfied about the class time in the daytime as most of them could concentrate in class.

Program implementation analysis

4.6 Views and understanding of teaching and learning

The small-group training format enabled one-on-one communication and interactive activities such as role play and simulated talk. All of the training sessions were conducted in small groups of four people. The training mode was highly interactive. The pedagogical approaches were task-based, text-based, collaborative, skills-centered and learning team based. Based on the learning materials, trainers designed a range of oral communication, writing and quick reading tasks to enhance learner's occupational communication competence. Role play and simulation were used to mock the conversation, meeting and telephoning with customers, suppliers and colleagues. The training and learning of English occupational communicative competence were also based on authentic situations or communication problems from the learner's work scenarios. Instructional audio and video were used to showcase the best practice business presentations, telephoning, meetings and socializing.

Trainers also created a learning environment before and after the training sessions by introducing creative self-learning methods to integrate *EOP* learning with the daily work, such as by showing the students media programs and machinery manuals to enhance the understanding of language use in occupational contexts. The learners were encouraged to use their spare time to digest the learning content and apply it within work settings.

Commented [HKIEd1]: Jenny was the only trainer?

Commented [HKIEd2]: What are these?

Vocational context

4.7 Climate and Environment

The working language in the company is Mandarin Chinese. However there is on-the-job communication in English. The company owner thought using English on the job could provide a channel for workplace English communicative competence development:

English use is the best teacher. I reckon they should use English. Reading customers' e-mails is a kind of learning. Reading brochures is a kind of learning. (Stephen)

Alternative learning support can be derived from the workplace environment and daily life. It can be provided by both the trainer and the workplace. Jeremy, a mechanical engineer in the company preferred immersion in a compulsory English environment, where only English was used

in communication. The **trainer** also agreed that the training participants had been overcoming the barrier of the poor linguistic environment by putting more effort into using English on the job.

Commented [HKIEd3]: Who?

4.8 Resources and support

The company owner and training participants had varied views on the benefits of alternative learning support from online learning platforms, which can cater to their special work requirements. The technical support engineer tended to prefer online learning due to tight schedules and frequent business trips. Moreover a conducive English learning environment was considered more useful than a short-term training program in improving employees' workplace English communication skills. For instance, as Bill often had business trip, he enrolled in the EF web-based course in which there is daily 'one-on-one oral communication with a teacher'. Bill thought his job 'needs flexible and autonomous learning'. Helena believed that 'true improvement is in daily living', though she sometimes 'listens to some news or watches some movies, or reads some English novels', which is better.

Commented [HKIEd4]: Isn't this part of daily life?

Training effectiveness

4.9 Intended learning outcomes

After taking this training, the two engineers went with the company owner to the USA to participate in machinery training. They successfully passed the training and obtained their certificates, as evidenced in their company news, suggesting that the workplace *EOP* training has successfully helped the company to realize its training goals. Stephen thought there was 'real improvement' after the training. The trainer was also satisfied by their progress.

Training participants also obtained concrete help in workplace English communication skill development, such as oral communication and business e-mail writing. They have also acquired useful industrial knowledge:

Last training is organized mainly because my colleagues have to go abroad. It helps them to brush up their English. In this way, their vocabulary increases. Besides English, there will also be some essential industrial knowledge. When they communicate with others, they can have the topic. (Laura)

4.10 Learner self-assessment results

One year after completing the program, training participants Bill, Laura, Jeremy and Helena were

asked to self-assess their overall workplace English communicative competence, writing and oral communication on a 1-4 rating scale, 1 representing the lowest proficiency, and 4 representing the highest. The self-assessment results were analyzed using SPSS 21 and are shown below in **Table 1**.

Table 1 Self-Assessment for case study 1

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Language aptitude	4	2	2	2.00	.000
self-assessment writing	4	1	2	1.75	.500
oral	4	1	2	1.50	.577
Valid N (listwise)	4				

From the table, we can see that the average score for overall language competence is 2, which is lower intermediary. Writing and oral scores reflect a perception of particularly low competence. Laura scored 1 in writing and oral communication. Jeremy also scored 1 in oral communication ability. Although we acknowledge the limitations of self-assessment, these low ratings suggest that the participants themselves do not feel that they have sustained a high level of English competence over time.

4.11 Unintended outcomes

There were diverse benefits to the company garnered from this corporate program. Participants improved their workplace English communicative competence, career prospects, and confidence, interest and motivation. The company owner Stephen observed that through workplace English training, employees not only acquired professional improvement and salary increases, they also enhanced their confidence in using English on the job. Both Stephen and Laura had noticed a positive change in participants' attitudes and interest in learning workplace English.

Participants appreciated the scope for career enhancement that accrued from the training. Helena explained that if her English improved, she could have more 'communication opportunities with overseas customers' or 'meetings with people from different countries'. Increasing her vocabulary also made it easier for her to watch English movies, so she appreciated the improvements to both her professional and personal life. Bill agreed that the English training improved his 'personal quality'.

4.12 Long-term learning outcomes

The company owner, Stephen, thought that employees' workplace communication was becoming easier after three months' training. Where previously that had demonstrated 'zero foundation' in the language, they now showed a 'remarkable improvement in spoken English', but these gains began to deteriorate over time 'through not using English'.

The trainer felt the long-term learning outcomes would depend on the business environment, on whether English was becoming a daily working language and on whether employees were aware of the importance of continuous improvement.

4.13 Sustainability of learner autonomy

In case study, the company owner did not observe adequate commitment to workplace English learning from their employees. He felt that they lacked strong interest and motivation. Nevertheless, some training participants had become active English learners through participating in alternative training and learning activities.

Training participants were also aware of the importance of persistence in workplace English learning, perseverance, instrumental motivation, interest and the benefits of learning together with other colleagues. All these measures contributed to continuous workplace English communication skills development. Helena thought that she should combine interest and motivation together. Bill explained that by communicating with others at the same (English proficiency) level, the 'perseverance' can be 'stimulated'. For him, it was about *'whether going on learning English after the course ends'*. If there was *'progress, which generated economic or material improvement, I am definitely facilitated to continue learning English'*.

Nevertheless, Laura, facing the Chinese market, was de-motivated to persist in workplace English learning due to inadequate English use on the job. She arranged to learn English periodically. As her workplace communication was basically *'95% in Chinese'*, she could not use English in her job and thus *'her motivation is not strong and sufficient enough'*. Laura's case implied that if English is used often on the job, the learner will be more motivated to continue learning English after the course ends.

4.14 Skills development for employability and employment

Trainer thought that workplace English communicative competence training was, essentially, a

skills development process, through which training participants enhanced their employability.

One technical support engineer explained that improving his workplace English competence could facilitate his international career development when he enhanced his English presentation skills. Jeremy described two probable jobs that would have required him to travel around Asia and America. The *‘basic introduction and question and answer’* portions of the interview process went well, but he had trouble with *‘long presentations’*. He thought that if he could speak English, he would be able to *‘travel around Asia’*.

As Helena explained, employees working in *‘Chinese or foreign companies’* must communicate with *‘overseas clients, international experts and foreign counterparts’*. Communication in English was *‘convenient’* and helped with companies’ *‘technical ability improvement or business growth’*. It could also help an individual employee *‘improve his ability’*.

Case study 2 of workplace English training in a mainland China dishwasher production company N

Program design analysis

4.15 Training needs analysis

The training needs were collected through Company N’s HR department, at which point the trainer received the information through talks that occurred before the course commenced. The information was used to determine the course level and textbook, which were approved by the training participants.

The second case studied was a Chinese dishwasher manufacturer (Company N), acquired by an Italian global company. To facilitate the merger, the expatriate Italian General Manager expected to communicate more with his Chinese employees. However, the managerial staff did not possess adequate communicative competence. Thus, the HR Department organized a three-month workplace English training program for middle-level staff members with production, quality control, accounting, sales, managerial and HR functions.

However, compared to the rich and varied training needs and requirements elaborated in the post-course qualitative interviews with training participants and HR Officer, the training needs analysis in the initial stage may be inadequate to address the following job specific needs as the

trainer was not aware of the job context at that time.

4.16 Course objective

The course objective was to enhance managerial level professional English competence by focusing on the communication skills of listening and oral communication in the context of daily business operation of dishwasher manufacturing process.

4.17 Course content and materials

The training topics were based on the learning materials from *New Interchange English for International Communication 3* (Richards, Hull and Procter 2000), and were designed to enhance employees' spoken and written competence. There were 16 units in the textbook, supplemented by personalized spoken and written handouts, designed by the instructors. The training topics included dealing with consumer complaints, communication across cultures, education and learning, career moves, self-improvement, challenges and accomplishment. The training topics were wide ranging and covered different aspects of international communication.

Michael, quality control officer of company N felt that the textbook, which targeted trainees with a foundation for learning, was okay. The workplace English training program in Wuxi was a general English course. Michael observed that if it had '*referred to industry, the course would be more special and cover areas of quality, commercial, marketing and product*'. The training course he experienced in Singapore was mainly on business. The trainer linked the learning materials to real-world business scenarios by introducing professional terms in industry and authentic workplace international communication language, knowledge and skills. It proved effective based on the positive feedback was collected from the training participants.

4.18 Class size

Trainer felt quite comfortable with the 12-person group format. Michael thought that the 12-person group was a good platform for inter-peer communication and teamwork cultivation. Joan, the Accountant, preferred one-on-one teaching because she felt it would be more targeted and suitable. Yet having several people in a group allows trainees to communicate, such as in workshops, with everyone making progress.

4.19 Class Time

Company N's program ran from October 2006 to December 2006. Its total length was 32 teaching hours. Class time was from 4:30 - 6:30 pm, spanning both working and after-work hours.. Training participants were happy with the arrangement and they enjoyed the class time.

Program implementation analysis

4.20 Views and understanding of teaching and learning

Trainer reflected the delivery of the training program was enjoyable and covered the necessary steps in program implementation. Based on previous training needs analysis, the workplace business English training approaches were integrated and encompassed *EOP/ESP* needs-based, text-based, content-based and task-based approach, communicative competence development skills-based approach, simulation, conversation, cases and real world scenarios, construction of workplace learning and training climate, tailoring of the workplace learning curriculum, selection of instructional media, instructional design (including pre- and post-training activities) and one-on-one or peer tutoring.

In commenting on the process of teaching and learning in the workplace *EOP* program, Michael observed that role play was an often used teaching method for including '*dialogue*' in the training. In Singapore the role play was in English. George, the purchasing officer at company N simply preferred classroom-based spontaneous oral practice/conversation practice. He also recommended other training methods that can be used in workplace English training programs, suggesting '*case studies, practice, coaching and the cultivation of thinking ability*'.

Vocational context

4.21 Climate and environment

Training participants were concerned about the working language, which is Chinese in many companies, and can created barriers to employees' professional English communication skills development. Sarah, General Manager Secretary of company N explained that at the Wuxi branch, there was '*little environment*' for her to use English in her job, and thus the '*scenario would not recall the newly acquired knowledge*'. Joan and Sarah agreed that a multimedia method would be better than reading books and rote learning, where dynamic and flexible scenarios would be needed.

After the program, training participant Michael felt that his English improved the most in Singapore, the English working context and digressed later on his return to China. The business environment seemed to constrain his success in English learning because his daily work was confined to a small area, which made it difficult for him to '*practice a lot after the course*'. Upon his return from Singapore to China, his English use had degraded. He used 'English professional vocabulary in emails or reports', but communication in China was basically in Chinese, and there was not much English use. Michael said that his English would be better from frequent use if he worked overseas. At least Michael enjoyed career growth through the migration to work in an English medium environment. Trainer also agreed that the long-term learning outcomes could be hindered by the specific business environments.

Trainer was also concerned that Chinese as the workplace language could constrain the effectiveness of workplace English training, yet may be compensated by the provision of English multimedia resources.

4.22 Resources and support

In this case study, resources and support are realized through on-the-job communicative competence development is achieved through frequent English communication at the departmental level or by joining in company English training. Trainer thought participants' on-the-job communicative competence development was more effective and positive for the long-term learning outcomes.

For example, Michael has experienced a change in business functions from QC to marketing in its Singaporean subsidiary, which required a large amount of on-the-job professional English communication practice. This job change contributed to his workplace English communicative competence development and his career enhancement. Michael compared his experiences in Wuxi and in Singapore. In the Wuxi branch, the communication focus was on '*daily work, such as on quality*' while in Singapore, English communication was more about '*marketing and business*'. In Singapore, daily communication including dining and activities was in English. Michael also mentioned his '*shopping and business trip to Italy and Australia*' was all in English, offering him chances to improve his language skills.

Training participants thought they could obtain professional improvement in communication

by joining the workplace training programs. George explained that ‘*some courses can improve his business communication ability*’. Some courses targeted at ‘*purchasing ability*’ and his professional ability improved.

Training effectiveness

4.23 Intended student learning outcomes

In the post-course interviews, the employees stated that their present English proficiency was at CET-4 or lower levels. Currently, Michael explained he had ‘*passed CET-4, not CET-6*’. Tania had passed CET-4 as well while George had only reached CET-2. George commented that since entering the company, his vocabulary had increased, but grammar was not good. In the Company N study, CET-4 could also be used as a communication competence benchmark.

4.24 Learner self-assessment results

Pamela, Human Resources Officer at Company N, did a statistic calculation. In overall workplace English competence, 30% of the participants were at level 2 (lower intermediary), 50% were at level 3 (higher intermediary) and 20% were at advanced level 4. For workplace written communicative competence, 10% were at level 2 (lower intermediary), 40% were at level 3 (upper intermediary) and 50% were at advanced level 4. For workplace oral communicative competence, 5% were at level 1 (beginner), 15% were at level 2 (lower intermediary), 40% were at level 3 (upper intermediary) and 40% were at advanced level 4.

Training participants Michael, Sarah, Tania (R&D officer of company N), George and Joan were asked to complete a self-assessment of their language aptitude five years after program completion. They rated their writing and oral communication abilities on a 1-4 rating scale, with 1 representing the lowest proficiency and 4 representing the highest. The results of self-assessment were analyzed using SPSS 211 and are listed in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Self-assessment results for case study 2

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Language aptitude self-assessment	5	2	3	2.20	.447
writing	5	2	3	2.40	.548
oral	5	2	3	2.40	.548
Valid N (listwise)	5				

The training participants in Company N had an upper-intermediary level of language aptitude. Michael scored a 3 in language aptitude, writing and oral communication; Sarah scored a 3 in oral communication; and Tania scored a 3 in writing. These training participants had the potential to reach the advanced level of competence.

4.25 Unintended outcomes

Training participants stated that participating in workplace *EOP* training programs was beneficial to the cultivation of teamwork spirit. Michael explained as the '*teaching model is a workshop*', he could study together with his colleague in the factory, which helped to build up the teamwork through daily communication. They could understand each other using English, which increased '*communication methods or channels*'. Michael considered it as a '*platform of communication*'. Tania indicated an increased confidence after talking with her teacher and classmate discussions in the classroom environment. Trainer also observed synergy among training participants, which was good for organizational development.

4.26 Long-term learning outcomes

Training participants felt that the long-term learning outcomes depend on the frequency of professional English use on the job. Michael elaborated in the following comment:

In previous time, my work is confined to a small area. After that course, I have practiced a lot. After I returned to China for more than one year, the frequency of English use also lowered. Later there is more English professional vocabulary used in some emails or reports. But communication here is basically in Chinese, so there is not much use in this. English will be more used if I work overseas. (Michael)

4.27 Sustainability of learner autonomy

In company N's program, trainer observed sustained and autonomous workplace English learning activities in various forms, some of which provided good learning outcomes for training participants, such as Michael.

In addition to the classroom-based training, the training participants engaged in online self-access workplace English training and on-the-job professional English practice to improve their professional communicative competence. Michael explained that while he did not participate in

'online training' along with 'traditional training', he did read some email newsletters. He used English in the Singapore office and learned through 'online learning materials on the HQ website'. He also joined some 'English related activities in Wuxi and Italy'.

The participants also studied English after the training programs by watching movies and practicing on the job. George explained he sometimes watched English movies but did not persist very long. He preferred the classroom and he has tried some 'web-based training'. On the job, George practiced English by communicating with 'expatriates, in the meeting and in the work'. He also believed he could improve more through watching videos.

4.28 Skills development for employment and employability

The participants thought that as their workplace became more international, their professional English communication skills development could improve job promotions, job admissions and career paths. Michael explained that Company N's internal communication was all in English. In his previous department in 'finished product quality control', he used less English. After his transfer from 'CSQ to SQE, to take charge of the big department', however, he used English more often to communicate with 'overseas SQE'. Michael confirmed that 'English can benefit my promotion'. Later he transferred from Wuxi to Singapore also because of his good English which he said played 'an unforgettable role' in his development on the job. George agreed that English could enhance the 'possibilities of job promotion'.

Training participants also thought developing professional English communication skills would help their job applications. Sarah thought English skills were 'useful in recruitment'. On the job, English was useful because the 'remarkable process in English can indeed help the job and good performance'. Joan stressed that 'good English is helpful in job application'. Pamela indicated that workplace English competence not only benefitted job ability, but also was an important aspect of job promotion and salary increase.

5. Discussion

5.1 Research question 1: How effective are EOP training programs in preparing employees for global business communication in the Chinese workplace?

For workplace literacy programs, Gallo (2004: 119) summarized that program evaluation is

essential to show the ‘value of the program’ to program stakeholders by not only standard assessment but also meaningful impact measurement. This study is based in the Chinese context. It fully addresses the effectiveness of *EOP* programmes in preparing employees for global business communication in the workplace by collecting comprehensive and relevant information through the following instruments: post-course qualitative interviews, trainer’s reflection, business communication document study and participant observation in two complete workplace English programs in mainland China. In addition, the effectiveness issue is considered from both short- and long-term perspectives. The answer is that workplace *EOP* in the mainland China context can exhibit immediate effectiveness, such as the engineers’ success in passing their EMI machinery training certification in the U.S., and gradual improvement. The unintended outcomes have been similar to those in previous studies, such as increased confidence, motivation to continue learning English in the workplace autonomously, career development, improved professional abilities and teamwork. The training participants and company owners all agreed that workplace *EOP* programmes helped them develop skills that boost employability.

Yet, it is difficult to attribute considerable progress to workplace *EOP* programs after the short-term courses, which ranged from 18 hours in case study 1 to 32 hours in case study 2. As Burt and Saccomano (1995: 3) suggested, ‘it is unlikely that a workplace *ESL* class of 40- 60 hours will turn participants with low-level English skills into fluent speakers of English.’ It is important to ‘realize that *ESL* workplace programs may not provide enough practice time to accomplish substantial progress in English language proficiency.’ It implies that substantial progress in workplace *EOP* competence development relies on individual commitment in the learning process.

5.2 Research question 2: What factors contribute to and hinder the effectiveness of *EOP* training programs in the Chinese workplace?

Benseman (2012: 101 - 102) in the New Zealand context of his Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) study, found ‘characteristics of effective courses’ that include ‘experienced tutors/providers, tutors with LLN qualifications, integrating training into long-term company planning, courses run in work time, teaching content was related to participants’ specific learning needs based on learning needs analyses and their work and personal needs and interests, participants with high motivation and a sense of commitment, and consistent attendance at teaching sessions’. This Chinese context

study strongly confirms the previous studies through identifying factors that may contribute to and hinder the effectiveness of *EOP* training in the workplace.

Factors facilitating effective program design

Course content and material relies on ready-made textbooks, supplemented by authentic materials, case studies and professional vocabulary from the workplaces. This confirms the *ESP* literature which suggests the use of authentic materials based on needs analysis and investigation of specialist discourse (Basturkmen, 2010). Harding (2007: 10 - 11) also encouraged the ‘use of contexts, texts, and situation from the students' subject area, exploitation of authentic materials, making the tasks and text authentic’.

Class size ranges from 4 to 12-person group, which is comfortable to the trainer. The one-on-one group format is considered the most efficient, but may be tiring. Pair-work or groups of 8 – 12 people are considered optimum by one professional *EOP* trainer.

Factors hindering effective program design

Training needs analysis collects comprehensive information before the program begins through multiple instruments such as written assessment, surveys or interviews. However in the practice of these two case studies, limited information is collected in the training needs analysis stage through face-to-face talk with company decision-maker, which may be a factor hindering the program effectiveness. To contribute to the effectiveness of workplace *EOP* training, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998: 125) suggested collecting information relevant to ‘professional information about the learners, personal information about the learners, English language information, the learner's lacks, language learning information, professional communication information through linguistic analysis, discourse analysis and genre analysis, and information about how the course will be run’ before the course commences, which is missing in these two case studies.

Class time is preferably in the working time, affirming Benseman’s (2012) findings, or on the weekend in the daytime. Poor class time arrangement can reduce the program’s effectiveness, as can a truncated course length. Previous studies have found that significantly short courses were unlikely to have remarkable effects on participants’ English proficiency, and this study confirms those findings.

Factors facilitating effective program implementation

The workplace *EOP delivery and methods* rely the use of role play, case studies, communicative competence development scenarios incorporating authentic contexts, simulation and spontaneous conversation. This is in line with earlier methodology theories by Hutchinson and Waters (1987).

Teachers can provide trainees with learning *resources and support*, such as multimedia materials, books and magazines. On-the-job communicative competence development in the workplace also offers a good channel of support.

Factors hindering effective program implementation

In *climate and environment*, in most scenarios, working language is Chinese, which may constrain on-the-job communicative competence development. On the other hand, at the time when working language is English, that may increase the chances of international business communication competence development.

6. Conclusion

This study first develops workplace *EOP* training program evaluation framework in **Figure 1** based on the evaluation theories and models. This study then applies the evaluation framework to two workplace *EOP* case studies in mainland China. Based on the evaluation framework, training program effectiveness is examined through factors of training program design, training program implementation, variables of short-term training effectiveness and long-term effects. Various instruments have been used to collect data, including qualitative interviews, documentary study, workplace trainer's reflection and participant observation with training participants during the program and after the training programs have been completed.

This study contributes to the literature by identifying positive and negative factors in programme design and implementation across different workplace *EOP* training programmes to see whether there is any "fault" in the process and whether there is room for improvement. In this study, most of the program design factors lead to effective program implementation. The training needs analysis could have been more thorough to cover authentic workplace discourse (Koester, 2010) being included in the course materials, which might have led to more effective and efficient

programme implementation. In program implementation, most of the factors lead to short-term learning outcomes and long-term effects, except for climate and environment in which Chinese as a working language could constrain effectiveness.

As workplace *EOP* training is context specific, different companies can generate various unique cases or models of corporate programs. Their training effectiveness in program design and implementation is worth investigation. It is also necessary to examine corporate-specific context, if resources permit. Future research can be expanded in other areas or regions with multinational companies who place great emphasis on workforce development, in particular professional communicative competence enhancement. More cases will be needed to improve the transferability of the findings to other industrial or cultural contexts.

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