The Whole-process Research Paper Writing Task in the College EST Course

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Abstract. The current situation requires college students to develop their academic English competences, but the input-focused EST courses can’t meet the needs. This paper introduces and analyses the design of the whole-process writing task in the College EST course. This task requires the students to do a research and report it in the paper, which stimulates students to think and work hard in and out of class to plan and do the research creatively and learn various skills to finish the output task, research paper writing. The actual teaching and learning result shows it works well and has gained success to some degree.

Introduction

The rapid development of science and technology and broadened international communication, especially Chinese Belt and Road strategies, make it more necessary for college students to develop their academic English competences to confront their future work on technology development and research or their further studies at home or abroad. Even when in college, students should get to know the latest news about the development of science and technology, and the trend of the field development, so that they can make predications about their own development. Thus, English literature reading and other academic communication methods are necessary for them to get the related knowledge and information. Some college students may even have the opportunities to attend the international conferences and present and argue for their creative ideas and thoughts in public in English. Some universities encourage the students to publish their research papers in international journals. That’s why many universities provide courses like English for Science and Technology (EST) for students to cultivate college students’ competences in English.

ESP courses have broadened students’ knowledge range, improve their English competences in the field of science and technology and help much to strengthen students’ quality as international comprehensive talents [1]. They have not only enhanced students’ linguistic and social skills, but also deepen their learning in their field, and sharpen their competitiveness in their academic development.

Within the decades, teachers and experts tried to find ways to improve the effect and efficiency of ESP courses. For example, paper [2] suggests the case-based and task-based teaching methods. Paper [1] stresses the variety of the task designing, and points out that teachers should consider students’ interests in the task designing. Paper [3] builds a three-dimensional teaching method supported by information technology. Paper [4] thinks that EST courses in the colleges of science and technology can take advantages of the special sources from the colleges and try to improve students’ basic translating skills and cultivate their reasoning and logical thinking. But all these methods are focused on the input of information and skills, but not the most important result index, output. The teachers try different ways to stimulate students to learn, but they don’t know how much they have learnt or how much they can do.

The Problems of EST Classes

The author has also taught EST for a decade and worked together with a stable teaching team,
choosing mature and qualified textbooks, carefully selecting and enriching the teaching content, designing and reforming means of student assessment. For example, the author makes full use of vivid materials such as video and audio to improve students’ listening ability and oral analysis and expression ability in English; exercises students' thinking and expression ability with mathematical questions; introduces skills and knowledge related to English-Chinese translation; guides students in analyzing English articles on science and technology, and enhances students’ vocabulary, and so on. Students are also encouraged to do many tasks after class, for example, collect professional articles and try to translate them.

However, there are still some aspects needing improvement. Firstly, input is still more important than output. For example, reading and listening are the main contents in class, which fails to fully arouse students' attention to the ability of speaking and writing in English. Secondly, students’ extra-curricular time is not fully utilized to promote their actual ability of using English. In addition, students' English learning and professional learning are not fully united and combined, so that their ability of autonomous exploration and learning should be stimulated and they should be encouraged to combine their English learning and professional learning.

The Whole-process Research Paper Writing Task

EST belongs to English for Special Purpose (ESP), which should include three parts, that is, Social English, Study Skills and the English of a Student’s Specialization [5]. The study skills are thought to be the foundational content, and they are even considered as the basic feature which separates it from other teaching methods. Study skills should include lingual and non-lingual skills. Lingual skills include “the skills of listening to the English class and take notes, reading literatures and taking notes, searching for the needed materials, reading and getting the main ideas, writing academic papers and experimental reports, attending academic discussion. Non-lingual skills include the skills to make use of the sources of library, searching for the reference and make full use of them, and make use of the tools like dictionaries. All these skills should be cultivated and should be the goal of EST.

Therefore, it’s necessary to design such a course with the reformed teaching content and method to meet the requirements and cultivate the above-mentions skills of college students. The whole-process research paper writing task in the course is not made up of a series of tasks to fulfill the purpose. Instead, the task requires the students to do a research and write an English paper to report, and that’s why it is called the whole-process research paper writing task.

The Content and Designing of the Whole-process Task

The entire task is to complete a research and write an English research paper. In order to finally complete this challenging task, it is necessary to complete the sub-tasks that should be finished in and out of the class, so that it will not be too difficult for the students, and the students can fully learn, explore, report and accumulate their competences in the process of completing the sub-tasks, and finally complete the whole challenging task. In the whole process, students’ skills are practiced to meet the academic English communication needs of listening, reading, writing and oral expression in the professional field, and lay the foundation for the students’ independent ability in EST and the future development in their professional fields.

The sub-tasks of each part of the course are as follows.

Sub-task 1: Literature search and reading—learn to search for the information and understand related material.
Sub-task 2: Topic selection—learn to find the interested and feasible research topic.
Sub-task 3: Abstract writing—learn to focus on the main problem and research plan.
Sub-task 4: Conduct research—learn to plan and carry on the research.
Sub-task 5: Outline Writing—learn to plan the structure and main points of the paper.
Sub-task 6: Introduction writing—learn to write the literature review and introduce the paper briefly.
Sub-task 7: The main body of the paper—learn to report the research procedure, result and discussion.
Sub-task 8: Conclusion and analysis—learn to summarize the research and give a final conclusion.
Sub-task 9: Paper revision—learn to revise the paper.
Sub-task 10: Presentation—learn to present the research or the paper with the help of ppt.

The Actual Effect of the Task

The EST course with the Whole-process Research Paper Writing Task has opened four times for the second-year college students in the University of Science and Technology of China since 2017. Each time all the students who regularly attended the classes finished the research and the paper and passed the course. In addition, they were required to send the abstracts to the International Collegiate Conference co-organized by China English for Academic Purposes Association, Shanghai Advisory Committee on College English Teaching and some other organizations. Even though because of the early deadline, there were only a few full papers were submitted to the conference each time, there were always one or two papers which won Excellence Prize. Through this experience, students also got to know the procedure of attending an international academic conference.

Empirical research can be done to further test the effect and efficiency of this EST course with the Whole-process Research Paper Writing Task.

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References