Empirical Study on “EGP+ESP”-Based College English Curriculum Reform in Application-oriented Universities: A Case Study

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Abstract. Before the formulation of Guidelines on College English Teaching, different types of universities have already made attempts on the English-teaching reforms in accordance with their own objectives of talents training. After a thorough survey, we made an empirical research on the “EGP+ESP”-based college English curriculum reform which was carried out among 1796 non-English major students of Grade 2014 and Grade 2015 in Huaihua University. The result shows that 88.07% of the students think it is necessary to open ESP courses and intercultural communication courses; 60.96% think it’s reasonable to pass CET-6 before selecting ESP; 44.1% and 25.47% of the students prefer the courses that aim to improve English speaking and listening ability; 39.2% care whether the elective courses are helpful for employment; 43.2% concern whether the course can improve their humanities; 12% are interested in whether the course is helpful for postgraduate study or studying abroad; only 27.78% of the students think their selection of courses isn’t influenced by their classmates; 65.54% of the students think the ESP courses should be conducted in the form of discussion; 55.56% and 31.37% tend to choose the open-book examination or writing course paper.

Introduction

For a long period, the teaching contents and teaching methods of college English course is highly overlapped with that of English course at elementary education stage, and English learning cannot meet the needs of students’ career development, both of which result in students’ lack of English learning motivation. Therefore, it is imperative that the teaching reform of College English should be carried out. According to the forthcoming Guidelines on College English Teaching compiled by the National Foreign Languages Teaching Advisory Board, the content of college English teaching should be composed of English for General Purposes (EGP), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Cross-cultural Communication. Thus college English courses are classified into compulsory courses, designated elective courses and optional elective courses. In line with their types, levels, students’ quality, running orientation and objectives of talents training, universities and colleges should arrange the teaching contents and hours properly by following the rules of language teaching and learning so as to form a distinctive, open, dynamic, scientific and reasonable course system for college English. [1] It is a top priority to determine the proportion of EGP, ESP and Cross-cultural Communication courses and open ESP courses conducive to achieving training objectives after getting the essence of the new teaching guidelines.

Definition of Related Terms and Theoretical Basis

EGP and ESP

EGP, namely English for General Purposes, puts more emphasis on students’ basic skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating to lay a good language foundation for their further study of ESP courses. ESP, short for English for Specific Purposes, requires learners’ knowledge in specific field besides basic language knowledge. In other words, EGP is the basis of ESP, while ESP is the extension and continuation of EGP. Though arranged in different chronological order, they are closely interrelated and integrated with each other in content.
Application-oriented Universities

Faced with regional economy, relied on disciplines and based on application-oriented education, application-oriented universities put more emphasis on undergraduate education. This kind of universities can be defined as those aiming to cultivate high-level talents with practical skills in line with social needs. Application-oriented universities should set up clear developing goals, control their developing directions, and establish the training mode for innovative talents with practical skills so as to strengthen the construction of application-oriented disciplines, give full play to their advantages and develop their own distinctive features. [2]

Theoretical Basis

As Hutchinson & Waters (1987) point out, the teaching of ESP courses is based on students’ needs analysis which includes target needs analysis and learning needs analysis. They hold that target needs refer to the knowledge or skills students acquired after learning, which include three aspects: necessities (what the learners must achieve), lacks (what the learners lack), and wants (what the learners hope to achieve). To put it another way, target needs help teachers determine their teaching content on the basis of students’ needs, deficiencies and targets. [3]

With the internationalization of higher education and economic globalization, we must walk out of the traditional teaching mode. Through analyzing college students’ needs in learning English and investigating colleges’ or employers’ needs, we would like to establish new ideas as follows: English study must serve colleges and meet the students’ demands for professional learning. [4]

Case Analysis

Situated in the west of Hunan province, Huaihua University is a typical local university. With clear running orientation, it strives to build a high level application-oriented university for undergraduates. Non-English majors in grade 2014 totaled 2,815 began to try curriculum reform of college English. Then students in grade 2015 totaled 2,738 are participating the second round of the reform. Up till now, a total of 1,787 students have passed CET-4. Taking the passed students as experimental subjects, Huaihua University opened some ESP courses and Cross-cultural Communication courses as specifically shown in the Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Opening time</th>
<th>Selected students</th>
<th>ESP course names</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>third semester</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>Humanities English, English Speech and Oratorical Skills, Business English</td>
<td>College English Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>fourth semester</td>
<td>996</td>
<td>Comparative Study on Chinese and Western Cultures, Practical English Writing, Appreciation of British and American Literature</td>
<td>Professional English Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>third semester</td>
<td>791</td>
<td>Training Course for CET-6, Speech and Oratorical Skills, Business English</td>
<td>the above two</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Towards the end of the third semester, we conducted a questionnaire survey on 657 students in grade 2014 who took ESP selective courses to learn their learning situation and views towards the opening of ESP courses.

Opening Time

A solid language foundation is needed for ESP learning; otherwise, it will have little effect. In local colleges and universities, quite a few students are weak in English and their learning enthusiasm is insufficient. In the questionnaire survey, only 13.01% are satisfied with their English
level, while 36.3% are dissatisfied with that. 60.96% of the sample students of grade 2014 consider that ESP courses opened in the third semester will affect the passing rate of CET-6. This group of students hope to take CET-6 training course before selecting ESP courses. Through communication, it has found out that many students take the passing of CET-4 and CET-6 as one of their major tasks in university in that it is helpful for them to hunt jobs in the future. To meet with students’ demands, Huaihua University has set up CET-6 training class in the third semester for students of grade 2015 who have passed CET-4 (791 students), with 520 attendees, accounting for 65.74% of the total number for the current period. It shows that there is a demand for CET-6 training among students, and better results will come if we adapt to students’ learning needs.

From the survey, we suggest that ESP courses could be put off by one semester after students have passed the CET-6. The ESP courses should not only be limited to the third and fourth semester, but continue until the eighth semester to make sure students could choose the ESP courses according to their needs.

Course Setting

According to the survey, speaking and listening are the preferred abilities for the students to improve, which respectively accounts for 44.1% and 25.47%. 39.2% of students care whether the elective courses are helpful for employment; 43.2% of them concern whether the course could improve their humanities; 12% students are interested in whether the course could pave way for the postgraduate study or studying abroad. Thus while setting ESP courses, we should fully take into account students’ learning goals, motivation and their future job-hunting direction.

CET-6 training course can be set in the third semester; at the same time, some senior English skill courses could be opened, such as Advanced English Viewing, Listening and Speaking Course and English Newspaper Reading; in the fourth semester, more ESP courses should be offered such as Business English, Tourism English, Hotel English, Workplace English, and English Speech; cross-cultural courses could be Comparative Study on Chinese and Western Cultures, and Appreciation of British and American Literature, English Movie Appreciation; and other courses for higher level test could be included such as English for Postgraduate Examination, TOEFL, IELTS and also Academic English.

Course Selection

At present, ESP and intercultural courses are compulsory courses, and students who have passed CET-4 have to take one course per semester and then take an examination at the end of each semester. Students are free to choose what they like. 58.11% of the students believe the selection of ESP courses should be based on their own will, while 41.89% of them think it is acceptable for the university to conduct curriculum adjustment and they are subject to the adjustment. 25.7% of the students think their ESP courses selection is largely affected by classmates; on the contrary, only 27.78% of them think there is no influence from their classmates. Students who actually feel the influence account for 46.58%. These data show that students are herding in the selection of courses. Nearly half of the students feel it’s acceptable to receive guidance and adjustment while choosing courses, which provides a good evidence for curriculum adjustment in the future reform.

Teaching Mode

After observing some ESP classes and discussing with students, the author has found that language teachers tend to follow the traditional teacher-centered teaching mode, with most of them adopting the grammar-translation method. Under such pattern, students passively accept knowledge with no active participation and critical thinking. They lack real communication. It is contrary to the law of language learning, and also runs counter to the learning objectives of ESP courses. 65.54% students hope that ESP courses could be conducted in discussion; 20.95% of them hope it is in the form of lecture; and 10.81% of them hope it could be taught in task-based method.

ESP teachers should actively explore effective teaching methods and change old teaching models, which means students should give full play to their initiative and take the leading role in class.
Together with the adoption of task-based method, the combination of discussion and lecture can improve students’ comprehensive ability, which helps them learn relevant courses in English.

**Assessment Method**

ESP courses are designed to be examined, either in the way of writing course paper or taking open-book examination. According to the survey, lack of learning pressure will affect the learning outcome. 16.78% of the students believe that ESP courses are very helpful in improving their English; 43.36% think it’s nothing special; while 25.87% think it’s of little help. Both teachers and students should account for the poor effect. Students who choose the open-book examination or writing course paper account for 55.56% and 31.37% respectively; only 7.19% choose close-book examination. This result is partially due to the nature of ESP courses. On the other hand, it shows that students want to deliver with easier assessments. 44.44% of the students think that the assessment of ESP courses should focus on the integrated use of knowledge; 31.37% think simple applications of the knowledge should be checked. This indicates that most students understand the goal of ESP courses is to practice.

Putting appropriate pressure on students, such as requiring them to obtain a certificate or participate in competitions, can improve the ESP courses’ learning outcome. For example, students who choose speech courses need to participate in school or provincial speech contests, and the competition results will be taken into assessment; students who choose Business English need to take BEC exam to obtain Cambridge Business English Certificate. Specify assessment requirements before students elect courses and urge them to finish with competitions and certificates.

**Teachers’ Training**

 Teachers majoring in language are not adequate for ESP courses’ teaching, compared to those qualified ESP teachers with solid English and professional knowledge. So for teachers’ training, the school needs to combine sending teachers out and bringing talents in, thus making great efforts to achieve transformation for language teachers. University can also organize joint training projects with a variety of professional teachers, or introduce teachers with overseas studying experience.

**Results**

Embracing the reform, 88.07% of the students think it is necessary to open ESP courses and intercultural communication courses. For the third and fourth semester, the popularity of such courses is 78.91% and 68.24% respectively. And 68.31% of the students want to study college English with those who have passed CET-4, which means that the CET-4 is a recognized standard for classifying students and in line with the students’ learning needs.

**Conclusion**

In the application-oriented colleges and universities, ESP courses and intercultural communication courses should be added in addition to traditional EGP courses. They should be suitable for the university’s educational goals, talents training model and students’ knowledge basis. Through a series of measures, such as adding examination courses, paying attention to the difficulty level of each course and the proper time to open, providing students with guidance on selecting courses, using competitions to promote study, and training or introducing ESP teachers in various ways, we can constantly modify and perfect English curriculum models for local application-oriented colleges and universities.

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