From EGP to EAP: Research on the Development of Teachers’ Competence

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Abstract. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is believed to be the trend of college English teaching reform and development; therefore it is necessary for English teachers to shift from English for General Purposes (EGP) to EAP. The success of the shift lies in the development of teachers’ competence. Based on the competency framework proposed by BALEAP for EAP teachers, the paper discusses the competence that English teachers need to acquire in order to be qualified for EAP teaching and the strategies for teachers’ professional development. The aim is to provide reference for English teachers’ shift from EGP to EAP.

Introduction

College English teaching in China has been featured by English for General Purposes (EGP). At the beginning of this century reforms were started in 2002 and 2007, "but no matter what to do, the society and the students seem not to be satisfied with college English teaching"[1]. Therefore, how to improve it so that it does help promote the learners' ability to use English has become one of the important issues in the field. Many scholars and researchers (Luo, Han, Cai etc.) hold that English for Academic Purposes(EAP) will become the main stream of English teaching in the new century, so college English teaching in China needs to be oriented toward EAP[234]. They suggest adding EAP courses to the current English curriculum, shifting gradually from EGP to EAP, for EAP courses enable learners to use English for their own sake rather than for a future unclear goal. However, the success of the shift lies to a great extent in the development of the teachers' EAP teaching competence. Teachers will be qualified for EAP teaching with further professional development on the basis of EGP teaching. Then, what are the differences between EAP teaching and EGP teaching? What are the requirements for EAP teaching? What preparations do teachers need to make in order to give EAP courses? The paper tries to discuss the above questions and offer strategies for English teachers' professional development.

EAP and its Teaching Theory

Jordan (1975) cites the definition of EAP (from ETIC 1975) when he explains the concept, "EAP is concerned with those communication skills in English which are required for study purposes in formal education systems"[5]. Obviously, the aim of EAP teaching is to help learners to acquire the ability to learn, to do research, and to communicate in English. It is a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and it can be further divided into English for General Academic Purposes and English for Specific Academic Purposes. The former concerns about the 'common core', mainly involving 'study skills', for example, listening to academic lectures and note-taking, academic writing and discussion; the latter is related to specific disciplines, for instance, business English, engineering English, etc. focusing on the language ability required by a certain discipline.

EAP/ESP differs greatly from EGP in that the former has clear teaching purposes, but the latter does not, therefore, "in some situations, English for General Purposes has been named 'TENOR' - 'the Teaching of English for No Obvious Reason'"[5]. EGP aims at helping learners to acquire the general English form of expression that people use in their daily life, e.g. when they go shopping, call someone, or write to someone. However, such social purposes of English as a foreign language are not significant for Chinese learners, so they are unlikely to be motivated to learn to use it.
Eventually, they learn English for test-taking. Is it the need of the learners or the society? If not, then what is the reason for the existence of English teaching? EGP teaching is oriented by language, while EAP is by learners and context. Most EGP courses focus on listening and speaking, teaching learners the conversational and social style; but EAP courses focus on reading and writing, teaching them the formal academic style. Liz Hamp-Lyons summarizes the main differences of EAP and EGP and describes the nature of EAP by citing Streven's view: the focus of EAP is not the literature and the culture of English speaking countries but the practical use of English, and language teaching matches the need and the goal of learners [6].

As an important branch of ESP, EAP displays the characteristics of ESP, Strevens (from Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001) summarizes them as follows: 1) courses are designed for learners' specific need; 2) content is planned for specific discipline or profession; 3) teaching focus is vocabulary, syntax, semantics and discourse; 4) teaching method is different from that of EGP [7]. Based on these characteristics, Dudley-Evens & St. John point out, ESP course design and teaching practice should follow the teaching principles: 1) authenticity, 2) need analysis, 3) and learner-centeredness [8]. 1) Authenticity is shown by the teaching materials of EAP/ESP, which come from the learners' disciplines compiled by the professionals for the learning of related specialty rather than for language teaching. The use of teaching materials depends on the teaching purposes on the premise that they ensure that the content and the difficulty are proper for the learners. Hence, Jordan (from Maley 1986) holds that authenticity should be considered at least in four aspects: materials, task, event, and learners' experience [5]. 2) Ideal course design is always based on the effective need analysis. Since EAP/ESP has clear target situation, target situation analysis constitutes an important aspect of need analysis, which analyzes the textual features, communicative features in different fields. In the learning process how learners learn and how they use learning strategies becomes another aspect of need analysis that is, learning need analysis. Target need analysis helps us understand what learners need to do in target language situation; learning need analysis enables us to know what they lack and what they need to do for learning purposes. 3) In the teaching process, what approach to take to meet learners' need? The usual way is to tell learners how to learn. As a result there is always discrepancy between learners' knowledge and ability. In EAP/ESP teaching, communicative activities, problem-solving exercises, tasks, projects etc. are the main forms, which embody the teaching idea of learner-centeredness. EAP/ESP poses much higher demand than EGP for teachers' knowledge structure and teaching competence. Therefore, college English teachers should not be confined within EGP teaching and should improve their own adaptability. As Robinson (from Jordan 1997) said, "the key quality needed by the ESP teacher is flexibility: the flexibility to change from being a general language teacher to being a specific purpose teacher, and the flexibility to cope with different groups of students, often at very short notice"[5]. The paper refers to BALEAP competency framework for teachers of English for academic purposes and discusses knowledge and competence that English teachers need to acquire in order to be qualified for EAP teaching.

Knowledge and Competence Required by EAP

Knowledge transmission is believed to be the duty of teachers, so they attach great importance to it. But knowledge also needs to be exchanged in order to broaden it. However, it is not given enough attention in our higher education. Consequently, learners do not get adequate training in academic writing, paper presentation and publication. To help them acquire these skills, EAP teachers should be able to do research, to write in clear, coherent and proper English, and to communicate with the professionals. Meanwhile, teachers should avoid academic misconduct and teach learners how to cite and how to use referencing. In this way they will learn to show respect for other's work.

Since there exist differences among disciplines, EAP teachers are expected to differentiate them in language expressions and help learners to be aware of discourse features of text in their disciplines. Hence, EAP teachers should not only focus on "grammar and syntax at the level of word, clause, and sentence", but also emphasize "discourse features beyond the sentence, cohesion and coherence, semantics and pragmatics, approaches to text classification" [9]. With knowledge
and competence in discourse analysis, teachers are able to help learners to write and speak in the way of their disciplines.

To achieve the purpose, EAP teachers need to know what the target situation requires for learners and what they lack in academic learning. Since long, our English teaching has put emphasis on the transmission of linguistic knowledge and has neglected the development of learners' critical thinking and autonomy. As a result, they tend to receive others’ ideas passively without questioning, and receive knowledge without actively constructing it. When teachers understand the importance of critical thinking and autonomy in academic learning, they "will employ tasks, processes and interactions" [9] to develop learners' critical thinking and autonomy. Based on the consideration of various needs in learning, teachers will be better oriented in their choice of teaching content and teaching method.

What to teach is a question that syllabus design concerns. Since EAP courses aim at developing learners' skills in discourse processing, text processing and text production become the main content of EAP courses. With text processing skills and strategies, teachers will be able to give support to learners in listening and reading practice. With text production skills and strategies, they will teach learners speaking and writing with a text-based approach. Under the competency framework, EAP teachers should "identify and analyze academic genres and the functional and rhetorical features of academic texts" [9], because they are accepted and followed, and have great influence on the content and form of a text. With these, they will help learners to use language to communicate appropriately and effectively.

With text processing and text production as the main content, EAP courses aim at developing learners' ability to communicate in English. Hence, 'procedural knowledge' rather than 'language knowledge' is the focus, and 'learning by doing' is the feature of the teaching process. So teachers should differentiate between an EAP class and an EGP class, and understand "the teaching techniques and the rationale for their appropriate use"[9], and be able to use them in the teaching practice.

As a complicated process, the assessment of EAP courses is varied, which can be criteria-based and performance-based. EAP teachers need to choose the proper form of assessment for a single skill or integrated skills, for the purpose of providing feedback on learners' performance and teachers' teaching.

**EAP Teacher Professional Development**

To be qualified for EAP teaching, English teachers have to take the challenge of shifting from EGP to EAP. Therefore, English teachers’ in-service training should be enhanced. It is a process of continuous learning and practice, and it is a process of teacher professional development. It needs the joint efforts, but teachers' self-development plays a decisive role.

EAP teaching poses higher demands for teachers: 1) they should have systematic language knowledge, especially knowledge of register, discourse, and genre, so that they can give guidance to text analysis, literature reading and paper writing in different disciplines; 2) they should have comprehensive teaching skills from course design to implementation, for they are interrelated and produce effect on EAP courses; 3) they should have ability to do academic research so that they can give help to learners in their academic practice. Hence, English teachers need to make judgment about their professional development accordingly, and acquire the related knowledge and competence through all possible ways. For instance, they can read EAP/ESP journals and books, getting to know the latest development at home and abroad in this field. They can participate EAP/ESP course training program and related conferences, so that they can exchange ideas with the professionals and obtain first-hand information and resources. Meanwhile, they should reflect on their teaching, thinking and summing up the merits and demerits. In this way, they are expected to promote their professional growth. They can also start action research, observing the teaching process carefully, locating problems, collecting data, analyzing and assessing the results, and write a report or a paper on the basis of it. Gradually they will improve their ability to do research.
Though EAP teaching aims at developing learners' language ability and study skills, the teaching materials involve knowledge of specialties. But language teachers are unlikely to get to know them all. Therefore, cooperation between language teacher and subject teacher will be an effective way. In joint-teaching, EAP teachers provide support at the level of language, helping learners to solve language problems; subject teachers act as information providers, enabling language teachers to understand the related knowledge so as to proceed with the teaching. In this way learners' subject knowledge and language skills are likely to be developed. The forms of cooperation are various. Which form to adopt depends on the teaching requirement, the content of cooperation, and the willingness of both sides. Besides cooperation between teachers, cooperation between teacher and student is also necessary. In terms of subject knowledge, students know more than language teachers, so teachers need to change their role and ask students in order to understand what they do not know. As Hutchinson and Waters (from Jordan 1997) said, "ESP teachers do not need to learn specialist subject knowledge", but “the ability to ask intelligent questions” [5].

Apart from English teachers' self-development, administrators of school should pay attention to the training of EAP teachers. They need to make proper planning for EAP teachers’ training, sponsor the related programs, and encourage teachers to offer EAP courses. Eventually, EAP teachers will grow.

Conclusion
EAP has gradually become the trend of college English teaching in China, so the shift from EGP to EAP is imperative. This requires English teachers to improve their teaching through professional development so that they can keep in step with the time.

References


