

# Research on ESP Courses in Application-oriented Private Colleges Based on Needs Analysis

Lingyan Zheng

College of Foreign Languages  
Fuzhou University of International Studies and Trade  
Fuzhou, China

**Abstract**—Guided by the theory of needs analysis, the ESP course set in five private universities which start application-oriented transformation in Fuzhou and the needs of students, teachers and employers for the course are investigated through questionnaires and interviews. It is found that the implementation of ESP is different and there is no uniform standard; the teaching methods are relatively out-of-date and the sources of teaching materials are single; qualified teachers are in short supplied. In order to better implement ESP teaching, it is necessary to improve teaching methods so as to teach students in accordance with their aptitude, strengthen the construction of ESP teaching methods, and optimize the structure of teachers.

**Keywords**—needs analysis; ESP; private universities; questionnaires; interviews

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, with the acceleration of globalization and the rapid development of society in an all-round way, the demand for high-level foreign language talents has become more and more urgent. In order to meet the needs of society for talents, many domestic scholars have begun to devote themselves to the reform of College English teaching. At present, the majority of undergraduate college English teaching is general English teaching which is CET-4 and CET-6 oriented and focusing on the basic skills of language. The shift from general English teaching to the teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is not only the expectation of College English teaching [1], but also a trend of College English education [2]. Compared with the foreign research on ESP teaching, the domestic research started relatively late, the research methods were relatively single, the vision was narrow [3], and the empirical research was limited. At the same time, most of the research focuses on English majors in public colleges and universities, while there are few studies on College English in private colleges and universities. Therefore, guided by the needs analysis theory, this study takes five private undergraduate colleges and universities which start application-oriented transformation in Fuzhou as the research object to provide some suggestions on the curriculum design of ESP in private colleges and universities.

## II. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

### A. English for Specific Purposes

ESP originated in the 1960s. It refers to English related to a particular profession or subject. It is an English course specially offered according to learners' learning purposes and learning needs. Hutchinson & Waters pointed out in his book *English for Specific Purposes: A learning-centered approach* (1987) that three factors contributed to the emergence of ESP: socio-economic development, the promotion of linguistic studies, and the attention of educational psychology to learners and learning processes. So far, ESP has a history of more than 50 years. It has gone through five stages of development: register analysis, rhetorical or discourse analysis, target situation analysis, skills and strategies analysis, and learning-centered approach [4].

### B. The Theory of Needs Analysis

Needs analysis refers to non-experimental techniques and methods to study needs through introspection, questionnaires, interviews and observation. The needs analysis mentioned in this paper refers to the needs analysis in language teaching. It originated from ESP and has received extensive attention since 1970s [5]. Munby pointed out that the purpose of needs analysis is to adjust language learning courses to meet the needs of learners with different English proficiency and learning purposes [6]. For ESP, needs analysis is also a continuous process and an effective tool to anticipate learners' needs. It runs through the whole process of curriculum design and has an impact on the selection of learning materials, curriculum design and teaching methods. Hoadley-Maiment pointed out the triangular model of needs analysis, that is, demand information comes from teachers, students and employers [7]. The demand information in this paper comes from students and teachers from five private colleges and universities which start application-oriented transformation in Fuzhou, as well as 20 employers.

## III. DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF INVESTIGATION AND RESEARCH

### A. Design of Investigation and Research

Questionnaire is the most important method and means to collect demand information. The questionnaire designed in this study is based on Hutchinson & Waters' needs analysis

model [4], and appropriate adjustments are made according to the actual situation.

### B. Implementation of Investigation and Research

The research object in this survey includes three parts: students, teachers and employers. Students and teachers are from five private colleges and universities which start application-oriented transformation in Fuzhou: Jinshan College of Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University, Yango University, Fuzhou University Zhi Cheng College, Fuzhou University of International Studies and Trade and Fuzhou Institute of Technology. 50 junior and senior non-English majors (a total of 250) were randomly selected in each college or university, and all non-English majors were tried to be covered according to the college and professional settings of each college or university. 10 teachers (a total of 50, including 25 professional teachers and 25 College English teachers) were selected in each college or university, including young teachers with less than 10 years' teaching, middle-aged backbone teachers with 10-25 years' teaching and senior teachers with over 25 years' teaching. There are both male and female teachers. In addition, the information of 20 employers comes from the Internet.

## IV. A SURVEY OF THE NEEDS FOR ESP IN FUZHOU APPLICATION-ORIENTED PRIVATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

### A. A Survey of Students' Needs

1) *Starting time and duration of courses:* In all the five colleges and universities surveyed, ESP courses are offered, such as Accounting English, Logistics English, Engineering English, and so on. However, ESP courses are not open to all non-English majors, accounting for 36.3% of all majors, and all courses are not open to freshmen.

According to the data obtained from the questionnaire, 49.8% of the students tended to choose that ESP should be offered in the fifth semester and 41.6% chose the sixth semester. The proportion of students in these two parts is over 91%. It can be said that the vast majority of students chose to set up ESP courses in the third grade of university. They believe that after four semesters of general English learning, their ability of listening, speaking, reading and writing of English can be effectively improved, which will provide the necessary basis for further study of ESP. 3.2% of the students thought that the course should be offered from the second semester and last for at least four semesters. The reason given by them is that ESP is related to the majors they study. It can provide necessary support for effective reading of professional literature and help their further studies. For example, it can help them to continue their professional studies abroad in the future.

2) *Teaching methods:* Regarding the teaching methods used by teachers in ESP classes, 73.2% of the students chose teacher-led teaching mode, 8.6% chose student-led teaching mode, and the remaining 18.2% chose the integrated mode of the two. Teacher-student interaction in classroom is an effective teaching method, which can creatively achieve teaching objectives, promote students' initiative development,

improve classroom efficiency, and thus achieve the optimization of teaching. Of the students who chose teacher-led teaching mode, 9.1% chose teacher-student interaction in each class, 65.4% chose sometimes, and 25.5% chose almost none. 87.2% of the students who chose the student-led teaching mode chose teacher-student interaction in each class, while 53% of the students who chose the combination of teacher-led and student-led mode chose this option.

Thus, in the student-led classes, teacher pays more attention to the interaction between teachers and students. Teacher is the guides of the classes, and pays more attention to stimulating students' enthusiasm and creativity in learning.

3) *Language of instruction:* The students surveyed gave their own opinions on what kind of language should be used in ESP classes. Only 4.3% of the students chose total English. They think that teachers' teaching in English can make them immerse in the English classroom atmosphere, and their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills can be fully trained and improved. 49.8% of the students chose English as the main language and Chinese as the supplement. They think that teachers mainly use English to teach, which can improve the listening and speaking skills of English language in an all-round way. At the same time, assisting with Chinese can help them understand and improve the efficiency of classes. 42.6% of the students chose Chinese as the main language and English as the auxiliary language. They think that their English level needs to be improved. The content of ESP class is related to their majors and is more professional than that of general English, so the content will be more difficult. Teachers mainly teach in Chinese while English is supplemented, which can help them understand the course better and the proportion of English teaching can be increased when their language ability is improved. 7.6% of the students chose total Chinese. They think that their English foundation is weak. Chinese teaching helps them to digest and absorb knowledge and improve the efficiency of classes.

4) *Teaching materials:* For teachers, textbooks are the main basis for teachers to teach, while for students, textbooks are the main materials to acquire systematic knowledge of the course. It can be seen that textbooks are important for a course. The textbook here is in a broad sense. It includes not only textbooks, but also workbooks, audio-visual products, photocopies, newspapers and magazines, radio and television programs, photographs and so on, which are used by teachers and students both in and outside the classroom. In addition, materials written or designed by teachers themselves can also be called textbooks. The difficulty of teaching materials is related to classroom efficiency. If the textbooks are too difficult and beyond the students' English level, the students cannot accept them; if the textbooks are too simple, they cannot meet the students' needs for knowledge; only the textbooks with appropriate degree of difficulty can achieve the teaching objectives efficiently.

Among the questionnaires collected, 2.8% of the textbooks are original textbooks imported from abroad, 92.5% are domestic textbooks, and 4.7% are self-compiled by the teachers. It can be seen that the textbooks published in China are the choices of most ESP courses, and the textbooks of well-known publishing houses are the first choice. For private undergraduate colleges and universities, students' English level is generally low, and most of these textbooks are for undergraduates with average English level or above in public colleges and universities. Therefore, such textbooks are difficult to fully meet the actual needs of students in private colleges and universities.

### B. A Survey of Teachers' Needs

1) *Teaching staff structures*: Teachers teaching ESP are a key factor in the success of ESP courses. Generally speaking, English teachers, professional teachers, professional teachers and English teachers together, external experts or professors are the choices for this course. However, according to the data collected, all the teachers for ESP courses are assumed by professional teachers. Teachers of the courses are faced with an unavoidable dilemma: most English teachers are not qualified for the courses because they lack the required professional knowledge despite their solid knowledge of English language; however, most professional teachers have professional knowledge, but they have not received professional language teaching training. Language knowledge and skills are just indispensable conditions for ESP.

2) *Teaching Focus*: ESP is actually a language learning related to a particular major. Teachers also have to deal with several skills of language learning in classroom teaching, such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. What is the focus of teachers on these basic skills? 45.7% of the teachers chose reading and translation together as the key points, while ignoring the training of other skills. 22.5% of the teachers focused on training students' reading and translation skills, supplemented by listening and speaking. 26.3% of the teachers paid attention to reading, writing and translation skills, and listening and speaking skills are occasionally involved. Only 5.5% of the teachers paid attention to the comprehensive training of students' five skills. While improving students' traditional strengths, namely reading and translation skills, they also strengthen the training of students' relative weaknesses, namely, listening, speaking and writing skills. From the above data, it can be seen that teachers generally attached importance to reading and translation skills, ignoring listening, speaking and writing skills.

### C. A Survey of Employers' Needs

In order to get a better job, 80% of the students study ESP, which shows that a high level of English will promote employment. Similarly, employers, especially domestic enterprises related to English, joint ventures, or foreign enterprises, have clear requirements for the English proficiency of their candidates and employees. Passing CET-

4 or CET-6 is taken as the restriction by most of the enterprises in China. At the same time, they examine the students' practical application ability of English language through English interviews, and try to avoid that the examination-taking ability of the employees is better than their practical application ability. Joint ventures or foreign enterprises generally require higher English language proficiency of candidates than domestic enterprises, and pay more attention to the comprehensive use of English language of candidates in the work.

## V. SURVEY RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### A. Major Findings

According to the survey above, ESP courses are offered in different situations, and the starting time and duration of courses are different. They fail to meet the needs of students. On the other hand, most students lack the motivation to learn ESP. Although they understand that ESP is more practical than general English, most students do not have long-term motivation in the test-oriented English learning due to the lack of tests like CET-4 and CET-6. Meanwhile, ESP is the combination of English language and specialty, which is more difficult than general English. It is also a frustration for students who are not well-grounded in English and lack of self-confidence.

The teaching methods used by teachers are relatively outdated. Teachers focus on reading and translation, and neglect the training of listening and speaking skills. Current teaching fail to reflect the different disciplinary characteristics of ESP compared with general English and can't meet the needs of enterprises. Teaching methods are not reformed according to market demand so as to train students. As a result, the disconnection between students' capability and enterprise demand is prominent. At the same time, the selection of teaching materials fails to fully consider the actual situation of students, and the teaching effect of the course does not meet the expectations. The resources of teachers are single, the allocation is not optimized enough, and the qualified teachers with both English language and professional knowledge are lacking.

### B. Suggestions on Curriculum Implementation

The curriculum design should be based on the needs analysis and fully consider the needs of students, teachers and employers. There should be a systematic implementation plan before the beginning of the course, including the beginning time, duration, use of teaching materials, structure of teaching staff and so on.

1) *Teaching materials*: The selection of teaching materials should aim at improving students' practical language application skills, and should be in line with the actual level of students. At the same time, policies of colleges and universities should encourage and support teachers to develop school-based ESP textbooks. Teachers can form a teaching team to prepare lessons collectively, restructure the content of the textbooks, and use the materials that teachers find or compile by themselves in conjunction with the selected textbooks.

2) *The operation of classes*: In terms of teaching methods, it is suggested to innovate, abandon old and out-of-date teacher-led teaching methods, try new student-led teaching methods and focus on the cultivation of students' comprehensive language application ability. Teachers should try to teach in English as much as possible. If students cannot accept it, teachers should control the proportion of Chinese and English according to the actual situation of students, so as to achieve the ultimate goal of teaching in English. While teaching knowledge and skills, teachers can also train students' ability of thinking in English through situational materials and designed tasks.

3) *Teaching staff*: According to this survey, all the ESP courses are taught by professional subject teachers, but strictly speaking, teachers of professional subjects alone are not fully qualified for teaching ESP. Therefore, it is necessary to train teachers systematically. Most professional teachers have master's degree or at least undergraduate degree and some of them even have overseas study experience. Their English is not bad. Those teachers who are interested in ESP teaching can be trained in English language teaching skills by English teachers. On the one hand, most of them can improve their own English level; on the other hand, they can learn relevant English language teaching skills.

4) *Students*: The implementation of graded teaching is suggested. Students will be organized into different classes according to their different levels of English and different learning needs, and teachers develop different teaching objectives and plans according to different classes so as to maximize the implementation of teaching in accordance with students' aptitude. Hutchinson & Waters once pointed out that if both learners and teachers are aware of learners' learning goals and motivations, this cognitive situation can influence them to choose more appropriate and reasonable language curriculum content [8]. Therefore, it's better to achieve mutual understanding between teachers and students in class. Teachers guide students and students cooperate with teachers to achieve students' main position in the class, finally maximizing the realization of teaching objectives and the best teaching effect.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The globalization of economy promotes the demand for internationalized and applied talents, and also drives the demand for ESP courses. According to the survey, the establishment of ESP courses in five private colleges and universities which start application-oriented transformation in Fuzhou is different, with different implementation standards and lack of qualified teachers. Teachers' teaching methods are outdated, failing to conform to the curriculum, effectively achieve the curriculum objectives and meet the needs of students. The implementation of the curriculum is not effective. There is no good distinction between ESP courses and general English courses. Relevant colleges and universities should plan and implement courses scientifically and rationally on the basis of needs analysis, so as to meet

the needs and expectations of students and society, and make colleges and universities keep pace with the times in training talents. However, due to the limitation of the author's own level, there are inevitably some shortcomings in this research: first, due to the limitation of time and space, the coverage of questionnaires, especially interviews, is not wide enough, and the collected data can not reflect all the situations; second, the analysis of the collected data is not comprehensive and in-depth, and the analysis of the causes of the data is not thorough enough. The follow-up study of ESP is still valuable and needs to be conducted with persistent attention and further research from more perspectives.

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