

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Teaching in Chinese University

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ABSTRACT

The proposed research aims at three aspects: first, to understand the teaching experiences of ESP teachers in the Tourism School of the university where I work in China; second, to understand the teaching styles of the ESP teachers in the Tourism School; third, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of ESP teaching there.

Keywords: “Chinese University English Education,” “English For Specific Purpose,” “Language Teaching,” “Second Language Development”

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

English has become an international language of communication in the world of globalization today, “everywhere there will be something going on in English” (Pennycok, 1995: 35). In China, with the “opening to the outside world” policy, people needs to use English more than ever before. The wide spread of English use in the social environment actually results in the changes in the teaching of English at every stage within education in China. More emphasis has started to be put on the developing the students’ actual ability of using English. This trend is especially obvious with the shift in the aims of the 1999 and the 2004 college English curriculums of China (See appendix 1). English teaching at tertiary level should also aim more on the learners’ specific needs of communication in their future job and social activities. The present situation of college English teaching in China seems not to satisfy this goal very well because the general English courses students are learning is more likely a ... rerun of the course taught to these students when they were in secondary school was unlikely either to capture their interest or to prepared them for the use they were likely to make of English while studying at university level (Dudley-Evans, 1988: 27).

In contrast, English for specific purposes (ESP) seems to be the only a logic approach to help the students facing the demands of “a Brave New World” by developing the specific language ability they need.

However, the present situation of ESP teaching in most Chinese universities is not encouraging. Though started in 1960s, it is not until recently that ESP teaching in universities is about to bloom. According to the College English Curriculum of China (1999), ESP courses are compulsory for the year three and four students. But as a matter of fact, most students will stop learning English when they pass the national College English Test (CET) for their degree at the end of the second year. This is mainly due to lack of motivation among students to learn English, which has always been a big obstacle for effective teaching of English in universities.

In the university where I work in China, it is quite a new story to set up ESP courses for undergraduates. There used not to have any until the year 1999 when three schools in the university set up ESP courses for students: Business, Medical and Tourism School. Tourism School is the newest schools established in 1999 in the university. Everything is brand-new in this faculty: the teaching staff is newly organized; the courses are newly designed; and students are first tourism-major students in my university who are expected to become professional “international” tourist guides after graduation. Out of this need, tourism students’ English language ability is much stressed. Students are taught on the one hand general English, which is compulsory to all the undergraduates in the university. On the other hand, they are given ESP courses, namely Tourism English, two-hour listening and speaking class and four-hour reading class every week. The course content is based on situations that tourist guides may come across in their future job, such

as communicating with foreign tourists and helping with the possible problems during the trip.

Since ESP is a fresh practice in my university, what the teachers in the tourism school are trying to do is more like pioneers for ESP teaching. I am very interested to explore into the teaching of tourism English to satisfy my curiosity about what it is going on there in the teaching of ESP and how it is going on. I believe ESP teaching is becoming a new direction of language teaching in Chinese universities. Therefore, as a general English teacher having no experience in ESP teaching, I want to update myself by finding out how ESP teachers consider their teaching experiences of ESP and how could ESP teaching help students in university to gain better language ability.

1.2. Aims of the Research

The proposed research aims at three aspects: first, to understand the teaching experiences of ESP teachers in the Tourism School of the university where I work in China; second, to understand the teaching styles of the ESP teachers in the Tourism School; third, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of ESP teaching there.

1.3. Significance of the Research

ESP has become one of the most prominent methods of EFL teaching for more than forty years now, but in my view, it is still an ignored part of English teaching in China at tertiary level. Therefore, the research I am going to carry out is expected to contribute something to the development of ESP teaching in my university in the following sense. First, the exploration of ESP teaching in Tourism School of the university I work can help the ESP teachers in the Tourism school, who are new in teaching ESP, more aware of their teaching practice. Then, the information obtained from the study may be helpful to other faculties who intend to set ESP courses for students. In addition, the sharing of ESP teachers' teaching experiences tends to provide some thinking to my colleagues of general English teachers who are interested in exploring ESP teaching at tertiary level.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As I mentioned above, the economic growth in China actually brings the prosperity of many industries in China, and tourism is one of them. As a matter of fact, tourism has become one of the biggest incomes of the nation with increasing number of tourists in China every year. This results in an increasing demand for tourism guides who are capable of communicating with the tourists efficiently. The Tourism English course carried out now in the Tourism School in my university aims to meet this social needs and the students' needs for good job opportunities after graduation. This is a

new practice for both the ESP teachers and the students in my university.

However, when I try to go through the literature in the field of ESP, I find one problem. Though the resource of literature concerning ESP is rich, it is very hard for me to find literature on ESP teaching in the field of tourism. I can't even find a proper definition for the Tourism English taught in my university. However, in my view, it is proper to regard tourism English teaching as one practical form of ESP teaching; therefore, we might well use the literature of ESP to interpret and understand the teaching and learning involved in tourism English in the Tourism School in my university.

In the next part, following aspects of ESP literature will be covered: first, the definition and types of ESP; second, ESP teaching theories, including the nature of ESP teaching, its differences with EGP; third, ESP teaching methodologies.

2.1 What is ESP?

2.1.1. Definitions

English for specific purposes, usually called ESP, is a more complicated than it seems to be. Robinson (1991) states it is impossible to produce a universally applicable definition of ESP in a few words because many new factors are being involved from time to time. In the ESP literature, scholars define ESP in many different ways which emphasize different aspects of ESP.

Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) define ESP broadly as an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning and explain ESP as an approach to language learning, which is based on learner's initial identified need to learn the language while most other definitions are closely related to the learner's reason for learning. Strevens (1988:2) gives a comprehensive definition of ESP with four absolute and two variable characteristics.

However, Dudley Evans and St John (1998) points out that Strevens' definition of ESP can confirm the false impression held by many teachers that ESP is always and necessarily related directly to subject content. Therefore, they give an extended definition based on Strevens' definition. The absolute characteristics of ESP are:

- ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learner;
- ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves;

□ ESP is centered on the language (grammar, lexis, and register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities.

Variable characteristics of ESP are:

□ ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines.

□ ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of general English.

□ ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be used for learners at secondary school level.

□ ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students. Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems, but it can be used with beginners.

(Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998: 5)

The framework of Dudley-Evans and St John's definition resembles Strevens' one, and it combines Robinson's (1991) "criteria" to ESP. The third and fourth variable characteristics are stretched out of one aspect in Robinson's definition of ESP:

...the students on an ESP course are more likely to be adults rather than children. ... It is often assumed that ESP students will not be beginners but will have already studied EGP for some years.

(Robinson, 1991: 3)

Though may not be the universally applicable one, in my opinion, it gives an elaborated and clear picture of what ESP really looks like. More importantly, their definition tries to remove the absolute characteristic that ESP is in contrast with General English (Gatehouse, 2001) but at the same time added more variable characteristics which allows greater flexibility in methodology choices for ESP teachers under different teaching contexts.

2.1.2. *Types of ESP*

Just like it is defined differently, ESP is classified into various kinds as well according to different aspects of ESP. In this part, some main classifications of ESP in the literature are introduced.

Strevens (1977) claimed the first and basic distinction within ESP is between EST and all other ESP and the second distinction is between occupational and educational. It is not strange for him to stress EST for at that time EST was a term almost interchangeable with ESP. However, this classification of ESP has out of date with its rapid growth in all directions and invasion into more and more areas (Abdessalami, 2004).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 17) used "a tree of ELT" (see appendix 2, figure 2) to show the relationship between different aspects of language teaching. ESP is broken down into three branches: English for Science and Technology (EST), English for Business and Economics (EBE), and English for Social Studies (ESS), each of which is sub-divided into two branches: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) (echoing Mackay & Mountford, 1978). However, they do note that there is not a clear-cut distinction between EAP and EOP (Gatehouse, 2004) as "in many cases the language learnt for immediate use in a study environment will be used later when the student takes up, or returns to, a job" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987: 16). Tourism English for the tourism-major students in my university can belong to both EOP and EAP in this sense.

Robinson (1991: 3) makes further and detailed distinctions between EOP and EAP in his "ESP family tree". Her classification of ESP is more from an aspect of learners' experience. According to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), this distinction is very important in that they may affect the degree of specificity that is appropriate to ESP courses. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) classify ESP in greater detail by professional areas (see appendix 2, figure 3).

In my opinion, how ESP teacher carries out ESP teaching depends largely on how s/he considers what ESP is. In other words, what kind of picture of ESP in an ESP teacher's mind may influence all the decisions made during the ESP teaching and this picture may vary from one teacher to another, from time to time in different context.

2.2 *ESP teaching*

Mackay and Mountford (1978) point out that ESP teaching is generally used to refer to the teaching of English for a clear utilitarian purpose, such as occupational requirement or vocational training program or some academic or professional study, etc. The utilitarian purpose is central to the concept of ESP teaching; however, to discover the learners' real needs in achieving the purpose to guide the whole ESP teaching process is never an easy job.

2.2.1. *the Nature of ESP teaching*

ESP teaching by nature is not to teach students the language itself, but rather to help students learn how to use the language to achieve the purposes. In describing the definition of ESP, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) stress that ESP must be seen as an approach not as a product. Strevens (1988) points out that the view that the nature of the learners' needs should determine the teaching given to them forms the basis for ESP

teaching. To put it simpler, ESP teaching style should always be learner-oriented and communication-based.

On the other hand, ESP differs from other forms of English language teaching in its specificity, however, the meaning of the word 'specific' has to be interpreted properly by ESP teachers in order to carry out effective ESP teaching. Mackay and Mountford (1987) make the distinction between specific language and specific purposes. As they argue, ESP implies a special aim, but it need not imply a special language. They contend special language is a "restricted repertoire of words and expressions selected from the whole language" which "are not languages" and knowing the restricted repertoire wouldn't enable learner to conduct effective communications in novel situations. (Mackay & Mountford 1987:5). Therefore, the focus of the word 'special' in ESP ought to be on the purpose for which learners learn rather than on the specific jargon or registers they learn (Gatehouse, 2001).

2.2.2. *ESP and EGP*

In answering his own question "what is the difference between ESP and the General English", Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 53) stated that "in theory nothing, in practice a great deal." In theory, he contended there is no much difference between ESP and EGP by saying ESP is not a matter of "specialized varieties" of English; ESP is not just a matter of special language elements; the learning process of ESP is nothing different from that of EGP (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987: 18). In practice, the big gap between the two lies in the fact that in EGP, learner's need can't be specified and as a result no attempt is made to discover learners' need while in ESP, needs analysis is always irreducible and definable. Being aware of all these differences, Strevens made some claims about the advantages of ESP:

- ESP, being focused on the learners' needs, wastes no time;
- ESP teaching is perceived as relevant by the learner;
- ESP is successful in imparting learning;
- ESP is more cost-effective than General English.

(Strevens, 1988: 2)

Upon these claims, Dudley-Evans (1998) indicates that it is true that ESP teaching is more motivating for learners than General English.

2.3 *ESP teaching methodology*

2.3.1 *Does ESP teaching methodology exist?*

Firstly, before I talk about specific aspects involved in ESP teaching, let's try to make out one point which I consider very interesting and important for us to move towards a better understanding of ESP teaching methodology. Does ESP teaching methodology exist? Hutchinson and Waters (1987) claimed, as I mention in previous part, ESP is not differently in kind from any other form of language teaching. Therefore, they concluded:

There is, in other words, no such thing as an ESP methodology, merely methodologies that have been applied in ESP classrooms, but could just as well have been used in the learning of any kind of English.

(Hutchinson & Waters, 1987:18)

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998: 4) argued directly against it by saying "Specific ESP teaching has its own methodology" though the methodology of ESP teaching may not differ radically from that of EGP. And they further explain that

All ESP teaching should reflect the methodology of the disciplines and professions it serves; and in more specific ESP teaching the nature of the interaction between the teacher and learner may be very different from that in a general English.

In terms of ESP methodology, Strevens (1988) and Robinson (1991) are in line with Dudley-Evans and St John. Strevens argues that even the basic teaching activities of ESP are same with those of other language teaching, "ESP can and does select its own methods and techniques as it needs (1988:10)." Robinson (1991) suggests that an ESP need not include special language and content; but it needs students to engage in special activities demonstrating their needs, which maybe for specialist texts.

Relating to my own context, I would like to argue that not only should ESP have its own teaching methodology, but also the awareness of this methodology among ESP teachers is crucial to ESP teaching practice. In a latter part of the proposal, I will introduce some special methods that may be used especially for ESP teaching which worth further exploration of ESP practitioners.

2.3.2 *The ESP teacher*

To begin with, who is the ESP teacher? Strevens (1988) states almost always s/he is a teacher of general English who has unexpectedly found him/herself required to teach students with special needs. Because of the shift, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) point out that ESP teacher does differ from EGP teacher in that

s/he does not only teach, also very often “s/he is involved in designing, setting up and administrating the ESP course (Robinson, 1991: 81)”. Strevens (1988) identifies the major difficulties for ESP teachers is the gap between the learner’s knowledge of the subject and the teacher’s ignorant of it which demands for high quality of the ESP teacher in conducting ESP teaching with success.

Then, what are the qualities required for the ESP teacher? First, s/he is required to have the common qualities of a “good teacher”. For example, intelligent, creative, sincere, warm toward other, responsible and of sound judgement (Sifakis, cited Wheeler, 2003). Second, Robinson (1991: 80) stresses 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.

In order to be flexible like that requires ESP teacher regard success with teaching an ESP course as a professional challenge. For EFL teachers, the challenge is even bigger because it does not only come from the subject, but also from their language competence.

Thirdly, what is the role of the ESP teacher? This is a controversial issue. If we refer to the methodology as the interaction between the ESP teacher and the learner (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998), the teachers’ role in ESP teaching could be quite different from that in EGP. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998: 13) expound the role of the ESP teacher as: teacher, course designer and materials provider, collaborator, researcher, and evaluator. Sifakis (2003) mentions an ESP teacher should also act as an advisor and counselor. The knowledge required to act out the role is the ability to ask intelligent questions in student’s special field; therefore, the ESP teacher shouldn’t become a teacher of subject matter, but rather a student of subject matter (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

2.3.3 *Team-teaching method for ESP*

In my reading of the ESP literature, one method called ‘team teaching’ is being discussed a lot nowadays. This method might sound unfamiliar to many of my colleagues in China; however, it has been there since 1970s in the field of ESP teaching but without being put into much practice until the recent prosperity of ESP teaching and learning in the world. The benefits of the approach are summarized as

□ The student is given the opportunity to see how well he is measuring up to the requirements of his department, and to catch up on work not fully understood.

□ The language teacher is able to see at first hand what difficulties the students are having with their subject course, and to learn a little of the way communication takes place in a given subject.

□ The subject teacher receives feedback on how well he has been communicating with his students.

(Dudley-Evans, 1983: 25)

(also see, Hutchinson & Waters, 1987: 164)

According to my understanding, team-teaching method for ESP can be regarded as an umbrella term of the “subject-language integration” methods (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998: 45), which may have various forms in different contexts. They give very detailed description and analysis of what the method is about, and how to carry it out and emphasize that the method is a whole process from cooperation and collaboration to team-teaching.

However, Robinson (1991) points out that it was not possible to have language and subject teachers together in the same classroom due to the heavy teaching load and some subject teachers’ fear of being observed by a language specialist. Therefore, he suggests subject-language integration more practically should refer to a situation where there is normally only one teacher present in the classroom, who is then involved with both language and content, using the materials produced by the earlier collaboration between subject and language teacher. Though many people would argue the practical difficulties in applying team-teaching methods in ESP teaching, I reckon it is beneficial to all stakeholders and worth more attention in ESP practice.

2.3.4 *ESP course design*

Waters (1994) defines rigorous needs analysis, specialized course and material design as the main features which differentiate the ESP course design approach from the rest of ELT. However, a successful ESP course design demands a whole process in which every procedure involved in the ESP course design should be considered carefully: needs analysis, syllabus design, method, material, and testing.

First, given the ESP course is to enable learners to function adequately in a target situation, Hutchinson & Waters (1987), Robinson (1991), Dudley-Evans & St John (1998) and Richards (2001) all emphasize the importance of ‘target situation analysis’ proposed by Munby. Walker (1995) claims if target situation is not defined, the course content might be organized along a wrong line which may be doomed to failure. Other kinds of needs analysis are: present situation analysis, linguistic analysis, discourse analysis, genre analysis and means analysis (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Robinson, 1991). Mackay (1978) and Richards (2001) suggests some ways to carry out needs analysis.

Second, communicative syllabuses, namely situational, topical/content-based, task-based syllabus and more integrated text-based syllabus have been preferred since 1980 in the ESP course design literature. Situational syllabus is most related to developing especially ESP course in that it presents language in context and teaching language of immediate practical use. Content-based syllabus has the advantage of addressing student's need, motivating students, allowing for integration of the four skills and use of authentic materials. Task-based syllabus is proposed most by second language acquisition theorists as a basis for syllabus design for the reason that tasks are motivating for learners and engage them in meaningful communication (Richards, 2001). However, in practice, a combination of approaches is often used in syllabus design (Richards, 1990) and text-based syllabus is much explored in the literature of ESP teaching. Explicit explanation concerning text-based syllabus in theory and practice can be found in Feez (1998).

Third, ESP should have its own teaching methodology due to the nature of the ESP teaching and a wide range of methods and materials might be employed for teaching ESP. But basically learner-centred approach and communicative teaching method are preferred for ESP teaching. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) stress the learner-centred approach on the ground that ESP is more concerned more with language learning than language use (Hutchinson, 1988). And ESP is considered the best example of communicative language teaching. In the not-much found ESP literature concerning tourism, Walker (1995) argues for the benefit of topic-based approach for the teaching of the English of tourism. (See appendix 3)

Fourth, most of the ESP materials are "in-house" materials instead of published textbooks. Robinson (1991) argues a better way would be the idea to incorporate the local produced material with local themes. And Waters (1994) argues from the aspect of the content and methodology of ESP materials. He proposes less specialized content with sufficient face-validity to differ from general English and a more "teacher-friendly" methodology. Walker (1995) introduces the use of the content following, tourism-wise, chronological development in teaching tourism English, which greatly increased students' motivation.

The final part is about ESP testing. Alderson (1988) comments "virtually no attention has been paid to the question of testing within ESP courses." Therefore, there is not sufficient theoretical description about how a good ESP test should be. But ESP test is first a test, so if it is a good one, it should test the language ability of the learner which includes both language knowledge and strategic competence (Bachman, 1990). Second it is an ESP test, so it should relate more closely to the students' reason for learning English. In addition, as

ESP aims at learner's actual ability of using language in specific context, I would suggest criterion-referenced test (CRT) may be considered more effective for ESP testing which bases directly on the English language needs of students (Hughes, 2003).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Interpretive Epistemology

Usher (1996) argues that research aims at gaining knowledge, and all research is based on an epistemology, which is to do with the ways we look at the world and make sense of it. In other words, epistemology deals with "the nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope and general basis." (Crotty, 1998:8; cited Hamlyn, 1995) The major distinction between different epistemologies lies in their ways they view the nature of knowledge. Positivist epistemology believes that knowledge is about the objective truth (Crotty, 1998). The world is lawful and orderly and human behaviour is governed by general, universal, predictable laws; therefore, the goal of research is to develop general and "universal laws that explain and govern the reality which is being observed" (Cohen, 2000: 7; Usher, 1996), which most of the time is associated with quantitative research (Crotty, 1998; Cohen, 2000).

In contrast, according to an interpretive epistemology, the knowledge is concerned not with generalization, prediction and control but with interpretation, meaning and illumination (Usher 1996). The goal of the research under interpretive epistemology is then closely related to the interpretation of meaning, the meaning of the ongoing action of the individuals being researched. The way the researchers view the nature of knowledge is actually determined by the way they interpret the meaning of the research objectives. Usher (1998) says that to make sense of the social world, we need to understand the meaning that construct and are constructed by interactive human behaviour and human action is given meaning by interpretive frameworks. This conforms to the constructionism belief that "there is no meaning without a mind" and meaning is discovered; it is constructed, by neither researcher nor other people alone, but both at the same time. Usher (1996: 19) calls the process "double hermeneutic".

Another aspect of interpretive epistemology is that it is always context-shaped. Usher refers to research as a "practice" instead of a "technology" out of the interpretive epistemology assumption that "all human action is meaningful and hence has to be interpreted and understood within the context of social practices (Usher, 1996: 18)." The double hermeneutic process indicates that in research, subject and object emerge as partners in the generation of meaning (Crotty, 1998). However, both the subject (researcher) and the object

(participants) are social being under certain form of social framework, and their behaviour tends to be shaped by the social framework. This is what Usher (1996: 19) refers to as our “pre-understanding”. It has been argued that because of the existence of pre-understanding, the meaning we interpret from the object is always partial, perspective-bound, and prejudiced. Therefore, in order to avoid biased interpretation, Psaths (1973, cited in Taylor & Bogdan, 1997: 7) recommended a method for researchers called “bracketing”, that is, the temporarily set aside our meaning, suspend our subjectivity. However, as Gadamer (cited in Usher, 1996: 76) argues, no one can escape from our pre-understanding, even for one moment. I would prefer Gadamer’s idea of “fusion of horizon”, seeking knowledge with our pre-understandings. Therefore, I would like to consider my research as a learning experience of gaining new knowledge both for the object and subject during the process of interpreting meaning from each other.

3.2 Qualitative Research

According to Crotty (1998), the researcher’s epistemology usually determines the way the researchers understand and interpret knowledge they obtain, that is the methodologies. Therefore, the methodologies I will employ under an interpretative epistemology can be regarded as a qualitative research.

What I intend to find out from the research is the understanding of the whole process of a social practice, in particular, teaching practice in a specific context. It aims at exploration and interpretation of the subjective meanings of individual thoughts and behaviors. Therefore, as Crotty (1998) points out qualitative methods can be adopted to ascertain these meanings because for one, qualitative research is concerned with the meaning people attach to things in their life (Taylor & Bogdan 1997). Punch (1998) also states that qualitative approach is sensitive to context and process, to live experience and to local-grounded-ness and the researcher is trying to get closer to what is being studied. For another, Taylor and Bogdan (1997) claim that quality research is inductive instead of deductive, and the meaningfulness of the research is emphasized most. In my research, what I intend to do is not to produce any generalization about the participants; instead, what I intend to do is to understand the participants’ thoughts and feelings in the teaching practice in the specific context through exploring their acts in the practice. Therefore, to get “the meanings people attach to things and events”, qualitative is the best way (Punch, 1998: 243).

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Research site

My research will be carried out within the Tourism School of ZZ University in China. There are three advantages for my choosing this site. First, it may be helpful for me to have more all-around understanding towards my research interest. I graduated from this university in 1996 and have been working as an EGP teacher there for seven years before I came to Australia. The familiarity with the English teaching situation there will help me make more sense out of what I will be observing from a more broad aspect. Second, it may be easier for me to collect data I need for the research. There are four English teachers in the Tourism School, three of which are my previous EGP colleagues. Therefore, I think they would be willing to provide me with information at their best. Third, it may make my research more significant. I am still holding the teaching position in the university, so I consider the research I am going to carry out might have be considered beneficial to the improvement of English teaching in the university by the authority; therefore, they might allow me greater freedom in collecting data, using data and publishing the research result.

3.3.2 Research participants

The participants involved in the research are all from Tourism School of ZZ University. They are the four tourism English teachers and a student who is now taking tourism English course. Three of the four English reading teachers used to be my EGP colleagues at the Foreign Language Teaching Department of ZZ University before 1999. They are all experienced EGP teachers who have a Bachelor’s degree in English language and literature. They experienced the whole process of the change in identity from an EGP teacher to an ESP teacher, and they know what happened and what is happening now in ESP teaching, which is something I feel curious about. The similarity they express about their teaching experiences in the process will enable me to get a general idea of my interest in ESP teaching at the same time, individual differences which will definitely be found among them allow for deeper thinking in the field. The other English teacher who teaches listening and speaking has a Bachelor’s degree in English language and literature and a Master’s degree in history. Before 1999, he has been teaching “Revolutionary History of China” in the History Department in ZZ University. He has been teaching tourism English and another course named “Tourism History of China” since he came to the Tourism school in 1999. His identity of being an ESP teacher and subject teacher at the same time and his experience of being an EGP teacher and subject teacher and ESP teacher really interests me.

My research will mainly focus on the ESP teaching aspect. However, I do plan to interview a student who is now studying ESP course in the site for direct feedback of it. After all, as teacher, students are the people we want to benefit most through our researches.

3.3.3 Data collecting methods

According to Punch (1998), qualitative research aims in-depth and holistic understanding in order to justice to the complexity of social life; therefore, the methods in a qualitative research can be less formalized and more flexible than that those in quantitative research. Among varieties of qualitative research methods, interview is the most frequently used on one because it can personalize and therefore permits a level of in-depth information-gathering, free response, and flexibility that can't be obtained by other procedures. However, interviews can be differentiated by degrees of explicitness and structures (Seliger, 1989), from open interviews to very structured ones. The selection of the interview type should therefore be aligned with the strategy, purposes and research questions (Punch, 1998).

The method I am going to use for data collecting in my research is in-depth interview in a form of unstructured way. As a type of qualitative research method, in-depth interview is regarded as a means of providing accurate interpretations of social life because in-depth interview is more associated with the interpretive tradition (Minichiello, et al. 1995). Taylor and Bogdan (1997) define the in-depth interview as:

By in-depth qualitative interviewing, we mean repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants directed toward understanding informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their words.

One important point is that I want the interview to be flexible to insure the active response from the interviewee; therefore, the interview should not go like a rigid question-answer one but rather more open-ended. Though with some relevant question concerning information I want to get from them, it is not necessary to be the same question nor in the same order in interviewing different participant.

What I plan to do is to interview each teacher individually, and after that, I will conduct a group interview involving all the participants except the student. Every individual interview is supposed to last one hour and it will be carried out at the time and place convenience of the participant. I will interview the participants face to face and I will record all the interviews at the same time to make sure I won't miss the point I might miss by relying on my own memory and some note-taking. The group interview will last one hour hopefully on one Thursday afternoon after the routine weekly meeting of the week is held because it is

the only time during the week that all the teachers in the Tourism school gather at the university. It will be conducted in the Tourism School meeting room. I exclude the students from the group interview at the thought that the student actually might not feel free to contribute to the discussion in front of so many teachers. In the one-hour group interview, I mean to get some information that I might not get in individual interviews. Rubin and Rubin (1995: 114; cited in Taylor & Bogdan, 1997: 114) describe the advantage of group interviewing like this:

In focus group, the goal is to let people spark off one another, suggesting dimensions and nuances of the original problem that any one individual might not have thought of. Sometimes a totally different understanding of a problem emerges from the group discussion.

All the interviews will be carried out in Chinese though all the teachers are English teachers and the student has certain communicative ability in English. It is out of the consideration that some teachers might feel uncomfortable when being involved an interview conducted by a Chinese colleague. Also, better and more thorough understanding might be achieved due to the greater clarity of the interviewees' understanding of the question and the deeper interpretation of their answering these questions.

3.3.4 Data analyzing

The method I use for the research is the in-depth interviewing with open-ended questions. Since qualitative research is more open and flexible, it doesn't demand fix information from the participant. Therefore, I am sure when the data collection has been done, there will be a huge "messy" qualitative data there, waiting to be sorted. However, Punch (1998) suggests that there is no single right way to do qualitative data analysis, no single methodological framework though many scholars have tried to do so. My analysis needs to be done on computer. Firstly, I will listen to the tape and translate the record of every interview into in English script and type every script into the computer. All my analysis will be based on these scripts. The first question in analyzing them will be to sort out the same or similar questions being actually asked in the interview. I will put them in order with numbers. Those comments which don't belong to any question will not be studied at this stage. I will analyze the data mainly in two ways. One is internal analysis, that is I will analyze one script as a whole and try to see the way the interviewee's individual understand the questions and get a holistic understanding of his/her opinion. The other is external comparison between different scripts to find out the similarity and differences in the data. But as I mentioned previously, I don't intend to produce any generalization about the participant or the teaching practice. Therefore, the next step in data analysis will

focus on exploring why there will be such differences and similarity by referring to the relevant literature.

My research is under the interpretive epistemology, and therefore, the method I will use to analyze the data will also aim at enhancing the understanding between all aspects. When I try to interpret meaning from any data collected, I will take its context where it is produced into consideration to insure the validity of the data.

4. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ethics and ethical principles extend to all spheres of human activity. (NSEC, 1999) And obviously my research is closely related to exploration of human behaviour. I consider the ethical issues involved in my research are mainly related to the following aspects:

First, the respect for persons. All the participants should be respected. As far as my research is concerned, I would like to make two points concerning this. One is to get the consent for the participant. Before the research is undertaken, I will apply for admission from the Tourism School and inform the participants of everything about my research. To take part in the research or not, to stay in or leave the research will be totally free for all the participants. Second is when involving student as participant, respect should be given to them as much as to the teachers. They shouldn't be looked down upon or being criticized for any comment they give. They should feel free to speak out their thought without restriction. This is very important in a Chinese context where students are usually in an inferior position in the power relationship between the teachers and students.

Second, the issue of benefit. This is associated with power in the research. As a researcher, I should enjoy the privilege of using the data for my own research purposes. However, my freedom of using the data or publish the data will be limited to some extent by the power from the university authority. They may take the priority of using the data to their own benefits without asking permission from me as the researcher. Again in my context, the authority interferes in almost every step of educational research and their power can't be ignored.

5. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

First limitation of this research lies in the lack of literature concerning tourism English teaching. Both the ESP teachers in the Tourism School and me as a research are strange to Tourism English teaching. On top of that, it is hard for me to find theoretical support from ESP or tourism literature relating to tourism English teaching at tertiary level. What I am trying to do here is more out of my own interest and assumptions,

sense of professionalism to improve the English teaching practice in my context. Second one is the research will be carry out within one particular school within a single university with participants from only this school, and it focuses only on the teaching aspects, so the data gathered in the research may be limited in the sense that it may not be applied to some other contexts. My research ability can be a limitation of the research. Though being an English teacher for many years, I have never done or been involved in any kind of educational research before. Therefore, due to the lack of my research experience, my proposed research is unavoidably problematic in some aspects. But I will go on to improve it to achieve my research aims which I am really interested in exploring.

6. CONCLUSION

As a new trend of English language education, ESP concentrates more on language in context than on teaching grammar and language structures. It covers subjects varying from accounting or computer science to tourism and business management. The ESP focal point is that English is not taught as a subject separated from the students' real world (or wishes); instead, it is integrated into a subject matter area important to the learners. In other words, ESP combines subject matter and English language teaching. Such a combination is highly motivating because students are able to apply what they learn in their English classes to their main field of study, whether it be accounting, business management, economics, computer science or tourism. Being able to use the vocabulary and structures that they learn in a meaningful context reinforces what is taught and increases their motivation. Therefore, I believe my future research will be a path of developing English language learners language skills and language proficiency, and fulfill their desire of career development.

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