

A Trial of Modularization Teaching in Postgraduates Academic English Reading and Writing

Ting Liu

Dalian Jiaotong University
lexus79@163.com

ABSTRACT

Double questionnaires have been conducted among 459 postgraduates of Grade 2020 in a second-tier university in china, with the first one analyzing students' fundamental levels of English and their practical needs for academic English. After the collection of No. 1 questionnaire, a modularization course is tailored to meet the learners' real demands for academic English at the postgraduate level including basics for English writing, academic English reading as well as academic English writing practice. Then the second questionnaire is carried out to evaluate students' satisfaction with the modularization teaching, which apparently renders the first-hand feedback to ensure proper adaptation for future teaching.

Keywords: modularization; academic English; needs analysis; postgraduates.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the English curriculum for Non-English Postgraduates was issued in 1992, State Education Commission has been stressing on the importance of English as a tool for international communication. To keep pace with the speeding globalization, Graduate Student Affairs Office of State Education Commission highlighted that at the backdrops of globalizing higher education, diversified means and channels should be applied to improve graduates' practical ability of using English as a tool in communication across cultures, particularly speaking and writing competence in their specializations and other relevant areas [1]. Currently, the majority of Chinese universities have already cultivated academic English courses of various types at the postgraduate level, with major purposes to enhance learners' ability to comprehend professional journals, draft academic papers and interact in English in the international forum.

However, the current situation is far from perfect. A growing consensus concerning the issue is that postgraduates scraping through CET6 or even CET4 show least likelihood to draft English academic papers, not to mention to publish papers in globally influential journals. [2] According to Michael H. Long in the Second Language Needs Analysis, the curriculum must be in conformity with the practical levels and needs of learners.

[3] Therefore, the best possible solution for each university undoubtedly is to offer them autonomy in customizing their curriculums based on the assessment of students' English levels on average and the analysis of their needs.

2. DESIGN OF DOUBLE QUESTIONNAIRES

2.1 The goal

No.1 questionnaire aims to evaluate postgraduates' fundamental English levels and the graduation requirements from the university. Meanwhile, students are also required to describe their learning strategies paired with their autonomic study awareness so as to provide reliable statistics for the teaching reform. The aim of No. 2 questionnaire serves to supply timely response by probing into learners' satisfaction and improvement in comprehensive aspects of academic English so that the subsequent curriculum can be well adjusted to be more student centric.

2.2 The sample and methods

A sample of 459 postgraduates of Grade 2020 from a second-tier university in Liaoning Province participated in the reform, with the first questionnaire conducted in early September 2020, two weeks before the course

started. After 16 weeks' teaching, they took the final exam at the end of December and answered the second questionnaire in January 2021 due to the fact that academic English course for postgraduates merely lasted for one semester with 64 teaching hours. Sojump, a mini program was utilized to gather and analyze data, in combination with face-to-face interviews.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS FROM SURVEY 1

At the phase prior to the teaching reform, the initial part of questionnaire No.1 is designed to assess students' English levels by inquiring what scores they've gained in the 3 standardized English tests CET4, CET6 and Postgraduate Entrance Examination and how many times they have tried. Individual needs and expectations for academic English are also incorporated into the questionnaire with a list of six potential motives. Graduation requirements from different departments and different directors is another factor this survey is concerned about. [4]

3.1 Analysis of initial English levels of students

Chart 1. Needs for academic reading and writing

| | Fairly important | Very important | Moderate | Little |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|----------|--------|
| Academic English reading competence | 55.99% | 31.37% | 10.24% | 2.4% |
| Academic English writing competence | 49.24% | 33.12% | 15.69% | 1.96% |

The outcomes of the survey have it that 86% of the participants pass band 4 exam, among whom approximately one third pass it in the first attempt and only about 7.4 earn more than 497; over 84% students fail to pass CET6; seven out of ten students obtain low grades with the results of postgraduate entrance exam wandering between 50 and 69 and around 97% of them register for this exam less than twice. The findings provide clear clues for course designers that the majority of students have not acquired enough skills to learn academic English immediately so the first module of the course

should be set to sharpen their awareness of standard writing basics, such as sentence writing, paragraph writing and passage writing.

3.2 Analysis of needs for academic English

Humanistic psychology points out that only when learning meets learners' specific demands, can it stimulate their inner drive and transform the process into a voluntary one.

3.2.1 Requests for graduation

No rigid regulation is set for graduates from the school authorities but higher expectations come from the supervisors. For example, 39% participants report that their supervisors frequently assign them to read academic papers in their fields; more than 46% are occasionally required to browse English journals in their specialization; around one third sometimes have to express in English; over 42% are supposed to write academic papers in English; only less than 20% report no needs for academic English at all.

3.2.2 Individual needs

To gain a comprehensive picture of students' specific needs, six items are listed on this respect, including almost 77% needs for reading professional materials in English, nearly 47% options for writing English papers, over 44% demands for interaction in the working settings. Besides, around 14% of the learners highlight their intention of signing up for bilingual courses and one out of ten are liable to attend international conferences while merely 11% deny the necessity of studying academic English.

Chart 1 Needs for academic English reading and writing

3.2.3 Analysis of students' autonomic learning awareness

More than half of the testees claim that they have already fostered autonomic learning awareness for academic reading and even nearly 44% tend to browse authentic English materials voluntarily, ranging mainly from professional fields (79.3%), daily topics (35.95%) to news (25.9%).

Less passion is demonstrated in the academic English writing, with merely 45% admitting a little awareness of academic English writing and 32% reporting frequent writing practice confined to compositions for CET4, CET6 and occasionally journals.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS FROM SURVEY 2

In response to the discovery of survey 1, a tri-module course is designed with basic English writing module to sharpen students' awareness of standards and rules in constructing sentences, paragraphs and passages. Academic English reading module is supplemented to improve the competence of comprehending authentic materials in various fields and academic English writing module to enhance the basic skills to describe major

trends presented in various charts.

4.1 Effectiveness of basic writing module

Similar improvement is displayed in the reconstruction of standard writing in three respects, namely sentence writing, paragraph writing and passage writing. Over 60% interviewees experience dramatic or noticeable improvement in the awareness of writing criteria while 35% witness moderate growth.

Chart 2 Improvement in the awareness of writing criteria

| | Dramatic improvement | Noticeable improvement | Moderate improvement | Little improvement |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Sentence writing | 25.93% | 35.51% | 33.12% | 5.45% |
| Paragraph writing | 27.02% | 33.33% | 35.95% | 3.7% |
| Passage writing | 27.45% | 35.29% | 29.85% | 9.8% |

4.2 Effectiveness of academic reading module

The wide coverage of professional topics is what over 60% students feel satisfied with the textbooks but high frequency of technical terms and unfamiliar professional backgrounds hinder students' comprehension so more than 68% feel overawed. But after 18 class hours' reading in depth over half of the learners spot enormous or apparent progress while reading academic passages and almost 43% of them see moderate growth.

describe statistics presented in a variety of charts, such as bar charts, line charts, pie charts and tables because the skill of describing data is of vital significance to masters of science and technology. The awareness of writing criteria has been remarkably improved according to around 60% students and the remaining admit medium improvement. Seven out of ten learners say they have mastered the right way to build the essay and know the best way to elaborate on the depiction of major trends illustrated in various types of charts. Over 62% learners are amazed at the improvement of the chart compositions they newly construct and approximately 35% see mild progress after the training.

4.3 Effectiveness of academic writing practice

Attainable writing practice is implemented, namely to

Chart 3 Improvement of writing criteria awareness and academic writing skills

| | Dramatic improvement | Noticeable improvement | Moderate improvement | Little improvement |
|--|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Writing criteria awareness | 21.13% | 38.34% | 37.04% | 3.49% |
| Mastery of layout of chart composition | 19.83% | 48.37% | 28.98% | 2.83% |
| Writing skills | 20.26% | 45.53% | 30.94% | 3.27% |

| | | | | |
|------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| Quality of chart composition | 21.57% | 40.96% | 34.64% | 2.83% |
|------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|-------|

5. CONCLUSION

The findings from the two surveys show unanimous awareness of the significance of academic English for postgraduates but due to the fundamental English level and limited prior knowledge, lack of confidence and motivation are the major obstacles that have to be removed. The tri-module course functions to remove the barriers and gradually boost their confidence from three perspectives, writing basics, academic reading and writing. The high satisfaction rate towards the course confirms the necessity of the teaching reform, which also provides some inspiration and sparks some reflection for academic English teaching for years to come. Student-orientation serves as the prerequisite as the teaching reform as their motivation needs to be activated. The design should be specified in accordance with learners' personal needs and the graduation requests of the university. [5] Attainable goals should be established in any area of teaching to avoid frustration and autonomous study awareness needs to be cultivated. No consensus could be reached in the academic English education for postgraduates so universities of different tiers should tailor their academic English courses in accordance with the average initial English levels of students, the graduation requirements set by the school authorities and prospects learners see themselves in the subsequent career advancement.

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