

An Exploration of the Integration of General English and ESP Teaching from the Perspective of International Cooperation

— A case study of 2+2 program of international business faculty, BNNU

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Abstract. The current trend of educational internationalization not only demands the good command of general English but also the sophisticated application of relevant ESP to meet the requirements of specialized knowledge and career development. This paper is based on the content of College English course and attempts to explore the pattern of integrating the general English and ESP teaching from the perspectives of background introduction, vocabulary instruction and associations, sentence analysis and in-class role play activity. On the analysis of the questionnaire designed to survey students' feedback to this new approach, it has been found that most students consider the integration of general English and ESP teaching as the useful method to their learning of specialized course. Moreover, the content of vocabulary instruction and associations is found to be most effective.

Introduction

With the profound development of education internationalization, international cooperation in running university has currently become the issue of great significance in China when the status-quo of Chinese education is under investigation. Ongoing development and modification of the international model adopted in running university result in the higher demand for learners' English proficiency, which is reflected in their ability of using English as a tool to learn specialized knowledge. As indicated by Zhenbang Zhang (2003), a clear understanding of professional literature and a thorough grasp of specialized teaching materials cannot only rely on general English. Therefore, this paper will explore how to effectively integrate the teaching of college English and ESP setting against the background of international cooperation along with the enhancement of students' proficiency in general English and ESP.

Review of studies on the correlation between college English and ESP in China

The Connotation and orientation of college English and ESP teaching

College English aims at training the skills of using English including listening, reading, speaking and writing as well as understanding the basic grammatical structure of English. Therefore, most College English courses are consisted of Intensive Reading, Extensive Reading and Listening or the combination of the three titled as Integrated English. In addition, the teaching materials used in college English teaching like New Horizon and New Standard College English place much emphasis on culture and humanity topics, focusing on the vivid and interesting texts and the commonality of core vocabulary, which will contribute to passing the CET Band 4 and Band 6.

English for Specific Purposes, shortened as ESP, refers to English related to certain profession or discipline, subjected to the specific wishes, needs and demands of learners (Hutchinson and Waters 1987), such as English for E-commerce, travelling and journalism, with the purpose to help learners acquire the communicative competency to engage in specific working environment by means of English. Stevens (1988) makes a distinction between four absolute characteristics of ESP, that is, ESP consists of English language teaching which is (1) designed to meet specified needs of the learner; (2) related in content (i.e. in its themes and topics) to particular disciplines, occupations and

activities; (3) centered on the language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, etc., and analysis of this discourse; and (4) in contrast with General English.

The correlation between college English and ESP Teaching

Based on the distinctive orientations and goals of college English and ESP teaching, their relationship and significance have aroused the heated discussions and attentions. According to the different English level, Min Wang (1997) suggests that the instruction of college English should be multiple-level and flexible to meet requirements of different aims and students' English proficiency. The courses of fundamental English are suggested to be offered for those of poor foundation to improve their English language knowledge whereas those of good mastery of English are encouraged to communicate in English in their own professional field. Zhiwei Xiao and Jigen Zheng (2008) analyze and construct the model of integrating the level-based college English and ESP teaching by fostering the talents for different levels and professions, which will not only improve the fundamental English level but satisfy the needs of individuality. Moreover, Wei Hu (2011) indicates the implementation of ESP teaching in the level-based college English teaching from the aspect of ESP vocabulary instruction together with the analyses on teaching materials, teacher assistance and establishment of ESP corpus. In terms of the importance of college English and ESP teaching, Jigang Cai (2004) puts forward the idea that ESP doesn't absolutely substitute for or weaken the role of college English but it is the ongoing development of general English, which means ESP is an important part of training the practical language skills to meet the demands of learners based on the satisfying development of their language knowledge and skills of fundamental English teaching in the future. Aiming at the independent colleges, Yan Liu and Jigang Cai (2009) illustrate the feasibility of the implementing the ESP teaching in the basic level of college English learning from the respective of language basis of learners, practical needs and wishes, faculty and allocations of teaching hours. Although the previous researches all affirm the feasibility of implementing the ESP teaching into the phase of college English, none of them explains how to integrate them in the real teaching context, specifically from the aspects of teaching contents.

An exploration of the integration of general English and ESP teaching content

The existence of problems in current phase of English teaching

This is the case study of English courses offered for 2+2 program of International Finance Major in International Business Faculty (shortened as IBF), Beijing Normal University Zhuhai campus. Students from this program are supposed to spend the first two years in IBF and pursue their study in the cooperated universities overseas in the next two years on the basis of their GPA and IELTS. In the previous two-year learning, most of their courses are bilingual instruction, using original English textbooks and following the credit transfer system. Students of 2+2 program are grouped into level one and level two according to their performance in oral and written English tests at the very beginning of the new semester. The English courses provided for them are College English and Intensive English. College English is taken in the first four semesters in the first and second year with four teaching hours per week, which focuses on the instruction of general English using the textbook as New Standard College English (An Integrated Course 1-4), published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. In addition, Intensive English is offered for them responding to the requirements of cooperated universities overseas, of which three courses per semester (two teaching hours per course) are instructed in the first year: in the first semester, courses including Listening, Speaking and Reading; in the second semester, courses including Listening and Speaking, Fundamental English Writing and Academic Writing, all using self-designed teaching materials.

In light of feedbacks from students, teachers home and abroad, the problems of current English learning exist as followings:

(1) Except from learning specialized courses, students are under great pressure to attend ten teaching hours per week learning English which is almost equivalent to learning hours of English major;

(2) Students have found it time-consuming to look up for new words when learning such courses as Microeconomics and Macroeconomics which are using English original textbooks and adopted bilingual teaching;

(3) Although students have passed IELTS but it is still difficult for them to adjust themselves and pursue their study in English speaking countries.

The main reason for these difficulties lies in the lack of understanding and mastery of English vocabulary, discourse and background information for major disciplines. Due to their next two-year study in overseas universities, it is impossible to provide them with such courses of ESP as business English, financial English as the supplement in the third or fourth year. Therefore, it is of great importance to promote the ESP teaching in the first year for establishing the solid foundation for learning the specialized courses.

An exploration of the integration of college English and ESP in terms of teaching content

In response to the teaching syllabus of college English and the requirements of overseas universities, the teaching hours for students of 2+2 program have reached ten per week. Therefore it is impossible to offer them more classes for solving the problems they have met in the first year learning. Based on the teaching content of college English teaching, this paper will attempt to integrate the ESP into college English teaching from four specific aspects including background introduction, vocabulary explanation and association, sentence analysis and in-class role play, taking the first unit of New Horizon College English (An Integrated Course) as an example.

(1) Enrich the variety of topics when introducing the background information and introduce the current events in line with the professional expertise. For instance, when discussing about the campus life, these topics concerning about establishing a business and door-to-door selling are introduced to help students get acquaintance with operations in the context of business.

(2) Stimulate the creative thinking of students when explaining the core vocabulary of college English by activating the terminology of finance or business. For example, aside from explaining the general meaning of the word “assure”, its meaning in the field of business and finance, such as “insurance cover against an eventuality that (sooner or later) must occur” is also instructed by paraphrase. Additionally, students are motivated to conduct divergent and associative thinking, coming up with or spelling out the words or phrases closely related to business and finance, such as “life assurance, insurance, guarantee, warranty”, and then derive these expressions like “China life, premium, insurance industry, unemployment insurance, underwrite” which will contribute to accumulating and memorizing the terminology.

(3) Cite the sentences from the articles of business and finance field to explain the usage of core vocabulary. In this way, students will gradually recognize the differences between college English and ESP learning as well as the distinctive features of each discourse. Also take the word “assure” as an example, the sample sentences can be illustrated as “Beijing offers growth assurance in its economic balancing act.” or “This article provides an overview of mechanisms available to fulfill financial assurance requirements, with a focus on recent trends in accessing the competitive environmental insurance marketplace”.

(4) Select the situations in the business and finance to do the in-class role play when summarizing the unit one and reviewing the background information. For instance, choosing these contexts relevant to the unit one topic about campus life as “door-to-door selling in dormitory, opening an account in ABC bank, making a purchase in a supermarket” to do the mini-play by applying in ESP knowledge into the reality and experiencing the practicability of ESP.

The feedbacks to the integration of college English and ESP teaching

The integration of college English and ESP teaching is carried out in four classes majoring in International Finance (2+2 program) of the year 2012, totally 186 students. According to the data collected by questionnaire, about 86% students prefer to this tentative teaching and recognize its helpfulness in their specialized courses learning. However, 9.7% of them hold the view that the teaching content of this integration is comparatively complicated with no emphasis on key points and it is difficult to master the extended knowledge; 4.3% students stand in the neutral position without giving their opinions.

In terms of these four aspects as background introduction, vocabulary explanation and association, sentence analysis and in-class role play, vocabulary explanation and association is found to be the most useful, winning the agreement from 79% students, which is followed by background introduction (9.6%) and sentence analysis (7.8%). However, the role play is of the least effectiveness but is of the most interest.

Table1. The effectiveness of the integration of college English and ESP

Class \ Effectiveness (%)	Background introduction	Vocabulary explanation & association	Sentence analysis	In-class role play
Class 1 (41 students)	14.6	78.1	4.9	2.4
Class 2 (40 students)	7.5	85.0	5.0	2.5
Class 3 (42 students)	7.1	76.2	11.9	4.8
Class 4 (43 students)	9.3	76.7	9.3	4.7
Total 186 students	9.6	79	7.8	3.6

Conclusion

It is generally believed that ESP teaching, the further development of general English, should be offered for junior and senior college students. However, the students of the international cooperation program will contact with English original textbooks and receive bilingual teaching when they are in their first year of learning, which gives the integration of college English and ESP teaching the new challenge and will become the crucial step of college English reform in the future. It is suggested that the experimental in-class instruction regarding the integration of college English and ESP as a variable to be conducted to examine the strength and weakness of this teaching pattern, especially in terms of vocabulary acquisition.

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