

A Tentative Study on Problems of Curriculum Design of Five-year Higher Vocational Applied English Major

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Abstract: Through investigation of local enterprises, teachers and students, this paper finds out some problems like students' low learning initiative, unreasonable curriculum weight, less practical teaching, outdated teaching materials, etc of applied English major in five-year higher vocational curriculum design. In addition, it puts forward some countermeasures such as motivating students' interest, adopting new teaching ideas and methods, bringing in appropriate teaching materials, etc to promote the continuous development of teaching reform.

1 Introduction

Applied English (in economy and trade orientation) belongs to English for special purpose which is called ESP for short. It combines English basic knowledge and a special purpose together, which can not only meet learners' needs for other specialized knowledge but also present two advantages namely strong pertinence and high practical value in the current social development background. The distinguishing features of ESP: English level must reach the degree of flexible use in certain disciplines; English knowledge must be integrated with professionalization, and English level and English knowledge must be dynamically integrated as supplement for each other.

2 New requirements proposed by curriculum design of higher vocational applied English major

As a popular major serving territorial economy, the teaching orientation of higher vocational applied English major is to cultivate students' ability of grasping practical English knowledge and basic skills, so that they can read and translate English materials related to their own vocational groups, conduct general communicative activity of English listening, speaking, reading and writing, and deal with practical problems of vocational technology business with English as tool. The sustainable development of higher vocational education needs assurance of education quality, which requires us to integrate fundamentality, practicality and professionalism together rather than blindly copy the curriculum design of undergraduate course, avoiding turning profession and English into two skin.

Throughout previous researches on higher vocational education curriculum design, they mostly discuss higher vocational education as a whole. Relatively speaking, they lack researches on a certain major especially in Yangtze River Delta regions where external exchange and trade are extremely developed. Researches on applied English major (in economy and trade orientation) are even more deficient.

3 Preliminary investigation of curriculum design of higher vocational applied English major

3.1 Investigation methods: questionnaire survey and interview together

3.2 Investigation objectives

The first kind is graduates of applied English major. They have experienced "graduation practice", accumulated certain work experiences, and achieved more or less some attainment. Investigation of them is of course an essential way of obtaining the first-hand information from students' demands.

The second kind is teachers who engage in applied English teaching in this university. They have

the most contact with students in teaching, education and management. They are best qualified to speak on students' defects.

The third kind is people in foreign trade corporations and HR department of other related enterprises. Taking them as our investigation objectives can enable us to directly know present society's demand conditions of business English professional.

3.3 Questionnaire design

Questionnaires can be grouped into two types. One is to know the society's demand of applied English major students. The investigation contents have covered social demands, English level, comprehensive ability, cross-cultural communicative ability of applied English professional, satisfaction for applied English professional, and comments and suggestions on applied English major curriculum design. The other is to know the demand of applied English major students. The investigation contents contain learners' driving force, satisfaction for curriculum design, expectation for curriculum design, preference of learning method, and expectation for future occupation.

There are the most readily statistical choice questions, the most easily operated sorting questions and open-type questions for in-depth understanding of individual needs.

4 Results of curriculum design investigation of higher vocational applied English major

4.1 From perspective of social need

As for language competence, more than half of personnel in HR department think that College English Test Band Four and fluent spoken English are the basic requirements for their recruitment. However, listening and speaking in English language competence are considered as the most vital, which totally accords with the teaching idea of "listening and speaking go first". Moreover, reading and writing are also very important. From the progress of language learning, students with excellent listening and speaking ability are definitely superior to others in English reading and writing aspects. The reason is that listening, speaking, reading and writing of language learning are an integrated unit. Abilities of various aspects progress together and can not be separated from each other.

As for trade experience, enterprises have no intention to take responsibility of personnel training. They realistically require those who can handle immediately, because it means high efficiency as well as high economic benefit.

What kind of professional skills and knowledge are most demanded by the personnel market? From the questionnaires, we can see most personnel surveyed in HR department highly approve graduates' foreign trade knowledge and skills. However, it is not easy to make students grasp sufficient and new professional skills. Classroom time is rather limited, but the professional skills are changed and developed rapidly, which requires us to accomplish the construction of plenty of experimental training bases and to follow up the training course construction and training materials. Basic skills and knowledge in classroom teaching should be integrated with constantly updating new technology and new knowledge. Only with the help of such high-efficiency and wide teaching can students remain invincible in employment competition. The qualified and necessary talents can therefore be endlessly delivered to society.

As for comprehensive ability, most departments have proposed high requirements for graduates' interpersonal skills.

In addition, awareness and ability of cross-culture communication are also a kind of subtle ability, which runs throughout the working career.

4.2 From the perspective of learners

The most popular learning way of students is group discussion, the classroom activity with more response is oral presentation, the most favored extracurricular English learning way is multimedia, and the most welcomed extracurricular activity is practice. Those "the most ones" have played a vital guiding role in our curriculum design.

Investigation of curriculum design itself has showed that more than half of the students are dissatisfied. Their reasons are mutually exclusive. Some hold that courses in language culture aspect such as Background of Britain and America, Selected Readings of Newspapers and

Periodicals, etc should be set because they have high-level demands for study. Some students look down upon courses like Background of Britain and America, Cross-cultural Communication, etc and think that these courses are useless after graduation. Courses that can be useful immediately should be opened.

In addition, there are few courses in the fifth semester except for practical training. Students are dissatisfied that they enter into substituted post exercitation situation like this. The guilty feeling is too normal because they enter into talent market as “semi-finished products”. However, students can accept the course difficulty and density.

As for teachers’ evaluation and requirements, they are the dominator of classroom teaching activities and their role can not be ignored. Only by grasping firmly and well the “teaching” and “learning” link can classroom teaching be three-dimensional and well-rounded. Teachers of applied English major are all equipped with “double-qualified” specialized knowledge and background. Some teachers even have experience of working in foreign enterprises.

Students’ questionnaires reflect their demands for society, and the future employment situation and orientation of applied English major are extremely unknown. Does it show that our teachers have repeated too much what the book says and know much less of current news of inside and outside of industry?

As for the fact whether the practical operation is conducted in truth, our teaching is accepted by most students. The application of many new-type instructional software and hardware facilities has more or less made up for the deficiency that we lack training bases which can accommodate a large number of students.

As for the evaluation of teaching materials, most of our teaching materials originate from the undergraduate courses with different covers. The contents are outdated and there are too many knowledge points and too few parts for ability training. The only way of learning such kind of teaching material is to memorize mechanically, which is definitely not the interest of students in higher vocational colleges. The teaching materials they need are easy to understand, full of divergent thinking, used for creative study and application, and not confined to a certain standard answer. Such kind of teaching material better comes from the original ones. Teaching for practical ability in European and American countries has obviously moved well in front of us.

5 Enlightenment brought by curriculum design investigation of higher vocational applied English major

5.1 Students have large practical teaching demands for related business of foreign trade and English

Practical teaching here refers to not only enabling students to see the present and future of this industry but also making them practically think about their struggling objective and orientation. The most important is to make them experience the most classic and new-style working scenes. Employment for them will never be a problem after such kind of study. This demand is realistic.

5.2 Students have high requirements for teachers

Students require that teachers should be equipped with not only solid basic skills but also abundant cross-culture knowledge and practical experiences. They had better have the ability of crossing China and western countries, and integrating the past and the present. Moreover, they should have certain industry experience and can not be too inexperienced. All these above have proposed new requirements for our teaching recruitment and training. We should appropriately employ some teachers who once worked in foreign trade enterprises or foreign-owned enterprises. Of course, these talents can only be found by accident and not through seeking, so the existing teachers should regularly conduct post practice in enterprises and pass the “double qualification”. In addition, we should encourage teachers to focus on current affairs and industry orientation, and treat the news as significant contents of teaching and research office activities.

5.3 Government participation and coalition of college and enterprise

Government has participated in no matter the German mode or the Australian mode. In order to improve the degree of employment rate and stability, enterprises and higher vocational colleges

should ally with each other. Theoretical teaching and practical teaching are closely linked with each other. Not a single one can be omitted. In other word, the dynamic integration of applied English major and foreign trade enterprises can not be achieved only by one department leader or several department leaders. Only if government and industry have had full understanding of this, applied English major can achieve significant development, or the defects will be existing forever with regret.

6 Countermeasures of curriculum design of higher vocational applied English major

6.1 Motivating the learning interest of applied English major

As the saying goes, “to merely know is nothing compared to being interested to know, being interested to know is nothing compared to deriving joy from learning it”. Students with interest and motivation will actively take part in each link of teaching, and teachers can timely adjust their teaching method and process, so that a win-win situation can be achieved.

How to make them know whether everything they have done is meaningful or not? We should invite many entrepreneurs to do lectures and ask students to practice in enterprises on vocation. With personal experiences, students can get the picture of their future employment and will strive for it with a purpose.

6.2 Using appropriate teaching materials

Interestingness and comprehensive practicality are the necessary materials in higher vocational students’ teaching materials. The difficult level of textbooks can be a little more than students’ level. Of course, as for students with higher level, some divergent and profound questions can get them fed.

6.3 Reforming the teaching methods of applied English major

Whether applied English major is simple superposition of language and foreign trade or not? The answer of this question is definitely no. Then how to present such kind of dynamic integration in teaching process? The answer is bilingual education, teaching the courses of foreign trade module in English. At the same time, teachers of English major should encouraged to do desultory reading of knowledge of foreign trade and international situation aspect. Students generally hope that there are more foreign trade courses easy for them to handle. However, the weakness of English basis will inevitably become their soft spot in future occupation and the sustainable development of their future occupation will also be restrained.

Listening and speaking ability must be placed at the first place of English application ability. Students should lay solid foundation of listening and speaking ability and then make comparatively accurate writing and translation. The language input and output process will bring transformation of evaluation mode. “College entrance examination decides the whole life” has been incompatible with present needs. Evaluation modes including diversified and multilevel teacher evaluation, group member evaluation, and self evaluation are fairer with high efficiency.

7 Conclusion

Carrying out research and practice of five-year higher vocational cohesion curriculum design of applied English major is the fundamental work of quickening higher vocational education reform and development as well as a systemic project with broad aspects and complicated contents. In this process, we should adhere to seriously stringent, realistic and pragmatic attitude, and strive to update talent training mode, form talent training characteristics and promote talent training quality.

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