

Analysis on Problems and Strategies of Vocational ESP Teaching

Taking Yantai Nanshan University as Example

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Abstract—In recent years, ESP (English for Special Purpose) has become the hot spot in education field. However, study on vocational ESP teaching is still rare and with great potential. Taking Yantai Nanshan University as an example, the essay analyzes the current problems in vocational ESP teaching and concludes the countermeasures and strategies, hoping to provide valuable references for vocational English education.

Keywords—ESP; vocational college; problems and strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

As the rapid development and cooperation of world economy, especially after China's entrance of WTO, English is playing a more and more essential role not only in our daily life, but also in all walks of life as an important linguistic tool for international communication. Therefore, high qualified personnel with both skillful ability for English communication and certain professional knowledge are favored and admired by all industries. No longer can Traditional EGP (English for General Purpose) meet the need of modern society. Expertness and utilization have become new features for the learning and using of English. At present, ESP has become the main trend for English teaching. As the increasing demand for specialized compound talent, studies on ESP are of great importance and necessity.

So far, the importance of ESP has aroused people's wide concern in theoretical circle. However, in practice, it hasn't received the deserving attention. Sometimes, the results of ESP courses are not satisfactory, or even a mere formality. As a discipline in formation and developing, ESP will surely encounter challenges. Taking Yantai Nanshan University as example, the essay will take vocational ESP teaching as research objective, analyze current problems in vocational ESP teaching, and put forward countermeasures and strategies with practical value hoping to make contributions for Chinese vocational ESP teaching.

II. DEFINITION OF CORE CONCEPT

A. ESP(English for Special Purpose)

ESP (English for Special Purpose), dating back to Late 1960s, is a variety of English which is closely related with a particular occupation, subject or purpose or English Courses

which is set up according to learners' particular purpose or needs. ESP is the combination of EGP and a particular purpose and profession, with the aim of meeting learner's requirements of other professional knowledge. The characteristic of ESP teaching is clear, targeted, practical and with high value. In a word, the emergence and application of ESP is not only the inevitable demand for world economy development, but also the natural tendency of linguistic revolution.

So far, researches on ESP have extended to a great variety of industries, business English, tourism English, textile English, hotel English, to name just a few. Strevens proposes four characteristics of ESP teaching: firstly, from the aspect of need, it should meet the requirement of given learners; then, from the aspect of content, it should relate with specific vocation and profession; next, from the aspect of vocabulary, syntax and discourse, it should focus on the linguistic use of certain professional activities; finally, ESP should contrast with EGP.

B. Teaching

As for the concept of teaching, there are roughly three kinds of definition. Some consider teaching as imparting knowledge, some regard teaching only as classes; still some consider teaching as intellectual education. The author prefers none of these opinions, because of the following reasons: To begin with, teaching is a course of two-way exchange, including both teaching and learning as well; In the second place, there are a great variety of teaching patterns. Except for classroom teaching, there are still field-based instruction, supervised teaching, practical teaching, so on and so forth; Finally, teaching is the basic approach for realizing teaching purposes, while intellectual education belongs to the category of teaching content.

The author considers teaching as educational activities which target at educating people by means of imparting knowledge. To be specific, regulated by teaching purpose and guided by teachers on purpose and in a planned way, students learn and master actively and enthusiastically the scientific knowledge and skills in order to promote all-rounded development.

C. Vocational ESP

A vocational school, sometimes called a trade school or vocational college, is a post-secondary educational institution

designed to provide vocational education, or technical skills required to perform the tasks of a particular job. It is traditionally distinguished from four-year colleges by their focus on job-specific training to students who are typically bound for one of the skilled trades. As the development of ages, vocational schools are paying attention to the importance of ESP.

Basic Requirements for English Teaching in Higher Vocational Education published by the Department of Education requires that colleges should run ESP courses, combining with the learning of specialized knowledge so as to ensure the continuity of school English learning and its practice. As the continuity of EGP, ESP is the combination of English language and professional knowledge. Therefore, the vocational ESP is the most remarkable characteristic of the vocational English education.

III. FEASIBILITY STUDY ON ESP IN VOCATIONAL ENGLISH EDUCATION

A. *From the Aspect of Teaching Objective*

Both ESP and vocational English teaching have common purposes in teaching. The ultimate goal for vocational English education is to help students realize the transform from language learning to language using and foster their ability to use the language within specific professional area. Therefore, vocation English teaching should take both students' need of learning and employer's need for human resources into consideration, meeting various requirements and providing truly practical services. By introducing ESP, the vocational colleges can cultivate integrated personnel with skilled professional knowledge and English using ability. There are three basic principles in ESP, namely, student-centered, authentic, and requirement analysis, which correspond with the purposes of vocational English teaching. In a word, it is of great feasibility to reform vocational English teaching by introducing ESP.

B. *From the Aspect of Students*

Students in vocational colleges have the foundation of ESP learning. On one hand, students in vocational colleges can generally be classified into following categories: professional senior talents, trainees, on-campus students. Considering English as a method or a tool of working, they have the desire of English learning eagerly and actively; On the other hand, they have master the basic vocabulary, grammar, and core linguistic knowledge, which make linguistic foundation for ESP learning. Actually, ESP learning is the strength and supplement of their professional ability and beneficial to their life-long study and sustainable development.

C. *From the Aspect of Teachers*

Though the theory of ESP has been built for quite a long time, its practices are still in the rudimentary and exploring stage, that is, the transform from EGP to ESP. The transformation takes place not only in the aspect of students and colleges, it is also true for the teachers. They should master both the professional and related English knowledge.

They are the perfect combination of English language teachers and the professional teachers. For this purpose, they should undertake strict training, which can be divided into two categories. On the one hand, English teachers should learn professional knowledge with their utmost effort; on the other hand, teachers with sound professional knowledge can participate English training. Only in this way can teachers meet the requirement of ESP teaching.

To conclude, vocational English teaching should always take students' need as the first prerequisite, combine basic linguistic language with professional language, and transform teaching focus from EGP to ESP. Introducing ESP is both a revolution and the practical need in vocational English teaching.

IV. PROBLEMS IN ESP TEACHING, TAKING YANTAI NANSHAN UNIVERSITY AS EXAMPLE

Yantai Nanshan University was founded in 1991, developing from Nanshan Vocational Technical Institute. At present, it has two levels of education, namely, the undergraduate education and the junior college education. As the university was invested by the Nanshan Group and the orientation of college-running is applied and technical education, the college set up several practical and applied disciplines, including Hotel Management, Tourism Management, Textile Engineering so on and so forth. All majors mentioned above require profession-related English teaching. Accordingly, the college establishes various English courses for the need, hotel English, tour English, tourism English, textile English, to name just a few. However, in practice, the author observes several problems, which restrict the effect of teaching and the realization of teaching goals. These problems can be concluded in following categories.

A. *From the Aspect of Curriculum*

Through practical investigation and interviews on both teachers and students, the author summarizes the shortcomings in ESP teaching from the aspect of curriculum. In the first place, a majority of majors set up major-related English courses for only one semester or two semester, which is not sufficient at all. What's more, the total number of class hour are becoming less and less. As we all know, society and scientific technology is developing in unprecedented speed, which means that some new words are appearing and some words will be out of date and fading away gradually. In order to understand and grasp the leading edge of international science and technology, students should first understand the meanings of related expression, which are the major content of ESP teaching. In other word, timeliness and effectiveness are the key point of ESP teaching.

B. *From the Aspect of Teaching Material*

What's more, there are problems in teaching materials and methods. There is no authorized and specified teaching material in ESP teaching. Usually, the teacher themselves choose the textbook on their own, without the guidance of tested teaching program. Also, teachers follow the traditional teaching method in undergraduate education, taking textbook

knowledge as the key point, which contrasts with the principles of ESP teaching. ESP teaching requires authentic situation and usage. All problems mentioned above lead to the embarrassing situation that students can not use English skillfully in real working condition, though they attended ESP teaching.

C. From the Aspect of Teaching Target

According to the interview, nearly half of the students believe that the objective of ESP teaching is to help students improve their English level in general, while only a quarter believe that ESP learning is beneficial to solving the practical problems in authentic working conditions in the future. It reveals the misunderstanding of ESP teaching target. Most teachers and students lay the focus of learning on knowledge instead of practical application and the teaching target of ESP, that is, training on profession-related English using ability, is not emphasized prominently and clearly.

D. From the Aspect of Learning Outcome Evaluation

So far, every procedure of ESP teaching is still in exploring and repeated testing. So does the evaluation on learning outcomes. Many majors are still following the tradition method, namely, the close-book exam. However, it turns out that this traditional method can not reflect students' true level of English learning and using. As for the teachers, though they have realized the weakness of the close-book exam and tried some initiative methods, close-book exam is still the main form in evaluating learning outcomes in ESP teaching.

The sweeping approach of close-book exam are driving ESP teaching into the morass of exam-oriented education, which blots out the professional feature of vocational education and make students and teachers tired of boring learning and teaching. What's more, as the traditional Chinese saying goes: "to teach students in accordance of their aptitude", the close-book exam ignores the differences between students.

E. From the Aspect of Teaching Crew

Generally speaking, teachers taking the mission of ESP teaching have certain background of English education, who are simple in the knowledge structure and short of professional knowledge. The teaching crew is lack of dual-qualification teachers and most ESP courses are undertaken by teachers who traditionally teach college English. These teachers are skilled in the English language and short of practical experience. Therefore, in ESP teaching itself, grammar and vocabulary becomes the core of teaching and students can not learn professional knowledge through ESP learning. Moreover, the teaching method of repeating what the books say is not innovative at all and not suitable for the requirement of vocational English Education.

V. COUNTERMEASURES AND STRATEGIES FOR ESP TEACHING

So far, we have analyzed the problems in vocational ESP teaching, taking Yantai Nanshan University as example. The next procedure should take measures from various aspects to

solve these problems and get rid of current embarrassing situation. The author will discuss these points in detail.

A. To Strengthen the Understanding on the Importance of ESP Teaching

At present, in order to truly realize ESP teaching in vocational English education, colleges and teachers should first change their opinion, taking ESP teaching as the continuity of EGP and an important teaching content for training the ability of English using. ESP is an essential component and the ultimate goal of vocational English education. In practice, more class hours should be added.

Moreover, at the national level, there are no authorized curriculum and evaluation standards. The Department of Education should organize scholars in ESP teaching and provide basis for specific teaching, from teaching target to evaluation system to vocabulary.

B. To Compile ESP Teaching Material of High Quality

Nowadays, ESP teaching has drawn more and more attention from both theoretical circles and practical teaching area. Also more and more colleges have set up ESP courses. However, correspondent teaching materials are still in great demand, especially, those with high quality. Compiling teaching material of high quality has become the task of top priority. The compiling of teaching material should obey the following rules. To begin with, it should follow the principles of being major-related, innovation and encouragement; In the second place, it should reflect the rules of language itself, language teaching, and language learning; Next, it should meet the requirement of being authentic, compatible, and comprehensive; Last but not least, it should keep pace with the times. To be specific, it is not only suitable for the current situation of vocational English teaching, but also covers the new developing trend in the area.

C. To Perfect the Evaluation System

It is common sense that specialized evaluation system on ESP teaching should be established. Traditional methods, either the close-book exam or the grade exam are not suitable any more. Evaluation on ESP learning should take the whole course of learning into consideration, rather than the assessment of knowledge itself, and lay particular emphasis on evaluation of applied skills and learning procedures.

What's more, the evaluation system should be divided into different levels. Teachers can give out questions with different difficulties for students of different levels. What the student should do is be better, comparing with themselves. In this way, every student can have the sense of success and confidence in English learning.

D. To Improve the Teacher's Quality

Teachers undertaking the mission of ESP teaching should be qualified with both sound English knowledge and professional knowledge as well. Currently, most of them are college English teachers. They are skilled in English language itself but weak in professional knowledge. Many measures can be taken to improve their quality and train dual-qualification

teaching crew. To begin with, teachers with sound English knowledge can learn the professional knowledge on their own, which can save a great number of time and sources; in the second place, teachers with sound English knowledge can master certain professional knowledge through specific training; Finally, colleges can invite skilled technicians with great English ability to be a member of teaching crew, which is a shortcut for solving the problem in short period.

E. To Improve English Proficiency by Combine the On-campus and Off-campus Learning Together

According to the study of linguistics, linguistic competence can easily be forgotten on cognitive level, and can only be maintained and strengthened through linguistic activities, in other word, in usage. To create new discourse according to the authentic linguistic context is the evidence of linguistic competence and the final purpose of vocational English education. Therefore, more scene teaching should be organized, by means of which the students can improve their operational ability.

Taking Yantai Nanshan University as example, the college can establish cooperation with corresponding companies. In this way, students can visit the job site and experience the work on their own under the guidance of ESP teacher. Moreover, they can adjust to the working condition as soon as possible after graduation, which is the goal of vocational English education.

VI. CONCLUSION

As the exchange and merging of global culture and economy, professionalism and diversification have become the new demand for English education, which correspond with the goal of ESP teaching. As for vocational education, more time and energy should be put into linguistic competence in real working condition. In recent years, study on ESP teaching has become the hot topic in China, which is not enough in reality. Study on vocational ESP teaching is especially rare, which is the original intention of this essay.

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