

Problems in Transforming EGP Teachers in China's Universities into ESP Teachers

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Abstract—Because of the significant cultural and economic shifts in China along with a turn toward student-centered instruction in Universities, there was an insufficient number of English for Specific Purpose (ESP) Teachers in Chinese universities. As a result English for General Purpose (EGP) Teachers had to be transformed into ESP Teachers. The study uses 65 of the converted ESP teachers to determine the difficulties teachers had in making this transformation. Some measures used to determine the problems related to the transformation of these teachers are presented in the paper.

Index Terms—ESP teachers, EGP teachers, transformation, difficulties

I. INTRODUCTION

With the globalization of the world economy and the specialization of most professions, one of the directions for the reform of undergraduate English teaching in China is that English for General Purposes (EGP) teaching needs to gradually transform into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching. The important difference between ESP teaching and EGP teaching is that in ESP, the teaching is directed toward communicating with a set of professional skills and particular profession-related activities. University English teaching reform has meant that ESP teaching has been a challenge for English teachers since they were originally only engaged in teaching English for general purposes. They now have to reflect on their professional development and try to determine the way to meet the new demands of the situation. This study plans to explore the difficulties ESP teachers have faced and the way they prepare to make these changes.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

ESP emerged as a single field in the 1960's. The flowering period of ESP has been closely tied to the rapid expansion in science, technology and commerce. The ESP teaching movement resulted from the English language needs of the learners to connect their learning to their professions and job description. Up to now, ESP has undergone five main development phases: (1) to include analysis of sentence grammar; (2) to promote rhetorical or discourse analysis so as to understand how sentences were combined to produce meaning; (3) to promote target situation analysis believing that the ESP course design process should proceed by first identifying the target situation and then carrying out a rigorous analysis of the linguistic features of that situation; (4) to emphasize the phase of skills and strategies that are needed to look below the surface and consider not the language itself but the thinking processes that underlie language use; (5) to see ESP as a learning-centered approach (Hutchinson and Waters, 2002).

A generally accepted definition of ESP is that its courses are those in which the aims and the content are determined, principally or wholly, not by criteria drawn from general education, as when English is a school subject, but by functional or practical (job related) English requirements of the learner (Strevens, 1977). Hutchinson and Waters (2002) define ESP as an approach to language learning that is based on learners' needs. What they mean is that ESP not only includes a particular kind of language, teaching material, or methodology, but also involves the learners, the language required and the learning context.

According to Freeman (1989), ESP teaching is a process of making decisions on the basis of knowledge, skills, attitude and awareness. "Knowledge" and "skills" are the foundation of teaching while for Freeman "attitude" and "awareness" are its roots. "Knowledge" mainly refers to the subject matter and the students' background information. More specifically, the former refers to the knowledge of both English and teaching methods, and the latter involves background information about students' English proficiency, their learning strategy and personality or their individual differences. "Skills" refers to a teacher's ability to use appropriate methodology and to deal with its textbooks, class organization and management using student-centered instruction. "Attitude" means how teachers think of themselves, their students as well as the relationship between the two and the whole manner of teaching. "Awareness" is the capacity to recognize and monitor the attention one is giving or has given to some aspects of teaching (Freeman, 1989).

This study will focus on the difficulties ESP teachers may encounter as they address knowledge, skills, attitude and awareness.

In terms of ESP teachers' professional development, Perry (1980) believes it means the growth in their teaching career, including the increase of confidence, enhancement of teaching skills, extension and consolidation of subject knowledge, and reinforcement of the awareness used in their teaching. Jia Aiwu (2005) argues that foreign language teachers' development is composed of two dimensions. The first is teachers' psychological growth in their teaching, including their attitude, subject knowledge and competence, and subject teaching ability. In the first dimension, attitude level refers to strengthening of professional belief and values; level of subject knowledge and competence indicates the extension and deepening of subject knowledge; level of subject teaching ability focuses on enhancement of teaching skills and awareness of enriching ability with colleagues. The second dimension lies in their development gained in in-service training or education. ESP teachers' professional development in this study refers to changes in the teacher's attitude, knowledge, skills and awareness.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. *Research Design*

In modern tertiary education the new role of foreign language education is to develop interdisciplinary talents with solid and broad knowledge. ESP which is designed for specific learners according to their academic and professional needs clearly meets this demand. Because some EGP teachers have transformed into ESP teachers, this study intends to determine the difficulties those teachers face and propose some effective ways to avoid them. More specifically this thesis aims to address two important questions:

1. What difficulties do these teachers encounter during their teaching?
2. What are effective ways to foster ESP teachers' development?

B. *Research Method*

The participants in this research study include 65 English teachers from 8 science and engineering universities and colleges. Because the number of ESP teachers was insufficient many EGP teachers were transformed into ESP teachers. But because of the advancement of science, technology, and economics, teachers need more understanding and better command of both specialist knowledge and skills.

C. *Data Collection*

Two different sources of data, the questionnaire survey and the semi-structured interview, were used to seek the information to answer these questions. They are introduced in the following section.

D. *Instruments*

(1) Questionnaires

In the literature review mentioned above, the questionnaire contains several items that deal with ESP teachers' teaching attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness. A total of 65 questionnaires were given to ESP teachers, of which 56 were fully completed. The data was collected through e-mail or paper responses. The rate of completion was 86.15%. The Survey used SPSS 16.0 analyze the data.

(2) Semi-structured Interviews

In order to understand why participants did not respond to all of the questions an in-depth semi-structured interview was given to 10 teachers who did not finish the questionnaires. The semi-structured interviews were conducted separately through phone calls or QQ (Tencent Instant Messenger) contacts using a set of questions to attain more clear, authentic, and abundant information. The researcher made detailed notes about the interview results.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this part of the research, the results of both the questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews are presented, followed by discussions of issues relevant to the better preparation of ESP teachers.

A. *Teachers' Attitude*

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES TOWARDS ESP TEACHING

Item	Options	Numbers	Percentage
Would I like to teach ESP?	A. strongly agree	9	16.07
	B. agree	30	53.57
	C. no idea	10	17.86
	D. disagree	6	10.71
	E. strongly disagree	3	5.36
ESP teachers should regard students as the focus of their teaching using the describing characteristics of ESP.	A. strongly agree	12	21.43
	B. agree	26	46.43
	C. no idea	11	19.64
	D. disagree	5	8.93
	E. strongly disagree	2	3.57
ESP teachers should be Language teacher, Collaborator, Course designer and materials provider, Researcher and Appraiser.	A. strongly agree	16	28.57
	B. agree	25	44.64
	C. No idea	11	19.64
	D. disagree	3	5.36
	E. Strongly disagree	1	1.79

Attitude involves teachers' stance toward the issue of "learner-centeredness" or "teacher-centeredness", and also their performance and behaviors in dealing with the matter of actual teaching. From the above table, 69.64% of participants among the 56 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to teach ESP courses. Although they have had to face many new challenges involved in daily teaching, they think it is worthwhile profession. When asked to explain the reason for this choice, the interviewees made it clear that they were aware that the purpose for college English teaching would mean an increase in social demand to cultivate interdisciplinary foreign language talents.

Learner-centeredness is defined by a perspective that combines a focus on individual learners' cultural background and their learning needs, such as the knowledge available, the effective practice, etc (McCombs & Whisler,1997). 67.86% of participants hold that they should regard students as the center of language teaching; they clearly adopted the learner-centered approach. The interviewed teachers realized that students should be responsible for their own learning. They realized that teachers must construct an optimal learning environment in which learners should be actively involved in their learning.

73.21% of participants agree that ESP teachers have to fulfill a variety of roles, such as language teacher, collaborator, course designer, materials provider, researcher and appraiser. Because of the on-going changing patterns of learners' needs, ESP teachers have to adopt multidimensional and newly determined responsibilities, such as formulating certain goals and objectives, selecting and developing effective materials, planning appropriate courses, and evaluating the learners' development.

B. Subject Knowledge

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES TOWARDS SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE

Item	Options	Numbers	Percentage
How would you describe your mastery of the specific subject knowledge?	A. knowing all about it	0	0
	B. knowing a lot about it	5	8.93
	C. knowing some subject knowledge	12	21.43
	D. knowing little about	34	60.71
	E. knowing nothing about it	5	8.93
What did you do when you meet with some specialty problems? (multiple answers)	A. ask the subject teacher for help	36	64.29
	B. consult reference materials	47	83.93
	C. ask other specialties	15	26.79
	D. discuss with students	19	33.93
	E. turn to other alternatives	21	37.50
Need analysis is the basis for designing ESP syllabus and compiling teaching materials.	A. strongly agree	11	19.64
	B. agree	24	42.86
	C. no idea	15	26.79
	D. disagree	4	7.14
	E. strongly disagree	2	3.57

The subject knowledge, related to a specific discipline, is an important part of ESP teaching. Teachers need to have a basic subject knowledge in the specialist field. Better command of the subject knowledge on the part of the ESP teachers is highly favorable and an understanding of content is highly desirable. Nevertheless, 60.71% of participants admit that they know little about the required specific subject knowledge. The interviewees mentioned that they were not familiar with the ESP subject matter or did not have a good command of the vocabulary and stylistic features in a certain ESP field. The reason for this low content knowledge is that teachers who used to be EGP teachers do not belong to a subject-related discourse community. When they met with some specialty problems, they usually asked the subject teacher for help (64.29%) or consulted reference materials (83.93%). Some said that they ask specialists (26.79%), discuss this with the students (33.93%), or turn to other alternatives (31.50%). Most scholars, however, insist

that ESP teaching should foster students' language skills and their communicative competence, and that teachers need to be equipped with subject knowledge to achieve satisfying teaching results. They felt that without subject knowledge ESP teachers' authority with their students would be weakened. Jigang (2004) additionally pointed out that ESP teachers should reach a moderate level of subject knowledge as well as English language competency.

Needs analysis is one of the most important elements in an ESP curriculum and 62.50% of participants strongly agree or agree that needs analysis is the basis for designing an ESP syllabus and developing teaching materials. However, the interviewees mentioned that some colleges developed ESP courses merely by being in accordance with particular professional requirements rather than carefully assessing individual needs. Many were concerned that a poorly funded teaching system would lead to degrading students' long-term competitive advantage. They hope that ESP teaching would help meet their students' personal needs such as cultivating autonomous learning ability, fostering their social adaptability, and enhancing their comprehensive quality.

C. Teaching Skills

TABLE 3
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES TOWARDS TEACHING SKILLS

Item	Options	Numbers	Percentage
What are the teaching methods frequently adopted by the teacher? (multiple answers)	A. The grammar-translation method	36	64.29
	B. the communicative approach	29	51.79
	B. the teacher-centered method	35	62.50
	D. the content based instruction	31	55.36
Are the teaching materials appropriate?	A. strongly agree	2	3.57
	B. agree	9	16.07
	C. no idea	11	19.64
	D. disagree	26	46.43
	E. strongly disagree	8	14.29
Do you think it necessary to reorganize teaching material?	A. strongly agree	11	19.64
	B. agree	30	53.57
	C. no idea	9	16.07
	D. disagree	4	7.14
	E. strongly disagree	2	3.57

Teaching skills involves the abilities and techniques of adopting suitable teaching methods to deal with teaching materials, and design the teaching procedures, and classroom activities that are a part of teaching. From Table 3, we see that each teaching method listed was frequently adopted by ESP teachers. As we all know, the communicative approach, the student-centered approach, and content based instruction are all effective ways to develop students' comprehensive abilities, which are necessary to help students deal with various problems and emergent situations in future jobs. Although many teachers have realized that these three methods are essential to ESP teaching, they may have adopted the teacher-centered, grammar-translation method because they knew little about subject knowledge. The interviewees admitted that they were often limited to the explanation found in the text itself because they lacked a sense of its deeper meaning. They were ready to explain the language points in the texts but overlooked student's subject specialist knowledge and other matters. These limitations can make ESP teaching consume much added time with low efficiency in teaching results.

60.72% of participants believe that the teaching materials were unimportant. Some teachers mentioned that the current materials they surveyed are either too specialized, not easily available, or very outdated. The teaching material should, however, be drawn from subject-related authentic materials and serve students' future work well. Nearly all of the interviewees held that it was necessary to select, analyze, and reorganize the teaching materials by themselves as needed.

D. Teachers' Awareness

TABLE 4
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES TOWARDS TEACHING SKILLS

Item	Options	Numbers	Percentage
What kind of ESP teacher training program has been organized by your college?(multiple answers)	A. inviting experts to give lectures	41	73.21
	B. sending teachers to receive further education	15	26.79
	C. funding cooperation teaching team	36	64.29
	D. other ways	12	21.43
How to promote teachers' professional development?(multiple answers)	A. autonomous learning	37	66.07
	B. action research	38	67.86
	C. reflective teaching	41	73.21
	D. team collaboration	31	55.36
	E. other ways	37	66.07

In teachers' professional development, awareness serves the function of triggering and monitoring teachers' attitude, skills, and knowledge. Heightened awareness helps teachers hold a positive attitude that allows them to be open to change. As can be seen from Table 4, college administrative departments prefer short-term teacher training program, such as inviting experts to give lectures (73.21%) and funding teaching teams (64.29%). In their interviews, some teachers mentioned that their colleges hadn't attached enough importance to ESP teaching and did not want to invest much money for teachers to receive further education (26.79%). No doubt teachers were eager to have the opportunity to receive full-time further education to make up for deficiencies. But due to lack of systematic pre-service and in-service training, they have to further improve the teaching quality and foster their professional development through practices such as autonomous learning, action research, reflective teaching, and team collaboration.

V. IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the analysis of the problems and the survey results, we offer four recommendations to improve the quality of ESP teachers.

A. *Fostering the Positive Attitude*

Positive attitudes and actions employed by teachers can create positive changes in the lives and professional development of their students. The survey shows that most ESP teachers have positive attitudes towards ESP teaching. ESP teachers should respond to students' various interests and needs and help them develop positive self-concepts and cooperative attitudes by listening to them speak about their future. Additionally, they should provide clear feedback for them, help them comprehend what they are going to do in classes, encourage them to develop intrinsic motivation, discover their capabilities, and take responsibility to develop special skills for learning. ESP teachers' positive attitude can be fostered by fulfilling the responsibilities of being a language teacher, course designer, material provider, collaborator, researcher, and assessor under the principles of ESP teaching.

The nature of ESP determines that its basic teaching process should be learner-centered. That means that ESP teaching should place emphasis on process rather than product, developing communicative competency, using authentic materials, and valuing collaborative group work. The classroom activities appropriate to the learner-centered approach, require students to apply knowledge in diverse and authentic contexts, to explain ideas, interpret texts, and construct arguments based on evidence, rather than focus exclusively on the acquisition of predetermined "right answers". The teaching practice should follow the principle of involving students' collaborative work and giving them support to engage in task-oriented dialogue with each other, such as role play, group work, pair work, task-oriented work, and discussion. The teacher's lectures and learner-centered classroom activities should vary with the lesson patterns and learning goals. In sum, ESP teaching in learner-centered classrooms serves to meet learners' needs, interests, experiences and lifelong development.

B. *Enriching Subject Knowledge*

ESP teaching is neither a simple language course nor a simple subject course but a closely integrated course with equal attention placed on language use and subject knowledge (Elisabet et al, 2015). It is favorable for ESP teachers to know much about subject knowledge because this enhances teachers' confidence and thus contributes to the success of their teaching. The Survey, however, indicates that ESP teachers are aware that they lack professional subject knowledge. Many teachers feel ineffectual because of the lack of subject matter knowledge they are expected to teach. Science that lacks knowledge, in particular, can be seen as dull, boring, complicated, incomprehensible, and confusing, which can only have a very negative effect on their teaching.

It is essential that ESP teachers should try to dispel the fears and hostility towards ESP subject matter. They should be motivated to accumulate every bit of subject knowledge through many different ways such as asking professional subject teachers for help and consulting reference books. Above all, ESP teachers should be eager to receive relevant training courses, and if possible, be sent to other universities at home and abroad for training. Through regular in-service training, the subject knowledge of ESP teachers will be enhanced and their comprehensive ability will be improved. However, due to limited time and inadequate funding, it is impossible for most ESP teachers to participate in different kinds of training on subject knowledge. Therefore, they have to study independently by reading related books or resources online to make up for the deficiency.

Needs analysis is the basis for designing an ESP syllabus and compiling teaching materials. Compared with EGP, the need analysis of ESP is easier to be carried out, which is a unique feature of ESP. Needs analysis involves two aspects according to West (1994). One is related to Target Situation Analysis (TSA), which centers on identifying the learners' language requirements in the occupational or academic setting. The other means analyzing learning needs which includes what kind of knowledge the learners lack, which skills learners should learn first and which ones later, and which learning strategy learners respond to best. The necessary information can be obtained through several means: administering questionnaires, conducting interviews, making classroom observations, and analyzing course documents. The information can be gathered as well from different sources: students, teachers, sponsors, administrators, program developers, and others.

C. *Strengthening Professional Skills*

As an ESP teacher or practitioner, I've recommended, in addition to the necessary language competence and specific subject knowledge, some personal skills that are of great significance (Ellis & Mark, 2002). Grammar-Translation method still dominates ESP teaching through integrating teaching methods. This method pays great attention to grammar rules and reading, but unfortunately does not take listening, speaking and subject matter into adequate consideration. The Communicative Approach attaches importance to the needs and the role of students, but it does not pay as much attention to subject matter. A blend of Content-based Instruction (CBI) that absorbs the advantages of both the Grammar-Translation Method and Communicative Language Teaching, is more compatible with ESP teaching. This instruction has the potential to enhance students' motivation, to accelerate acquisition of their language proficiency, to make the language learning experience more enjoyable, and to fulfill the task of language learning. There are various models of CBI, among which the theme-based model, the sheltered model, and the adjunct model are very common. In theme-based language instruction, the course syllabus is based on different themes or topics which provide rich content for students to learn (Brinton et al, 2003). Within the sheltered model, the teacher uses special methods to shelter or focus on subject matter so as to make the content more accessible to learners. In another approach, the adjunct model, students with sufficient language proficiency are encouraged to participate in content activities (Stryker & Leaver, 1997).

The selection of an effective approach and use of compatible materials plays a significant role in ESP teaching. If teachers try to authenticate the language, learners can be gradually initiated into the conventions of the English language use and acquire it. The problem is that at present teachers save too little time to research and develop appropriate and useful materials. This survey shows more than 60% of teachers think the present ESP teaching materials are far from satisfactory. Therefore, it is believed that many teachers have become slaves of the published course books available. The teaching materials should come from the authentic materials used in the related workplace; teaching activities and practices designing both need to reflect the socio-cultural context of ESP. The chosen materials containing different types of exercises, activities, and tasks, should instigate communication among the students. Based on the students' needs and objectives, the materials should treat the four language skills equally. More importantly, teachers need to reorganize the range of materials and opt for the best ones based on their own classroom experience and their learners' needs, objectives, levels, and interests.

D. Enhancing Development Awareness

Awareness means that ESP teachers work to achieve their teaching objective through effective ways, that provides opportunities to promote their professional development. The survey indicates that ESP teachers have to rely on short-term training and meta-cognitive awareness to foster their professional development based on real world situations. In fact, autonomous learning, action research, reflective teaching, and team collaboration are common and effective ways to raise their awareness.

The survey found that most of the teachers rely on autonomous learning much more than the collectively organized training programs to fulfill further development. Just as Master (1997) suggests, in most cases, professional ESP practitioners train themselves, learning as they go. Teachers should have an active and critical attitude toward both national and local educational reforms, have a lifelong learning consciousness, consider the development of learner autonomy as their responsibility, and integrate professional development into teaching practice.

Action research can often be adopted to reflect systematically and critically on practice for improving teaching expertise. In this way, ESP teachers may not only improve their practice but also learn to theorize about that practice. During the process, teachers initially plan an area of interest or concern in their practice, then collect data, analyze and interpret it to look for particular patterns that exist, and finally develop an action plan designed to implement and improve the classroom/school practice. This cycle of plan, act, observe, and reflect can then be repeated and research continually developed based on a particular research topic (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

Schon (1983) put forward a universal reflective teaching model based on two frameworks of "reflection-on-action" and "reflection-in-action". "Reflection-on-action" refers to occurrence before and after the action, including the course of the thinking and planning before class as well as reflections on classroom events after the class. "Reflection-in-action" refers to reflective dialogues between practitioners and the teaching situation in action. Reflective teaching can be carried out in various ways and ESP teachers should choose the ones that fit their preferences, such as diary keeping, observation, teacher assessment, video and so on.

Collaboration with professional teachers is advocated for improving ESP teaching quality and promoting the teacher's professional development. Such cooperation is usually a two-way process: the subject teacher helps the English teacher deal with subject content matter while the English teacher helps the subject teacher solve the language problems that learners experience. The effective cooperation can happen both in class and out of class. One kind of collaboration is that the language teacher and subject teacher share the instruction content with the two teachers being simultaneously present in class. The other collaboration or cooperation can take place outside the class, most typically in the production of teaching materials.

VI. CONCLUSION

ESP teachers transformed from GEP teachers have to face many challenges and prepare themselves for a radical shift in learning. What they have needed to do is to cultivate a positive attitude, enrich the existing knowledge, strengthen the professional skills and enhance their development awareness. The researchers hold the belief that only with continuous and extensive attention and studies can ESP teachers make great progress in their professional development and promote their teaching to meet the ultimate educational demands and social economic development of the country.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work was financially supported by [Shandong Social Science Planning Fund Program] under Grant [Number 14CWYJ25]; [Shandong Educational Scientific 12th Planning Program] under Grant [Number CBW15029].

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