

# Exploration on ESP Teaching Reform from the Perspective of Educational Ecology

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**Abstract.** The appearance of educational ecology, which is an educational boundary science emerging in recent years, provides us with a new thinking method to observe education so that we can pay attention to individual life and educational problem under the ecological perspective. According to the theory of educational ecology, the ESP (English for specific purpose) classroom is an integral ecological system, which has its own particularity, so it is required to discuss relevant problems of ESP teaching, especially educational reform, with the guidance of educational ecology. Based on the demarcation of relevant concepts, this paper analyzes the performance of ecological unbalance in ESP teaching of China and also proposes the specific strategies for implementation of ESP teaching reform based on educational ecology.

## Introduction

In recent years, the emerging educational ecology has realized a good combination of natural science and social science so we can analyze all sorts of phenomena in teaching well by using the ecological theory and methods. However, educational ecology is not the simple combination of pedagogy and ecology but a new independent discipline system. From the perspective of educational ecology, ESP teaching forms its own ecological system, where teachers and students are the subjects and others such as teaching conditions, social norm and learning need are those extremely important factors. The teaching and ecological subjects of ESP course do not exist in isolation but are interdependent and continuously interactional. Meanwhile, other ecological factors will also ceaselessly act on the ecological subjects. From the perspective of educational ecology, the interior of ecological subject, ecological subject and ecological factors shall continuously be adjusted and adapted to each other, so that an ESP teaching ecological environment with more development potential can be formed.

## Definition of relevant concepts

The so-called educational ecology mainly refers to exploring all kinds of educational phenomena and causes by using the ecological principle, namely the ecological system, ecological balance, co-evolution and other theories, so as to better grasp the objective law of teaching and exhibit the future development direction and trend. As the ecological environment of education considers education as its key link, it plays a great role in restraining and regulating the appearance, existence and development of education. Besides, it can be mainly divided into three parts: the first is an unitary or compound ecological system which considers education as its core link and combines the external natural environment and social environment etc.; the second is the relation, which is built based on the core of a single school or a certain layer and can reflect each other in the educational system; the third is the system which considers learners' individual development as its main axle and explores the factors in the external environment, covering nature, society and spirit etc.

The so-called ESP teaching, which first came from the register theory proposed by Halliday in 1960s, mainly refers to the English closely related to a specific occupation or discipline. English courses set according to students' specific purposes and needs mainly cover the register, environment, discourse, skills and strategic analysis etc. The ESP teaching not only focuses on studying the

superficial form of English language and thinking activities in language use but also focuses on how to better correlate English language use and learning. ESP is established on the learning-centered conceptual foundation. Besides, its teaching concept was introduced to our country in 1970s and achieved rapid development in the 1990s.

### **Manifestations of ecological unbalance in current ESP teaching of our country**

The first is hegemony and control tendency in teachers' behaviors in the ESP classroom ecology. At present, China's English teachers mainly play the part of powerful subjects, can actively play an active role in controlling the classroom and show their authority via giving orders or punishments etc. Such behaviors of criticizing learners and clear and uncompromising requirements are also typical manifestations of ecological unbalance. The essence is to ponderously impose their thoughts on learners to embody the objective of controlling the classroom.

The second is the conformity and withdrawal tendency in learners' behaviors in the ESP classroom ecology. In a current ecologically unbalanced ESP classroom, students are usually underactive and passive in their behaviors, which usually show the characteristics of conformity and withdrawal. As for a learner with the tendency of conformity, his thinking is generally characterized by low independence, low criticalness and conformity. The behavior of conformity goes against cultivating learners' subject spirit and thought of seeking difference. After one develops the habit of following the general trend blindly, one may become unconfidently withdraw all the time.

The third is the dangerous flowerpots effect tendency in ESP teaching. The flowerpots effect is also called local environment effect, because a flowerpot is a semi-artificial and semi-natural environment, which has a great weakness in space but also has a decreased adaptability to ecological factors because it is an artificial environment. Without the elaborate cultivation of people, the plants in flowerpots cannot stand a severe test. Nowadays, the ESP classroom teaching always implemented in such an environment so that students can only develop their abilities in this environment. In the classroom, learners in a passive state have no learning initiative; besides, the majority of time in classroom is occupied by the insipid teaching of a teacher. Due to such an austere teaching fact, we are required to practically respect life and pay attention to the physical and mental harmony as well as personality perfection of learners so as to drive students to learn ecologically.

### **Specific strategies for implementation of ESP teaching reform based on educational ecology**

#### **Reasonably implement the demand analysis to create a harmonious teaching environment.**

Traditional ESP classrooms are usually carried out in the mode dominated by teachers' teaching and followed by students' listening. Teachers can comprehensively control the teaching mode and content so that learners can only passively accept English knowledge. Such a teaching mode greatly damages learners' subjective initiative and restrains their creativity. Even though the ecological subjects and factors have different statuses and functions in the ecological system, they are completely equal in status and independent with each other. During the teaching process, a teacher is a teacher organizer and knowledge lecturer instead of a dominant power and creator. A better learning effect can be achieved only by forming a favorable relation between teachers and students, so a teacher should get along with students and other ecological factors equally and harmoniously, comprehensively consider learners' learning characteristics and needs, and fully help them to throw themselves into learning. It can be said that demand analysis is an indispensable link in ESP classroom teaching under the guidance of ecological education. When selecting main teaching contents and teaching methods, all teachers will comprehensively consider the demands of learners and society. During curriculum setting, teachers can make an analysis on the target situation in the forms of test and evaluation, questionnaire investigation and field interview etc. The target situation analysis is mainly to learn a specific situation's practical requirement for learners' ability to use ESP. During a situation analysis, it is required to know learners' existing knowledge structure and their specific levels attained and know their demands and ESP knowledge that they hope to learn. After the analysis

on learning situations, teachers can better command the practical needs of both students and the society so that they can maximally and comprehensively utilize all sorts of originally limited resources to implement the ESP teaching activities in a more efficient way. It can be said that the social need is a rigid demand which must be satisfied. Learners' need is more subjective and individualized. As the main organizer of ESP teaching activities, teachers should reasonably guide students' need, practically avoid the teacher-dominant teaching activities and provide learners with their most desirable knowledge.

**Actively establish the learners-oriented ESP classroom.**

An ecological niche is not only one of the extremely important terms in ecology but also an important foundation for contacting the internal and external relations in an ecological group. The ecological niche subjects involved in educational ecology are not limited to the population but relate to the educational ecology system, ecological groups and individuals etc. From the perspective of educational ecology, a classroom, where the ESP teaching is carried out, is also like a large-scale open system, where all learners are in their corresponding positions, have their proper ecological niches and have their respective advantages and disadvantages; therefore, it is required to pay high attention to students' individual differences, design teaching contents corresponding to learners' characteristics, be devoted to improving the richness of contents, diversity of thinking methods, activeness of teaching methods and the comprehensiveness of teaching evaluation during ESP teaching.

**Spare no effort to explore the educational ecological resources and implement individualized ESP teaching.**

According to the theory of educational ecology, every kind of creature has its unique time, space and functional position different from other species in its growth cycle and this is the ecological niche of this creature. Ecological niches are all sorts of ecological functions and statuses formed after mutual influences of individual creatures in specific ecological environments. As initiated by the theory of ecological niche, an individual creature can develop better in an environment suitable for itself and should develop based on its distinct characteristics, individuality, need and ability etc. Only when the pluralistic development road is implemented, can all creatures be in the extremely harmonious ecological situation. Usually, the development objective and development trend of individual creatures are different and are also full of their personal colors. Based on their own needs, they can avoid all kinds of unnecessary competitions concerning survival and thus they can coexist in the same ecological environment more harmoniously and orderly. The theory of ecological niche plays a very important enlightening role in the ESP classroom teaching in colleges. Thus, the teaching managers of colleges should more clearly know their own distinct characteristics and advantages, reasonably position the ecological niche of their college's ESP education in the similar subject teaching of nationwide colleges, determine the specific teaching objects according to their own characteristics and learners' backgrounds, and reasonably choose teaching contents. In ESP classroom teaching, it is not reasonable to just generally teaching words, grammar and other contents in teaching materials, because learners who basically master ESP knowledge but has not the least of personality and no strong market competition can be only cultivated in this teaching mode. Therefore, colleges can stand firmly in the increasingly fierce competition only by better combining their advantages with current market needs and arranging individualized curriculum more scientifically.

**Encourage teachers to carry out cooperative teaching and create the dynamic ESP teaching situation.**

The ecological environment in nature will change at any time. That is to say, a new change may be caused due to the interaction among ecological factors. Besides, the natural ecological environment is very open so that energy, substances and information can continuously exchange, input and output. In an open ecological situation, any subtle change in all ecological factors can cause changes in the overall ecological environment, so it requires the ecological environment to be adjusted continuously to maintain dynamic balance. Extremely similar to the natural ecology, the ESP teaching ecology is also dynamic and open. They both will constantly change with time and specific situations. However, the current practical situation is that the determined teaching programs and teaching materials for ESP

curriculum in colleges will usually not be changed so it is difficult to practically meet the new social requirement in the internet times. In order to practically change the current situation, teachers should continue exchanging information with the outside world, because only continuous input of new information and energy can practically guarantee the output quality to increase more vitality and charm to ESP teaching ecology. In addition, both teachers and students should walk out of the college classrooms and carry out practical teaching in the industries related to ESP learning, and have thorough communications and dialogues with practitioners concerned so as to learn the latest and most flexible application cases of an industry and acquire the most ideal industrial development status; in this way, it can make up for the teachers' deficiency in specialized knowledge, better satisfy learners' learning needs and further enhance the practical teaching effect of this curriculum.

## Conclusion

To sum up, the study on educational ecology opens a brand-new space for ESP teaching reform. With the basic purpose of improving learners' interpersonal skill, the main mode of activity-oriented teaching and the significant means of cooperative learning, the English teaching reform can help to develop the interactive teaching and thus create the ecological ESP English classroom. More importantly, each member in an English classroom can communicate with each other to realize experience sharing during this process so that the enriched teaching contents can help to improve students' overall English application ability. Therefore, it is required to use good theories concerning educational ecology to facilitate the ESP teaching reform so as to further improve the ecological structure of English classroom and thus form a more harmonious ecological system of English teaching; in this way, high-quality talents with global vision and competitiveness can be really cultivated.

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