

# **A Study on ESP Teachers Team Construction: the Cooperation between the College English Teachers and the Teachers of Professional Courses**

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**Abstract.** With the development of college English reform, more and more scholars have realized the importance of ESP courses and a lot of universities have made tentative efforts in promoting ESP courses. However, such factor as an insufficient supply of competent ESP teachers restrains and slows down the in-depth development of ESP teaching and learning. This paper first analyses the status quo and constraints of ESP teaching team, and then proposals are given on how to construct the ESP teaching team based on the cooperation between the college English teachers and the teachers of professional courses.

## **1. Introduction**

In recent years, English for Specific Purposes (hereinafter referred to as ESP) has aroused wide attention in the higher education. English for General Purposes (hereinafter referred to as EGP) is not the goal of college English teaching anymore, and College English teaching will mainly focus on ESP [1] [2].

In order to promote college English teaching reform, improve college English teaching level and cultivate students' comprehensive application ability, the teaching requirements of college English courses (for trial implementation) referred to as 'curriculum requirements' are issued by the Office of the Ministry of Education in 2004, in which the followings are emphasized: the goal of college English teaching is to cultivate students' comprehensive ability of English application, in particular, listening and speaking ability which enables them to communicate verbally and in writing effectively in the future work and social intercourse.

Hence the transition of college English teaching from EGP to ESP is becoming a necessity.

## **2. ESP Teachers Team Construction**

### **2.1 The Definition and Importance of ESP**

By the term English for Specific (or Special, Specified, Specifiable) Purposes is meant that type of language learning which has its focus on all aspects of language pertaining to a particular field of human activity [3]. In other words, it is a way of teaching/learning English for specialized subject with some specific vocational and educational purposes in mind. ESP course is connected with a special field such as business English, tourism English, law English, civil engineering English, etc. It satisfies the special needs of the learners and equips the learners with the specific language knowledge and skills needed in carrying out the job.

### **2.2 The Status quo of the ESP Teachers**

Domestic ESP teachers generally fall into two types: one is college English teachers and the other is teachers of professional courses. In ESP teaching, College English teachers and professional teachers bear the advantages and disadvantages. Although college English teachers have strong language and pedagogical knowledge, they often know little about professional knowledge because of the constraints of their academic background. Meanwhile, because teachers of professional courses lack formal language training and know little about language teaching, it is difficult for them to effectively organize classroom teaching [4].

Hence, the necessity of cooperation between the college English teachers and the teachers of professional course becomes evident.

### **2.3 The Definition of Co-Teaching**

Co-teaching or team-teaching is when two educators work together to plan, organize, instruct and make assessments on the same group of students, sharing the same classroom [5]. It is also referred to as team-teaching, cooperative teaching or collaborative teaching. In a broad sense, co-teaching is not only confined to the classroom teaching, and more than two teachers or organizations are often involved in co-teaching, who cooperate with each other on a wide range of tasks, including utilizing the teaching stuff and teaching materials, making teaching plans, choosing teaching approaches, writing textbooks, testing and making evaluation.

### **2.4 The Theoretical Foundation of Co-Teaching**

Constructivism theory provides a theoretical basis for co-teaching. The theory of constructivism holds that knowledge construction is achieved through consultation and reconciliation between individuals and others. With good interaction and cooperation and the effect of assimilation, the individuals can eliminate gaps and differences and achieve mutual integration and consensus and further enrich and improve the personal knowledge. With the continuous effective interaction and cooperation between individuals, the balance between individual original experience and knowledge and cognitive structure will be constantly broken, creating conditions for individuals to acquire new experience and knowledge and cognitive structures. The individual's ability to absorb new experiences and new knowledge can be largely improved with the deeper level of interaction between individuals, the wider scope of cooperation, the greater degree of openness and the more active interaction model.

Compared with traditional independent teaching, cooperative teaching has the following four advantages: diversity, professionalism, individuality and cooperativeness. In co-teaching, flexible and varied teaching methods can be applied; in teaching activities, the teachers' expertise can be fully utilized; teachers adapt to individual students different needs; from the teaching design to the actual teaching activities, co-teaching needs the cooperation between teachers, the cooperation between teachers and students and the cooperation between students [6].

Therefore, incorporating co-teaching into ESP teaching will give full play to the respective advantages of college English teachers and teachers of professional courses. The cooperation and learning among teachers is of great significance for the development of ESP education, the team construction of ESP teachers, the transition from college English teachers to inter-disciplinary teachers and the reform of college English teaching. Hence, the close cooperation between profession teachers and language teachers is a powerful guarantee for successful ESP education.

### **2.5 The Importance of Co-Teaching in ESP Teaching**

College English teachers and teachers of professional courses differ in the structure of professional knowledge and ways of thinking, teaching methods and so on. According to the theory of constructivism, the cooperative teaching has built up a mutual learning platform for the college English teachers who have strong language skills but lack professional knowledge and the teachers of professional courses who have sufficient professional knowledge but lack strong language skills.

In the process of implementing co-teaching in ESP teaching, college English teachers can have opportunities to understand, systematically learn and master the theory of a specific profession; with the improvement of the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in the cooperation, teachers of professional courses acquire English application abilities and cross-cultural communication abilities and master the law of language teaching.

Therefore the cooperation of college English teachers and teachers of professional courses in the field of ESP teaching is an effective way to cultivate competent ESP teachers in universities, and it is also an effective way to promote college English teaching reform and transform college English teachers into inter-disciplinary teachers.

## **2.6 Cooperation in ESP Teaching in Different Stages**

Before the establishment of a formal ESP agency, ESP instructors' attempts at ESP courses are often individual and informal, so the consultations between relevant agencies become necessary [7].

To a certain extent, relevant university leaders haven't realized the importance and necessity of co-teaching in ESP teaching, which results in a lot more difficulties and slows down the development of ESP co-teaching. For example, in a lot of universities, College English teachers and teachers of professional courses often belong to different departments and they cooperate privately instead of publicly and formally. To fully promote the ESP co-teaching, the university institution is required to fully recognize the importance of co-teaching and give certain policy support.

Establishing a teaching team consisting of the college English teachers and the teachers of professional courses is the first step to guarantee a successful co-teaching in ESP teaching. If possible, ESP department can be a good choice to make ESP co-teaching catch enough attention. Furthermore, ESP teaching offices must be set up officially to ensure the cooperation in ESP co-teaching can be carried out regularly and formally. College English teachers can choose a certain major that they are interested in or want to learn. Teachers of professional courses with good command of English can join in the cooperation with college English teachers.

With the ESP department or ESP teaching office established, the teaching team members can negotiate their different tasks in the cooperation. Teachers of professional courses are in charge of the ESP courses and responsible for all connected with the profession, while college English teachers are in the role of "English counselors" giving full guidance to the teachers of professional courses and the students [8].

The cooperation lasts throughout the three stages of teaching with college English teachers and teachers of professional courses developing collaboratively from professional and linguistic perspectives.

In the pre-class stage, they cooperate in writing ESP textbooks and supplementary materials; teachers of professional courses are responsible for the selection of professional content, drawing up teaching objectives, teaching content, teaching plans, teaching assessment methods, evaluation criteria, while English teachers are responsible for checking the language standards and specifications, writing formats.

In the while-class stage, they organize the classroom teaching in varied ways. They can teach in turns in the same class or in different classes. They also play different roles in cooperation with the students: college English teachers consult the students and teachers of professional courses for the professional knowledge and teachers of professional courses consult the college English teachers for the language knowledge. No matter who is on the stage, the college English teacher or the teacher of professional course, the class provides a good opportunity of mutual learning.

In the after-class stage, they cooperate mainly in making evaluations which include the evaluations of everything involved in the previous two stages, namely, the pre-class stage and while-class stage. Teaching reflections from the evaluations in turn promotes the research on ESP co-teaching and give guidance to the cooperation in the pre-class stage and while-class stage. Since the college English teachers are familiar with the teaching contests and the college English contests, they can organize ESP teaching contests to promote the teaching skills of the ESP teachers, and ESP knowledge contests regularly to develop the students' interest in ESP learning.

In different stages, college English teachers and teachers of professional courses benefit a lot in cooperation.

## **3. Summary**

The establishment of the ESP co-teaching helps to integrate the resources of the various disciplines within the university. The interdisciplinary cooperation teaching style of college English teachers and teachers of professional courses is conducive to the scientific integration of the teaching and learning resources in the two departments.

Duo to this or that problem, co-teaching should not be widely used [9]. However, under the existing conditions in China, neither professional teachers nor EGP teachers can independently undertake the task of teaching ESP, therefore, cooperation between English teachers and professional teachers is a sensible approach.

The cooperation between the college English teachers and the teachers of professional courses is not the end of ESP co-teaching and cultivating adequate and competent ESP teachers to help the students to be competent in their work is the real purpose of ESP co-teaching.

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