

Needs Analysis of English for Academic Purposes for Sino-Foreign Joint Collegiate Program: A Case Study of Shanghai Polytechnic University

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Abstract: *College English teaching reform has been a heated topic in the educational sector in China. Some researchers contend that the College English curriculum cannot prepare students for their academic study in tertiary education. It should be replaced by English for academic purposes. Many universities have also started their English for academic purposes. However, not much study has been done on the needs analysis. It is the top priority for the curriculum development. This paper studied the English requirements of Sino-US programs of Shanghai Polytechnic University and the target needs and learning needs of the learners. It found that academic vocabulary, genre and study skills should be the emphasis of EAP courses of the Sino-foreign collegiate programs.*

Key Words: *English for academic purposes; Needs analysis; Sino-Foreign collegiate program*

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Introduction

In the past three decades, the nature of the college English teaching in China is English for general purposes. Many students only aim to pass the College English Test Band 4 at universities. Consequently, they may have good marks at tests but are not able to understand lectures in English, or write English essays etc. Cai and Liao (2010) and Long (2011) pointed out that English for general purposes cannot prepare students for their academic study at universities with the internationalization of the Chinese tertiary education. They argued that English for academic purposes should substitute English for general purposes at university level. The purpose of teaching English is to prepare students to learn their subjects and conduct their researches at universities but for the sake of teaching the English language per se.

For the programs jointly run by the Chinese universities and the overseas universities, courses are delivered in English with textbooks in English. Students are required to comprehend lectures, make presentations and write essays or references in English. However English for general purposes is unable to meet the needs of the students enrolled in the jointly-run programs.

English for academic purposes

English has become the international language for people to interact with each other in their social life, academic context, and workplace. English for academic purposes firstly started in Britain aiming to prepare students for their academic study with English as a medium of instruction. In 1960s, some British universities offered English for academic purposes focused on English language knowledge and skills needed at universities.

English for academic purposes has emerged out of the broader field of English for specific purposes, defined by its focus on teaching English specifically to facilitate learners' study or research through the medium of English (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). It is generally defined quite simply as teaching English with the aim of facilitating learners' study or research in that language (Flowerdew et al., 2001; Jordan, 1997). Hyland (2006) defined EAP as a "specialized English language teaching grounded in the social, cognitive and linguistics demands of academic target situations, providing focused instruction informed by an understanding of texts and constraints of academic contexts" (p2). Recently, Hadley (2015) described EAP as "tertiary level English instructional training that enables learners to improve their language proficiency within higher educational institutions, irrespective of the country within which that instruction takes place" (p. 23).

English for academic purposes in China

The teaching of English for academic purposes is not a new topic worldwide. Nevertheless, it is gaining attention just recently in China. Nowadays, there is a heated debate on whether English for academic purposes should take the place of English for general purposes (known as College English at the tertiary level in China) in the foreign language field in China.

The new Guidelines for College English Teaching- A National Syllabus issued in 2016 by the Chinese Ministry of Education for the first time states that the content of college English is composed of English for general purposes, English for academic purposes) and Intercultural communication. Therefore, many universities start to incorporate English for academic purposes in their English curriculum in one form or other regardless of the challenges they may encounter.

English for academic purposes is not only an English education catering to international students with the increasing internationalization of education. It has been gaining more attention in countries where more courses are delivered with English as a medium of instruction. Whether study overseas or having bilingual education in their home country, a growing number of learners hope to study and research with English as a medium.

English requirements of the Sino-US jointly-run programs

English education has always been a crucial topic in the development of the jointly-run programs in the past three decades in China. The biggest challenge of such programs is the students' English proficiency. As for the jointly-run programs, English is used as a medium of instruction. Overseas universities usually have higher requirements for the students' English proficiency, especially for the students' ability to use English to complete their academic study.

For the students enrolled in the jointly-run programs at Shanghai Polytechnic University, they are required to have college-level English language proficiency

By successfully completing their EAP coursework through level 4 (EAP 04XX) and meeting minimum score thresholds on the PERT Reading and Writing

By successfully completing EAP coursework through level 4 in Listening/Speaking and Reading (EAP 0400 & 0420) and level 6 in Grammar/Writing (EAP 1640) (regardless of PERT scores; students do not have to retake the PERT if there are scores already on file

By presenting official TOEFL or IELTS (academic module) scores that meet minimum score thresholds as well as PERT Reading and Writing scores that meet the minimum thresholds

The cutoff scores:

□ TOEFL = 79-120

□ IELTS = 6.5-9.0

For the two jointly-run programs of Shanghai Polytechnic University, the courses are all delivered with English as a medium of instruction. Therefore, the students' English proficiency will be a determining factor of whether they will complete their academic study successfully.

Needs analysis of English for academic purposes

Needs analysis is the starting point of English for academic purposes course development and teaching. With the learners' needs teacher use teaching methods that cater for that particular need. In Brown's (1995) course development system, needs analysis is the first stage of the whole system which includes target need and learning need. After needs analysis language knowledge, study skills and genre related to subject matter can be determined.

Though many universities in China have started to offer their courses of English for academic purposes, studies report a lack of any needs analysis mechanism in place or even a lack of awareness (Cai, 2012; Canagarajah, 2014). In this paper, we studied the needs of the 60 students enrolled in the jointly-run programs with a questionnaire. The questionnaire items are edited based on the needs analysis questionnaire of Cai (2012).

Target needs

By analyzing the target needs we studied the English knowledge and skills that the learners need in the future context.

Table: 1

Do you have the following needs currently or in your future study? (multiple choices)

A. study courses with English as a medium of instruction	100%
B. read the literature on your subject matters in English	100%
C. listen to the lectures in English	100%
D. study overseas	30%
E. have no needs at all	0

The above survey showed that the learners of the jointly-run programs all need to study their subjects with English as a medium of instruction, read the literature on their subject matters in English and listen to the lectures in English. Among them 30% expressed their interest in studying overseas. They hope to be adapted to the academic environment overseas quickly. For the students enrolled in the jointly-run programs in China, they need to use English to do their academic study.

Learning needs

By analyzing the learning needs we found out the knowledge and skills that the learners need to learn to achieve their goals.

Table: 2

If you have the needs listed in Table 1, which of the followings describe your current situation? (multiple choices)

A. having difficulty in comprehension of lectures in English or taking English notes.	95%
B. being slow in reading English textbooks and literature.	90%
C. having a small vocabulary, especially academic vocabulary.	85%
D. having difficulty in making presentation and participating seminars or discussion.	100%
E. having difficulty in writing abstracts, reports and essays.	100%

The learners are the first year university students with comparatively low English proficiency level. They will need English to complete their study with English as a medium of instruction. They need to read English literature, writing essays and sit in the exams etc. More than 85% of the students feel it a challenge. However, those knowledge and skills are the prerequisite for the students to complete their jointly-run programs.

Pedagogical implication

The gap between the students' target needs and learning needs reflected the students' needs to learn English for academic purposes. The nature of English for academic purposes is the use

of the language in the academic context. With the survey of the students' needs we found that academic vocabulary, genre knowledge and study skills should be the focus of the teaching.

Academic vocabulary teaching

In the survey nearly 85% of the students reported that a lack of academic vocabulary is a barrier to comprehension of lectures and texts. The research of Kuhen (1996) showed that the academic vocabulary is a very important index of whether students could succeed in their courses of English for academic purposes.

Academic vocabulary, also called as sub-technical words, is frequently found in the academic texts of many areas (Farrell, 1990). This category of academic vocabulary includes words and phrases (collocations) commonly used in lecture and text, but not commonly used in everyday speech (Kuhlen, 1996). Academic vocabulary is the basis for the comprehension of lectures, reading English literature and essay writing.

The academic word list compiled by Coxhead includes 570 word families, which covers 10% of the academic passages. Those words only account for 1.4% of the novel corpus. In the teaching of academic vocabulary we use the AWL highlighter & gapfill (<http://www.eapfoundation.com/vocab/academic/highlighter/>) to design vocabulary exercises to enhance the students' awareness of academic vocabulary.

We use the AWL highlighter tool to highlight the academic vocabulary in a particular text and get a list of the academic vocabulary of each level.

Example 1: Learning English for Academic Purposes: Why Chinese EFL Learners Find EAP so Difficult to Master. David C.S. Li, Learning English for Academic Purposes, November, 2009

Excerpt

Owing to tremendous typological and linguistic differences between Chinese (Mandarin/Putonghua, among other Chinese "dialects") and English (notably Standard English or EAP), Chinese EFL learners tend to find it difficult to learn English up to a high proficiency level. Acquisitional problems **occur** at practically all linguistic levels: phonological, lexico-grammatical and discourse-pragmatic. In this paper, we have discussed and **illustrated** several salient learning difficulties at the lexico-grammatical level, including the misuse of an independent **clause** as the subject of a longer **clause** (e.g. *Snoopy is leaving makes me happy), 'pseudo-tough movement'

(e.g. *I am difficult to learn English), and ‘non-standard Q-A sequence involving ‘negative yes-no questions’ (e.g. ??Yes, I don’t smoke). We also saw that under the influence of topic-prominence in their first language, Chinese EFL learners tend to find it difficult to acquire the typical subject-predicate structure in English, as shown in the omission of the ‘dummy subject it’, or unidiomatic sentences bearing a topic-prominent structure in their English output (e.g. *This field, grow rice is best!). Finally, we have seen how the logographic writing system in the learners’ first language, Chinese, is of little reference value in the process of developing literacy in English, which is written with an alphabetic script. All this helps explain why, for the majority of Chinese EFL learners who have little home support and few opportunities to practice using the target language, mastering English (Standard English or EAP) up to a high level is such a daunting task despite years of hard work.

Level 1 involving majority occur process structure

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Level 2 acquire finally

Level 3 illustrated negative sequence task

Level 4 despite output

Level 5 clause target

Level 6 none

Level 7 topic

Level 8 none

Level 9 none

Level 10 none

Then we use the AWL gapfill maker to create the word family gapfill as follows. By doing this exercise students learn the academic words by explicit instruction. They will also practice the use of prefixes, suffixes, inflection and subject-verb agreements, etc.

Owing to tremendous typological and linguistic differences between Chinese (Mandarin/Putonghua, among other Chinese “dialects”) and English (notably Standard English or EAP), Chinese EFL learners tend to find it difficult to learn English up to a high proficiency level. Acquisitional problems _____ (*reoccurs*) at practically all linguistic levels: phonological, lexico-grammatical and discourse-pragmatic. In this paper, we have discussed and _____ (*illustrations*) several salient learning difficulties at the lexico-grammatical level, including the misuse of an independent _____ (*clauses*) as the subject of a longer _____ (*clauses*) (e.g. *Snoopy is leaving makes me happy), ‘pseudo-tough movement’ (e.g. *I am difficult to learn English), and ‘non-standard Q-A _____ (*sequenced*) _____ (*uninvolved*) ‘ _____ (*negatively*) yes-no questions’ (e.g. ??Yes, I don’t smoke). We also saw that under the influence of _____ (*topics*)-prominence in their first language, Chinese EFL learners tend to find it difficult to _____ (*acquires*) the typical subject-predicate _____ (*restructuring*) in English, as shown in the omission of the ‘dummy subject it’, or unidiomatic sentences bearing a _____ (*topics*)-prominent _____ (*restructuring*) in their English _____ (*outputs*) (e.g. *This field, grow rice is best!). _____ (*finalise*), we have seen how the logographic writing system in the learners’ first language, Chinese, is of little reference value in the _____ (*processing*) of developing literacy in English, which is written with an alphabetic script. All this helps explain why, for the _____ (*majorities*) of Chinese EFL learners who have little home support and few opportunities to practice using the _____ (*targets*) language, mastering English (Standard English or EAP) up to a high level is such a daunting _____ (*tasks*) _____ (*despite*) years of hard work.

Genre knowledge

In table 2 students reported they have difficulty making presentation, comprehension of English lectures, writing essays and references. Apart from a lack of academic vocabulary, it is also due to the pedagogy of English for general purposes. In China many students memorize grammar rules and vocabulary by rote. They do written exercises most of the time. Students are learning the language rather than use the language. Language teaching should focus on the usage of the language in a particular academic context, for example, seminars, presentations and essays etc.

Since 1980s researches showed that language teaching based on genre can meet the needs of different social contexts and learners. It also improves the students’ academic capability and comprehension (Swales, 2014). Different academic genres have their unique and conventional schematic structures. In the teaching of English for academic purposes, the genre-based teaching

approach not only analyzes the macro structure of the whole text but also the universal expression of every part of the text including the vocabulary and grammar. In this way students may have the awareness of academic genres.

Based on Swales' (1990) CARS model we create a schema for an oral presentation to help the students with their comprehension of the presentations and production of their own presentation.

Moves and steps to achieve the moves	Language structures could be used in each step
<p>Move 1 Relating the audience to the topic of the speech</p> <p>Step 1. Greeting the audience and introducing yourself.</p> <p>Step 2. Identifying the topic.</p>	<p>Good morning everyone. It's a pleasure for me to be here with you today. Let me introduce myself...</p> <p>My talk today is concerned with...</p>
<p>Move 2 Outlining the presentation</p> <p>Step 1a Explicitly stating the sequence of the presentation.</p> <p>Step 1b Using visual aids.</p>	<p>My presentation is divided into three parts. In the first part..... In the second part.... In the end...</p> <p>If you look at this graph, you will see...</p>
<p>Move 3 Concluding the presentation</p> <p>Step 1 Summing up the talk.</p> <p>Step 2 Q&A session</p> <p>Step 3 Thanking the audience for listening</p>	<p>What I have talked about today is mainly about...</p> <p>If you have any questions, I am happy to answer them.</p> <p>Thank you all for listening.</p>

Study skills

Jordan (1997) lists the study skills required in EAP programs: lecture / talks, seminars / tutorials / discussions / supervisions, practical / laboratory work / field work, private study, reference material, etc. Having adequate study skills learners become more independent and have higher learner autonomy. The instruction of study skills is an indispensable part of EAP in the western countries. It improves the learner autonomy, which will subsequently promote the learner efficiency. 95% of the students surveyed reported difficulty in comprehension of English lectures. 100% of the students stated a lack of confidence in making English presentation and participating discussion or seminars. Therefore, study skills should be integrated into the English for academic purposes courses. For example, in the English listening class, other than the training of listening comprehension strategies, teachers should also give a good input of academic vocabulary and note-taking strategies.

Conclusion

The new Guidelines for College English Teaching- a National Syllabus issued in 2016 by the Chinese Ministry of Education for the first time states that the content of college English is composed of EGP (English for General Purposes), EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and Intercultural Communication. It acknowledges the incorporation of the instrumentality and humanity of language, which is considered the needs of educational globalization. This paper studied the English requirements of Sino-US programs of Shanghai Polytechnic University and the target needs and learning needs with the need analysis. It found that academic vocabulary, genre and study skills should be the focus of EAP curriculum of the Sino-foreign collegiate programs.

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