

# Practice of College English Teaching Reform That Highlights Specialty Features of Art Majors

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As is known, most of the art majors aren't good at English, with a weak foundation and poor study habit., which is a common problem that many new institutes are facing. In order to change the situation, the author has carried out a reform among the art majors. In addition to EGP (English for General Purpose) teaching, a lot of ESP (English for Special Purpose) has been supplemented in English class. Thus, college English teaching is integrated with specialty features of art majors. The practice of the teaching reform has improved students' interest and ability to use English.

*Keywords:* college English, teaching reform, art majors, specialty features

## Preface

Because of the specialty features of their majors, the matriculation scores for the art majors are far lower than those of other majors in college recruitment. It's known that the basic knowledge of art majors is limited, so is their English. They are not interested in it, so the classroom absence is a common phenomenon. The proportion of the students who can't graduate for their English credits is relatively high. Of course, this problem is closely related to certain factors, such as their weak foundation and bad learning attitudes. Meanwhile, it can't be ignored that the main content of college English teaching is EGP (English for General Purpose). Both the teachers and students have focused on language knowledge for a long time, and it digresses from the students' majors. The obsolete teaching content and teaching mode cannot stimulate students' subjective initiative in English learning. In view of this situation, the author has carried out a reform to integrate college English teaching with specialty features of art majors. Besides EGP, ESP (English for Special Purpose) has been taught in class so as to enhance students' interest in learning and improve teaching quality.

## Relevant Theoretical Basis

### The Practical Research on ESP at Home and Abroad

The ESP teaching has a long history in foreign countries. After World War II, with the rapid development of science and technology and economy in the western countries and the increasingly frequent exchanges of different countries, ESP was formed in the English speaking countries in the 1960s. In the 1980s, it has been developed in an all-round way. By the 1990s, it has made great achievements in both theory and practice. At

present, ESP courses in Europe and America have been very mature, including News English, Tourism English, Marketing English, Science and Technology English, Foreign Trade English, International Financial English, E-commerce English, Legal English, Medical English, Academic English, Literature Reading, and so on.

The research of ESP is in the ascendant in China. In 1996, Professor Liu Runqing (1996) predicted that “English Teaching in the future will be much more combined with a certain field of professional knowledge or a certain subject, and ESP teaching will become the mainstream of English teaching in the 21 century” (p. 3). Professor Cai Jigang (2004) also said that the basic English teaching would be the main task of secondary school, while the focus of college English teaching would be shifted to ESP. ESP teaching is the development direction of college English teaching reform in China (Cai, 2010). In 2000, the annual meeting of the English Group of the University Foreign Language Steering Committee listed ESP teaching as one of its three central topics. In 2011, China ESP Research was founded by Beijing Foreign Studies University to publish research achievements on ESP theory and teaching practice. This marked the gradual deepening of ESP’s teaching and research in China. In September 2013, the 5th Asian International Seminar on ESP Teaching and the 2nd China International Seminar on ESP Teaching were held in Fudan University. The convening of this seminar has played an important role in the teaching research and practice of ESP in China.

### **The Core of the College English Curriculum Requirements**

The *College English Curriculum Requirements* (Ministry of Education, 2017) points out clearly that the college English course is part of the humanities education in colleges and universities, with both instrumental and humanistic nature. As for its instrumentalism, the college English course is the promotion and expansion of English teaching at the stage of basic education. The main purpose is to improve the students’ ability of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating on the basis of high school English teaching. The instrumentality of college English is also embodied in ESP. That is to say, students can acquire the ability of communicating in academic or professional fields by learning English related to their majors or future work. As for its humanism, one of the important tasks of the college English course is cross-cultural education. Language is the carrier of culture as well as part of culture. As a communication tool, when students learn English, they need to learn and exchange advanced science and technology or professional information. They also need to understand the cultures of foreign countries, improve their understanding of different cultures, the awareness of the differences and similarities between Chinese and foreign cultures, and cultivate intercultural communication ability. Therefore, we should fully excavate the rich humanistic connotation of the college English course and realize the organic unity of instrumentality and humanity.

### **Teaching Reform Practice**

In order to achieve the goals pointed out in the *College English Curriculum Requirements*, the author has carried out a reform in the teaching of art majors that highlights their specialty features. The reform has covered several aspects.

#### **The Reform of Teaching Content**

The textbook used by our art majors is a new version of *21st Century Practical College English* published by Fudan University Press. In addition to the teaching materials in this textbook, the author has supplemented a

lot of ESP related to students' majors. For example, for Physical Education majors, we have supplemented the Olympic Games, basketball, football, table tennis, volleyball, swimming, gymnastics, martial arts, and other related contents. The chapter of Olympic Games includes five aspects: Origin of Ancient Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin, Modern Olympic Games, International Olympic Committee, and Beijing Olympics Games. For Fine Art majors, we have supplemented sketches, colors, brief introduction of different painting styles, famous painters, and appreciation of art works. For Music majors, we have supplemented famous musicians, different music styles in different periods and appreciation of famous songs. Students are highly motivated and feel that it is useful and interesting to learn English related to their majors.

### **The Reform of Teaching Modes**

Besides teaching content, a good choice of teaching modes is also necessary to arouse students' interest.

**Adopting situational teaching method.** Situational teaching means that we provide sufficient examples for language function as well as activate the knowledge of language through designing some real and quasi real scenes for specific situations. The vividness and figurativeness of these situations will help students to integrate knowledge into it, improve their interest in learning, and change the dull situation of English teaching in the past (Wang, 2012). Situational teaching is an inevitable trend in the development of foreign language teaching in the 21st Century (Shu & Zhuang, 1996). When the Physical Education majors learn the rules of basketball, the way of shooting, and the gestures of the referees during the study of the chapter of Basketball, we take the students to the basketball court for field exercises, and the students quickly grasp the English expressions of several shooting terms and fouls. After that, we ask some students to be referees and some students to compete as athletes. In this way, it not only increases students' interest in learning English, but also applies their learned English into practice. Our classroom is sometimes a playground, a concert field, sometimes a gallery or a gathering scene, and the roles of teachers and students are constantly changing. It is fresh and live language that the students have learned. No wonder their ability to use the language effectively has been improved little by little.

**Adopting task-based teaching method.** Task-based teaching method is useful in arousing students' learning interest, cultivating their team spirit, improving their autonomous learning and so on. When learning the chapter of swimming, the students are asked to learn certain content independently before class, such as the basic vocabulary on swimming, the origin of swimming as a sport, the four kinds of competitive swimming and their features, and so on. Students are also required to make preparations for such questions like "Who is your favorite swimming star? And why?" In class, the teacher will first ask the students to discuss and communicate on these topics in groups, and then invite some students to make short statements in class. At last, the teacher will make some comments and sum up.

**Making full use of modern educational technology.** Multimedia not only provides exciting and intense sports events, but also creates an English learning environment which can provide intuitive images and enhance students' understanding and memory of the English language. During the teaching process, teachers make full use of various sound image and video information provided by modern teaching media so as to create a good teaching environment, which is consistent with the content of teaching and is conducive to stimulating students' interest in learning. For example, when we introduce the famous Holland painter Vincent Van Gogh to the students from the Academy of Fine Arts, we play the video materials of Van Gogh. This not only helps students

understand the short life and the main representative works of Van Gogh, but also greatly enhances the students' enthusiasm for learning and enriches the students' feelings about the text. It can also deepen students' memory of their learned knowledge, widen their scope of knowledge. In this way, a lot of teaching effects will be achieved.

Here comes another example: Before the 2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil, we firstly asked the students to learn the related vocabulary and knowledge of football, and then let them watch the related video of the last World Cup in South Africa (2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa). After that, students would have increased their understanding of the major cities and related knowledge of South Africa (such as city names, climate, geographical location, altitude, population, major industries, etc.). Meanwhile, they would again have the chance to review and consolidate the names of the 32 countries entering the World Cup finals. In this way, students have learned and mastered English while they are watching videos. With the combination of words, sounds, and images, the vivid learning process stimulates students' interest and thirst for knowledge (Huang, Huang, & Nie, 2010). Students can learn English while watching matches and their learning efficiency can be improved.

### **The Reform of Examining Mode**

Curriculum examination is an important tool to supervise and urge students to study and evaluate the teaching effect, and is an indispensable part of teaching. At present, as for the college English examination, there is a common phenomenon that we emphasize the knowledge in the book too much, but the development of students' ability is neglected. To constantly carry forward the teaching reform, we have carried out the corresponding reform in college English examining mode. The essential principle of the reform is to attach importance to formative assessment and weaken the final examination. Students' curriculum scores (100 points) = formative assessment results (50%) + final exam results (50%). Formative assessment results are synthetically assessed by the teacher according to the students' homework performance, participation in classroom activities and class attendance. The final examination consists of two parts: written test (40%) and professional English skills test (hereinafter referred to as skill test) (60%). The content of the skill test covers four aspects: music, sports, art, and broadcasting. About 10 test questions for each major are formulated by the Ministry of Foreign Language Teaching and the Ministry of Foreign Language Teaching also formulates a unified detailed rules and regulations for scoring. The teacher organizes the skill test within the last week of the semester. When attending the skill test, the students are asked to pick up one question out of ten randomly. They are supposed to be given 3-5 minutes to make preparations for the question. All the test questions in skill test are related to students' majors. For example:

What's the main features of country music?

Talk about the symbolic meanings of the Olympic rings.

Why do you choose hosting as your major?

What kind of program do you want to host? Why?

Work in groups, and act out one act of Titanic.

Please give a brief introduction of Leonardo di ser Piero da Vinci.

Please try to commentate on a basketball match section.

After students have finished their presentation or performance on the selected topic, it is OK for the teacher to make short conversations with the student according to their performance.

### Teaching Reform Effect

Through the reform that highlights their specialty features in the college English teaching of art majors, both the students and the teachers have achieved a lot. First of all, the transfer of teaching emphasis from EGP to ESP has erected art majors' consciousness to meet the needs of the development of their ability for professional posts and raised the students' interest in English study. The number of students who are late or truant has been reduced greatly. Their enthusiasm for classroom activities is high and classroom atmosphere is active. In addition, the new teaching modes have greatly reflected the educational idea such as student-centered, ability standard, and comprehensive quality. Thus, the students' ability to apply English has been improved in a practical way, and they have been more affluent in oral and written English. What's more, during the teaching process, college English teachers feel deeply that they lack knowledge in music, sports, art, and other majors. They often consult the teachers who teach art majors, learn from the students, and collect and sort out relevant information and materials through the library and the Internet. They constantly make great efforts to broaden the knowledge, which promotes the growth of them as "double qualified" teachers.

### Conclusion

Nowadays, people from different countries and regions are closely connected by economic globalization and technological advance. As the most widely used language in the world, English is an important tool for international communication as well as scientific and cultural exchanges. So college English courses should be set, on the one hand, to meet the national strategic needs, serve the national reform, and open up as well as economic and social development. On the other hand, they should meet students' different needs such as professional learning, international exchanges, further study, future career, personal employment, and so on. College English courses have practical significance and long-term influence on the future development of college students. Learning English well can help students to set up a global vision, cultivate their international awareness, and improve their cultural attainments. At the same time, it provides a basic tool for knowledge innovation, potential development, and all-round development, and helps the students get ready to meet the challenges and opportunities of the era of globalization. With the integration of the global economy, our society has a greater need for all kinds of high technology applied talents, and professional posts have greater demand for employee's ability of English application. Talents with both profound knowledge in a particular field and good English expression skills will be welcomed by all walks of life. So it is urgent to update the concept and content of college English teaching. EGP teaching cannot meet the needs of social development. College English teaching that highlights art majors' specialty features can not only effectively stimulate students' enthusiasm for study but also improve students' ability of practical application of English.

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