

Research on ESP teaching reform for graduate students

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Abstract: Aiming at a series of problems in ESP teaching for graduate students, such as unreasonable course structure, problems in teaching team construction, lagging teaching materials and teaching resources, this paper puts forward some suggestions, such as reshaping ESP curriculum system, strengthening the construction of ESP teaching staff, constructing the “government-industry-university-research” cooperative education mechanism, and implementing the ideological and political concepts of the curriculum. The aim is to further promote the reform of ESP teaching for graduate students and cultivate high-quality composite talents.

Key words: graduate English; ESP teaching; Curriculum thinking and politics

Introduction: English for Specific Purposes, ESP for short, refers to English courses that are related to occupations, disciplines, or the specific needs of learners. As early as the 1960s in foreign countries, relevant research on ESP has begun, and a more mature and perfect ESP teaching system has been formed. Since the end of 1970s, research on ESP teaching model has gradually emerged in China. For example, Wang Jingxia and Yang Rongguang’s “A Review of Domestic Research on English for Specific Use (2000-2021) -- a Visual Analysis Based on CiteSpace” (2023), Wang Hongye’s “Construction of ESP Teaching Model for Graduate Students in Public English under the Guidance of Social and Cultural Theories” (2019), Zhang Bin and Liu Yunhong’s “Research on English for Specific Use (ESP)” Practice Research in Student English Teaching -- Based on the Teaching Practice of Graduate students majoring in Food Science and Engineering of Henan University of Science and Technology (2017). However, on the whole, the research on ESP teaching mode is still in the exploratory stage in the domestic academic circles at this stage, and the research perspective is still relatively narrow and the research scope is not extensive, especially the research on ESP teaching for graduate students is even less. In view of this, this paper takes graduate English as an entry point and makes the following exploration on the construction of ESP teaching mode.

I. Existing problems in ESP teaching for graduate students

With the deepening of higher education reform, most of the major universities in China have formed a relatively mature English teaching system, but on the whole, most universities still need to further improve the degree of emphasis on ESP teaching. At present, the traditional EGP mode, that is, the general teaching mode, should be adopted for the graduate English teaching in most colleges and universities in China, and a set of ESP teaching mode that combines professional characteristics and reflects the orientation of running a school has not yet been formed.

1. The curriculum structure is not reasonable

As a necessary practical skill for talents of all majors in the new era, the improvement of comprehensive English application ability can effectively help students broaden their horizons and expand the breadth of their majors. However, in view of the current situation of graduate English teaching, ESP teaching mode has not received due attention in the reform of English teaching, and EGP teaching mode still occupies a dominant position in graduate English teaching, lacking of targeted adjustment of English curriculum system and teaching content based on professional characteristics and professional talent training objectives. In addition, some colleges and universities do not pay attention to the integration of professional courses and ESP English courses, and lack of practical English teaching for students’ professional characteristics, leading to the problem of separation of “learning and application” in graduate English teaching. The existence of this problem is not only unfavorable to the interdisciplinary transformation of English courses, but also unable to meet the needs of students’ international communication, career development and scientific research needs.

2. There are problems in teaching team building

A high-level teaching team is the key to promote the reform of ESP teaching for graduate students and cultivate compound talents. The team of graduate English ESP teachers includes not only the teachers of general English courses, but also the teachers of professional subjects. Due to professional restrictions, specialized and refined professional course content may be difficult for English general courses teachers to master. Therefore, it is difficult to effectively integrate the teaching content with professional knowledge, and they can only be limited to the explanation and imparts of English knowledge and English skills. As for professional teachers, in the process of talent training, they often only focus on imparting professional knowledge, and it is difficult to take into account the cultivation of students’ comprehensive English ability. Therefore, due to the limitations of their respective majors, it is difficult for both general English teachers and professional subject teachers to meet the needs of ESP teaching. Coupled with the lack of interdisciplinary consciousness in some colleges and universities, it is even more difficult to build a “double-qualified” teacher team. In addition, some English teachers, restricted by the traditional EGP teaching concept, tend to pay more attention to teaching theoretical knowledge in the teaching process, but ignore the application and practicability of English, which to some extent leads to the reform of English ESP teaching for graduate students always in a dilemma.

3. Teaching materials and teaching resources lag behind

ESP teaching mode requires teachers to expand the teaching content on the basis of the traditional EGP teaching mode, integrate

professional knowledge, and build a compound teaching mode of “English knowledge + professional knowledge”. However, under the influence of the traditional EGP teaching concept, English teaching for graduate students tends to pay more attention to the cultivation of students’ listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities, with a relatively simple knowledge system, and neglects the cultivation of students’ practical skills, especially the promotion of productive English skills to the development of students’ professional abilities. On the other hand, from the perspective of current teaching materials and teaching resources used in graduate English teaching, there is a general problem of emphasizing the foundation and neglecting the major. Digital ESP teaching resources are even more scarce, which leads to the obstruction of students’ independent extra-curricular learning and affects their overall learning effect.

4. Neglect the unity of “educating students” and “educating talents”

As a comprehensive subject with both instrumental and humanistic characteristics, English teaching should also take into account the cultivation of students’ professional spirit and humanistic quality, which requires that graduate English teaching should give full play to its ideological and political education and value-leading role, and promote the effective integration of curriculum ideology and politics into ESP teaching in combination with school positioning and professional characteristics. To realize the organic combination of “educating students” and “educating talents”. However, from the perspective of the current English teaching practice of some colleges and universities, although the ESP teaching reform has achieved initial results, it has neglected the cultivation of students’ humanistic quality and socialist core values. In addition, due to the lack of planning for the curriculum ideological and political construction of ESP teaching system for graduate students in some colleges and universities, it is seriously hindered in the cultivation of compound talents with a sense of responsibility, cooperation ability and family and country feelings.

II. ESP teaching reform for graduate students

1. Reshape ESP curriculum system

The deepening of higher education reform and the proposal of the “Four new ideas” have provided a new opportunity for the transformation and development of graduate English teaching. In this context, ESP teaching for graduate students should be combined with school positioning, professional characteristics and social needs, reshape ESP teaching concept and teaching objectives, highlight the dominant position of students, and adjust the teaching focus to cultivate students’ major-related English ability. In the specific teaching practice, teachers can adjust and optimize the traditional EGP teaching model and create a favorable external environment for the implementation of ESP teaching model for graduate students by reshaping English teaching objectives and establishing disciplinary relationships according to the career development planning and needs of graduate professionals and from the perspective of students’ long-term development and meeting social needs.

In graduate English teaching, the implementation of ESP teaching mode requires teachers to abandon the traditional practice of simply emphasizing horizontal professional development or extensively adding relevant professional subject content on the basis of English teaching. On the basis of their own professional knowledge, teachers should integrate professional knowledge into English teaching content organically and pay attention to the transferability of professional knowledge, so as to help students enrich knowledge. To improve professional ability, so as to realize the organic combination of knowledge imparting and ability cultivation. In this regard, teachers should construct ESP curriculum system of “English knowledge + professional knowledge” from different perspectives such as teaching concept, curriculum structure and teaching resources. At the same time, they can give full play to the advantages of the Internet, integrate high-quality teaching resources online and offline, and develop ESP school-based teaching materials in combination with professional characteristics and language practice. In the ESP teaching process, teachers can make use of advanced technologies, such as VR, AR, ICT, etc., to create smart classrooms and promote the two-way interaction and deep integration of English teaching and professional knowledge. Pay attention to the mining and application of big data processing technology, track students’ English learning process in real time, and adjust teaching strategies in time according to the effective feedback of students’ learning progress and learning effect; Implement mixed teaching and promote the effective combination of online teaching and offline teaching, so as to build an ESP teaching-oriented graduate English teaching system.

2. Strengthen the construction of ESP teaching staff

Document No. 1 of the Letter of the High Education Department (2020) clearly puts forward: comprehensively promote the construction of “Four new”, with the construction of new engineering, new medical science, new agriculture and new liberal arts as the guide, reform the concept and standard of higher education personnel training, innovate the mode of personnel training, and improve the quality of personnel training. In this context, creating EPS teacher team has become the key to improve the quality of postgraduate English teaching and cultivate compound English talents. In this regard, on the one hand, colleges and universities should build cooperation platforms to promote project cooperation and academic exchanges between English and other disciplines, so as to help English teachers improve their language ability and promote interdisciplinary integration, so that they can transition from EGP teachers to ESP teachers smoothly. At the same time, colleges and universities should also actively set up a team of composite teachers to provide professional support and consultation for the construction of ESP teachers, strengthen the cultivation of English teachers’ professional quality, and help them make up for their shortcomings in professional disciplines. On the other hand, colleges and universities should encourage inter-school cooperation and interdisciplinary communication between English teachers and professional teachers, and include excellent general English teachers and professional subject teachers in the ESP teaching team, so as to build a high-level ESP teaching team. On this basis, colleges and universities should actively expand the international exchange platform to help ESP teachers broaden their vision and expand the pattern,

so that they can change the teaching concept, improve the application ability of various modern and diversified teaching methods, flexibly apply the teaching methods such as situational teaching method and case method to the ESP teaching process, and help the cultivation of interdisciplinary and composite talents.

3. Establish a collaborative education mechanism of “government, industry, university and research”

The ESP teaching model for graduate students aims to promote the organic integration of English teaching and students’ development at a higher and broader level. Therefore, the reform of English ESP teaching should combine the students’ career planning and the society’s specific demand for professional talents, and reshape the relationship between ESP teaching and talent training. In this regard, the graduate English teaching should integrate the resources inside and outside the university, build a cooperative education mechanism of “government, industry, university and research”, and improve the ESP teaching system. The establishment of the “government-industry-university-research” collaborative education system requires colleges and universities to actively establish cooperative relations with the government, enterprises and other subjects, improve the English ESP teaching system internally, highlight the practicability of English teaching, strengthen the improvement of students’ post adaptability, innovation ability and comprehensive English application ability, and cultivate them into “specialized and multi-functional” compound talents.

4. Implement the ideological and political philosophy of the curriculum

Under the background of promoting morality and cultivating talents, the reform of ESP teaching mode for graduate students needs to promote the organic integration of curriculum ideology and politics in English teaching according to the guiding spirit of the Party and the state, so as to realize the combination and unity of “educating people” and “educating talents”. As a language subject, there exists strong cultural conflict in the teaching process of English itself. Therefore, in the ESP teaching process, teachers should guide students to compare Chinese and Western cultures, rationally understand the cultural conflicts between the two, and dig deeply into the contents of traditional Chinese culture in the teaching content, so as to cultivate students’ cultural identity and guide students to enhance their cultural self-confidence. In addition, the English course itself has a high ideological and political education value. In the process of ESP teaching reform, teachers should give full play to its disciplinary education value, promote the integration of ideological and political elements in ESP teaching, and further reflect the instrumental and humanistic nature of English teaching.

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