

An exploratory study of designing a learner-based curriculum in the ESP classroom – A case study of Immigration English

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ABSTRACT

English has played an important role in Taiwan due to the rapid global changes. The purpose of this study was to explore learners' expectations when designing English for Specific Purposes class in the discipline of immigration studies. Open-ended questions were used to understand learners' perceptions towards such freshmen English course.

The study sample consisted of 20 college freshmen in the immigration studies of four-year baccalaureate program. Based on the results, students described the course of Immigration English should include all aspects of immigration. The topics should cover related authorities in the field of immigration, human flow management, criminal investigation regarding the immigration issues such as human trafficking, immigration guidance, and national examination preparation. After completing this course, majority of students expected to know more about professional immigration English, to enhance overall English abilities, and to strengthen their listening skills. Suggestions are also proposed for the language teachers in the field of immigration.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Immigration English, learner-based curriculum

Introduction

Because of National Immigration Agency's (2016) special nature of the business of strengthening border management, protecting national security, respecting multiculturalism, and safeguarding the human rights of immigrants, English has become a heavily emphasized language in the field of immigration. Having a good competency in English is one of the required abilities for immigration personnel.

In order to equip immigration personnel as judicial enforcers and civil servants, Special Civil Service Examination for Immigration Administration Personnel was first held in 2012 (Ministry of Examination, 2011). Foreign language with the concept of professional English is one of five core test subjects.

In correspondence to the changes of Special Civil Service Examination for

Immigration Administration personnel, Department of Border Police of Central Police University established a new bachelor program for immigration study in January 2011. Understanding learners' perceptions is crucial to develop a comprehensive English program in a four-year curriculum for immigration English.

The purpose of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course is to equip learners to function sufficiently in a target situation in which learners will use the language competently. Therefore, learners are the center piece when designing a language course. Analyzing learners' needs is an important step in ESP curriculum design. It can determine the essence of an ESP course and help prioritize what learners need. As a result, this study aims to explore learners' understanding and expectations towards such ESP course in the field of immigration.

Literature Review

English for Special Purposes

English for specific purposes (ESP) is a domain of teaching English language including Business English (Wu, 2010), Legal English (Candlin, Bhatia, & Jensen, 2002; Deutch, 2003), Nursing English (Saragih, 2014), Medical English (Yu & Seepho, 2015), Marine English (Chang, 2011) and Tourism English (Shih, 2010), etc. For example, Nursing English is taught to nurses who are going to work in the hospital and may serve patients from other countries. English is a universal way for communication in a multilingual environment.

(1) Definition of ESP

Since the movement of ESP in the 1960s, the numbers of linguists, researchers, scholars have attempted to define the term of ESP, but a universal definition seems to be not quite produced. Streven (1988) pointed out that ESP has four absolute characteristics and two variable characteristics. Absolute characteristics include: ESP is designed to meet learners' needs, is related to particular disciplines, is focused on the language syntactically, lexically, semantically and discoursally, and is opposite of general English. Variable characteristics are described as ESP may be, but is not necessarily limited to a specific language skill and can be taught in any ways. Strongly influenced by Streven's ideas of ESP, Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998) defined ESP is to meet learners' specific needs, may be related to specific disciplines, may use a different methodology from that of general English, and is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students.

(2) ESP in Taiwan

With the movement of re-construction of qualified technical and vocational

education since 1996, many schools have established ESP courses/curriculum to fulfill students' need in different disciplines in order to respond to the great demand for English contexts vocationally and professionally. In the field of ESP, needs analysis has a great influence on the curriculum design, teaching process, teaching methodology and teaching outcomes and other relative implications in teaching (Lai, 2005; Shih, 2010; Wu, 2010; Chen, 2013).

In Lai's study (2005), she mentioned in her study that students who took ESP courses were able to apply four language skills in class. They expected an effective ESP teachers should utilize a variety of pedagogical knowledge and needs analysis to assist students in learning. More advanced ESP courses should be offered with a much closer relationship with industries.

Shih (2010) indicated that vocational and comprehensive high school students who major in Food and Beverage Management, Tourism and Hospitality have studied English for Tourism and Hospitality for a year at the time. This study was to explore students' perceptions toward this ESP course. The results showed that students have a strong career-oriented need toward English for Tourism and Hospitality and hope to improve their working competence.

Wu (2010) examined students' and instructors' perspectives of Business English courses. Similar to studies of Lai (2005) and Shih (2010), the results revealed that students believed that Business English courses contain both business and English knowledge and would be helpful in the job markets. Most instructors suggested that more relevant courses can be provided for students to study Business English well.

Chen (2013) also stated that because of the global expansion in the tourism industry, English communicative competence is a basic requirement in this industry. The results showed that students in Department of Tourism and Leisure Management have strong motivation for acquiring the English course credits to increase their competitiveness in the future career, and for greater developing personal upward character. English teachers also found that students' perceptions and motivation towards learning English has changed.

(3) ESP in Central Police University (CPU)

ESP programs has rapidly developed since 2010 after Special Civil Service Examination Grade 3 for Police changed one of its core test subject English to Professional Police English. In correspondence to such changes, the school has modified its English curriculum since then. From 2010 to 2014, seniors were obligated to take a two-hour non-credited class for Professional Police English to prepare for the test every week. Starting 2012, English class for freshmen has changed

to Professional Police English. In addition to ESP programs of Professional Police English, other professional English for fire science and maritime science were established in Department of Fire Science and in Department of Maritime Police.

Also in correspondence to the changes of Special Civil Service Examination for Immigration Administration personnel and meeting the qualification of National Immigration Agency's special nature of the business, Department of Border Police established a new bachelor program for immigration study in January 2011. ESP curriculums were first set up for sophomores and juniors in the program of immigration study. However, after evaluating the national exam-taking performance, additional ESP curriculum was set up for freshmen in the academic year of 2016.

Methodology

Since a new ESP course was set up for freshmen in the academic year of 2016, the author was eager to explore what learners expect from this class. This was an exploratory study in gathering learners' opinions towards this ESP course in the immigration studies. The study participants were 20 freshmen enrolled in the immigration studies of Department of Border Police of Central Police University. Of this sample, 14 male and 6 female students in the freshmen class of immigration studies.

Learners' understanding and expectations towards a newly established ESP course of Immigration English were analyzed in a qualitative way by using a set of open-ended questions. Open-ended questions are as followed:

1. What is Immigration English?
2. What topics should Immigration English include?
3. What do you expect from this class?

Results

This study aimed to explore the understandings and expectations of freshmen who enrolled in the immigration studies of Department of Border Police towards a newly established ESP course. A total of 20 freshmen participated in this exploratory study. A set of open-ended questions was used for the author's references when designing an ESP course based on learners' perceptions. Open-ended questions are included as followed: (1) What is Immigration English? (2) What topics should the course of Immigration English include? (3) What do you expect from this class?

(1) What is Immigration English?

According to students' description about the course of Immigration English, they described the course as a professional English in the field of immigration. The course

should cover all aspects of immigration including technical terms used in the workplace, related dialogues regarding immigration issues, ports of entry including airports and harbors, document inspections and any professions in the discipline of immigration.

(2) What topics should the course of Immigration English include?

Table 1 presents the topics to be included in the class by students. Students mentioned many topics should be covered in the class. According to their responses, topics can be divided into 5 major categories such as corresponding immigration authorities, human flow management, criminal investigation, immigration guidance, and information about national examination. Under the category of human flow management, topics such as airport, ports, document inspection, and entry and exit are mentioned. Topics of human trafficking, illegal immigrants and terrorism are grouped in the category of criminal investigation. Immigration guidance consist of laws and regulation, kinds of migrants, human rights, and cultural aspects. Last but not least, students cared about passing the national examination. They hope the course can prepare them with test-taking strategies.

Table 1

Brief Summary of topics to be included in the course of Immigration English

Topics	# of students
1. Corresponding immigration authorities	4
2. Human flow management	1
(1) Airport	5
(2) Ports of entry	2
(3) Document inspection	5
(4) Entry and exit	2
3. Criminal investigation	
(1) Human trafficking	3
(2) Illegal immigrants	2
(3) Terrorism	1
4. Immigration guidance	
(1) Laws and regulations	7
(2) Kinds of migrants	
(A) New immigrants	2
(B) Migrant workers	5
(C) Investors	2
(D) Foreign spouses	3

(E) Travelers	2
(F) Students	1
(G) Refugees	3
(H) Skilled workers	1
(3) Human rights	1
(4) Cultural aspects	1
5. National examination preparation	2

(3) What do you expect from this class?

As noted in Table 2, top three expectations after completing the course of Immigration English are to know about professional immigration English including technical vocabulary usage in the field and laws and regulation regarding immigration aspects, to enhance overall English abilities and to enhance listening skills.

Table 2

Brief Summary of expectations for the course of Immigration English

Expectations	# of students
1. To know more about professional immigration English	7
2. To enhance overall English abilities	5
3. To enhance listening skills	5
4. To be able to use in the workplace	4
5. To pass the national examination	4
6. To have a better understanding in the field of immigration	3
7. To enhance oral skills	3
8. To learn English with ease	1
9. To enhance writing skills	1

Conclusion and Suggestions

Due to the rapid changes in globalism, traveling countries to countries or finding jobs overseas are more and more popular around the world. Tasks such as strengthening border management, protecting national security, respecting multiculturalism, and safeguarding the human rights of immigrants have presented greater challenges for immigration personnel than before. English has become one of the major languages for conveying information in the world as well as in Taiwan. As a result, teaching has shifted from teacher-based to learner-based. Schools in Taiwan, especially in the college level, are striving for understanding learners' needs.

In this study, according to freshmen in the immigration studies of Department of Border Police, their perceptions and expectations towards the course were collected

and analyzed. Based on the results, students described Immigration English should include all aspects of immigration. The topics should cover related authorities in the field of immigration, human flow management, criminal investigation regarding the immigration issues such as human trafficking, immigration guidance, and national examination preparation. After completing this course, majority of students expected to know more about professional immigration English, to enhance overall English abilities, and to strengthen their listening skills.

Language teachers play a crucial role in the process of English for Special Purposes (ESP) teaching. They have more responsibilities than a general English teacher. Besides of being a language teacher, he or she needs to be a language course planner. To motivate students' learning in the class, designing a course need to be appropriate, able to promoting critical thinking and scaffolding problem-solving skills, and most importantly, fun to learn.

Teachers as course planners also need to be aware of the changes around the world including immigration laws, acts, and regulations regarding human flow management, criminal investigation, care and assistance mechanism for immigrants and human rights. There are some suggestions regarding content design and teaching activities on the topic of human flow management presented as below:

Because of the surging number of tourists from Mainland China, there are challenges facing the border management. Teachers can provide more information when dealing with security management of people of the Mainland area such as the Travel Permit for people of the Mainland area issued by Mainland China and by Taiwan government, cooperation protocol on the border control management, establishment of communication platform, and the establishment of border agency for examining and issuing Entry and Exit Permit, and providing interview sessions. Moreover students can be assigned on searching topics regarding current state of people of Mainland China entering Taiwan such as problems of simplifying the application procedures for documents of Mainland China tourists (e.g. inaccuracy of identity check), problems of inadequacy of immigration officers for auditing the application cases (e.g. inaccuracy of pre-entry identity security reviewing), problems of rapid changes on amending regulations (e.g. improper response on border security enforcement).

These supplementary reading materials and in-class activities can broaden students' points of view and stimulate their critical thinking on the issues of human flow management. Students are able to acquire this content-based knowledge from the real life situation as well as having opportunities to analyze various scenario that may happen in the real life. This learning material also enriches students' international

perception to be able to serve the public better.

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