

The Teaching Mode Reform and Innovation of “Specialized English for Environmental Design” in the Context of Educational Internationalization

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Abstract: As informatization and globalization continually deepen, the demand for internationally qualified talents increases, so the globalization of higher education is an inevitable trend in today’s society. As a first-line course that is directly connected with internationalization, “Specialized English for Environmental Design” is now offered in many universities in China. However, there are many problems in the combination of the course design and teaching objectives, so this paper takes the course in XDSISU as an example, analyzing the series of teaching reforms and innovations that have been carried out, hoping to provide a certain reference value for related courses.

Keywords: Environmental design; Specialized English; Teaching reform

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1. Introduction

With the development of “the Belt and Road” and the policy of “Education power” and “the Workforce Development Strategy”, the internationalization of higher education has become an important part of strengthening the educational system and country modernization, it is also the trend for all universities in China^[1]. As environmental design is a discipline that strongly combines theory with practice, the interdisciplinary and application-oriented talent this course cultivates, not only needs to be equipped with expert knowledge but also adapt to educational internationalization, as well as proficiently use English to carry out project proposals and negotiation, finally meet the needs of the whole design industry.

This paper takes the teaching mode reform and innovation of the course “Specialized English for Environmental Design” in Xianda College of Economics and Humanities, Shanghai International Studies University (XDSISU for short) as a case study, discusses the combination of English teaching with

environmental design in the context of educational internationalization, to better enhance students' ability to conduct national and international design project communications, and to analyze worldwide materials and literature, thus achieving the cultivating goal of modernization and international qualification talents.

2. Current teaching mode of “Specialized English for Environmental Design”

“Specialized English for Environmental Design” is a compulsory course for environmental design, aiming at specialized English learning and multi-national design project communications. After studying, students will be able to master a series of core vocabulary and phrases, proficiently use English to present design proposals or negotiations as well as browse worldwide materials and literature, finally becoming a multi-disciplinary and diversified highly-skilled talent in line with the needs of the country, university, and the market.

The teaching objectives for art and design majors in the country are mostly realized in the course of “College English”, like cultivating students' ability to read English literature and training their general listening, reading, and writing skills ^[2]. While the teaching objectives for “Specialized English” need to be more targeted and practical, focused on enriching and expanding students' expert vocabulary, and training the design project presentation and communication skills. At the same time, closely combining the design's major characteristics, conducting the teaching process from shallower to deeper, and ultimately meeting the teaching objectives.

2.1. Current teaching arrangements

“Specialized English for Environmental Design” in most universities in China is arranged in lower grades. As art and design majors are more likely to arrange more foundation courses and less practical courses in lower grades, while more practical courses and fewer foundation courses in higher grades, practical courses require more effort and time. The advantage of arranging “Specialized English” in lower grades is that it efficiently combines with major foundation courses, and students have enough time to study and review, which is good for English learning.

Nevertheless, arranging “Specialized English” in lower grades is highly overlapped with the general compulsory course “College English” that is offered in the same period, so students have to face two types of English courses at the same time ^[3]. As a result, higher demands towards university and faculty in terms of the complementarity and differentiations between two English course teaching are placed out.

In the aspect of class hours and credit arrangement, “Specialized English for Environmental Design” in most universities is around 24 class hours to 40 class hours, usually in one semester. It can be seen that the class hours and credit allocation are less than that of “College English” as well as other major courses ^[4]. Thus, it is more likely to expose students to a great number of English expert vocabulary in a short period when they have not yet formed their expert knowledge system. From this, students are confused in terms of the vocabulary and phrase system, which is not good for English learning.

2.2. Current teaching contents and methods

Environmental design involves a wide range of majors, like architectural design, interior design, and landscape design, and is also inextricably linked with industrial design, public art, and other design majors ^[5]. Correspondingly, the teaching content of “Specialized English for Environmental Design” is relatively wide

and cross-disciplinary, which puts forward higher requirements for teaching content planning.

At present, the selection of teaching materials for “Specialized English for Art Design” is varied, but for “Specialized English for Environmental Design” are few, as the teaching content and the textbook are not deeply connected with the original foreign publications, and mainly focused on vocabulary lists and extensive readings, thus the teaching materials are considered to be impractical and ineffective ^[6]. The teaching method is mostly lecture-based learning, which means the teacher directly feeds the theory to students ^[7]. The teaching mode is inflexible and the teaching method is conservative, although compulsorily feeding vocabulary and reading can enhance the student’s ability of English literature reading in a certain degree, it is unlikely to stimulate their learning interest, and cannot effectively practice the English using ability, thus failing to truly realize the teaching objectives.

2.3. Current assessment methods and faculty

The assessment method of “Specialized English for Environmental Design” in most universities still takes the form of closed-book examinations, like paper translation, vocabulary testing reading comprehension, and so on. The assessment of spoken English is limited, lacking the assessment of oral skills under business or proposal presentation scenarios, which is not a good way to examine the specialized English learning results ^[8].

In the aspect of faculty, there are two categories of lecturers for this course, one is those with a design major background and the other is those with an English major background, both of them have certain limitations. Due to the characteristics of art and design majors, lecturers with design major backgrounds have relatively lower English skills and lack bilingual teaching capacity and experience, which makes it difficult to carry out an effective and orderly teaching process. Yet the strong interdisciplinary nature of the environmental design major requires lecturers to have solid design backgrounds, which is practically impossible for lecturers with English major backgrounds to reach the depth and breadth of design majors in teaching “Specialized English for Environmental Design” ^[9]. Thereby, brings out the predicament of the faculty for the course “Specialized English for Environmental Design” in many universities in China.

3. Teaching mode reform of “Specialized English for Environmental Design”

The previous analysis shows that the course “Specialized English for Environmental Design” has many problems in terms of teaching arrangements, teaching contents, teaching methods, assessment methods, and faculty. To solve these problems, the author puts forward the following strategies for reforming the teaching mode.

3.1. Teaching arrangements reform

In the author’s opinion, “Specialized English for Environmental Design” should be arranged in lower grades in universities, and be taught as a foundation course. Since “College English” is generally arranged in the beginning four semesters of the lower grades, it is appropriate to arrange “Specialized English for Environmental Design” in the second semester of the sophomore year. As the students’ English skills have been relatively improved after studying “College English” during three semesters, the further training in specialized English that is offered afterward stands a chance to effectively improve their overall English skills, as well as less overlap with the teaching process of “College English”. Moreover, after the major

course cultivation in three semesters, students are more likely to have a deeper understanding of the expert knowledge, which helps them to integrate the overall expert knowledge system with specialized English.

In terms of class hours, it is appropriate to arrange the course into about 32 class hours which can be divided into 2 class hours per week in 16 weeks or 4 class hours per week in 8 weeks^[10].

3.2. Teaching contents and methods reform

In the aspect of teaching contents reform, it should follow the characteristics of the environmental design major that combines theory with practice, and abandon the conservative teaching mode of lecture-based learning. The course “Specialized English for Environmental Design” taught by the author in XDSISU is divided into three modules: theoretical lectures, educational practices, and assessment.

The theoretical lecture module is focused on expert English learning and is aimed at consolidating the foundation of specialized English, in which a series of expert vocabulary expansions and intensive reading are carried out. In the educational practice module, innovation attempts such as scene simulation practice, role-playing practice, and outdoor practice are carried out, aiming at stimulating students’ learning interests as well as examining English learning results. In the assessment module, students are requested to research the typical design projects according to the selected topics and make a presentation to explain the design project using specialized English, in which design reports are also requested to be presented. The overall assessment is made up of presentation and writing, on the one hand, it expands their ability to collect and summarize information as well as practice their oral English, on the other hand, it tests their ability to write and translate design reports, to achieve the teaching objectives of combining theory with practice.

In the selection of teaching materials, besides textbooks as the basic theoretical material, it is also necessary to add original foreign publications, design websites, and other up-to-date materials^[11]. The teaching materials with text, words, videos, pictures, and building models motivate students as well as broaden their horizons, which is vital for art and design major students.

3.3. Faculty reform

During the bilingual teaching process of “Specialized English for Environmental Design”, the faculty is an extremely important part of the whole process. In the author’s opinion, the solid and reliable professional qualifications and English skills of the faculty directly affect the teaching process of the course. Therefore, universities that offer this course should pay more attention to the cultivation and establishment of high-quality teaching teams.

For example, lecturers with the following situations are considered to be proper for this course: design major lecturers with abroad study backgrounds; design major lecturers who have passed public English language ability tests or university-level bilingual teaching assessments; and English major lecturers who have certain in-depth understanding and research on design majors^[12].

4. Teaching mode innovation of “Specialized English for Environmental Design” in XDSISU

Xianda College of Economics and Humanities, Shanghai International Studies University is an application-oriented university in Shanghai, and it is characterized by the concept of international education. Based on the university’s concept and in line with the trend of international development, the course “Specialized

English for Environmental Design” has put forward several innovation attempts in terms of teaching mode reform, to cultivate multi-disciplinary, diversified, and high-quality design professionals who can meet the needs of internationalization.

4.1. Innovation of practice module: Scene simulation and role-playing

Issues like “only rote learning, but not using” are commonly existing during the English teaching process in universities in China, in which students can only use the words or sentences separately and passively, so it is difficult for them to nimbly utilize the language according to scenarios. However, the key point of specialized English teaching is to build up the possibility for students to use English as a business communication tool in the future, such as design proposal presentation and construction guidance, which requires a higher level of practical application for words and sentences according to scenarios^[13].

“Scene re-enactment” is a common teaching method in English teaching^[14]. In this course, the author integrated the interactive practice of “scene simulation and role-playing”, adopting the general design work scenes of “design review” and “design explanation” which are selected from some representative interior design variety shows like “Amazing Interiors”, “Dream Home Makeover”, and “Interior Design Master.” Students are freely divided into groups of two or three, role-playing the owners or designers respectively, and conducting the design show clips to practice the conversations in certain scenarios.

For example, how to describe design concepts and how to negotiate and coordinate during the construction process. Through a 20-minute scene simulation practice, students can truly master the common specialized English in business conversations, improve their oral skills and finally lay a solid foundation for them to proficiently use English as a communication tool in the future.

4.2. Innovation of practice module: City walking practice

City walking is a popular activity among young people in Shanghai, where participants explore the city and experience its unique charm through stroll. At the same time, Shanghai has organized a series of “Stories of Shanghai Architecture” activities, where various types of excellent architectural tours are open to the community^[15].

In this course, the author integrated these two typical activities in Shanghai with specialized English knowledge, creatively carried out the bilingual outdoor practice of “City Walk with Specialized English for Environmental Design”, leads the students to visit the famous buildings and design scenes in Shanghai, while the lecturer gives bilingual explanation using expert vocabulary and phrases, helps students to transform textbook knowledge into practical ability, as well as adopts a creative teaching method to motivate their enthusiasm towards English learning, therefore helps them to better master specialized English.

5. Conclusion

Environmental design is a discipline that combines theory with practice, emphasizing the cultivation of multi-discipline and application-oriented high-quality talents. “Specialized English for Environmental Design” is the result of a closely integrated environmental design major with the globalization of higher education, and it is one of the foundations for cultivating and delivering internationally qualified talents to society. In this course, international communication ability should be considered as the core, and closer attention should

be paid to the ability to connect with international demands. Thus, teaching contents, teaching methods, assessment methods, and faculty should be carefully considered during the course design process, which requires us to closely combine the teaching objectives with application-oriented and internationalization, fully conduct the teaching mode reform, and deeply explore the potential innovation, to cultivate multi-discipline, diversified and international qualified talents who meet the demands of the country, university, and the market.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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