

Stakeholder Perceptions of Connecting ESP Courses With Graduation Seminar Topics

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Abstract

English as a global language and recent attention to the merits of the integration of language learning with knowledge/content construction has led to the necessity for the inclusion courses reflecting these ideals in tertiary educational programs including liberal arts. With this in mind, in the 2020 academic year, the presenters' university in Japan asked them to review the third-year content-based English classes and develop an ESP program that would enable students to study content related to their graduation seminar subjects in English. Fourteen content English courses divided into two categories were created: Comparative Cultural Studies and Intercultural Communication. Course topics include American Studies, British Studies, Japanese Studies, Children's Studies, Political Science, SDGs for International Cooperation, Gender, Race, Tourism, Economics, Organization Behavior, Cross-Cultural Management, Information Science, and SDGs for Business. Instructors with expertise in these areas were also hired and the new courses commenced in the 2021 academic year. This presentation reported on the progress of implementing the new courses, and discuss data obtained from students and professors in regard to the new courses. The preliminary results demonstrated that while 77 percent of the students surveyed felt a strong connection between the content studied in their English classes and their Graduation Seminar, the results from the Seminar professors and CBE Instructors surveyed indicated less of a perceived connection between the classes and the seminars. The issues surrounding these findings and plans for the next stage of the ESP curriculum project was elaborated upon.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Learner Interest (LI), Curriculum Development

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Introduction

In the 2020 academic year, the authors' university tasked them with developing a set of English for specific purposes (ESP) courses that included both content and language instruction (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998; Hutchison, and Waters 1987; Basturkmen, 2006). The authors surveyed professors in their department and determined that graduation seminar course professors wanted their students to learn skills for engaging with the seminar content in English. Next, they reviewed currently offered courses and determined that the content-based English (CBE) courses, which were required elective classes for third year students, would be suitable for the new ESP program. They set about renaming the courses to align with seminar topics and designed fourteen courses with the following titles: Comparative Cultural Studies and Intercultural Communication. Course topics include American Studies, British Studies, Japanese Studies, Children's Studies, Political Science, SDGs for International Cooperation, Gender, Race, Tourism, Economics, Organization Behavior, Cross-Cultural Management, Information Science, and SDGs for Business. Then the authors surveyed current English skills instructors about their expertise and ability to teach the new courses. Several instructors possessed knowledge in some of the ESP topics and showed interest in teaching the new courses. Other content specialists were hired to teach the courses that could not be taught by instructors who were currently employed at their university. The courses were also moved to Fridays, when the seminar courses are taught, so that ESP and seminar professors would find it easier to discuss the content of the new courses. Instruction of the new ESP courses began in the 2021 academic year. This paper will detail the progress of implementing the new courses and data from a survey administered to both students taking the courses and instructors after the first semester of instruction.

Establishing the New ESP Courses

Several years ago, the authors' university created "B's Vision," which aims to motivate students and help them improve their practical English skills as they develop the skills to communicate in English in a variety of situations related to their academic and future career interests. B's Vision included B's Vision Communication. The concept of B's Vision Communication is to eventually develop a Communication Masters Series that will encompass English for general purposes (EGP), English for business purposes (ESP), English for academic purposes (EAP), ESP, and English communication for sustainable development goals (SDGs). Then in April 2020, a General English Committee was established partially with the goal of working toward the implementation of B's Vision.

Within the General English Committee, a subcommittee tasked with creating ESP courses was established. The subcommittee, dubbed the ESP Team, consisted of four professors consisting of the ESP/Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) and EAP specialists, a member of the International Liberal Arts program, and a member of the International Business program. After discussing options for creating the new ESP courses, the ESP Team decided the best path forward would be to begin with ESP courses for third-year students then once those were established, they would begin working on developing ESP courses for first and second year students, which will eventually become one of the cornerstones of B's Vision Communication. The team decided the smoothest method for introducing ESP courses would be to connect the third year CBE courses with the graduation seminar topics that are taught in Japanese. They surveyed the graduation seminar instructors, who are not English teachers, about the kinds of English skills they wanted their students to learn, and many of the seminar instructors indicated that they wanted their students to be able to communicate in

English about the topics they study in their seminar classes. Next, the ESP Team researched options for adding new courses to the curriculum as well as changing the content of currently offered courses. Eventually, the team determined that adding entirely new classes to the current curriculum would entail a tremendous amount of time and paperwork to get approval. Changing the names and content of current courses was much easier though. Thus, introducing ESP related to the seminar topics in the CBE courses was the logical choice because the existing CBE courses could simply be renamed, and the content changed to align with the content taught in the seminar classes (Guo, 2012).

Once the English needs were determined and the decision was made to revamp the currently offered CBE courses, the ESP Team began creating new courses that covered topics related to the seminar content. The courses were also divided into lower and higher levels based on the third grade students' English levels, which would allow the students to study the authentic content at a language level suitable for their current English language skills.

In order to promote success in the incorporation of these classes, the ESP Team felt it was important to encourage communication and collaboration between the ESP and seminar professors as this is considered instrumental (Coffey, 1985, Lorenzo, 2005). Thus, the ESP Team applied for and received approval to reschedule the CBE/ESP classes so they would correspond with the seminar class day. The rationale for holding both classes on the same day was to help create a sense of 'parallel with experience' (Belcher, 2013) for the students. The team felt that holding the classes on the same day would enable students to learn content related to their seminars in English as well as their seminar topic on the same day, which would reinforce both the language and content they were being taught. They also theorized holding the classes on the same day would motivate students to learn English because they would be able to connect content being taught in Japanese with their new English skills from the CBE courses. Since most of the ESP teachers are part-time, having them on campus on the same day as the seminar professors, would also provide more opportunities for the professors to meet, discuss seminar and ESP topics, and collaborate to provide better content and language instruction in the new ESP courses.

Implementing the new Program

The new ESP courses began in April 2020. Students are required to take one ESP course each semester in their third year, so they were placed into one course based on their seminar topic and another course covering a topic of their choice. Because the courses as well as most of the instructors were new, the ESP coordinator advised the new teachers about planning, class activities, and other aspects of teaching the courses such as uploading the syllabi to the university's website, grading, and textbooks or materials choices.

Stakeholders Feedback

Upon completion of the first semester, the coordinator surveyed the students, ESP instructors, and seminar professors to do a progress check, learn their impressions of the new courses, and determine whether any changes needed to be made to the courses in the second semester. With an overall response rate of 80% a total of 115 students, ten ESP instructors, and seventeen seminar professors responded to the survey. Two sections of the questionnaires were highlighted: firstly, the link between ESP classes and seminars, and secondly the perceived usefulness of the ESP classes for Seminar study. 77% of the students reported they felt ESP and seminar classes were related, and 72% reported that they perceived the

knowledge gained from ESP classes as useful in their respective seminar classes. Students comments reinforced these findings with students comments such as:

"The link between the content in my CBE class and my seminar was very clear and I think it helped me a lot" (Student A).

"Learning a different point of view about the US from my CBE Instructor helped me to make an opinion in my Seminar class discussion" (Student B).

In response to the same questions, 50% of the ESP instructors and 29% of the seminar professors reported that they perceived the content in ESP classes to be related to the seminar classes. With regard to the usefulness of the knowledge gained from ESP classes in seminar classes, 30% of ESP instructors and 35% of seminar professors reported that they perceived the knowledge gained from the ESP classes was useful in the seminar classes. Comments from ESP instructors eluded to a lack of communication and feedback from seminar professors though as can be seen in the following comments:

"I would like to receive at least some feedback on my syllabus from the seminar professor" (ESP Instructor A).

"It would be great if we could have a meeting with the seminar professors so I could double check my teaching focus" (ESP Instructor B).

These findings perhaps illustrate not only a lack of communication between the seminar professors and ESP instructors but also between these two stakeholder groups and the students. Perhaps the lack of communication was due to the ongoing coronavirus situation and the fact that university policy was to teach one-third of the semester at school with the rest of the courses being taught online as commented by both these stakeholder groups:

"I think that it was rather difficult with the classes being online hyflex classes to meet the ZEMI Profs" (ESP Instructor A).

"I would like to get to know the CBE Instructors but with COVID-19 often our schedules don't match. I look forward to being able to talk after things become semi-normal again" (Seminar Professor A).

Since the seminar professors and ESP instructors were not at school every week, and possibly not at school on the same weeks, they might not have had opportunities to meet and discuss the courses. The difficulty in finding opportunities to communicate can be seen in comments from both the ESP and seminar professors that demonstrate it is an important issue that will need to be continually addressed as the pandemic continues. As Initially, there was a plan to create an ESP corner in the teachers' lounge where ESP and seminar topic materials could be housed and ESP instructors and seminar professors could meet. Because of the ongoing coronavirus situation and uncertainty about the university's policies regarding instruction in the 2022 academic year, establishing the ESP corner has been put on hold though. The authors continue to feel that communication between the stakeholder instructors is vital for the program's success and will work to find better avenues of communication for the upcoming academic year.

Conclusions

With one full year of the new ESP classes completed, the most apparent conclusion is that there is still a lack of communication among all of the stakeholders. These findings perhaps illustrate not only a lack of communication between the seminar professors and ESP instructors but also between these two stakeholder groups and the students. Addressing the communication issue is important as this program continues because the purpose of the new classes is to motivate students as well as to provide them with English skills to engage with the content learned in Japanese in their seminar classes. Furthermore, although workshops and a symposium were held to educate faculty members about the new classes before they began, it appears there is still a lack of understanding of the concepts of ESP on the part of the seminar professors and perhaps a lack of confidence on the part of the ESP Instructors. Facilities such as the development of an ESP corner, either a virtual or physical, will continue to be investigated as both seminar professors and ESP instructors have indicated that they would like the opportunity to have more contact with each other in order to enhance their understanding of ESP, align the content of the seminar and ESP courses, and develop more confidence in providing suitable ESP content that will further motivate students to learn about their seminar topics in English.

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