Bridging the Gap between EGP and EMP- A Collaborative Project between the University and the Hospital

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Abstract

This paper examines the effectiveness of the collaboration between the university and the local hospital, particularly in the area of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). As a language teacher, it is always problematic to seek the possibilities working with the subject teachers in terms of the cost and time (Kenney & Bolitho, 1984). ESP teachers are struggling between language teaching and the knowledge of special subjects. Thus, it is essential to help language teachers become an effective ESP practitioner by reaching out to local industries. Teachers may use their language skills to help those who have professional knowledge but lack language skills which maybe of immediate needs at work. At the meanwhile, language teachers can be self-trained as an effective ESP practitioner by working with professionals.

The project was initiated with a workplace English training program to improve the English language proficiency of the hospital nurses and administrative personnel. The study focuses on a need-based course design, tailor-made teaching materials and teacher’s self-training. The findings drawn from the data obtained through the needs analysis and learners’ perception questionnaires, interviews with the learners and the head of the training department were discussed. The results show that in general, the course has met the needs of the hospital and the nurses and administrative personnel, though there are some discrepancies between learners’ needs and employer’s expectation. The issues were raised and suggestions were made to offer significant implications for similar projects of industry-university collaboration.

Keywords: ESP, industry-university collaboration, needs analysis, teacher’s self-training
以產學合作的模式跨越專業英語的鴻溝

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摘要

本研究旨在藉由與當地一所醫院的合作案例，調查大學與產業界有效合作模式的可能性，尤其是在專業英文的領域裡。由於經費、時間、教材內容與取材等的限制，英語文教師常不容易與專業教師合作。專業英語教師亦經常困惑於英語文與專業之間擇一之不足的窘境。如何協助英語教師藉由與業界的合作成為有效能的專業英語教師，以幫助具有專業知識但英語文能力不足，工作上又需此一語言技能的專業人士。

此合作案例起源於一所醫院的醫護及行政人員作職場英文的訓練計畫。此研究著重於需求分析為基礎的課程設計，為學習者量身訂作的教材及教師專業自我訓練。經由需求分析，學習者的認知問卷，與學習者、教研部主任的訪談等方式收集資料所得的研究結果發現，雖學習者的需求與院方的期望有些落差，此課程有符合該醫院的醫護及行政人員的需求。結論中並針對研究所引發的議題給予建議，以作為日後有相似產學合作案為參考。

關鍵詞：專業英文、產學合作、需求分析、教師自我訓練
Introduction

Industry-university collaboration is an important policy set forth by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan. To benefit both parties, the intensive collaboration is strongly recommended. Thus, industry can benefit from the expertise of academic professionals and university teachers can gain practical industry experience.

As a language teacher, it is always problematic to seek the possibilities working with the subject teachers in terms of the cost and time (Kenney & Bolitho, 1984). Robinson (1991) also stressed that subject-language integration is very untidy in practice. ESP teachers are struggling between language teaching and the knowledge of special subjects. Thus, it is essential to help language teachers become an effective ESP practitioner by reaching out to local industries. Teachers may use their language skills to help those who have professional knowledge but lack language skills which maybe of immediate needs at work. At the meanwhile, language teachers can be self-trained as an effective ESP practitioner by working with professionals.

Industry-university collaboration can be designed in a variety of different models. In the case of this study, Chaoyang University of Technology (CYUT) agreed to offer a staff training course for the industry, a local hospital. An initial discourse took place between the two parties two months before the classes began. The representative, Head of Education & Research Department of the hospital (H), stated the main goal of the training program was that the nurses and administrative staff should be able to demonstrate proficiency in English because of the number of foreigners visiting the hospital. Additionally, nurses and staff should have the ability to introduce the individual departments they work for. Furthermore, it was expected that besides listening and speaking language skills training, the employer also felt nurses and staff were expected to use their English writing skills to produce the manuals and brochures of the various hospital departments. Thus, the objectives of the course were proposed by H as follows:
1. To promote English proficiency of nurses and administrative staff;
2. To produce a printed manual of commonly used conversation among doctors, nurses and patients in each department;
3. To produce a printed introductory brochure of all departments.

Wu & Badger (2009) indicated that one of the distinctive features of ESP contexts is that the teachers often have to deal with areas of knowledge with which they are not familiar. Dudley-Evans (1997) stated that the communication in an ESP classroom makes distinctions by the difference in the subject knowledge between the learners and the language teachers. Teachers usually lack specialized knowledge and experience in practice. Hence, Huang (2000) and Lin (1996) suggested learning by teaching and collaborating with industrial specialists. Annette, Rachael & Rod (2004) mentioned more broadly in teacher education that recent developments which have increased site-based workplace learning opportunities. Thus, research questions of this study are addressed as follows:
1. What are the benefits of this collaborative program for both parties?
2. How does the course meet the needs of the industry?
3. How does the course help nurses and the administrative staff improve their English proficiency?

The study

To examine whether the outcome of this industry-university collaboration model met the needs of the industry, this study administered a multi-method approach in which quantitative and qualitative research methods were adopted to obtain the validity and reliability through the
questionnaire surveys and interviews.

**Participants**

This study was conducted in the local hospital which is responsible for reporting directly to the Health Department, Executive Yuan of Taiwan. 24 participants recruited from 14 departments to attend this course were invited to do the questionnaire surveys. At the end, there were 17 learners who completed the course. 6 participants from 17 nurses and administrative staff who were the most consistent attendees and 1 administrative Head were interviewed.

**Data collection**

Data were collected through two questionnaire surveys, including needs analysis and learners’ perception questionnaires, as well as interviews with nurses, administrative staff and the Head of the Education & Research Department.

McNeil (1985) explained that a questionnaire can be conducted in a face-to-face situation or can be completed by the respondents with supervision or guidance. In the case of this study, the researcher conducted the surveys with those who were present in the classroom. Thus the returning rate was highly satisfactory. Best (1983) stated that as a data-gathering technique, the interview has unique advantages and can be most effective where concern for human motivation is revealed in reasons for action, feelings, and attitudes. The interview questions prepared for the nurses, staff and the department head who was in charge of this program were semi-structured, open-ended guided questions. Hence, the respondents were free to answer with limited guidance, and in most cases, were encouraged to answer by the use of additional questions improvised by the researcher. Accordingly, the techniques of prompting and probing were employed extensively during the interview.

**Data analysis**

The questionnaire data were analyzed by using descriptive statistical methods to calculate the frequencies and percentages in relations to the aggregate responses of total samples. When analyzing interviews, Patton (1990) suggested if a standardized open-ended interview is used, it is suitable to do cross-case analysis, which means answers grouped together from different people to common questions or different perspectives can be analyzed relative to central issues.

**Course design**

The main argument for professional participation is that ESP theory is not easily generalized to apply to a specific teaching context. There is also no espoused ESP curriculum which can correspond to the particular teaching setting. Consequently, teachers have to develop their own curricular in accordance with the learner’s needs and teaching conditions.

This training course was designed for a total of 20 hours distributed equally in 10 weeks, in terms of 2 hours per week. The course content comprised the commonly used dialogues of twelve departments. During the course, whenever the teaching dialogue of each department was completed, learners needed to produce the most frequently used English phone conversation and the conversation in the clinic in print. At the end of course, learners were asked to perform a role play based on the conversation they wrote for each department. Video-taping and professional evaluation of the learners’ final performance was conducted.

**ESP professional self-training and tailor-made teaching materials**
Robinson (1991) stressed that subject-language integration is very untidy in practice. It also reasoned for the insistence on trainees becoming involved in actual ESP settings and how this professional participation can be a form of self-training. Maclean (1997) highlighted that a conventional theory-into-practice ESP training model could not be sufficient without the context-specific principles of ESP curriculum development. Hence, EGP teachers can be justified in training themselves as ESP practitioners in a practice-into-theory direction by professional reflection and consulting with professionals.

Many researchers have pointed out that collecting authentic data is essential to produce ESP materials for courses. Ellis & Johnson (1994) defined authentic materials taken from the real world and not specifically created for the purpose of language teaching. Since there were no teaching materials available, the researcher decided to make the teaching materials by herself.

In order to obtain assistance from professionals, the researcher met with the industry representative who is also a doctor of pathology and asked for related materials. Others were from the medical authority, such as the Department of Health, Executive Yuan of Taiwan and some were retrieved from the real work place, such as the map of the hospital building to indicate the locations of each department, the registration forms and drug bags with drug-taking instructions. Robinson (1991) mentioned that to the particular relevance of ESP, materials are normally used in the learners’ own specific workplace.

Findings

**Needs analysis questionnaire**

Schmidt (1981) stated needs assessment is recognized as the necessary starting point in designing curriculum materials for ESP. Therefore, the needs analysis questionnaire conducted in the beginning of the course was intended to investigate what the present and future needs of learners’ use of English were. It was composed of three sections: personal background, current and future use of English.

**Learners’ background**

There were 24 learners who attended in this course in the beginning and there were more females (83.3%) than males (16.7%), ranging in age from 20-40 and above. However, half of them were 26-30 years old. Their seniority range varied in descending order by over 3 years (45.8 %), 3 years (20.8%), 1 year (16.7%) and 2 years and under 1 year with an equal percentage of 8.3. Also, their educational backgrounds were not the same; however, the majority of them (62.5%) were university graduates, followed by institute/university of technology (20.8%) and graduate school (16.7%). The 24 learners were from 14 departments. The distribution was equal with 12.5 percent from Pharmacy, Emergency Room and Laboratory, followed by the Respiration Intensive Care Unit (RICU), Nursing, Rehabilitation and Radiology departments also equal with 8.3 percent, and Special Examination, Outpatient Department (OPD), Chest Medical Department, Surgery room, Pediatrics Room, Pathology and General Affair with an equal percentage of 4.1.

**Learners’ current use of English**

In the second part of the questionnaire, the questions were designed for multiple responses, so that the percentages of responses were reflected as accurately as possible in describing the learners’ English learning experience.

The results showed the majority of the learners have been studying English less than four
years (63.6%), yet with 22.7 percent who have been studying English more than six years. When asked about what they do to improve their English, more than half of the learners “watched subtitled English movies” (54.5%), followed by “others” (36.4%) and “reading business/professional papers/magazines” (9.1%). As to the English needs at work, “communicating with clients” received the highest percentage (31.3%), followed by “writing letters and documents” (18.8%), and “meetings” and “others” gained equal percentage of 12.5. A significant percentage (63.2%) showed the learners communicated in English with “clients/patients” the most, “co-workers” followed with 10.5%, while zero percent of using English with “supervisor”.

With respect to the learners’ difficulties in English learning, “grammar” and “speaking” were rated equally at 24.5%, followed by writing (20.4%), listening (18.4%), reading (8.2%) and others (4.1%). Furthermore, concerning “which area they needed most to improve in English”, the learners responded that the primary needs of improvement were in “conversation at work” and “daily conversation” both which were at 34.8 percent equally, followed by “social needs” (13%), “English certificates” (10.9%) and “professional certificate tests” (6.5%).

It is worth notably that as far as the frequency of English usage was concerned, “rarely use English” scored quite high regardless of the location or social setting as seen by the following: “at work” (76.5%), “in daily life” (88.2%) or “talking with friends” (88.2%) respectively. As to the experience of attending any English courses after leaving school, the learners responded equally positively and negatively. Meanwhile, the majority have neither taken the courses for English certificates (75%) nor received them (79.2%).

**Learners’ future use of English**

In dealing with how learners would like to take an English course in the future, the responses to “how long they would like to take a course for improving English” were various from one hour a day to 8 hours per week, but two hours weekly seemed the most appropriate for course arrangement (16.6%). They also considered two hours per week for assigned homework will be most acceptable (25%). Moreover, considering the training courses, the learners first preference is “daily conversation” (31.5%), the second being “English presentation skills” (24.1%), “conversation at work” ranking third (16.7%); “phone conversation” and “writing English letters” receiving equal percentages (11.1%). “Writing English medical report” appeared to be the least favored choice (5.6%).

In the open-ended questions, with respect to the learners’ short-term and long-term goals of learning English, it is worth noting that either in their short-term or long-term goals, nearly half of the respondents reported that speaking English fluently is their most important concern. Other goals included expanding their vocabulary, reading newspapers, writing English letters or obtaining an English certificate.

**Learners’ perceptions towards English learning**

The learners’ questionnaire regarding their perceptions towards English learning was administrated at the end of the course and attempted to find out how the learners evaluated themselves after the course and the satisfaction level with the course and teacher. The 17 participants, 2 males and 15 females, who completed the course were surveyed. The findings therefore will be presented in three parts: (1) Learners’ self-evaluation; (2) Learners’ satisfaction level with the course; (3) Learners’ satisfaction level with the teacher.

**Learners’ self-evaluation**
In part one, learners perceived their learning attitude and satisfaction level with their learning outcome. The data showed the learners were satisfied with their attendance (76.4%). They agreed that on the average, they worked hard with this course (58.8%) but only 11.8 percent considered they worked very hard in the class. In addition, more than half of the learners (53%) perceived they concentrated in the class. Only 29.4 percent of the learners agreed they would ask questions in the class, email to the teacher or discuss with other course participants, while more than half of the learners (58.8%) agreed passably that they would do the above. As to the learning outcome, 41.2 percent of the learners agreed the course has helped them with English listening comprehension, and of those, 47.1 percent agreed fairly. With a similar result, 47.1 percent of the learners believed that the course has helped them with their professional English conversation proficiency, while with a high percentage of 52.9 agreed passably about this. Moreover, 47.1 percent of learners agreed the course has helped them with confidence in English, along with 47.1 percent perceived the same reasonably.

Part two of the questionnaire attempted to investigate learners’ satisfaction level with the course. Pertaining to the schedule of the course, the majority of the learners (70.6%) were highly satisfied with the arrangement. With respect to the allocation of teaching hours which was 2 hours per week for a total of 20 hours in 10 weeks, 47.1 percent of the respondents were satisfied. Meanwhile, it is worth noting that a relatively high percentage of 41.2 of the learners were satisfied moderately. With regard to the time for practice in the class, more than half of the learners (53%) found it sufficient. Moreover, a high percentage of 58.8 respondents were satisfied with the requirements of the assignment. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that 35.3 percent of learners rated their satisfaction at average. With a high percentage of 64.7, the learners considered the final performance (role play) very helpful, but also with 35.3 percent rating their satisfaction level at average. With regard to the teaching materials/handouts, most learners (58.9%) agreed they were appropriate, but with 35.3 percent of them agreed only moderately appropriate. Though in general there were 47.1 percent of the learners satisfied with the planning of the course, there was also an equal 47.1 percent rating their satisfaction level at average. Lastly, the results indicating what caused ‘the learners’ the most difficulty with this course’ ranked “the way of teaching” first(35%), and placed “schedule of the course” and “content is difficult” equally (25%).

In part three of the questionnaire, the goal was to determine the learners’ level of satisfaction with the teacher. Significantly, 94.1 percent of the learners were highly satisfied with the “teacher’s English competence,” “teaching skills,” “willing to help learners,” “clear expression in the class,” “interaction with learners” and “being conscientious and responsible”. With respect to “course content” and how the “way of teaching can inspire learners’ English learning interests and motivation,” these areas also resulted in high percentages of 88.2% and 84.3% respectively.

Interview
To gain more substantial insights of the learners and the department head’s views regarding this collaborative project, interviews were conducted which complemented the findings of the questionnaire. 6 participants from 17 nurses and staff with the most consistent attendance were selected to join the interview. In addition, one of the stakeholders, an administrative supervisor, was also included.

Interview with nurses and staffs
The interview with the nurses and administrative staff was intended to investigate: (1) what the benefits of collaboration with the university were; (2) the purpose of attending the course; (3) the use of English at work; (4) whether this course can help with their English learning; (5) what the advantages of attending this course are.

The interviewees included 2 pharmacists, 2 occupational therapists, 1 nurse and 1 doctor. They hold at least a Bachelor’s degree, and 2 out of 6 hold a Master’s degree. The working experience ranged from 1.5 to 21 years and 2 out of 6 obtained at least one English language certificate.

The data from the interviews with the nurses and staff featured the significance of this cooperative program with the university and uncovered the discrepancy between the learners’ needs and employer’s expectations. In particular, the teacher’s lack of professional knowledge was also pointed out.

Regarding the advantages of collaborative training program with the university, the interviewees believed the university is resourceful, teachers have more teaching experience in communicating with learners and understand learners’ needs more. However, there were two interviewees who were concerned the teacher may not understand the working environment of the hospital. Mainly, the purpose of the learners attending this course is that they were interested in English learning, but two mentioned they were assigned to be there. The interviewees also revealed they seldom use English at work and only when speaking with foreign patients or caretakers, which did not happen often. Though they can use job related professional terms in English without difficulties, it is hard for them to understand foreigners’ accents and read doctors’ medical records. All interviewees agreed the course have helped with their English speaking and listening proficiency, but 5 out of 6 interviewees thought the help with English writing was insufficient. They also believed they have benefited a lot from the course. Two mentioned they can integrate what they learned from the course in their daily work and stated that,

During the course, when there are foreign visitors, I feel I can speak more fluently and sometimes I can even refer to the course handouts more easily.
After the course, I dared to talk in English with foreign patients/ caretakers and visitors.

In the last part of interview, the nurses and staff provided positive feedback with respect to the final performance of role play and the teacher’s provision of the pattern sentences for practice. A few suggestions for the future course had been made, including the longer teaching hours, smaller class size; ideally, 5-10 learners in each class, leveling the learners and focusing more on speaking. They also suggested the hospital should provide the same kind of training courses more regularly with more varieties.

Interview with the of Education & Research Department

The interview with the Head of Education & Research Department aims to obtain the insights based on her intensive administrative experience in staff training. The outlines of the interview include four issues: (1) reasons of collaboration with CYUT, (2) what are the advantages of this collaborative training program, (3) if the outcome of this collaborative training program is satisfactory, (4) suggestions for future collaboration.

The department head considered the reasons of collaboration with CYUT were based on its reputation, credits as well as ample teaching and learning resources. She stated that the most
significant advantage they gained from this collaborative program was the progress of nurses’ and administration staffs’ English proficiency. English presentation in particular was second and the completion of the mission. Therefore, the outcome of this training program is regarded as satisfactory. Meanwhile, she proposed that the future program can be focused on the standardization of the English service process in the hospital, and the continuous staff training in English proficiency to improve the English service for foreign patients and to expedite internationalization of the hospital.

Discussion

The findings illustrate the learners’ needs analysis questionnaire, learners’ perception questionnaire and the interviews with the nurses, administrative staff and the Head of the Education and Research Department. After cross examining the findings, there are two issues that deserve more attention.

**Discrepancy between the learners’ needs and employer’s expectations**

The results of the Needs Analysis Questionnaire revealed the learners have most difficulties in English speaking, wherefore they need to improve either at work or in daily life. It is noted that in their short-term and long-term goals, speaking fluent English is their most important concern shown at the end of the open-ended question. In addition, in interviews with nurses and staff, learners agree that this course is helpful with their English speaking and they also suggested that they would strive to be more focused on English speaking in future training courses. Nonetheless, the objectives of the course proposed by the employer, besides listening and speaking English skills training, the learners were expected to be trained in writing by producing the manuals and brochures of their respective departments. This is one of the discrepancies between the learners’ needs and employer’s expectations.

Moreover, from the questionnaire and interview, the results show that the learners ‘rarely’ use English either at work or in daily life and even hardly talk with friends in English. Furthermore, only 20 percent of them hold an English language certificate. The reason they attended this course mainly was for their own interest or some were even assigned by their superiors. However, from the interview of the department head, she placed more emphasis on expediting internationalization of the hospital to provide better English service for foreign patients.

**Teacher’s lack of professional knowledge**

Though learners view the teacher’s performance as highly satisfactory and highly regard the teacher’s professionalism and teaching experience, there was one concern raised that the teacher lacks the requisite medical background and therefore does not understand the working environment of the hospital.

Strevens (1988) and Ellis & Johnson (1994) indicated, in general, ESP teachers are primarily teachers of General English, i.e. language teachers. When transferring from General English to ESP teaching, the difficulty lies in the gap between the learners’ knowledge of the special subject and the teachers’ unfamiliarity with it. In addition, Robinson (1991) stressed that language teachers fear they may not be able to cope with the students’ area of specialty. Anthony (2011) also argued against that knowledge of the specialist field is an essential criterion for successful ESP practitioners.
However, Ellis & Johnson (1994) clearly defined the role of the ESP teacher and stressed that regardless of the background of ESP teacher, this individual is primarily a language teacher. They argued that ESP teachers do not need to be an expert in any particular area because the learners already have specific content knowledge.

**Conclusion and Suggestions**

In the model of industry-university collaboration, both parties can benefit from it. For the industry, the department head mentioned that in order to reach the goal of internationalization of the hospital, the mission of improving nurses and staffs’ English proficiency and service in English have been completed. As to the university, an EGP teacher can be trained as an ESP teacher through this collaborative program. The results demonstrated the staff training course has met the needs of the industry (hospital) as well as assisted with nurses and the administrative staffs’ English proficiency.

In light of the results, here are some suggestions: first of all, according to the learners’ questionnaire, there was a discrepancy between the learners’ needs and the employer’s expectations. Afifi (1991) mentioned the identification of learners’ needs should be undertaken by three separate bodies: the learners, the teaching establishment, and the learner’s employer. Hence, conducting a needs analysis questionnaire to the learners’ employer and the learners is necessary to help the employer understand the needs of the employees. It is advisable to do this in advance as it might minimize the inconsistency of needs and expectations from both parties.

Additionally, the objectives of the course set by the industry should not be too broad, in terms of training of four English skills in such a short period of time. The outcome of the course proposed by the employer, besides listening and speaking English skills, the learners were expected with the writing training to produce the printed manuals and brochures of their respective departments. As the result, it is a mismatch with the needs of the employees. It is suggested the goal of English skills training should focus only on one or two, for example, listening and speaking skills and separately, an additional course could concentrate on departmental manual and brochure writing.

Furthermore, as the nurses and staff mentioned, English was rarely used in their work or in daily life. So they did not see the need to attend this kind of training course, which did not align with the hospital policy. The hospital should provide incentives to motivate and encourage nurses and staff to improve their English skills. Accordingly, the outcome of the English training course will be more effective.

Lastly, though ESP has been popular in the field of English learning and teaching, ESP teacher education and training programs are lacking. Hutchinson & Waters (1987) emphasized that little effort has been made to retrain teachers or at least allay their fears. In addition, as a language teacher, it is always problematic to seek the possibilities of working with the subject teachers in terms of the cost and time. Therefore, we may look for the opportunity of self-training through the industry-university collaborative program to cross over from the language side to the other “side of the fence”, stated de Beaugrande (2000).

**References**


