

# Study and Practice on the Construction of General Academic English Curriculum in NCEPU

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## Abstract

General academic English has become a new trend during the transitional period of college English reform in China. This paper introduces its construction practice in North China Electric Power University (Baoding) from the following aspects: need analysis, course objectives, course content, course arrangement, course evaluation and course implementation effect. This paper aims to provide theoretical basis and practical experience for the construction of general academic English curriculum and the reform of College English.

**Keywords:** General academic English (EGAP); curriculum construction; college English teaching.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION ABOUT COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING

In the past three decades, China's College English teaching has achieved the expected results through a variety of exploration and reforms. In the new era, China has promulgated a series of strategies and put forward new requirements for the training objectives of higher education: cultivating top-notch innovative talents with international vision. As a basic course with the widest range and more credits in China's higher education system, college English plays a role of quality education to broaden knowledge and understand world culture (Department of higher education, Ministry of Education, 2020). It also undertakes the responsibility of general education. However, studies have shown that no matter what level of students, they generally believe that the current college English teaching fails to meet the diverse learning needs of students, and quite a number of graduate students, even in key universities are generally deficient in academic English skills (Sun yunbo, Feng Jie, 2014).

Under this background, colleges and universities are transitioning from general English teaching to academic English teaching. As a new

college English course, academic English aims to improve college students' international communication ability, including the ability to listen to English academic lectures, the ability to read English literature and analyze texts, the ability to write English papers and participate in academic conferences and publish academic reports. The topics are rich and diverse, involving social, cultural, scientific and other aspects.

Although academic English teaching has received more and more attention in college English teaching in China, a series of problems still exist in actual teaching: knowledge input and skill training are overemphasized meanwhile thoughts output and content expression are neglected, which is contrary to the teaching objectives of academic English; teachers lack professional academic background; emotions, attitudes and values fail to integrate into teaching methods effectively; students' subjective initiative and participation need to be stimulated. Therefore, a problem arises: how to make academic English "useful", "interesting", and "meaningful"? The research group conducted the teaching practice from March to July in 2022.

## 2. The Teaching Practice of EGAP in NCEPU

As a national key university, North China Electric Power University (Baoding) has adapted to the reform trend in recent years. College English is a compulsory course for freshmen in NCEPU(Baoding). General college English is set in the first semester and EGAP is set in the second semester. It usually has 64 class hours and the current textbook is *English for General Academic Purpose-Integrated Course* published by FuDan University Press.

## 2.1 Course need analysis

The teaching object is non-English majors in Grade One in NCEPU. They have finished the general college English for the 1<sup>st</sup> semester, so they have equipped with the basic requirements for EGAP. A total of 161 freshmen were investigated for the course need analysis in this study, including 45 female and 116 male from different majors. See Table 1 for the survey results:

Table 1

Item	Subtotal	Proportion
Understand English lectures and take notes	147	91.3%
Oral presentation of academic views and academic research results	152	94.4%
Academic reading skills for searching, extracting, analyzing and evaluating information	148	91.9%
Logical thinking ability and critical thinking ability	150	93.1%
Skills in writing literature reviews, academic research proposals and reports	140	90%
Basic academic research methods, such as questionnaire design	142	88.2%
Number of valid filling		161

Based on an online questionnaire concerning the analysis results of the target learning situation and teaching objects, this study believes that EGAP must focus on cultivating students' academic awareness, academic literacy and academic research methods to prepare students for using English in their future study and work.

## 2.2 Course objectives

EGAP course has 4 class hours per week, a total of 16 teaching weeks, and adopts big classes (about 50 people in each class). Combined with the needs analysis questionnaire, the overall objectives of the course are set as follows:

- Cultivate students' strong international communication and competitiveness in the professional field;
- Cultivate students' academic communication ability, including academic awareness, academic norms and application ability in academic environment;
- Cultivate students' rigorous academic literacy, critical thinking and logical thinking;
- Cultivate students' ability of inquiry learning, autonomous learning and cooperative learning;
- Cultivate students' humanistic quality, international awareness and cross-cultural communication ability.

## 2.3 Course content and teaching method

### 2.3.1 General introduction

EGAP course aims at enabling students of different majors to learn the most basic academic English skills of various disciplines. The whole book has six units and each unit has two formal academic articles, which include the basic elements such as

abstract, introduction, result, discussion and literature reference. Although the textbook involves medical science, environmental science, psychology, biology, freshmen who are likely to lack professional background can understand it. The themes of the six units are health, global warming, greenhouse effect, breastfeeding, genetically modified food and medical fraud, etc. Each unit arranges the content according to the steps of academic paper writing. The writing themes of unit 1 to 6 cover the following topics: how to choose the theme of the paper, how to collect the data needed for writing the paper; how to write the literature citation, summary and introduction; how to write the methods and conclusions; how to write the conclusion and abstract of the discussion; how to write the oral presentation of the paper.

Each course unit has an assignment guided by learning the genre knowledge and practicing the core academic skills. This assignment is centered on the unit topic and requires students to complete an output project in the relevant topic areas.

EGAP course mainly adopts project-based learning (PBL) teaching method, which is guided by solving practical problems and organized by completing projects. PBL can provide students with rich pragmatic tasks, so that students can complete various tasks, so as to build learners' practical pragmatic competence (Zhang Haiming, 2016). In terms of teaching arrangement, this study delicately designed ethical and educational elements into the output project (See Table 2). Ethical and educational elements are the characteristics of Chinese education, which aim to adhere to the correct value orientation of college students.

Table 2

Arrangement of General Academic English Course			
Unit Theme	Explicit Goals before Class	Implicit Goals in Class	Output Project
Unit 1 Health and Cigarette Smoking	Watch the Ted video "How do cigarettes do harm to our body?" Think about the harm of smoking to the body?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Figure out teenagers' motivation to smoke.</li> <li>2. Understand the laws and regulations formulated by the Chinese government for the establishment of smoke-free public places.</li> <li>3. Avoid plagiarism, master academic methods and establish academic integrity.</li> </ol>	Group report: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Investigate smokers around: age, smoking reasons and summarize the hazards of smoking.</li> <li>2. The significance of quitting smoking, combined with the introduction of World No Tobacco Day;</li> <li>3. Develop a healthy lifestyle.</li> </ol>
Unit 2 Understanding of Global Warming	Watch the video "China's path to carbon neutrality by 2060" and think about the key to solving the climate crisis?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The concept of "community with a shared future for mankind".</li> <li>2. China's efforts to achieve the goal of global carbon neutrality.</li> <li>3. Start with me and save energy and reduce emissions.</li> </ol>	Group oral presentation: Investigation on the current situation of carbon emissions in the world and the measures taken to achieve carbon neutrality.
Unit 3 Breast Feeding Practice	Watch the video: bottle feeding vs breast feeding and think about the advantages and disadvantages of the two feeding methods?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understand the reasons for the general decline of breastfeeding.</li> <li>2. Understand the relevant measures taken by the Chinese government to ensure breastfeeding.</li> <li>3. What they can do to support breastfeeding.</li> <li>4. Promote breastfeeding.</li> </ol>	Research report on "the importance of breastfeeding".
Unit 4 Genetically Modified Foods	Watch the video "Genetically Modified Food in Solving World Food Shortage" and think about the reasons, advantages and disadvantages of GM food.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dialectically view the advantages and potential hazards of genetically modified food.</li> <li>2. Recognize that food safety is related to national stability and development.</li> <li>3. The use of science and technology should comply with national laws and regulations and social ethics.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Oral presentation by the group: overview of GM technology and GM food (meaning, development history and current situation).</li> <li>1. Questionnaire on genetically modified food.</li> </ol>
Unit 5 Scientific Fraud	Watch the video: "Academic Integrity VS Academic dishonesty" and think about what is academic misconduct?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Help students understand how to define academic misconduct.</li> <li>2. The necessity of curbing scientific fraud and academic fraud.</li> <li>3. Strengthen students' understanding of academic integrity.</li> </ol>	Research report: Academic dishonesty of College Students.
Unit 6 The Effects of Food Deprivation	Watch the video: "The delicious Chinese food in Winter Olympic" and think about the impact of diet on people.	What is food security?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Oral presentation: Foreign athletes' comments on Chinese cuisine in the Winter Olympics.</li> <li>2. Proposals on how to ensure China's food security.</li> </ol>

### 2.3.2 Specific example

Take Unit 1 Health and Cigarette Smoking for example. According to the specific situation of freshmen, teachers should strengthen the training of language skills and cultivate students' emotions, attitudes and values instead of language itself. Teaching objectives should be set up as the following:

#### a. Academic Skill Objectives

- Understand the characteristics of a research article;
- Choose a particular topic for research;
- Learn to use outside sources correctly.

#### b. Value Objectives

- Make students understand the disadvantages of smoking and help them form the healthy life style.

- Avoid plagiarism and cultivate the awareness of academic honesty.

#### Before class, preparation task list:

1. Read the article "Health related quality of life and health risk behaviors among smokers" and think about the following questions:
  - What are the problems of previous studies in question?
  - What major factors will help recover the health of the smokers apart from the reduction of smoking?
  - What kind of people tend not to smoke currently according to Table 1?
  - What findings of the article are not consistent with those of the previous research?
2. Find out the stylistic features of research articles based on reading tasks; find out where external resources are used in the text: paraphrase, quotation and summary
3. Read the regulations of China on the main contents of smoking control in public places to understand the laws and regulations formulated by the Chinese government to establish a smoke-free environment.
4. Watch the Ted Video "How do cigarettes affect the body?" and prepare for the presentation. Team leader allocates the task to group members.

#### In class: teaching design and process

Teachers use PBL and other teaching methods. In the classroom, teachers guide students to take an active part in class activities.

At the beginning of the class: watch the Ted Video "How do cigarettes affect the body?"

Group form: two groups responsible for it  
Reporting points:

1. Summary of the hazards of smoking
2. Summary of smoking situation of people around: smoking age, smoking reasons
3. How to quit smoking and smoke less, combined with the introduction of World No Tobacco Day, so as to cultivate healthy lifestyle.

Through quiz and Q&A, teachers check the preview effect about this unit's academic skill study:

1. Understanding the characteristics of a research article: introduction ; materials and methods; results, discussion
2. Deciding on a topic
3. Formulating research questions
4. Writing a working title
5. Using outside sources correctly: There are 3 methods to insert outside information into writing: paraphrasing; quoting; summarizing. These three methods serve as the effective ways to avoid

plagiarism. Teacher can guide students to find some news, materials to establish the concept of academic integrity.

In the part of reading and discussion, teachers should first ask students to read enough before class and be clear about the content of the text before they can fully participate in the discussion in class. During group discussion, teachers should give full guidance to remind students to stick to the topic and reading materials, and discuss in combination with their own life experience.

Teacher and students from other groups will give feedback on the two groups' performance. Through comments, both students and teachers can enhance the understanding of the topic "Health and Cigarette Smoking", and cultivate healthy lifestyle.

#### After class: Evaluation and reflection

The evaluation of this unit adopts rubrics, which guides students to carry out independent learning and research on relevant topics after class, and forms certain written research results. In the process of independent research, students not only practise and improve their language and skills, but also give insight into the relationship between smoking and health and the significance of cultivating healthy lifestyle. The teaching process implements the principle of teachers' leading and students' participation. Equal participation is the premise for the implementation of research-based teaching.

#### 2.4. Course evaluation

EGAP pays attention to multiple abilities as the teaching goal of the course, and the cultivation of literacy ability is a gradual process. Therefore, final examination cannot evaluate the teaching effect. Formative assessment is helpful for teachers to make diagnostic evaluation of learning situation in the process of curriculum implementation, obtain effective feedback information, and adjust the next step of teaching. Therefore, this study increased the proportion of formative evaluation and adopted the combination of "formative evaluation (50%) + summative evaluation" (50%).

Formative evaluation includes unit tests, project research evaluation, and writing task to achieve project-driven and joint participation of teachers and students. As a traditional formative evaluation method, unit test has a high degree of cooperation among students and is easy to operate, which is suitable for testing the teaching effect of specific knowledge points at the end of unit teaching. The project research evaluation system includes group written work (research plan and report), group oral presentation and written assignments. The evaluation system attaches importance to the "practical performance" of students in the learning process, and relies on the self evaluation scale to measure students' learning behavior and result

representation. Among them, the evaluation of group presentation is divided into teacher's evaluation, and group members' mutual evaluation. This approach spurs the enthusiasm of class discussion and enables students to train their critical thinking ability in academic context.

### 3. Implementation Effect

After completing the course teaching practice for one semester, the research group conducted a survey on 161 students. The questionnaire set up 16 questions concerning the following topics: the difference between EGAP course and College English course, the learning effect of literacy skills, the recognition of this course, the comments on the integration of ethical and educational elements, etc.

The survey results show that 91.2% of students believe that general academic English learning skills are significantly different from general college English courses in terms of learning content and learning methods, and it is a useful supplement to college English. 95.4% of students believe that this course is very practical. Through this course, they can improve the academic listening (78.8%), speaking (72%), reading and writing (69%) respectively. In the cultivation of students' academic quality, 95.6% of the students have improved their speculative ability and critical ability. Among the most popular modules, students choose academic English writing, how to make English reports and critical reading as their favorable ones.

The teaching practice of EGAP course has achieved good teaching results, which signifies further improvement of the college English curriculum system. Students have successfully completed the transition from general English to professional English learning. They have not only mastered effective academic English learning skills, but also strengthened their personal academic literacy. In addition, they have stimulated students' interest in professional learning and enhanced their self-confidence in English learning.

### 4. CONCLUSION

This study explores the design and implementation of general academic English curriculum in the transitional period of college English, and preliminarily summarizes some curriculum design ideas and principles by using PBL, verifying the effect of curriculum implementation. It can provide valuable practical cases for researchers of College English Teaching, enrich the experience of curriculum design and teaching of general academic English in China, and develop relevant curriculum design and teaching theories. However, this study has limitations. In future research, more data should be collected to further

explore the teaching concepts and methods of general academic English.

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