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A Study of the Academic English Teaching System in Chinese Universities

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Abstract: ***This study systematically analyzes the current research status of English for Academic Purpose (EAP) teaching in China from three dimensions—teaching methodologies, teaching models, and curriculum development—based on a review of 334 relevant studies. The findings reveal that the current teaching system exhibits characteristics of systematization and ecological development. At the methodological level, an ecosystem has formed, centered on an outcome-oriented approach that organically integrates various methods. At the model level, blended teaching has evolved from simple combination to a "multi-dimensional hybrid" paradigm that restructures the teaching process, with its technological role upgraded to that of an ecosystem builder. At the curriculum level, the goal has shifted towards cultivating comprehensive academic literacy, with the content system reflecting layered integration and value guidance. In response to existing challenges, this paper proposes that the future should focus on promoting systematic education, exploring effective paths for differentiated instruction and faculty development, enhancing empowerment through intelligent technology, and improving comprehensive evaluation mechanisms to build a higher-quality Academic English education system.***

Keywords: English for Academic Purpose (EAP), Teaching methodologies, Teaching models, Curriculum development**.**

1. Introduction

With the accelerated internationalization of higher education and the continuous deepening of the construction of "Emerging Engineering, Medical, and Liberal Arts", cultivating students' international academic communication skills has become a core task of talent cultivation in Chinese universities. As a significant category of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), EAP holds key value in helping students master disciplinary language norms and participate in international academic dialogue (Sun & Li, 2011; Wang, 2013; Cai, 2014). The rapid development of information technology and the ongoing renewal of educational philosophies have further propelled diversified exploration and practical innovation in Academic English teaching at the levels of methodology, models, and curriculum systems.

The academic community has amassed a rich body of research on Academic English teaching. Existing studies often focus on the classroom application of specific teaching methods, explore the construction of technology-empowered blended teaching models, or address curriculum development directions such as ideological-political education and disciplinary integration, providing valuable references for teaching practice. However, these studies struggle to fully present the overall research context and developmental characteristics of Academic English teaching in domestic universities.

In view of this, using "Academic English teaching model" "Academic English teaching methodology", and "Academic English curriculum development" as search terms on CNKI, with the journal source category set to "All Journals", language limited to Chinese, and no time restriction, and after excluding notices, catalogues, calls for papers, interviews, and other ineligible literature, 334 target studies were identified. The following sections take these 334 studies as the research sample to analyze, summarize, and conclude the research status in the three dimensions of Academic English teaching methodologies, teaching models, and curriculum development, aiming to provide references and insights for research in this field.

2. Research Findings and Discussion

2.1 Research on Academic English Teaching Methodologies

Current research and practice in Academic English teaching methodologies in China do not represent the proliferation of a single method, but rather the formation and evolution of a methodological ecosystem derived from different teaching philosophies to address specific teaching contexts.

Firstly, the developmental trajectory of teaching methodologies has progressed from an early focus on training basic skills of the "common core" of language (e.g., listening to lectures, note-taking), to a deepening concern for genre and discourse analysis of "disciplinary discourse", and finally to a focus on cultivating comprehensive competencies and literacy based on "academic practice". This process is not one of replacement but of continuous layering and organic integration. For instance, teaching methods centered on Project-Based Learning (PBL) or case studies (Cai, 2019; Li & Du, 2014) essentially construct a top-level framework that necessitates the integration of various underlying methods for support: project research requires Content-Based Instruction (CBI) to define the topic (Jiang, 2019); literature review and thesis writing must employ genre analysis to master academic conventions (Huang, 2010); group collaboration and presentation of outcomes rely on interactive collaborative and scaffolding teaching methods (Chun et al., 2021; Zhang, 2007). Therefore, the core feature of current Academic English teaching methodologies is the organic combination of various methods, under the guiding principles of being "outcome-oriented" and "student-centered", to accomplish authentic academic tasks.

Secondly, distinctive core teaching models have emerged at the practical level. These models transcend discussions of single methods, embodying systematic instructional design. Represented by practices at China University of Petroleum

(East China), the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) guided "Define-Realize-Assess" closed-loop model follows the main thread of "defining expected learning outcomes-realizing expected learning outcomes-assessing learning outcomes". Its innovation lies in designing teaching methodologies within the macro context of the university's "Double First-Class" initiative and postgraduate training systems (e.g., the "Two-Four-Three" system), achieving precise alignment between teaching methods and talent cultivation goals (Chun et al., 2021). The construction of teaching communities, the creation of innovative practice spaces, and the reliance on academic competition platforms are all innovative combinations of teaching methods aimed at realizing these "outcomes". Furthermore, the "Project/Case-Text" hybrid model practiced at Fudan University exemplifies technology empowerment (Cai Jigang, 2019). It closely integrates project/case-based teaching with in-depth text (genre, metadiscourse) analysis and utilizes online micro-lectures to impart academic skills (such as citation norms), realizing the flipping of the classroom. This model merges "doing" with "learning", "online" with "offline", and "language analysis" with "research practice", representing the trend of Academic English teaching methodologies towards refinement and hybridization. Concurrently, Beijing Forestry University, targeting the characteristics of agricultural and forestry institutions, constructed a trinity teaching model of "Academic Thesis Writing-Modern Academic English Reading in Agriculture and Forestry-Academic English Listening and Speaking" (Li et al., 2017). Based on the "Input, Interaction, and Output" theory, this model emphasizes that different teaching modules (writing/reading, reading, listening/speaking) within the same curriculum system employ teaching methods with different emphases but consistent goals (e.g., the writing module focuses on genre analysis and project-driven learning, the listening/speaking module focuses on scenario simulation), forming a synergy to collectively serve the overarching goal of enhancing academic communication skills in the disciplinary field.

However, current practice still faces a series of challenges, including significant disparities in students' language proficiency and academic foundations, the need for updates to teachers' own disciplinary knowledge structures, constraints imposed by large class sizes and limited class hours on in-depth project implementation, and the incompleteness of diversified assessment systems matching process-oriented teaching (Li & Du , 2014; Chun et al., 2021). Therefore, the future evolution of Academic English teaching methodologies in China must address existing difficulties, seeking systematic breakthroughs in areas such as differentiated instruction, faculty development, resource development, and assessment innovation, continually refining the hierarchical integration and model innovation of teaching methods.

2.2 Research on Academic English Teaching Models

The core paradigm of current Academic English teaching models in China has evolved from the simple early blend of "offline teaching as the main, online resources as supplementary" to integrated models that restructure the teaching process and ecology with student learning at the center. Overall, the current state of Academic English teaching models exhibits the following distinct characteristics and trends.

First, blended learning has become the dominant teaching model framework, but its connotation has deepened from the physical-level blending of "online" and "offline" to a "multi-dimensional hybrid" encompassing the physical, technological, learning theory, and assessment layers (Gu, 2023). For example, within the context of "Emerging Engineering" construction, research has constructed a complete teaching process containing four stages: "pre-class guided learning/self-study, in-class collaborative learning/ interactive learning, after-class facilitated learning/checking learning, and end-of-course research learning/creative learning", achieving an organic integration of time, space, technology, and teaching activities (Gu, 2023). This model not only expands the teaching time and space but also, through methods like project-driven learning and cooperative inquiry, integrates knowledge transmission, skill training, and literacy cultivation throughout, aiming to achieve the compound talent cultivation goal integrating "knowledge, ability, literacy, and profession".

Second, within the blended framework, the flipped classroom has been widely adopted and innovatively varied as a core implementation path. Its commonality lies in "learning before teaching, teaching based on learning", but its specific forms are diverse due to technological support. For instance, one study utilized the editing functions of the TED-Ed platform to construct a flipped classroom model for general Academic English listening and speaking, featuring "pre-class multimodal video self-learning+in-class Q&A and oral practice", effectively enhancing students' academic listening and speaking abilities (Wu, 2015). Another study relied on self-built academic English corpora and micro-lectures to construct a flipped model of "online corpus-driven learning+ offline task inquiry", significantly improving students' academic English application skills and self-directed learning abilities (Li & Ge, 2020). These practices indicate that the core value of the flipped classroom lies in freeing up in-class time for deeper interaction, collaboration, and critical thinking training.

Furthermore, the role of information technology has been upgraded from a "supporting tool" to an "ecosystem builder", deeply integrated into all elements of the teaching model. Current models commonly construct digital learning environments centered on SPOCs (Small Private Online Courses), MOOCs, online collaboration platforms (e.g., Tencent Classroom, QQ Groups), automated grading systems, and even Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI). For example, the BREAD (Blended Reading) platform built based on QQ Groups effectively enhanced students' deep EAP reading abilities by integrating tasks such as information acquisition, interactive learning, networked learning, and material development (Zhong et al., 2020). More cutting-edge explorations have begun applying Generative AI (GAI) to course syllabus design, teaching content generation, and personalized feedback, attempting to construct a new "AI-empowered" teaching paradigm (Wang, 2024). Technology not only provides resources and tools but also reshapes the ways of teacher-student interaction, student-student collaboration, and learning assessment.

Moreover, the construction of teaching models exhibits a distinct orientation towards ecologicalization and integration. Research is beginning to approach the issue from the perspective of classroom ecology, focusing on the dynamic connections and mutual affordances between elements such as teachers, students, teaching materials, and the technological environment. One study constructed an "online-offline ecological writing circle" model, cultivating students' academic writing abilities through cycles of collaborative reading, conception, writing, and revision within authentic task-driven contexts (Chen et al., 2024). Simultaneously, successful teaching models emphasize holistic reform, manifested as the deep integration of "textbooks, curriculum, and teaching methods". For instance, the practice at South China University of Technology followed the path: developing three-dimensional textbooks that meet needs-building supporting school-based SPOC online courses-implementing online-offline flipped classroom teaching, thereby systematically promoting Academic English teaching reform (Zhu et al., 2021).

In summary, domestic Academic English blended teaching models have completed the transition from simple spatial fusion to multi-dimensional system construction, and from tool application to ecological empowerment. Their characteristics of multi-dimensional integration, path innovation, technological upgrading, ecological construction, and assessment refinement fully affirm the core supporting role of blended learning in Academic English teaching reform.

2.3 Research on Academic English Curriculum Development

The development of Academic English curricula in Chinese universities has continued to deepen alongside teaching reforms, achieving systematic innovation in the four core dimensions of curriculum objectives, content systems, implementation models, and evaluation mechanisms, gradually forming an overall construction pattern characterized by literacy-orientation, cross-domain integration, model innovation, and diversified evaluation.

Firstly, regarding curriculum objectives and positioning, the development focus has shifted from merely improving language skills to cultivating students' comprehensive academic literacy for using English as a tool for professional study, scientific research, and international communication. Curriculum positioning is becoming increasingly clear, closely aligned with the overarching talent cultivation goals of universities. For example, curriculum development explicitly serves the demand for compound talents under the "Emerging Engineering, Medical, and Liberal Arts" initiative (Fan et al., 2023), aiming to break down the barriers between college English teaching and professional education. Its objective system encompasses the language dimension (mastering academic genres and norms), the cognitive dimension (developing critical thinking and logical abilities) (Guo et al., 2021; Zhang & Ma, 2020), and the value dimension (shaping correct values, enhancing cultural confidence) (Zhang, 2023), reflecting the organic unity of knowledge, ability, and educational goals.

Secondly, regarding curriculum content and system, the development exhibits characteristics of "layering, categorization, and integration". First, content design follows the path of transitioning from "English for General Academic Purpose (EGAP) to English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP)", and is further subdivided into modules based on academic skills (e.g., literature reading, thesis writing) and professional topics (Yang et al., 2021). Second, the curriculum system breaks through the limitations of a single language course, actively exploring cross-disciplinary co-construction models. Represented by the practice of the Academic English (Medical) course at Fudan University, a deep collaborative mechanism is constructed involving language teachers and faculty from professional departments jointly participating in teaching teams, collaboratively determining teaching objectives, and co-developing teaching materials and supplementary resources, ensuring the authoritativeness, currency, and professionalism of the teaching content (Fan et al., 2023). Third, ideological and political education is systematically integrated into the curriculum content system. Research goes beyond the conceptual level, delving deeper into the mechanisms for integrating "ideological and political elements" with Academic English teaching in both theory and practice, achieving subtle value guidance through project design and in-depth textual analysis (Zhang, 2023).

Furthermore, regarding curriculum implementation models, blended learning has become the dominant framework supporting the operation of the new curriculum system. The integration of online and offline elements is no longer a simple overlay but a systematic restructuring of the teaching process based on the "outcome-oriented" concept. For instance, the widely adopted PCT (Project/Case-Text) hybrid teaching model closely integrates online resource learning and discourse analysis with offline project inquiry and collaborative interaction, forming a complete closed loop of pre-class guided learning, in-class internalization, and post-class expansion and innovation (Cai, 2019; Zhang, 2023). Additionally, teaching innovations centered on thinking experiment training and logical thematic seminars (Guo et al., 2021), as well as modular teaching constructed based on linguistic system theory (Zhang & Ma, 2020), all reflect that curriculum implementation models are evolving towards supporting deep learning and cultivating higher-order thinking skills.

Finally, regarding the curriculum evaluation system, the development direction has shifted from summative language testing to process-oriented, diversified, and multi-agent comprehensive evaluation. The content of evaluation is no longer limited to linguistic accuracy but extends to multiple dimensions such as academic discourse construction ability, critical thinking level, teamwork spirit, and academic ethics. Evaluation methods integrate various forms, including online learning data, classroom performance, project outcomes, peer review, and portfolios. In interdisciplinary collaborative courses, mechanisms for joint question-setting and grading by language teachers and subject teachers have also emerged to ensure comprehensive and fair assessment of students' academic performance (Fan et al., 2023).

In summary, domestic Academic English curriculum

development has entered an active period of systematic integration and innovative development with distinctive features. Curriculum developers are committed to building a new curriculum system rooted in fostering integrity and ability, centered on cultivating academic literacy, supported by interdisciplinary content, underpinned by blended teaching models, and safeguarded by diversified evaluation mechanisms. However, the development process still faces a series of challenges, including how to optimize the long-term collaboration mechanism of interdisciplinary teaching teams, how to precisely design course difficulty to accommodate students' varied academic foundations, how to develop high-quality school-based teaching materials and resources, and how to establish a more scientific and effective evaluation system for the educational effectiveness of ideological and political elements in the curriculum. Future curriculum development needs continuous deepening in these areas to promote Academic English courses in playing a more solid supporting role in high-quality talent cultivation.

3. Conclusion

Through a systematic review and analysis of 334 core publications, this study presents a panoramic view of the research and practice landscape of the current domestic Academic English teaching system from three dimensions: teaching methodologies, teaching models, and curriculum development. Overall, the domestic Academic English teaching system has preliminarily established an educational ecosystem that is rooted in fostering integrity and ability, aimed at generating academic competence, driven by deep integration and technological innovation, and carried by systematic curricula.

Based on the above research conclusions and in response to persisting challenges in current practice, such as significant student differentiation, insufficient interdisciplinary teaching capacity among faculty, ineffective deep interdisciplinary collaboration mechanisms, and a mismatch between the evaluation system and innovative teaching models, this paper proposes the following recommendations for future development:

First, deepen the consensus on concepts and promote the paradigm shift from "method application" to "systematic education". At the institutional level, top-level design needs strengthening to deeply integrate Academic English teaching into the talent cultivation programs of various majors under the "Emerging Engineering, Medical, and Liberal Arts" initiative, clarifying its positioning and contribution within the university's overall educational goals. Exploring the construction of Academic English course clusters at the departmental or professional cluster level, organically connected with professional courses, is encouraged to achieve the transition from "a single course" to "a set of systems", ensuring that Academic English learning permeates the entire process of students' professional growth.

Second, focus on core challenges and explore effective paths for differentiated instruction and faculty development. In response to the vast differences in students' academic foundations and language proficiency, research and promotion of dynamically diagnosed layered and classified instruction and personalized learning path design should be vigorously pursued, utilizing learning analytics to provide students with adaptive learning resources and feedback. Regarding faculty development, there is an urgent need to establish normalized, institutionalized interdisciplinary teaching communities and faculty development support systems. For example, initiatives such as establishing "Academic English and Professional Education Integration" teaching reform projects, forming fixed teaching teams composed of language and subject teachers, creating joint teaching and research positions, and organizing interdisciplinary workshops can provide language teachers with sustainable disciplinary content support and pedagogical training, while simultaneously enhancing subject teachers' awareness of academic discourse, achieving mutual empowerment.

Third, strengthen technology empowerment to build an intelligent and personalized teaching ecology. Proactively embrace the transformative potential of intelligent technologies like Generative Artificial Intelligence. Future teaching model innovations should strive to construct a "human-machine collaborative" intelligent teaching environment. For instance, exploring the use of AIGC (AI-Generated Content) technology to assist in developing discipline-customized teaching materials, designing virtual academic exchange scenarios, and providing personalized writing tutoring and feedback; utilizing learning analytics to deeply mine students' learning process data for precise learning diagnosis and intervention. The focus of technology application should shift from resource presentation to in-depth support for cultivating higher-order thinking and personalized learning experiences.

Fourth, improve evaluation mechanisms to establish a diversified evaluation system that matches the development goals. Evaluation reform is key to driving the deepening of teaching reform. Efforts should focus on constructing a comprehensive evaluation system aligned with the goal of cultivating "comprehensive academic literacy" and spanning the entire learning process. This system should integrate quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods. In terms of evaluation content, it should balance multiple dimensions such as linguistic accuracy, academic genre norms, critical thinking, research process management, and academic integrity. In terms of evaluation subjects, it should incorporate teacher evaluation, peer assessment, self-reflection, and subject teacher evaluation. In terms of evaluation vehicles, it should fully utilize process data such as e-portfolios, project logs, and collaborative editing records, making evaluation a tool that truly promotes learning and development, not merely a measurement tool.

In summary, the future development of Academic English teaching in China needs to build upon the existing systematic and integrative achievements, directly confront deep-seated challenges, and synergistically advance conceptual deepening, path innovation, faculty development, and evaluation reform. This will enable the construction of a higher-quality Academic English education system that is more adaptive, empowering, and forward-looking, providing solid support for cultivating innovative talents of the new era with outstanding international academic dialogue capabilities.

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