

Innovative Research on the Reform Path of English Teaching in Talent-Oriented Universities in the Hainan Free Trade Port

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Abstract: To meet the demand of flexible and practical talents under the background of the construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port, we take the comprehensive communication ability as an example to discuss the development path of three abilities needed by English majors – general communication ability, professional application abilities, and cross-cultural communication—and analyses the current issues of college English teaching, such as one-size-fits-all objectives setting, mismatching of course contents with industrial requirements, and single and inflexible pedagogical approach. Based on the idea of industry relevance, competency-oriented education, and diversity of combination modes, the paper presents new ideas in three aspects: adjustment of hierarchical and classified educational goals, constructing a flexible module-based course framework based on the actual situation of the Free Trade Port, and building up an “school-enterprise cooperation + internet empowerment” education mode. It analyzes a three-in-one cultivation pattern integrating English communication ability, Free Trade Port-related industry knowledge, and Intercultural ability, providing concepts and direction to cultivate English talents in the background of the Free Trade Port.

Keywords: Hainan Free Trade Port; Talent-oriented approach; College English; Teaching reform

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1. Introduction

Hainan Free Trade Port has promoted the construction of characteristic industries, such as cross-border trade, marine economy, etc., generating a pressing need for versatile English-proficient specialists who have professional expertise and intercultural skills. The main course designed to meet that need is College English. Yet, the teaching aims of the existing College English courses in Hainan universities are homogenized; the contents lack typicality of ports and a single mode of teaching that is isolated from social practice, which does not satisfy the demand for talents. This paper discusses new ideas about reforms in College English Teaching according to talent demands in the background of the Free Trade Port.

1.1. Research contributions

This research has three unique contributions to the literature. First of all, different from the prior research, which

treats college English teaching as a single curriculum, this study develops the initial hierarchical target framework to distinguish elementary, intermediate, and high-end stages based on the industrial structure of the FTZ. Secondly, while previous modular systems target generic business English, we present here for the first time a port-specific modular system which incorporates Hainan's local industry policies and across cultural situations; third, differentiating itself from "informationalized" instruction mode, we proposed an "industry-school combination + information-based" hybrid paradigm with industry-school combination at its center instead of on its periphery.

2. The competency requirements for university English professionals in the development of the Hainan Free Trade Port

2.1. General English communication skills requirements for cross-border industries in Free Trade Ports

Hainan Free Trade Port is a transnational industrial cluster and an open window for international trade; therefore, there are many cases like handling of overseas transactions and dealings with foreigners' official documents, etc, which set standard, reasonable requirements for common use of the English language. This competence is a universal communicative skill oriented at the international environment of the free trade port, which necessitates being able to read or write knowledge between two languages and understand basic needs. It is essentially a basic standard of English skills for people working in the free trade port, which overturns the previous single-minded teaching model of universal English courses based on examination. Instead of looking at what is actually being communicated across borders by the free trade zone, and how languages are really used successfully to achieve goals, instead of learning grammar rules and words for the common English language can be used to meet the needs of international exchanges between countries in the free trade zone area.

Since the international nature of transnational industries in the Free Trade Port requires English competence to be context-sensitive and adaptive, including key topics such as international business, online shopping and participation at international exhibitions, and requiring an ability to respond appropriately to diverse communication contexts. Whether responding to face-to-face foreign visitor events or participating in remote international business transactions, professionals must be able to quickly adjust their language style to different situations, as well as learn major rules about cross-country communications in the FTZ.

2.2. Requirements for professional English application skills in characteristic sectors of the Free Trade Port

Based on the geo-political advantage of the Hainan Free Trade Port, it will cultivate characteristic core industries such as international tourism, such as marine economy, and across-the-board finance. Professional English level for the specific development of this industry has very accurate and special demands. It is not simply a combination of common English with specialized terms; one has to master the term sets and linguistic patterns used in particular professions, enabling proficiency to perform such tasks as writing international correspondence and participating in business negotiations, thus attaining an advanced level of language learning combined with subject matter expertise. It is also different from the more familiar, discipline-oriented training pattern of specialized English, but sets up a competence growth pattern according to the employment needs of the typical industry in the Free Trade Port, so that the professional use of English serves a purpose, i.e., it is applied to real-life tasks within an intercultural context.

Proficiency in professional English that is characteristic of particular areas of activity within the free trade port should be reflected by certain territorial and normative specifics, weaving together the port's special policies, sectoral developments, and indigenous characteristics. Take English for international tourism, for example; it has to be in line with the development of Hainan as an international tourism and consumption hub, including island experience and duty-free tourism situations; English for maritime economy (e.g., deep sea technologies).

2.3. Requirements for cross-cultural communication skills in international exchanges at Free Trade Ports

Hainan Free Trade Port is an international exchange platform; therefore, the daily work of Hainan Free Trade Port involves frequent intercultural exchanges with many and various demands in terms of integration for intercultural competence. The ability to understand different nations' cultural customs and thought patterns not only includes, but more importantly, avoiding language barriers, realizing good cross-cultural cooperation and disseminating the Free Trade Port culture and development philosophy to the world. This is a high-level ability for English talents in the Free Trade Port. This innovation overcomes the theory and formality of conventional cross-cultural training by taking actual Free Trade Port cases as the focus of teaching, which focuses on both technical use as well as translation skills for the development of the port's global outreach. Since intercultural situations are varied and may have different demands, the integration of the local culture in Hainan for communications is needed ^[1].

3. Current issues in college English teaching at Hainan Universities under a talent-oriented approach

3.1. Disconnection between teaching objectives and the competency requirements of Free Trade Port professionals

At present, the English education goals at the university level in Hainan are still aimed at preparing for CET-4 or CET-6 exams and cultivating basic general English abilities, showing general uniformity. These goals are not designed specifically in accordance with the needs of the construction of the free trade port and have a large gap with the demand for the three-level core competence of the free trade port. The majority of colleges and universities continue to use the acquisition of vocabulary knowledge, grammar knowledge and examination results as the main evaluation indicators, lacking in the necessary competences to operate within the Free Trade Port -professional use of English, intercultural competence etc. and therefore, there is a gap in training and skill acquisition as against the actual requirements for the port, which does not help to produce all-round competent English personnel that suits it.

The formulation of English teaching goals at Hainan colleges and universities has not adopted the method of joint efforts by schools and local governments. They have not yet established mechanisms that match the demand side with the industrial departments of the Hainan Free Trade Port, or even with foreign-related enterprises. which makes it impossible for them to accurately grasp what kind of specific English professional competence is required by each industry, and its educational goals are always based on the general model of a regular university, which is not adapted to the local features and industrial structure in the Hainan Free Trade Port. Therefore, the English educational goals set for talents from various majors are not well differentiated and do not accurately integrate "English + major specialty + Free Trade Port industry", thus making it difficult to nurture talents that can meet the individualized needs of Free Trade Port special industries.

3.2. The teaching content lacks representation of the free trade port's industrial and regional characteristics

Teaching of English at colleges and universities in Hainan is still mainly based on the general English textbook, whose contents are mainly about the common day-to-day and business situations; it does not cover the policy knowledge of developing the Hainan Free Trade Port, the industrial background or the area features, causing the disconnection between the course setting and the real demand for the development of the Free Trade Port. The teaching has no language material related to high-frequency transnational situations under the Free Trade Port, nor can it cover special English content for special industries, such as the international tourism industry and marine economy industry. Therefore, students' English ability cannot be applied to the practical work scene at Free Trade Port, and lack of Industrial English application skills.

The update speed of related English education contents is not fast enough to match the development step of the Free Trade Port industry in Hainan colleges and universities, without a content updating process aligned to the port's industrial

growth. Although the Free Trade Port continues to innovate on policy and industrial practice in relation to, for instance, cross-border trade or the duty-free economy, the scope of English teaching is still limited to traditional general knowledge, while it hasn't been updated with the most recent policy documents, industry case studies, and practical material about international affairs ^[2].

3.3. The teaching model struggles to meet the requirements for cultivating interdisciplinary talents

In the university or college in Hainan, the instruction of English is still based on the traditional method "teacher-oriented lecture combined with practice during class". In which teachers dominate the learning process, while learners are mostly recipients of knowledge passively (without exploring or applying it independently). making it difficult to develop the English skills needed in the free trade port.... The use of digital learning technology is limited, and the Internet resources aren't used completely to form a personalized, interactive study environment; the boring teaching method makes students' participation degree in English learning low and their ability of comprehensive application improve slowly.

4. The core principles of talent-oriented university English teaching reform in the Hainan Free Trade Port

4.1. Principles of industrial alignment: Aligned with the key industrial development needs of the Free Trade Port

The principle of industry alignment is the basic rule for the talent-oriented university English teaching reform under the Hainan Free Trade Port, which requires the whole process to be highly consistent with the development priorities of major industries such as cross-border trade. International tourism, marine economy, and modern service directly respond to the English level demands for every single industry. Teaching aims were designed by content, and methods have to be based on the real industrial needs of the Free Trade Port, leaving aside classic, standardized pedagogical methods. It makes it possible to coordinate English teaching with the port industry growth, to link English talent development with direct support for its strategic sectors.

To achieve the policy of industry integration, we should regularly match demands between colleges, the industrial authority of the free trade port, and foreign related enterprises. Carry out regular investigations about the need for industrial English talents so as to accurately grasp the English level needs of each position in various industries ^[3]. According to the survey results, the contents and programs for English education need to change in time by incorporating them into the entire teaching process with the real working situations and the actual job needs of the industries in the free trade port.

4.2. Competency-based principle: Focus on cultivating comprehensive English application skills

The third is to follow the basic concept of ability orientation, which means breaking up with examination orientation and focusing on cultivating students' ability when reforming English education at colleges or universities in Hainan province, focuses on building holistic English language competency, with an emphasis placed on three critical areas of focus for the FTZ: communications, professional practice and intercultural communication to create an instruction system that centers around competency cultivation. The teaching method reduces independent examination for words and syntax and puts more emphasis on cultivating learners' English communication ability in an actual free trade port situation. The practical competency test becomes part of the central content in teaching appraisal, supporting the transition from "teaching what we know" to "training for doing."

To implement the competence-based approach, we should restructure the English teaching programme and methods by increasing the proportion of practical disciplines and creating educational resources in accordance with the actual conditions of the customs-free zone, for example, simulated international business meetings, actual participation in international government service, or training exercises in intercultural communications.

4.3. Principle of multidimensional integration: Integrating cross-cultural competence with professional competence

Diversified Integration Principle means that talents-oriented university English teaching in Hainan Free Trade Port should

get rid of conventional, singular language ability training pattern and to realize “English language ability + cross-culture literacy + Free Trade Port professional quality” comprehensive fusion, through the full-process penetration of English education with the cultivation of cross-culture communication literacy and Free Trade Port professional quality, students not only obtain a good command of English language ability, but also cultivate intercultural communication awareness and cooperation ability that are suitable for international exchange in the Free Trade Port, as well as the professional consciousness and skills in line with its industry development ^[4].

To realize the idea of diversification in integration, English instruction needs to be integrated with things like intercultural communication, free trade port industrial policy, and international business etiquette. Free trade port cross-cultural communication cases and international occupation’s job requirements need to be entered into the classroom teaching and practice.

5. Innovative approaches to reforming university English teaching with a talent-oriented approach in the Hainan Free Trade Port

5.1. Reconstructing tiered and categorized teaching objectives aligned with the requirements of the Free Trade Port

In general, it can be said that reforming stratified and grouped teaching goals according to the target of the Free Trade Port is essentially a departure from the homogenized setting model for goals. Innovatively set up the “general level + professional level + advanced level” three-level system, to realize accurate and differentiated talents’ growth. The general level is aimed at all students, cultivating basic English communication abilities required by international common life in the Free Trade Port and strengthening the foundation of English listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. The professional level corresponds to students’ specialization areas of study and Free Trade Port’s related industries, developing professional competence in the English language, which has two levels: a higher-level course aimed at highly proficient students in English, developing advanced-level skills of high-level international business and negotiation.

In the reconstruction of the hierarchical classification and graded teaching goals, we need to set up a realization mechanism in line with students’ major directions and industrial demands of the free trade port, applying differentiated teaching and evaluation standards to students of different majors or English proficiency levels. For the students majoring in special majors under the free trade ports, e.g., tourism administration and international trade, the goal is to improve their professional English language usage ability; for science and engineering majors, it focuses on cultivating their English abilities of scientific and technological communication; for the student who has a weak background in English language basics, fundamentals must be reinforced, but for the other student, advanced skills need to be emphasized.

5.2. Developing a modular teaching content system reflecting the characteristics of the Free Trade Port

The key to building an independent module-based teaching content for the free trade port is to break through the limitations of conventional textbook patterns, innovate and establish “General English Module + Free Trade Port-Featured Specialized English Module + Intercultural Communication Module”, realizing a high degree of fusion between education content and operation demand of the port. Through General English Module, we can improve basic linguistic ability of students with content about actual cross-border communication scenes at the free trade port; the Specialized Professional English Module with sub-modules of major industry in the Port coupled with industrial policy, professional terms, and practical examples of cases; the Cross-Cultural Communication Module solves real cross-cultural communication problems in the free trade port with reference to local culture factors and foreign communication etiquettes.

The establishment of a three-dimensional modularized teaching content needs to establish a dynamic updating mechanism for teaching content, which should keep up with the development of the industry in the free trade port, as well as its policy adjustments. It is updated to reflect current industry literature, legislation, regulations, and global examples as they become available ^[5].

5.3. Establishing a diversified teaching model tailored to talent cultivation for the free trade port

The key to building up a diversified mode of education for the free trade port is not only breaking through the limitations of a single educational mode, but also actively exploring an all-around integrated mode of education involving cooperation between schools and industries, as well as cyber empowerment, which combines on-campus education with off-campus education. On-campus learning and off-campus learning; theory and practice. Utilizing online resources like Xuexitong platform and Free Trade Port English Resource Library, an online-offline hybrid mode of instruction is applied, with digital technology supporting individualized, learner-centered processes, with dedicated Free Trade Port content provided online and scenario-based, interactive pedagogical activities taking place offline.

International tourist attractions, and cross-border trade platform establishment of off-campus practical teaching base and provide enterprise practice class and international scenario practice course^[6], invite industry practitioners in free trade port and key staff members who are responsible for foreign affairs in enterprises to carry out English teaching and mentorship of practical course, bringing in actual international business projects from practice to class, so that students' English competence is improved via authentic project-based learning.

6. Conclusion

The high-level construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port has put forward higher requirements on practical and multi-skill talents in English, which urges colleges and universities to reform English teaching modes from examination orientation to requirement of talents demand oriented, this article accurately defines the three key abilities required for English talents in Free Trade Port, analyzes the current problems in teaching, points out three basic principles for reforms, and puts forward new directions of teaching reforms from three aspects: teaching goals, curriculum systems, teaching methods, all to form the three-dimensional talent training system.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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