

## SOME SOLUTIONS TO ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH AT UNIVERSITY OF TRANSPORT TECHNOLOGY, THAI NGUYEN CAMPUS

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### SUMMARY

With its important role, English today has not only become a common language in the world but also a language of trade, commerce and transportation. English, therefore, plays a significant role in the transport sector in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In reality, improving the quality of teaching and learning for non-English major learners at universities and colleges in the whole country in general and University of Transport Technology, Thai Nguyen Campus in particular is a matter that has been attracting much interest of administrators as well as lecturers who are directly involved in the training process. In order to propose solutions to improving the capability of using foreign languages for students at universities of transport, this paper is aimed at illustrating some issues in teaching and learning English in the transport sector. At the same time, there are a number of measures to improve the quality of teaching and learning English in the transport sector at University of Transport Technology, Thai Nguyen Campus. It also offers some suggestions to enhance the quality of teaching and learning English specialized for the transport sector at University of Transport Technology, Thai Nguyen Campus.

**Key words:** *English for specific purposes, quality of teaching and learning, transport technology, foreign language, curriculum.*

### INTRODUCTION

As an international language, one of the most popular and common languages in the world today, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is being widely taught for students at non-English major universities. According to the regulations and in the training programs administered by MoET, Ministry of Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), foreign languages are compulsory subjects, mainly belonging to general knowledge.

University of Transport Technology, Thai Nguyen Campus (UTT) is one of the major centers for training human resources for the transport sector, providing human resources for domestic and foreign transport companies, and labor export. The UTT students are motivated to learn English because after graduation they will become dynamic, motivated and skilled engineers who have the qualifications to meet the requirements of the international labor market. In addition to such capabilities as professional skills and

discipline, graduates must demonstrate their ability to communicate in English at work. The ability to use English in communication is one of the important criteria of employers as well as the first criterion of a developing country like Vietnam in the context of international integration. However, up to now, the ability to use English of students in the transport sector after graduation has not met the requirements of the domestic and international market. Therefore, graduates encounter many difficulties in finding a job.

With the expectation to enhance English communication skills for the transport engineers in the international integration of Vietnam, I would like to inherit the scientific achievements of previous scholars, administrators to provide solutions to improving the English teaching and learning for students.

### REALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH AT UTT

#### **Reality of teaching English**

The teachers of English at UTT meet the standard requirements and are mainly divided

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into four specialized groups: construction, engineering, economics, information technology. The teaching staff is enthusiastic, constantly strive to study, improve experience, and regularly innovate teaching methods suitable for new students.

Each year, English language teachers take turns to participate in short-term courses on active teaching methods at home and abroad. Therefore, their professional skills and teaching methods are increasingly improved, meeting the requirements of international integration.

Lecturers who are engaged in English for specific purposes (ESP) teaching, have solid knowledge and experience to teach English to the last year students. In teaching, lecturers help students have good English communication skills for their future work. One of the drawbacks, however, is that the ESP teachers do not have much experience and extensive knowledge of the discipline they are teaching, so “instead of interviewing experts in the field, analyzing the language in that discipline, even the students’ needs analysis, many ESP teachers depend on pre-printed curricula without assessing their relevance, or hesitate to conduct necessary analysis of difficult professional subjects and then modify the contents accordingly” [1].

ESP teachers are sometimes under pressure when teaching because they have to learn about the subject’s expertise. Although there is cooperation between English language teachers and specialized teachers, there are also occasional barriers to the transfer of knowledge to students in a truly effective way as they were not trained in these specialties. In fact, many teachers are passive, lacking confidence while conveying specialized content to students [2].

#### **Reality of learning English of students**

Although English is a compulsory subject at secondary school, the English proficiency level of students at the beginning of the

course is still very poor, reflecting the fact that the amount of foreign language knowledge they have accumulated at schools does not correspond to the amount of time they have spent on learning. The students’ gap in knowledge is really alarming. Their language skills are very limited, especially the listening and speaking skills. The ability to listen to and get the information of the majority of students is below average. In addition, many students come from the rural, remote and mountainous areas of the Northern provinces where English language teaching and learning are not paid much attention. Others do not know anything about English because they learn French, Chinese instead of English at high school.

ESP is included in the curriculum after the student complete the GE program. This is an advantage because most of them remember and apply the knowledge they have just learned, creating momentum for learning ESP. However, the GE knowledge of students is mostly limited, weak in communication skills. The fast speed of learning, the huge amount of knowledge to receive, the difference in level and regional factors are really difficulties for both students and teachers. Moreover, learning ESP right after GE, beside the advantage mentioned above, is also a problem for students because at this period they have not been equipped with any knowledge of their profession in Vietnamese. Although the specialized content in English does not cover all the subject area, it is also not a simple matter, especially when they are in English [3].

#### **Reality of the curriculum**

Due to some subjective and objective reasons, the ESP curriculum has not met the subject requirements. The budget for curriculum development is still limited and the distribution is not sufficient so there is not enough funding to carry out practical surveys. Therefore, the English language curriculum is

mostly composed by teachers of English, basing much on experience and subjective judgment but limited in terms of expertise. The curriculum is mainly compiled from available resources, lack of linkage, logic, system, discrete in content and not close to the real needs of learners, disciplines and the real requirements at work.

With limited time, the curriculum cannot cover the basic and important contents, nor cannot go into the narrow specialties that students are trained. Some specialized knowledge has many specific and difficult terminologies, long and complicated sentence structures that confuse students.

#### **Reality of the infrastructure**

The facilities are still limited. Most of the English classes in the university are not standardized, not designed for teaching and learning foreign languages. The classrooms are not sound-proof; the furniture is arranged in traditional style, only suitable for presentation methods, not suitable for interactive teaching methods [4].

In addition to the physical difficulties, the number of students in a class is too large, about 30 to 60, twice more than the number of students in a standard foreign language classroom. English teaching equipment is not appropriate for the size of the university.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **Improving the profession and quality of the teaching staff in English and specialized teachers of English**

- Enhance listening and speaking skills for teachers of English by giving them the opportunity to interact with native speakers, to improve their English proficiency, exchange experience with overseas teachers. By 2017, most English teachers can hear and understand articles taught by foreign experts. This figure will reach 100% by 2020.

##### **Solutions to improve the quality of teaching and learning English**

- ESP teachers can flexibly apply different teaching methods depending on the content

and characteristics of each discipline. The emphasis on all four language skills is necessary, not focusing on one skill.

- Lecturers should have professional sessions, periodic discussions with other ESP teachers, specialized instructors, and ESP students to find the most effective ESP teaching and learning methods.

- Lecturers should actively provide some specialized terminology for the discipline and reduce grammatical exercises if students have learned the grammatical contents in GE. It is necessary to equip students with reading and translating skills so that they can study more specialized materials in English by themselves; focus on developing communication skills so that students can use English confidently in communication at work. [5]

- Assign students to work in groups, in pairs so that they could have opportunities to interact, promote teamwork skills, and support each other in studying. Organize group presentations, English language activities such as English Olympic Games, English Festival, English Speech Contest, Exploring Maritime Industry in English, English Clubs at faculty and university level for students to demonstrate their ability to communicate in English in the subject area. Also, it is necessary to integrate these activities into the subject assessments so that students have the motivation to learn by themselves.

- It is necessary to do career orientation for students effectively so that they have proper awareness of the importance of ESP in their real work later. Regular ESP teaching and learning workshops should be held at the beginning of each semester so that students can gain experience from lecturers and students of previous courses.

- Pilot teaching specialized English for the transportation discipline and gradually expanding the scale for inter-college courses in the next stages.

**Compilation of textbooks**

In order to be effective in teaching and learning ESP, specialists or lecturers developing curriculum frameworks and textbooks should pay attention to the real needs of the transportation industry in order to provide a relevant knowledge frame. There should be collaboration between two groups of teachers: English teachers and specialized teachers to coordinate and support each other in the curriculum development [6].

The amount of time allocated for each lesson should also be reasonable and scientific. The content of each unit should be related to the subject area so that learners can acquire certain amount of technical knowledge after completing the course. The allocation of lessons must also be based on a reasonable distribution with subject areas. Each lesson should incorporate all the skills, practical exercises, communicative situations at work in dealing with companies or international tender packages. The vocabulary appendix should be designed for each lesson.

**Strengthening equipment and facilities essential for teaching and learning foreign languages**

- Review facilities for teaching foreign language at the university.
- Develop a list of facilities necessary for each level of teaching and learning foreign language.
- Purchase and equip appropriate equipment for teaching and learning English in classrooms, audiovisual and multimedia rooms.
- Train and foster teachers and technicians in order to efficiently use instruments for teaching and learning foreign language; exploit foreign materials and information sources for the right purposes, especially the Internet, to serve teaching and learning process [7].
- Build an English program to strengthen the key courses of the school as a basis for compiling curriculum, materials and teaching plans.

- Reckon English programs, curricula and subjects that will be taught in English.

**Promoting international cooperation:**

- Expand and diversify forms of international cooperation in education, training human resources, labor export, supporting English teaching and learning activities, extracurricular activities Olympic, Festival, rhetoric in English, etc., to create a healthy playground for students to use English.
- Facilitate and welcome qualified experts and lecturers abroad to visit and participate in training and seminars for trainers ; send managers and lecturers to participate in fostering courses, international conferences and seminars on teaching foreign languages at home and abroad.

**Applying self-study method**

In addition to creating interest in learning for students, self-study instruction is extremely important. Uncle Ho is a good example of self-studying foreign languages. Uncle knew more than 10 languages thanks to the result of self-study. Uncle Ho taught himself. Uncle Ho's experience in learning foreign languages was that he used what he had already learned in reading books and writing newspapers. Beside Uncle Ho, in reality, there are many examples of successful self-learning foreign languages. Foreign languages can be self-taught. Therefore, in addition to teaching students language knowledge and helping them develop skills, teaching them self-learning methods is extremely necessary [8]. In order to help students learn by themselves, teachers should take time to help them learn how to read international phonetics, how to look up dictionaries. Introduce books for them to learn to read. Nowadays, we have more tools to support self-learning foreign languages such as English learning softwares, reference books, the Internet. Teachers need to introduce good sites to learn English on the internet for students.

## CONCLUSION

The author's solutions suggested above are based on observations as well as experience from the process of direct teaching. Developing a program as well as a specialized English curriculum which is scientific, suitable and practically effective in the learner-centered direction to meet the needs of learners is not simple, but it is a very good thing to do, and should be done as soon as possible. This helps the university save money and effort, and also create a society of high qualifications and foreign language proficiency to catch up with the current globalization.

Within the scope of this article, the author focuses only on a number of issues related to teaching English as a maritime academic subject as well as the needs of learners. The article can be subjective, but the author hopes that the ideas can serve as a basis for managers to adjust strategies; lecturers can refer to curriculum development, and teaching method innovation; students use to adjust their English learning so that they can acquire knowledge fully. The author believes that English will truly become a useful tool to help students confidently enter the future, and complete their work.

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**TÓM TẮT**  
**MỘT SỐ GIẢI PHÁP NÂNG CAO CHẤT LƯỢNG DẠY VÀ HỌC TIẾNG ANH**  
**TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC GIAO THÔNG VẬN TẢI,**  
**CƠ SỞ ĐÀO TẠO THÁI NGUYÊN**

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*Trường Đại học Giao thông Vận tải, Cơ sở đào tạo Thái Nguyên*

Với vai trò quan trọng, tiếng Anh ngày nay không những là ngôn ngữ chung trên thế giới mà còn là ngôn ngữ của giao thương, giao dịch và vận tải; do đó tiếng Anh đóng một vai trò không nhỏ trong ngành vận tải trong thế kỷ 21. Trên thực tế, việc nâng cao chất lượng giảng dạy và học tập tiếng Anh chuyên ngành cho các đối tượng người học không chuyên ngữ tại các trường đại học và cao đẳng trên phạm vi cả nước nói chung và trường Đại học Giao thông Vận tải, cơ sở đào tạo Thái Nguyên nói riêng là một vấn đề đã và đang thu hút nhiều quan tâm của các nhà quản lý cũng như các giảng viên đang trực tiếp giảng dạy. Với mục đích đóng góp những giải pháp làm tăng khả năng sử dụng ngoại ngữ cho sinh viên các trường giao thông vận tải, bài báo này tập trung phản ánh một số vấn đề trong quá trình dạy và học tiếng Anh chuyên ngành giao thông vận tải, đồng thời đưa ra một số giải pháp nhằm nâng cao chất lượng dạy và học tiếng Anh chuyên ngành giao thông vận tải tại trường Đại học Giao thông Vận tải, cơ sở đào tạo Thái Nguyên.

**Từ khóa:** *Tiếng Anh chuyên ngành, chất lượng dạy và học, công nghệ vận tải, ngôn ngữ nước ngoài, chương trình.*

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