

# *ESP Teachers' Difficulties during Identity Constructions in a Chinese Tourism University*

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**Abstract:** The article explores the difficulties when the three ESP teachers of a Chinese tourism university construct their identities and tries to answer: “what are the challenges and difficulties during the English teachers construct their ESP teacher identities?” In this study, three ESP teachers from the tourism university were interviewed. The questions of interviews are designed based on Pennington’s teacher identity model. The result shows that the participants’ becoming ESP teachers are complex processes of transforming professional practices and constructing professional identities. The article studies struggle of ESP teachers’ identity and display the difficulties of becoming an ESP teacher in a tourism university in the specific context about tourism.

## 1. Introduction

ESP is the abbreviation of ‘English for specific purposes’. In the tourism university, teachers are required to integrate the contents of relevant tourism courses with English to meet the needs of social and economic development for students. English for General Purpose (EGP) is still the main mode of English teaching in most tourism colleges and universities of China. It mainly cultivates students’ basic English abilities which lacks the consciousness of combining English with tourist professional knowledge. While ESP teachers are required to acquire and maintain their professional knowledge and skills to provide teaching services through rigorous and continuous research. They are also required to have a personal and common sense of responsibility and make sure of students’ well-being.

Pennington holds that there are two frames of TESOL teacher identity “practice-centered and context-centered frames”. On practice-center frame, there are five sub-frames “instructional, disciplinary, professional, vocational and economic”. The instructional frame means “content and methods” during the teaching instruction; the disciplinary frame means teachers’ “knowledge and research”; the professional frame is about “beliefs and practices”; the vocational frame states “commitment and attachment”; the economic frame is related to teachers’ “academic and economic position”.<sup>[1]</sup>

## 2. Acquisition

In the interviews, three ESP teachers of the tourism university answered the fifteen questions based on Pennington’s five practice- centered frames theory on teacher identity. They described

their experiences in the ESP teaching, compared and reflected on the similarities and differences between EGP and ESP, stated the difficulties in teacher identity construction in the narrative process.

#### (1) On instructional frame

The goal of ESP teaching in the tourism university, is to teach students how to communicate with the specific English in tourist field concerned about. In order to promote the construction of ESP teachers' identity, three English teachers changed their concepts and overcome their fear of ESP courses. They said that ESP teaching is not content teaching, but language teaching. They thought ESP course does not require teachers to systematically understand the professional knowledge of specific disciplines, nor does it require teachers to understand the frontier knowledge of these specialties. On the contrary, what ESP teachers need most is practical knowledge related English.

Take one ESP teacher of three participants for example. Miss Su teaches students who major in Tourism Management. The ESP on-the-spot teaching of Tourism Management major adopts the joint teaching form from ESP teacher and enterprise tutor. Miss Su is not familiar with the solutions to emergencies in the field. The enterprise tutor is not familiar with the pedagogy theory and content planning of the teaching. Both of them will not receive the best teaching effect when completing the on-site teaching alone. Therefore, they have different roles in the ESP on-site teaching. The ESP teacher has to collaborate with the enterprise tutor to finish the teaching tasks.

#### (2) On disciplinary frame

The establishment of ESP course is completely based on the analysis of social needs and learners' needs. Some graduates can't cope with the actual needs of the industry. According to Lim, learners who attend ESP courses have at least three expectations: cultural and educational aspects, personal aspects, and professional aspects.[2] Learners' needs have four meanings, which the top one is their vocational requirements. Without any guiding and preparation, they had to understand about the requirement, connotation and characteristics of ESP courses as soon as possible. They integrated their past, present and future, and find the key points of their professional identity construction. Because their identities are results of the interaction between internal and external factors, they thought teachers' subjective initiatives are vital to complete the construction and transformation of professional identities.

#### (3) On professional frame

Teachers' identities help the three teachers to understand the important knowledge and skills in teaching. They chose ESP teaching directions according to their educational backgrounds. It is quite a painful thing to learn the basic knowledge of the professional disciplines according to their own interests. After receiving some professional training and internship, the teachers accumulated practical teaching knowledge through teaching practice. In the process of gradual improvement of knowledge, they completed the identity transformations from 'EGP skilled teacher' to 'ESP junior teacher', and finally to 'ESP skilled teacher'. Through cooperation with professional teachers, the three teachers effectively guaranteed the teaching quality with analyzing students' needs, setting up ESP courses, selecting teaching contents and designing teaching activities. The ESP teachers' professional knowledge is not so profound, but they faced ESP teaching with a positive attitude towards professional knowledge. Danielewicz proposes that identity is the result of the interaction between the individual's inner world and the external world which includes two parts: asking and answering.[3] Through the proficient classroom control ability, the participants can be recognized as qualified teachers by students and peers.

#### (4) On vocational frame

As ESP English teachers, they think it is necessary to determine the relationship and difference between ESP and professional English courses in the context of ESP. ESP is a transitional course between general English and professional English, which is an important part of language teaching.

The teachers carry out English learning skills training for students. They think they do not need to master professional knowledge, so they do not need to fear and have anxiety in teaching. For ESP teachers, it is more important to have a positive and correct attitude towards ESP teaching and to be interested in students' major. It is necessary to actively participate in the research of professional knowledge, hold a positive attitude, broaden the scope of personal knowledge, and be able to master the basic theory of tourism major, so as to promote the transformation of College English teachers' identity and provide a fulcrum for the positioning of identity. The construction of teachers' professional identity is not only to answer the question of 'what kind of person I am', but also to answer the question of 'what kind of person I want to become'. [4] The results of the interview show that they all love the teaching of ESP and are satisfied with the respect, but they hope to get a raise in salary. They are very happy to learn English knowledge related to tourism, and intend to continue to be ESP teachers in the future.

#### (5) On economic frame

For these three teachers with clear goals, interest and ability, they sit in on undergraduate courses, initially constructed a framework of professional theoretical knowledge through several years of systematic learning. At the same time, they have acquired certain self-learning ability of professional knowledge. They cooperated with professional teachers to explore the effective teaching mode of ESP course. The sharing of teaching, research experience and results in the process of cooperative teaching will continue to develop ESP teaching healthily in the atmosphere. ESP teachers establish a win-win cooperation mechanism with enterprise projects, professional teachers, ESP teachers' professional community and relevant enterprises. They hope that the university can support their career development more academically and economically. Based on Farrel's theory, the three ESP teachers summed up their teaching roles as: managers; professionals; cultural assimilators. [5]

The answers of the subjects covered their English learning experience, teaching experience, training experience, participation in research activities, response to the teaching reform, and their future professional development and planning. The article makes an analysis of teachers' professional identity construction and proposes effective ways to help ESP teachers complete the identity construction for promoting the professional development of teachers and curriculum reform of ESP in China.

## References

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