

Xia Yu*

*School of Foreign Languages
Southwest University of Political Science and Law, People's Republic of China
Sheilayu327@hotmail.com*

Chengyu Liu

*School of Foreign Languages
Southwest University, People's Republic of China
liucyswu@163.com*

CURRICULUM REFORM OF COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING IN CHINA: FROM ENGLISH FOR GENERAL PURPOSES TO ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

Abstract

College English teaching (CET) in China has long been accused of being time-consuming and inefficient and generated outcry against CET practices from academic circles and the public. In order to change the situation, Chinese government has initiated several rounds of English curriculum reform, moving from focusing on language foundation, i.e. English for General Purposes (EGP), to a stress on practical language use in general and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in particular. This paper first reviews these ESP-oriented changes in college English curricula from a historical perspective. Then, we evaluate the recent scholarly debates over the issue of whether CET should be completely replaced by ESP. Finally, we analyze the challenges facing ESP-oriented curriculum reform and highlight that qualified ESP teachers and ideological shift of stakeholders are key to high-quality ESP courses intended by policy makers. This paper reveals that China has a strong desire to make a breakthrough in CET, preparing to usher in the post-CET era featuring English for Academic Purposes (EAP) though fraught with difficulties and complications.

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Key words

EGP, ESP, College English teaching, curriculum reform.

* Corresponding address: Xia Yu, School of Foreign Languages, Southwest University of Political Science and Law, No. 301, Baosheng Ave, Yubei District, Chongqing Municipality, People's Republic of China.

Sažetak

Već dugo se nastava engleskog jezika na fakultetima u Kini optužuje kao neefikasna i spora, što je izazvalo prigovore protiv takve nastave u akademskim krugovima i široj javnosti. Da bi promenila tu situaciju, vlada Kine je inicirala nekoliko rundi reforme kurikuluma engleskog jezika, udaljujući se od opšteg engleskog jezika i stavljajući naglasak na upotrebu jezika u praksi uopšte, a posebno engleskog jezika struke. U ovom radu najpre predstavljamo izmene u nastavnom programu engleskog jezika struke koje su se desile tokom vremena. Zatim iznosimo ocenu nedavnih diskusija među stručnjacima o tome da li nastavu engleskog na fakultetima treba u potpunosti zameniti engleskim jezikom struke. Na kraju analiziramo probleme sa kojima se suočava reforma kurikuluma usmerena ka engleskom jeziku struke i ističemo da su obučeni nastavnici engleskog jezika struke i ideološka promena kod stejkholdera ključni faktori u realizaciji visokokvalitetnih kurseva engleskog jezika struke, što je namera zaduženih za ovu oblast. U radu pokazujemo da Kina ima jaku želju da u potpunosti promeni nastavu engleskog na fakultetima uvođenjem nastave engleskog jezika za akademske potrebe, iako je ta namera bremenita teškoćama i komplikacijama.

Ključne reči

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opšti engleski jezik, engleski jezik struke, nastava engleskog na fakultetima, reforma kurikuluma.

1. INTRODUCTION

College English (CE) has been a required course for the overwhelming majority of Chinese university students (more than 90%, Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; J. Wang, 2007). It used to be called “public English”, a name suggesting a “common core” course learned by all undergraduates of arts, science and engineering other than English majors. Over a decade ago, an influential Chinese linguist envisaged the decline of CE:

Since English is now required as a compulsory subject of study from Grade 3 at primary schools, and even Grade 1 in some first-tier cities like Beijing, we may reasonably expect that English proficiency of pupils at primary- and secondary-schools will have greatly improved. Therefore, the justification for CE may be called into question. (Hu, 2002: 9)

Hu's prediction seems to be attested by the rampant reduction of academic hours for CE in recent years. For example, the national requirement for academic hours in 2007 was 280, and the number was reduced to 144-216 in 2017 (see Table 1). In practice, according to a survey of 100 universities, the average academic hours for CE shrank to 180 with the extreme case of Tsinghua University (China's top university) being 72 (Cai, 2017a) (see Table 2 for more information). However, the country sets increasingly demanding requirements for college graduates' English proficiency to respond to the pressure and needs resulting from China's increasing integration into world economy and globalization as well as the country's national development and changes in Chinese college students. The mismatch between the pressing demand for graduates' high English competence and the nationwide discount of academic hours for CE could be ascribable to incessant outcry against College English teaching (CET) practices from academic circles and the public; that is, paying too much and receiving too little, or in former Chinese vice premier's words, "time-consuming and inefficient"¹ (L. Li, 2003: 1).

SYLLABUS/REQUIREMENTS/ GUIDELINES	INITIALS	ACADEMIC HOURS
1962 Syllabus	ETS (1962)	240
1980 Syllabus	ETS (1980)	240
1985/1986/1999 Syllabus	CES (1985/1986/1999)	240-280
2004/2007 Requirements	CECR (2004/2007)	280
2015 Guidelines (draft)	GCET (2015)	not specified
2017 Guidelines	GCET (2017)	144-216

Note: ETS=English Teaching Syllabus; CES=College English Syllabus; CECR=College English Curriculum Requirements; GCET=Guidelines on College English Teaching.

Table 1. Changes of academic hours stipulated in CE curricula

¹ Li Lanqing, former vice premier who was then in charge of education in China, stated that Chinese students in the cities are required to learn English from grade three in primary schools and those in major cities even start from grade one; unfortunately, English is the only subject that lasts for so long while achieving so little in China.

REGION	UNIVERSITIES	CREDITS	ACADEMIC HOURS
East China	FU	8	136
	SJTU	8	136
	ECNU	8	136
	ECUST	10	170
Northeast China	HIT	8	136
	YBU	8	136
	DMU	8	136
Central China	HUST	7.5	127.5
South China	GUT	8	136
Southwest China	SWU	6	102
	SWUPL	8	136

Source: Cai (2017a)

Note: FU=Fudan University; SJTU=Shanghai Jiao Tong University; ECNU=East China Normal University; ECUST=East China University of Science and Technology; HIT=Harbin Institute of Technology; YBU=Yanbian University; DMU=Dalian Maritime University; HUST=Huazhong University of Science and Technology; GUT=Guangdong University of Technology; SWU=Southwest University; SWUPL=Southwest University of Political Science and Law.

Table 2. List of credits/academic hours for CE in current Chinese universities

Has CE come to an end in China with the advent of post-CE era? This current paper intends to evaluate the recent scholarly debates over this issue and understand policy development by reviewing literature from both Chinese-medium sources and English-medium sources. In order to set the debates and review in rich historical and social contexts, we deem it necessary to provide a diachronic account of the development of CE and its curriculum reforms.

2. THE EVOLUTION OF CE AND ITS CURRICULUM REFORM

The political movements from the building of new China (1949) to the end of the Cultural Revolution (a political and ideological turmoil lasting from 1966 to 1977) had great impact on CE development in Chinese tertiary institutions. The situation of CE program seriously deteriorated when China developed a close relationship with the Soviet Union during the 1950s and the early 1960s. Even though English and other foreign languages were built into college and university curricula during this period, they tended to be replaced exclusively by College Russian (Dzau, 1990). With the breakup of Sino-Soviet solidarity in the late 1950s, English became a recognized subject and was given top priority “in recognition of its increasing popularity around the world” (Ford, 1988: 25).

In 1962, the Ministry of Education (MOE, known as the State Education Commission between 1985 and 1997) issued the first English Teaching Syllabus

(ETS) to give a unified direction for the nationwide Public English of 5-year-universities of technology (J. Li, 2008). This is the first nationally unified curriculum syllabus since the founding of the People's Republic of China, signifying the termination of the then disordered condition of CET. Unfortunately, College English lost its status again very soon in the Cultural Revolution when Chinese higher education came to a halt: all colleges and universities stopped enrolling new students for a few years.

CE was reinvigorated in 1978 with China's initiation of open-up and reform policy to pursue economic development and modernizations in industry, agriculture, national defence and science and technology (Sun, 1996). It was believed that one key element in the drive to modernization was "to have a significant number of competent users of English in a whole range of professions, business, workplaces and enterprises" (Y. Wang, 1999: 45). Accordingly, the CE programs were viewed as an important part both in the higher educational system and in the development of the nation (Han, 2008). Under such circumstances, CET was reinvigorated as Chinese educational systems, which had been damaged during the Cultural Revolution, were restored (Yan & Zhang, 1995). In 1980, MOE promulgated Public English Teaching Syllabus for 4-year-universities of Science and Engineering, which resembles the *1962 Syllabus* in almost every aspect. The only difference lies in that the 1962 version stressed laying a solid language foundation along with the learning of specific areas of expertise, and the 1980 version took a prudent attitude towards learning English in tandem with specialty at an early stage, but demanded a display of general features of English for science and technology (EST) (J. Li, 2008) (see Table 2 for a summary of the teaching objectives of CE curricula since 1980). It appears that learning English for serving the study of specialty has long been an area of concern, which is commonly known as English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

The College English Syllabus (CES) for Science and Engineering Undergraduates (*1985 Syllabus*) and the CES for Arts and Sciences Undergraduates (*1986 Syllabus*) issued respectively in 1985 and 1986 were considered the first two genuine syllabuses in China for its completeness and detailed elaboration (L. Li, Zhang, & Liu, 1988). The CES released in 1999 (*1999 Syllabus*) combined the 1985 and 1986 syllabuses into a unified syllabus, representing a revised edition of the previous two. The *1999 Syllabus* discontinued any further distinction between teaching for arts, science and engineering students on the ground that clear demarcation between specialties was no longer considered necessary and the unified syllabus could facilitate teaching management and evaluation (Xu & Fan, 2017). In addition, the *1985/1986 Syllabus* suspended ESP direction by stressing the "common core" of English, along with the claimed primary objective of CET as the development of reading competence (Dong, 1986). Therefore, CET in China since the 1980s has taken place within the scope of the English for General Purposes (EGP) curriculum (Gao & Bartlett, 2014), which typically neglects disciplines, instead covering topics relating to "campus life, personal growth,

politeness, appreciation of music, health and hygiene, friendship and human emotions, paths to success, and cultural values” (Cheng, 2016: 213). The ESP element in the *1985/1986 Syllabus*, if any, was reflected in the description that, at the Professional Reading stage, students were assumed to have improved their professional reading ability and to be able to obtain professional information as needed.

“Professional Reading” was replaced by “English of specialty”² in the *1999 Syllabus*, prescribing that “English of specialty is an important part of CET and an effective way to help students transit from learning to practical application. The course should be offered in the third or the fourth year” (MOE, 1999). The *2004/2007 Requirements* shifted the goal of CET from prioritizing reading in the *1999 Syllabus* to listening and speaking, in an attempt to cultivate students’ ability of using English in oral communication. This change, however, was criticized for being contextually blind and linguistically groundless, meaning, the policy is not only hard to implement but also unlikely to guide teaching in the right direction in the Chinese context (cf. Du & Guan, 2016). The Guidelines on College English Teaching (GCET) released in 2015/2017 continued to place top priority on the practical use of English, reflecting an encouraging trend towards departure from a stress on language foundation and a focus on language use (Xu & Fan, 2017). However, if put under intensive scrutiny, descriptions of teaching objectives in these curricula, are not always consistent and clear-cut in terms of the use of the English language. For instance, as shown in Table 3, the *1985/1986 Syllabus* defined the objectives as developing students’ reading ability and enabling them to use English as a tool to obtain professional information, but the *1999 Syllabus* replaced this objective with enabling them to communicate in English and helping them lay a solid language foundation. The *2004/2007 Requirements* extended the focus from developing students’ ability to use English to also embrace improving their comprehensive cultural literacy, which was criticized for being too vague to serve the needs of academic studies and future careers (Cai, 2012b) against the backdrop of China’s increasing integration into the globalization of world economy. The *2015/2017 Guidelines* went further to claim to “enhance intercultural communication awareness and communicative competence [...] improve their comprehensive cultural quality” (MOE, 2017: 1). The inconsistency in teaching objectives postulated in curriculum documents foreshadows the controversy over the orientation of CET, which will be discussed in the next section.

² This is a literal translation of Chinese term 专业英语 (*zhuan yeyingyu*), referring to English used in specific fields such as medicine, finance, law, etc., hence medical English, financial English and legal English.

SYLLABUS/ REQUIREMENTS/ GUIDELINES	TEACHING OBJECTIVES
CES (1980)	Help students lay a solid language foundation to enable them to read English for general Science and Technology, as well as English of specialty.
CES (1985/1986 ^a)	Develop in students a relatively high level of competence in reading, an intermediate level of competence in listening (and translation), a basic competence in writing and speaking and enable students to obtain professional information using English as a tool.
CES (1999)	Develop in students a relatively high level of competence in reading, an intermediate level of competence in listening, speaking, writing and translating, to enable them to communicate in English and help them lay a solid language foundation.
CECR (2004/2007 ^b)	Develop students' comprehensive ability of using English in a well-rounded way, especially in listening and speaking, so that they will be able to communicate effectively in English in their future study, work and social interaction; meanwhile, enhance their autonomous learning ability and improve comprehensive cultural literacy.
GCET (2015/2017 ^c)	Develop students' ability of using English, enhance cross-cultural communication awareness and communicative competence, develop their autonomous learning ability and improve their comprehensive cultural quality, enabling them to use English effectively in study, living, social interaction and future work to meet the needs of nation, society and individuals.

^a The 1985 Syllabus and 1986 Syllabus are similar in teaching objectives, only differing in the translation requirement for the former, so they appear in the same table.

^b The wording of the teaching objectives of the 2004 and the 2007 Requirements is somewhat different, but the main contents remain unchanged, so they appear in the same table.

^c The 2015 Guidelines is the draft of 2017 Guidelines. These two versions only differ in that the latter adds some quantifiable terms on the requirements of class hours in the "Course Design" section, so they appear in the same table.

Table 3. Teaching objectives of the College English curricula (revised from Xu & Fan, 2017: 274)

3. SCHOLARLY DEBATES OVER THE FUTURE OF CET

The several rounds of reform of CET discussed above reflect China's awareness of the urgent need to adjust its curriculum to change the current situation of the low quality and efficiency of CET as well as the country's determination to cultivate graduates with adequate command of English for global changes and national development. It was argued that the innovation of these College English curricula had taken place alongside a number of encouraging progress and trends since the mid-1980s when China accelerated its modernization and internationalization drive (Xu & Fan, 2017). However, these positive development trends in policy rhetoric have not prevented the voice of cancellation of CET. One of the most controversial debate topics in CET concerns whether CET should be replaced by ESP. The radical insisted that ESP should completely take the place of traditional CET featuring EGP while the conservative took a hybrid position of integrating ESP

with EGP. We now present the arguments of both sides from the following three vantage points, namely, students' English proficiency, direction of CET reform and the teaching contents of tertiary English teaching.

3.1. Students' English proficiency

Prompted by policy efforts and social changes, students' English proficiency is assumed to have greatly improved. As aforementioned, language policies in China make English a subject of study from grade three at primary schools and one of the three compulsory subjects in National English Matriculation test (*Gaokao*), and a compulsory course for college students of all majors (W. Li, 2016). Advances in science and information technology together with tremendous private investment by parents have made available to students more learning resources and opportunities of exposure to English. In defending this position, Cai (2012a) compared national CE curriculum documents in terms of their vocabulary requirements from a diachronic perspective. As shown in Table 4, the required vocabulary size has been expanded from 1,500-1,800 words in ETS (1980) to 4,795 words in College English Curriculum Requirements (CECR) (MOE, 2007), with a corresponding increase in reading speed from 10 words per minute to 70 words per minute. Huang, Chen, Xu, Li, & Fu's (2004) survey of 914 students enrolling in universities in Hangzhou (a second-tier city in China) in 2003 found that the average vocabulary size of these freshmen reached 5,617 words, surpassing the vocabulary size requirement (4,795 words) stipulated in CECR (2007) released four years later. Moreover, the new English curriculum standard (NECS) for senior secondary school was said to be not significantly different from CECR (2007) in terms of requirements on four skills and vocabulary size (Cai, 2012a; Feng, 2010). These sharp contrasts were taken as important indicators of students' substantial improvement in English proficiency. For that reason, Feng (2010), after surveying 32 universities under the direct administration of the MOE, concluded that the realistic necessity of CE as a course in higher education institutions was no longer justified.

SYLLABUSES/REQUIREMENTS	VOCABULARY SIZE (WORDS)	READING SPEED (WORDS/MIN)
CES (1962)	1,400	< 10
CES (1980)	1,500-1,800	10
CES(1985)	3,800-4,000	55-58
CES (1986)	4,000	58
CES (1999)	4,200	61
CECR (2007)	4,795	70

Table 4. Comparison of vocabulary requirements by size in College English curricula (Cai, 2012a; Huang et al., 2004)

As opposed to this, some scholars contended that it would be unwise to cancel CET as China is a large country with uneven development of education, hence disparity gap existing in students' level of English among different tertiary institutions (S. Wang & Wang, 2011). By and large, the English competence of freshmen is not adequate enough to enable them to deal with English of specialty so that we need to help them continue to lay a solid language foundation in college (Y. Li, 2001). This view is supported by a recent empirical study based on a major university in West China (F. Li & Zhang, 2016), which suggested that the vast majority of the student subjects' perceived English proficiency is below the basic requirement for communication so that it would be imprudent to cancel CET at present, at least in the universities in West China where the students lag behind those in East China in terms of English proficiency. The controversy over students' English proficiency points to the issue of whether students need to fulfill certain minimum requirements in language proficiency before enrolling in ESP courses, and if so, how can these requirements be defined and measured? All this remains questions that need further research.

Besides, it is further argued that the difficulty of CE far exceeds that of English taught to senior high students in terms of both language and cognition, which is reflected in the length and abstraction of texts, the complexity of rules of grammar, the abundance of vocabulary and the range of knowledge concerned (S. Wang, 2013). From this viewpoint, it is indispensable to offer the course of CE to university students including those of relatively high proficiency of English.

3.2. The direction of CET

Although there is a consensus that CET in China needs constant innovation, scholars and experts divided into separate camps with regard to the orientation of CET reform. The scholars insisting on the cancellation of CET attributed the failure of CET to its incorrect orientation of EGP, which rendered the nation's demand for competent English users unexpressed in tertiary English policy. They stated unequivocally that instrumentality represented the direction of English education at tertiary level, for English functions as a tool for either obtaining professional information or maintaining cross-cultural communication or passing various tests (Cai, 2017a). And the major function of instrumentality of CE should be directed to providing students with necessary foreign language skills needed in their academic study and future work (Cai, 2017b); therefore, competence in professional English or academic English rather than general English should be highlighted to enable students to communicate professionally or academically in English upon graduation. This perceived specific use of English for professional and academic purposes is not only congruent with the inexorable spread of English as an international language for global communication, but can be further explained by the conceptualization of English as what Bourdieu (1991) called "linguistic

capital”, which can be easily converted to other forms of capital, such as cultural capital (in the form of educational qualifications) and economic capital (in the form of better employment and career development) (Pan & Block, 2011; Xu & Fan, 2017).

The pragmatic perception implicit in the instrumental value of English is opposed by many other scholars who believe that English learning should go beyond instrumental value and recognize its humanistic value as well since language, as an inseparable part of culture, is also the carrier of culture and human thought (Xu & Fan, 2017). In this sense, English education constitutes an important source to cultivate students’ humanistic qualities and enhance their whole-person development including a person’s cognition, affect, values and character (Xu & Fan, 2017). In fact, humanistic consideration has been the ideology underpinning the CE curricula. For example, the *2004/2007 Requirements* described CE as “not only a language course about basic English knowledge, but also a quality education course that helps students to broaden horizons and learn about different cultures” (MOE, 2007), that is, to “improve their comprehensive cultural literacy” (MOE, 2004, 2007). The *2015/2017 Guidelines* continues to claim that enabling students to “improve their comprehensive cultural quality” should be the overall teaching objective of CE (MOE, 2015, 2017). Clearly, this position goes beyond perceiving English as a tool to acquire knowledge and economic benefits in society and reiterate the humanistic value of English learning in terms of enhancing students’ cognitive and personal development. For instance, the *2015/2017 Guidelines* clearly defines the nature of CET as unambiguously “a part of higher education bearing both instrumental and humanistic values” (MOE, 2015, 2017). From this view, the new *Guidelines* proposed to integrate instrumental with humanistic values, an even-handed solution to the controversial issue of whether CET should give more priority to the instrumental value or the humanistic value. This balanced policy stance on the integration of both values was further elucidated in the description of the three categories of courses: EGP, ESP and EIC (English for Intercultural Communication), each of which carries equal weight in the course system with EGP highlighting both values, and ESP and EIC focusing on instrumental and humanistic features respectively (Xu & Fan, 2017).

According to instrumentalists (e.g. Cai, 2017c), such an approach, while politically correct, is unwise, as reorientation of English education to the cultivation of whole persons, focusing on moral and cultural qualities simply eliminates the disparity between English and other humanistic disciplines, further lowering the institutional status of CET. This is seen as a major barrier to the transition of CET from EGP to ESP, for the idea of nurturing whole persons seems so irrefutable that it silenced the voice of utilizing English as a tool for disciplinary communication.

3.3. The teaching contents of CE

The aforementioned heated debate on the orientation of College English has never been detached from dispute over whether English is taught for general purposes or for specific purposes at tertiary level. Advocators of humanistic value maintained that EGP is supposed to help students develop a world vision, raise international awareness and improve their humanistic literacy, which is different from ESP aiming to enhance students' academic literacy³. Taking the part played by EGP as unsubstitutable in tertiary English education, this view held that CET should be EGP-oriented and merely supplemented by ESP (S. Wang & Wang, 2011). The instrumentalists, however, argued forcefully that the devotion of limited credit-bearing CE courses to the appreciation of English literature and understanding of foreign society, history and cultures in the name of humanistic literacy or liberal/holistic education is misleading and obliterates the distinction between CE and courses for English majors (Cai, 2017a). They insisted that CE should be replaced by English for Academic Purposes (EAP), which aims to equip students with necessary academic English language and study skills to enable them to succeed in their academic studies and future professions (Cai, 2014, 2016b). The instrumentalists even rejected the eclectic approach that EAP could be incorporated into the mainstream course of EGP based on the apparent incongruity between EAP and EGP: (1) EAP requires higher linguistic ability of students who need to use English for their academic studies than EGP does; (2) EAP is tailored to the current needs of students' disciplinary studies, which is needs-driven while EGP aims to help students lay a solid language foundation, which is learning-driven or exam-driven;⁴ (3) EAP is genre-based, cultivating students' academic foreign language competence in their particular disciplinary communities while EGP develops general communicative competence in daily life. In short, EAP should be set as an independent course, completely replacing the present CET (Cai, 2016b). The demand of EAP was also directly driven by internationalization of higher education in China. As early as in 2001, the MOE published guidelines for improving the quality of undergraduate teaching of English, requiring that within three years 5–10% of undergraduate courses offered by tertiary institutions be conducted in English. ESP instruction seems to be a step forward towards the goal of bilingual instruction at tertiary level.

Interestingly, the instrumentalists cited the principle of micro-economy to justify the substitution of CET with EAP: altering the contents of production can directly influence the survival of an enterprise while change of modes of

³ Academic literacy, according to Wingate (2015), is widely and traditionally conceived of as ensuring that students have the necessary skills to read and write academic texts.

⁴ The position of EGP has been maintained and reinforced by the backwash effect of nationwide College English Test Band Four and Band Six (CET-4 and CET-6) since 1987 (Yu & Liu, 2018b). Preparation of these tests, according to Zhao (2016), significantly consumes most of college students' time and energy and hence distracts their attention from the subjects they major in.

production, staff quality and raw materials can only affect the production efficiency; similarly, the only way out for CET reform is to orient English teaching towards EAP with the focus on English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) as opposed to English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). The former is focused on the training of students' academic communicative competence such as understanding academic lectures, making notes, conducting presentation, writing reports, reviews and papers as well as engaging in academic discussion and the latter on familiarizing students with the discourse, genre and language features in their particular field of expertise such as engineering, law, finance, medicine, etc. It is believed that there is an urgent need for radical changes of CE, as the whole generation of Chinese scientists and engineers could not proficiently use English to extract necessary information from the readings in his/her own field of specialization, nor communicate effectively in international conferences, journals and engineering activities, which was seen as a failure attributed to the orientation to English teaching for general purposes rather than specific purposes, the neglect of English as a tool to communicate in disciplinary studies (Cai, 2017c).

In contrast to the policy of prioritizing listening and speaking prescribed in CECR (2007), the teaching objective of EAP prioritizes reading and writing. Indeed, as Widdowson (1997: 143) reminded, "professional and academic registers are, for the most part, essentially written varieties, and tend to retain a written mode even when spoken". And unlike teaching materials for EGP which pursue daily life topics and idiomatic language written by native speakers, texts selected for EAP courses are usually informative/argumentative writings regardless of the writers' linguistic and cultural background. It has been suggested that texts written by non-native speakers should be purposely included (Wood, 2001) as role models into the classroom since almost half of the papers in *Nature*, *Science* and *Cell* are contributed by non-native speakers (Cai, 2016b). The ultimate goal for this lingua franca model is to cultivate experts in ESP sense rather than native speakers in EGP sense. It is hoped that ESP teaching following this "lingua franca" model can increase the awareness of approaching and English as a global/international language.

4. NEGOTIATION OF ESP AS A LANGUAGE POLICY

Recent CE curriculum documents seemed to have adopted a balanced attitude to controversy under discussion, that is, EGP and ESP should be developed simultaneously, complementing each other. This even-handed policy proposing to integrate instrumental with humanistic values was found to be reflected in the restructured course design in a major university in Southwest China (Yu & Liu, 2018a). A diversity of courses was categorized into six course groups among which the group of *language use* includes courses such as Legal English, English for Management, English for Academic Reading, English for Academic Writing, which

are of prominent instrumentality-oriented ESP features, while the group of *language and culture* offers courses like Introduction to British/American Literature, Introduction to European Culture, and Introduction to English-speaking Countries, displaying remarkable EIC attributes highlighting humanity. Other groups of courses are devoted to helping students lay a solid language foundation, possessing both instrumental and humanistic values.

The equilibrium strategy employed by the national government, however, does not mean that the radical reformers' voices went unnoticed. Instead, their criticism of the current direction of CET has exerted influence on the policy-makers. For example, the *2015/2017 Guidelines* granted an official status to ESP in CET, making it clear that ESP represents an indispensable aspect of CET. The release of local policy document, *Framework of Reference for EFL Teaching at Tertiary Level in Shanghai (Trial Implementation) (Shanghai Framework)* (The Shanghai CET Advisory Board, 2013) made a compelling case for the approval of ESP-guided English teaching by local authorities. The trial implementation of *Shanghai Framework* in 26 universities in Shanghai was assumed to be successful with the support of local government, though fraught with difficulties and complications (Cai, 2016a).

The top-down reform being carried out in Shanghai indicates that China is positively responding to internal task of internationalization of higher education as well as external pressure for innovation. In 2015, Chinese government announced a plan known as the "Double-First Academic" initiative, aiming to ultimately build a number of world academic universities and disciplines by the end of 2050, in an effort to make China an international higher education power. This initiative entails the cultivation of world-class tertiary graduates who are made competitive in the international arena of economy, science and technology. The government seemed to have been convinced that ESP-oriented English teaching could facilitate their effort to achieve this goal to some extent, after all, when we talk about English as an international language we generally mean the specific use that is made of it for professional and academic purposes (Widdowson, 1997). In the revised edition of *Shanghai Framework* (Cai, 2017d), EGP was practically replaced by EAP, as the latter makes up 85% of the total as compulsory courses (see Table 5). The promulgation and implementation of *Shanghai Framework* demonstrate that a comprehensive reform of CET is in full swing, making Shanghai the "special education zone of China"⁵ by granting it special (more ESP-oriented) policies and flexible governmental measures than the rest of universities in mainland China.

⁵ "Special education zone of China" is coined by the authors according to "special economic zones of China" (SEZs) which are special economic zones located in mainland China. The government of China gives SEZs special (more free market-oriented) economic policies and flexible governmental measures. This allows SEZs to utilize an economic management system that is more attractive to foreign and domestic firms to do business in than the rest of mainland China.

COURSE NATURE	TRANSITIVE COURSES ^s	CORE COURSES ^c		SELECTIVE COURSES
	EGP	EGAP	ESAP	LE
credit pct.	0.5%	55%	30%	10%
course	ER	AER	RWS	ICA
content (e.g.)	CE	APD	JAW	CT

Source: Cai (2017c)

Note: ^s=selective; ^c=compulsory; LE=Liberal English⁶; ER=English Reading; CE=Comprehensive English; AER=Academic English Reading; APD=Academic Presentations and Discussions; RWS=Reading and Writing of Specialty; JAW=Journal Article Writing; ICA=Intercultural Communication in Academics; CT=Critical Thinking.

Table 5. Suggested curriculum structure of CE in *Shanghai Framework (revised draft)*

5. CHALLENGES FACING EAP-ORIENTED CURRICULUM REFORM

Since the autumn of 2013, EAP instruction has been implemented in 26 tertiary institutions which accounts for two-thirds of higher institutions in Shanghai. This was a top-down movement to reform CET as nearly half of these universities got involved in the piloting of *Shanghai Framework* under pressure from the local authority (Cai, 2016a). This was made against the backdrop of public outcry against current CET practice which has been maintained by CET-4 and CET-6 and also in alignment with the government's ambition of making Shanghai a modern international metropolis by 2020, which necessitated the availability of many high-caliber talents proficient in English and competent for international communication in their specific areas.

In these pilot universities, EGAP was taken as the main contents of EAP courses because several factors adversely affected the implementation of ESAP. First, ESAP is more connected with expertise in specific fields compared to EGAP, and English teachers whose academic background is linguistics- and literature-based, will face great challenges in putting ESAP courses into practice. Second, ESAP normally requires team teaching between CE teachers and specialty teachers. Such a collaboration mechanism is absent in universities in China for the lack of policy and financial support. Third, English as Medium of Instruction (EMI) content courses account for only a tiny part (about 10%) of the full curriculum even in prestigious universities such as Fudan University and Shanghai Jiao Tong University, therefore, there is no pressing demand to respond for the majority of college students (Yu & Liu, 2018b). As a compromise, EGAP was suggested to take up 60% of the total credits as compulsory courses while ESAP accounts for only 15% as non-mandatory provision. However, some universities have done no more

⁶ Also called 通识英语 (*tongshiyingyu*) in Chinese. It is part of liberal education that provides students with broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g. science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth study in a specific area of interest.

than pay lip service, failing to impose EGAP courses to all non-English majors as required, let alone ESAP courses. The reason they took was to attend to students' diverse needs and interests. In fact, this round of local reform met with some resistance from teachers, experts, administrators and policy makers who have a vested interest in traditional CET including textbooks, tests and teaching (Cai, 2016a). Despite the difficulties and complications in implementation, the proportion of EGAP to ESAP was suggested as 55% to 30% in the revised edition of *Shanghai Framework* (The Shanghai CET Advisory Board, 2017), with both being required as compulsory. The government also provided intensive teacher training on EAP course design and teaching method in response to the pressure of shortage of qualified EAP teachers (Q. Li, 2015).

The spirit of *2007 Requirements* stating that colleges and universities should formulate, in the light of their specific circumstances, an individualized College English syllabus to guide their own CET, guides the great majority of universities. Although many a university initiated ESP instruction in order to keep up with the trend of CET reform, the delivery of ESP courses was far from satisfactory. For instance, English teachers in a medical university were reported to be forced to undertake Medical English Reading instruction without any professional training in advance. The school authority urged these teachers to choose one direction of medicine such as pathology, physiology, anatomy, etc. to engage in specialty teachers' lesson preparation for the knowledge of medicine. Well-intended as the idea may be, English teachers usually failed to devote themselves to the cooperation involving a brand-new field for various reasons (L. Li, 2012). As a result, ESP instruction still focused on the meta-linguistic level, such as vocabulary, grammar and sentence-by-sentence translation, the benefits of which were interrogated by both teachers and students (Chen, 2016).

Apparently, there will be overwhelming challenges for converting ESP courses on paper into practice. We see the current lack of qualified ESP teachers as the biggest challenge. We now offer three sets of suggestions to tackle this problem. First, CE teachers cooperate with specialty teachers. Specialty teachers have expertise and research experience in the target specialty, which reflects the weaknesses of CE teachers. High proficiency in English possessed by CE teachers, on the other hand, are the relative weaknesses of specialty teachers. Since the strengths and weaknesses of these two cohorts of teachers are complementary, it would be desirable for them to carry out a team teaching or other means of collaboration such as inviting specialty teachers to work as consultants. Second, encourage CE teachers to seek personal and career development by pursuing cross-disciplinary education. Specifically, CE teachers can further their degree study in the specialty involved in ESP course. For instance, CE teachers in charge of the course of Legal English may pursue PhD study in International Law or other law-related fields, which is indeed the case in the university where the first author is employed. Third, extend the resource pools of ESP teachers to include specialty teachers who are competent in utilizing English in their specialized fields. Those

who have years of learning or work experiences in foreign countries would be ideal candidates.

While concurring with Widdowson (1997: 145) that “English teaching in the general curriculum would be a version of ESP”, we have some caveats. Firstly, is it feasible to completely replace CET with EAP courses across the nation even to include higher vocational colleges, which lay stress more on practical skills than theoretical expertise? The radical insists that EAP courses should be offered to this group of students as compulsory courses in that professional English alone cannot make them go further in future occupation (Cai, 2017d). Desirable as the idea is, we argue that prerequisites for students’ English proficiency and motivation should be taken into consideration as these two factors are crucial for students to maximize the benefits from EAP courses. Therefore, further research is needed on the necessity and applicability of EAP courses in higher vocational colleges. Second, it remains questionable whether students’ learning of EAP courses upon entering college as advocated by the radicals is more effective and efficient than traditional approach to EAP courses in which what is called “English of specialty” is offered to students in their junior and senior grade. Third, the current lack of ESP needs-analysis indeed poses significant problems for the design for ESP courses to prepare students for their future demands (Xu & Fan, 2017). According to a small survey conducted in the university where the first author was employed, students in the “experimental class” who received ESP instruction upon entry into university, actually preferred more EGP contents for fear of being unable to obtain good scores in the entrance examination for postgraduates they might sit for several years later (Yu & Liu, 2018b). Moreover, governments’ awareness of the pressing need to adjust curriculum might not be sufficient to guarantee the implementation of ESP-guided CET reform without stakeholder participation, in this case, university administration. It was found that the ideology of administration at university level was crucial for the initiation of reform, as the stakeholder decides whether they would be willing to give financial and management support (Yu & Liu, 2018a). In addition, mere change of teaching orientation and contents might not be a magic cure-all for problems persisting in CET, without concomitant transformation of other decisive factors such as teaching approach, assessment methods and most importantly, overall quality of English teachers (Wen, 2014). And there is no empirical research showing that increased intensity and density of EAP-oriented courses necessarily leads to proportionate outcomes in cultivating students’ “academic foreign language competence”⁷ (Snow & Uccelli, 2009), especially when professional standard of CE teachers might not be sufficient to meet the requirements of teaching EAP (Borg & Liu, 2013). In a word, without proper solution to the questions of “how to teach” and “who is to teach”, the new round of reform is likely to run the risk of “taking the old road while wearing new shoes” (Wen, 2014: 3). Since the goal of language teaching is not to

⁷ According to Snow and Uccelli (2009), academic foreign language competence includes linguistic skills, genre mastery, reasoning/argumentative strategies and disciplinary knowledge.

reproduce native speakers but to produce L2 users, hence teaching for the situations that L2 users encounter (Cook, 2007), it is important for the government to promote stakeholder participation through comprehensible delivery of the philosophy of ESP, that is, “teach the aspects of language appropriate to the students’ anticipated uses” (Cook, 2007: 245).

The ideological change towards foregrounding the instrumental value of CE, however, has been challenged by the seemingly unassailable idea of cultivating whole persons through teaching liberal English. In fact, CET has never detached from CET-4 and CET-6 focusing on testing students’ five skills in English, as the MOE stipulated that the passing rate of CET tests be a measurement for CET quality. In practice, universities only pay lip service to improving students’ comprehensive cultural literacy as described in curricula in the context of prevailing test-oriented education in China. We argue that humanistic value and vision can be cultivated in all English classrooms whether it being EGP or ESP-based. This of course relies on English teachers’ awareness and capability of taking advantage of appropriate opportunities in daily teaching to lead students in the learning process and transform their learning experiences.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has traced the CET reform led by the revision of relevant curricula in relation to the necessity of the transforming from the traditional EGP-oriented CET to completely ESP/EAP-oriented courses. It has also evaluated the recent scholarly debates over this issue, demonstrating how China is approaching the controversy over the future of CET. The review discloses that the driving force of CE reforms in recent decades in China has been shifted to the need to promote economic development and international competitiveness from political and ideological considerations. The scholarly debates over the future of CET reviewed in the paper are indeed healthy exercises in curriculum innovation, as contrasting ideas, radical or conservative, need to be juxtaposed and evaluated to the benefit of students and the interests of the nation (Liu, 2016).

The discussion of a series of CET reforms in China shows that China has a strong desire to make a breakthrough in CET, preparing to usher in the post-CET era featuring EAP though fraught with difficulties and complications. The increasing valued status of ESP in curriculum documents and the implementation of *Shanghai Framework* reflect China’s awareness of the urgent need to produce English users who are able to “communicate with like-minded people in other parts of the world” for “professional and academic purposes” with an emphasis on “communication and information” (Widdowson, 1997: 143) when English is used as an international language in our times. Therefore, higher education institutions are expected to shift from teaching students about the English language to its practical use both in course design and in methodology. While admitting these

changes are laudable and suitable for national development, we also cautioned that, if ESP-oriented curriculum reform is to be more widely implemented in higher education in China, it should be informed by robust needs-analysis and buttressed by the training of qualified ESP teachers and university administration, as qualified ESP teachers and ideological shift of stakeholders are key to high-quality ESP courses intended by policy makers.

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XIA YU received her PhD at the University of Southampton, UK and is employed as a professor at the School of Foreign Languages, Southwest University of Political Science and Law, People's Republic of China. She is currently doing post-doc research in School of Foreign Languages, Southwest University. Her research interests include foreign language education, second language acquisition, and English for specific purposes. She has published a number of studies in journals such as *System*, *Language Learning Journal*, and *TESOL Journal*.

CHENGYU LIU is a professor of Linguistics and TEFL, supervisor of PhD students, and director of the School of Foreign Languages, Southwest University, People's Republic of China. He has published widely in and outside China in systemic functional linguistics, third language acquisition and foreign language education.