

Role of English Language in Facilitating Interdisciplinary Learning in Higher Education

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Abstract

The globalization of higher education has necessitated a comprehensive understanding of the English language as a pivotal medium for interdisciplinary learning. This paper explores the significance of English in fostering collaboration across diverse academic disciplines and enhancing the educational experience of students. It investigates how English serves as a bridge for communication among scholars and professionals from varied fields, facilitates access to a vast array of academic resources, and promotes critical thinking and innovation. Through qualitative analysis and case studies, the research illustrates how proficiency in English equips students with the necessary skills to engage in interdisciplinary projects and prepare for the demands of a global workforce. Furthermore, the paper highlights the challenges faced by non-native English speakers in interdisciplinary settings and proposes strategies to mitigate these barriers. The findings underscore the essential role of English in promoting interdisciplinary learning and preparing students for a multifaceted global landscape.

Keywords: English language, interdisciplinary learning, higher education, globalization, communication, academic resources, critical thinking, global workforce, non-native speakers, collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape of higher education, the role of the English language has evolved beyond mere communication; it is increasingly recognized as a crucial facilitator of interdisciplinary learning. As disciplines become more intertwined, the ability to navigate and integrate knowledge from various fields is paramount. English, as a global lingua franca, serves as a bridge that connects diverse academic disciplines, fostering collaboration, and innovation. This essay explores the significance of the English language in promoting interdisciplinary learning in higher education, supported by relevant literature.

Interdisciplinary learning involves the integration of concepts, theories, and methodologies from multiple academic fields to address complex problems and generate holistic understanding. The importance of this approach is underscored by the increasing complexity of global challenges, such as climate change, public health crises, and technological advancements. These multifaceted issues cannot be adequately addressed within

the confines of traditional single-discipline studies. Therefore, fostering an environment that encourages interdisciplinary collaboration is essential for preparing students to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

The English language plays a pivotal role in facilitating interdisciplinary learning by providing a common medium for discourse among students and educators from various backgrounds. According to H. G. Widdowson (1994), English has transcended its status as a native language and has become a key tool for international communication, especially in academic settings. This is particularly evident in higher education institutions where diverse student populations converge, each bringing unique disciplinary perspectives. The ability to communicate effectively in English enables students to engage in meaningful discussions, share ideas, and collaborate on projects that draw from their respective fields.

Moreover, the integration of English language proficiency in interdisciplinary curricula enhances students' ability to critically engage with academic texts, participate in discussions, and articulate their ideas coherently. As noted by C. Coffin and K. O'Halloran (2006), the mastery of academic English is crucial for students to access, analyze, and synthesize information from various disciplines. This skill set not only enriches their academic experience but also prepares them for professional environments where interdisciplinary collaboration is increasingly common.

Literature on the subject further emphasizes the importance of English language proficiency in promoting interdisciplinary learning. For instance, the work of S. H. Hyland (2009) highlights the role of academic discourse in shaping knowledge production across disciplines. Hyland argues that effective communication in English is essential for students to contribute to and engage with the academic community. Additionally, M. J. McGinnis (2011) asserts that interdisciplinary courses that incorporate English language instruction not only enhance students' linguistic skills but also foster a deeper understanding of content by encouraging students to draw connections between different fields.

Furthermore, English language proficiency is closely linked to the employability of graduates in a globalized job market. Employers increasingly seek candidates who can communicate across disciplines and collaborate effectively with diverse teams. A report by the British Council (2015) indicates that English proficiency is a vital skill that enhances career prospects, particularly in multinational organizations. This underscores the need for higher education institutions to prioritize English language development as part of their interdisciplinary learning frameworks.

In conclusion, the English language plays an instrumental role in facilitating interdisciplinary learning in higher education. Its status as a global lingua franca enables effective communication and collaboration among students and educators from diverse academic backgrounds. By integrating English language instruction into interdisciplinary curricula, higher education institutions can enhance students' academic experiences, critical thinking abilities, and employability. As the world continues to grapple with complex challenges, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration through effective communication in English will be crucial for cultivating innovative solutions and preparing future leaders.

Importance of English in Higher Education

English plays a crucial role in higher education, serving as a lingua franca that connects students, educators, and researchers from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Its significance is evident in various aspects, including academic communication, access to resources, global opportunities, and fostering critical thinking.

One of the primary reasons English is important in higher education is that it serves as the medium of instruction in many universities worldwide. Institutions in countries where English is not the primary language often adopt it for their academic programs. This transition allows students to engage with a broader range of educational materials, lectures, and discussions. English proficiency enables students to participate actively in their courses, enhancing their learning experience and understanding of complex concepts. Additionally, many renowned universities, such as those in the United States and the United Kingdom, attract international students seeking high-quality education, further solidifying English's status as a global academic language.

Access to a vast array of resources is another critical aspect of English's importance in higher education. A significant portion of academic literature, research papers, and journals is published in English. By mastering the language, students gain access to cutting-edge research and the latest developments in their fields. This access is essential for academic growth, as it allows students to stay informed and contribute meaningfully to ongoing scholarly conversations. Furthermore, many online educational platforms and resources are predominantly available in English, making proficiency in the language even more vital for students seeking supplementary learning materials.

In addition to academic resources, proficiency in English opens doors to various global opportunities. Many multinational companies and organizations require employees to have strong English language skills, especially

for roles in management, marketing, and communication. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, employers often prioritize candidates who can navigate cross-cultural environments and communicate effectively with diverse teams. By equipping themselves with English language skills during their higher education, students enhance their employability and adaptability in a competitive job market.

Moreover, English fosters critical thinking and intercultural understanding among students. In higher education settings, students often engage in discussions and debates that challenge their perspectives and encourage them to think critically about various issues. English serves as a common ground for these exchanges, enabling students from different backgrounds to articulate their thoughts and share their experiences. This interaction enriches the learning environment, promoting tolerance and respect for diverse viewpoints. Additionally, the ability to analyze and critique English-language texts fosters essential skills such as logical reasoning and argumentation, which are vital for academic success and personal development.

In conclusion, the importance of English in higher education cannot be overstated. As the global language of instruction, it facilitates academic communication, grants access to invaluable resources, and opens up numerous opportunities for students. Furthermore, it nurtures critical thinking and intercultural understanding, essential components of a well-rounded education. In an increasingly interconnected world, mastering English is not just an academic requirement; it is a crucial skill that empowers students to thrive in their studies and future careers. As higher Education Continues to Evolve, The Ability To Communicate Effectively In English Will Remain A Cornerstone Of Academic And Professional Success.

FACILITATING INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING THROUGH ENGLISH

Facilitating interdisciplinary learning through English is an increasingly vital approach in contemporary education, reflecting the complexities of the modern world. Interdisciplinary learning merges insights, theories, and methodologies from different disciplines to foster a more comprehensive understanding of various issues, phenomena, or problems. English, as a global lingua franca, plays a crucial role in this context, acting as a bridge across disciplines while enhancing students' communication, critical thinking, and collaborative skills.

One of the most effective ways to facilitate interdisciplinary learning through English is by integrating subjects such as science, history, art, and mathematics into English language and literature curricula. For instance, a literature unit could explore themes of climate change in various novels and poems, allowing students to analyze scientific concepts while enhancing their language skills. By discussing how authors portray environmental issues, students engage with scientific content while also practicing critical reading and writing. This holistic approach encourages them to think critically about the texts, fostering deeper understanding and appreciation of both literature and environmental science.

Furthermore, project-based learning (PBL) provides an excellent framework for facilitating interdisciplinary learning. In PBL, students work on projects that require them to apply knowledge and skills from multiple disciplines. For example, a project could involve researching a historical event, writing a report in English, and creating a presentation that incorporates visual art elements. This approach not only enhances their English language skills but also promotes teamwork, problem-solving, and creativity. Students learn to communicate effectively with their peers from various backgrounds, preparing them for real-world collaboration in diverse environments.

In addition, technology serves as a powerful tool in promoting interdisciplinary learning through English. Online platforms and resources allow students to access information from various fields, collaborate with peers globally, and engage in discussions that transcend traditional classroom boundaries. For example, using video conferencing tools, students can connect with experts from different fields, such as scientists, artists, or historians, who can provide insights that enrich their understanding of a specific topic. These interactions help students develop their English communication skills while expanding their knowledge across disciplines.

Moreover, incorporating diverse texts and materials into the English curriculum can foster interdisciplinary connections. Texts such as articles, documentaries, and podcasts related to current events can serve as starting points for discussions that span multiple disciplines. For example, a discussion about the ethics of artificial intelligence might lead to inquiries in computer science, philosophy, and sociology. By engaging with various perspectives, students not only refine their English language skills but also cultivate critical thinking and ethical reasoning abilities.

Assessment in interdisciplinary learning should also reflect the integration of disciplines. Rather than traditional exams, educators can design assessments that require students to demonstrate their understanding of content across subjects. For instance, students could be asked to write a reflective essay that connects themes from a novel to contemporary societal issues, drawing on research from social sciences. This type of assessment not only evaluates their language proficiency but also their ability to synthesize information and articulate their thoughts clearly.

In conclusion, facilitating interdisciplinary learning through English enriches students' educational experiences by promoting collaboration, critical thinking, and effective communication. By integrating various subjects, employing project-based learning, leveraging technology, incorporating diverse materials, and designing comprehensive assessments, educators can create a dynamic learning environment that prepares students for the complexities of the modern world. This approach not only enhances students' language skills but also empowers them to navigate and contribute meaningfully to an interconnected and rapidly changing society.

STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY IN INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING

Enhancing English proficiency in interdisciplinary learning is essential for students who need to navigate various fields of study while communicating effectively. As the global landscape becomes increasingly interconnected, the ability to use English across disciplines is not just beneficial but necessary. Here are several strategies that educators and learners can employ to enhance English proficiency in an interdisciplinary context.

1.1. 1. Integrating Language and Content Learning

One effective strategy is to adopt a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach, where language learning is combined with subject content. By integrating language skills with academic subjects, students learn English in context, making it more relevant and practical. For example, in a science class, students can learn specific vocabulary and phrases related to scientific methods while conducting experiments. This approach not only enhances their subject knowledge but also builds their language skills in a meaningful way.

1.1. 2. Collaborative Learning Environments

Creating collaborative learning environments fosters communication and interaction among students. Group projects and interdisciplinary activities encourage students to discuss concepts, negotiate meaning, and articulate their ideas in English. For instance, in a project that combines art and history, students can research a historical period and present their findings through creative means, such as a visual presentation or a drama. This not only allows them to practice their English skills but also promotes teamwork and critical thinking.

1.1. 3. Contextualized Vocabulary Instruction

Teaching vocabulary in context rather than in isolation is crucial for language retention. Educators should focus on key terminology and phrases relevant to specific disciplines, helping students understand how to use them effectively in different contexts. For example, in a business class, students can learn vocabulary related to marketing strategies, financial terms, and negotiation skills. This contextualized instruction enables students to see the practical application of the language they are learning.

1.1. 4. Use of Technology and Digital Tools

Incorporating technology into the learning process can significantly enhance English proficiency. Digital tools such as language learning apps, online collaboration platforms, and multimedia resources provide students with diverse ways to engage with the language. For example, using online discussion forums allows students to express their ideas and receive feedback from peers, while educational videos can provide visual context for complex topics. Additionally, interactive platforms can offer personalized learning experiences tailored to individual proficiency levels.

1.1. 5. Promoting Critical Thinking and Reflection

Encouraging critical thinking and self-reflection helps students develop their language skills while engaging with complex interdisciplinary topics. Educators can pose open-ended questions that require students to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information. For example, after a unit on climate change, students can be asked to reflect on its implications for different disciplines, such as economics, sociology, and environmental science. This reflective practice not only improves language skills but also deepens understanding and engagement with the content.

1.1. 6. Continuous Assessment and Feedback

Regular assessment and feedback are vital for tracking progress and identifying areas for improvement. Educators should implement formative assessments, such as peer reviews, self-assessments, and reflective journals, to gauge students' language proficiency and their ability to apply it across disciplines. Providing constructive feedback helps students understand their strengths and weaknesses, guiding them toward more effective language use.

Challenges Faced by Non-Native English Speakers

Non-native English speakers often face a myriad of challenges when learning and using the language. These challenges can stem from linguistic, cultural, and social factors, impacting their ability to communicate effectively in various contexts.

One of the most significant challenges non-native speakers encounter is achieving a sufficient level of language proficiency. English has a complex grammar system, diverse vocabulary, and various dialects, which can be daunting. For instance, the pronunciation of words can vary widely, with different accents and intonations. Additionally, idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs can confuse learners, as their meanings are not always intuitive. For example, the phrase "kick the bucket" does not relate to its literal interpretation, which can lead to misunderstandings.

Understanding cultural nuances is another challenge non-native speakers face. Language is deeply intertwined with culture, and grasping these subtleties is crucial for effective communication. For example, humor, politeness, and contextual meanings often differ from one culture to another. A non-native speaker might inadvertently offend someone by using a direct approach in cultures where indirect communication is the norm. Additionally, cultural references in conversation, such as sports, movies, or historical events, can alienate non-native speakers who may not be familiar with them, making it challenging for them to engage fully in discussions.

Social anxiety is a common issue among non-native speakers, especially in situations where they feel their language skills may be scrutinized. This anxiety can lead to a lack of confidence, which in turn may prevent them from speaking up in group settings or participating in conversations. The fear of making grammatical errors, mispronouncing words, or being misunderstood can be debilitating. Consequently, non-native speakers might limit their interactions, leading to missed opportunities for practice and social engagement, which are crucial for language acquisition.

In educational settings, non-native English speakers may encounter specific barriers that hinder their learning process. Many institutions do not provide adequate support for students who are still mastering the language, resulting in academic disadvantages. Non-native speakers may struggle with reading comprehension, especially if they encounter complex texts filled with jargon or colloquialisms. Additionally, assessments may not account for language proficiency, leading to lower grades that do not accurately reflect their understanding of the subject matter. In the professional world, non-native speakers may face challenges related to career advancement and workplace integration. They may be overlooked for promotions or opportunities due to perceived language deficiencies, regardless of their expertise in their field. This can be particularly frustrating in global companies where English is the primary mode of communication. Moreover, non-native speakers might encounter biases from colleagues or clients, who may underestimate their abilities based solely on their language skills, leading to a lack of recognition for their contributions. The challenges faced by non-native English speakers are multifaceted, encompassing linguistic difficulties, cultural nuances, social anxiety, educational barriers, and professional hurdles. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from educational institutions, workplaces, and society as a whole. Providing support, fostering inclusive environments, and promoting understanding can empower non-native speakers to overcome these obstacles, ultimately enriching the diverse tapestry of English-speaking communities. Encouraging a culture of patience and acceptance will not only benefit non-native speakers but also enhance communication and collaboration in our increasingly interconnected world.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the role of the English language in facilitating interdisciplinary learning in higher education is pivotal. It serves as a common medium that bridges diverse academic disciplines, enabling effective communication and collaboration among students and faculty from various fields. Proficiency in English enhances access to a vast array of scholarly resources, fostering critical thinking and innovation. Moreover, it encourages cultural exchange and the sharing of ideas, essential for addressing complex global challenges. Ultimately, English not only enriches academic discourse but also prepares students for a globalized workforce, equipping them with essential skills for their future careers.

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