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Research Article

A PERSPECTIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

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ABSTRACT

EAP - English for Academic Purposes - refers to the language and associated practices that people need in order to undertake study or work in English medium higher education. The objective of an EAP course, then, is to help these people learn some of the linguistic and cultural – mainly institutional and disciplinary - practices involved in studying or working through the medium of English.

English for academic purposes (EAP) has emerged out of the broader field of English for specific purposes (ESP), defined by its focus on teaching English specifically to facilitate learners' study or research through the medium of English. Initially EAP was taught for the academic success of the overseas students at universities in some Anglophone countries. Nowadays, with the internationalization of higher education, many countries where English is used as the second or a foreign language are aware of the importance of EAP and start to integrate EAP courses at their universities.

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INTRODUCTION

EAP - English for Academic Purposes - refers to the language and associated practices that people need in order to undertake study or work in English medium higher education. The objective of an EAP course, then, is to help these people learn some of the linguistic and cultural – mainly institutional and disciplinary - practices involved in studying or working through the medium of English.

EAP is often considered to be a branch of English Language Teaching (ELT), although not all EAP teachers have come through the ELT route. It is a type of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) - along with English for Professional Purposes (EPP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) - in that the teaching content is explicitly matched to the language, practices and study needs of the learners.

English has become the international language for people to interact with each other in their social life, academic context, and workplace. English for academic purposes (EAP) has emerged out of the broader field of English for specific purposes (ESP), defined by its focus on teaching English specifically to facilitate learners' study or research through the medium of English. Hyland defined EAP as a "specialized English language teaching grounded in the social, cognitive and linguistics demands of academic target situations, providing focused instruction informed by an understanding of

texts and constraints of academic contexts." Recently, Hadley described EAP as "tertiary level English instructional training that enables learners to improve their language proficiency within higher educational institutions, irrespective of the country within which that instruction takes place."

Initially EAP was taught for the academic success of the overseas students at universities in some Anglophone countries. Nowadays, with the internationalization of higher education, many countries where English is used as the second or a foreign language are aware of the importance of EAP and start to integrate EAP courses at their universities.

For EAP learners, language proficiency is no doubt the biggest challenge. It is identified that, the inadequate study skills and deficit in digital literacy are two major challenges that the EAP learners are faced with. However, they have not got the deserved attention from the curriculum developer or instructor.

Inadequate study skills

Adequate study skills are especially critical for school success. Today study skills tutorials or workshops are also offered at universities to prepare both indigenous and overseas students ready for university. The inclusion of study skills is essential as part of EAP courses offered in the countries. Jordan lists the study skills required in EAP programs: listening to lectures, talks/seminars, participating in tutorials and discussions, working under supervisions, conducting practical, laboratory

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work, fieldwork and private study, reading reference material, etc. With adequate study skills learners become more independent and have higher learner autonomy so as to be more likely to be successful academically. The oral classroom activities like the classroom presentation, group discussion and even raising questions that are often used in the EAP classrooms has become demanding for the students.

The instruction of study skills is an indispensable part of EAP for all the learners. It improves the learner autonomy, which will subsequently promote the learner efficiency. Some research has started to identify the importance of study skills in the process of learning. However, the integration of study skills training in the EAP course still needs to be carefully planned. What study skills are most needed for a particular group of learners? What methods will be applied for that particular group? Those questions should be addressed when an institution start to implement its EAP courses.

Digital deficit

In a world where technology is developing at a very rapid speed, language and language teaching has also been greatly influenced by technology. Walker states that digital technologies are becoming part of the way that people communicate and part of the context in which language is used. Simpson and Obdaloargue argue for the inclusion of systematic development of digital literacies within the EAP curriculum.

On the one hand, technology-based skills provide learners more opportunities to exercise their learner autonomy in their learning process. With higher learner autonomy EAP learners will have better performance. On the other hand, in the modern academic context, learners should be digital literate to be successful at universities. However, it is pointed out that there is a gap between the learners' technology-based skills and what is expected of them. Therefore, it is proposed that the EAP curriculum developer and instructors should integrate adequate technology-based skills into the EAP courses.

The most problematic use of English in higher education is probably writing. Writing tasks vary from writing short answers in examinations to writing essays, reports, dissertations, theses, journal articles and maybe monographs and textbooks. EAP courses usually pay attention to the process of writing - planning, organizing, presenting, re-writing, and proof-reading. Typical writing skills include research and using sources, writing different text types as well as different genres, and using an appropriate style with a degree of accuracy. Nowadays, there is usually a focus on summarizing, citation and referencing in order to avoid plagiarism. Students, for example, also need to do a large amount of reading, listening and note-taking. This must be done flexibly and involves surveying the text, skimming for gist or general impression, scanning to locate specifically required information as well as intensive study of specific sections of the text. Listening involves following a lecture or discussion, which means recognizing lecture organization and extracting relevant points to summarize. In both reading and listening, language skills such as understanding important points, distinguishing the main ideas from supporting detail, recognizing unsupported claims and claims supported by evidence and following an argument are essential as are recognizing known words and deducing the meaning of unfamiliar words and word groups from the

context. Speaking is becoming increasingly important as teaching methods change to involve more group work. Making presentations involves producing and using notes, planning and presenting. Discussion includes interrupting politely, asking questions, agreeing and disagreeing. More recently, in addition, use of on-line discussion facilities of VLEs (Virtual Learning Environments) is becoming important (Gillett & Weetman).

Knowledge of language

More importantly, as well as teaching these language skills, knowledge of the language that is used in these skills in the students' specific subject areas is necessary and forms an essential component of EAP courses. EAP teachers normally believe that explicit knowledge of this language can be helpful. Recent research has provided us with useful data on academic language, both grammatical (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad & Finegan) and lexical (Coxhead). This includes knowledge of different text types (oral and written) and features of different genres, linking words, signposting expressions, and appropriate style. Students also need knowledge of various strategies that they can use in comprehending written and oral texts and producing essays and oral presentations. As examinations and other forms of assessment are so important, knowledge of the format and language of exam questions is also necessary.

Culture and intercultural awareness

The culture where the language is used in EAP is higher education, usually, but not necessarily, in an English speaking country. Therefore, knowledge of the academic culture is necessarily part of an EAP course and students and other learners need to be aware of differences between their own academic cultures and the culture where they are studying. Writing conventions, such as organization and use of sources, for example, can vary from country to country. Students in the UK, for example, need to develop a willingness to accept responsibility for their own learning and to be reflective and critical. Other areas of difficulty include use of names between lecturers and students, how and when to ask questions and how to deal with lateness and privacy. As well as knowledge of the higher education culture in the UK, there are subject specific cultures that students and lecturers need to be aware of. This applies to all students, not just students from other countries. Bourdieu's point that no-one speaks (or writes) academic English as a first language, therefore everyone needs to learn it (Bourdieu & Passeron) is often quoted in this respect.

CONCLUSION

As the main objective of EAP courses is to teach the language, both general academic language and subject specific language as well as language related practices such as summarizing and writing introductions. The language of the learners' academic subject and language related study skills will form the main component of the EAP skills classes. It is advisable to provide EAP instructors with progressive training of the subject area knowledge relevant to their teaching and the EAP theories and pedagogy fundamental to the EAP course delivery. The collaboration between general English instructors and subject content instructors is proposed to be a way to improve the EAP delivery quality.

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