Material matters: The case for English for Academic Purposes as subject matter of university language courses

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Abstract

This study investigated undergraduate preparation of English as a Second Language (ESL) students through *English for Academic Purposes* courses, in relation to recipient subject lecturers' expectations. Qualitative data were gathered from 36 faculty teaching ESL undergraduates in nine countries. A two-phase approach included seeking discursive responses to questionnaires from faculty and information about curricula. Outcomes highlighted difficulties with material selection for EAP tutors. Tutors chose between 'general interest' or 'discipline-specific' material, but reported that the former could lead to oversimplification or discipline irrelevance, while the latter usually requires some specialized subject knowledge which may be beyond tutors' remit. Addressing this, it is suggested that articles about EAP-related topics can form the subject matter of EAP courses with significant benefits. In particular, they can simultaneously provide students with models of academic writing, while the content reinforces skills needed for successful study.

Introduction

Education, as it progresses from primary through secondary to higher levels, becomes increasingly specialized, so that students who continue their studies at higher levels do so within disciplines such as medicine, engineering, law, agriculture, social sciences, and so forth. These disciplines influence students' communication needs, and in the case of ESL students improving their communication skills through classes in *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP) and the related field of *English for Academic Purposes* (EAP), decisions must be taken with regard to the content of the texts provided for study in these classes. The question arises: to what extent should these texts be drawn from the student's discipline? How discipline-specific do the materials need to be, and what is meant by the term 'discipline-specific'?

Discipline specificity, and the degree to which language tutors and programs should accommodate it, has been at the heart of much recent research and debate in the related fields of EAP and ESP (Spack, 1988; Gaffield-Vile, 1996; Hyland, 2002; Pulverness, 2002). This paper reports on the outcomes of research which suggests that practitioners in EAP continue to experience difficulties in relation to the degree of discipline specificity of their teaching materials. Prompted by this situation, a change in practice at one institution, involving the use of EAP-related materials, is described. It is suggested that the deployment of EAP-related materials can address many of the problems identified in the research while also accounting for the transitional status of pre-sessional and early in-sessional students here in the Arabian Gulf region, and elsewhere.

The research investigated the practice and expectations of faculty employed in tertiary institutions in relation to ESL students. The research questions were:

- What skills do lecturers in various disciplines expect first year university students to have, and why do they expect them to have these skills?
- What skills do EAP tutors teach, and why do they think that these skills are important?'

The faculty at the centre of the study fell into two groups: those teaching English for Academic/Specific Purposes (EA/SP) and those teaching different subjects in disciplines that included humanities and science. Specifically, the research set out to investigate tutors' practice vis-à-vis lecturers' expectations of their ESL students. Qualitative methods sought data on the views of faculty and included questionnaires sent to both groups.

Several outcomes related to the 'carrier' content of EAP/ESP courses, that is, the material that forms the object of study. The choice was found to lie between using 'general interest' or cross-curricular material about topics such as global warming (generally felt to be the only option in the case of discipline-heterogeneous classes) or using 'discipline-specific' material (considered suitable in the case of more discipline-homogeneous classes). In a primarily 'general interest' approach, the research identified several difficulties including sustaining student motivation when topics are perceived to lack discipline relevance; while in a more 'discipline-specific' approach, tutors felt that lack of subject knowledge meant that they were unable to deal with the topic in sufficient depth in relation to their students' capabilities, a difficulty that has been observed by others in the field (e.g. Spack, 1988).

In response to these and other issues that are detailed below, a change in practice was introduced on an EAP course involving the use of articles drawn from the field of EAP. For several reasons, it is suggested that this is a readily-implemented and rational response to the problem of identifying meaningful carrier content, of likely interest to anyone involved in teaching EAP.

Review of Related Literature

Communicating for specific purposes

'English for Specific Purposes' (ESP), with its focus on the specific purposes and needs of the learners, is an umbrella term that encompasses both English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) (Dudley-Evans, 2001). While the term 'EAP' clearly relates to the language and skills ESL students need in order to study through the medium of English, 'EOP' is used in situations where students study English for work-related reasons, of which 'Business English' is currently a noteworthy example.

EAP/ESP pedagogy differs from general English language pedagogy primarily owing to differences between their starting points. While the starting point in the general English classroom will often be language, in the EAP/ESP classroom it is more likely to be the students and their communication needs (Hamp-Lyons, 2001; Dudley-Evans, 2001). This situation arises in part because ESP and EAP students have more specific and identifiable needs than those attending general English classes, making possible a narrower, more clearly defined, pedagogic focus. These needs are specific to the extent that they are informed by the communicative competence considered sufficient for ESL students to function within their target academic community. Dudley-Evans (2001: 132) makes a further distinction, citing Blue (1988) and noting the distinction between English for *General Academic* Purposes, or EGAP, which is "designed for pre-study groups, or groups that are heterogeneous with regard to discipline" and English for *Specific Academic* Purposes, or ESAP , which is "designed to meet the specific needs of a group from the same discipline."

Reviews of current practice in the field of EAP (e.g. O'Loughlin, 2002; Cook, 2003; Burnapp, 2006) suggest that another key difference between general English language pedagogy and EAP is the recognition within EAP pedagogy that 'communicative competence' transcends language skills. 'Communicative competence' in this context includes the need for students to apply and develop their skills through involvement in relevant and authentic academic contexts, and to engage in a process of acculturation towards a degree of 'social and academic integration' (Beder, 1997; Cooper et al, 2006) adequate for survival within the target academic culture. Acculturation may be achieved in part by the development of appropriate behaviours, attitudes and strategies (Acton, 2003), including an increasing awareness of learning processes through reflective and metacognitive skills.

Cooper et al (2006) emphasize the need for EAP students to develop and practice the skills they require through involvement in the academic community. They note that it may be helpful to view EAP students as "participants in a 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998), as learning is a social activity that takes place within such a community." This observation is supported by the approach described below, which was found to foster action enquiry within both the transitional and target communities of practice.

Other studies have sought to compare the practice of EAP tutors with subject-lecturers' expectations. Ferris and Tagg (1996), for example, examined the expectations of subject lecturers in relation to their ESL students' oral and aural skills, while Kehe and Kehe (1996) investigated the preparation of ESL students in Japan intending to study in the U.S. In both cases, however, the focus was on ESL students studying their disciplines of choice in the U.S., while the research reported here investigated the preparation of ESL students studying at English-medium institutions in several international contexts.

Materials matters: discipline-heterogeneous groups

A review of published coursebooks suggests that many that focus on EAP are skills-oriented, emphasizing those skills that all students are likely to need regardless of their target discipline (e.g. Glendinning and Holmstrong, 1992; Jordan, 1997; Bell, 1998; Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998). The four language skill areas may be addressed in combination or, perhaps more commonly, discretely, as Hamp-Lyons notes: "EAP courses also typically focus attention on the language skills separately: the 'rules' and strategies of academic skills are not like those of general language skills [….]." (2001: 129). This observation was supported by the research reported here, but was criticized for reasons described below.

Skills-oriented course books may be particularly suitable when classes consist of students of various disciplines, that is, discipline-heterogeneous groups. The topics selected for reading and study purposes, for example, are often general or cross-curricular, to ensure a broad appeal. This is the approach taken with a course book found to be in widespread use in the research, Jordan's (1999) 'Academic Writing Course: Study Skills in English'. This text includes articles on topics such as the manufacture of paper and breakfast cereal, and the physical description of Australia.

A few courses reported on and aimed at discipline-heterogeneous groups did not, however, use published materials, relying instead upon materials developed in-house. It was found that the media frequently offered a rich source of materials in these cases. Examples of topics included often related to social issues such as global warming or animal welfare.

However, it has been pointed out that the use of general interest topics can lead to a situation in which the content fails to be of interest to students in itself, being seen instead simply as a prompt to communicate. Such topics, particularly in cases where the material has lost its authenticity through simplification or abridgment, may also lead to the alienation of students with greater subject knowledge

than that reflected in the text (Pulverness, 2002). These and other issues arising from a 'general interest' approach, are discussed below.

Materials matters: discipline-homogeneous groups

ESP courses, however, being discipline-homogenous, that is, oriented more towards a specific discipline with groups of students of the same or closely related disciplines, tend to rely to a far greater extent upon discipline-specific materials, many of which are developed in-house (Dudley-Evans, 2001: 135) in order to ensure that the needs of a specific, local community are addressed. There are consequently comparatively few published materials that may be described as belonging to the field of ESP, although some areas, most notably Business English, have generated many course books that rely upon business topics and texts (e.g. Cotton et al's (2001) *Market Leader* series). Hyland (2002) notes that a discipline-specific approach offers a number of benefits, as different disciplines have different views of knowledge, research practices, and ways of seeing the world. These distinct discourses, Hyland argues, need to be reflected in ESP materials, to enable students to engage effectively with their target disciplines.

However, it has been noted (e.g. Clapham, 2001) that even where classes were organized according to discipline, students of one sub-discipline may not be interested in reading material drawn from another sub-discipline (for example, students of one branch of engineering, such as mechanical, may have little interest in petroleum engineering; likewise students of Business English specializing, or intending to specialize, in human resource management may be less interested in reading about marketing or finance). It appears to be the case that the issue of specificity – and how specific to become – is one that cannot be avoided, regardless of the apparent homogeneity of class composition (Pulverness, 2002).

Materials: towards alternatives

Partly in response to such issues, others (for example Gaffield-Vile, 1996: 108) have suggested an "integrated EAP/subject content course" in which sociology (Gaffield-Vile's example) is used as 'carrier' content source on the grounds that it is interdisciplinary and more likely to help students adjust to the new culture of an English-speaking country, assuming that students are heading to such a context. This proposal is a useful one in that the topic, being interdisciplinary, may have wider appeal to students. The proposal presented here may be seen as a development of this idea.

Research Base

Qualitative design

The desired outcome of the research was a deeper understanding of the practices, experiences, and perspectives of those teaching ESL students in a variety of contexts. As such the study was not considered to be a suitable target for the application of a classical logical positivist approach. Instead, it called for a focus on the nature and the quality of the data, requiring an "interpretive science in search of meaning, not an experimental science in search of laws" (Geertz, 1973: 5). In qualitative approaches to an enquiry, the focus is on interpreting data rather than quantifying it, and the research calls for a holistic, rather than atomistic, description. There is therefore less call for the identification, analysis, or quantification of variables. The research is experience-based with emerging emic themes rather than being guided by predetermined etic themes or outcomes (see for example Patton, 1987; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Thus, the approach is inductive, with theory being generated during the course of the study.

Participants

In order to answer the research questions, a two-phase qualitative, or subjective, research design was applied. Phase one involved identifying potential participants, carried out through a process termed "generative networking" (Brandt, 2004: 389 - 399), similar to 'snowball sampling' (a technique for developing a respondent base where existing respondents identify further potential participants from among their colleagues and acquaintances) but differing slightly from it in its reliance upon email as the medium of communication. A key feature of this process is the involvement of participants in making contact with further participants, which helps both with establishing rapport and with encouraging them to respond. The method was taken to its third degree; that is, first-level participants identified second-level participants, who in turn identified third-level participants. A response rate of 42.86% led to the receipt of 36 completed questionnaires (16 from subject lecturers and 20 from EAP tutors), referring to 24 different courses in nine tertiary institutions in countries that included Indonesia, Australia, Bahrain, the UAE and the UK. The response rate was considered acceptable given that the pilot study had suggested that participants would need between 25 to 45 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Research instrument

The first phase of the research involved the preparation and administration of questionnaires developed specifically for this project. Open-ended questions were designed in order to provide data which would supply insights into the practices and experiences of EAP tutors and subject lecturers. The first section was aimed at gathering information about the individual, the institution where he or she worked and the course or courses that he or she taught, or had taught in the five years prior to participation in the research. In the second section, all faculty were asked to respond to open-ended questions and to relate their responses to the needs of students who had achieved, or were considered capable of achieving, an IELTS score of five or above. Thirty-five questions were organized into five sections: 'your students', 'your course', 'your teaching practice', 'your materials' and a set of questions that related to the respondent's previous experience. Examples of questions from the section 'your students' include:

1. EAP/ESP is characterized by an emphasis on students' needs and purposes. How are your students' needs identified at your institution, and who is involved in the process?

2. Generally speaking, at the end of your course, what do you consider to be your students' strengths and weaknesses in relation to the skills they need to study their chosen discipline?

In questions in the section 'your course' included:

1. Which aspect of your course do you consider to be most successful in terms of addressing your students' needs, and why?

2. What do lecturers who receive your students say about your course? What is their attitude towards it?

A pilot study was conducted with experienced researchers and faculty in order to pre-test the instrument (Baker, 1994) and to establish the internal validity of the questionnaire. The validity of the interpretations made of the data was also tested through phase two of the research design, outlined below.

Analysis

Participants had been asked to respond discursively and so qualitative techniques were employed to analyze these data. Initially two data books were created, one for each faculty group, and data were

entered by collating all responses to the same question, then searching for themes within the collated responses. Themes were then coded to facilitate subsequent identification of patterns (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Once this process had been completed and all data had been entered, it was possible to reorganize them according to the identified themes, enabling the identification of consistencies or differences within the data.

In phase two, a small number of faculty who had not participated in the first phase were invited to comment upon the preliminary findings. The purpose of this stage was to verify the preliminary outcomes by enabling, where analysis of these new data suggested it was necessary, the rejection, modification, or supplementation of the emerging issues, analyzed through a similar process to that employed in phase one.

Results

Twenty-five final outcomes were labeled 'critical issues' after completion of phase two and are likely to be of interest to anyone involved in the design of EAP courses. These issues were organized into seven themes plus a collection of miscellaneous issues for the purposes of discussion:

1. Oral communication skills development
2. Discipline specificity
3. Reading and writing skills development
4. Research skills development
5. Assessed team work
6. Transition to tertiary academic culture
7. Academic language
8. Miscellaneous issues

Seven issues that relate to the development of students' oral communication skills are discussed in Brandt (forthcoming). Six issues are considered under the theme of 'discipline specificity' in this paper.

Critical Issues for the Design and Content of EAP Courses

Four issues are considered central to this paper:

1. The suitability of general interest 'carrier' content.

The use of so-called general interest materials was heavily criticized in the data for reasons that may be summarized as follows:

a) Little obvious relevance to students' disciplines in some cases.

b) Lack of interest to students, exacerbated by (c) below.

c) The rationale for their use is not always made clear to students, who may fail to understand why they are reading about the manufacture of glass bottles, for example, when they have registered to study psychology or law.

d) Material was sometimes no more challenging than late secondary level.

e) Some 'social issue' topics (e.g. vivisection, abortion) were felt to reflect dilemmas specific to particular contexts which were of less concern and relevance in other contexts.

f) The media were cited as common sources of materials for teaching both EAP and ESP; however it was noted that articles from the internet or newspapers, for example, tended to be 'journalistic' and as such did not represent examples of academic writing.

2. The suitability of discipline-specific 'carrier' content.

Several tutors felt that they had been inadequately prepared for the task of teaching ESP. ESP seemed to be something that many tutors "fell into because of circumstance" (informant) or were asked to do because of secondary school qualifications. Perhaps consequently, a number of tutors felt uncertain about their focus. One noted that

> …they [students] often know the subject better than I do […]. It can be embarrassing and it often means I can't push them in the way I could if I was sure of my ground [.....] and sometimes I don't know what to focus on – is it the language? Is it the concepts? They often seemed intertwined. (Mary, Bahrain).

Mary identifies a tension between language and content, and wonders where her emphasis should lie. Pennycook (1994: 17) has suggested that this problem is underpinned by the belief that language and content can exist independently of one another. He suggests that, rather than being simply a "medium through which meanings are expressed", language in fact

> … itself has meaning, […] it is not simply a medium through which meanings based on some sense of objective reality or personal intention pass […] it may play a fundamental role in how we make sense of the world and how the world makes sense of us. (Pennycook, 1994: 17).

This strongly suggests that language cannot be taught as if it were an independent reality or devoid of meaning. It may be further argued that language skills cannot constructively be taught independently of one another. As Mary noted, language and content are "intertwined"; reading and writing, for example, complementing each other as they do, are likewise intertwined.

A third issue identified in the data is concerned with the idea that disciplines are themselves homogeneous. A number of tutors reported teaching groups of students organized according to discipline, but discovering that the students' interests in fact varied according to their elected sub-disciplines. This prompted one tutor to observe that "ultimately, if you take into account students' interests and electives, you need to prepare different material for each individual." Specificity, taken to its logical conclusion, means individualized materials and programs.

3. The lack of identity of EAP as a subject.

Tutors and lecturers alike observed that there was a status and credibility issue with EAP/ESP, which was "often demoted to a background service provided to enhance the greater good but [….] not entirely necessary." It was felt to be "not a proper subject" but often seen as a "scaffolding for *real* subjects like science." [Italics in original]. It seems that the role is poorly understood by those teaching other areas, and tutors reported having in some cases to explain and justify their existence at institutional levels. The problem may be exacerbated by the current options for sources of material, which lie between on the one hand materials that are of general interest but which may as a result suffer from the problem of "*futility:* [because] the content has little pedagogical rationale beyond serving as a medium for language learning" (Pennycook, 1994: 13, italics in original), and on the other hand materials that must be 'hijacked' from other disciplines.

4. The institutional need to respond to students who wish to change discipline after having taken a discipline-specific course.

In institutions which offered ESP courses at pre-sessional level, it was noted that difficulties were created for students wishing to change discipline, having completed an ESP course or courses. For example, in one institution students were required to take a course in *English for Law*, *English for Engineering* or similar, depending upon their target discipline. However, the question arises: what should the institution do with students who successfully complete English for one discipline but subsequently wish to transfer to another? To what extent does a course in, for example, "English for Law" assist the student who subsequently transfers to a science degree?

Two further issues are also of interest here though perhaps of less direct relevance to the theme of discipline-specificity:

5. The need to integrate the development of reading and writing skills.

Of the 24 courses referred to in the data, eight took a 'discrete' skills approach at least some of the time, that is, individual language skills (reading, listening, etc) were treated separately in the form of classes or complete courses with titles such as "Academic Reading". Tutors felt that this could lead to a "fragmentation of language and lost teaching opportunities". Several tutors reported a preference to teach reading and writing combined, and speaking and listening combined. This fragmentation may have contributed towards critical issue 6 below, in which tutors distinguished between the study of language for its own sake and the use of language for communication, a division that echoes the language/content split described and challenged by Pennycook (1994: 13). This situation draws into question the viability and validity of attempting to teach reading divorced from writing, or speaking divorced from listening.

6. The need for students to 'operationalize' English rather than 'examine it as an isolated entity or entities'.

Faculty involved in teaching or receiving ESL students felt strongly that at this level and context students did not need to study language *per se* but needed instead to apply it in situations through which they could develop and practice academic skills, including those related to research and writing about that research. However, if EAP students are to conduct even small-scale research, what can they most usefully investigate? Clearly, the options available to them from general interest topics or from within their own disciplines may suffer from a number of the criticisms identified above.

Reflecting upon these students, however, it is possible to see that they themselves, their teaching and learning in particular, could self-reflexively become their own object of study, actively inquiring into their own contexts and their roles and responses within them. A number of areas suggest themselves for this. The students are, for example, in transition, an area that is well documented (see Yan and Peat, 2004, for example); their teaching and learning is at the heart of many debates, including the issues of what language and skills they need, what content should be used, how people learn and study, as well as topics such as critical thinking, plagiarism, teamwork, presentation skills, and student autonomy. What would be the impact therefore, of asking EAP/ESP students to read articles on such topics, which serve to define EAP/ESP as an academic field, and to conduct research into such areas? This question informed the change in practice that is described next.

Changing practice

The study derived from the preliminary research was conducted at a national university in South-East Asia during semester 2, 2005 – 2006. English is the medium of instruction at this university and students took core courses in communication, normally tailored to their broad disciplines, during the first and second years of a four year program. All students participating achieved an IELTS score of five or above during this semester, a prerequisite to proceeding with their degrees.

The study focused on 20 students taking 'English for Business 4'. Students were studying a range of subjects related to business studies. The course ran for 3 hours per week for 14 weeks. Aims focused on the development of academic reading, writing and speaking, and assessment was achieved through course work and a final examination. Course work required students to work in teams to carry out small-scale research projects related to their topic. Students were instructed to choose a topic from within the field of EAP or language learning: topics selected included study skills and information literacy. Having identified research questions, students were required to carry out small-scale literature reviews, construct questionnaires to elicit data, collate and analyze results, write a report and present their results.

EAP-related materials

The use of EAP-related materials represented a significant departure for these students who had previously developed their skills through texts such as Jordan's (1999) 'Academic Writing Course' (semester 1), and Cotton, Falvey and Kent's (2001) 'Market Leader' series (semesters 2 and 3). These students, at the end of their fourth semester, had therefore experienced three approaches to material selection: general interest (represented by Jordan's 'Academic Writing Course'); discipline-specific (represented by Cotton et al's 'Market Leader') and EAP-related materials. Clearly, the opportunity for feedback on the three experiences was presented, and students were asked: which did you prefer, and why?

All 20 students broadly preferred the EAP-related approach. Many reasons were given, including

"It was interesting to research ourselves and other students. I didn't think before that we were interesting [enough] for this. [….] I liked doing projects that no one had done already."

"We get enough business stuff on our other courses. It was good to have a change."

"I enjoyed reading about the reasons why we'd been learning some of the things you taught us to do."

When asked if they would have preferred to have studied EAP-related topics during all four semesters, all responded affirmatively but six qualified their response by adding that they would have liked a combination of EAP-related materials and business-related materials, with, in two cases, an emphasis on the former. No one expressed an interest in a course based upon general interest topics.

Discussion

An EAP-related approach can address the issues above and offer a number of advantages to all participants in the process, that is, students, tutors, lecturers, and the institutions in which they work, by providing relevant content. These benefits, and the issues they address, are shown in table 1 below.

One of the main benefits of using EAP-related materials is their ability to reinforce through their content the skills that students are developing at this stage in their academic lives, and to provide the opportunity for enquiry in and through action. Critically, the approach can allow students to read, reflect

upon, research and write about their own current experiences and contexts, thereby foregrounding and privileging these students' transitional status. Authenticity, originality, relevance and immediacy of topic are ensured through a focus which is more on responding to the content of texts, developing self-awareness, on learning about and understanding their own experience and contexts, and successfully communicating this to others, than on aspects of language in relation to arbitrarily selected general interest content or discipline-specific content which may nevertheless lack relevance to students or be beyond the brief or expertise of their EAP tutors. In this approach, language and content are seen as inseparable; by reading, researching and writing, students are actively engaging with academic texts, thereby 'operationalizing' the language for an entirely valid and meaningful purpose. Tutors, under less pressure to acquire discipline-specific knowledge, can concentrate on their own subject and engage democratically with their own students in researching their own subject area. Students can find themselves actively and democratically engaged in contributing to knowledge within their subject, a subject that should not be viewed as theirs temporarily, but as a necessary aspect of all stages of their student lives. In this approach, the emphasis is shifted from 'students as language learners' to 'students as researchers' involved in investigation into their own contexts.

Issue: **Benefits of using EAP as subject matter for:**	**1. Suitability of 'general interest' carrier content**	**2. Suitability of discipline-specific 'carrier' content**	**3. Identity of EAP as a subject**
Students	Students can be provided with good examples of academic writing of different genres about relevant, appropriate topics. Students' status and confidence are enhanced, as they are able to participate actively in their current field of EAP. Ideas for original research will emerge.	Students taught by tutors who are recognized as specialists and experts in their field: tutor credibility is improved.	Students see EAP as an established, research-worthy, field. They read articles about that field, which reinforces the skills required for scholarship and the workplace.
EAP Tutors	Tutors are teaching their own subject. Opportunities to learn about own field are enhanced as tutors are working with materials about EAP. Ideas for original research will emerge as a matter of course through collaboration with students	Minimal need for tutors to undergo discipline-specific training.	Tutors recognized as experts in their field.
Subject Lecturers	Status and credibility of colleague-tutors enhanced as they are seen to be teaching their own subject.	Status and credibility of colleague-tutors enhanced as they become identified with a recognized subject	Field of EAP more clearly established and defined in the eyes of those involved in other disciplines. Status and credibility enhanced.
Institutions	Enhanced institutional credibility as EAP moves from status of outsider to fully-	Less need to provide specific discipline-related training for tutors.	Field of EAP clearly established and defined within the institution; less need for

	fledged research-worthy subject.		departments to spend time explaining or justifying themselves.

Table 1: Addressing issues 1-3: The benefits of using EAP as subject matter of EAP courses.

The other three issues are addressed as follows:

4. Students transferring to another discipline: Students take a transferable, predominantly EAP-related course: transfer problems are eliminated.

5. Separation of skill areas: Reading and writing can constructively be addressed together in EAP-related approach.

6. Need to 'operationalize' students' existing language proficiency: An action enquiry approach allows students to read, reflect upon, research and write about their own current experiences and contexts. Relevance, authenticity, originality and immediacy of topic guaranteed. Focus is on developing self-awareness, on learning about and understanding own experience and contexts, and successfully communicating this to others.

Another significant benefit lies in the potential for enhanced status and credibility that the subject of EAP could acquire. The current perception of the field, as a support service reliant upon 'hijacking' others' material, could shift towards an understanding of EAP as a recognizable, well-defined subject in its own right, with its own concepts, arguments, issues, and body of research.

Conclusion

While the use of EAP as subject matter on EAP courses could go a considerable way towards addressing the issues raised by the research, it is not suggested that discipline-related materials be entirely abandoned. Rather, it would be possible and constructive to complement EAP-related materials (which, following student-centred principles could be student-sourced) with discipline-specific material, by focusing on the genre of article being studied, in recognition of the fact that

> … the academic language needs of our students are closely related to the purposes of the disciplines they are being inducted into. That is, different disciplines foreground different types of language – in terms of genre, grammar and lexis. (Cullip and Carol, 2002)

The desirability of using student-sourced material related to their specific disciplines has been raised by several writers, such as Dudley-Evans and St John (1999), and more recently by Pulverness, who noted that

> At certain points it will no doubt be necessary to […] give students the opportunity to deal with text functions which are more subject-specific, such as describing technical process, for example. However, given the difficulty of identifying the right materials, the best source for such texts may well be the students themselves, if they can provide examples [of] journal articles […] which they have actually had to tackle – or will do so – in the course of their studies. (Pulverness, 2002)

In the EAP-related approach complemented by student-sourced discipline-specific materials that is proposed here, students could learn about issues such as needs, purposes, genre, and so forth, and then relate these understandings to their own disciplines, providing them with an opportunity to see how their own discipline "foregrounds different types of language".

Within such an approach there need be no limit to the number of disciplines represented in each class; indeed a variety could be seen as an advantage as students seek to explain their articles to others

outside their intended field, including their tutors. For example, if students read an article that introduces EAP, they could be asked to locate a comparable article in relation to their own discipline – that is, one written as an introduction to the field. Likewise with abstracts (medical students could read an EAP-related abstract and then locate a medicine-related abstract e.g. Anderson et al, 2001; Hospers et al, 2007); with conference proceedings, with full journal articles, or with book reviews. Why should EAP students, for example, not read this paper? This paragraph scores a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of 12.4, suggesting it is readable by high school graduates, and it presents a number of ideas and issues that offer opportunities for discussion and further research that could be conducted by students.

This approach enables us to introduce the student to different academic genres at a stage when this is most needed. This material can offer opportunities for linguistic analysis and original exploitation within a context that is of immediate relevance to all ESL students studying at English-medium institutions, acknowledging their transitional status.

It may be worthwhile to consider the approach described above from an EFL perspective, particularly in relation to the more advanced adult student. This suggests a number of opportunities for further research: to what extent would it be useful, at appropriate proficiency levels, to displace the current use of general interest topics and make learning a second language in its various contexts a more central subject matter of the EFL classroom, inviting adult ESL students to develop their communicative competence by researching their own language learning experiences and contexts?

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