

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION: EMPOWERING YOUR
CAREER

25th September 2021

English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) in Malaysia: The Prospect of the Road Less Traveled



Dr. Shahrul Nizam Mohd Basari
Kulliyah of Languages and Management,
International Islamic University Malaysia,
Pagoh Campus.



Introduction

- English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has developed from being a platform to address the **use of English communication skills for study purposes and research** (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Jordan, 1997; Hyland, 2006) to taking a role to address the dilemma of being **accommodationist or critical to ideologies and politics in education** (Hyland, 2006; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002).



Introduction

- EAP has raised interesting issues and controversies in conceptualizing and determining its nature and role.
- One key issue is related to the notion of specificity, which has been discussed in the context of '**English for GENERAL Academic Purposes**' (EGAP) and '**English for SPECIFIC Academic Purposes**' (ESAP) (Hyland, 2006).



Introduction

- **Three areas of controversies**
- **A Case Study at a Malaysian Public University**



The Three Areas of Controversies

- Three areas of controversies in EAP (Hyland, 2006):
 - 1) the two approaches in EAP – EGAP and ESAP;
 - 2) the approaches in the teaching of student writing – the study skills, academic socialisation and academic literacies models;
 - 3) the pragmatic and critical perspectives of EAP.
- It is important to note that to date, the EGAP, study skills and pragmatic models have been the dominant approaches in EAP.

EAP: EGAP vs ESAP



- **EGAP** - the teaching of the skills and language that are **common** to all disciplines.
- Based on an idea that EAP should not be seen as a course to fulfill specific purposes, but an approach to language teaching in which the learning process should not differ from general English.
- **EGAP** model appears to **accommodate course designers** especially in managing the stakeholders and preparing the course materials.
- Students can see the relationship between skills and can utilise them in their studies and projects



EAP: EGAP vs ESAP

- **ESAP** - a view that is concerned more with the needs of a particular group in academic contexts; in other words, ESAP implements **disciplinary specificity** in an EAP course.
- Disciplinary specificity - the teaching of the features that distinguish one discipline from others.
- For example, EAP courses that distinguish the courses by disciplines such as English for Law or English for Medicine are considered ESAP.



EAP: EGAP vs ESAP

- One of main arguments against **EGAP** concerns the notion of the common core hypothesis – **transferable general skills and forms** across contexts and purposes.
- The main problem lies in defining what a common core is, that it might be ‘core’ in a very general sense and give the wrong impression of uniform disciplinary practices.
- Whereas for **ESAP**, this model requires more work in designing the course.



EAP: Study Skills, Academic Socialisation & Academic Literacies

- The **study skills** model emphasises on fixing students' problems in the areas of surface structures, grammar and spelling.
- Can be associated with the EGAP approach, where the focus of the course is to enable students to see the relationship between skills and their studies.
- Students are provided with **skills that are supposed to be transferable to other contexts** and contribute to their communicative competence.



EAP: Study Skills, Academic Socialisation & Academic Literacies

- The **academic socialisation** model brings the **cultural context** into perspective.
- Different from the study skills model as it integrates language, user and context.
- Mainly focuses on student orientation to learning and how they interpret learning tasks and acculturation into academic discourse.
- From the academic socialisation perspective, the tutor is expected to induce students into the culture of the academy.



EAP: Study Skills, Academic Socialisation & Academic Literacies

- The **academic literacies** model not only draws on the skills and academic socialisation approaches but pays more **attention to the relationships of power, authority, meaning making, and identity** that are implicit in the use of literacy practices within specific institutional settings.
- In the academic literacies model, the institutions where learning takes place are sites of discourse and power.



EAP: Pragmatic vs Critical Perspectives

- Pragmatism is the mainstream approach in EAP.
- The pedagogic approach to teaching writing especially in EAP should focus on **preparing students to write their assignments.**
- Pursuing political goals and/or changing students' sociopolitical consciousness should not be in the agenda.

EAP: Pragmatic vs Critical Perspectives



- Social constructivists reject the view that writing is an act of an individual mind trying to communicate a message but see writing as a social act that relates the individual with the society.
- This position is related to critical theory and critical pedagogy.
- Critical theory that has turned into practice is known as critical pedagogy, where schools are regarded as sites of political struggle, educators as transformative agents, and individual empowerment and social transformation as the education goals.
- In critical pedagogy, a critical approach to second language teaching focuses on the relationships between language learning and social change.



EAP: Pragmatic vs Critical Perspectives

- Critical EAP shares some similarities with the academic literacies approach.
- Like Street (1995) who used the term '**ideological**' to refer to culture and power structures in literacy practices, Benesch (2001) also describes critical EAP as **ideological** as it examines power relations and hierarchical arrangements in societies and institutions.



EAP: Pragmatic vs Critical Perspectives

- Pragmatic EAP is effective to meet short-term needs of the institution like providing **necessary skills for students to write their assignments, playing its role as accommodationist.**
- Seems to be a **student-friendly** approach, where students only need to accept what has been decided for them and strive to meet the course's prescribed targets instead of spending time to think about issues surrounding the course and addressing them.



EAP: Pragmatic vs Critical Perspectives

- However, by not addressing issues like the political issues in the curricular and pedagogical decision-making and the students'/lecturers' voice in the course, we are limiting the opportunities especially for the students and also lecturers to be conscious about optimising what students can learn.



A Case Study at a Malaysian Public University

- Looks at an EAP course at a language centre in a public university in Malaysia.
- The course focuses on the writing skills for academic purposes.
- The instructors are writing instructors from the language centre, with no specialisations in the disciplines where the students are from.



A Case Study at a Malaysian Public University

- EAP is taught to students from different faculties, where they may be in the same class, learn the same content, do the same tasks and produce the same product, which is a research paper.
- Therefore, the EAP course at this language centre can be closely associated with EGAP.



A Case Study at a Malaysian Public University

- Despite the description of the course that fits the definition of an EGAP-based course, there is a question of the instructors' perceptions of this approach.
- Even if they are aware of the EGAP approach in the course, what WOULD their attitude BE towards an ESAP-based EAP course?
- This study was conducted to investigate the instructors' perceptions of the EAP course that they are teaching at the language centre.



A Case Study at a Malaysian Public University

Methods:

- Qualitative design
- Purposive sampling
- Semi-structured interviews
- - 15 EAP lecturers (1 – 16 years of experience)
- Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)



A Case Study at a Malaysian Public University

Findings:

- Initial responses from all the EAP instructors revealed that none of them knew about the two approaches at all.
- Ten out of 15 instructors provided responses which were congruent with the notion that the course is an EGAP course.



A Case Study at a Malaysian Public University

Findings:

- Out of the 10 EAP instructors who perceived the EAP course as an EGAP course, five of them believed that the course should be changed to use ESAP in its approach.
- The instructors' reasons are due to: 1. the faculty's needs; 2. the students' disciplinary specificity needs; and 3. the students' future career needs.



A Case Study at a Malaysian Public University

Findings:

- On the other hand, out of 10 EAP instructors who perceived EAP as an EGAP course, only two were of the view that the course should remain as it is.
- Their reasons are: 1. the opportunities for students to learn from other disciplines; and 2. the standardisation of the course.



A Case Study at a Malaysian Public University

Discussion:

- The results of the interviews revealed that most of the EAP instructors' perceptions matched the course description of being an EGAP-based course, which is the mainstream approach in most EAP courses.



A Case Study at a Malaysian Public University

Discussion:

- It is important to note that during the interviews, none of the EAP instructors were aware of the term EGAP, although EGAP has become a popular approach in EAP (Basturkmen, 2006).
- However, they were able to relate to its meaning once the explanation was given. Despite not knowing the term, the instructors were used to the idea of transferable skills as stated in the course outline. This suggests that the instructors' perceptions of what a language course entails MAY have been shaped by the concept of EGAP, at least subconsciously.



A Case Study at a Malaysian Public University

Discussion:

- The instructors were mainly exposed to the pedagogy which reflected an EGAP approach: teaching language skills common to all disciplines; showing the relationships between the skills; and transferring the general skills across contexts and purposes (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Jordan, 1997; Hyland, 2002), even though the concepts were not introduced to them as EGAP.



A Case Study at a Malaysian Public University

Discussion:

- In addition, the course sits well with every feature of wide-angle EGAP. The use of one set of general skills, such as research writing skills in EAP, is a trait of ‘wide-angle’ EAP courses with a concept similar to English for general purposes courses (Basturkmen, 2006; Widdowson, 1983).



A Case Study at a Malaysian Public University

Conclusion:

- In conclusion, the EGAP-based approaches and the study skills model that have been embedded in the EAP course may have influenced the EAP instructors in making their comments about the course.
- Their explanations about the teaching approaches in EAP were all related to the notions of general skills needed by the students to meet the faculty requirements, and their roles as the provider.



A Case Study at a Malaysian Public University

Conclusion:

- In all interviews, none of them shared views reflecting the notions in ESAP such as disciplinary specificity or specialism. Working closely with subject specialists, a practice in ESAP, was also not seen as an option by any of the instructors.
- It shows that academic writing at the language centre in this study is only associated with the EGAP and the study skills model of student writing.



A Case Study at a Malaysian Public University

Conclusion:

- Additionally, there was also no indication of the notions of the academic socialisation and academic literacies models being applied in the course, even by the senior instructors. For example, ideas to induct students into the culture of the faculty, the use of genres in teaching (academic socialisation) and power relations in discourse practices (academic literacies) were never mentioned or suggested.
- This limited perspective calls for a new orientation to expand the course to encompass other perspectives, at least as far as academic writing is concerned.



Thank You!