

EAP Teacher Education : Searching for an effective model integrating Content & language teachers'schemes

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Abstract

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has been an ever-growing branch of EFL instruction in Iran. The main objective of the EAP programs at Iranian universities is claimed to be filling the gap between the students' general English competence and their ability to read authentic discipline-specific texts. Although materials development for these courses has attracted a lot of attention in recent years, there has been little or no serious systematic concern for EAP teacher education. The discipline-specific courses are offered either by ELT instructors or subject-matter(content) instructors , with no collaboration between the two parties. This, in turn, has resulted in a severe confusion in implementation of these programs.

After reporting the results of a nationwide research on the status of the current Iranian EAP instructional system with focus on the actual implementation of these courses, the present study aims at providing a model for EAP teacher education and practice. Building upon close collaboration between ELT and subject-matter departments as an indispensable prerequisite phase of curriculum planning for EAP teacher education , the proposed model integrates the theoretical views concerning the principles and practice of EAP methodology with the educational, cultural, and local peculiarities of the Iranian context. The model and the argumentation promise some implications and applications to EAP teacher education worldwide.

Introduction

Parallel with the swing of pendulum toward ‘present situation analysis,’ there emerged an awareness of the significance of attending to the learners’ individual and learning needs as well as methodological aspects of ESP (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Hutchinson, 1988; Waters, 1988). As Widdowson (1983) had already held, methodology should be placed “at the very heart of the operation with course design directed at servicing its requirements and not the reverse” (p.107). Further, he maintains that “it is perfectly possible to adopt a communicative methodology in the realization of a structural syllabus” (Widdowson, 1990, p. 130). This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) where a reading course, for example, might take a restricted approach to reading by focusing exhaustively on an examination of factual information at the cost of such more important issues as ‘critical-rhetorical analysis’ of the text and the writer’s personal attitudes (Bloor, 1998).

Broadly speaking, it is agreed that the principles underlying EGP methodology or any other forms of language teaching are all relevant to ESP/EAP methodology. The overall aim is to make the ESP experience a lively and relevant one for both teachers and learners. Strevens (1988, p. 44) enumerates the main teaching activities common to all forms of language teaching as ‘shaping the input’, ‘encouraging the learner’s intention to learn’, ‘managing the learning strategies’, and ‘promoting practice and use’. However, Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991, p. 305) maintain that, “ESP requires methodologies that are specialized or unique”. For instance, they believe that an EAP course run collaboratively by a language teacher and a content teacher or sheltered and adjunct EAP classes would call for “different approaches than those found in general English classes” (ibid.).

Theoretically speaking, the principles of communicative methodology (e.g., Morrow, 1981; Johnson, 1982) emphasizing communication and means of achieving it provide the general methodological framework for ESP/EAP.

In terms of practice, Johnson, (1982), for example, stresses the problem-solving and task-oriented nature of communicative exercises through citing five principles: ‘information transfer’, ‘information gap’, ‘jigsaw’, ‘tasks dependency’, and ‘correction for content’. The only methodological difference between these strands of ELT may lie in the fact that in ESP/EAP “activities can have a truly authentic purpose related to students’ target needs” (Robinson, 1991, p. 4).

More specifically, as Jordan (1997) has realized, certain areas are especially more important to ESP/EAP methodology. These include authenticity, problem-solving communicative activities, learning by doing, and so on. Quite often, these methodological discussions are translated into designing and performing appropriate tasks (Robinson, 1991; Jordan, 1997).

Suggestions as to appropriate techniques for ESP/EAP teaching abound in the literature. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) translate the fundamental theoretical principles underlying their suggested approach to ESP into practice through suggesting an inventory of techniques including ‘gaps’, ‘variety’, ‘prediction’, ‘enjoyment’, ‘an integrated methodology’, ‘coherence’, ‘preparation’, ‘involvement’, ‘creativity’, and ‘atmosphere’. With regard to the means of implementation of methodological principles in ESP/EAP, Huckins (1988) emphasizes the role of authentic language teaching and introduces such tasks as ‘role-play’ and ‘case studies’ as appropriate means of engaging learners in real communication. The ESP/EAP methodologists maintain that role-plays and simulations involve argumentation between groups of students and pave the way for more natural and realistic communication (Jones, 1982; McDonough, 1984). Among other categories of common tasks in ESP/EAP, we can name ‘project work’, and ‘oral presentation’. A project work requires the learners to perform some out-of-class activities and deliver the end product linguistically, often using the written mode as in a technical report or a manual. This task type is particularly

favored in EAP methodology since it develops the learners' language skills (Bloor & John, 1988) and contributes to their sense of 'autonomy and individualization' in EAP learning and research (McDonough & Shaw, 1993).

EAP Methodology in Iran

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has been an ever-growing branch of EFL instruction in Iran. Currently, EAP courses form a considerable part of the curriculums for almost all academic disciplines at university. Since its inception, materials production has been the focus of interest and attention in the EAP enterprise. Specifically, since 1980s the Iranian Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology (MSRT) has undertaken the responsibility of compiling textbooks for narrow disciplines. So far, over 200 textbooks have been published by the Ministry. The rationale behind this materials proliferation policy is to gear EFL pedagogy more closely to the learners' needs in special fields of study, and in so doing, to enhance the students' level of motivation and interest. The textbooks follow a rigid distribution of instructional exercises and activities for all academic disciplines with focus on reading comprehension skill. The emphasis is on practicing microlinguistic aspects of reading skill.

As for the current EAP methodology, there is hardly any published document on the current patterns of methodological preferences among the Iranian community of EAP practitioners . This would be quite shocking once we consider the fact that EAP courses are taught by ELT instructors or subject-matter instructors with little cooperation between the two. The departments and practitioners generally do not agree on objectives, methodology, and assessment approaches.

In the absence of any EAP teacher training workshops or even teacher manuals, there is confusion with respect to the actual implementation of EAP courses in Iran. Even, it is not sure whether the EAP instructors implement the courses

consistently as presupposed by the curriculum developers and the materials compiling center. Therefore, this study is motivated by the pressing need for scrutinizing the actual practice of discipline-based EAP courses in the target academic contexts. Specifically, it was designed to explore whether EAP courses are implemented consistently across academic disciplines by the ELT and subject-matter instructors. A secondary concern of this study is to present a model for EAP teacher education and practice based on close collaboration between ELT and subject-matter departments as an indispensable prerequisite phase of curriculum planning for EAP teacher education . The findings may provide baseline preliminary methodological data for improving the circumstances in similar EAP circumstances around the world.

Presenting a brief picture of Iranian EAP methodology

Method

Participants

EAP Students

The respondents to the student questionnaire were 377 university students from the disciplines of medicine, dentistry, computer, sociology, and theology and Islamic sciences. They were sophomores enrolled in the corresponding EAP courses. The EAP participants represented thirteen state universities located in different parts of Iran.

EAP Teachers

The EAP instructors participating in this study were ELT instructors and subject-matter instructors representing all the universities from which the cluster samples of EAP students were taken. The data collected from the EAP instructors included the 75 completed questionnaires comprising both open and close questions, 50 non-participant

observation reports, and 30 interviews. A brief account of the demographic profile of the EAP instructors is presented below.

The majority of the EAP instructors were M.A./M.Sc./M.D. holders (78%) and the remainder (22%) were PhD holders. As for fields, 43% of them were specialists in TEFL, English literature, or linguistics and the others (47%) were subject-matter instructors who had been teaching EAP courses at their departments for some years (mean 9.56). The average respondent reported to teach three EAP courses for undergraduate students. The average class size in EAP courses offered by the respondents was 45.

Instrumentation

In order to provide a comprehensive profile of the current EAP methodology in Iran, a number of questionnaires, interviews and observation checklists were developed. A simple student questionnaire was developed based on the key instructional parameters initially examined through some observations. The questionnaire tapped the frequency of certain key methodological aspects in EAP classes. A similar questionnaire was developed for the EAP instructors in order to rate the frequency of the above cited methodological aspects (i.e. sentence by sentence translation, pre-reading and post-reading activities, question-answer chains in English, translation assignments as an important part of classroom activities, emphasis on improving the reading skill, use of English as the dominant medium of instruction, analysis of text structure and rhetorical patterns, and classroom participation). The respondents were asked to rate the frequency of the above features in their current EAP classes on a four-point scale from ‘never’ to ‘always’. All the instruments employed in this study were piloted and reasonable psychometrics were obtained.

Results

The detailed descriptive statistics and analysis of variance for EAP students' rankings of the frequency of the aforementioned marked instructional activities in their classes were conducted. Overall, the findings showed that Iranian EAP programs are implemented in the target settings rather heterogeneously across academic disciplines. The results of separate Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVAs for the eight instructional activities in the student questionnaire indicated significant differences across majors for all items except for question 7 (analysis of text structure). Actually, no clear pattern was detected for students' responses to this question. That is, whereas students of medicine (68.8%), dentistry (50%), and computer (66.7%) ranked the frequency of this activity as 'never' or 'sometimes', students of sociology (56.5%) and theology (50.6%) ranked it as 'often' or 'always'. It may be reasoned that the respondents did not have a uniform conception regarding this instructional activity.

Further, as it was pointed out earlier, EAP courses in Iran are offered either by ELT departments or subject-matter departments. It would be worthy to see if there exist noticeable differences in classroom implementation of EAP courses as taught by ELT instructors or non-ELT instructors (subject-matter instructors). Table 1 shows the results of the comparison of the medicine students' rank-ordered responses concerning the frequency of the eight instructional activities in classes taught by ELT instructors and non-ELT instructors.

Table 1. Mann-Whitney U– Wilcoxon Rank Sum U Test for Comparison of Medicine Students’ Frequency Rankings of EAP Instructional Activities between ELT and Subject-matter Instructors

Activity	U	W	Corrected for Ties	
			Z	2-tailed p
1. Sentence by Sentence Translation	580.0	1756.0	-5.5576	.000
2. Pre-reading and Post-reading Activities	1219.0	2856.0	1.2112	.2258
3. Question-Answer Chains in <i>English</i>	831.0	3244.0	3.7933	.0001
4. Translation Assignments as an Important Part of Classroom Activities	902.0	3173.0	3.3392	.0008
5. Emphasis on Improving Reading Skill	1057.0	2233.0	1.8471	.0647
6. Use of <i>English</i> as the Dominant Medium of Instruction	842.0	3283.0	3.8671	.0001
7. Analysis of Text Structure	1366.0	2641.0	-.3964	.6918
8. Classroom Participation	1385.5	2660.5	.2728	.7850

p < .05

As it can be observed in Table 1, there were significant differences in the respondents’ rankings of the frequency of four instructional activities (items 1- 3- 4- 6) between classes taught by ELT instructors and non-ELT instructors (i.e., subject-matter instructors). That is, whereas subject-matter instructors tended to translate the reading materials sentence by sentence, their counterpart ELT specialists favored exploitation of more question-answer chains in English as one of the main techniques in EAP reading instruction. Likewise, subject-matter instructors offering

EAP courses assigned their students translation tasks more frequently than ELT specialists. Further, ELT specialists generally insisted on English as the main medium of instruction. But subject-matter instructors used English less frequently. This contrast has probably got its roots in different ideological positions that these two types of teachers take concerning the ESP enterprise. That is, whereas ELT specialists consider ESP as an approach to foreign language teaching for clear utilitarian purposes, non-ELT instructors tend to be more concerned with content and interpretation of the content of the reading materials rather than the linguistic aspects of ESP (see Robinson, 1991 for an exhaustive discussion of different orientations in ESP methodology).

However, the two groups of EAP instructors were not significantly different with respect to the frequency of pre-reading and post-reading activities (Q2), emphasis on improving reading skill (Q6), analysis of text structure (Q7), and classroom participation (Q8). Particularly, although the contribution of text structure training to ESL/EAP reading comprehension performance is well documented in the literature(e.g. Carrell, 1985; Hewings & Henderson, 1987, Atai & Afghari, 2000, Atai, 2002), both ELT specialists and subject-matter experts seemed to neglect the facilitating role of this instructional activity in EAP reading courses. Finally, probably the typically large size of EAP classes (M= 45) as documented in a related survey (Atai, 2000) depleted the potential opportunity for students to participate actively in EAP classes, irrespective of the type of instructor.

As for the EAP teacher questionnaire, the observation reports and the interviews, the following generalizations were found concerning the dominant methodological concerns:

- Sentence-by-sentence translation as a dominant activity for Humanities majors
- No Consistent pattern of instructional activities and methodology preferences
- Use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the EAP reading courses

- Classroom participation as a low priority in the EAP courses
- There is no consistent Iranian methodology pattern
- Content instructors and ELT instructors have different methodological ideologies
- Collaborative EAP methodology is the missing link between content and language instructors
- Instructors do not have clear ideas about their roles and learners' needs
- Instructors cannot meet the challenges of academic literacy
- Instructors do not usually share their responsibilities with the students
- The scope of beyond-the-classroom activities is rather limited
- Teacher-centered activities dominate the instructors' lesson plans
- There is no systematic instruction corresponding to disciplinary variations

Implications and suggestions : Towards an integrated model for EAP teacher education

The findings provide clues to a wide range of methodological inconsistencies in the classroom implementation of EAP courses. EAP instructors seem to have vague ideas concerning the principles and practice of ESP methodology as well as the role of the teacher in EAP courses. The dominant teaching method in Iranian EFL/EAP is Grammar-Translation Method. However, there is an obvious gap between principles underlying this method and the methodological requirements of EAP courses. Therefore, EAP curriculum planners are seriously invited to think of methodology and teacher education as an indispensable phase of the coherent process of curriculum development and renewal. Finally, the findings underscore the significance of in- service training programs for EAP instructors to reconsider their roles in struggling with EAP contexts and to widen their repertoires of language teaching strategies/activities. Based on a

synthesis of the actual practice of EAP methodology in Iran and the current literature regarding the recent advances in EAP methodologies , the following recommendations are offered to EAP teacher education programmers :

1. There is a pressing need to redefine the roles of the Language teachers and content instructors in the EAP curriculum development. The two parties should join in a collaborative task in order to set the goals and plan the needs assessment projects. Given this close cooperation in data collection and triangulation of sources and agents, we hope to devise performance objectives as a joint enterprise. The EAP teacher education programs, then, should replicate the tasks the teachers are supposed to carry out in the target academic contexts.
2. Analysis of the target situation tasks and responsibilities must be considered as a joint descriptive research activity where content teachers may shed more light on determining the most authentic activity types replicating the target situation demands.
3. The content teachers and language teachers may join to decide on the appropriate syllabus type which best fits the purposes of the course and the actual resources available to the practitioners. The syllabus must accommodate the task-based nature of EAP and cover the fresh topical areas so that maximum student participation and interest is guaranteed.
4. As for the actual presentation of the EAP courses, we assume that cooperation between the two parties is essential. The language teacher assumes full responsibility for classroom presentations. The subject-matter colleague supports the ELT partner in such ways as providing advice on highly fresh topics and tasks ,

clarifying the concepts which may go beyond the ELT colleagues' conceptual knowledge, planning for more authentic tasks including tours of target academic and professional sites, helping the ELT colleagues with preparation of extra teaching facilities, planning and conducting joint projects with students, and, finally, joining the EAP class to supplement the EAP teacher's presentation specially where the technical/topical demands of the area under teaching go beyond the ELT teacher's expertise knowledge.

5. EAP instruction is a highly accountable enterprise. The courses must be renewed and improved based on the results of the summative and formative evaluation projects. In order to set realistic performance standards, the ELT teachers and content instructors should jointly consider the setting and situations and decide on reasonable criteria. Both parties may be included as information sources for collecting data and eventually making decisions about the renewal of the programs in the future.

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