

How can EAP skills enhance students' academic study?

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I. Introduction

EAP lessons

- help students in academic language skills
develop academic study/research skills

(Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002; Hyland 2006)

- connect with content for specific subjects, occupations or activities (Johns and Price-Machado, 2001).
- Students will have higher motivation if EAP content is more related to their subjects (Jordan 1997).

- enhance communicative skills
- achieve future academic success (Jordan 1997)

- not only improvement of English-language proficiency, but also students' recognition and ability to participate in different academic activities, e.g.

- take notes in lectures
- deliver presentations
- engage actively in group discussions

(Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002)

II. Research methods

Aim:

to explore how 2-year EAP learning can reinforce students' study in their academic disciplines at XJTU and UoL.

Participants :

- 1) students in Y3 and Y4 at XJTU and Y2 and Y3 UoL
- 2) academic departmental staff at XJTU and UoL

Research tools:

- *Questionnaire*: students: 100(XJTU) + 62 (UoL)
staff: 12 (XJTU) + 27 (UoL)
- *Interview*: students: 20 (XJTU) +15 (UoL)
staff: 5 (XJTU) + 6 (UoL)

Research Questions:

- What are students' perceptions of which specific EAP skills help them in academic study?
- What are academic departmental staff's perceptions of students' utilizing EAP skills in study?
- What are the connections between the study skills learnt in EAP modules and skills from other modules?

III. Findings

- Majority of students felt that EAP skills are transferrable to other modules and helpful to their academic study.
- Year 3 students consider EAP skills are more helpful than Year 2 group.
- Possible reason is that the deeper they learn the courses, the more they understand and practice these skills and the better they can apply them.

- Writing and reading skills e.g. structuring an essay, skimming and scanning articles benefit a lot.
- Listening and speaking skills help them to understand lectures and communicate with teachers.
- Analyzing problems
- Comfortable in group discussions
- Better teamwork and cooperate effectively in team projects

T3: some students are good and some are not. year 3 are better than year 2. most students can complete assignments in English and writing is understandable.

Majority of students at UoL can adapt the new environment.

- *T2: They work very hard. The front seats are always taken by xjtlu students.*
- *T4: some are very good, some are extremely good. They are good at writing and speaking. They can understand the lecture, even the jokes in the lecture. But approximately (up to) a quarter of them are not good.*

Students in Liverpool have a higher evaluation for EAP.

More team work opportunities in civil engineering, architecture, electric and biology via lab and field trip at UoL

Top 1 helpful from EAP-academic writing

Citation/plagiarism is not a big problem, helpful in preparing and writing fyp reports.

but some students still cannot cite properly.

General problems

- Prefer to read Chinese books, rather than English books
- Poor speaking hinders them to ask/ answer questions/discussions in class.
- At XJTU, teacher interviewees suggested good pace is important for students to understand, sometimes slow down to help students' understanding.
- But at UoL, teachers expect students to cope with normal speed in class and tutorials.
- A big range: some students have poor grammar/writing/communication skills.
- Chinese students at UoL tend to stick together, speak Chinese with each other.



Listening skill

- At XJTLU:

Understanding lectures:

59% of the students can understand lectures most of the time

66.67% of the teachers thought that students could understand the lecture most of the time.

But accent is a big problem for understanding lectures

- At UoL:

Less than half of Liverpool students can understand lectures.

More diversity and percentage of international teaching staff and their accents may account for this difference.

Taking notes:

- At XJTLU

The majority of students could take notes effectively.

42% of teachers thought students can actively take notes.

- At UoL

73% respondents claim that they can take notes effectively at least half of time during the class.

26% of teacher think students can take notes effectively most of time, 22% think half of time.

36% think a little or cannot.

- The correlation between understanding lectures and note taking is strong.

(SPSS: $P < 0.01$ and correlation coefficient of 0.566)

- But due to various accents of teachers, more training on accent differentiation in EAP lessons is needed in order to improve students' rate of understanding lectures.

Communication with teachers

- Half of XJTLU students could communicate effectively with their teachers.
- Several interviewees said that the inability to express what they want to say often hinders them from uttering appropriate sentences, and most of the time, they tend to translate first from Chinese to English, instead of thinking in English.
- More than half of the UoL students confirm the ability in effective communication with teachers.

- 42% of XJTLU teachers think students can communicate effectively with them during and after class.
- 19% UoL teachers think most of time, 40% think half of time. 30% think a little and 11% cannot
- Two key reasons: nervousness and lack of vocabulary
- Certain correlation between communicative skills and the ability to understand lectures (SPSS: $r=0.498$ and $P<0.01$.)

This means the better students' communicative skills are, the better they can understand lectures for both year 3 and year 4 students.

Teamwork

- Nearly 50% of students from both sides had good teamwork skills with others as a result of EAP training, with only less than 5% saying they can't.
- They have to do projects and research together which helps a lot from different team members.

S11 :

Yeah, I think so. We have a lot of chances to work with other students when we conduct experiments.

During this process I think I develop the skill of practical thinking and team spirit.

- Engineering students at UoL such as civil engineering, electrical engineering, architecture, telecommunication, genetics and internet computing does better in cooperating in a team as they are frequently exposed to team projects and practice.
- Thus, group assignments in EAP can help to stimulate team spirit and teamwork.
- A medium correlation ($r=0.406$, $p<0.01$) between communicative and team-work skills

This means the better students' are able to communicate, the better their ability to work in a team is.

Group discussion

- Majority of students (55%) said that they could participate actively in group discussions.
- Majority of XJTLU teachers: students can participate actively and contribute to group discussions during the class half of the time, but not all the time.
- 37% of UoL teachers: students can contribute group discussion. 63% thought they can do a little or can't do it.
- Main problems for ineffective group discussions—
lack of confidence/discussion/ language skills, reluctance to cooperate, reluctant to participate,
miss opportunity for practice due to poor attendance

- A rather strong correlation between teamwork skill and group discussion (SPSS: $r=0.482$ and $P<0.01$)
- UoL teachers suggested that XJTLU students need to work with local or non-Chinese students.

One teacher said:

It's common that XJTLU students when work as a group among themselves will speak Chinese rather than in English, so I am guessing this is the case when they were at XJTLU. It would be desirable to encourage them to use English more often in group projects.

Presentation skill

- Half of students could deliver presentations effectively.
- 42% of XJTU teachers thought that students could make a good presentation in class.
- 30% of UoL teachers thought that students could make a good presentation in class.
- UoL teachers reported that although students can make a good presentation after preparation, they cannot give a good presentation without preparation.
- Lack of confidence and presentation skill as well as pronunciation are top 3 problems.

deliver presentations = communicative skill
(SPSS: $r=0.476$, $p<0.01$)

deliver presentations = group discussion
(SPSS: $r=0.371$, $p<0.01$).

Reading skill

- 65% of students indicate that their scanning and skimming skills have improved respectively.
- Half of teacher respondents from both sides pointed out that students can read assigned readings after class effectively and thus make contributions to the class.

S12:

Skimming and scanning are helpful for the actual reading of the reference materials such as books, journal articles as I can easily locate the main or key information in an article within a short period of time.

There is a significant difference between year 3 and year 4 students in skimming skill and drawing inferences as a result of EAP training.

Year 4 students perceived skimming skill and drawing inferences more useful than year 3 students.

- S8 from Economics (UoL):

EAP training speeds up my reading pace and I can clearly feel that it helps my IELTS reading.

Writing skill

- 71% (XJTU) and 84% (UoL) students indicated they can structure their articles better due to the EAP training compared with the development of other writing skills.

They know how to find and cite references and can avoid unknown plagiarism.

- Nearly 50% indicated that their essays are more coherent and cohesive and they can answer what the question asks.

S2: “I found that writing is not simply about the usage of vocabulary and grammar, it is also the ability to write in western logic to express themselves clearly.”

- A number of students mentioned the usefulness of SPSE (situation, problem, solution and evaluation) taught in EAP lessons, and compare and contrast essay.
- Generally speaking, writing can be the most advantageous part in EAP learning as students have never encountered academic writing format before.
- The introduction and training of Standard English writing do benefit them in academic study.

- Most of the teachers indicated that their students could structure their essay half of the time.

T2 (UoL): Academic writing. It is not so bad. A lot of them write well, they paraphrase very well, they write the references well. I don't worry about most of them.

- However, some students don't know to use linking words and lack cohesive devices/logic and clarity, and poor grammar.
- Half of the teachers also indicate that students could only use a limited range of appropriate vocabulary and sentential structures.

T4: For example in introduction, students rarely give an introduction to the structure of what they are writing. They don't tell you what's coming. They don't sign post to the reader. They don't make it easy for the reader.



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- Several teachers thought that students don't have topic sentences or a thesis statement.
- Some thought they can't express their ideas in a clear way.
- Writing essays under exam conditions is a particular weakness.

Plagiarism/citation

67% students indicated that they learnt how to avoid plagiarism as a result of EAP training.

Approximately 60% of students indicated they learnt how to paraphrase and cite references respectively.

Majority of UoL teachers reported that XJTLU don't have plagiarism or collusion.



But some students still cannot cite properly.

Critical thinking

28% (XJTLU) and 33% (UoL) students could think critically most of the time, while 46% (XJTLU) and 52% (UoL) indicated that they could only do this half of the time.

58% of XJTLU teachers thought students could think critically half of the time, but not all the time.

30% of UoL teachers thought students could think critically, but 66% thought students cannot.

Reasons: Lack of academic skills, culture differences and education in schools

Suggestions:

Reading more academic articles, seminars, debates, arguments

Case study

- 55% (XJTU) and 85% (UoL)-Case studies are helpful learning how to exchange ideas and develop critical thinking skills by discussing issues and examples in groups and understand others' ideas.
- Give them examples to learn, facilitate discussion, enhance their speaking skill.
- The topics of case studies are transferrable to their majors and are thus helpful in generating inspiration.
- But more targeted materials for different majors are needed in EAP teaching.

- Interesting and helpful for freshman to understand EAP skills as the examples are easier to understand.

S9: Case studies are helpful for the generation of ideas as it serves as a tool for brainstorm and development of critical thinking and problem solving (e.g cultural misunderstanding, risk management) when the cases are well designed and carefully selected”.

This suggests the role case studies plays in cultivating students' ability to think critically and solve problems effectively.

Compared with non-XJTLU Chinese students

UoL teachers

55% -XJTLU students are better

33% thought same

11% thought even worse

XJTLU teachers

T1: Although non-Chinese students can express themselves clear, they go worse and worse and the Chinese students go better and better. I think Chinese students work harder and I show great respect for them.

Suggestions on EAP

Students

- more native expressions and avoid Chinglish
- more interesting western cultural background, e.g. **understand some jokes** related to western culture.
- adding EAP classes in year 3 and 4.

S5 from BA: The writing coursework in EAP does improve report writing and essay. But it is not enough and we have forgotten some of the skills such as finding documents.

- more in-class writing exercises
- critical thinking skills, specialist vocabulary, listening practice, speak skills, literature review, sentence structure, specialist knowledge in their majors
- attending EAP class, not missing any chance to improve English

XJTLU Teachers

- starting from proper addressing to clearly stating purpose to being able to summarize a topic in a grammatically correct sentence, instead of putting loosely thrown together words
- More in-class writing exercises

UoL teachers:

- Verbal communication should be enhanced.
- More training on discussions, writing longer reports and essays.
- Some students cannot write long sentences, all very short sentences.

- Self confidence to provide own views and opinions
- 30% of XJTLU students have difficulties based on poor language skills.
- Attend English classes and make more efforts to speak English on an everyday basis.
- Integrate with international students at XJTLU and UK and other students at UoL to practice English more often.
- *T4: From Spain, France, Romania, Arabic, all of them are better than xjtlu students. It is because those xjtlu students do not interact with local people, while European students mingle with local student. They make rapid progress after some time when they arrive in Britain, while Chinese students do not communicate with local students.*
- Seminars and discussion sessions
- English for operating system on laptops, not Chinese
- Writing e-mails
- Study, study, study.
- Practice, practice, practice

S3: “EAP teachers who are native speakers of English should pay more attention to the way they talk in order for better comprehension among us students.”

This suggests EAP native speaker tutors may consider adjusting ways of thinking, choice of words and pace of speech in order to serve better for students' comprehension.

Academic teachers:

T1: “Teachers have to treat Chinese as assistance of English with full acknowledgement the existence of Chinese. Critiquing in a friendly way by the teacher side could be helpful.”

Teachers need realize the legitimacy of Chinese and treat Chinese as a first language as an asset or facilitating tool instead of an obstacle for ESL.

T1: teachers should pay attention to the cultural specificity of Chinese students. For example, if students don't understand you, they can still nod, which is an indication of attention to the sound the teacher is making, which is quite different from what we normally understand in a western context.

Teachers should meet middle level, and can't just teach and ignore whether students can follow.

At XJTLU, sometimes Chinese can help Chinese students understand better , not only English (A foreign teacher), supported by Chinese academic staff interviewees.

IV. Conclusion

- While some good development and improvement of EAP skills, some students still need to further develop their academic English and study skills.
- A range of accent recognition and encouraging students' western way of thinking in order for better transition to year 3 and 4.
- More practice for time writing essays in class and give feedback

- More presentations and discussions are beneficial for their speaking and listening.
- Case study—good for critical thinking and team work

However,

- Poor attendance affects development of English and academic study skills.
- Some students seldom or never come to EAP lessons, but pass EAP exams with just 40 or less than 50, or resit exams.