

Challenges of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in Bangladeshi Universities

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Abstract

In Bangladesh most of the universities teach English language to the beginners for improving their proficiency in English as their medium of instruction. So, the need for students' English language proficiency is increasing day by day. This paper examines issues related to English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in Bangladeshi context. The researcher reveals the attitudes of teachers and students towards EAP, limitations of teaching EAP and has made some suggestions on how EAP can be helpful for students. In English medium universities EAP is taught so that students of different disciplines can successfully cope up with their academic courses conducted fully in English. This goal points out teaching EAP is not merely teaching grammar and skills in traditional ways rather it is based on contexts of particular disciplines. EAP teaching and learning in Bangladesh varies a lot depending on the design of the courses, teaching methods, attitude of students according to their discipline and the performance they can make throughout the semesters. In most of the universities, EAP is taught as grammar and skills. Grammar is taught deductively rather than contextual language teaching. Reading and writing skills are practiced in conventional methods. Students who are efficient in English actively participate in classes; while less and least efficient students are not interested in getting involved in language learning. Some teachers are interested and find it challenging to teach language to the multidisciplinary students, while others have reverse attitude. EAP teaching is not successful in Bangladesh as students are not motivated and teachers cannot contextualize language teaching according to different disciplines. Appointing efficient and knowledgeable teachers can be a great help and at the same time materials should be relevant to different disciplines.

Key Terms: EAP, language skill, multidisciplinary students

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Introduction

Background

The popular status of English as a Lingua Franca has made it an essential means of communication throughout the world. “English is the language of globalization, international politics and diplomacy, commerce, science and technology, computer and the internet among others” (Sharndama, Samaila and Tsojon, 2014). This attitude towards English has made it very special in the sector of academia. “Due to the status of English as an international language and advancements in technology in recent years, there has been a worldwide increase in demand for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses varying in length and the mode of instruction” (Jordan, 1997). Thus, EAP has become an unavoidable concept in higher studies.

What is EAP?

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. (Gillett, 2011)

EAP is, in fact, a branch of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) taught in higher education institutions. Teaching content of EAP course is matched to the requirements of the learners. EAP serves a large amount of ESP activity world-wide.

Why Do the University Students Need English Language Skills?

All the English medium universities in the world perform their academic activities in English. As English is the medium of instruction, students are bound to use English for all kinds of academic activities throughout their academic career. Irena (2011) states that the goal of English education is now to develop students’ academic and professional competence, enabling them to effectively communicate in academic and professional contexts. So, the outcome of English language learning expands to their life after education as well. Sharndama, Samaila and Tsojon (2014) have very appropriately listed students’ need to develop their English language skills. They have pointed out that students need English language to:

- i. Understand and make the most effective use of their study materials.
- ii. Develop the specialized language and vocabulary relevant to their disciplines.
- iii. Interpret assignment questions and select relevant and appropriate material for their response

- iv. Write well-structured and coherently presented assignments, without plagiarism
- v. Communicate their needs to their tutors, and
- vi. Work productively and interact well with other students.

Goals of EAP Course

Generally EAP courses are introduced in tertiary level to enhance students' skills required to perform activities in an English-speaking academic context across core subject. Major goal of EAP is to improve the learners' proficiency in English language and to help them to overcome some of their difficulties in English. As English is the medium of instruction and communication, EAP's goal is to improve students' communicative competence. Chowdhury and Haider (2012) have perfectly said, "The English language courses taught at the tertiary level are usually EAP courses, since the objectives of these courses are not only to give students a practical command of English but also to enable them to use the language in the study of their fields of specialization.EAP courses tend to teach formal and specialized academic genres". They have also cited Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) wisely who look at the functions of EAP as a course "to cover those educational activities in higher education", the purpose of which is teaching and learning of the English language required by the undergraduates, postgraduates and/or staff. They need English language and communication skills for access to subject knowledge or 'content', either prior to their studies or during studies. Thus, courses may also include a more narrow focus on the more specific linguistic demands of a particular area of study, for example law and judiciary subjects.

Needs Analysis

EAP is taught based on the needs of the students of different academic programs. Students' proficiency could be improved once their needs have been properly assessed. According to Diane (2009), "EAP is one of the types of ESP, tailored to the needs of the learners at various levels". Needs analysis is truly essential for the planning and designing of any EAP course. Needs analysis is fundamental to any EAP approach in course designing and teaching. Only needs analysis can choose the course objectives and can also guide in selecting the course contents and resources to be used. "Assessment of needs from the individual learner's perspective is an important part of any instructional program design and it can benefit both teachers and students alike" (Lytle, 1988). Thus, to obtain the fruitful outcome of the EAP, both from instructor's and learner's point of view, needs analysis is a must.

Role of Teachers

EAP practitioner's role is a highly complex one, for which no preparation seems to be fully adequate. The EAP teacher needs to be able to analyze contexts and language, understand learners' needs and develop materials that suit those contexts and needs.

The role of the EAP tutor surpasses the limited framework of language teaching, to involve institutional awareness and a detailed knowledge of specialized discourse. An EAP tutor needs to research and assist students in understanding and constructing texts in their disciplines and to actively 'engage with the disciplines' (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998).

EAP teacher must have the knowledge of the specialist academic discourses within universities and the intention and time to conduct research on the broad features of specific academic literacies. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998: 42-46) outlined three necessary skills for EAP: co-operation, collaboration and team teaching. Collaborative and co-operative knowledge can make an EAP teacher well-informed about the specialist discourse and team teaching along with the teachers of the particular discourses can bring ultimate benefit to the students. EAP instructors' responsibilities transcend the use of competencies, and involve deeper reflection on intentions along with 'responsibilities for their own learning'. (Sharpling, 2002)

Method

Study of the Researcher

The objective of the empirical investigation of this research is to study and find out the challenges of the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses taught in Bangladeshi universities. For this purpose, an empirical investigation has been carried out on the English language teaching techniques in universities, the limitation of EAP courses and students' and teachers' attitudes towards these courses. The aims and objectives can be pointed out like: finding out the challenges of EAP courses in the universities in Bangladesh, and observing what teaching and learning situations exist in the undergraduate level English language classes.

In this regard the research question was: What are the challenges of EAP courses offered in tertiary level institutions?

Research Techniques and Tools

The researcher selected three English medium universities in Dhaka city. These universities offer EAP courses to the beginning undergraduate students of all departments. Research group was founded with the EAP course teachers and the undergraduate students of four different departments undertaking these courses: LLB, Textile, BBA and Sociology. The main research instruments were: 1) questionnaire for students; 2) questionnaire for teachers and 3) class observation checklist. Instruments for the research were

designed and administrated with care. All these methods were used for the survey to ensure accuracy, authenticity, validity and reliability of the data collection. The researcher observed twelve EAP classes in the three universities, collected data from twelve teachers and 380 students through questionnaires. Researcher also interviewed the teachers face to face and took notes.

EAP Teaching in Bangladesh

EAP Settings

In Bangladesh almost all the universities offer English language courses as grammar and skills for the beginning undergraduate students of different departments. The outcome of teaching English language in the earlier semester varies from university to university depending on the design of the courses, how these are taught, the attitude of students according to their discipline and the performances they can make throughout the semesters. The reason for offering EAP courses is to make the students efficient in the use of English language so that they can smoothly perform all the academic activities required by the courses of their own discipline that are conducted in English.

Course Plan and Design

Most universities offer English I and English II in first two semesters where each course carries 100 marks. The contents of the first course are English grammar while the second course consists of English skills. Courses have mid-term, quizzes, presentation, assignment and final examination. Number of quiz varies from 2 to 4 according to the academic procedure of particular university. Mostly teachers of English departments take these courses.

Teaching Method

If the content of EAP course is grammar then grammar is taught deductively. There is no contextual grammar teaching. Sometimes practices are given in classroom from reference books or materials downloaded from different websites. In few cases, teachers prepare their own materials. Students' participation is rare in classroom teaching other than doing written works. Most of the teachers are much comfortable in Reading and Writing, rather than Speaking and Listening. Ratio of Reading - Writing: Speaking - Listening skills practice is 70%--30%. The reasons behind this are Speaking is time consuming and students are less interested to speak in English in front of the teacher and the whole class. Ice breaking takes longer time which hampers the allocated class time. In most cases listening practice is difficult because of the lack of technical support in most universities. For listening, teachers advise students to watch English channels, listening BBC radio and read English newspaper.

Findings

Attitude of Students: Positive

EAP course students have both positive and negative attitude towards their course. A handful of students find the course helpful and necessary. They truly want to develop their language skill as they encounter the need of it. They need to perform all of their academic activities in English. Very few efficient language users in EAP classroom want to brush up their skill and remain motivated in classroom. Few inefficient students become interested to develop their language skill once they get the opportunity in the EAP classroom. Discipline draws demarcation line. That means students of some particular faculties, namely, students of science and business faculties are positive about their need of being efficient in English. They understand this efficiency will definitely help them in their professional life as well.

Attitude of Students: Negative

The researcher has found negative attitude of students is stronger. Most of them are least bothered about the need of English language proficiency. They are much more careful about the self-disciplinary courses. They find no relations between EAP course and their self-disciplinary courses as the EAP course does not have any contextual materials. As a result, they just want to pass the EAP course anyway. Many of them also think doing these courses is wastage of time. In this case also discipline draws demarcation line. This study shows students of humanities have negative feeling about EAP courses. They are least motivated to enhance their English language skill.

Attitude of Teachers: Positive

Like the students, EAP course instructors also have mixed feeling regarding the courses they teach. The researcher has found some of the self-motivated teachers truly have positive attitude towards teaching EAP courses. During the interview session one teacher has mentioned, "Teaching in different departments gives different tastes". He thinks if he teaches different students in different semesters from different departments he is never bored and can develop his teaching methods gradually which can facilitate the students. Some of the teachers think EAP teaching enhances subject specific knowledge and makes confident. While preparing the course materials for multidisciplinary students their knowledge of different disciplines develop and they can incorporate this knowledge while teaching contextual EAP courses. Another teacher has argued, "It's a challenge teaching language to multidisciplinary students and creates research field".

Attitude of Teachers: Negative

It is quite surprising that many EAP instructors have adverse attitude towards teaching EAP courses. Teachers do not bother about subject specific

knowledge. They feel designing contextual course materials is time consuming and tiresome job. It is quite difficult to prepare teaching and practice materials every time for different departments. One of them strongly mentioned, "I don't feel at home in teaching multidisciplinary students going to their departments". Some of them think going to different departments to take courses loses their respect. In some cases lack of respect from students of other departments make them feel negative about teaching courses in different departments. In most of the universities, teachers feel that it is a matter of dishonor for senior faculties to take EAP courses. Usually, newly appointed teachers are assigned to take EAP courses in different departments. The researcher has found from this study that students' disinterest demotivates the teachers.

Students' Voice: How the Course should be

Based on the questionnaire answered by students the researcher has got some suggestions from them. Most of them think classes should be learner-centered and interactive. They have stated if they get chance to be involved in classes actively, they can practice English more and can develop their skill. Some of them have mentioned teaching methods should be updated that can raise students' interest to be present in classes. A number of them have also pointed out that teaching materials should also be interesting. Availability of teachers during need is also a concern for many of the students. Teachers are only present during classes and students cannot reach them when need as they are not the teachers of their own departments.

Teachers' Voice: What They Want

From the answers of the questionnaires for teachers and from the direct interview with them, the researcher has also found the teachers' expectations in favor of teaching successful EAP courses. Some of them think, they should have spaces for professional development. Institutional support is also desired by them. Institution should provide them enough opportunity to prepare themselves for teaching successful EAP courses by arranging and funding training for them and by delivering required resources and materials for the courses. As EAP teachers need intensive preparation and adequate contextual knowledge to teach these courses, so they should have relief from course burden. They also have urge to get respect from students and colleagues of other departments where they are allocated to take EAP courses. Last but not the least, financial benefits for taking these courses is also desired by them.

Limitations of EAP Courses

Success of EAP courses is hindered by some limitations as observed by the researcher. In universities, disciplines have been increasing and number of students is also increasing. Therefore, number of EAP courses in

different departments is also increasing. As a result, a good number of English teachers with less experiences and low efficiency have been appointed to teach English language to the students of different departments. Contents of the courses are least related to the disciplines where EAP courses are offered. For example, EAP courses offered by LLB department do not contain any content related to the context of Law and Justice. Students are demotivated to learn and practice as the course materials are fully different from their core discipline. If the teachers are from English department, students of other departments don't respect them, not even in English classes. On the other hand, English course is not fully new to them. So, they feel relaxed regarding this course from the very beginning. Teachers of respective departments are also relaxed in students' use of language in academic work. They pay less attention to the students' use of language in answering questions, understanding written and spoken texts and even in presenting their assignments in writing and orally. There is also lack of support in allotting classroom, materials and resources from respective departments as English is not the main stream course.

Recommendations

From the above study, it can be suggested that upgradation of the EAP course design is a must. Teachers must be aware of students' needs and academic requirements. Teaching materials should be contextual in collaboration with different faculties. Teachers must know the objectives of teaching those courses. Classes should be interesting and student centered. Teachers should pay attention to develop students' motivation. Teachers of respective departments should make the students aware of their use of language in academic work; namely in understanding printed course materials, classroom discussion, answering exam questions, giving oral presentations and preparing assignments. Efficient teachers who are self-motivated and innovative should be assigned so that they can make the language classes interesting and contextual for their students. Teachers' training should be arranged to keep the teachers updated about the new happening in the language teaching field.

Conclusion

This paper has observed the status of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) as an approach to the teaching of English language based on learner's academic needs for English. The researcher has also observed the ways how EAP is taught and learnt by the teachers and students in Bangladeshi universities. The researcher has found EAP teachers' need to be able to analyze contexts and language, understand learners' needs and develop materials that suit those contexts and needs. The major goal of EAP can be fulfilled if the course contents, materials and teaching-learning methods are

accumulated according to the needs of the learners. Teachers' efficiency of analyzing students' need play a vital role for successful EAP teaching. The researcher has suggested the ways to improve EAP teaching in Bangladesh.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire for Students

(This action is a part of a personal research. Your opinion will be kept fully confidential.)

Name of department: _____

Semester: 1st/ 2nd

1. What is the name of your English language course?

2. What are taught in this course? (Put tick)

Grammar/ Skills (Reading/Writing/Speaking/Listening)

3. What type of activities do you do in classes?

4. Do you like to do the English course? Yes/No (Put tick)

If yes, why?

If no, why?

5. Does your course have any similar vocabulary or settings with the courses of your own discipline?

6. Do you think this course can help you in your own discipline courses? Yes/No (Put tick)

If yes, how?

7. What do you need more for the development of your English course?

8. Additional comment. (If any)

Appendix B: Questionnaire for Teachers

(This action is a part of a personal research. Your opinion will be kept fully confidential.)

Name of department: _____

Course Name: _____

Students' semester type: 1st/ 2nd

1. How many EAP courses usually do you teach per semester?

2. What type of differences do the courses have?

3. What are the contents of these courses?

4. What type of activities do you give your students to do?

5. Do you like to teach EAP courses? Yes/No (Put tick)

If yes, why?

If no, why?

6. Are the contents of the EAP courses you teach contextual with the students' own discipline? Yes/No (Put tick)

7. Do you provide contextual practice works to your students? Yes/No (Put tick)

8. Do you think this course can help your students in learning their own discipline courses? Yes/No (Put tick)

If yes, how?

If no, why?

9. What limitations do you face during teaching these courses?
10. What do you need more for teaching the EAP courses successfully?
11. Additional comment. (If any)

Appendix C: Class Observation Checklist

Observer: _____ Teacher Observed: _____ Date: _____
Time: _____ University: _____ Department: _____
Course: _____ Semester: _____
Details of lesson observed: _____ Aims of the lesson: _____
Skills focus: _____ Materials used: _____

Teacher's activity	Yes /No	Comments/ Examples
1. Did the teacher teach grammar in class?		
2. Did the teacher teach language skills in class?		
3. Was the class interactive and interesting?		
4. Were the students actively involved in class activities?		
5. Did the students enjoy practices in class?		
6. Were all the students motivated to get involved in learning?		
7. Was the teaching method appropriate for EAP class?		
8. Were the contents of the course contextual relating to their discipline?		
9. Were the language practices contextual relating to their discipline?		
10. Did the teacher have adequate knowledge about the particular department?		
11. Was there any limitation to make the EAP class successful from teacher's side?		
12. Was there any limitation to make the EAP class successful from learners' side?		
13. Was there any limitation to make the EAP class successful from institution/department's side?		

Main stages of the lesson (tasks and activities, time spent on each)

General comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the course

