

FROM LANGUAGE TO SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: DECONSTRUCTING EAP IN A TRANSNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Saida Radjabzade*, Liliya Makovskaya and Saida Akbarova

*Correspondence: sradjabzade@wiut.uz

Abstract

The write-up reflects on the practice observed in the EAP module of one of the transnational higher education institutions in Tashkent (Uzbekistan). Initially, the EAP module aimed to develop the learners' language proficiency further; however, at the request and suggestions of the subject lecturers and different stakeholders, graduate attributes were enhanced in the module learning outcomes. Consequently, the focus and assessment tasks shifted from implementing the Study Skills, Academic Socialisation and to Academic Literacies models (Lea & Street, 2006). If, in the past, the EAP lessons targeted teaching grammar, vocabulary, and the development of language skills needed for academia, at present, they address teaching language skills and developing soft, academic, and research skills.

Keywords: EAP Curriculum, Academic Language Skills, Assessment Tasks, Year-Long Module, Digitalization, Models

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INTRODUCTION

Over two decades, the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) module has enriched learners' academic English skills with other skills development (e.g., study, research, and soft skills). This transformation has become possible through the experiential application of various frameworks. In particular, *study skills*, *academic socialisation*, and *academic literacies* have been the base that built the link between graduate attributes, the EAP module learning objectives, skills, and community of practice (Basari, 2018; Ding, 2007; Evans & Green, 2007; McGrath & Kaufhold, 2016). While *study skills* model focuses on language acquisition and is narrowed down to particular skills development, *academic socialisation* model

relates to specific fields of study and their successful skills development in specific areas of study, which can be transferred to other contexts. The *academic literacies* model concentrates on helping students acquire knowledge and abilities unique to their field and transferrable to other contexts (Lea & Street, 2006). These three models can generally possess specific features but overlap once come into action. They are mainly used in academia when developing curricula, syllabi, and lesson plans for particular subjects. For instance, in the EAP modules, they are mainly used to accommodate the needs of both first and foreign-language speakers who come from non-academic backgrounds or with minimum knowledge about academic honesty, professional presentations, university materials, academic writing which are essential to succeed in an academic context (Lillis & Tuck, 2016). So, these models help the educators build a programme with a main focus on developing students' academic writing and reading skills (to deal with texts, lectures, presentations and writing tasks), academic communication (among peers, between pairs, lecturers and students), and strategies to deal with academic tasks (notetaking, skimming, scanning, time management) needed for successful performance in the modules in upper levels.

The main part of the write-up is divided into two sections that will help the reader picture a particular change in the EAP module development applying the aforementioned models at one of the transnational higher education institutions (HEI) in Uzbekistan (Central Asia). This practice-based chapter discusses the changes and developments made in a specific time frame over two decades regarding the module focus and assessment tasks with the final picture of the module assessments after the changes. The paper is finalised by providing a conclusion and implications.

BACKGROUND

The EAP module was introduced when Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT), the first internationalised university in Uzbekistan that has English as a medium of instruction, opened doors to its first students in 2002. WIUT now hosts approximately 5,000 students. This higher education institution offers bachelor's degree courses in Business Management, Economics, Finance, Commercial Law, and Business Information Systems; master's degree courses in Applied Economics, Business Intelligence and Analytics, Human Resources Management and Talent Development, Learning and Teaching, Public Health, Business Management, Research Methods, and local Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy) and DSc (Doctor of Science) in Management, Econometrics and Statistics. All undergraduate (BA) courses require

completing the university's Certificate of International Foundation Studies Course (CIFS). This foundation programme is structured and organised to assist students in succeeding in their upper-level studies by incorporating several optional and required core language, skills, and math related modules. As English is considered to be a foreign language in the country, the university requires at least 6.0 in IELTS (with no less 5.5 for each skill) for applicants to be admitted to study in an English-medium context.

EAP is one of the core year-long modules that aims to prepare students for academic life, specifically understanding academic lectures and academic sources, producing research-based presentations or talks, and being able to write academically. The students on the course are mostly 17-18 years old who have graduated from secondary schools or academic lyceums, in which they have studied for 11 years. Most students come from Uzbekistan, and only a few originate from China, South Korea, Egypt, Kazakhstan, Russia, Pakistan, India, and others. All prospective learners should provide an IELTS certificate to show their language proficiency and be eligible for the foundation course. The EAP module is taught by experienced teachers who have worked at the HEI for over five years and obtained their MA and PhD degrees in and outside the country.

CHANGES IN THE FOCUS OF THE EAP MODULE

To realise specified goals, the initial EAP syllabus and lesson plans heavily followed the *study skills* model (Lea & Street, 2006), emphasising teaching students the mechanics of written language (sentence structure and punctuation), vocabulary, and grammar development using the *Headway* upper-intermediate coursebook and supplementary materials that enabled learners to develop reading, listening, and speaking skills. However, with further improvements in the requirements at the upper levels, students needed to possess linguistic, academic, and cultural skills to embark on an undergraduate degree course. Thus, the EAP module emphasised developing academic skills focusing on *academic socialisation* to adjust in university life such as listening to academic lectures, participating in tutorials, reading books, articles, and other materials, conducting library and Internet searches for relevant ideas, referencing the sources, and writing essays relevant to the academic context. Furthermore, following *academic literacies* students had an opportunity to evaluate sources critically, extract information from the various text genres applicable to academic study, plan and write the draft of a short academic essay using an appropriate academic style, reflect critically on their learning, and produce an improved academic essay,

write annotated bibliographies using the proper referencing conventions, take accurate notes and use these notes to answer questions and write formal emails, and short reports in an educational context. These enabled learners to develop multiple sets of academic skills.

Later in 2012, based on the requirements of the parental university (University of Westminster, 2014), and the expectations of the module leaders of content subjects regarding more sophisticated academic writing, report writing replaced essay writing. This was suggested with a thinking that the academic reports would focus on discussing the findings and writing a literature review and could help improve referencing skills. Providing proper acknowledgement of sources has always been one of the significant challenges for EAP students. Hyland (2008) believes that citation demonstrates the ability to reference and give credit to the author and highlights the students' reading skill and evaluation of the source idea to support his/her argument. Thus, making changes to the module that has enabled EAP to be a language and an academic skills-oriented module that can allow students to be equipped with various transferable skills has become an essential goal for the EAP team.

It has become possible to incorporate communicative language skills (listening, reading, speaking, writing) with the required set of transferable skills which are part of *academic literacies*, *academic socialisation* and *study skills* models (e.g., working with others, problem-solving, presentation, research, leadership, creativity and many other skills) and academic skills (e.g., source incorporation, proper acknowledgement of authors' ideas, notetaking and others) that have influenced teaching and learning positively. The content and specific study skills were carefully analysed before integrating academic English language competencies, study, transferable, and 21st-century skills. Students could not only be ready to complete the module but also be professionals in their field with strong critical, analytical, creative, hard, and soft skills (Anand & Ackley, 2021).

If we imagine the three models in a line graph, it will perfectly picture the integration of the models with the high or low focus in the development of the module throughout these years. Because at the starting point, the EAP module was more oriented on *study skills* and less on *academic literacies* and *academic socialisation* models, later this paradigm changed to vice-versa. As Lillis and Tuck mentioned 'academic meaning making' plays an important role in exploring other 'new genres and practices' within academia (2016, p. 6). By now, the EAP module has mostly applied *academic literacies* and only then *academic socialisation* and *study skills*.

CHANGES IN THE ASSESSMENT TASKS OF THE EAP MODULE

The assessment tasks have been updated following the changes in the focus of the EAP module (see Figure 1).

At the initial stage, the module included in-class tests on writing the summary of the listening and exam on developing an essay. Another assessment task was to create a portfolio, in which students provided an email, an annotated bibliography, and a short report. One of the limitations of the in-class test and exam was the pressure on students to produce writing under exam conditions. As Sokolov (2014) explains, the key drawback of such kinds of writing tests is that it makes students produce ‘a single essay in a strictly limited time with little (or no) choice of topic and no opportunity for revision’ (p.141). Another limitation was learners’ confusion with different types of writing genres. They confessed that they did need more time for writing. Based on the limitations, first, a process writing approach to an argumentative essay was introduced. The main aim of the change was to enable students to start by developing an outline, paragraph writing that led to an essay writing, to develop further reading skills, in-text referencing, compiling a reference list, to support personal opinions, paraphrase, edit and proof-read.

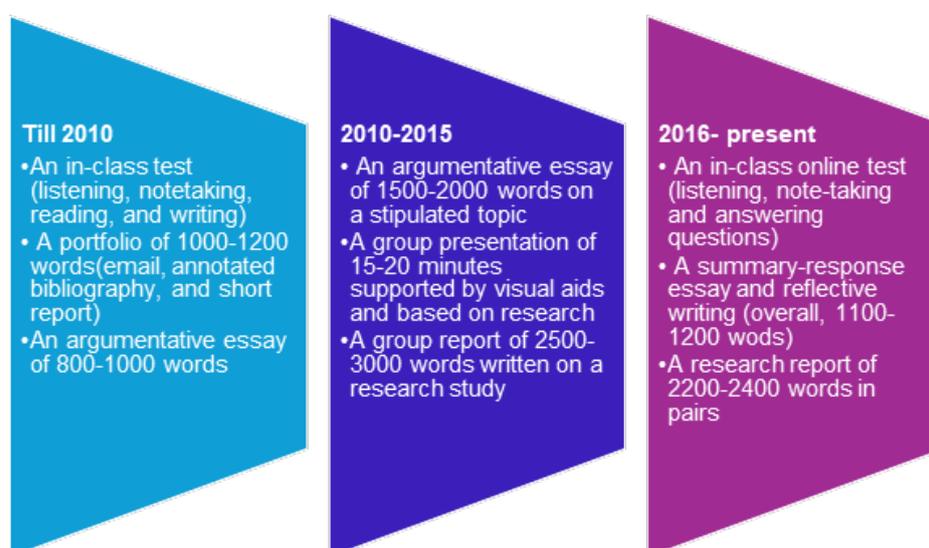


Figure 1: Changes in the Assessment

Overall, the initial EAP syllabus and assessment accommodated students’ language needs. They enhanced their language proficiency and developed the academic skills they needed to meet the university’s

requirements; however, the *study skills* model limited lecturers from going deeper in exploring contexts and audiences that were needed to produce quality academic writing.

That is why, the assessment tasks were set up applying *academic literacies* and *academic socialisation* models which included submitting written coursework (Semester 1), delivering an oral group presentation, and a written group report (Semester 2). If in the assessment task for Semester One, students worked individually to acquire specific academic skills such as evaluating sources, summarising, paraphrasing, writing argumentatively and referencing, in Semester Two, they challenged themselves by working in a group task and applying all the skills mentioned above as well as acquiring new ones such as researching, teamwork, problem solving, conflict resolution, synthesising, and report writing.

Finally, the updated EAP module assessment included in-class tests for evaluating students' academic listening and summarising skills to support continuous assessment and technology integration in the module. Technology use has also increased because of the pandemic, which has influenced the module structure to move and manage online. The digitisation of teaching and learning has posed particular challenges for students and teachers to be competent technology users (Leslie et al., 2022; Kohnke & Jarvis, 2021). Teachers took different professional development courses on e-learning to adapt face-to-face designed activities in an online format to motivate students to participate actively in online classes. They learned to use different applications to integrate into the learning management system (Big Blue Button) to build an effective and safe learning environment where students enjoyed collaborating, discussing, and sharing their opinions with the class. Likewise, the learning management system has trained students to boost their class performance.

The Semester Two syllabus and teaching calendar were designed based on project-based learning, doing research, and writing a report. If, in Semester One, the assessment followed Bloom's taxonomy, as students remembered, understood, and applied their knowledge to create a summary of the text, evaluating sources for strong evidence use; Semester 2 was more complex, and they wrote a report from scratch based on their small-scale research on a specific topic of interest (see Figure 2). In addition, it followed collaborative learning because students worked on the project in a group of three people. Students were more involved in the task because they were in charge of their learning, communicated their challenges and confusions with each other and found ways to solve them (Wulandari, 2022). However, some students

needed help with decision-making, taking full responsibility for their learning, and, most notably, working in groups and sharing roles during the research and writing processes (Tien, 2021). To avoid the clashes in assessment tasks of other modules, we have excluded the presentation task of the research findings; instead, we have included a one-on-one meeting between the teacher and a small group of students during the semester. It could help the teacher to track students' progress and build rapport. In addition, students could show their sources, clarify, and discuss any questions they could have during the data collection process, and only then could they start the writing process.

In-class computer-mediated test	Individual written coursework	Pair-work report
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening (for gist, details, inference) • Digital literacy skills • Reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Argumentation • Summarizing • Paraphrasing • Critical reading • Referencing • Evaluating skills in terms of evidence • Secondary research • Reflection • Incorporating sources in writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical thinking • Group/pair work • Basic research skills / primary research • Synthesizing / Summarizing • Communication skills / discussions • Argumentation • Paraphrasing • Basic statistical analysis • Use of sources • Digital skills

Figure 2: Skills development in EAP

These changes in the module assessment focused more on developing students' language, self-reflection, research and study skills, communication, and collaboration skills, which are essential for the upper level of study and the job market.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the changes to the EAP module focus and assessment tasks have applied the three models to ensure our students have been equipped with the necessary language, soft, transferable, and research skills to survive and flourish in a competitive job market in the 21st century. If at the beginning, we started the module construction focusing more on *study skills* (working on exams tasks, dealing with exam pressure and timing) and *academic socialisation* models (communication with peers, lecturers and working with course

materials), and less on *academic literacies* (evaluating the texts, lectures critically, and writing academic tasks) later considering upper levels' requirements, the labour market, our students' background and needs we reversed our focus on these three models stressing on *academic literacies* more than *academic socialisation* and *study skills* model. Although it took us two decades to move from a language teaching approach to a more advanced EAP module that integrates academic English language competencies and transferable skills, it provides students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in their future studies and careers. We hope that this write-up with the explanation and reflection on three models integration in our EAP module development can provide EAP educators, teachers of different writing courses and curriculum developers with 'food for thought'. It is important to remember that change is a gradual process that requires patience, strength, knowledge, and much effort to make it work. Eventually, these changes have a positive impact on our learners' academic and professional journeys with essential skills achievement.

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Notes

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