

ESL Educators' Belief in Teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) to Low Level Learners

Nor Yazhi Khamis*, Azwin Arif Abdul Rahim, Suriyakumar Sinnadurai,
Zarina Mohd Ali, Zuraina Ali

*Centre for Modern Languages and Human Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Pahang,
Lebuhraya Tun Razak, 26300 Kuantan, Pahang, Malaysia.*

Article Information

Received 21 April 2015
Received in revised form 20
December 2015
Accepted 24 December 2015

Abstract

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) emerged from the broad concept of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). EAP is intended to facilitate learners in academic setting whilst the latter is more general in its purpose and approach. As such, lack of fundamental knowledge and understanding among ESL educators on the differences of the two teachings could lead to ineffective EAP classroom practices. This study identifies 72 ESL educators' belief on EAP teaching for low level engineering undergraduates at four Malaysian technical universities. The study used an online reflective questionnaire adapted from Alexander (2012) and semi structured interviews with eight senior members of the institutions. The findings indicated a tension which might exist between the beliefs about general CLT and specific EAP teaching among the educators. The lack of awareness among the educators on the differences between the two has consequences on their EAP practices. The senior educators concurred with the findings and highlighted the need of specific EAP competency and formal trainings for the ESL educators in teaching EAP at the Malaysian technical and engineering based higher education institutions.

© 2015 Penerbit Universiti Malaysia Pahang

Keywords: Educators' beliefs; English for Academic Purposes (EAP); Low level learners; Technical and engineering

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) derives from a general Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) concept. Belcher (2006) and Hyland (2006) specified EAP as an approach that depends on learners' specific field instructional materials and derived from corpus-enhanced genre studies and critical pedagogy. EAP teaching concentrates on "teaching English specifically to facilitate learners' study or research through the medium of English" (Hamp-Lyons, 2011: 89) where the target is to develop learners' communicative competence by participating in their content discipline communicative activities (Basturkmen, 2012). Flowerdew (2005) regards EAP from "General English courses through to very specific English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses" (p. 8) with learners' context of learning determining learners needs specificity (Bax, 2003; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Graves, 2008; Savignon, 2007). Therefore, EAP is suitable for tertiary education context in Malaysia in which learners study content specific field using mostly English as a medium (Soo Ruey Shing & Tam Shu Sim, 2011). Even ESL learners with low proficiency i.e. Band One and Two (based on Malaysia University English Test) are introduced to EAP to equip the learners to perform appropriately in academic settings (Belcher, 2006; Hyland, 2006).

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +60122039112; Fax: +6095493112

E-mail address: nyazi@ump.edu.my [Nor Yazhi, K.]; ariflesl@gmail.com [Azwin Arif, A.R.]; suriyakumar@gmail.com [Suriya Kumar, S.]; zarina@ump.edu.my [Zarina, M.A.]; zuraina@ump.edu.my [Ali, Z.].

In a study by Alexander (2012) where this study stems from, the study demands the teaching of EAP in the UK. The teaching of EAP is required at the kick start of a language programme and aims for some substantial achievement within a short period of time. The growth of EAP in the country has created a demand for educators, particularly on short intensive pre-session courses to equip learners at the start of their academic programmes enrolment. Hence, Alexander (2012) stated that some centres employed educators who were trained and experienced in general CLT but may be new, thus less experience in the teaching of EAP to accommodate with the demand. Ding, Jones and King (2004), however, reported that even experienced CLT educators faced difficulties when they started teaching EAP particularly in relation to content field type of language teaching.

Most Malaysian universities have adopted the EAP approach. The teaching of EAP for ESL learners is widely spreading, and EAP courses are prepared to meet the learners' academic demands of studying in institutions of higher learning (Wong Fook Fei, Thang Siew Ming, Noorizah Mohd Noor, Hafizah Latif & Mohd Sallehudin Abd. Aziz, 2013). However, several graduate employment projects commissioned by the Malaysian Department of Higher Education (at that time Ministry), Morshidi Sirat, Ambigapathy Pandian, Balakrishnan Muniandy, Fazal Mohamed Mohamed Sultan, Harshita Aini Haroon, Hazita Azman, Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan and Ratna Roshida Abdul Razak (2008) and Isarji Hj Sarudin, Ainol Madziah Zubairi, Mohamad Sahari Nordin and Mohd Azmi Omar (2008) identified some consistent need for a comprehensive review of English courses particularly for Specific Purposes or fields in Malaysian universities. The recommendation was in direct response to the nation's concern for the declining standard of English among Malaysian university learners and graduates and the need to meet the expectations of the stakeholders (Isarji Sarudin, Ainol Madziah Zubairi & Afiza Mohamad Ali, 2009). Su-Hie Ting and Syaharom Abdullah (2010) specified their EAP studies in engineering field and found the distinct characteristic of the engineering discipline writing. The specificity was manifested in the precision and substance of the recommendation reports produced by the engineering learners. This presents the need of specific EAP teaching for Malaysian ESL learners studying engineering at tertiary institutions.

1.1 Problem Statement

Accordingly, the concern of this study emanates from the need for better EAP teaching specifically to Malaysian low level learners studying engineering programmes. Learners with proficiency level as low as MUET Band 1 and 2 are accepted to study in most Malaysian universities. The learners are however, required to score minimum of least Band 3 (Modest User) before they are able to graduate. Bromley (2005) ascertained this as a common scenario at the Malaysian public high institutions under the assumption that most Malaysian ESL learners do not know how to improve their English language command even after 13 years of learning. Inadvertently, the inability to cope with the content due to paucity of English proficiency may risk learners opting out the learning process altogether, which has been an apparent reason for the depreciating number of interest in science among Malaysian learners ever since 2007 (The Star, 2012). Fact is these learners are undeniably 'false beginners' who are still struggling in finding suitable way in acquiring the language. Yet, albeit EAP tangible evidences of praxis identified in most studies, it is imperative to note that EAP is highly recommended for low intermediate to advance level of English learners. Though argued by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) as most courses assume basic language system of the discipline it serves, EAP is practically not recommended for beginner or low proficient learners (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Learners without the necessary academic language skills may find themselves unable to cope with the high level scientific skills of engineering particularly the English medium engineering programmes.

On the other hand, this is also, a probable reason for ESL educators to resort to proficiency type of teaching for the low level learners which underlies CLT. For that, EAP teaching practices among ESL educators teaching at the Malaysia engineering tertiary level of education context necessitates specific investigations. Even with different scales of investigations into ESL educators' beliefs in various settings, little is known about the educators' beliefs towards EAP teaching to low level learners at the technical and engineering tertiary-level institutions. Hence, this paper intends to find out the beliefs of ESL educators at four selected technical universities in teaching EAP to their low level engineering learners. Using an online survey that contrasts general CLT and specific EAP teaching, the educators' beliefs were classified into

success factors or barriers to effective EAP teaching statements which were adapted from Alexander (2012). Subsequent interviews were carried out to find out more about the beliefs. Both the survey and interviews aimed to find out which of the beliefs do the educators hold in teaching low level learners at their institutions.

1.2 Research Objectives

This paper aims to find out the beliefs of ESL educators at four selected technical universities in teaching EAP to their low level engineering learners. Using an online survey that contrasts general CLT and specific EAP teaching, the educators' beliefs were classified into success factors or barriers to effective EAP teaching statements which were adapted from Alexander (2012). Subsequent interviews were carried out to find out more about the beliefs the educators hold in teaching low level learners at their institutions.

ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

2.1 English for Academic Purposes Teaching

Alexander (2012) contended that educators who are unaware of the different approaches required in teaching EAP may create barriers to their learners' effective language learning. Her earlier findings (Alexander, 2007) on 150 UK educators showed that few of the educators had access to formal EAP training. When asked about their confidence in teaching EAP, majority of the educators with more than five years' experience needed more years to feel confident. This was in contrast to the educators with less than five years' experience who had taken only a year or less to feel confident teaching EAP. These surprising responses indicated that the educators considered teaching EAP was about applying their existing knowledge and skills to new materials and context. When in actuality, Belcher (2006) emphasised the need of educators to adopt a new concept and develop towards the ideal E[A]P which are termed as "combined needs assessor, specialised syllabus designer, authentic materials developer and content-knowledgeable instructor, capable of coping with the revolving door of content areas relevant to learners' communities" (in Alexander, 2012: 100). Alexander (2012: 101) then inferred this as,

...the breadth and depth of commitment required, especially from [educators] with humanities backgrounds, to engage with technical content areas, a process which takes much longer than a year and which can be a daunting prospect. In the absence of formal training, it is important to support critical reflection on the appropriateness of general CLT beliefs for the EAP context.

This study concurred with Alexander (2012) in which for changes in teaching to happen, educators need to explore what their beliefs are and reflect on how their teaching can change as a result of new teaching situations. In this regard, educators' beliefs and pedagogical knowledge are closely related. With the new teaching beliefs in mind, EAP educators are able to determine which part of language skills to be taught and how best to teach it. If not inevitable, some educators may be too stuck in their existing beliefs which possibly incompatible with what is required in EAP teaching.

2.2 Educators' Beliefs

Graves (2000) asserted that educators' classroom practices are inevitably influenced by their own beliefs. In fact, Griffin and Ohlsson (2001) identified that beliefs have more influence than knowledge in determining how individuals organise and define tasks and problems which make beliefs stronger predictors of individual's decisions and actions. In understanding beliefs which is defined as "tacit, personally-held practical system of mental constructs" (Borg, 2006: 35) that influence individual's decisions and actions (Alexander, 2012), Pajares (1992) cautioned the need to infer individual's underlying conditions. Inferences, however, are often unable to accurately represent individual's beliefs because beliefs cannot be directly observed or measured; it must be inferred from what people say, intend and do

(Alexander, 2012). The inferences can be made via educator learning which is considered as a socially negotiated process and relies on person’s knowledge, learners, subject matter, curricula, and context (Freeman, 1996). This involves reshaping existing knowledge, beliefs and practices rather than inflicting new theories, methods or materials on educators (Johnson & Golombek, 2002). Different theoretical backgrounds that underlie learning to teach and teaching methodologies are essential especially for novice educators because it provides ways of understanding how knowledge influences classroom practices (Alexander, 2012).

More importantly, it is the educators’ beliefs about what constitutes good language teaching that affect their classroom practices (Borg, 2006; Phipps & Borg, 2009). For example, in a study by Phipps and Borg (2009) noted “how contextual factors such as classroom management concerns and student expectations can cause tensions between educators’ beliefs and their practices” (p. 385). These authors stressed the importance to recognise educators’ tensions between their beliefs and their classroom practices which can lead to a change in their professional development (Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Pajares, 1992). A change in beliefs is more likely if educators can be persuaded to try out new ways of teaching which are workable for their learners’ successful learning (Pajares, 1992).

2.3 EAP Teaching versus CLT

Alexander (2012) contrasted general CLT and specific EAP teaching based on the origins and development of the two teaching methodologies. Though the two are based on communicative competence concept (Richards, 2006; Savignon, 2007; Widdowson, 2009) and the emphasis on what is suitable for a certain context (Johnson, 2009), there are dissimilarities identified (Table 1).

Table 1. The dissimilarities of CLT and EAP teachings.

Dissimilarities	CLT	EAP Teaching
Driven by real needs	For communication between peoples in the new European Economic Community (Johnson, 2009; Savignon, 2007)	For continuing access, through a lingua franca, to the technical expertise and academic knowledge of former colonial powers (Bloor & Bloor, 1986; Hamp-Lyons, 2011)
The importance of knowing what is appropriate in a context (Johnson, 2009)	More difficult because learners do not have clear purposes for learning (Graves, 2008; Johnson, 2009) The Threshold Level (van Ek, 1975 cited in Johnson, 2009) was introduced to specify a common core of functions for socialising which are presumably needed by all learners	The target context for language use can be identified and specified precisely Needs analysis is a “defining feature” (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 178), which essentially refines the goals of an EAP course and to ensures its syllabus caters to the target audience
The effects of developments in second language acquisition (SLA) research by placing the learners at the centre of learning process (Cook, 2009; Savignon, 2007)	Spoken language is prioritised in comparison to written which is considered secondary and derived form (Cook, 2009; Widdowson, 2009). The emphasis on spoken fluency usually leads to a relaxed classroom in establishing good social relations (Senior, 2006) which can also mean as a “ <i>measure of a good lesson for many [educators]...where activities work and learners are happy, with little tangible evidence that learners have learnt anything</i> ” (Cook, 2009: 139).	The focus shifts from language form to language function and the centrality of the learners’ responsibility in their interlanguage development. These are to address learner needs which enhance motivation and promote learning Learners can be supported to function beyond their current competence level by instructional scaffolding (Foley, 1994), sharing responsibility for tasks with teacher or peers. The more skilled partner models the use of spoken or written language, asks questions to

<p>Teaching content</p>	<p>Learners are actively involved in negotiating meaning in pairs or groups to solve problems, discuss issues or express their personal views (Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood, & Son, 2005; Senior, 2006).</p> <p>Content at low proficiency levels is still largely drawn from the common core of functions for conversation and basic survival detailed in <i>The Threshold Level</i> (Johnson, 2009).</p> <p>When grammar is taught, the use tends to be made of a ‘proportional syllabus’ (Yalden, 1983 cited in Johnson, 2009: 320), which assumes that low level learners need a basic foundation of core grammatical structures before more complex notions and functions can be introduced</p>	<p>extend existing knowledge and gradually transfers control of the task to the less skilled partner.</p> <p>Course design has followed a “deep end strategy” (Johnson, 1982 cited in Bloor & Bloor, 1986, p.12) in which even at lower levels, learners can interact with authentic texts from their disciplines and later acquire relevant grammatical structures (Bloor & Bloor, 1986).</p> <p>Learners are facilitated to perform in an academic context so the focus is on understanding and producing academic texts, with syllabuses based on the context rhetorical functions and genres (Bruce, 2008; Swales, 2004; Trimble, 1985). This type of syllabus avoids atomistic approaches and encourages learners to acquire procedural knowledge about discourse and reapply this in different contexts (Bruce, 2008).</p>
-------------------------	--	--

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Participants

There were two groups of participants involved in the study. 72 ESL educators from four technical universities participated in the first stage of the study. Eight senior educators from each of the university participated in the second stage of the study. The senior ESL educators were identified as EAP experts in technical and engineering field who have had experiences as the head of departments and deans at the institutions. The educators were ESL educators from four technical universities that offer diverse English medium engineering programmes where its medium of instruction highlights the exigencies of English language and communication skill.

3.2 Research Instruments

Two types of instrument were used in this study, i.e. an online questionnaire and interview questions. The first was an online survey that comprised 23 pairs of reflective statements on CLT and EAP teachings. The questionnaire was adapted from a study on ‘Exploring teacher beliefs in teaching EAP at low proficiency levels’ by Alexander (2012) and checked for its reliability. The questionnaire items had Cohen’s Kappa values ranging 0.5 to 0.60 which indicated ‘Average’ reliability based on Viera and Garret’s (2005) Scale of Kappa Reliability Value.

The statements were categorised in four sections: beliefs about low level learners, beliefs about course books for low level, beliefs about teaching low level and beliefs about teaching EAP to low level learners. The statements were paired into opposing beliefs: beliefs which might form barriers to efficient teaching and beliefs more likely to promote effective teaching for low level learners in an EAP context. The second stage was semi-structured interviews conducted with two senior ESL educators from each university.

3.3 Research Procedures

This study was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, the questionnaire was piloted and revised. The survey was made available for nearly three months before the new semester of 2011 session began. Based on the replies, 72 ESL educators from four technical universities participated in this first stage of the study. The respondents were asked to choose the statement from each pair which best represented their view (Alexander, 2012). The survey aims to find out the beliefs that the ESL educators hold toward EAP teaching for their low level learners.

The second stage was semi-structured interviews with eight senior ESL educators from the four universities. The interviews were recorded and transcribed with the purpose to support the beliefs of the ESL educators participated in the survey. As well, the interviews were used to identify the beliefs that underlie effective EAP teachings at the universities.

FINDINGS

4.1 The First Stage

In the first stage, the findings illustrated the 72 ESL educators' various levels of education and experiences. The respondents' highest level of education were grouped based on their ESL or language and linguistics academic qualifications i.e. bachelors, masters and PhDs (Table 2). Majority of them were educators with Bachelor's degree (48.6%), followed by 26 educators with Masters' degree (36.1 %) and 11 of them were with PhDs (15.3%).

Table 2. Participants' highest level of education.

Level	<i>n</i>	%
Bachelor	35	48.6
Master	26	36.1
PhD	11	15.3
Total	72	100

In term of experience, the proportions were reflected in the respondents' level of education (Table 2). Slightly more than half of the respondents (51.4%) possessed less than five years of experience as most recorded holding Bachelor's degree as their highest qualification. This indicated that most of the respondents were newly graduated educators with minimal teaching experience either in CLT or EAP at tertiary level institutions. Interestingly, 25 (34.7%) of the respondents admitted to have more than 10 years' experience and only 10 (13.9%) had five to ten years (Table 3). These groups represented ESL educators with vast experience in CLT and some probabilities of experience teaching EAP at higher institutions.

Table 3. Years of experience teaching English at tertiary level.

Years of Experience	<i>n</i>	%
Less than 5 years	37	51.4
5 – 10 years	10	13.9
More than 10 years	25	34.7
Total	72	100

The findings in the following sections are discussed in percentages with reference made to opposing statements ‘1a’ to ‘6a’ as ‘barriers’ and ‘1b’ to ‘6b’ referred as ‘success’ factors to EAP teaching for low level learners. The percentages represented the beliefs the educators have chosen with regards to EAP teaching at their institutions.

In the first section, ‘Beliefs about low level learners of English’ (Table 4), majority of the educators believed low level learners should study the language system at the same time as they study academic English (3b; 94.4%) and be challenged with new and unfamiliar materials and difficult tasks (5b; 95.8%). Hence, they believed it was not necessary to put learners into classes according to their level for them to make progress (2b; 48.6%).

Table 4. Beliefs about low level learners of English.

Barriers	%	Success	%
1a Learners learning a second language are similar to children learning their first language.	77.8	1b Learners learning a second language are adults with experience of learning their first language.	22.2
2a Learners should be divided into levels and taught at the correct level to make progress.	51.4	2b It is not necessary to put learners into classes according to their level for them to make progress.	48.6
3a Learners should study the language system before they study academic English.	5.6	3b Learners should study the language system at the same time as they study academic English.	94.4
4a Learners should follow the natural order of acquisition i.e. listening/speaking before reading/writing.	70.8	4b Learners can learn language skills in the order that suits their needs and abilities.	29.2
5a Learners should not be challenged with material and tasks which might be too difficult for them.	4.2	5b Learners should be challenged with new and unfamiliar materials and difficult tasks.	95.8
6a Learners at this level are not able to study independently.	75.0	6b Learners at this level are able to study independently.	25.0

However, a number of significant findings were gathered from what were considered to be the barriers to efficient teaching for low level learners in an EAP context (statements 1a, 2a, 4a and 6a). Most of the educators believed ‘ESL learners were similar to children learning their first language’ (1a; 77.8%), ‘should follow the natural order of acquisition i.e. listening/ speaking before reading/writing’ (4a; 70.8%) and ‘do not believe that learners at this level were able to study independently’ (6a; 75%). Further, slightly more than 50% of the educators believed that the learners should be divided into levels and taught at the correct level to make progress.

The educators believed low level learners similar to children learning their first language influenced the educators to teach the learners according to the natural order of acquisition. This led them to believe that these learners were not able to be independent in their studies. Unfortunately, this dominant beliefs gathered from the respondents were in contrast to successful EAP teaching. Instead, the low level ESL learners should be treated as adults with experience of learning their first so that they can independently learn language skills in the order that suits their needs and abilities.

In the next section, on the ‘Beliefs about course books for low level learners’ (Table 5), there were large number of the educators who believed that learners need to master a small number of topics and texts to maintain interest and motivation (1b; 86.1%), and this is done by bringing in new texts and tasks to

supplement a course book (4b; 79.2%). Also, for a successful EAP teaching, if learners want to study at a higher level, some of the educators believed it is their responsibility to support the learners to achieve tasks (3b; 56.9%).

Table 5. Beliefs about course books for low level learners.

Barriers	%	Success	%
1a Learners need to meet a variety of topics and texts briefly to maintain interest and motivation.	13.9	1b Learners need to master a small number of topics and texts to maintain interest and motivation.	86.1
2a The units in a course book are not linked and they can be taught in any order.	69.4	2b The units in a course book are linked so it is important to follow the specified order.	30.6
3a If an educator has to support learners to achieve tasks, then the materials are at the wrong level.	43.1	3b If learners want to study at a higher level, then an educator can support them to achieve tasks.	56.9
4a It is better to supplement a course book by exploiting its texts and tasks further.	20.8	4b It is better to supplement a course book by bringing in new texts and tasks.	79.2
5a An educator needs to impose her/his own style and approach on the materials in a course book.	69.4	5b An educator needs to follow the specified approach to the materials in a course book.	30.6
6a The Teacher's Book is mainly useful for new and inexperienced educators.	63.9	6b The Teacher's Book is useful even for very experienced educators.	36.1

On the other hand, some of the educators were somehow hindered from being successful in teaching EAP when they chose to use 'a course book that has unconnected units' (2a; 69.4%). Not only it is incorrect when the educators 'impose her/his own style and approach on the materials in a course book' (5a; 69.4%), the educators disregarded the usefulness of Teacher's Book and considered it 'mainly useful for novice EAP educators' (6a; 63.9%). 43.1% of the educators also believed that when they have 'to support their learners to achieve certain tasks assigned, they deemed the materials they used were at the wrong level' (3a).

In EAP teaching, it is important for the educators to introduce a small number of topics and texts by bringing in new texts and tasks so that learners would be able to maintain their interest and motivation. They needed a course book with linked units, and it is important to follow its specified order. With that, even very experienced educators would find the usefulness of the Teacher's Book. However, many of the educators in this study chose to use course book which were not linked and could be taught in any order. This was why they felt the needs to impose their style and approach on the materials in a course book. They had no confidence in the Teacher's Book in which they felt was mainly useful for new and inexperienced educators and reprimanded the materials when they had to do more to support learners to achieve tasks.

The educators were also queried on 'Beliefs about teaching low level learners' (Table 6). Most of the educators showed strong beliefs toward the need 'to explain the aims of a lesson to help learners to reflect on their learning' (1b; 93.1%) and to 'focus lessons on the skills and language to be tested if learners are working towards an exam' (5b; 88.9%). Most of them also agreed that 'a lesson was a success if their learners struggled but progressed in their learning' (2a; 61.1%).

Table 6. Beliefs about teaching low level learners.

	Barriers	%	Success	%
1a	An educator should not explain the aims of a lesson because reflection is not important at this level.	6.9	1b An educator should explain the aims of a lesson to help learners to reflect on their learning.	93.1
2a	A lesson is successful if the learners liked it and wanted to do the same activities again.	38.9	2b A lesson is successful if the learners struggled but progressed in their learning.	61.1
3a	It is important, at low levels, to correct all the mistakes in learners' writing or speaking.	43.1	3b It is important, at low levels, to correct only mistakes relating to the focus of the lesson.	56.9
4a	It is the learners' responsibility to develop as independent learners.	50.0	4b It is the educator's responsibility to develop learners as independent learners.	50.0
5a	If learners are working towards an exam, lessons should focus on exam tasks in past exam papers.	11.1	5b If learners are working towards an exam, lessons should focus on the skills and language to be tested.	88.9

Nevertheless, the educators' beliefs were equally distributed when it came to whose responsibility in developing independent low level learners, i.e.,

4a It is the learners' responsibility to develop as independent learners (50%).

4b It is the educator's responsibility to develop learners as independent learners (50%).

The findings indicated that some of the educators believed that low level learners were able to develop themselves in learning the language for academic purposes. This belief was the opposite of successful practice in teaching EAP where it was the EAP educators' responsibility in assisting learners to develop independent EAP learners. A close tie also appeared in the following statements.

3a It is important, at low levels, to correct all the mistakes (43.1%).

3b It is important, at low levels, to correct only mistakes relating to the focus of the lesson (56.9%).

Some of the educators believed on the needs to correct all learners' mistakes. In contrast, teaching EAP to low level learners required educators to only correct mistakes that were related to lesson. This was because low level learners were facilitated by educators or peers to perform in an academic context. The more skilled peers modelled the use of language for the low level learners until eventually the low level learners were able to understand and produce academic texts. This highlighted the EAP educators' responsibility to develop low level learners as independent learners along with the more skilled learners.

Finally, in Table 7 'Beliefs about teaching Academic English to low level learners', the educators believed that learners at low level can understand and discuss academic concepts in their first language (5b; 93.1%). The educators also understood that the teaching of EAP requires learners to build up functional vocabulary for comparing, defining or discussing problems (2b; 70.8) and relates tasks and activities in the classroom to a university context (1b; 68.1%).

Table 7. Beliefs about Teaching Academic English to Low Level Learners

Barriers		%	Success		%
1a	It is not necessary to relate tasks and activities in the classroom to a university context.	31.9	1b	The educator should relate tasks and activities in the classroom to a university context.	68.1
2a	Learners need to build up topic-based vocabulary, related to their discipline.	29.2	2b	Learners need to build up functional vocabulary for comparing, defining or discussing problems.	70.8
3a	Learners need to learn verb tenses and sentence linking words.	62.5	3b	Learners need to learn noun phrases and meaning relations between sentences.	37.5
4a	Newspapers and magazines are a good source of texts for this level.	77.8	4b	Academic texts from textbooks can be adapted for this level.	22.2
5a	Learners at this level cannot understand and discuss academic concepts even in their first language.	6.9	5b	Learners at this level can understand and discuss academic concepts in their first language.	93.1
6a	Learners should practise reading, writing, listening and speaking at their level of competence.	63.9	6b	Learners should be supported to read, write, listen and speak beyond their level of competence.	36.1

Conversely, some of the educators still considered newspapers and magazines were a good source of texts for low level learners (4a; 77.8%) when they should be using adapted academic texts from textbooks (4b; 22.2%). 63.9% of the educators believed that learners in this level should practise reading, writing, listening and speaking at their level of competence (6a) and focused on verb tenses and sentence linking words (3a; 62.5%). Whereas in actuality, the teaching of EAP required educators to support low level learners to learn language skills beyond their competence level (6b; 36.1%) and noun phrases and meaning relations between sentences (3b; 37.5%).

4.2 The Second Stage

In the second stage, interviews were conducted to eight identified senior ESL educators (SE1 to SE8) who have had administrative experience in recruiting EAP educators at their respective universities. The interviews were carried out to identify the senior educators' beliefs toward effective EAP teachings for low level learners at their respective universities. The senior educators believed on the need to differentiate between teachings of CLT and EAP for their learners especially when the context of learning i.e. technical and engineering was already known to the educators. One senior educator (SE3) commented that:

The [educators] must understand the nature of the language usage in technical and engineering fields, its purpose, audience with whom the [learners] might need to interact and must align these together with the teaching skills to develop the [learners].

Further, one senior educator emphasised on the need to cater to their engineering learners' academic needs so that the learners not only able "to understand the content, the concern is on whether they know how to use it in life and to be independent learners" (SE7). It was agreed that attention was particularly crucial for low level learners as compared to other levels of learners because they "may require extra assistance during the teaching, therefore, an educator may need a specific competence to teach this group of learners" (SE4) and lessons must be specifically tailored to the [learners'] needs" (SE2). In fact, one educator (SE4) voiced her concern with this group of learners because:

...it is language for a specific purpose, a certain level of proficiency is required. Learners will have to deal with the language and content. This might prove arduous to those with low language proficiency.

Moreover, one senior educator (SE5) highlighted the importance of needs analysis in EAP teaching

Because the [educators] have to understand the [learners'] ability first, and they need to align the teaching pace, material, knowledge for [learners] to absorb since there are specific academic purposes skills [learners] need to develop all at once; hence, only competent and experienced [educators] would only be able to teach the low level proficiency groups.

To add, the educators were aware of the distinct between CLT and EAP teachings simply because *"the methodology is different"* (SE2) and *"both need specific approaches and method of delivery"* (SE6). When asked on the ESL educators' requirement in teaching English for Academic Purposes courses for low level learners, all the senior educators agreed on the need of EAP competency for the educators to deliver effective EAP teaching. One senior educator (SE3) asserted that:

...to teach the new tertiary [learners] who have just enrolled for a degree/diploma programme whose needs of English language is first to function in completing engineering related academic task and subsequently need English for later use – say, for employment upon graduation – requires specific competency in EAP teaching.

This need of EAP competency among the ESL educators was reiterated by the fifth senior educator (SE5) stating the fact that engineering and technical fields have its own specific language used. He added that having EAP competency in specific academic context like engineering was considered an advantage and allows the ESL educators to feel more confident in their teaching.

In general, when it comes to teaching EAP for low proficiency engineering [learners], a specific competency actually is an advantage for the [educators]. Fossilization is the issue that we need to cater as the [learners] always make mistakes. Therefore, as an educator, you have to be expert in certain skills like linguistic, language skills and etc. so that the [learners] are able to apply the knowledge independently. Honestly, I prefer to teach E[A]P for the learners as they can learn it meaningfully and in a way, it increases the learners' motivation .

As mentioned by the fifth senior educator, another senior educator (SE8) reflected this advantage on learners stating that:

A specific competency in teaching English for Academic Purposes is essential to enhance your [learners'] motivation, creativity and problem solving skills especially among the low English proficiency [learners]. A variety of activities in pair and group work with the more proficient [learners] will encourage the [low level learners] to work together to complete the task given.

The discussion on the need of EAP competency among the educators became more detailed as the senior educators were concerned with the low level learners' needs in learning EAP. The need of EAP competency among the educators was *"to ensure that the low-level learners are appropriately and correctly guided and facilitated"* (SE1). The educators also indicated that *"there's more scaffolding involved when teaching lower proficiency learners"* (SE4) *"because in EAP, we need at least to be able to critically discuss and analyse academic topics, I mean engineering and technical related concepts and situations"* (SE6). The senior educators substantiated the need of EAP competency among the ESL educators to support low learners to develop beyond their current competence in learning the language in technical and engineering contexts. However, none of the senior educators clarified on the type of formal or informal EAP trainings required, where it can be obtained and what are the specific competencies in teaching EAP.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings from both stages presented the ESL educators' beliefs that necessitate EAP teaching competency among the educators. The results from the online survey depicted some influences of CLT teaching in some of the educators' beliefs. It could also indicate some uncertainties among the educators on what were the requirements for a successful EAP teaching to low level learners. These plausible explanations reflected the educators' beliefs judging from years of experience among the respondents (Table 3). Most of the respondents who possessed bachelor degrees with less than five years of experience (51.4%) were probably unsure of their EAP teaching practices due to lack of experience. Another group with more experiences (48.6%) had some mixed beliefs particularly in beliefs about low level learners, beliefs about course books for this level and beliefs about teaching EAP to low level learners.

Also, though there were a number of high percentages in the 'success' statements, the statements were connected with others in the survey. The influence of CLT was evidence as there were nine 'barrier' statements scored more in percentages (>51.4%) of the less experience group of respondents. For instance, majority of the educators believed 'learners should be challenged with new and unfamiliar materials and difficult tasks' (table 4). However, many respondents contrasted this belief by choosing 'learners need to learn verb tenses and sentence linking words' which is instead a practice in CLT (noun phrases and meaning relations between sentences' in EAP teaching) (Table 7). The teaching of verb tenses in CLT tends to be made of a 'proportional syllabus' (Yalden, 1983 cited in Johnson, 2009, p. 320), "which assumes that low level learners require a basic foundation of core grammatical structures before more complex notions and functions can be introduced" (Alexander, p. 102). Also, it is unlikely that learners were going to be 'challenged with new and unfamiliar materials' with newspapers and magazines as good source of texts' (CLT) rather than academic texts (EAP) (Table 7).

Moreover, 'practicing reading, writing, listening and speaking at their level of competence' (Table 7) by following 'the natural order of acquisition i.e. listening/ speaking before reading/writing' (Table 4) was implausible in challenging learners with difficult tasks. Hence, when compared the beliefs from the survey with the supports gathered from the interviews, the findings from this study signaled a tension which might exist between the beliefs about general CLT and specific EAP teaching among the educators who participated in the online survey.

CONCLUSIONS

EAP teaching being the centric of discussion in this study is to address low level learners' needs in learning the language via EAP due to the complexity of academic language in context. This study attempted to bridge the gap by investigating the ESL educators' beliefs in teaching EAP to low level learners. The educators' belief requires closer attention as the belief influences their pedagogical activities including the course design, material selection and classroom practice in teaching of the engineering undergraduates to learn English for effective communication in their discipline-knowledge field. Yet, apart from degrees in ESL or linguistics, experience and prior knowledge from teacher training programmes, teaching at secondary schools or non-engineering contexts, the findings demonstrated some tensions in the educators' beliefs in teaching EAP. This investigation was crucial because the educators' belief in some of the barriers to EAP could lead to doubt on the effectiveness of their EAP teaching at the institutions.

The ESL educators who had CLT beliefs in teaching EAP particularly for low level learners were inconsistent with beliefs on EAP teaching. CLT was adopted possibly due to the educators' experience in teaching secondary school English subjects and/or strengthen by the number of low level learners at the tertiary level. CLT could hinder in meeting EAP course outcomes because the educators felt the necessity to concentrate on learners' basic needs before coming to the core of the syllabus. This was because the teaching of CLT with emphasis on proficiency embraced a prevailing purpose to compensate the language deficiencies (Cowling 2007; Felder, Brent & Prince 2011; Kantonidou, 2008). Cook (2009), however, asserted that 'false beginners' at tertiary level who were assumed to have already acquired communicative competence did not need to re-learn general ideas. It was also possible that they already possess analytical

capabilities to understand explicit grammar instructions. The specific goal i.e. learning the language as means of communicating the engineering knowledge implied in the teaching of EAP, as opposed to global mastery of the language like CLT, centralizes the type of skills required in learning the language within limited classroom meetings (contact hours).

Eventually, the findings from this study seemed to confirm the anecdotal evidence that there was very little EAP formal training or support. The results indicated tensions in the respondents' beliefs that involved understanding EAP materials, learners' needs in the disciplines and how to deliver the materials in the classroom. Most of the respondents in this study who were novice EAP educators were left to find out for themselves by trial and learners' error on what was appropriate for their EAP context. Alexander (2012) stated that the key challenges for new EAP educators involved working with texts from a variety of academic disciplines. They need to learn how academic discourse is patterned at whole text level and to use this procedural knowledge "to anchor their teaching rather than descriptions of language structures" (Alexander, 2012: 102). In spite of these challenges, the educators who were new to EAP were found to teach EAP without necessary guidance and formal trainings.

The educators needed specific EAP competencies to approach the low level engineering learners to understand and produce engineering academic texts based on the rhetorical functions and genres common to engineering context. They required a pedagogical approach that differs from CLT where they can be supported to function beyond their current level of competence by instructional scaffolding, sharing responsibility for tasks with teacher or peers (Alexander 2012). This lack of EAP teaching competency among the educators called for specific EAP trainings. A training of EAP can inform the educators on the best practice of collaborative work between ESL and engineering educators in an EAP discipline content integration at the institutional level. The move "provided greater opportunities for assimilation into the discipline and allows the interfacing of communication skills and...engineering to take place more effectively" (Collins, Li & Cheung 2000: 32). It has been proven to generate progressive impact on learners' perception and optimizes the learning of both, EAP and engineering courses. An intervention of EAP training is hence, recommended to maximize learners' meaningful learning as well as a consolidation part of the educators' continuous professional development.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, O. (2012). Exploring teacher beliefs in teaching EAP at low proficiency levels. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 11(2), 99-111.
- Alexander, O., Argent, S. & Spencer, J. (2008). *EAP Essentials: A Teacher's Guide to Principles and Practice*. Reading: Garnet Education.
- Alexander, O. (2007). Groping in the dark or turning on the light: routes into teaching English for Academic Purposes. In T. Lynch, & J. Northcott (Eds.), *Educating legal english specialists and teacher education in teaching EAP: Proceedings of IALS teacher education symposia, 2004 and 2006*. Edinburgh: Institute for Applied Language Studies, University of Edinburgh.
- Basturkmen, H. (2012). Languages for specific purposes curriculum creation and implementation in Australasia and Europe. *The Modern Language Journal*, 96(1), 59-70.
- Bax, S. (2003). The end of CLT: A context approach to language teaching. *ELT Journal*, 57(3), 278-286.
- Belcher, D.D. (2006). English for Specific Purposes: Teaching to perceived needs and imagined futures in worlds of work, study, and everyday life. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(6), 133-156.
- Bloor, M. & Bloor, T. (1986). *Languages for specific purposes: Practice and theory*. Centre for Language and Communication Studies, Occasional Paper 19. Dublin: Trinity College.
- Borg, S. (2006). *Teacher Cognition and Language Education: Research and Practice*. London: Continuum.
- Bromeley, P. (2005). *Towards a social, motivational, metacognitive strategy instruction model: Theory & practice* (PhD thesis). School of Language Studies and Linguistics, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities. National University of Malaysia.
- Bruce, I. (2008). *Academic Writing and Genre: A Systematic Analysis*. London: Continuum.
- Collins, R., Li, S. & Cheung, D. (2000). Language professionals in engineering faculty: Cross-cultural experience. *Journal of Professional Issues in Engineering Education and Practice*, 126(1), 32-34.

- Cook, V. (2009). Developing links between second language acquisition and foreign language teaching. In K. Knapp, & B. Seidlhofer (Eds.), *Handbook of foreign language communication and learning* (pp. 139–162). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Cowling, J.D. (2007). Needs analysis: planning a syllabus for a series of intensive workplace courses at a leading Japanese company. *English for Specific Purposes*, 26(4), 426-442.
- Ding, A., Jones, M. & King, J. (2004). *Perfect match? Meeting EAP teachers' needs and expectations in training*. Paper presented at BALEAP professional issues meeting, teacher training in EAP, University of Essex.
- Dudley-Evans, T. & St John, M. (1998). *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A Multi-disciplinary Approach*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Felder, R.M., Brent, R. & Prince, M.J. (2011). Engineering instructional development: programs, best practices, and recommendations. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 100(1), 89-122.
- Flowerdew, J. (2005). Integrating traditional and critical approaches to syllabus design: The 'what', the 'how' and the 'why?'. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 4(2), 135-147.
- Flowerdew, J. & Peacock, M. (2001). Issues in EAP: A preliminary perspective. In Flowerdew, J. & Peacock, M. (Eds.). *Research Perspectives on English for Academic Purposes* (pp. 8-24). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Foley, J. (1994). Key concepts: Scaffolding. *ELT Journal*, 48(1), 101-102.
- Freeman, D. (1996). The "unstudied problem": Research on teacher learning in language teaching. In D. Freeman & J.C. Richards (Eds.), *Teacher Learning in Language Teaching* (pp. 351–378). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Golombek, P.R. & Johnson, K.E. (2004). Narrative inquiry as a mediational space: examining emotional and cognitive dissonance in second-language teachers' development. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 10(3), 307–327.
- Graves, K. (2008). The language curriculum: A social contextual perspective. *Language Teaching*, 41(2), 147-181.
- Graves, K. (2000). *Designing Language Courses: A Guide for Teachers*. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
- Griffin, T.D. & Ohlsson, S. (2001). *Beliefs vs. knowledge: A necessary distinction for predicting, explaining and assessing conceptual change*. Paper presented at the 23rd Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society: Edinburgh, Scotland. Retrieved from <http://tigger.uic.edu/tgriffin/> [5 December 2014].
- Hamp-Lyons, L. (2011). English for academic purposes. In Hinkel, E. (Ed.). *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*, Vol. 2 (pp. 89-105). New York: Routledge.
- Hutchinson, T. & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes: A Learning-Centered Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hyland, K. (2006). *English for Academic Purposes: An Advanced Resource Book*. New York: Routledge.
- Isarji Hj Sarudin, Ainol Madziah Zubairi, Mohamad Sahari Nordin & Mohd Azmi Omar. (2008). The English Language Proficiency of Malaysian Public University Students'. In Md Yurof Abu Bakar, Nor Eieni Hj Mokhtar, Rohana Jani, Ainol Madziah Zubairi, Norasma Othman and Aries Gan (Eds.), *Enhancing the Quality of Higher Education through Research: Shaping Future Policy*. Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Higher Education. pp. 40-65.
- Isarji Sarudin, Ainol Madziah Zubairi & Afiza Mohamad Ali. (2009). *A comparative analysis of engineering students' problems in speaking and writing*. Paper presented at the Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference of Teaching and Learning (ICTL 2009) INTI University College, Malaysia.
- Johnson, K. (2009). Foreign language course design. In K. Knapp, & B. Seidlhofer (Eds.), *Handbook of Foreign Language Communication and Learning* (pp. 309-340). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Johnson, K.E. & Golombek, P.R. (Eds.). (2002). *Teachers' Narrative Inquiry as Professional Development*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kantonidou, M.M. (2008). *English for specific purposes in the context of electrical engineering curricula: A case study*. Paper presented in EAEEIE Annual Conference, 2008 19th, (pp. 48-53). Retrieved from http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/xpls/abs_all.jsp?arnumber=4610157 [23 April 2012].
- Mangubhai, F., Marland, P., Dashwood, A. & Son, J. (2005). Similarities and differences in teachers' and researchers' conceptions of communicative language teaching: Does the use of an educational model cast a better light? *Language Teaching Research*, 9(1), 31-66.

- Morshidi Sirat, Ambigapathy Pandian, Balakrishnan Muniandy, Fazal Mohamed Mohamed Sultan, Harshita Aini Haroon, Hazita Azman, Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan, and Ratna Roshida Abdul Razak, (2008). The University Curriculum and the Employment of Graduates. In Md Yurof Abu Bakar, Nor Eieni Hj Mokhtar, Rohana Jani, Ainol Madziah Zubairi, Norasma Othman and Aries Gan (Eds.), *Enhancing the Quality of Higher Education through Research: Shaping Future Policy*. (pp. 136-159) Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Higher Education.
- Pajares, M.F. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research*, 62(3), 307-332.
- Phipps, S. & Borg, S. (2009). Exploring tensions between teachers' grammar teaching beliefs and practices. *System*, 37(3), 380-390.
- Richards, J.C. (2006). *Communicative Language Teaching Today*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Savignon, S.J. (2007). Beyond communicative language teaching: What's ahead? *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39(1), 207-220.
- Senior, R.M. (2006). *The Experience of Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Soo, R.S. & Tam, S.S. (2011). EAP Needs Analysis in Higher Education: Significance and Future Direction. *English for Specific Purposes World*, 11(3), 1-11.
- Su-Hie Ting & Syaharom Abdullah. (2010). *Report writing skills of engineering students*. Paper presented at the Proceedings of The Second International Conference on the Roles of the Humanities and Social Sciences in Engineering, Bayview Hotel, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia, 12-14 November 2010.
- Swales, J. (2004). *Research Genres: Exploration and Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- The Star. (2012, January, 26). *Depreciating number of interest in science among Malaysian learners ever since 2007*.
- Trimble, L. (1985). *English for Science and Technology: A Discourse Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Viera, A.J. & Garrett, J.M. (2005) Understanding Inter Observer Agreement: The Kappa Statistic. *Family Medicine* 37(5), 360-363.
- Widdowson, H.G. (2009). The linguistic perspective. In K. Knapp, & B. Seidlhofer (Eds.), *Handbook of Foreign Language Communication and Learning* (pp.193– 218). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Wong Fook Fei, Thang Siew Ming, Noorizah Mohd Noor, Hafizah Latif & Mohd Sallehudin Abd. Aziz. (2013). A blended approach in teaching an EAP course: Malaysian instructors' perceptions of the new course materials. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 18(3), 103-117.