Where Next for EAP?

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Abstract

EAP has changed over the last 30 years as new insights into academic discourse have informed the content of courses across the Anglophone world. However, this paper will argue that the biggest drivers of change in coming decades will be changes to education globally that will see new generations of students commencing their EAP studies from a higher initial level of English competence, and also studying in different locations and in different institutions. Globalisation is causing an increasing number of countries to rethink their English language education policies, and this will change the profile of students exiting secondary education in those countries. This combined with the emergence of a variety of new institutions offering higher education in English will reshape the global EAP landscapes and provide new challenges and opportunities for the EAP profession. This paper explores these changes and predicts how they will shape EAP in the future.

Keywords: *EAP; internationalisation; higher education*

1. Introduction

The last 30 years have seen incredible changes in the world of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). However, while practitioners and professional publications have tended to focus on questions of methodology and programme content, it is changing patterns in global English language education that are likely to have the most significant long-term implications for the field. The current model of EAP provision, based upon non-native speaker students travelling to study English in Anglophone countries before taking degrees in those same countries, could become increasingly redundant in a world where English is both emerging as the lingua franca of international higher education, and becoming an 'essential skill' acquired by most at progressively earlier stages in their educational careers. As the British Council observed in their 2013 report on trans-national education:

> 'The global education market is changing rapidly. The number of students choosing an overseas education continues to increase, but there are now many more destinations and modes of delivery from which to choose' (British Council [BC], 2013, p.1)

This paper therefore seeks to explore the current trends in English language education and international higher education in order to identify those key trends that will shape EAP teaching in the future.

2. Discussion

The nature of English language education is evolving as a result of the changing global role of English. Fuelled by its emergence as the language of international business, English is becoming an essential skill alongside numeracy and first language literacy in the modern world (Graddol, 1997, 2006). The global economic slowdown of 2008 appears to have had no significant adverse effects upon this trend. In fact, the number of international students coming to the UK to study (the traditional participants in EAP programmes) grew from over 229,000 in 2007-8 to over 298,000 in 2010-11 (UK HE Information Unit, 2013). It does not seem unreasonable to conclude that in an increasingly competitive global marketplace, the value of English language skills remains as high or even higher during times of economic consolidation as during periods of rapid growth.

Recognising the importance of English language skills for economic growth, governments have acted to promote English language education in their countries. This promotion has often meant introducing the teaching of English at progressively younger ages within state schools. Where the state is not doing this, parents who can afford to do so are sending their children at increasingly younger ages to private education providers. It has been a matter of interest to applied linguists for many years whether younger or older students make better language learners (e.g. Long, M. H, 1990), but the debate is still broadly unresolved, however, the value of more rather than less teaching input is not a topic of discussion. Simply put, more time spent studying a language leads to higher levels of attainment. What then are the implications of this for students who wish to eventually study in the medium of English?

It has been suggested that commencing English language education earlier will result in students reaching the standard necessary to study other subjects using English earlier too. It is commonly accepted that IELTS 6.5 is the level of English expertise needed to study most academic subjects at undergraduate level, and at an average UK university this would typically be the entry requirement for international students wishing to study for a degree with a moderate language burden, such as economics. Graddol has estimated that children who start studying English at 11 or 12 in typically non-intensive state education programmes are unlikely to reach this level before they are 20, whereas children who start studying English at 5 or 6 are likely to reach this level by the age of 14 (Graddol, 1997, 2006). This means that if those same students wish to enter university at 18, they will already have sufficient English to study for their chosen degree in the medium of English. They may still need support adapting to the requirements of using English for university study, or in developing their general study skills, but they will be entering university broadly on a par with native speakers of English of the same age.

Given the above, it is not surprising that countries are starting to introduce English language education at increasingly younger ages. Some countries have long done this, in Finland, for example, primary school English has been a reality since the 1970s (Takala, 1986). However, it is changes to the English language education systems in those countries that have tended to supply the bulk of international students to Anglophone countries that are likely to have the most significant impact upon the future of EAP.

English was introduced at the primary level in 1997 in South Korea by the government in response to the emerging challenges of economic globalisation (Shin, 2007). Similarly, in response to the emerging role of English globally, the Argentinian government developed a policy for English in the primary curriculum during the 1990s (Tocalli-Beller, 2007). In Japan, teaching English has been an option for primary schools since 2002, however the variable uptake of this option has meant that junior-high schools still assume that their pupils have no prior experience of learning English (Kanno, 2007). These, and other examples demonstrate that the trend towards introducing English at younger ages is already well underway and is likely to become the norm in the future. And as noted above, the significance of this trend for EAP teaching is clear: students who previously needed significant input to improve their English to the level where they can use it for study at tertiary level will no longer need the kind of EAP support that has traditionally been provided to them. This is the first factor that needs to be considered when predicting the future of EAP.

Alongside an increasingly early introduction of English into the curriculum over the past 20 years, there has also been a significant change in the way English is taught. The rejection of the Audio-Lingual Method and its replacement first by Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and then, still within the ‘communicative tradition’ that CLT established, by Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), began in European language schools in the 1980s and has spread rapidly since (Knight, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). These ‘communicative’ approaches, with their focus on learning a language for actual use, rather than as a subject for academic study, are expected to prepare non-native English users better for the demands of studying in the medium of English than the methodologies they replace.

While there have been questions concerning the transferability of methodologies between countries with very different learning cultures (e.g. Butler, 2011), the fact that communicative approaches are increasingly being adopted globally is not in question. Singapore was an early adopter when its official English syllabus adopted a communicative approach in 1991 (Zhang, 2006). China’s State Education Development Commission introduced a CLT-based syllabus in 1992, and in 2001 introduced a TBLT syllabus for the country’s secondary schools (Liao, 2004). Similarly, in its ‘Seventh National Curriculum’ of 1997 South Korea put CLT at its core, while in 1999 ‘communication abilities’ were placed at the centre of the Japanese national curriculum (Choi, 2007) (Butler & Iino, 2005). Hong Kong appears to have been the most enthusiastic adopter of TBLT, which appeared in its 1997 primary syllabus and its 1999 secondary one (Carless, 2007). In a survey of the region, Nunan noted that Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam had also adopted communicative approaches in their national curricula (Nunan, 2003). This then is the

second factor that needs to be weighed up when seeking to predict the future of EAP: students will not only be receiving English education form a younger age, they will also be receiving English education that will better prepare them for studying at university level in the medium of English.

Given the above changes to both the age of commencement of learning English and the approach and focus of teaching, certain changes for the field of EAP would seem inevitable. The language needs of non-native speaker students entering English language universities should be much closer to those of home students, who may also require support adapting to academic discourse conventions. This could be predicted to start a trend away from current patterns of EAP provision towards broader study skills/academic literacies development that is aimed at native and non-native speakers alike. However, this is not the only way EAP will be changing as, along with a changing student profile, the higher education institutions they will be entering are also undergoing change.

The current global population is in excess of 7 billion and is expected to grow and then stabilise at 10 billion by 2050. This increased population will require educating, and more of that education will be at tertiary level as both governments and individuals realise the economic benefits of higher education. Nations around the world are therefore expanding their university provision. This significant increase in capacity in the tertiary sector is occurring alongside an increasing demand for English speaking graduates. The trend is therefore to teach more subjects using English in order to produce the kind of graduates required in the 21st century.

Until recently degrees taught in English were only offered in those countries where English was a national language. That is no longer the case. An analysis of current and planned university policy in this area suggests that the growth in international higher education has seen the emergence of 3 new models of English language university education:

- universities from English speaking countries establishing branch campuses or partnerships with universities in other countries
- universities in non-English speaking countries offering degrees in the medium of English
- universities from non-English speaking countries establishing campuses that operate in English in other countries,

These developments have resulted in significant increases in both transnational education, and in the number of non-native speaker students studying in English in their own countries.

The establishment of overseas campuses by UK universities, such as those in China and Malaysia by the University of Nottingham (www.nottingham.ac.uk), and the establishment of partnerships with overseas universities to offer UK degrees, such as the University of Liverpool's partnership with Xian Jiaotong University in China (http://www.xjtlu.edu.cn/en/), combined with the emergence of more extensive online education, have led to a situation whereby there are already more students studying for a UK degree abroad than there are international and EU students studying in the UK (Ratcliffe, 2013). For the countries hosting these institutions, this supporting of transnational education often represents a significant commitment and the governments of these countries often offer significant incentives to entice new educational providers to establish a presence with them (BC, 2013) This increase in opportunities for international students to study for the degrees they desire within their own country or geographical region will clearly have an impact upon the number of students choosing to travel to Anglophone countries to study in the future.

Parallel to this increase in universities from Anglophone countries establishing a presence in non-Anglophone countries is an increase in the number of universities in non-Anglophone countries offering degrees in the medium of English. While this has long been common practice in countries that were formerly colonies of the UK, such as India or Pakistan, it is now becoming more widespread in countries where English has not previously played a significant role, namely those countries considered part of Kachru's 'expanding circle' of English use (Kachru, 1985). While the option to study in English has existed for some time in Finland, the practice is spreading to other parts of Europe, as demonstrated by Italy's Politecnico di Milano's announcement that all of its postgraduate and many of its undergraduate courses will be delivered and assessed in English from 2014 (Coughlan, 2012). Similarly, universities in Asia outside of those countries with a traditional educational role for English, such as Singapore, are also adopting a policy of using English for some or all of their teaching, for example the Pohang University of Science and Technology in South Korea (Coughlan, 2011). Again, such changes are likely to have an impact upon the number of students travelling to Anglophone countries to study as students of these English-medium universities will graduate not only with comparable subject knowledge to their colleagues who have studied abroad, but also, at least in theory, a similar level in English.

The final trend identified above can be seen as an amalgam of the two already described whereby universities from

non-Anglophone countries follow the trend of their Anglophone competitors and establish campuses overseas while also adopting a policy of offering their degrees in the medium of English on those campuses. Perhaps the most intriguing example of this is the decision by France's Sorbonne University to use both English and French at its campus in Abu Dhabi (Coughlan, 2011). As non-Anglophone countries follow the pattern established by Anglophone ones of establishing overseas campuses in order to reach new students, it does not seem unreasonable given the global role of English to expect many of them to follow the Sorbonne's example and at least partially adopt English as the medium of instruction in order to prove attractive to students. These changes in the provision tertiary level education in English are then the third factor that will shape the future of EAP.

What, then, do these changes identified above signal for the future of EAP in a world where it has already been estimated that 'there are probably more non-native than native English speakers using English for at least some purposes on university campuses around the world' (Jenkins, 2014, p.5)? Firstly, it seems clear that the model of non-native speaker students studying in English speaking countries, while not disappearing completely as many students will still want the wider cultural and educational experience of studying overseas, is likely to decline in importance. Indeed, as was stated above, it is already declining in relative importance for UK universities. Given that it has been the EAP profession in Anglophone countries that has tended to take the lead in establishing professional bodies and conducting research into EAP, this shift in balance is likely to have significant implications for the profession. In fact BALEAP, the organisation of EAP professionals whose original name highlighted the 'British' nature of the organisation, moved to lessen this emphasis on Britain in 2010 (see http://www.baleap.org) in order to reflect the increasing geographical diversity of the organisation. It does not seem unreasonable to predict a shift in the global centres of EAP development away from Anglophone countries toward those non-Anglophone countries where increasing numbers of students are being prepared to use English to access higher education.

It seems reasonable to predict that new providers of higher education in English outside of Anglophone countries will need support in delivering what they promise, and this is likely to see new opportunities for EAP teachers outside of English speaking countries. While this will increase the EAP teaching options for native speakers globally, its most significant impact is likely to be a significant increase in the number of non-native speakers becoming EAP teachers in their own countries. Demand for EAP teacher training programmes can therefore be expected to grow, especially within non-English speaking countries. In the short term this demand is still likely to be met by teachers travelling to take part in teacher-training programmes in Anglophone countries, but increasingly such programmes will be offered at a distance, as is already the case with the University of Nottingham's MA in Teaching EAP, or replaced by in-country EAP teacher-training. Initially this might be expected to be offered through the overseas campuses of Anglophone universities, or through programmes supported by Anglophone organisations, such as the British Council, but ultimately educational institutions in non-Anglophone countries where EAP is taught are likely to 'take ownership' of training their own EAP teachers.

Similarly, it doesn't seem unreasonable to predict that there are likely to be many opportunities in the area of programme and materials development to support institutions starting to offer their programmes in English. While this is likely to initially follow the teacher-training pattern described above, whereby developments are initially overseen by, or managed in collaboration with, publishers and EAP professionals from Anglophone countries, it does not seem unreasonable to expect responsibility in these areas to also move to the countries in which the students are studying.

Parallel to these issues concerning the support for students studying in English in non-Anglophone countries, it is necessary to consider the issue of faculty support – that is, helping academic staff who have previously taught in the vernacular to teach in English. If the curriculum is to be delivered in English, the importance of this part of the process cannot be overestimated. While some institutions will wish to recruit staff who are not only experts in their own disciplines but can also teach using English, they and many others will face the challenge of helping existing staff make the transition to using English in their teaching. This will clearly have huge implications for those institutions and the academic staff employed by them, but it will also provide exciting opportunities for EAP professionals as they help facilitate this change to English as the medium of instruction within those institutions, and it is a process that is already encouraging lively discussion (see Irwin, Hong & Roach, 2011; Jenkins, 2014).

3. Conclusion

Given the three trends identified by this paper and the predictions made based upon them, it seems reasonable to say that while the future for EAP will be markedly different from its past, it will nevertheless continue to influence the education of many more students worldwide as English increasingly becomes the global language of higher

education. While challenging existing models of EAP delivery, these changes will also result in new opportunities both for those already involved in EAP, and for the large number of new EAP professionals that can be expected to enter the profession. Given this, it is vital that the field of EAP concerns itself not only with those current pedagogic issues that already interest the profession, but remains aware of the impact that global changes to the nature of higher education will have upon it. With a few notable exceptions, such consideration of the broader context of EAP provision has been rather neglected, yet if the field is to remain vibrant and coherent in the future, more research is needed to predict exactly what that future will look like.

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