

# English Language Teaching in Norway and Iran: English for Academic Purposes<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is a growing field which aims to enrich curriculum in order to bridge the gap between general knowledge of English, and academic or discipline specific use of English. This paper considers past attempts to develop consistent academic courses as it examines EAP courses in Norway and Iran, where English as a foreign language has been employed for professional interaction. It considers various aspects of EAP courses including history of EAP courses, authenticity, and evaluation of course offerings. This paper aims to explain the current status of EAP in both countries to determine whether the demands of students have been met. It looks how these countries try to improve academic learners' English language proficiency. In order to meet academic English needs, it is important to use authentic materials in order to enrich learners' academic English proficiency. This cannot be attained without careful scrutiny of the history of EAP courses in both countries, and authenticity, and evaluation of updated materials. It is recommended that EAP course designers take into account the development of authentic EAP materials. This would provide insight for further investigation of EAP materials through understanding what is currently happening

## Resumen

El inglés con fines académicos (EAP) es un campo cada vez más importante que apunta a enriquecer el plan de estudios con el fin de cerrar la brecha entre el conocimiento general del inglés y el uso académico del idioma. Teniendo en cuenta algunos intentos durante las últimas décadas para desarrollar cursos académicos consistentes, este documento examina los cursos de EAP en Noruega e Irán, donde se ha empleado el inglés como idioma extranjero para la interacción profesional. Considera diversos aspectos de los cursos del EAP desde diferentes puntos de vista, incluida la historia de los cursos de EAP, la autenticidad y la evaluación de las ofertas de cursos. Este documento tiene como objetivo explicar el estado actual del EAP en ambos países para determinar si se han cumplido las demandas de los estudiantes y encontrar las tendencias que adoptan estos países para mejorar el dominio del inglés académico de los estudiantes. Para satisfacer las necesidades académicas de inglés, es importante que se usen materiales auténticos para enriquecer el dominio académico del inglés de los alumnos. Esto no se puede lograr sin un cuidadoso escrutinio de la historia de los cursos de EAP en ambos países, la autenticidad y la evaluación de los materiales actualizados. Como resultado, se recomienda que los diseñadores de cursos EAP consideren el desarrollo de materiales EAP auténticos. Esto sería de ayuda en la búsqueda de información para una mayor investigación de los materiales de EAP a través de la comprensión de lo que está sucediendo actualmente

## Introduction

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses are designed to help language learners improve their academic language proficiency and prepare them to communicate in the target language at a professional level. Thus, students may be expected to participate in seminars, read articles, write theses and dissertations, and listen to lectures. These and other activities aim to prepare students to take further academic coursework in the target language and to function properly in professional settings.

Generally, EAP courses aim at empowering students to take academic courses in a second or foreign language (Stoller, 2001). However, as Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) suggested, "not all ESL methodologies are appropriate to use for EAP" (p. 177). In line with that, Stoller (2001, as cited in Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001) pointed out that it may be challenging to find a unique pattern for instruction in EAP courses because of the variability on language learning. As a result, there is a variation in both the quality and types of instruction in different educational settings where EAP courses are offered. According to Hyland (2006), Lea and Street (1998, 2000, 2006), skills, socialization, and literacy as three main common grounds in EAP. These include cognitive and linguistic skills, knowledge of academic genres and discourses, and academic literacies. Jarvis (2001) also distinguished between two forms of EAP; *pre-sessional* and *in-sessional* courses to be taught in EAP teaching. The former refers to taking English courses prior to continuing academic discipline, and the latter refers to courses taken while students simultaneously attend subject area. Another

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classification distinguishes between *subject-specific EAP* such as social sciences, and *common-core EAP*, such as study skills as a general academic language.

Clapham (2001) suggested that “pupils can take advantage of different academic courses from other sources including their leisure reading and earlier scholastic studies” (p. 99). By this, it may be argued that students can lessen their problems in general English, study skills and excessive dependence on teachers which are some important factors in improving their learning. However, as other researchers point out, because of the diversity of perspectives on language learning, it would be hard to find a unique course design (Stoller, 2001). Therefore, the choice of EAP teaching materials is limited, and the existing textbooks provide neither ideas on how to approach a lesson especially in the introduction section (Kirkgöz, 2009), nor content that is relevant enough for all learners.

However, EAP courses can offer learners some important advantages. Gatehouse (2001) proposed gaining three related abilities linked to succeeding in an EAP course, namely using the particular jargon characteristic of that specific occupational context, using a more generalized set of academic skills mainly to understand a new culture, and using the language of everyday talk to communicate effectively, such as responding to an email message. These areas are important for EAP students because they involve “critical analysis and development of language for specific and often localized communicative purposes” (Rilling & Dantas-Whitney, 2010, p. 1). Learners can also feel that target language, English, “belongs” to them (Hubbard, 1995, p. 20).

When designing and implementing an EAP course, it is vital to consider the aims of learners and engage them in language learning. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) identified the importance of comprehensive course planning, for example including grammatical and lexical features. Kennedy and Bolitho (1984) emphasized the awareness of students’ purposes in learning the language. Robinson (1980) examined some of the available EAP materials, and Robinson (1991) also conducted a survey on the present state of EAP courses. However, some studies concluded that EAP courses mostly consist of problems in planned and organized materials aiming to prepare learners for publishing academic papers. Mackay and Mountford (1978) looked at specific problems of EAP learners in language and study skills and found that, in effect, learners are not as competent as it was expected.

Despite these overreaching goals, EAP is affected by local perspectives, ranging from academic literacy, learners’ rights and needs, to feedback and assessment. Hutchinson and Waters (1987), for instance, emphasized the role of learners’ needs and learning activities in EAP courses. Jordan (1997), on the other hand, argued the importance of academic subjects in EAP courses in order to enable learners to perceive how to use language in their academic life, such as attending conferences, giving a speech, and so on. The types and structure of EAP courses may also vary in different countries and at various institutions. Some tangible examples are Norway and Iran with different course programs. In Norway, academic writing courses, oral communication and presentation skills, journal analysis workshops, and article-based dissertation writing courses are offered, while in Iran, academic writing courses, and academic presentation courses are provided.

The purpose of the present paper is to compare and contrast EAP courses in Norway and Iran in order to find overall quality of offered courses in effect since both countries use English as a foreign language for professional communication with considerable difference in EAP course improvement. In what follows, history, authenticity of EAP materials, and evaluation of EAP courses will be considered in both countries.

## **EAP in Norway**

### *Historical overview*

In the aftermath of World War II and to modernize the foreign/ second language curriculum based on students’ needs, teaching and learning English received special attention in Norway. However, adopting teaching approaches from the Great Britain and the United States has affected the curricular reforms since 1950’s (Reynolds, 2001). In language learning, learners engage in “the pragmatic, authentic and functional use of language for meaningful purposes” (Brown, 2007, p. 241), because a large number of texts are in English. Although Mæhlum (2002, p.131) expressed a concern that “the dominance of English led to Norwegian loss”, teaching and learning English have not discarded.” It is of worth noting that reading comprehension as a basic ground to literacy needs to be practiced further particularly in higher education in Norway “to master authentic materials and allow the ownership of the curriculum” (Felix, 2005, p. 88) in

order to have professional interaction. To enable learners to have international contacts, Gottlieb (2004) asserted the crucial role of intensive teaching at all levels to all age groups.

#### *Use of authentic materials*

Using authentic materials in the class can support language learners to fully perceive and learn authentic language rather than practice language skills. Authentic materials can also assist language learners with different proficiency levels and goals. However, reading authentic textbooks specifically for academic purposes is the manifestation of insufficient number of lessons (Huang, Tindall, Nisbet, 2011). A number of studies indicated that language learners in Norway needed to improve their reading skills in order to gain benefits from advancement in different fields when it comes into reading to learn (Fjeldbraaten, 1999). Returning to the EAP instruction, a closer examination of EFL syllabi shows that providing advanced English reading comprehension skills to language learners is insufficient (Hellekjær, 2005), as these skills can be some means of enhancing EAP proficiency in general. For instance, skimming, scanning, or reading for detail (Faye-Schøll, 2009) are mostly common to practice. Vocabulary-handling strategies, guessing words from context and strong focus on reading for details (Faye-Schøll, 2009; Urquhart & Weir, 1998) need to be practiced considerably. Borrowing English vocabulary also entered Norwegian with the trend of "domesticated" pronunciation. In other words, the wide use of English language and in particular EAP moved along the spreading of Norwegian language (Awedyk, 2009, p.149) with the goal of having global communication.

#### *Evaluation of EAP in Norway*

EAP programs have been considered in various studies and in different domains of materials development in higher education. For example, a revised EFL syllabus was introduced in higher education in Norway to bring about some changes in current practices and to recognize the role of EFL instruction (Faye-Schøll, 2009) mainly in technical and professional programs. In 2006, the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, and Telemark University College took actions to write a strategy document outline to present at the Norwegian Forum for EAP (NFEAP) to improve four language skills. An excerpt on their mission is provided by Gulden (2008) as follows:

*Most institutions of Higher Education in Norway have internationalization high on their strategic agenda. Undergraduate and master's degrees and modules are offered in English to international and Norwegian students. Bilateral staff exchanges involve many researchers and academic staff at institutions of higher education in Norway. International conference participation and increasing pressures to publish are part of the picture nationwide as are the planning and organization of joint research and teaching projects across national boundaries. (p. 209)*

To evaluate EAP in Norway, some universities such as university of Tromsø and the University of Oslo also offer EAP courses to international students. Before participating in the program, students need to sit for a placement test that provides a comprehensive overview of their English proficiency level based on Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). In this case, students learn to speak and write the Norwegian language in an intensive program to ensure that they can get a rich foundation for attending a degree program at a Norwegian university. The University of Oslo, for instance, offers some courses to students at beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels so that they can participate in written and oral activities. However, Bråten (2007), Bråten and Olaussen (1997) and Roe (2006) noted the lack of reading strategies instruction in these courses to enhance the ability to decode the written words in the texts in the first language, and then work on improving their language in EAP courses.

Another instance of credit to updating EAP in Norway is that researchers actively take part in short or long-term research activities of the Research Council of Norway, which has membership in international research organizations in Europe. This work has promising implications for future academic publications in Norway. In 2004, the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions also published a dossier which included promotion of research in Norway.

In addition, 1758 academic journals are ranked either at level two or level one. This case manifests that English as an academic language is being promoted in Norway. Nevertheless, Hellekjær (2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2008), and Lehmann (1999) challenged English language proficiency of learners for academic purposes. To do so, they compared Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) with Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Hellekjær (2005) tested academic reading proficiency of students, and Hellekjær (2009) studied the status of EAP among students in Norway because there was the claim that academic Norwegian vocabulary deteriorated through not publishing concepts in Norwegian language.

## **EAP in Iran**

### *Historical overview*

In the early 1960s, with collaboration between Iranian universities and Western academic centers (Cowan, 1974; Bates, 1978), EAP courses started being offered in Iran mainly with the aim of teaching English to medical and engineering students. Consequently, many course books were published, and different programs were implemented through intensive reading courses. The content of the reading passages came from excerpts from different academic fields in order to teach technical word lists related to students' fields of study. However, in practice, these courses were designed on an ad hoc basis and lacked systematic students' need analysis, teacher education, and evaluation of programs, resulting in a gap between theoretical findings and practical implementation. That is to say, recent findings of studies have not been put into practice to remove or even decrease the pitfalls in EAP courses. Subsequent research revealed an overly extensive focus on vocabulary and syntax (Fathi, 2008; Amiryousefi, & Ketabi, 2011), weaknesses in EAP materials design (Tayebipour, 2005), and insufficient focus on communication (Eslami, 2005). Consequently, the ultimate goal of EAP, which is improving academic English language knowledge, was not fully met. Materials developed by The Organization for Researching and Composing University Textbooks in the Humanities, also known as SAMT, are assumed to be thorough enough in case of autonomy enhancement for proper development of language learning.

### *Use of authentic materials*

EAP material developers in Iran attempted to compile textbooks that would meet the students' educational needs. These textbooks provided language input, including basic structure, vocabulary, and reading comprehension passages. However, currently there are many teachers in Iran that are not competent and fluent enough in English language (Farhady, 2005), which result in teaching unfamiliar words or structures in their first language (i.e., Farsi/ Persian). Additionally, most EAP learners lack opportunities to deliver academic presentations (Atai, 2000), because EAP courses continue to utilize outdated materials, encourage learner participation in exercises rather than tasks, and lack needs analysis in order to take a more communicative approach. What seems not to be ignored is that the majority of available EAP textbooks published by SAMT have not been updated based on recent critical perspectives in English language teaching. In addition, most available EAP materials include a mass of reading comprehension passages which can assist learners to become just a good reader rather a proficient communicator. Therefore, the majority of degree holders have a poor command of English which is unfortunately a routine problem in academia.

### *Evaluation of EAP in Iran*

As a means of evaluation and quality assurance, EAP courses in Iran have gradually been receiving their accreditation since the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology established "discipline-based EAP programs" to gear up students' motivation and interest (Atai, 2006, p. 28). More specifically, every semester a large number of students enroll in EAP as a compulsory course. These courses, which are offered in Iranian higher education system, are meant to improve learners' reading skills and other language skills. EAP curriculum consists of one to three EAP courses with the contents of structure, organization, and reading sections in order to enable students to read and translate academic texts and present at conferences. The offered course books most importantly published by SAMT, as one of the popular publications, include three sections that are pre-reading, reading comprehension, and homework. Reading passages are relevant to learners' field of study and vocabulary exercises are contextualized. Coursework also includes reading comprehension passages related to the students' fields of the study. The offered EAP course is obligatory for all university students to pass; therefore, no placement test is necessary before enrollment. However, there is a consensus among EAP practitioners in Iran that developed materials have weaknesses in their designs (Tayebipour, 2005) because they cannot improve Iranian students' performance in different Iranian academic settings. According to Attai (2002), accountability and developmental purposes have also reported to promote EAP programs in higher education of Iran. However, because of having unsystematic plan, no constructive improvement has been observed so far. Moreover, developed EAP materials lack enough

authenticity to promote real communication since almost all textbooks include outdated reading passages or too much attention is paid to vocabulary. Thus, these materials lack enough authenticity to promote a real communication. Bruce (2011) accentuated that the consequences of challenges in EAP courses may cause learners to be unable to analyze and make sense of the texts and related discourses properly. Scholars

used questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations to develop profiles in EAP publication, and to publicly announce any problematized issues in the EAP context. They also published on reading strategies including skimming, scanning, guessing from the context, and understanding main ideas. Eslami (2005), Fathi (2008), Amiryousefi and Ketabi (2011), and Tayebipour (2005) critically published on offered EAP courses, revealed that some inconsistencies still exist in available materials in fulfilling students' needs. For example, SAMT, as a popular publication on EAP materials, is responsible for composing, preparing, printing and affordable marketing for university students. However, practically there seems to be a need to call for awareness of current theoretical and methodological points along with reconsidering some challenges in understanding and solving practical problems in EAP publications. The underlying reason is that the clear current objective of the EAP both on offered courses and materials need to be redefined, because most EAP teachers and students prefer to use available materials in the class by some international publications like Oxford rather than domestic published ones.

### **Conclusion**

According to Graves (2000), materials have to be developed based on the authenticity principles so that learners get familiar with the real-world language. In English language teaching, authenticity is aimed at providing learners with the use of English in the real world and not specifically for the teaching and learning process of English. It is also crucial to observe learners' needs (Varga & Kuna, 2015) to enable learners to use real life materials in the classroom. In this way, it is possible to expose learners to "natural language" (Wong, 2002; Gilmore, 2004). Celce Murcia (2000) believed that including authentic materials in EAP courses has a focal role. Thus, through exposure to authentic materials, learners can acquire competence in the target language that allows them to communicate appropriately in real-life situations. They can also improve their competence to appropriately use the language in the learning process through active interaction with content. In other words, learners can gradually learn to make a distinction between authentic and fabricated materials (Hubbard, 1995). That is to say, they reach the underlying threshold level to perceive "what is worth communicating and how this should be done" (Hyland, 2017, p. 21). On the contrary, Widdowson (1990) proposed that authenticity is hard to achieve because "the language used by the native speakers cannot be authentic for the language learner in classroom settings." (p. 44)

Researchers and practitioners have been calling for an extensive use of authentic materials in EAP courses to fulfill learners' needs and maintain their motivation. This has led to an increased use of authentic materials in the classroom. For example, learners encounter authentic texts rather than textbooks, which enhance their ability to participate in real communication. Willis (1996) argued that when learners are exposed to authentic materials, they have "a chance to achieve a particular communicative goal in a real situation" (p. 18). Breen (1985) also emphasized that students can understand varieties of English used at conferences, seminars, and in dissertations or academic texts (Swales, 1990). As a result, there is an active creation of meaning in the reader's knowledge in an interactive process which leads to gradual increase in their proficiency.

In practice, EAP courses are set up to aid students to learn specific academic skills. Thus, the aim of the academic writing class, for instance, is to prepare students for academic writing tasks, such as writing theses and dissertations with specific technical and formal language requirements. For example, students can be exposed to different samples of accepted ways to write an abstract. Robinson (1988), for instance, indicated that the process of writing consists of planning, organizing, presenting, re-writing, and proof-reading, which is commonly utilized in EAP courses (Bloor & St John, 1988). It corresponds closely to the writing process employed by professional writers, and it may also help learners to develop the ability to think logically, independently, reflectively, critically, and creatively. Likewise, in an academic listening course, language learners are exposed to lectures and discussions in English. For academic speaking skills, more interactional and collaborative activities are required to enable learners to meet the requirements for academic presentations. Furthermore, reading skills and contextualized vocabulary (Wallace, 1980) are supported in academic reading courses to perceive the structure of a text for better understanding of the content.

In EAP context, there have been some perspectives on professional teachers' viewpoints (Ferguson 1997; Sullivan & Girginer, 2002; Wu & Badger, 2009) on EAP offered courses. That is to say, using professional experiences is highly concerned (Beijaard, Meijer, Morine-Dershimer, & Tillema, 2005; Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000) to criticize and improve the quality of instruction; especially, in EAP teachers' professionalism. This can be justified through their knowledge. For example, this professionalism can be found by attending an annual general meeting on current issues such as the one annually held in Norway-

NFEAP. The effect of dominance of English in Norwegian academia is also suggested as useful forums. Critically speaking, it is crucial to constantly attempt to raise EAP competency from basic to academic English in order to promote international research cooperation.

For Iran, revisiting some offered impractical courses is of paramount importance to satisfy the students' demands. Thus, it is crucial to implement critical need analysis in order to give voices to students for expressing their needs and enable them to use language in an appropriate context effectively. Materials developers are expected to reengineer the EAP materials to encourage learners' motivation to actively engage in learning.

In sum, the main implication of this review is to call for a change on developing localized and specialized EAP materials. It is also the case to consider English as a means for International communication.

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