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AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF CHINESE COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHERS' TRANSITION FROM TEACHING ENGLISH FOR GENERAL PURPOSES TO TEACHING ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

Abstract

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Presently, few empirical studies exist investigating the experiences of teachers of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and the few that do exist (e.g. Alexander, 2012, 2013; Campion, 2012, 2016; Martin, 2014; Post, 2010) are confined to UK teachers only (Ding & Campion, 2016). Thus, by adopting ethnographic methods, the present study focuses on four teachers' transition from teaching English for General Purposes (EGP) to EAP in a new context – China, where the first policy concerning the introduction of EAP at Chinese tertiary institutes was published by the Shanghai Education Bureau in 2013. Findings revealed that during the transition the four teachers benefited from both their former teaching of EGP and their research experiences. The teachers concerned, to a varying extent, realized the importance of EAP, even prior to the commencement of the reform, and teaching EAP helped them overcome career crises, and stimulated their desire of becoming researchers. This study extends existing knowledge garnered from EAP teachers in the literature internationally, particularly those in transition from teaching EGP to EAP in China.

Key words

EAP, EAP teachers, EAP in China, pedagogical transition.

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Sažetak

Trenutno je malo empirijskih studija koje se bave iskustvima nastavnika engleskog jezika za akademske potrebe (EAP), a i one koje postoje (npr. Alexander, 2012, 2013; Champion, 2012, 2016; Martin, 2014; Post, 2010) ograničene su na nastavnike iz Velike Britanije (Ding & Champion, 2016). Zato se ovaj rad, uz korišćenje etnografskih metoda, bavi prelaskom četiri nastavnika sa nastave opšteg engleskog jezika na nastavu engleskog jezika za akademske potrebe (EAP) u novom kontekstu – Kini, gde je prvu politiku koja se tiče uvođenja nastave EAP na kineskim visokoškolskim institucijama objavio Šangajski zavod za obrazovanje 2013. godine. Rezultati otkrivaju da su tokom ovog prelaska četiri nastavnika imala korist od prethodnog iskustva u nastavi opšteg engleskog jezika i istraživanju. Nastavnici su u različitoj meri spoznali značaj nastave EAP i pre početka reforme, ta im je nastava pomogla da prebrode krizu u karijeri i podstakla je njihovu želju da se bave istraživanjem. Ovaj rad proširuje postojeća saznanja o nastavnicima EAP u dosadašnjoj literaturi, a pogotovo o onima u procesu prelaska sa nastave opšteg engleskog na nastavu EAP u Kini.

Ključne reči

engleski jezik za akademske potrebe (EAP), nastavnici EAP, EAP u Kini, prelazak sa jedne na drugu nastavu.

1. INTRODUCTION

The first policy concerning the introduction of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) at Chinese tertiary institutions was published in 2013 by the Shanghai Education Bureau in China (Shanghai Education Bureau, 2013). Almost all the tertiary institutions in Shanghai were asked to overhaul the original English for General Purposes (EGP) pedagogy for non-English major students to deliver an EAP pedagogy. However, this reform was on such a large scale that it incurred fierce debates. One of the debates was related to the concern about the quality of college English teachers; for example, many scholars believed that university instructors were not properly prepared to conduct the reforms (Borg & Liu, 2013). Thus, according to Cheng (2016), EAP research articles published in China have mainly focused on debating the feasibility of reforms, and as a result few empirical studies exist outlining the experience of EAP teachers.

Likewise, few such empirical studies have appeared internationally (Bruce, 2017; Ding, 2017; Ding & Champion, 2016). The existing handful of studies exploring the development of EAP teachers (e.g. Alexander, 2012, 2013; Champion,

2012, 2016; Martin, 2014; Post, 2010) are subject to a significant limitation that they were mainly conducted exclusively in the UK (Ding & Campion, 2016). As universities worldwide are more or less influenced by neo-liberalism emphasizing profit-making, and improving students' job hunting success rate (Hadley, 2015), many EAP teachers have been treated as "sub-academics" (Ding, 2017) or "student-processing-units" (Hadley, 2015). Few studies have reported the circumstances of these EAP teachers, as EAP teachers' voices have remained largely unheard, and the story of their professional development neglected (Bruce, 2017; Ding, 2017; Ding & Bruce, 2017).

Furthermore, according to Bruce (2017), EAP as a discipline should always involve as many examples of situations of EAP in different cultures as possible in order to develop and progress an established theory. The current study aims to research into the EAP teaching community in a Chinese context, providing readers with ethnography of the participant teachers' experiences of pedagogical transition, presenting the real-life experiences, histories, and contexts in which these teachers are embedded. The results produced offer a picture of Chinese EAP teachers that differs from that of the UK EAP teachers set out in previous literature.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. A brief introduction of ELT and EAP in China's tertiary level education sector

Approximately twenty-five million students are enrolled at tertiary level in China (Bolton & Graddol, 2012), and for the majority English is a compulsory course. Thus, China has become a "major site of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) activity" (Borg & Liu, 2013: 271). Following general improvements in the English proficiency of university students, increasing numbers of scholars have begun to discuss the best pedagogy to adopt when teaching English to university students (Cheng, 2016). Some of the most robust arguments espouse the benefits of EAP. In China, EAP is a pedagogy adopted by college English teachers, who are responsible for teaching students from non-English majors. As Cheng (2016: 210) argued, "ELT [English language teaching] at the college level is divided into two main streams in China: one for a relatively smaller number of English majors and the other for the non-English majors." Nowadays, college English teachers in Shanghai of China are encouraged to adopt an EAP pedagogy when teaching the students of non-English majors.

Indisputably, EAP is completely new in China, as EGP has long dominated EFL teaching (Cargill, O'Connor, & Li, 2012). Since the 1980s, English language teaching for non-English majors in higher educational settings in China has taken place within the scope of the EGP curriculum (Gao & Bartlett, 2014), which focuses on

the holistic and humanistic education of students in English. The EGP curriculum typically neglects disciplines, instead covering topics relating to “campus life, personal growth, politeness, appreciation of music, health and hygiene, friendship and human emotions, paths to success, and cultural values” (Cheng, 2016: 213).

To elaborate further, the most recent version of national EGP language policy was the *College English Curriculum Requirements* (CECR), published before the Shanghai EAP reform, which was stipulated by the Higher Education Department of China’s Ministry of Education in 2007. In the CECR, the policymakers defined the teaching goal of college English courses for the non-English majors as:

[T]o develop students’ ability to use English in a well-rounded way, especially in listening and speaking, so that in their future studies and careers as well as social interactions they will be able to communicate effectively, and at the same time enhance their ability to study independently and improve their general cultural awareness so as to meet the needs of China’s social development and international exchanges. (CECR, 2007: 18)

Such was the prevalence of EGP that until recently EAP was not formally acknowledged in China (Cai, 2012). Discounting the direct transplantation of EAP courses from the UK to universities such as the University of Nottingham’s China Campus in Ningbo, the first official negotiation of EAP as a language policy for Chinese tertiary institutes was in 2012 in *A Framework of Reference for EFL Teaching at Tertiary Level in Shanghai* (Cai, 2012). The framework was designed to target students needing to use English to study their subjects at undergraduate level, and the suggested framework was as follows:

1. an elective, remedial English enhancement course (0 to 2 credit hours) for those who need to improve their comprehensive general English skills;
2. a series of required English for general academic purposes (EGAP) courses (8 credit hours in total) to enhance students’ EAP listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills;
3. a series of elected English for specific academic purposes (ESAP) courses (2 to 4 credit hours in total), such as business English and legal English, based on the students’ subject areas (Cai, 2012: 2017 as cited in Cheng, 2016: 101).

This pedagogy proposed by Cai (2012) would eventually result in a thorough overhaul of the original EGP-based College English teaching commenced in 2013; however, due to the potentially large scale of the change, it has been the subject of much debate amongst researchers. One of the issues of debate is concerned with the quality of College English teachers, and the fact that professional standard of these teachers might not be sufficient to meet the requirements of teaching EAP (Borg & Liu, 2013). The college English teachers responsible for educating non-English majors have been accused of being disengaged from academic research (Borg & Liu, 2013), and many suffer from a relatively “low professional status”,

associated with “their perceived lack of preparedness as English teachers in general, and as EAP teachers in particular” (Cheng, 2016: 102). Furthermore, EAP research published in China, as Cheng (2016) indicates, has focused on debating the feasibility of reforms, which has led to too few empirical studies on the EAP teachers themselves.

2.2. EAP teacher education in the world

Thus far, a limited number of published journal articles and chapters in books exist on the subject of EAP teachers and their education (Ding & Campion, 2016). When combining this small number of existing publications, and expanding the parameters to include unpublished Master of Arts (MA) dissertations, and conference presentations, it has emerged that there are currently only a handful of researchers conducting empirical studies on EAP teacher development (e.g. Alexander, 2012, 2013; Campion, 2012, 2016; Martin, 2014; Post, 2010).

Although there is a standardized *Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes* (CFTEAP) (BALEAP, 2008), and the BALEAP (British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes) TEAP (Teaching English for Academic Purposes) Accreditation Scheme offers suggestions and benchmarks for EAP teachers (BALEAP, 2014), these are targeted at professionals in the UK, and are not readily translatable for use in contexts elsewhere (Ding & Campion, 2016). Moreover, they do not aim to produce critical EAP teachers, rather they simply provide teachers with membership rules defining necessary knowledge and skills, and favouring descriptive discussion over criticism (Ding & Campion, 2016). Therefore, these standards raise the possibility of establishing an orthodoxy among teachers, and thus the theoretical foundation of accreditation practices has now come under scrutiny (Ding & Campion, 2016). Generally speaking, EAP teachers are a heterogeneous rather than monolithic group (variation exists in terms of the type, context, position, tasks, and target audiences of their teaching). Thus, standards forcing them to conform to a somewhat institutionalized benchmark, made by “armchair” scholars, damage their autonomy and their role as reflective, professional practitioners (Ding & Campion, 2016).

2.3. An overview of the previous studies of EAP teachers

As an example of the aforementioned handful of studies of EAP teachers in the UK, Campion (2012, 2016) conducted a series of semi-structured interviews at the University of Nottingham to investigate the experience of six teachers who had made the transition from teaching EGP to EAP, focusing on the challenges they encountered in terms of training, and their experience in overcoming those challenges. Consequently, it was found that disciplinary specificity existed, as did

“specialised knowledge of language in academic contexts, with all the added disciplinary variations that this may entail” (Campion, 2012: 60).

Between 2002 and 2009, English language teachers at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, where Alexander (2013) works, were required to change from communicative language teaching (CLT) to EAP teaching, despite a lack of formal teacher education. As a result, many teachers complained that they were deprived of opportunities to gain the necessary expertise and confidence, and that they were consequently downgraded in status from experienced to pre-service teachers (Alexander, 2013). The result demonstrates to some extent defensiveness among teachers during the transition to EAP.

Based on the findings, Alexander (2012, 2013) felt it was necessary to enquire into the teachers’ personal beliefs about CLT, and to inform them that their knowledge of CLT might not be sufficient to teach EAP. Alexander (2012) asserts that if teachers are aware of their own beliefs regarding English language teaching, this will almost certainly facilitate their effectiveness when teaching EAP: teachers’ “beliefs about general communicative language teaching [...] might form potential barriers to successful delivery of EAP materials” (Alexander, 2012: 108), so “making teachers aware of their beliefs is the first step in helping them to change” (Alexander, 2012: 99).

By interviewing two teachers regarding their opinions about CLT, and their experience of using newly provided EAP textbooks, and subsequently collecting evidence via online questionnaires from more teachers, Alexander (2012) found the difference between CLT and EAP caused anxiety in many teachers.

Martin (2014), based at the London campus of the University of East Anglia, employed narrative methods to investigate the experiences of EAP teachers who had previously been trained as EFL professionals. The researcher examined how the teachers overcame uncertainties about becoming EAP teachers, what occurred during their transition, and their beliefs regarding the relevance of EFL to EAP courses. In terms of the relevance of EFL to EAP, Martin (2014: 309) points out that “there is clearly a well-trodden path between the two [EFL and EAP], linked not just by the fact that both fields have *English* in the title, but by the discipline of linguistics, and the linguist’s ability to analyse texts, and to recognise patterns of language”, and that EAP teachers draw “more on their academic qualifications rather than their TEFL qualifications”, as well as that “knowledge of academic processes is not a requirement for EFL teachers, but it undoubtedly plays a large part in EAP” (Martin, 2014: 309).

In terms of changes to their identity, it was found that the EAP teachers had a “heightened sense of responsibility for the progress that students should be making”; “pedagogically, participants recognised a shift from verb grammar to receptive and productive skills”; they also expressed “a heightened sense of professionalism and of having a clear role in students’ development”, “a more negative view of the EFL teachers’ role, describing it as vague and having ill-defined targets”, and felt that they were obliged to be aware of disciplinary

specificity (Martin, 2014: 310). Moreover, the teachers surveyed did not feel insecure about the transition, perhaps because they had all completed postgraduate programmes (Martin, 2014).

However, while all the aforementioned studies make a significant contribution to the world's understanding of the EAP community, they may not be transferred to the context of China. Most of the aforementioned studies appear to lack a detailed discussion of the EAP teachers' personal history and background, without which the direct interpretation of the EAP teacher is not holistic. In addition, a valid interpretation of teachers' intended actions may not be possible. Any behaviours, including those described in words, do not simply have a superficially physical or literal meaning, but also comprise different possibilities, which could prove problematic to identify unless, "one might go further and seek to explain why people behaved in the way they did by trying to re-enact their life history, of which this particular action is part" (Pring, 2015: 100).

3. RESEARCH AIM AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study therefore aims to enrich the literature on the study of EAP teachers in China and to observe how Chinese EFL teachers become EAP teachers by reinterpreting the Shanghai EAP teachers' view of the influence of EGP-EAP pedagogical transition on their development as college English teachers.

3.1. Methodology

In order to fulfill the research aim, one of the authors entered the field without preparing predefined research questions, as the current research adopts ethnography as the research methodology. Ethnographic studies support a qualitative approach, comprising extended participant observation periods and ethnographic interviews (Christensen, 2011; Creswell, 2013), in which researchers investigate and interpret the meaning of values, behaviours, thought processes, customs, the interactions of members, and the communal language in a shared culture (Harris, 1968). EAP teachers in Shanghai, as an emerging teacher group under the same EAP reform policy, who have participated in many similar activities and faced similar pedagogical transition, could be seen as a community with shared culture. As this EAP teacher community has rarely been researched, such a research gap fits well with the objective of ethnography, which is to explore the underlying meaning of behaviours and beliefs (Wolcott, 2008) of a particular community.

Ethnography is a research method that avoids bringing preconceptions into the research arena (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). As a result, if the researchers had pre-selected the sampling method before commencing the study, it might have

been counter to the spirit of ethnography. Moreover, as O'Reilly (2008) indicated, many ethnographers' understanding of the target community deepens with the time and the extent to which they enter the field; they may not know who they will meet, and what questions they will raise before they enter the field. Therefore, this current study adhered to a similar premise in which the authors knew the research participants via others' personal introductions, and became familiar with the participants as the ethnography study ensued.

3.2. Participants

The authors collected narrative data provided by the research participants via longitudinal fieldwork, from which some elements of the data were selected to interpret each EAP teacher's experience in order to demonstrate an in-depth picture of the participant teachers. Table 1 shows brief information concerning the participant teachers, with the names of the participants and institutions coded for the purpose of anonymity, and their answers secured on a password-protected personal computer, in order to ensure their confidentiality. Following Table 1, brief accounts of the four research participants are listed as background for readers.

NAME	GENDER AND AGE	POSITION	EDUCATION	INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION EXPERIENCE	TYPES OF PARTICIPATION	LENGTH OF INVOLVEMENT
F	M, 35	Lecturer	PhD candidate	Australia & UK	Observations online & offline, interviews, document analysis	8 months
L	F, 45	Professor	MA	UK	Observations online & offline, interviews, involving the researcher in teaching, document analysis	8 months
B	F, 50	Professor	MA	USA	Observations online & offline, interviews, involving the researcher in teaching, document analysis	1 year
R	F, 35	Lecturer	MA	N/A	Interviews, document analysis	2 years

Table 1. Information on the research participants

F was interested in English, and later received international higher education, and became a believer in learning by doing. After years of EGP teaching, he has

accumulated a wealth of observational data about his students, and abundant teaching experience. When working as an EAP course coordinator, he adopted a project-based EAP pedagogy.

L, after majoring in philosophy, and later in applied linguistics, found herself unable to publish in international academic journals while studying in the UK; however, after learning more about the field she made progress. Based on this experience, she returned to China to teach EAP, and during the process she found her EAP course lacked humanity.

B was dedicated to improving teaching efficiency, and she sought different methods to do so, but all ended in vain. After she studied at a US university, and experienced conflicts with her colleagues, she found the lack of a scholarly identity demotivated her students and made her colleagues irresponsible. Therefore, she designed an EAP course, aiming to establish her students' scholarly identities, based on literacy concepts learned in the US. However, her EAP course and associated team members were oppressed by her university, and after years of struggle, she has created a course online and used social media resources to support it.

R was very interested in reading literature and philosophy, and used classic texts to enlighten students' critical thinking, and tried to establish good relationships with her students.

3.3. Data collection

One of the authors spent eight months, one year, eight months, and two years, respectively, interacting with the four participant teachers, during which voice recorders and fieldnotes were used for keeping trace of the participants' class teaching and recording each conversation with the participants. When the author who did the data collection felt improper to record the teachers' voice in some occasions, memo was used to recall the details the participants told him. By doing so, this author was able to explore the participants' true feelings, as such a method could expose "the inner experience of individuals, how they interpret, understand, and define the world around them" (Faraday & Plummer, 1979: 776).

This study also employed decontextualized, unstructured interviews to repeatedly enquire about the research participants' experiences during their pedagogical transition, and the factors that influenced the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013). Not all the interviews in this study were face-to-face, and social media apps were used to carry out follow-up interviews with teachers when the authors left the research field. In practice, one of the authors conducted interviews during casual in-depth conversations with the research participants.

After the interviews, the author cross-referenced the materials provided by the participants, and later compiled a story of each participant teacher's experience with EAP (Hammond & Wellington, 2012). After the compiling of each

story, the authors sent the transcript to the respective participant teachers for checking, which was recommended by Creswell (2013) as a way to maintain the trustworthiness of qualitative research.

3.4. Data analysis

All the interviews were conducted in Chinese, and the authors translated them into English after transcribing and checking the accuracy with the participants. Thematic analysis was adopted to extract common themes from the stories, and to describe the characteristics of each EAP teacher during the pedagogical transition. Furthermore, cross-case comparisons of the four teachers were conducted in order to summarize the commonalities and differences among them (Schwandt, 2011). Therefore, discussion themes characterizing each teacher's pedagogical transition to teaching EAP will be presented with reference to the established literature of EAP teachers.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section includes the common themes extracted from the four cases, intending to showcase the features of four teachers' pedagogical transition from teaching EGP to EAP.

4.1. The EGP to EAP transition benefited from both the teachers' EGP teaching and research experiences

According to Liu and Xu (2011), competing pedagogies might produce challenges for teachers in transition. Indeed, Alexander (2012, 2013) reported that the pair of CLT-EAP competing pedagogies made teachers at Heriot-Watt University very uneasy. However, this situation did not affect the teachers involved in the current study. They transitioned from EGP to EAP as part of the natural process of self-improvement in their teaching for the reasons given below.

One feature that stood out upon reflection among the four teachers was the importance of their EGP experience. In other words, their EGP teaching to some extent facilitated EAP pedagogies and concept formation. For instance, *F*'s long years of EGP experience allowed him to obtain a thorough understanding of Chinese English learners and their educational context, which contributed to his needs analysis of students in relation to EAP pedagogy design, and most importantly, motivated him to use EAP to change the views of Chinese students.

The quotation below is his thought about Chinese students, which was based on his years long EGP teaching:

How come Chinese students do not need to investigate a real problem? They need it... in such a globalized world ... (if without it) how can they (students) cooperate with researchers from abroad? ... (if without it) they (our students) would be disadvantaged, for they could only write report (for others)... but the idea is others', they will never enter the core... to me, a very important part of higher education is socialising (students), I want them to become proactive participants rather than what they were in foundation education (in China) to accept whatever the authority offers. (F, interview 2)

Without such a reform of EAP, *F* might find it difficult to apply his ideas concerning education to teaching in order to change the Chinese students. Similarly, *B*'s EGP experiences led her to notice students' motivation as the upmost challenge to her teaching efforts. She claimed:

My purpose has always been to improve teaching... At that moment I realized that it is not the vocabulary or my teaching methods that matter; no matter what kinds of teaching method I choose, it will not improve their learning as long as they resist it, because they do not want it. (B, interview 3)

Reflecting on this issue, when she was encouraged by the education bureau to design and run an EAP course, *B* later integrated what she had learned from her US experience, and designed an EAP course to help build students' scholarly identity.

Thus, for these two teachers, transitioning from EGP to EAP was an uplifting aspect of their teaching, enabling them to apply what they considered important knowledge to their students, and were able to give their students more guidance. As Martin (2014: 310) found, after transiting from EGP, EAP teachers obtained "a heightened sense of professionalism and of having a clear role in students' development".

Secondly, transitioning to teaching EAP as another aspect of the natural process of teachers' self-improvement relies on the teachers' original education ideology and research background being consistent with their perceived EAP knowledge. For example, *L* did not undergo a significant challenge when she was asked to teach EAP; this might have been because she had to extend her view of international education, having learned EAP while preparing to publish when she was studying in the UK. This meant she had reflected on many of her ideas of English teaching before she returned to China and began teaching PBL (Problem Based Learning) EAP, through which she shared her ideas about learning academic English when conducting research projects. As far as *R* is concerned, her understanding of EAP contained critical teaching thinking, for which she had a profound foundation in philosophy and literature, gained through her previous studies, which contributed to her EAP teaching.

In general, drawing on their EGP teaching, education ideology and academic research background, all four teachers transitioned to EAP to enable them to demonstrate and apply their educational ideas and ideals in practice. Compared with the finding that EAP teachers benefit more from their previous academic qualifications rather than their previous general English teaching training (Martin, 2014), the current study raises the view that equal importance should be given to teachers' non-EAP teaching experience and academic background when discussing their transition from EGP to EAP.

4.2. The importance of EAP was realized by the teachers even before the EAP reform

In the current study, the facts learned about teachers' transition from EGP to EAP reflected a feature that previous studies have failed to discover. It might not be holistic enough to use the simple words "smooth" or "insecure", as previous authors have, to describe the investigated teachers' EGP-EAP pedagogical transition. The reason is that, in this study, every teacher experienced an entirely different transitional journey, such that most of their transitions had occurred even before the EAP reform. In other words, the investigated teachers had either already realized the necessity of teaching EAP to Chinese students, or had begun to apply EAP knowledge before the Shanghai EAP reform commenced.

For example, *F* detected the differences between higher education in China and abroad when working towards his Master's degree, and he helped students to prepare for the international academic English test (IELTS), which he thought was to some extent similar to academic English. Thus, long before he started teaching EAP, he had acquired overall knowledge of what a student might need to learn in advance if he/she were to pursue higher education abroad.

Similarly, *L* was trained as a researcher when studying in the UK, before returning to teach EAP in Shanghai. *B* realized the weaknesses in Chinese scholars' English academic writing when studying at an overseas university as a visiting scholar. By that time, she had debuted her first international publication, although her authorship credit had been appropriated by her supervisor, raising her suspicions about the academic integrity of Chinese scholars. *B*'s struggle for academic autonomy within her own department caused her to feel disappointed in the actions of the scholars in her field. Moreover, after she had experienced the academic atmosphere at universities in the US, she came to believe that Chinese university students should be trained as academics, an inspiration that was echoed after she learned about the EAP reform in Shanghai. Generally, while the transition from EGP to EAP did not occur after the Shanghai EAP reform commenced, there were examples of personal growth before the reform, and the EAP reform was just a chance for those involved to apply their knowledge.

However, *R* had neither experienced academic research and publication nor studying abroad, and despite being a Master's degree holder in applied linguistics, she remained confused about the aims and significance of EAP. Therefore, at least in the context of current study, teachers' academic qualification might not be deemed to be as important as their experiences of academic discourse, as Martin (2014: 309) observed, "knowledge of academic processes is not a requirement for EFL teachers, but it undoubtedly plays a large part in EAP".

4.3. Teaching EAP helped the teachers overcome career crises

As mentioned in the literature review, two kinds of English language teachers exist in Chinese universities: one group teaching and researching English literature, linguistics, or translation, and the other teaching general English to students from non-English majors, or the so-called college English teachers (CETs) (Cheng, 2016; Liu, 2011). The EAP teachers discussed in this research belong to the latter group.

CETs have entered a period of crisis resulting from the era of booming internet education, and abundant resources for learning English. Authors such as Borg and Liu (2013) criticized English teachers for weaknesses in terms of their teaching. Another aspect of the career crisis was that described by Liu (2011) of CETs being marginalized, or being remote from academic research and unrelated to academic disciplines, being voiceless in changing situations, feeling insecure, fearing innovation and changes to one's teaching. In short, CETs were treated more as tools than as scholars (Liu, 2011).

As a CET, *B* experienced marginalization. From her description, she was deprived of the right to choose teaching materials, or rename courses, and was ordered not to teach beyond a certain EGP syllabus, which is in line with Liu's (2011) description of CETs as being voiceless in the micro-politics of universities, and not being treated like scholars. Thus, *B* used EAP to overcome such unfair treatment, and to obtain scholarly autonomy. It is therefore understandable that she particularly stressed the nurturing of scholarly identity as a component of EAP. In addition, she proactively organized student research conferences and disciplinary translation projects.

F and *L* both shared features in common with *B*. They used a PBL EAP to link students' disciplinary knowledge, research methods, and academic English. Through such an approach, the course became important to the students, and the teachers directly participated in students' learning and future development:

The core of EAP as I understand it is students being able to use English to understand the world, and to think critically with an international horizon via the lingua franca, which could later equip them to be on the cutting edge in their future work. (F, online interview)

These findings to some extent align with the view that after teaching EAP, teachers have a “heightened sense of responsibility for the progress that students should be making” (Martin, 2014: 310) and “a heightened sense of professionalism and of having a clear role in students’ development” (Martin, 2014: 310).

Using EAP as an opportunity, teachers attempted to overcome this crisis. A career crisis undergone by Chinese EAP teachers is reflecting what their international counterparts have experienced in neoliberalism influenced universities: “I witnessed several EAP Units become divested of their scholarly status, relegated to the Third Space, and redefined as auxiliary educational service providers. Once placed in the Third Space of neoliberal universities, the EAP Unit would undergo the painful process of becoming a Student Processing Unit” (Hadley, 2015: 39). Hadley (2015: 39) directly quoted Allman’s (2001: 71) set of metaphors to describe EAP teachers’ status, saying that EAP teachers “are no longer educationalists – professional educators – but technicians.”

However, the authors of this paper did not find the EAP teachers in this study to be incompetent, as they were neither weak in terms of their teaching nor in their research. On the contrary, they had impressive potential. The participant teachers were neither unclear nor conservative in their career objectives, as indicated by Liu (2011). The current study demonstrated that these EAP teachers were resilient and open to new ideas, which differs from Cheng’s (2016: 216) remark on Chinese EAP teachers’ “low professional status and their perceived lack of preparedness as English teachers in general, and as EAP teachers in particular”. The variance in the results of the current study and previous studies might also have arisen because previous studies were not as prolonged and contextualized as the current research, and were not rendered anthropologically. One important implication of this study is that the participant teachers’ stories may lead to better understanding of a community that is, particularly in the Chinese context, under-described.

4.4. Teaching EAP stimulates the teachers to become researchers with visions of home and abroad

Based on the data from the current study, successful EAP teachers are not only researchers with the knowledge of how to conduct and present research in English, but they must also be familiar with higher education internationally. *L*’s reflections on her international publication experiences when she was in the UK demonstrated the necessity for EAP teachers to have an international vision:

I feel many teachers nowadays, including some of my colleagues in our department, may not have a deep understanding of those academic patterns, unless they have some international publication experience. (L, interview 1)

Simultaneously, those engaged in teaching EAP should be familiar with Chinese English learners in different contexts, and with Chinese education, just as *F*, *L* and *B* noted when tailoring their EAP pedagogies for their students. Compared with *R*, who did not possess as much knowledge of higher education abroad, *F*, *L*, and *B*'s EAP pedagogies were more practical for students seeking to further their studies abroad. Such features of EAP teachers were closely related to the cultural differences, the differences between Chinese education system and its western counterparts; therefore, it could explain why Chinese English learners have unique characteristics. Knowing the significance of EAP teachers' views of home and abroad, the university where *F* and *L* are based in regularly sends EAP teachers abroad for relevant training. Similarly, the Shanghai EAP reform committee sometimes invites international scholars to give seminars to EAP teachers from across Shanghai. EAP in this sense equips these teachers with views of both home and abroad.

5. CONCLUSION

This study adopted an ethnographic method to probe into a community of Chinese college English language teachers experiencing the pedagogical transition from teaching EGP to EAP, as established under the policies of the Shanghai education bureau. The current study discovered that the teachers' transition from teaching EGP to EAP benefited from both their EGP teaching, and their research experiences. The teachers, to a differing extent, realized the importance of EAP before the commencement of the reform. Teaching EAP helped them overcome career crisis, and stimulated them to become researchers with views of both home and abroad.

It is hoped that this research will extend existing knowledge of EAP teachers in the international literature, particularly those in transition from EGP to EAP in China. The current research provided a detailed, chronological, and contextualized picture of interpretation, identity construction, and the emotions of EAP teachers in pedagogical transition. The academic, proactive, critical, innovative, and resilient characters established by the four participants in the present study defied the suspicions about the professionalism of Chinese EAP teachers posed by some scholars.

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