

BOOK REVIEW



EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF POLITICS, POLICIES, AND PRACTICES OF EAP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Ian Bruce and Bee Bond (Eds.).
CONTEXTUALIZING ENGLISH FOR
ACADEMIC PURPOSES IN HIGHER
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This volume highlights the critical role of political and ideological factors shaping the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) landscape. It argues that EAP cannot thrive as a profession or discipline in isolation; instead, it must be aware of the broader political and institutional dynamics that influence higher education. There is expanding research in the pedagogy of how EAP is best taught and learnt in a variety of academic contexts (de Chazal, 2014), EAP teaching practices in different international and institutional settings (MacDiarmid & MacDonald, 2021) and development of EAP materials (Norton & Buchanan, 2022). This volume makes a valuable contribution to existing research by looking at EAP from politics and policies perspective. It posits that EAP practices, often overlooked as political acts, are closely connected with power dynamics. The central theme of the book is the profound influence of politics and policies on EAP practitioners and their students, and as such it draws our attention to the importance of comprehending the impact of policy to improve EAP teaching practices and the quality of students' education.

The book consists of eleven chapters, organized into four parts. The first part, with three chapters, focuses on the impact that the governments' macro level policies and practices have on contemporary higher education including EAP. In chapter 1, Ian Bruce discusses the social, political and economic forces that influence higher education and EAP in universities. Bruce highlights how EAP has evolved to support students entering and progressing through English-medium university

education worldwide. The chapter discusses various aspects, such as university structures, funding, management, and governance, as well as the influence of government policies, societal demands for increased student participation, globalization, and effects of marketizations on staff and student roles. Bruce specifically focuses on English-speaking countries, where universities have increasingly adopted a business-focused approach. The author notes the significance of international fee-paying students as an important source of revenue for corporatized universities, often positioning students as *consumers* due to tuition payments. However, he also highlights the tension between the university's strategic goal of effectively developing EAP students and the current corporatized environment. In this environment, he foresees a risk that EAP becomes subject to commercial forces, and is reduced to a commodifiable *service*. This could result in an oversimplified approach, where EAP is primarily seen as language proficiency courses benchmarked to such frameworks as the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) but lacking depth in needs analysis, discourse competence and academic skills development. Overall, Bruce raises valid concerns about the potential challenges faced by EAP within this business-focused, corporatized university environment, and highlights the importance of preserving the academic dimensions of EAP and creating the necessary academic environment to fulfil its core roles effectively.

Taking a critical perspective, in chapter 2 Jenna Mittelmeier and Bowen Zhang define internationalization as a term that encompasses diverse and disparate activities, whose significance can vary depending on the context in which they are applied. It is highlighted that the approach universities take towards internationalization is greatly influenced by national and international policies. The universities engage in activities such as recruiting internationally mobile students and staff, internationalizing the curriculum, collaborating in trans-border research, and offering English-Medium Instruction (EMI) programs. However, the specific approaches to internationalization, and the role of EAP in facilitating it, can vary significantly among institutions. As more international students choose English-speaking countries for their studies, the demand for EAP support in EMI programs has also grown.

Building further on the rhetoric of internationalization, chapter 3 discusses the commercial nature of international student recruitment and its influence on universities. Sylvie Lomer and Ying Yang highlight the ethical dilemmas related to equity, inclusivity, and fairness. They explore the relationships between universities, recruitment agents, and international students, emphasizing that marketization introduces ethical challenges for all parties involved. Overall, these discussions shed light on the complexities and ethical considerations associated with internationalization efforts in universities. Interestingly enough, we are reminded that internationalization should be approached critically, recognizing both the potential benefits and the challenges it poses to different stakeholders.

Part 2 of the book, with three chapters, discusses important issues related to the development of the international students' academic English language competence. Neil Murray's chapter 4 focuses on using standardized tests (namely, IELTS and TOEFL) functioning as gatekeeping measures for admitting international students to universities. While these tests meet the language entry requirements of institutions, they often fail to assess the students' knowledge of the specific academic language needs of their future disciplines. Murray introduces the terms EGAP (English for General Academic Purposes) and ESAP (English for Specific Academic Purposes), the former of which focuses on a cross-disciplinary approach, while the latter employs a range of linguistic practices suited for different disciplines. One of the author's main points is that creating discipline-specific language tests would be costly and may still have limited functionality due to the selective nature of their content. Instead, he proposes a *hub-and-spoke model* for academic language and skills preparation and support. This model involves faculty-based EAP teams, with a central hub in a Learning and Teaching Unit and *satellite units* (spokes) encompassing the four university faculties. The advantage of this model, according to Murray, is that EAP teachers would be physically located within the faculties, fostering integration and productive relationships with academic staff, and thus leading to more effective EAP provision and benefiting from teachers' discipline-specific knowledge and expertise. Overall, Murray suggests shifting away from EGAP towards ESAP and implementing a hub-and-spoke model to better address the actual language needs of international students in disciplinary contexts.

In chapter 5, Chang Liu and Nigel Harwood discuss the often-overlooked issue of proofreading for international second-language students in a UK university Writing Centre. The chapter presents the results of a research project conducted in a UK university Writing Centre, focusing on the beliefs of three key stakeholders regarding the appropriacy of proofreading for international students, specifically Chinese students. The study employs qualitative data collection methods, interviews, audio-recorded consultations, and student writings. The findings of the research reveal a complex picture of proofreading practices within this particular Writing Centre. Mismatches were identified between students' desires for accuracy-focused proofreading and their expectations of quickly having their writing fixed, and the Writing Centre tutors' expectations of students taking an active role during consultations. To address these mismatches, the authors propose recommendations to reconsider the policy and clarify students' goals and Writing Centre expectations. They also provide valuable suggestions for improving proofreading practices in Writing Centres when working with students from diverse disciplines.

In chapter 6, Bee Bond proposes a more proactive and engaged approach to EAP across the university, highlighting the potential for EAP courses to address the language needs of international students effectively. Drawing from her own institution as a case study, the author suggests that EAP should go beyond traditional pre-sessional preparation and in-sessional repair workshops to provide students with ongoing language support throughout their academic journey. This

approach ensures that language support is integrated into the university's overall policies and practices, ultimately benefiting both students and academic staff.

In Part 3 of the book, consisting of three additional chapters, the emphasis turns towards EAP language centres, exploring their complex position within universities, as well as their management and employment procedures. Jennifer J. MacDonald's chapter 7 examines the influence of neoliberalism on higher education within Anglophone contexts, and with Canada as a primary case study. She identifies three core effects, the first is commodification of English. Neoliberalism has transformed the English language into a commodity, assigning it market and exchange values, and proficiency in English, viewed as a privilege within Anglophone Canadian higher education, allowing access to academic and professional opportunities. The second is commodification of EAP support. Pre-sessional and in-sessional EAP support, provided by university English language centres, is similarly viewed through this lens of commodification. These programs are expected to enhance students' value as their English language proficiency grows, thus increasing their opportunities. The third is universities as labour market training grounds. Neoliberalism portrays universities as institutions primarily geared to prepare students for the labour market, emphasizing their role as skilled contributors to the economy. MacDonald also explores the complexities, contradictions, and paradoxes present in language policies and practices within Canadian higher education under the influence of neoliberalism. Her analysis reveals a discrepancy between the institutional portrayal of university English language centres, primarily contributing to international student recruitment, and how these centres present themselves on their websites, emphasizing their role in academic preparation, transformative learning, and cultural exchange.

In the next chapter, Richard Simpson addresses the complex challenges and tensions encountered when managing a university EAP centre. These challenges include striking a balance between meeting institutional demands for both quantity and quality in pre-sessional and in-sessional teaching, while simultaneously managing teacher training, language assessment, technology-enhanced learning, online delivery, and professional development. Drawing upon his extensive 25-year experience, with over half of that time spent as a centre director, Simpson focuses on some critical areas. Regarding pre-sessional provision, Simpson highlights the challenge of reconciling the demand for international student enrolment to maintain rigorous academic standards. The chapter explores the degree of integration of EAP into academic programs, and the complexities of managing this area in a market-driven and massified higher education landscape, particularly in the post-COVID era. Simpson also acknowledges the precarious nature of employment for many EAP teaching staff and suggests strategies to address these challenges, including community engagement, diversified delivery methods, and enhanced collaboration between EAP practitioners and disciplinary teachers.

In chapter 9, Michèle Le Roux explores the roles and identities of EAP practitioners operating under precarious employment conditions, referring to this

group as *practitioners of EAP in precarity* (PEAPPs). Le Roux investigates the professional and psychological impacts of precarious employment, and various responses by both the practitioners themselves and EAP associations. The author's analysis draws from her own experience transitioning from precarious employment to a permanent position within EAP. She highlights the limitations of precarious employment, both in terms of conducting empirical research and the psychological and spiritual aspects of it. The chapter demonstrates the concept of precarity as an outcome of capitalism's neoliberal turn, shedding light on the challenges and the marginalization experienced by PEAPPs. Le Roux concludes by emphasizing the need for collaborative approaches to reduce precarity and strengthen the position of EAP teachers.

The final part of the volume, consisting of two chapters, presents suggestions on how the EAP community can initiate discussions and collaboratively address the various concerns highlighted in the preceding chapters of the book. In chapter 10, Alex Ding and Ian Bruce discuss a less-explored aspect of EAP associations and their pivotal roles. The chapter begins by examining the limited body of literature that has focused on EAP/ESP teacher associations and their functions, and highlights the diverse activities of EAP associations in various countries. In the United States, EAP practitioners can engage with the Symposium of Second Language Writing (SSLW), while in Australia within the Australian Association of Writing Programmes (AAWP). The chapter also cites prominent organizations such as BALEAP in the UK, AELFE in Spain, and GERAS in France. Notably, well-established practitioner associations such as Iran's ESP Association, China ESP, and ESP Association in several Asian countries are highlighted. The authors emphasize the significant role these associations play in enhancing the professional development of EAP/ESP practitioners through conferences, symposia, workshops, networking opportunities, research, and scholarly activities. Ding and Bruce also express concern that EAP associations have received inadequate attention in the existing literature, and advocates expanding the scope of EAP associations to encompass policy positions and engagement with issues such as the governance and management of EAP units, university policies on international students, and a more comprehensive approach to ethical and social practice.

In the last chapter, Ian Bruce and Bee Bond synthesize the key ideas and arguments in the book while considering the future direction and nature of EAP within the context of contemporary challenges in higher education. They present several implications for the field. One crucial area that requires immediate attention is the impact of the financialization of universities on EAP. At the macro-level, there is an urgent need for research that investigates and brings to light the negative consequences of financialization on EAP, such as the commodification of courses, a lack of needs analysis-informed program development, reduced scholarly activity, and precarious employment practices. Additionally, EAP associations must actively advocate with governments on policy matters related to the recruitment of international, fee-paying students, internationalization, and the activities of universities.

Overall, this volume is a valuable addition to the expanding literature on EAP and EMI, and I strongly recommend it to EAP practitioners, researchers, EAP course designers and policy makers. It offers important and insightful contributions that enrich our understanding of EAP practices while also providing practical pedagogical insights applicable in various institutional settings. What makes this collection particularly valuable is that it does not aim to advocate for a single, distinct EAP pedagogy; instead, it displays the impact of recontextualizing EAP approaches to address a variety of issues related to the politics, policies and practices that shape EAP within higher education.

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