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EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF EMBEDDED ACADEMIC LANGUAGE AND LITERACIES PROVISION IN A SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Abstract

This paper outlines how a Listening Room approach was used by two practitioners of English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) to evaluate the impact of embedded academic language and literacies provision in two departments at the University of Leeds. In this small-scale case study, Listening Rooms were used to capture authentic conversations between student friends, who took part in a conversation about the impact of the language and literacies provision they were accessing within their respective schools. Within this, the EAP practitioners undertook a collaborative approach to data analysis which led them to revisit methodological dilemmas about the researcher's role in this type of evaluation study alongside the influence of emic and etic perspectives in collaborative data analysis processes. In this paper, they consider which type of researcher or teacher-researcher is best positioned to undertake these types of evaluation studies. In line with other evaluation studies, students identified key features of the provision that enhanced or thwarted their engagement in different types of academic communication. These features included the value of relationship-building, the influence of curriculum, learning and teaching practices, and explicit teaching of academic language and literacies. This study also captured important constructive suggestions that have implications for online teaching and classroom practice.

Key words

EAP, ESAP, embedded academic language and literacy, insessional, impact.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The approach to teaching English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) in close collaboration with discipline departments has developed in recent years (Tibbets & Chapman, 2023). In the UK, we tend to use the term 'insessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP)' to refer to this type of teaching. In this article, we outline how a listening room approach was used by two practitioners of ESAP to evaluate the impact of embedded academic language and literacies provision in two departments at the University of Leeds. Within this, we revisit methodological dilemmas about the researcher's role in this type of evaluation study alongside the influence of emic and etic perspectives in collaborative data analysis. Having identified issues with existing evaluations of ESAP provision, our small-scale study chose an alternative, humanistic way to understand students' experiences of their academic literacies' classes. In line with other evaluation studies, students identified key features of the provision that enhanced or thwarted their engagement in different types of academic communication. These features included the value of relationship-building, the influence of curriculum, learning and teaching practices, and explicit teaching of academic language and literacies. This study also captured important constructive suggestions that have implications for online teaching and classroom practice.

The paper firstly introduces the background and rationale for the study. It then discusses the relevant literature contextualising and providing a more comprehensive rationale for the study's approach. It also highlights some important methodological considerations related to undertaking a collaborative evaluation in different disciplines. An overview of the context of the evaluation follows. Next, we provide a transparent and detailed account of the method and our approach to analysis, which we found often to be less visible in other evaluation studies. We then share some of the findings of the study followed by a discussion of these insights in relation to existing literature. Finally, we reflect on some of the methodological issues and challenges we faced throughout the project.

2. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Embedded academic language and literacies provision in the University of Leeds has developed significantly since 2015. This insessional provision started in 2013 in the (then) Institute of Communication Studies. By 2016, this had expanded to offering bespoke provision in nine schools across the university. In 2025, there is insessional provision in every faculty and almost all schools. This microstudy is part of a wider project to evaluate the impact of this provision across the University. Evaluating education is not a politically neutral activity. It is often regarded as a neoliberal spin on accountability and increasing bureaucracy (Bulaitis, 2020; Olssen, 2016). Choosing which knowledges, competencies, attributes or outcomes to measure

within evaluations of university learning often rests on ideologies about the purpose of university and what is to be valued in Higher Education (HE) learning (Brown et al., 2013; Fetterman, 1988; MacDonald, 1974; McMahon, 2000; Lizzio et al., 2002; Woodall et al., 2014). In terms of 'student voice' in the UK, this refers to the process of actively involving students in decisions and discussions that impact their education. It is about giving students a platform to express their views, needs, and concerns, and using that information to improve their educational experience. This can be achieved through various methods, including student councils, surveys, focus groups, and formal representation on university committees (Canning, 2017). However, critics of the student voice 'agenda' have highlighted the implications of certain theoretical commitments, values and ideologies that are implicit within the student voice movement (e.g., in McLeod, 2011; Robinson & Taylor, 2007). Another concern is that this feeds into a student-as-consumer relationship within HE (Mendes & Hammett, 2023).

Although there has been discussion about the role of insiders/outsiders or emic/etic approaches in evaluative research in education (e.g., stemming from Pike, 1967; Zhu & Bargiela-Chiappini, 2013), this does not seem to have been addressed as explicitly or reflexively as it could be in EAP-focused evaluations of insessional provision. This will be discussed later.

For studies related to EAP or ESAP provision, evaluations are undertaken by different stakeholders. They may be undertaken at university level (especially for university-wide language and literacy initiatives, e.g., Edwards et al., 2021; Goldsmith et al., 2022), at faculty/departmental level (e.g., Jaidev & Chan, 2018) and at local level (e.g., Baik & Greig, 2009; Song, 2006). Studies at the local level are perhaps undertaken by curriculum designers, module leaders or individual practitioners. In addition to quality assurance processes (e.g., Maldoni & Lear, 2016; Wingate et al., 2011), motivations given include justification of provision to ensure it remains in-house and not outsourced to private providers (Pearson, 2020) or a desire to hear student voices (e.g., Cena et al., 2021; Eslami, 2010). Other evaluations have been designed to explore co-construction of curriculum or assessment (e.g., in Greenwood, 2022).

The value of qualitative approaches in evaluating educational initiatives has been demonstrated (e.g., in Edwards et al., 2021 and in Fenton-Smith et al., 2018) but there are still epistemological differences across the academy that can sometimes undermine the importance of qualitative insights (Cardano, 2020; Jones et al., 2021; Moravcsik, 2019). Arguably, the quantification and datafication of many HE practices and student outcomes has contributed to this (Holloway & Lewis, 2022; Williamson et al., 2020). Examples include reliance on final exam performance data and student surveys like the National Student Survey (NSS), which is considered methodologically flawed (Bennett & Kane, 2014; Bowles et al., 2020; Pollet & Shepherd, 2022; Sabri, 2013). The National Student Survey (NSS) is an annual, independent survey administered to final-year undergraduate students in the UK. It gathers students' opinions on the quality of their course and overall university

experience, aiming to inform prospective students, improve the student experience, and support public accountability. It is used as a way of comparing the student experience across universities and therefore it is of significant importance to university marketing in the UK (Cheng & March, 2010).

The role of human interaction within the evaluation process itself is often neglected. For these reasons it is important to rehumanise assessment of impact in a way that allows students to speak for themselves outside the constraints of weighted questionnaire items. This account explains the approach taken by the authors of the study: two EAP practitioners working in a School of Education and a School of Music, respectively. We were leaders or coordinators of the provision and also the curriculum designers and class teachers. We outline how we used an alternative method for capturing student insights about their experiences of insessional classes. We show how our findings largely resonate with existing evaluation studies, commenting on the role of this 'insider knowledge' in similar impact evaluations and explain how a consideration of an emic-etic continuum or dynamic helped us to make sense of our experience of collaborative data analysis.

3. LITERATURE

3.1. Perceived benefits of embedded academic language and literacies provision

There are many ways that collaborations between subject specialists and EAP practitioners benefit students (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Hyland, 2022; Li, 2019; Tibbetts & Chapman, 2023; Wingate, 2015). In addition, a growing number of studies demonstrate how embedded EAP provision can impact on students, staff and institutions. In terms of studies focusing on perceptions, students report finding courses useful, interesting or enjoyable (Baik & Greig, 2009; Li, 2019; Murray, 2022; Wingate et al., 2011). More specifically, they claim an increased understanding of theory, concepts, discipline content, assessment tasks and criticality (Edwards et al., 2021; Fenton-Smith et al., 2018; Li, 2019; Malviera Orfanò & Wingate, 2024). They notice an improvement in use of academic skills and communication (Benson & Anderson, 2016; Goldsmith et al., 2022). In addition to academic impact, affective benefits include increased wellbeing and a sense of belonging (Goldsmith et al., 2022; Song, 2006) as well as increased confidence in participation in other activities outside insessional classes, e.g., groupwork, tutorial participation (Maldoni & Lear, 2016). However, in these studies it is unclear if students could choose whether to use their first or second language in the research. Language proficiency and familiarity with particular vocabulary may also play a role here. This is an important consideration given the role language plays in the cultural and rhetorical aspects of evaluation or feedback genres (Bell & Brooks, 2018).

3.2. Methodological considerations in evaluating EAP provision

Many of these studies employed quantitative tools to measure impact. These included data analysis of attendance, assessment grades, academic progress, academic integrity tests and student retention (Fenton-Smith et al., 2018; Goldsmith et al., 2022; Maldoni & Lear, 2016; Wingate et al., 2011). However, many of them also used qualitative tools to explore participants' perceptions of impact: end-of-course students' surveys with open questions, follow-up interviews or focus groups (Fenton-Smith et al., 2018; Goldsmith et al., 2022; Maldoni & Lear, 2016; Murray, 2022; Wingate et al., 2011). Measuring the impact of EAP effectiveness is a complex process with a range of variables. Whilst some studies are more confident in making claims about impact (Goldsmith et al., 2022; Maldoni & Lear, 2016; O'Neill et al., 2022; Wingate et al., 2011), others argue it is difficult to confidently claim any causal relationships, i.e., that embedded provision is the driving factor (Edwards et al., 2021; Fenton-Smith et al., 2018). Bassett and Macnaught (2024) are critical of researchers' approaches and question the evidence provided to support embedded EAP impact. A further complication is the difficulty of comparing studies with so many variables, e.g., educational systems, student cohorts, disciplines and models of provision.

The roles of teachers-as-evaluators, as well as approaches to analysis within collaborative projects, have been less transparent in qualitative evaluations of ESAP provision. It is often not very clear who was involved in the evaluation and what role they played, i.e., were they curriculum designers, teachers and evaluators of the provision or were they external evaluators or researchers assessing the impact of provision designed and taught by others? Many studies appear to have been undertaken by EAP or other practitioners either on their own (e.g., Edwards et al., 2021; Gaffas, 2019) or in collaboration with academic content lecturers (e.g., Baik & Greig, 2009; Murray & Muller, 2019). Even when this information is given, it is unclear whether the evaluators or researchers were also the teachers or curriculum designers (e.g., in Wingate et al., 2011). Sometimes it is less clear who is involved in the research at all, making it challenging to assess the relationship between the anonymous 'researchers' and course designers and evaluators (e.g., Cena et al., 2021; Kasper, 1997).

This is an important methodological consideration that can be related to the anthropological concepts of emic and etic perspectives. Stemming from Pike's (1967) original work about the phonemic and phonetic categorisations of the sounds of language, the emic is taken to relate to the insider perspective and explanatory interpretations of participants or group members whereas the etic is the descriptive outsider perspective (Dwyer & Buckler, 2009; Haapanen & Manninen, 2023). In this project we identified ourselves as being both insiders and outsiders. We were insiders in that we understood more about the disciplinary cultures, students and ESAP provision within the specific schools in which we were working. This allowed for a more emic approach to data analysis whereby we could

review the practices, values and beliefs as a contributing member of the learning cultures of the ESAP provision and school. Yet we were also outsiders to one another's subject-specific contexts and outsiders to the students' immediate peer group. In this way we took an etic view in our attempts to interpret students' perceptions of the provision and some of the learning and teaching practices without directly being a part of it. Further details about the teaching context and the provision are given below.

4. CONTEXT

The insessional work in the School of Education and the School of Music has expanded since 2019 as schools requested the provision to be made accessible to a wider range of students and in Music to cater for a larger international student cohort. The students tend to be 'mostly multilingual and multicultural scholars for whom the medium of instruction is not a first language' (Taylor et al., 2023). Much of the insessional teaching in these schools draws on similar language and literacies learning approaches. These include, for example, genre and process approaches to academic writing, the influence of communicative language teaching, and sociocultural teaching and constructivism. The sessions are tailored to core MA modules within the schools. For example, students undertaking MA TESOL Studies (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) would explore how to structure their core assignment on 'Analysing Language Teaching' which is a complex multigenre assignment often leading to challenges in overall text coherence. Learning opportunities encourage students to notice key features of subject-specific language and literacies via text analyses, discussion and practice. These are intended to help students to make sense of the types of discourse and communities of practice in their field by considering communicative purposes, rhetorical functions, and language choices available in social interactions (which include more formal writing and speaking tasks).

In terms of the provision itself, the academic language and literacies classes took place once per week over two semesters in October to January and February to May. Each session lasted between sixty to ninety minutes. Students were also encouraged to complete one hour of asynchronous work pre- or post-class. Students attended voluntarily but the sessions were timetabled on students' programme timetables. As noted above, the sessions tended to be tailored to core assignments students were expected to complete within their degree programmes. The design of the sessions was discussed with subject lecturers and module leaders within the schools. In the School of Education, the assignment genres ranged from traditional exposition essays to hybrid genres that combined elements of research reports and reflections. In the School of Music, genres ranged from critical reviews to programme notes. The sessions also focused on academic knowledge and skills that students had requested to explore further. This included critical thinking within

their discipline, use of academic sources/literature and maintaining academic integrity.

Having outlined relevant details about the teaching contexts, the next section will discuss the particular focus and approach taken to assess the impact of the provision.

5. METHOD, PARTICIPANTS AND ANALYSIS

5.1. Listening rooms

We adopted a 'listening room' approach drawing largely on 'The Listening Rooms project' at Sheffield Hallam University (Heron, 2020; Parkin & Heron, 2023). The approach encourages students, who are also friends, to have an open and honest conversation in a safe space. The researcher is not present (whether online or in-person) so it is intended to help avoid researcher influences. The student discussion is recorded and the researcher(s) listen to the recording and analyse the transcript. This analysis should ideally be done with the student participants. In a study exploring diversity (Parkin & Heron, 2023), project participants discussed prompts around literature-informed themes including, 'Becoming', 'Belonging' and 'Success'. In addition to other methods (round-table discussion and data analysis by different stakeholders), they found the listening rooms allowed for insights into students' lived experiences, and influences on their confidence and perceptions of success. They also noted that peer groups and others who share lived experience influence students' sense of confidence and by engaging in wider social experiences it helps establish a sense of belonging.

5.2. Participants

Two listening room discussions between students in the School of Education and the School of Music were undertaken. There were two students in the listening room in the School of Education and three students in the listening room in the School of Music. The participants were undertaking one-year full-time taught master's programmes. The School of Education students were from mainland China and were undertaking MA TESOL Studies. They both aspired to become English Language Teachers in China following their MA studies. The School of Music students were also from mainland China and were studying Master of Music in Performance: a programme aimed at developing expertise in advanced musical performance. Having no previous experience of studying in UK HE and as undergraduates in musical disciplines, they had little experience of academic writing or communication in English. The five student participants had excellent attendance.

In order to offer some guidance to focus the student discussion on evaluative points while avoiding any over-steering or leading questions, three discussion prompts were used. These were: 1. "How would you describe your experience on the academic writing course/Academic Language for Music course?" 2. "How do you see the academic writing classes/Academic Language for Music course fitting with the rest of your MA studies?" 3. "What would you change about the academic writing course/Academic Language for Music course?" The online discussion lasted between 40-60 minutes. The students could choose which language to use for their discussion provided they were all proficient users of that language. The three School of Music students chatted in Mandarin about personal topics before moving on to discuss the prompt questions in English.

5.3. Data analysis

The online discussions were recorded, and we analysed the transcripts using affective, evaluative and In Vivo coding in the first instance (Saldaňa, 2018). Affective coding focuses on feelings or emotions such as when happiness, anger, sadness or frustration is mentioned. Evaluative coding highlights where positives and negatives were being noted, such as when something is described as useful/helpful/positive or unhelpful/negative or problematic in some way. In Vivo coding is when codes are created directly from the participants' own words and phrases. To demonstrate an example of these coding approaches, please refer to Table 1. The Affective codes are in **Bold** & *Italics*, the Evaluative codes begin with + or - and In Vivo codes use quotation marks.

These coding approaches related well to our evaluative focus while allowing for students' feelings to be foregrounded where this was a feature.

In terms of intercoding reliability, we endeavoured to approach the coding process in a systematic and transparent way. We were encouraged by qualitative studies that had attested to the role of intercoding measures in promoting reflexivity and dialogue within research teams (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). A comparison of coding for both transcripts revealed important areas of agreement regarding key emerging themes but, with some data it was necessary to have a fuller understanding of the context of core MA modules and insessional classes within the schools, in order to interpret the data meaningfully. This has important research implications when deciding who has the relevant knowledge and insights when undertaking intercoding in this way. Without a detailed understanding of the context, it was difficult to understand what students were referring to exactly (e.g., courses or session types) potentially leading to a superficial or even misinterpreted account of the discussion and evaluative points made. Although the coding approaches were agreed from the outset, there were significant differences in the numbers of codes and themes found in each case. This further signalled to us the potential issues that may have occurred in previous evaluation studies that have not undertaken a

collaborative approach to data analysis or have not reflected in detail on this process.

OK, uhm now I would like to talk about useful experiences and some unuseful	
parts. And firstly, the useful experience erm I was really uhm like to attend the language	+I ***LIKE*** TO ATTEND THE CLASSES
courses. Uuhm so firstly, I think it's really helpful to improve the skills on writing. For example,	+IMPROVE WRITING
I really loved the collaborate parts like the workshop. The workshop five, I found examples,	+"***LOVED*** THE COLLABORATIVE PARTS" +USING EXAMPLES
uhm, we can learn how to analysis the the paragraphs uhm from like the research	+ANALYSING PARAGRAPHS
performance, something like that and we can answer the questions. And also it's really	+ANSWERING QUESTIONS
helpful from the questions themselves, like how to make us, uhm, find like find some troubles	+VALUE OF THE QUESTIONS IN SUPPORTING ANALYSIS OF TEXTS INCL. IDENTIFYING LIMITATIONS
from overall writing parts, uhm.	

Table 1. Example of coding approaches

Interestingly, language that referred to feelings was absent except for noting when they 'liked' or 'loved' something. This may have been due to the descriptive nature of the prompts. The responses may have been different if students had been directly prompted to discuss their feelings. Nevertheless, the students did indicate perceived benefits, difficulties, and constructive suggestions for change. The themes below summarise key benefits and challenges noted by students.

6. STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPACT OF THE EMBEDDED EAP INSTRUCTION

This section shares some of the key findings which have been grouped into three overarching themes.

6.1. Theme 1: Relationships and expectations of others – tutors and student peers

Relationships with each other and with tutors was an important area for discussion. Benefits of student-student interaction included academic development as well as

inter- and intra-personal ones. In terms of academic development, students appreciated the opportunity to discuss and deepen their understanding of module assignments and research, but also the chance to practise discussion skills, which increased their confidence to communicate in module tutorials/seminars. In terms of personal development, they valued becoming acquainted with each other on a more personal level engendering a sense of belonging, "through the group discussion I got to know my classmate" (Music student 2), which was an element undoubtedly missing during the period of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Interaction with tutors was also seen in a positive light with students appreciating the opportunity to talk to their EAP tutor and ask questions (example 1).

(1) "We can use the free times to talk to you in this class. And we meet Angela ask some questions, such as when I write the essays." (Music student 1)

Comments about relationships with tutors focused on expectations of tutors' pedagogical approaches and classroom management matters. Students wished for more explicit EAP tutor instruction and input, for example, on referencing (example 2).

(2) "I think it's not fully discussed because the teacher hasn't told us when to use it – when to put it at the beginning or when to put it at the behind." (Education student 1)

They also requested more EAP tutor feedback and less peer-to-peer feedback due to its perceived limited benefits. Classroom management issues raised seemed to have been influenced by the online learning environment. Better management of group discussion was mentioned, including shortening the length of group discussion time and giving clearer task instructions beforehand. Another comment related to students not understanding when tutors spoke too quickly.

Some of the implications for pedagogical practice indicate the value of facilitating ways of making student expectations transparent and working to negotiate these in relation to teachers' perceptions of their role and responsibilities.

6.2. Theme 2: Learning and teaching practices, processes and curriculum

In terms of positive pedagogical practices, insessional provision was seen as important for signposting resources. It helped students familiarise themselves with the university's digital learning platform. One Music student felt more able to navigate the platform, access module and assessment information and use Turnitin. Signposting of other university online resources was also mentioned, e.g., university

library website and external websites, e.g., Google Scholar and Oxford Reference (database of Oxford University Press's digital resources), "I can use online resources to search for academic terms" and "it provides me with a lot of academic resources I can use" (Music student 3).

However, students felt some teaching and learning practices and processes could have been improved. In terms of practices, Education students found managing insessional reading requirements challenging (examples 3 and 4).

(3) "I think they if you read in class my reading speed is not so fast and I just can't understand it fully so it's limited what I can get from this class." (Education student 1)

(4) "Yes, yes me too, so yeah, that's that's a problem for me and that makes me feel you know, less effective when we have the group discussion." (Education student 2)

Thus, students' lack of pre-session reading had an impact on their experience during online classes where they felt both ill-prepared to engage in discussions and under pressure to read quickly in order to engage with their peers who had read the text.

Music students also commented on ineffective practices (example 5):

(5) "The part of writing question can be arranged before or after class, because if you, if we writing a lot in class, [...] it will be a little waste of time in class. This will make you spend less time to teaching us." (Music student 3)

In terms of processes and curriculum, students highlighted negative impacts. School of Education students noted challenges in the sequencing of insessional content in relation to module assignment deadlines (examples 6 and 7). All three core module assignments were to be submitted concurrently, and so students chose to work on different assignments at different times.

(6) "Yes, I have some memories about what I have learned in the writing. You know, academic writing, but I forget most of them, so I have to go back and read the worksheets and PowerPoints, [...] so it's very, you know, less effective." (Education student 1)

(7) "It would be nice if we can have the academic writing courses at this time [while writing the dissertation]." (Education student 2)

Consequently, there may have been a mismatch between the focus of insessional classes, and the assignments students were prioritising.

The insight into pedagogical practices and curriculum design shown by students reveal they have a unique 'insider' perspective on processes about which they are not consulted. These processes, mostly decided by course designers and

subject to university requirements, could be opened up to create a more collaborative approach to learning and teaching practices and course design.

6.3. Theme 3: Developing academic language and literacies

The theme of competencies and skills was discussed in detail by students. Both Education and Music students considered the positive impact of focusing on academic writing. This section is divided into two key aspects of academic writing highlighted by students. Possibly, the reason students commented extensively on academic writing is because of the challenge faced particularly at the beginning of postgraduate study. Education and Music students were positive about how their academic writing ability had developed in general and they also mentioned specific aspects, such as developing coherence and cohesion and understanding of features of academic writing.

6.3.1. Genre and language analysis

One pedagogical approach that seemed to support the development of academic writing was a focus on genre and language analysis. Education students noticed the challenges of genre approaches to language analysis. They were supported in analysing a range of texts, but wanted to be told which text examples were 'good and bad' (example 8).

(8) "There are many analysis about different excerpts for each lesson, and it's always very difficult for me and my group members because we can't, you know, distinguish which is good, which is bad, because for us they seem all very, very good." (Education student 1)

The pedagogic decision to encourage balanced noticing of both strengths and areas for improvement in different texts rather than provide formulaic examples suggests a need to explicitly state this decision or select example texts with significant differences.

Music students saw analysing texts as positive allowing them to compare bibliographies and essays and identify features useful for their own writing.

6.3.2. Critical thinking and thinking about thinking

Critical thinking was valued highly by Education and Music students. Education students wanted more instruction on critical thinking (example 9).

> (9) "The role of voice is something like whether to put the author, if this sentence written by this author to put it at the beginning, 'somebody says (blah blah blah) or this sentence (hand gesturing) got some quotation marks at the behind. Though it has been talked about, I think it's not fully discussed because the teacher hasn't told us when to use it – when to put it at the beginning or when to put it at the behind." (Education student 1)

They were concerned that critical thinking in their writing was not recognised by tutors (example 10).

> (10) "Sometimes I think I'm being critical, but the writing form that the teacher just cannot get the concept that I'm being critical (laughs)." (Education student 1)

Music students commented on learning about critical thinking in insessional workshops: writing critically and recognising the need to search for different sources to find different perspectives.

Both groups of students recognised the complexity of critical thinking, and the time needed for its development. These comments indicate the challenges of pedagogical approaches to teaching critical thinking skills or features of criticality within a discipline which are discussed in more detail below.

In summary, producing academic written texts is clearly a key concern for Education and Music students, and it would seem insessional teaching can have a significant impact on the development of academic writing competency. In addition, a focus on academic writing allows students to develop understanding of disciplinary differences in critical thinking and using critical thinking in literature searches.

7. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1. Impact of insessional provision

Below, we outline where the findings resonate with similar studies, and we discuss some important differences. We also reflect on the insights gathered by undertaking a collaborative approach to the research.

In line with other evaluations of embedded insessional courses, the ESAP provision was perceived to be mostly useful and enjoyable (as in Baik & Greig, 2009; Goldsmith et al., 2022; Li, 2019; Wingate et al., 2011). In common with Song (2006)

and Goldsmith et al. (2022), students emphasised the value of opportunities provided for interaction and for developing friendships, as well as feeling more confident about engaging in group discussion in other contexts (Maldoni & Lear, 2016). The purposeful design of these interactions and opportunities for meaningful dialogue were underpinned by communicative language teaching (CLT) and an understanding of the role of friendships, emotions and a supportive learning environment for students, especially those using English as a second foreign language (Anh & Davis, 2019; Medaille & Usinger, 2019, Taylor et al., 2023). This matter relates closely to current university discourse about ways of engaging students in seminars in both multicultural and monocultural learning environments (Kim et al., 2020). There are important curriculum design and pedagogic implications in terms of planning-in the time, space and opportunities students may need to forge positive relationships with each other and staff (Zumbrunn et al., 2014). In the current HE climate (i.e., concerns about students' mental health and changing student cohorts), this aspect of learning and teaching may be at risk of being neglected despite its very clear impact on learning and students' attitudes towards their studies and the university (Ahn & Davis, 2019; Peacock et al., 2020).

Although our study did not explicitly prompt for feedback related to confidence levels, which was one of the stated aims by Edwards et al. (2021), students commented on increased confidence in their use of academic skills and communication, in particular writing (as discussed by Benson & Anderson, 2016; Li, 2019; Maldoni & Lear, 2016 and O'Neill et al., 2022).

An issue not covered in the literature, but raised by Education students was the importance of ensuring insessional classes aligned with learning in content classes for knowledge about academic language and literacy to be developed at times salient to students.

7.2. On critical thinking

Echoing the findings of Wilson (2016) and Malviera Orfanò and Wingate (2024), some of our students noticed an improvement in their critical thinking ability, but they also acknowledged ongoing challenges in this area.

'Creative criticality' in academic writing is highly valued in the discipline of Music (Burland et al., 2021). In the subdiscipline of Performance, creative criticality is intrinsic to the performer's interpretation of a musical work, informed by research into how others have interpreted and/or performed it. The final recital or concert is the culmination of the performer's critical and creative thinking about the piece. This thinking is explained through genres such as programme notes and lecture recitals: genres which do not fall into the usual categories of academic writing and are therefore harder to define, posing greater challenges to Performance students.

Approaches to the teaching of critical thinking within TESOL teacher training has been the matter of debate for many years, including the implications of social and cultural practices embedded within conceptualisations and pedagogies (for example, as discussed in Atkinson, 1997; Oda, 2008; Pennycook, 2004; Yuan & Stapleton, 2020). Although 'higher order' cognitive skills of interpreting, analysing and evaluating are generally associated with critical thinking within degree programmes in the School of Education, what counts as critical thinking can be interpreted in general or more prescriptive ways depending on the subject area, the assessment design and the inclination of individual tutors when marking assignments. The findings from our study noted above indicate unresolved issues about students' and tutors' interpretation of critical thinking in the field and how this may be different to other disciplines or in different genres (discussed at length by Bruce, 2020, for example). This indicates that there could be an opportunity to explore these interpretations more explicitly or transparently with students and tutors, as shown by Atkinson (1997), Chau and Cunningham (2021), Silver (2006), for example.

In contrast with other research findings (e.g., Edwards et al., 2021; Fenton-Smith et al., 2018; Li, 2019; Maldoni & Lear, 2016), our students did not discuss whether their understanding of theory, concepts and discipline content had improved as a result of insessional classes, although this is an area commented on in end-of-course surveys when students frequently express a wish for more content teaching. Given the bespoke nature of the provision, this is an interesting finding that may be related to the nature of the prompt questions used in the listening rooms or may indicate a predominance of skills development within the provision. The listening room prompt encouraged students to consider how the insessional classes fitted with/complemented or otherwise linked with their master's studies rather than explicitly asking how the provision helped them to build disciplinary knowledge.

7.3. Emergency remote teaching

Our findings reflect much of the international pedagogic discussions that took place during the shift to emergency remote teaching in 2020 (e.g., in Bruce & Stakounis, 2021; Kohnke & Jarvis, 2021; Rinekso & Muslim, 2020). In common with Kaufmann and Vallade (2022), our students valued the online classroom for several reasons. It provided opportunities to develop rapport both with tutors and peers and to experience a positive learning environment. In particular, alongside the students in Rinekso and Muslim's (2020) study, our students enjoyed synchronous group discussion; it was said to foster an understanding of some subject content, interpersonal relationships and spoken communication competencies. At the same time, however, students also noted challenges with classroom management of group discussions (akin to those found by Bruce & Stakounis, 2021; Kohnke & Jarvis,

2021). In line again with Kaufmann and Vallade (2022), students also had a desire for more explicit tutor instruction, input and feedback. Parallelling the findings from Sun and Yang (2022) and Nartiningrum and Nugroho (2020) although interaction with tutors was seen as useful, students would have preferred more support from tutors in terms of explicit teaching and feedback on written assignments.

Another overarching implication that was reinforced through our analyses, is the value of engaging students in discussions about expectations of learning and teaching. Our findings show that students had clear ideas about the role of their teachers in this context. The extent to which these expectations could be or should be met could be discussed more openly and regularly with students.

7.4. Methodological insights

The collaborative approach taken in the design of the study and the data analysis provided some key insights that have relevance for these types of evaluation or impact studies.

We each approached the analysis differently and, despite having agreed the coding approach, we noticed different things in the listening room transcript. This is unsurprising, given the interpretivist nature of the study and qualitative data analysis, and it points to the value of interrater or dual coding techniques (Cohen et al., 2018). We also noticed occasions where we had misinterpreted the students' intended meaning because we did not have the full picture of the others' context and the students' studies. This highlights the importance of the emic perspective or insider knowledge and suggests the need to involve those ESAP practitioners and others who understand the context and issues well. This may be particularly relevant in the studies undertaken by researchers of EAP rather than EAP practitioners, the difference here being those 'insider' practitioners who teach EAP to/with students and those who do not teach EAP but rather undertake research on or about EAP practitioners and practice (Ding & Bruce, 2017). At the time of their research, these researchers of EAP may be employed to teach a different subject with their own students (such as TESOL studies or Applied Linguistics, for example) rather than being employed as an EAP lecturer. There are important differences in the insights, knowledge and positioning of these two roles that we believe could have impacted on the analysis and findings of existing evaluation studies.

Regarding the listening room approach, we saw that students did appreciate using the discussion prompts with a friend; and the conversation did reveal detailed and more constructive suggestions than previous course review methods (i.e., surveys) had revealed. Therefore, it seems this approach can encourage deeper or more extended discussion of matters that are important to students (Parkin & Heron, 2023). However, unlike focus groups, where the facilitator or researcher is present in the discussion, we were unable to seek clarification, elicit additional information or give further tailored prompts, which would have been useful for understanding students'

perceptions of insessional impact. It may also have been a missed opportunity to engage in dialogue about some important issues, e.g., students' expectations of tutors, which could have been a helpful learning activity in itself. This was a significant disadvantage and indicates this method should incorporate complementary methods, such as interviews or focus groups to find and fully understand discussion points.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Our study sought to understand the impact of embedded academic language and literacies provision on a small sample of students studying on postgraduate programmes in a School of Music and a School of Education. In our effort to rehumanise student-focused research and in our attempt to counter overly quantitative impact assessments that still prevail in HE, we foregrounded the students' point of view. The findings from our small-scale study support previous studies which show insessional EAP has an important added value for students. In particular, students identified a positive influence in three main spheres: relationships and expectations of others with reference to tutors and peers; pedagogical practices, processes and curriculum; and the development of academic language and literacies. At the same time, students' insights related well to some significant debates in the EAP field including genre-based pedagogies and approaches to the teaching of critical thinking within disciplines, for example. As indicated throughout this paper, students' constructive discussions in this study have led us to consider some aspects of teaching practice that could be further developed.

Our experiences of selecting the listening room approach as an alternative to more traditional methods, applying coding to our data analysis and valuing the affordances and limitations of 'emic' and 'etic' insights have encouraged us to become more principled in our approach to scholarship. Other EAP practitioners may find this approach to be beneficial in their own scholarly activities.

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