Research on Satisfaction with English for Academic Purposes Courses

Qiangwei Lu

University of Leeds, Leeds, England, LS2 9JT, ed21q2l@leeds. ac. uk

Abstract: EAP courses are of great importance for the development of EUMs' EAP skills. On the other hand, student satisfaction is an effective method to study the effectiveness of EAP courses. Therefore, this study designs a questionnaire from four indicators (teaching environment, course management, course resources and teachers) to investigate the satisfaction of EUMs in Ningbo University of Technology with EAP courses in order to provide references. According to the results, EUMs are well satisfied with all those four factors, especially teachers and course resources. Additionally, based on the results, feasible solutions to improve student satisfaction in EAP courses are proposed.

Keywords: English for Academic Purposes; Student Satisfaction

1. Introduction

The factual truth of China's continual development in politics, economy, and culture necessitates a group of foreign language professionals of high quality and standard, which cannot be done without English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Therefore, the need for a shift from foundation-driven English for General Purposes (EGP) to EAP that meets the needs of students learning English academically is evident[1]. Besides, English undergraduate majors' (EUM) EAP competency growth during their undergraduate years is the foundation stage. As the largest vehicle and means of teaching EAP, it seems necessary to conduct research related to the EAP courses.

2. Literature Review

2.1 EAP and EAP Courses

EAP first appeared in the proceedings of the 1974 and 1975 University of Birmingham conferences on Language Problems of International Students in British Higher Education. In the beginning, EAP is simply a programme designed to meet the needs of overseas students who would attend academic courses in higher education in English-speaking countries. EAP has something to do with language teaching and research aimed at meeting the communicative and practical demands of certain groups in an academic setting[2].

Fristly, EAP courses are designed for adults who have a basic knowledge of English and whose occupational background is consistent with the subject matter of their studies[3]. Later, EAP course is designed specifically to teach the English language knowledge and skills required for academic English, primarily to help learners develop the comprehensive language skills needed for academic course work[4]. In short, EAP courses are by far the largest and most important vehicle and means of imparting EAP.

2.2 Student Satisfaction

Student satisfaction is in the learning process; if their actual feelings equal or exceed expectations, they are satisfied; conversely, they are dissatisfied when they fall short of expectations[5]. From the above, it can be seen that student satisfaction is a subjective feeling of learning, including feelings of fulfillment, preference and achievement.

There is no systematic research on the factors that influence student satisfaction. However, from the previous findings of scholars[6][7], it is found that the main factors affecting student satisfaction in courses are in the areas of teaching environment,

course management, course resources and teachers. In addition to objective factors, students' gender, age and education also have an impact on student satisfaction. In this study, the author will focus only on objective factors that affect student satisfaction mentioned above.

3. Research Design

This study is a quantitative study and the data required is obtained by means of a questionnaire, which has only one main part: a survey on the EAP courses satisfaction of EUMs. The answers are designed with 5-point Likert scale (1=very unsatisfied, 2=unsatisfied, 3=not sure, 4=satisfied, 5=very satisfied). 235 valid questionnaires are returned through Wenjuanxing. The questionnaire is analysed by SPSS 22. 0 for reliability and validity, which resulted in a reliability of 0. 991 and a validity of 0. 939.

4. Empirical Satisfaction Analysis

Table 1 Satisfaction Analysis

	Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Not Sure	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Mean Value
Class Displine	2	3	66	98	66	3. 95
Class Interaction	4	7	72	101	51	3. 80
Class Atmosphere	4	6	67	96	62	3. 88
Teaching Environment						3. 88
Course Difficulty	1	4	67	102	61	3. 93
Course Assessment	1	4	61	123	46	3. 89
Mode of Course Delivery	2	3	64	112	54	3. 91
Course Management						3. 91
Textbooks	3	1	59	121	51	3. 92
Learning Materials	2	4	57	115	57	3. 94
Classroom Equipment	2	1	49	115	68	4. 05
Course Resources						3. 97
Teaching Ability/Attitude	1	3	59	99	73	4. 02
Professional Knowledge	1	4	59	101	70	4. 00
Post-class Help and Assistance	3	4	56	104	68	3. 98
Teachers						4. 00

According to Table 1, in teaching environment, EUMs at this university have a relatively high level of satisfaction with class discipline in EAP courses, with a mean value of 3. 95, followed by Class Atmosphere (3. 88) and Classroom Interaction (3. 80). This shows that the EAP courses at this university have an ideal class discipline and class atmosphere. Based on the data, their satisfaction with class interaction is comparatively lower than the first two. One reason for this may be that in class, teacher-student interaction, while meeting students' expectations, still falls short.

In course management, three elements are, in descending order, course difficulty (3. 93), mode of course delivery (3. 91) and course assessment (3. 89), with a relatively even distribution of mean values. This shows that the EAP courses at the university contribute positively to student satisfaction in terms of these factors, and students can adapt to the course difficulty and course delivery method, as well as accept the course assessment methods, but there is still large room for improvement.

In course resources, student satisfaction with classroom equipment is the highest at 4. 05, followed by learning materials (3. 94) and textbooks (3. 92). It can be seen that classroom hardware facilities such as multimedia and computers can enhance students' learning experience and quality; meanwhile, students believe that the textbooks and study materials distributed in class can also assist learning, so student satisfaction for all three is relatively high, but again, there is more room for improvement.

In teachers, student satisfaction is relatively average for three factors, teaching ability and attitude (4. 02), professional konwledge (4. 00) and post-class help and assistance (3. 95). This shows that the EAP teachers at this university are professional in teaching EAP and have strong EAP skills and knowledge. Besides, teachers can provide students with the necessary post-calss help to resolve any confusion they may have.

The avarage mean value of the four factors are Teachers (4. 00), Course Resources (3. 97), Course Management (3. 91) and Teaching Environment (3. 88).

5. Concluison and Feasible Solutions

5.1 Conclusion

According to the results, EUMs are most satisfied with teachers, which indicates EAP teachers can largely meet their needs; students are also satisfied with course resources. Students need not only EAP textbooks, but also other relavant materials that are beneficial for their EAP skills, such as handouts and online resources, as well as hardwares, such as microphones and multimedia. EUMs' satisfaction with course management and the teaching environment is not as high as the first two. However, overall, satisfaction is comparatively high. Students are satisfied with the discipline and atmosphere in class, except interaction. EUMs may think that teachers do have interactions in class, but not enough, resulting in not maximising student motivation; meanwhile, students are also satisfied with the course difficulty and way of course delivery, but in course assessment, students may think that current assessment method is relatively single and lacks flexibility.

5.2 Possible Solutions

Firstly, teachers need to increase the proportion of interaction with students in EAP courses in order to enhance students' engagement. In this way, not only will students be more effective and motivated in learning, but teachers will also be able to keep track of students' learning status and effectiveness. Secondly, teachers can enrich the current assessment methods. They can add formative tests, such as unit tests to test students' learning; besides this, teachers can also add post-class work completion and classroom performance, avoiding the single final exam to increase students' pressure. Finally, teachers should continue to maintain the current areas of high satisfaction, such as classroom discipline and atmosphere and the assistance provided after class, and continue to improve them in order to further increase student satisfaction.

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