Specificity and Culturally Relevant Teaching in English for Academic Purposes courses: A Bahrain university case study.

Dr Elena Novik, Faculty of Language Studies, AOU, Bahrain elena.novik@aou.org.bh
Dr Andrew G Scott, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia a.scott2@uq.edu.au

Abstract

One language controversy that continues to be the focus of debate for practitioners is the role of specificity in English for Academic Purposes courses (Hyland, 2002), and the respective merits of English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) courses. This widely debated topic has led to well-established arguments in favour of specificity and yet EGAP courses continue to be widely taught. This has resulted in some confusion for classroom practitioners regarding best practice. This paper will probe into this area of language controversy and clarify what is at stake in each of the approaches in order to enable practitioners to make principled and informed choices for their classrooms and their learners. We will illustrate the key issues of these two approaches and conclude with a brief case study of EAP courses at a University in Bahrain with reference to the particular contextual aspects affecting teaching EAP to Arabic-speaking students. This enables us to examine relevant issues such as developing general academic skills vs. developing discipline-specific academic language; cultural differences in academic discourse vs. adapting to western academic norms; appropriateness and suitability of specific EAP courses for the needs of the students and the society in general. We conclude the paper by focusing on more practical considerations, such as cultural sensitivity in curriculum design and instruction. In other words, we will discuss the application of EGAP and ESAP as a part of TEFL in Bahrain, focusing on the role of the cultural and contextual factors in the education process. We conclude that while the issue of specificity in EAP courses continues to be a concern for text analysis researchers, specific contextual factors assert a much stronger influence on EAP course design. We urge researchers to move beyond texts and investigate language classrooms to contribute to a better understanding of EAP as it is experienced by educators and learners.

Introduction

One dilemma that the scholars and practitioners teaching English as a foreign Language (TEFL) are faced with derives from the fact that English for Academic Purposes (EAP) should be taught to learners in particular (non-English speaking) contexts and thus, the EAP provision becomes enriched with new requirements and implications that offer both constraints and opportunities. Therefore, the choice between English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) is not a straightforward one. In this article, we will be discussing EAP as a part of English Language Teaching (ELT) programmes in the Arabic context, specifically Bahrain. Recent studies emphasize the need for tailored pedagogical frameworks to effectively teach English in Arabic educational settings. Alharbi and Albelihi (2023) highlight the importance of integrating genre-based approaches in ESAP curricula, suggesting that such frameworks help students navigate discipline-specific language and conventions. Similarly, Ellis et al. (2020) discuss the benefits of task-based language teaching in EGAP contexts, arguing that engaging students in authentic academic tasks

enhances their language proficiency, critical thinking skills and motivation. Other researchers (Lu et al., 2021) investigate combined approaches in EAP teaching, for example, genre- and corpus-based approaches in pedagogy. A recurrent theme in the literature is the various challenges that Arabic learners encounter in both EGAP and ESAP settings. Al-Issa (2020) identifies linguistic difficulties, such as the differences in syntax and academic vocabulary between Arabic and English, which can hinder effective communication. This is supported by Ahmed (2010), Al-Khatib (2017), Al-Mahrooqi & Denman (2014), Alharbi & Albelihi (2023) who note that students often struggle with the expectations of academic writing in English, including argumentation and citation practices. This paper revisits the established arguments for EGAP and ESAP and then examines specificity in the case of EAP courses in a university in Bahrain. The paper concludes with implications for practice.

Research Aim

The paper reviews the factors impacting the choice of EGAP and ESAP in English language courses in an Arabic context and reports on the specificity of EAP courses in a university in Bahrain. It aims to address the following research questions:

How is the controversy over the choice between EGAP and ESAP addressed in EFL contexts?
What types of EAP courses are offered in the case of a university in Bahrain?
What cultural and contextual factors affect the teaching of EAP courses in Bahrain?

Literature review

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is "the teaching of English with the specific aim of helping learners to study, conduct research or teach" (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 8) in English. EAP originated as a subfield of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Ding & Bruce, 2017). Descriptions often associated with ESP, as identified by Belcher (2006 p.134) are needs-based, pragmatic, efficient, cost effective and functional. All these attributes have positive connotations and reflect the perception that ESP aims to target and address the specific purposes required by learners. This view is captured in Hutchinson and Waters' statement, "Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English that you need" (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, p. 8). Strevens (1988) and Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) provide influential definitions of ESP. Strevens (1988) conceives ESP as possessing four absolute characteristics and two variable characteristics, whereas for Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) there are three absolute characteristics and four variables. There are similarities in their definitions, and these are worth examining. Both definitions see ESP as meeting the specified needs of learners. Strevens' assertion that the content is related to particular disciplines, occupations and activities may be seen to have much in common with Dudley-Evans and St John's observation that it uses the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline. Strevens' third absolute characteristic is that ESP is centred on language appropriate to these activities, specifying syntax, lexis, discourse, and semantics. Dudley-

Evans and St John's third absolute characteristic also notes that the language, skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities are of central importance. Finally, Strevens contrasts it with general English in his last absolute characteristic. Dudley-Evans and St John note, as their second variable characteristic, that it is possible for ESP to use methodologies different from those of general language teaching, depending on the specificity of the ESP classes.

The common elements identified above can be seen as answering Hutchinson and Waters' question about the foundation of ESP: " …'Why does this learner need to learn a foreign language?' " (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, p. 19) Even if Hutchinson and Waters answer their question somewhat differently, the key characteristics of ESP common to both of the above definitions involve meeting specified needs, being relevant to the discipline in terms of content or underlying methodology and activities, and also in terms of language and language use. Interestingly, Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 18) define ESP in terms of what it is not, perhaps illustrating the difficulty in providing a clear and comprehensive definition. A defining feature of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is the use of needs analysis to inform teaching and materials (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, p. 63; Dudley-Evans, 2001, p. 131). Results from needs analysis can lead to an assessment of resources and constraints, and the formulation of objectives from which the syllabus can be developed, realised through teaching materials and methodology, which in turn can be evaluated for effectiveness (Hamp-Lyons, 2001, p. 127). However, these processes are not necessarily linear and contextual factors will determine which processes require most attention and whether this occurs at the planning, teaching or replanning stages of course development (Graves, 1996, p.12).

Needs analysis (NA) was introduced in language planning during the 1970s and is regarded as a key principle in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The early research on NA primarily focused on ESP (Karimi & Sanavi, 2014; Nazim & Hazaeva 2020; Soroka, 2019; Sundari, 2022; Zohoorian, 2015), emphasizing the investigation of learners' language needs in relation to their academic and professional experiences, their lacks and wants as well as their strengths and weaknesses. NA is essential in ESP instruction because it helps design courses that effectively address the specific language needs of learners.

The term 'needs' is difficult to pin down, as "The very concept of language needs has never been clearly defined and remains at best ambiguous" (Richterich, 1983, p. 2). This is due to the development of needs analysis, which West (1994) notes as changing in focus and scope. Approaches to needs analysis vary according to different areas of language teaching. From a language for specific purposes perspective, "objective needs [are] stressed. Needs [are] seen as [the] gap between present language performance in a specific area and language performance required in a particular communication situation" (Brindley, 1989, p. 67). There are, therefore, two areas that require analysis: the target

situation, to determine the required language performance, and also the learners' present current language proficiency. According to Brindley (1989, p. 71), information from both of these areas can be obtained pre-course. However, needs change over time due to many factors, including the dynamic nature of academic disciplines (John, 1988) and "regular and on-going re-analysis of needs is therefore needed if an LSP course is to meet the requirements of all those involved" (West, 1994, p. 79). Target needs have been broken down into necessities (the demands of the target situation), lacks (the gap between existing proficiency and the target proficiency) and wants (the learners view of their needs) (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). An example of these objective and subjective needs related to an EAP course is the objective need to understand lectures versus the subjective need to learn more vocabulary in order to understand lectures (Dudley-Evans, 2001, p. 133). Learning needs describe the process of moving from current abilities (lacks) to operating in the target situation effectively (necessities) (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). A consideration of how students are going to learn how to use the language accurately, meaningfully and appropriately (Larsen-Freeman, 2003) is as important as discovering how language is used in the target situation (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). Even today, educators are still faced with the issue of identifying the most salient needs to meet, necessarily prioritising some over others, before then working on how best to meet the chosen needs while acknowledging that they are dynamic and change over a course of study.

Some researchers are not satisfied with the traditional approaches to the ESP practices including traditional needs analysis. "The traditional mainstream EAP approach has been described as "accommodationist" (Benesch, 1993, p.714) and it has been suggested that EAP too easily adopts the role of just fitting students into the mainstream activity of their department and into subordinate roles in the academic world. Benesch argues that needs analysis, the fundamental defining criterion of ESP, should be expanded to include "critical needs analysis and rights analysis" (Benesch, 2001, p. 61). The rights analysis treats students not as apprentices who must adhere to the academic rules and norms, but as active participants of the educational process influencing the course content and assessment methods (Benesch, 2001).

This critical approach promotes an active role of EAP teachers as providers of material which "involves *choosing* suitable published material, *adapting* material when published material is not suitable, or even *writing* material where nothing suitable exists" [italics original] (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998, p. 15). This role as materials writer can lead to appropriate published material being ignored, even when it is suitable (Swales, cited in Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998, p. 15). For some courses "textbooks may serve as a kind of data bank" (Kuo, 1993, p. 172) with the choice of material depending on the results of the needs analysis and ongoing negotiations with students. Arguably, the greatest strength of EAP is its ability to respond to the needs of learners (Hamp-Lyons, 2001, p. 130).

When EAP classes are made up of students from different disciplines, the course may be categorized as English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP), in contrast to a course designed for a group from the same discipline and termed English for Specific Purposes (ESAP) (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998). The EGAP approach works on developing the linguistic forms, language skills and study activities required by all students irrespective of their particular courses in particular disciplines. This might include listening to lectures, speaking and listening in tutorials, reading articles and writing assignments (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p.41). An EGAP approach identifies similar academic practices that are likely to be of benefit to all students. By contrast, an ESAP approach acknowledges that while comparisons may be made, the differences in academic disciplines are far greater than any similarities. This debate can be traced back to Halliday et al 1964. Hyland identities six main reasons in the literature for EGAP and ESAP, summarized in the table, below.

Table 1: A summary of arguments for EGAP and ESAP (Hyland, 2016, p. 18; Hyland, 2006, p. 10)

Arguments for EGAP	Arguments for ESAP
Language teachers are not language specialists (Spack, 1988).	Subject specialists do not have the knowledge or disposition to teach disciplinary literacy (Hyland, 2013).
Low proficiency language learners are not ready for discipline specific language	The claim that lower proficiency language learners are not ready for discipline specific language is not supported by second language acquisition research that shows learner need rather than syllabus sequencing leads to learning (Ellis, 1994).
Teaching subject-specific skills downgrades EAP to a low status service role (Raimes, 1991).	ESAP acknowledges the complexities of disciplinary literacies, upgrading the status of the specialized teachers who can understand them and incorporate this specialization into their classroom practices.
EAP should educate students so that they can understand and respond to a wider range of demands (Widdowson, 1983). In contrast, ESAP trains students in a narrow linguistic repertoire that ill prepares them for the unpredictable demands of assessment tasks and the criticality required to be succeed in them.	ESAP is not only concerned with teaching a specialized linguistic repertoire but also the disciplinary practices and values that are associated with them.
Generic skills, such as skim and scan reading texts for information, are applicable across disciplines (Bruce, 2005).	EAP classes should focus on discipline-specific communicative practices because participation in these practices often requires more than generic skills.
The main focus of an EAP course should be on the language forms and skills that are found in most disciplines, a *common core* (Bloor & Bloor, 1986), as well as general principles that are transferable across contexts	Identifying a common core is problematic for several reasons. Any form may have multiple meanings in different disciplines. For example, a study by Hyland and Tse (2007) found that items in the Academic Word List had different meanings and frequencies in different disciplines.

Hyland acknowledges that the initial debates between proponents of each approach have abated because there is now a greater understanding of the characteristics of academic language and the complexities of different educational contexts (Hyland, 2006, p. 17). This has resulted in the question of specificity,

and the two positions (i.e. EGAP and ESAP) at either end of a continuum presenting EAP practitioners with "a dilemma rather than a conflict" (Hyland, 2006, p. 17). This raises new questions about EAP provision in any given educational context: Where is the EAP course positioned on the specificity continuum and what are the reasons for its position?

Researchers of EAP in EFL contexts tend to give preference to ESP (English for Specific Purposes) (Mohammed et al., 2023). It teaches the students proficiency in the English language in their specialized field and is closely related to both academic and professional needs. According to Mohammed et al. (2023, p. 279) "ESP is founded on the idea that all language instruction should be tailored to meet the unique language use and learning requirements of a designated group of students, considering the sociocultural environment in which these students will utilize the language."

Needs analysis (NA) was introduced in language planning during the 1970s and is regarded as a key principle in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The early research on NA primarily focused on ESP (Karimi & Sanavi, 2014; Nazim & Hazaeva 2020; Soroka, 2019; Sundari, 2022; Zohoorian, 2015), emphasizing the investigation of learners' language needs in relation to their academic and professional experiences, their lacks and wants as well as their strengths and weaknesses. NA is essential in ESP instruction because it helps design courses that effectively address the specific language needs of learners.

Introducing the university case study

Bahraini students are viewed by teaching staff as having effective speaking skills, but they struggle with writing, especially in the academic setting. There is an explanation for that. These students come from a culture which prioritizes oral communication. As noted by Al-Mahrooqi & Denman (2014), "According to the Arab linguistic tradition, language is essentially a verbal communication tool where writing follows the spoken language pattern more closely than it does in English. In written English, there is the use of a syntactically clean sentencing which only favors concise and complete expression of ideas whereas the written Arabic often meanders around the information or ideas just as it does in their spoken language." (Spathopoulou, 2016, p. 256).

When Arabic students join higher education institutions, they are not familiar with academic expectations and may have difficulty with Western writing conventions and style (Al-Khatib, 2017). Arabic students may come from educational systems where directness and critical engagement are less emphasized). An additional layer of complexity arises through the use of Western ELT teaching materials. Arabic students are not always familiar with the Western contexts and find it difficult to relate to the topics and examples provided in the learning materials and textbooks which are based on Western values, beliefs and ideas (Spathopoulou, 2016).

Effectively, students who embark on higher education in English need to adjust to an academic culture that is totally new to them. They need to adopt a different way of thinking and of processing information. Analysing the importance of culture in Language Teaching, Kramsch (1993) talked about a third place, somewhere between the learners' native culture and the target culture that learners must define for themselves. It is this "middle landscape" that will provide the fertile ground necessary for learning to take place. If this process is successful, then it should be possible for students to use English effectively in an Academic context. It is closely connected with the idea of the centrality of context (Benesch, 2001) and the importance of the present situation analysis. That is why the choice between EGAP and ESAP is not an easy one, and the controversy discussed above can be seen in a new light.

It is worth looking at one particular example of a higher education institution offering students EAP courses. We will discuss the case of a university in Bahrain. By investigating the intersection of language acquisition, cultural context, and academic expectations, we will try to reflect on the strategies and approaches used for creating the so-called "middle landscape". We will see whether the EAP courses are appropriate for the context and effective in preparing the students for academic success and their future careers.

Research Methods

This research builds upon prior work, highlighting different aspects of EAP, reviewed in the existing literature and employs a case study approach together with analysis of the curriculum and course materials, and interviews with the Tutors. The research complies with institutional policies and national regulations. The gathered data formed a data set of interview notes, observations and information from graduates' and employers' surveys.

Results and Discussion

The university in this case study in Bahrain offers three different-level General English courses which comprise the Foundation program and can be categorised as EGAP. The important role of these courses as a pre-requisite for successful academic performance has been discussed by a number of authors (Al-Issa, 2020; McDonough, 2013). They emphasize their remedial nature and see them as bridging proficiency gaps. The students can only proceed to their specialized/ major courses after successfully meeting the learning outcomes of the Foundation program. These courses fall under EGAP as they introduce the students into the academic context and teach them the skills they will need in their further studies, writing being the most challenging.

The role of the Tutor cannot be underestimated as it is not only teaching students how to write but also to understand the challenges, they face due to the different writing conventions and cultural practices. Arabic speaking community tends to be oralized and collectivist. A few researchers, studying the WAC

(Writing across the curriculum) practices in Saudi Universities, mention that the Saudi students lack understanding of the writing process (Alharbi & Albelihi, 2023). The WAC teachers in their study report the following: "Students usually don't know about the process of brainstorming, planning, drafting, revising, and editing. I think this is also part of why students plagiarize. They don't know how to get the final product." (Alharbi & Albelihi, 2023, p. 9). One central issue is that "students are taught to participate orally in the class and the culture of teaching writing and reflecting via writing or even using writing as a tool of expression is almost non-existent" (Alharbi & Albelihi, 2023, p. 9).

Bahraini students also demonstrate some of these cultural features in the University context. The Tutors need to keep in mind that teaching English in the public school system is mostly based on rote memorisation while EAP courses involve discussion, argumentation, and critical thinking. Depending on their educational background, some students might struggle with critical analysis and integrating diverse perspectives, favouring a more straightforward presentation of ideas. Students often adopt an assertive tone, particularly in persuasive or argumentative writing, reflecting a confident stance on their topics. This can sometimes lead to a less nuanced approach to opposing viewpoints. It has been noticed that Arab students often favour a more elaborate introduction that sets the context, followed by a thesis statement. The overall structure can be less linear, sometimes circling back to ideas rather than progressing in a straightforward manner.

The mechanics of writing and the sentence structure in English are influenced by the Arabic writing conventions as well. For example, Arabic students often use run-on sentences and fragments (sentences without a subject or a verb, or subordinate clauses alone). They do not always stick to the English sentence (fixed) word order. "English cohesion is text-based, specified, change-oriented, and non-additive; while Arabic cohesion is context-based, generalized, repetition-oriented, and additive." (Phillips 2017 as cited in Al-Khatib 2017, p.75). In other words, traditional teaching approaches prevalent in the region often emphasize rote learning rather than critical thinking and inquiry-based learning, making it challenging to implement more interactive and participatory methods required in EGAP and ESAP. There may have been a lack of emphasis on critical thinking in previous education, leading to challenges in analysing and synthesizing information, especially in ESAP contexts that require specialized knowledge.

Therefore, tutors should take into consideration these educational and cultural nuances and offer the activities that are aligned with the cultural norms. For example, it is preferable not to ask the students to work in gender-mixed groups as they feel more comfortable working with the students of the same gender. The also respect hierarchy and the collective nature of discussion. So, pair work and group activities (such as discussion groups and peer support groups) will be more effective than individual activities. The same applies to the choice of the topics for discussion and examples from the textbooks.

The learning materials used in EGAP and ESAP courses at the case University are updated and provide good exposure to worldwide themes and topics. However, some of them may be unsuitable (from the religious, cultural or socio-political point of view) to discuss or reflect on through writing.

To summarize, we can identify 4 factors that have to be taken into consideration while designing and teaching EAP courses in Bahrain context:

1. The difference between the students' pre-University experience versus current academic expectations.
2. The difference between Arabic writing conventions and academic English writing conventions.
3. The cultural background and implications based on traditional/ Islamic values, collectivism, and the value of oral communication that comes from a strong oral tradition.
4. Contextual requirements (e.g., societal expectations and employer requirements) as most graduates take up careers in Bahrain. This point will be discussed later.

When these factors are identified with the help of present situation and target situation analysis and are organically embedded into the education process, we can speak about Culturally Relevant Teaching. The concept was introduced by Gloria Ladson-Billings in the mid-1990s. "Culturally Relevant Teaching" emphasizes integrating students' home and community experiences and their background knowledge into the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This approach highlights the significance of including students' cultural references in various learning contexts. A decade later, Gay (2022) and Villegas and Lucas (2002) coined the term "Culturally Responsive Teaching" to describe an educational practice that recognizes that students learn differently based on their cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds. According to Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011), "Culturally Responsive Teaching" goes beyond merely acknowledging each student's cultural uniqueness; it focuses on leveraging this uniqueness to create optimal learning conditions. Recognizing that culturally responsive teaching can boost student motivation, Wlodkowski (1999) developed the "Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching," aimed at higher education. This model serves as a foundational framework for implementing culturally responsive teaching practices in EAP classrooms and deserves a separate discussion.

The Culturally Relevant Teaching, if practiced by Tutors, will lead to creating the "middle landscape" and a smooth transition of the Arabic students to the English language academic context. To exemplify how this approach could be implemented, we make reference to the courses taught at the case study university. The Culturally Responsive Teaching of the lower level (General English/ EGAP) courses should continue at the higher level (ESAP/ ESP) courses, such as 'Writing Research' for students studying language and 'Language for Business' for students studying business. These two courses

introduce the students into the specialist terms and concepts of their professional field and enhance academic writing skills. They can be taken simultaneously with their major subjects and function as cross-curriculum EAP courses contributing into the students' overall progress. The 'middle landscape' is most effectively traversed at the Faculty of Language Studies, by introducing the students into the academic context gradually and smoothly by offering them a transitional, or intermediate, course on writing. The 'Writing Research' course focuses on the 'difficult' academic research and writing skills (e.g. paraphrasing, summarizing, responding to ideas, referencing) that the students are known to struggle with. "Students are not acquainted with such types of activities or assignments. I think the domination of oral culture and the absence of writing culture in pre-college life have immensely shaped their view towards learning as mere rote and mimicking a teacher's instruction" (Alharbi & Albelihi, 2023, p. 10).

It is also important to make sure that the materials used for instruction are aligned with their values and cultural norms as well as the requirements of specialized courses. According to Ibrahim Holi Ali & Rahman Abdalla Salih (2013) who investigated EFL teachers' beliefs and views about need analysis use and practices, specifically in the ESP/EAP tertiary context of the Sultanate of Oman, the needs analysis is of upmost importance for ESP material production. The materials used for the EAP Writing courses at the case University are designed for EFL users though some examples may not be applicable to the Arabic/ Bahraini, context. The students may not be familiar with some socio-cultural aspects of the UK or the USA and may have difficulty discussing or reflecting on them. Here the ethnographic focus of the present situation analysis can help the Tutors to adjust the content to the context relying on other supplementary materials. And this is a good example how students can participate in selecting topics for discussion (as part of rights analysis mentioned above).

From the experience of the case study tutors, teaching ESAP and specialized/ major courses, the students completing the Foundation program (three different-level EGAP courses) are not always well-prepared for succeeding in their specialized subjects. This issue of insufficient preparation especially concerns one of the faculties where the General English courses are followed by the specialised/ major subjects, and the students are not taught ESAP. This is a transitional gap which makes the life of the students and the tutors more difficult. One suggestion is to offer the students a hybrid curriculum that would combine EGAP and ESAP. It could be done at the final (highest) level of the Foundation program. In that case, the students would have to be divided into several streams (based on the needs analysis) and have a smoother transition to their major field of study. This view again emphasizes the importance of the needs analysis (current and target situations) taking into consideration the perceptions and professional opinions of the tutors who should be involved in designing curriculum.

However, the choice between EGAP and ESAP as well as the appropriateness of the current EAP courses at the university, is not only determined by the learning needs, academic considerations and cultural implications, but also by the contextual (employment) requirements, i.e. the expectations of employers and satisfaction of graduates with their education. How do the EAP courses contribute to the choice of careers and the success of the graduates in their jobs?

To answer this question, we need to look at the results of some surveys conducted by the case study University. One such survey, 'Students' Exit Survey (2022/ 2023)', was conducted to collect the feedback of Alumni. One segment of the Analysis of the survey demonstrates the responses to various Likert scale questions which are based on a 5-point rating system: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The questions cover the following areas:

- Oral and written communication skills.
- Critical thinking and research skills; other intellectual abilities.
- The University learning materials.
- Learning outcomes of the University programs and their compatibility with the needs of the labour market.

The respondents were the graduates of the University specializing in Linguistics, Business Studies and Computer Science. Most of the respondents from all the three faculties 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that their needs in the areas mentioned above have been met and they are satisfied with the outcomes. Out of the 50% of employed graduates, 26.33% work in their field of study and 20.4% in a related field. It is evident from the survey analysis that the majority of the graduates are satisfied with the learning outcomes of the university programs courses and 'strongly agree' or 'agree' that their programs are compatible with the needs of the labour market.

Another survey that can demonstrate the relevance of the EAP courses to the socio-economic requirements of Bahrain society is the Employers' Satisfaction Survey (2022/ 2023). One of its segments analyses the responses to various Likert scale questions, which are based on a 5-point rating system (Excellent, Very Good, Good, Average, Weak) with respective ratings of (5, 4, 3, 2, 1). 100% of employers find the writing skills (in writing research and reports) demonstrated by the graduates 'very good'. Problem-solving skills are found very good by 60% of employers and research & analytical skills are found very good by 80% of employers. The extent of satisfaction with the learning outcomes of the university programs and the graduates' level and competence in general is 'very good' in 60% of the cases. 100% employers are ready to hire the University graduates in the future.

The results of the surveys are convincing enough and demonstrate a high level of satisfaction of the graduates and employers with the university programmes. However, the EAP teaching programs, methods and materials could be further modified in line with the most recent changes in the world of education and the expectations of employers. According to the 'Analysis of General Questionnaire to Measure Employers' Satisfaction at AOU Bahrain (2022/ 2023)', segment 2.11 'Analysis of additional skills graduates should obtain', the employers would like to see workers with literacy in AI, cyber security and business development to adapt to the evolving and changing working environment. As well as that, 'being innovative' and 'thinking outside the box' seems to be crucial for having a competitive advantage. These skills need to be integrated into the curriculum and the activities of EAP teaching as these prepare specialists for the competitive and ever-changing professional business world as well as researchers pursuing studies or work in academia.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Practical Use

In conclusion, EAP in TEFL contexts needs special attention and extended research into different aspects of this field which are impacted by both socio-cultural factors and the demands of the global economy. This research should always keep in focus students' needs as determined by their culture, English language proficiency, and their preferences. Identifying and meeting these needs represents a challenge to teachers when designing and delivering their courses in particular contexts. These specific contextual factors should assert a strong influence on EAP course design. The current and future needs of students should guide the level of specificity in an EAP course rather than the pursuit of specificity for its own sake. As such, we urge researchers to move beyond textual analysis and shift their focus to language classrooms to contribute to a better understanding of EAP as it is experienced by educators and learners.

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