

Subject Standards and Criteria Serving as Benchmarks for English Language Teaching in Ghana

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Abstract

The English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course in tertiary education environments in Ghana is compulsory and pervasive. Irrespective of first-year students' course offerings they must of necessity take it, even if for a short period. The object of this study has been to explore and compare the subject standards and criteria that serve as benchmarks for the teaching and learning of EAP in four higher education institutions in Ghana with the aim of: (a) identifying how context-specific factors in the case study institutions affect the subject standards and criteria used in teaching and learning EAP in four higher education institutions in Ghana; (b) exploring differences in emphasis in pedagogy and curriculum as well as peculiar emphasis on process/outcome distinctions. Findings of this research were derived largely from a student survey and, to a lesser extent, from interviews with senior members and subject lecturers at the case study institutions. The study observed that even though none of the institutions involved in the study was aware of the Common European Framework of Reference for Language and consciously made use of it in designing their EAP curricula, they had their own standards similar to those in the CEFR. Their various course objectives spelt them out quite clearly. Institutional context, pedagogy, and curriculum designs of the case study institutions were found to be very similar as well. Through a cross-case analysis of their EAP curricula, the study discovered that all the participating institutions in the survey recommended an extension in the course duration for EAP, except in one case where the syllabus had been staggered to cover the four years of undergraduate studies. Desired outcomes of the processes put in place at all the case institutions are based on the level of achievement of learners in the EAP course.

Keywords: English for Academic Purposes; subject standards; benchmark; process / outcome distinctions

INTRODUCTION

Over the last four decades English language has witnessed increasing prominence as an 'academic lingua franca' (Crystal, 1997 & 2003). Similarly, the teaching and learning of the language for specific purposes has attracted unprecedented attention. This is manifested in the use of English not only as the leading medium of instruction in tertiary educational institutions, but also as the global language of research and

publication. Its envious status as the main international language of communication among professionals has contributed to increased research activity in the broader area of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and its offshoot, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) (Afful, 2007; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002; Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Swales, 1997; Robinson, 1991). As a specific purpose language teaching course, EAP is distinguishable from English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) through learner type, prospective or continuing student rather than a professional on the job (Robinson, 1991). EAP has a very broad scope that can be categorised under two main divisions: English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). While the former involves teaching of language and skills that cut across disciplines, the latter concentrates on imparting relevant skills and language to students from specific fields of study (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). For purposes of illustrating how English language education can be classified according to purpose, the diagram (i.e. Figure 1, under Appendix D) from Lee (2003) is adopted:

This broad scope of the course adds to its pervasiveness and the possibility of its use for students of diverse academic backgrounds. Another commonly used term associated with EAP is 'Study Skills'. It is considered as "identical in coverage to EAP or as part of EAP" (Ibid). In Ghana, while some tertiary educational institutions teach Study Skills as a stand-alone course, others teach it as part of the EAP course, terming it Language and Study Skills. In this study it is considered as part of EAP, taught to improve students' reading speed, and ability to read for gist; academic writing skills; listening and note-taking skills during lectures, and academic speaking skills. These skills do not preclude grammar teaching though, as students' grammatical difficulties can impact negatively on other skills. According to Mo (2005, p. 65), "Study skills are not something instinctively acquired but something consciously learnt." The pervasiveness and relevance of the EAP course in higher educational circles worldwide provides a good reason for conducting this research.

Objectives of the Study

The object of this study has been to explore and compare the subject standards and criteria for teaching and learning EAP in four higher education institutions in Ghana. The study explores the differences in emphasis in pedagogy and curriculum, and identifies areas of emphasis on process/outcome distinctions. It also aims at recommending best practices for replication in similar academic environments elsewhere.

Research Questions

To achieve the above objectives, three main research questions guided this study. These are:

1. What subject standards and criteria serve as benchmarks for EAP in the case institutions?
2. What differences exist in emphasis in pedagogy and curriculum?
3. How do case institutions emphasize various process/outcome distinctions?

EAP: A THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It is defined as “teaching English with the aim of facilitating learners’ study or research in that language” (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002, p. 2). EAP programmes are therefore designed to equip students who are undergoing training through the medium of English with the requisite language and related skills. The conventional communication skills that are often targeted are: writing, reading, listening and speaking; while the related language skills include appropriate linguistic tools that enable them in their analysis of the main features of the English language (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2007). Usually the teaching content is prepared in such a way that it matches the learner’s requirements (Robinson, 1991). Because of the illusiveness of the “general quality” idea, the quality literature stresses that the operational definitions of quality must be specific and “relate to a specific purpose.” The “fitness for purpose” concept of quality focuses on customers’ needs. Thus, the quality of EAP should be measurable based upon the principle of “fitness for purpose” in the student’s own view as well as that of the trainer. As a result, EAP is:

- Goal directed – students learn English because they need it for study and work purposes.
- EAP courses are based on needs analyses – that is, tasks that students have to do in English are clearly spelt out.
- Most EAP programmes have clearly specified time frames – In Ghana, the course is usually done during the first year of tertiary studies and could be described as a foundation course in preparation for academic courses. EAP learners are adults. For instance, research by a technical committee of the Wa Polytechnic Academic Board in 2006 revealed that English was every student’s second language (L2); and that students had been studying the language for an appreciable period, with the mean year being 18¾ (Wa Polytechnic, 2006).
- Students do not necessarily need specialist language – activities the students will engage in constitute the basis for courses.
- A very high level of proficiency may not be required – the need for students to succeed in their aims matters more.

(Robinson, 1991, p. 2-5)

One distinguishing factor that could be added to those cited from Robinson is that unlike other language programmes that require a period of residence abroad, EAP students may not need to travel abroad.

Like many other academic disciplines, EAP has its own issues. For instance, there is the issue of specificity of the concept as to whether students should be taught skills and academic features of language that are common to different disciplines or whether EAP should be focused on specific disciplines (Lis, 2010, p. 184). Coffey (1984) has been acknowledged as the first to distinguish ‘common core’ and ‘subject specific’ EAP, while the division of EAP into English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for

Specific Academic Purposes ESAP) has been ascribed to Blue (1988) (Ibid.). Based upon this, EAP has been commonly divided into two branches: EGAP and ESAP. EGAP tends to emphasize listening, speaking, reading and writing as relevant skills associated with the day-to-day study activities of students. ESAP on the other hand seeks to help students put into practice skills acquired in EGAP by applying them to actual subject tasks like in understanding lectures, reading texts, or writing essays and or reports. It is interesting to note that the Ghanaian version of EAP combines elements of both EGAP and ESAP as later discussions will reveal. Two questions worth considering at this point are: 1. What situations then may necessitate the teaching of EAP? 2. Does the distinctiveness of EAP have any implications for QA practices?

POSSIBLE CONTEXTS FOR EAP TEACHING

Different situations may warrant the teaching of EAP. Just like QA, national and institutional contexts play a critical role in determining the content of the programme. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998, p. 34 – 41) identify four types of situations in which EAP is taught:

- an English speaking country, where international students join tertiary education institutions (e.g. USA, UK, Australia);
- ESL situations, where English is mainly used at all levels of education but in everyday situation national language dominate (e.g. Anglophone countries in Africa, South East Asian countries);
- situations in which only certain subjects are taught in English (i.e. Medicine, Engineering, Science subjects) and the national language has dominant position in the school system (e.g. Middle East);
- ESP situations where subjects are taught in the national language (Latin America, South East Asia, mainland Europe, Scandinavia). (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

EAP teaching in Ghana falls within the second scenario described by the co-authors. As a former British colony, not only is English the official language in the country, it is also the main medium of instruction from primary through tertiary levels of education. EAP, termed locally as Communication/Communicative Skills or Language and Study Skills in some contexts, is a key course taught in tertiary education institutions to help undergraduates acquire relevant academic literacy skills (Afful, 2007). Tertiary students, irrespective of their fields of specialty, take the course even if for a limited time-frame. It is considered as a transitional course to re-orient undergraduates linguistically to metamorphose from the use of high school lingo to tertiary. As a general course that cuts across fields of study, its importance cannot be overemphasized.

STANDARDS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages

The CEFR “provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc.” (Council of Europe, 2001). It evolved as a result of the several issues that emerge when trying to describe levels of language learning, teaching and assessment. In different institutions and among different countries, levels can mean different things. The CEFR’s “Global Scale” which ranges from A1 to C2 thus serves as common reference levels. It describes what a learner can do at six specific levels A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2. A1 and A2 are for the basic user; B1 and B2 for the independent user, and C1 and C2 for the proficient user. These levels match general competency concepts of basic, intermediate, and advanced. Common reference levels are based on a set of “can do” statements describing what a learner is capable of, not what he/she cannot do or does wrong. The CEFR describes

- Competencies necessary for effective communication.
- Skills and knowledge related to language learning and competencies.
- Situations (people, place, time, organisation, etc.) and contexts (study, work, social, tourism, etc.) in which communication takes place.

(CEF, 2001 in Pearson Longman 2007, p. 4).

On the relevance of the CEFR in this study, two questions are worth considering:

1. Why should a framework termed “European” be worthy of consideration in a study conducted outside Europe?
2. What is the role of the CEFR in contributing to definition of the object of this study?

First, it should be noted that the word “*European*” in the Common European Framework does not imply that the framework is meant for persons studying or teaching in Europe alone; neither is it a political or cultural tool intended for the promotion of Europe or European educational systems (Pearson Longman, 2007). Instead, the term refers to European languages, one of which is English, the unit of analysis in this thesis. Furthermore, the CEFR is not a methodology and so does not prescribe a way of teaching. Rather, it serves as a descriptive framework for all language levels, affording language teachers a leeway to achieve new levels of proficiency using a methodology they deem convenient (Pearson Longman, 2007, p. 6). This makes the CEFR appropriate for and adaptable to language teaching research in Ghana as well.

Second, the object of this study being to explore the standards and criteria that serve as benchmarks in the teaching and learning of EAP at tertiary level in Ghana, the CEFR is worth referring to. As a language programme, EAP aims at equipping tertiary students with relevant competencies for effective academic communication and also prepare them for the world of work. Placing this in the quality context, the Global Scale of the CEFR can be said to have been tailored after the ‘zero defect’ concept of quality. Helping

learners see the value of learning and how attainable their language goals are, also make the scale fit in the 'value for money' concept of quality. Also, the CEFR's capacity of linking curriculum, pedagogy and assessment more closely than before, makes it what has been described as "the single most innovative feature of the CEF" (Little, 2011, p. 382). According to Little,

this capacity arises from its action-oriented approach to the description of L2 proficiency. Each "can do" descriptor may be used to specify a learning target, select and/or develop learning activities and materials, and shape the design of assessment tasks (Ibid.)

Thus, as far as the contribution of the CEFR to defining the object of this study is concerned, the following conclusions could be drawn: i) It might be used to construct the EAP curriculum as the quote from Little 2011 rightly infers; ii) It might be used as a scale (indicator) to measure proficiency levels of students after the EAP course, and iii) If a test were made and scored in CEFR terms also before the course, a measure of value-added might be made. These contributions notwithstanding, there is need to consider the following pertinent questions:

- a) Does CEFR really measure EAP-proficiency? (If this is a measure that has validity)
- b) Does it measure all of EAP-proficiency?

It is noteworthy that the CEFR does not really measure EAP-proficiency, but rather provides a "self-assessment" grid by which learners can measure their own competencies in all the basic communicative skills – reading, writing, listening and speaking. By the same grid, EAP teachers can also assess the proficiency of their students in the course. The CEFR was designed to provide common standards for the establishing of goals and determining achievement. Besides stating values to be considered in the design and approach to curriculum development, it also provides the needed conceptual framework for language teaching, learning and assessment. As a framework that does not prescribe a way of teaching, the CEFR cannot be said to be a methodology. It only provides a descriptive framework for all language levels; affording language teachers a leeway to achieve new levels of proficiency using a methodology they deem convenient (Pearson Longman, 2007, p. 6).

In defining client needs, the introduction of the CEFR poses the following questions as the basis to consider in need analysis:

- What will they need to do with the language?
- What will they need to learn in order to do what they want?
- What makes them want to learn?
- What sort of people are they?
- What knowledge, skill and experiences do their teachers possess?
- What access do they have to resources?
- How much time can they afford to spend?

(Council of Europe, 2001, p. 4)

Since the teaching content of EAP is prepared in such a way that it matches the learner's requirements, it meant that the above needs were taken into account the design of the EAP curricula of the case institutions. Thus, although none of case institutions specifically cited the CEFR, it is evident that the quality standards spelt out in the framework are not absent in their contexts. To ensure that the processes, procedures, and resources at the case study institutions are fit for enhancing the teaching and learning of EAP, it would be important to juxtapose their various course objectives with the Global Scale of the CEFR so as to assess actual student communicative abilities at the end of the EAP course.

METHOD

This research employed interviews and observation. Also it administered an appropriate survey to respondents and subsequently analysed their responses. The total number of participants in the survey was 550 and comprised undergraduate and diploma students as well as 17 academic and administrative staff drawn from two public and two private tertiary educational institutions in Ghana. Aiming for a perfect sample size in a typical L2 survey research has been described as "unrealistic or simply not feasible ... in the psychometric sense" (Dornyei 2003, p. 60). In view of this, the study adopted a sample that was deemed representative enough of the general population of each case institution.

Data analysis

The varied forms of data collected were analysed using version 16.0 of the computer-aided quantitative data analysis software – SPSS for data that were conducive to statistical analysis, while adopting "analytic" strategies to analyse data derived from unstructured open-ended questionnaires. Content analysis is said to be the reviewing "of forms of human communication including books, newspapers, and films as well as other forms in order to identify patterns, themes or biases" (Williams, 2007, p. 69). The method is designed in such a way that it enables the researcher to identify specific characteristics from the content in human communication. In the process, verbal, visual, behavioural patterns, themes, or biases are explored by the researcher. English for Academic Purposes, as a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), deals with the language and related skills that students need to acquire in order to undertake studies in higher education through the medium of English. As such, the teaching content is matched to the learners' requirements (Robinson, 1991). To best appreciate how far this objective is being achieved in Ghanaian higher education circles, the content analysis approach was deemed appropriate for adoption, especially as the study involved quantitative data. As a study involving qualitative methods as well, a naturalistic approach was adopted where necessary. Responses received from the survey were first summarised into coherent categories from which relevant themes were identified and labeled in accordance with some of the QA themes.

Interpretation

As a study involving a multiple-case design, care was taken in ensuring that evidence provided in the study was convincing enough to the reader. To achieve this, the limits of the cases covered by the study were clearly defined. Typical of multiple-case studies, this research followed “a replication of logic” (Tellis, 1997). Facts were obtained from a variety of sources and conclusions drawn were based on those facts.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

For easy reference in discussing the responses to Research Question (1) on standards serving as benchmarks for the EAP course in the case study institutions, a summary is presented in Table 1 under Appendix A. This is followed by a comparative summary of differences in emphasis in pedagogy, curriculum and QA procedures shown in Table 2 under Appendix B. Next is Table 3 under Appendix C, which presents a summary of emphasis in process/outcome distinctions among case institutions.

It is observable from the summary that the compulsoriness of the EAP course cuts across institutions. All the case study institutions also have similar objectives for the teaching of the course. They all cite the enhancement of students’ communication and linguistic skills with specific mention of reading and writing as the main objective, but tend to be silent on listening and speaking skills. IUCG is the only institution that explicitly refers to ‘speaking’ in the objectives where it is stated as helping students to “acquire academic presentation skills.” From the literature EAP is defined as “teaching English with the aim of facilitating learners’ study or research in that language” (Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002, p. 2). EAP programmes are thus designed to equip students (being trained with English as the main medium of instruction) with the requisite language and related skills. This description perfectly reflects the phenomenon in Ghana and also falls into the second of the four scenarios identified by Duddley-Evans and St. James (1998) for EAP teaching worldwide: ESL situations, where English is mainly used at all levels of education but with national language dominating in everyday situation (e.g. Anglophone countries in Africa, South East Asian countries). The conventional communication skills that are often targeted are: writing, reading, listening and speaking; while the related language skills include appropriate “linguistic tools” that enable them in their analysis of the main features of the English language (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2007). Robinson (1991) also observes that the teaching content (of EAP) is usually prepared in such a way that it matches the learner’s requirements. In Ghana, English is the official language and is used as the main medium of instruction from upper primary to university level. As rightly captured in the objectives of IUCG, the EAP course in Ghana, among other things, aims at “bridging the pre-tertiary gap” by helping undergraduate students improve upon their grammar, comprehension, writing and speaking skills.

As regards course duration and number of credit hours, UDS has the shortest of just a trimester and two credits in the first year; with IUCG having the longest of seven semesters and 11 credits. It was not surprising that respondents from the former

institution were among those who advocated for an extension of the EAP course to cover four years. In Wa Poly and CUCG, the course is taken for two semesters each with four and three credits respectively. Teachers and students from these two institutions also advocated for more contact hours for the course.

In Table 2 (Appendix B), a summary of pedagogical, curricular, and QA procedures is presented to portray the distinctions in emphasis by the case study institutions in these areas as far as EAP teaching and learning are concerned. It is evident from the summary above that although there are some universal features characterizing the pedagogy, curriculum, and QA procedures of the case institutions, emphasis on these areas vary from one institution to another. It is also observable that the distinction between pedagogy and QA is a bit blurred and, in some cases, overlap; nonetheless, it reflects the reality on the ground at the case institutions. Overall, organising periodic assessments through quizzes, take-home assignments, and examinations serve as the main media for monitoring student progress in all the case institutions. Discussing marked scripts afterwards is also identified by all the institutions as a popular means of getting student feedback for the improvement of future assessments; except that some students wondered whether such feedback is used at all for the intended purpose. With regard to monitoring mechanisms for teachers, it is only Wa Poly that acknowledges its use, saying this is done by management, the deans and heads of department. While UDS and IUCG add the adoption of a student-centred approach as a means of encouraging learner participation during EAP lessons, CUCG identifies the adoption of lesson plans, teaching to the understanding of learners, and ensuring that lessons are relevant and practical as some of their strategies for ensuring quality pedagogy. There has been a considerable volume of debate on which pedagogical paradigm yields the best results and leads to a more rewarding learner experience: a teacher-centred approach or a learner-centred classroom instruction? While some scholars argue that the two are not entirely different in the sense that they aim at a common outcome of ensuring that students do what they are supposed to do: learning; others contend that it is not just about outcomes; but rather process: how teaching/learning is done. A teaching style that is student-centred tends to engage students in the learning process whilst a teacher-centred paradigm mostly aims at transmitting information. This therefore suggests that a teacher-centred teaching may be limited in its engagement of learners during the learning process. The 'communicative approach' to language teaching (CLT) is defined as "a language teaching methodology that emphasizes interaction, student-centred learning, task-based activities, and communication for real-world, meaningful purposes" (Brown, 2007, p. 378). In this study, the teachers, in most of the cases, agree with their students in advocating that EAP lessons become more practical and interactive.

On specific areas highlighted in their curricula, reading and writing cut across the case institutions. Grammar and usage also feature prominently in all the curricula. Both Wa Poly and UDS cite note-taking skills, but the latter goes further to cite academic essay, report writing, summary writing; proposal writing; strategies of information/data search, among others as areas covered by the Study Skills component of their curriculum. Interestingly, the procedures identified at UDS this time around include

teaching students how to enhance their listening skills, an area that was hitherto not cited in the course objectives. The description of the EAP curriculum by the case institution shows that the skills taught in the course as well as the academic features of the English language are common to different disciplines and not necessarily focused on specific ones (Lis, 2010). Thus, the EAP course in the contexts of the institutions fits into Coffey's (1984) model of "common core" rather than the "subject specific" type. Viewed from that standpoint, it may be argued that the description of the EAP courses taught in all the institutions involved in this study is more consistent with what Blue (1998) calls "English for General Academic Purposes" (EGAP) as opposed to "English for Specific Academic Purposes" (ESAP). EGAP emphasizes general skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing as relevant skills associated with learners' day-to-day study activities; while ESAP deals with the teaching of the distinctive aspects of particular disciplines, and focuses on specific activities that students are required to carry out (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). Given that the communication and linguistic skills acquired in EGAP courses are transferrable to specific work, it must be acknowledged that the two are interconnected.

As a means of ensuring quality delivery of the EAP course, the case institutions identify various QA procedures in use in their local contexts. Like earlier observed, this area also manifests some features that are universal; nonetheless, there are specific practices that vary from institution to institution. Discussion of marked scripts with students in class again surfaced as a tool the case study institutions have in common. External peer review of examination questions is also a practice common to all the institutions. While the private case institutions have theirs reviewed by their mentoring institutions, those of Wa Polytechnic are sent to the NABPTEX for the same purpose eight weeks into each semester. Reviewers' comments serve as a means of improving upon the questions before they are administered to students.

With the exception of UDS, three of the case institutions: Wa Poly, CUCG, and IUCG went further to elaborate on the procedures adopted to enhance EAP teaching in their contexts. At Wa Poly, extra time is devoted to teaching of structure and usage in all three English-centred courses outside the official allotted time of two hours per week. The practice at CUCG is that a three-minute talk on personal experience, based on a written outline, is delivered by each student. In addition, small group oral presentations on an assigned section of the Earth Charter are done by learners. In the case of IUCG, the course is taught in small groups; with class activities being characterized by group work, oral presentations and extensive practical assignments. Writing, grammar, and usage drills are also organised for learners on weekly basis to assess their progress. Table 3 (Appendix C) provides a summary of areas of emphasis in the process/outcome distinctions by the case institutions. For the purpose of analysing the summaries presented in the table, reference is made to Heyworth's second and third models – 'quality as a process' and 'quality based on results'. In examining how quality principles can be applied in language teaching, Heyworth (2011) proposes four "models" namely:

- quality as client satisfaction
- quality as a process
- quality based on results
- quality based on values

Placing 'quality' in the language teaching context, Heyworth explains that "delivering language courses can be seen as a set of processes: a connected chain from needs analysis, general setting of curriculum aims, defining syllabus, planning lessons, etc." (Ibid.) The description of the processes and their application to EAP teaching and learning in the case institutions presented in Table 3 fits into Heyworth's first model. The processes and procedures outlined earlier in Table 2 and revisited here, were arrived at based on the analysis of the needs of first-year undergraduates in Ghanaian HEIs. Responses from subject lecturers interviewed at all the case institutions affirmed that majority of their students had course-initial challenges with poor grammar, poor reading and writing skills, and inadequate vocabulary as some of the commonest weaknesses. These areas also constitute the prime issues that the curricula and syllabuses of the case institutions seek to address. Afful (2007) in an earlier study observed that EAP (locally termed Communication Skills), is taught in tertiary education institutions as a means of helping undergraduates to acquire the relevant academic literacy skills. It is considered as a transitional course aimed at re-orienting undergraduates linguistically to metamorphose from the use of high school lingo to tertiary.

The third model which is 'quality based on results' takes into account the efficiency of the process such that these two fundamental questions are addressed: "how much language is learned?" "Is there satisfactory added value in the learning process?" (Heyworth, 2011). From Table 3, the desired outcomes of the processes put in place at all the case institutions are based on the level of achievement of learners in the EAP course. The attainment of enhanced reading and writing skills by learners is identified by all the case institutions. Three of the case institutions (Wa Poly, UDS, and IUCG) identify improved comprehension and self-expression as areas of desirable outcomes. On actual learner achievement, majority of Wa Poly and CUCG respondents rate their general communication and linguistic skills after taking the EAP course as "excellent". Their course teachers acknowledge this improvement, but do not think it is "excellent" as the students claim, and rate the achievement of the general quality objective of the university as average. In a similar learner self-evaluation at UDS and IUCG majority of respondents rated their achievement in the four major areas of communicative competence as "good". Their claims were confirmed by their teachers. While the UDS lecturers went further to rate the achievement of the general quality objective of the university as 50%; their colleague from IUCG declined to respond. Despite the disagreements between course teachers and their students in some cases over learner achievement, the results show that the overall realization of their QA objectives as far as EAP teaching and learning are concerned is satisfactory.

On how the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages fit into their various local contexts, the study found it quite surprising that such a strategic QA framework for language teaching as the CEFR was unknown to almost all the interviewees from the case institutions. Only one lecturer from Wa Poly admitted to having heard of it, but conceded that he did not know much about the framework. Nonetheless, the case institutions have standards serving as subject benchmarks in their local contexts. These are in the form of course objectives outlined in their curricula and syllabuses for the Language and Communication (EAP) course. At Wa Poly, an interviewee identified the syllabus for Communication Skills and the recommended grading scale of A to D at the end of each semester as the main standard for measuring learner achievement. Though not specifically cited by respondents from the other case institutions, the practice is not any different. To determine how the CEFR fits into the contexts of the case institutions would require a juxtaposition of their course objectives and desired outcomes summarized in Tables 1 and 3. The CEFR which evolved as a result of the several issues that surface when trying to describe levels of language learning, teaching and assessment hinges upon four thematic areas:

- i. quality based on client satisfaction
- ii. quality as a process
- iii. results-based quality assurance
- iv. quality and values

As Heyworth (2011, p. 17) observes, “the different models are not mutually exclusive, and in most environments are all present in some way.” In defining client needs, the introduction of the CEFR poses the following questions as the basis to consider in need analysis: “Language learning activities are based on the needs, motivations, and characteristics of learners:

- What will they need to do with the language?
- What will they need to learn in order to do what they want?
- What makes them want to learn?
- What sort of people are they?
- What knowledge, skill and experiences do their teachers possess?
- What access do they have to resources?
- How much time can they afford to spend?

(Council of Europe, 2001, p. 4)

As discussed in earlier, the above were some of the considerations that went into the design of the EAP curricula of the case study institutions. Thus, although none of the four case institutions specifically cited the CEFR, it was evident that the quality standards spelt out in the framework are not absent in their context. It was noted that because of the illusiveness of the ‘general quality’ idea, the quality literature stresses that the operational definitions of quality must be specific and “relate to a specific purpose” and that the “fitness for purpose” concept of quality focuses on “customer needs”. It was argued that in view of this, the quality of EAP should be measurable based

upon the principle of “fitness for purpose” in the student’s own view as well as that of the trainer. As a result, the teaching content is usually prepared in such a way that it matches the learner’s requirements (Robinson, 1991). This, as well as the characteristics identified below by Robinson, also hold true for the EAP course. It is observable that in all the case institutions the EAP course is:

- “Goal directed” – students learn English because they need it for study and work purposes.
- “EAP courses are based on needs analyses” – In all the case institutions, tasks that students have to do in English are clearly spelt out.
- “EAP programmes have clearly specified time frames” – In all the case institutions (except at the IUCG where it is taken for four years), the course is done during the first year and could be described as a foundation course in preparation for academic courses.
- “EAP learners are adults.”
- Students do not necessarily need specialist language – activities the students will engage in constitute the basis for courses.

(Robinson, 1991, p. 2-5)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study observed that none of the institutions involved in the study was aware of or had consciously used the Common European Framework of Reference for Language in the design of their EAP curricula. Nonetheless, they had their own standards similar to those in the CEFR spelt out in their various course objectives. Institutional context, pedagogy, and curriculum designs of the case study institutions were very similar too. A cross-case analysis of their EAP curricula revealed that all but one of the participating institutions in the survey complained of brevity of course duration and subsequently recommended an extension in the duration for EAP course to a minimum of two years. In an era of increased use of technology in communication, it was surprising to observe that none of the curricula examined made reference to enhancing students’ communicative skills in areas like sending and receiving emails and attaching documents to same. Desired outcomes of the processes put in place at all the case institutions are based on the level of achievement of learners in the EAP course. To ensure that the processes, procedures, and resources at the case study institutions are fit for enhancing the teaching and learning of EAP, it would be important to juxtapose their various course objectives with the Global Scale of the CEFR so as to assess actual student communicative abilities at the end of the EAP course. By way of assessment standards for language education, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) serves as a global reference (See 2.3 above). In acknowledging the importance of each of the basic communicative skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), it provides descriptors (“can do statements”) for assessing the quality of student performance at each stage of their linguistic development. Listening and speaking are thus equally important skills that learners would need if they can participate effectively in lectures and group discussions. Active listening is very

necessary for student feedback. Good speaking skills also help boost the confidence of students. Besides reading and writing, the ability of students to listen and speak well certainly goes beyond classroom task requirements to include enhancing their competences to cope with the demands of the world of work. It is therefore important that more conscious efforts are made at highlighting these other two skills in the EAP curriculum of case institutions. A review of the EAP syllabus which is highly recommended by this study should also take into account the appropriate use of the internet by students to enhance their communicative skills.

Note

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APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Table 1. Summary of Standards Serving as Benchmarks for EAP in Case Study HEIs

Wa Poly	UDS	CUCG	IUCG
Course Objective:	Course Objectives:	Course Objectives:	Course Objectives:
To develop in learners basic communication skills, especially reading and writing skills.	1. To assist students improve upon their skills and competencies in English as a working tool for other courses of study. 2. To improve the linguistic skills of students; 'polish' students' English grammar and usage; and enhance their writing skills.	1. To enhance learners' writing skills and the proper use of the English Language. 2. To improve the communication competence of beginning students in their self-expression at both inter-personal and group relationships. 3. To assist students obtain relevant helps for undergraduate level studies, goal setting and time management.	1. To help "bridge the pre-tertiary gap in English grammar and comprehension. 2. To assist students with English reading and writing skills relevant for university work. 3. To get students to develop the skills of extracting and sorting information from multiple sources and synthesizing them into coherent arguments in their essays and to acquire academic presentation skills. 4. To help students do close attentive reading and be able to distinguish main points from illustrative details.
Duration:2 semesters	Duration: 1 trimester	Duration:2 semesters	Duration: 7 semesters
Total no. of credits: 4	Total no. of credits: 2	Total no. of credits: 3	Total no. of credits: 11
Requirement: Compulsory to all first-year students	Requirement: Compulsory to all first-year students	Requirement: Compulsory to all first-year students	Requirement: Compulsory to all first-year and continuing students

Appendix B

Table 2. Comparative Summary of Differences in Emphasis in Pedagogy, Curriculum and QA Procedures in Case Study Institutions

Wa Poly	UDS	CUCG	IUCG
<i>Pedagogy</i>	<i>Pedagogy</i>	<i>Pedagogy</i>	<i>Pedagogy</i>
<p>i) Progress of learners assessed through oral quizzes, group and individual assignments, tests, term papers and examinations;</p> <p>ii) monitoring and supervision of teachers done by management, deans and heads of department</p>	<p>i) Adopting a student-centred approach to EAP teaching;</p> <p>ii) assessing students' progress in writing skills, grammar, vocabulary, and other language mechanics through take-home assignments, class exercises, and end of semester examinations;</p> <p>iii) discussing marked scripts with students;</p>	<p>i) Periodic assessment done to monitor student progress in the course;</p> <p>ii) adoption of lesson plans outlining the introduction, delivery, questions, evaluation, and conclusion;</p> <p>iii) teaching to the understanding of learners, iv) ensuring relevance/practicality of lessons;</p> <p>v) improved student/graduate performance</p> <p>vi) discussing marked scripts with students</p>	<p>i) Student participation in class encouraged;</p> <p>ii) EAP learning made more practical than theory-based;</p> <p>iii) learner progress monitored through quality assessment;</p> <p>iv) marked scripts discussed with students.</p>
<i>Specific Areas Highlighted in the Curriculum:</i>	<i>Specific Areas Highlighted in the Curriculum:</i>	<i>Specific Areas Highlighted in the Curriculum:</i>	<i>Specific Areas Highlighted in the Curriculum:</i>
<p>Conventional usage; correct use of special cases of verb agreement; correct use of punctuation marks; distinguishing between sentences, clauses and phrases, and sentence structure;</p> <p>comprehension; summary; and understanding figures of speech; and note-taking skills</p>	<p>i) English Language, general linguistic skills; grammar; usage; writing skills</p> <p>ii) Study Skills</p> <p>Introduction to study skills; preparing for academic work and communication context; plans and time-tables/time management (i.e. revising, making plans and time-tables); note-taking/note-making and lectures; academic essay/report writing/summary writing; proposal writing; systematic study method management of memory and learning; strategies of information/data search</p>	<p>i) Study, reading, writing, research, and oral skills</p> <p>ii) basic grammar rules, proper syntax, word usage, vocabulary enhancement and basic composition, and comprehension.</p>	<p>Grammar; reading & comprehension; academic writing skills</p>
<i>QA Procedures:</i>	<i>QA Procedures:</i>	<i>QA Procedures:</i>	<i>QA Procedures:</i>
<p>i) Extra time devoted to teaching of structure</p>	<p>i) Students taught how to enhance their listening skills,</p>	<p>i) Three-minute talk on a personal experience,</p>	<p>i) Course taught in small groups; class activities</p>

and usage in all three English-centred courses outside the official allotted time of two hours per week.	reading, academic report and proposal writing, and summarizing skills.	based on a written outline, delivered by each student; small group oral presentations on an assigned section of the Earth Charter made.	characterized by group work, oral presentations and extensive practical assignments; writing, grammar, and usage drills organised for learners on weekly basis to assess their progress.
ii) Draft exam scripts submitted to NABPTEX for review 8 weeks into each semester; peer reviewers' comments sent to course lecturers for corrections, if any, before administering the paper.	ii) Students also taught to plan their studies and assessment well; draw time-tables, manage time, take and/make notes; and how to communicate effectively.	ii) Students are taught how to choose and limit a topic; take notes, organise ideas, form a thesis, list sources, choose and use quotations properly, and document references.	ii) marked scripts are discussed and student feedback use for improvement.
iii) Marked assessment scripts sent for external review; external examiner's report made available to management and course lecturers for improvement	iii) Exams are moderated internally and externally.	iii) Mentoring institutions monitor and moderate examination scripts.	iii) Mentoring institutions monitor and moderate examination scripts.
iv) Marked scripts discussed in class with students for feedback for improvement.	iv) Marked scripts discussed in class with students for feedback for improvement.	iv) Marked scripts discussed in class with students for feedback for improvement.	

Appendix C

Table 3. Summary Showing Emphasis in Process/Outcome Distinctions by Case Study HEIs

Wa Poly	UDS	CUCG	IUCG
<i>Process</i>	<i>Process</i>	<i>Process</i>	<i>Process</i>
Students taught to: i) make notes; ii) develop reading and writing skills; iii) understand conventional usage; iii) use the special cases of verb agreement; iv) use the punctuation sign correctly; v) know the difference between sentences, clauses and phrases, and the structure of a sentence; vi) comprehend a passage; vii) summarize a passage; and understand figures of speech; viii) know the conventions of usage and develop writing skills	Students taught: i) subject-verb agreement; ii) the writing process – free writing, thinking, planning, gathering information, drafting the essay; iii) essay writing – narrative, descriptive, expository and argumentative; iv) editing – spelling, punctuation, and paraphrasing; v) common errors in English usage	Students taught: i) reading, writing, research, and oral skills; ii) basic grammar rules, syntax, word usage, vocabulary enhancement, basic composition, and comprehension	Students taught how to: i) read and critique a variety of academic essays in their areas of study ii) summarize extracts and essays; iii) simplify texts of moderate complexity; and iv) write both explanatory and argumentative synthesis of selected texts

<i>Desired outcomes:</i>	<i>Desired outcomes:</i>	<i>Desired outcomes:</i>	<i>Desired outcomes:</i>
i) Students able to: make good notes, ii) develop reading and writing skills; iii) understand conventions of usage; iv) use special cases of verb agreement; and use the punctuation sign correctly; v) know the difference between sentences, clauses and phrases, and the structure of a sentence; vi) comprehend a passage; summarize a passage; and understand figures of speech; vii) make notes and develop reading skills.	i) Students develop good writing skills; ii) comprehend written English literature; and iii) develop oral English skills	i) Learners' writing skills and proper use of the English Language enhanced; ii) communication competence of beginners in self-expression at both inter-personal and group relationships enhanced; iii) relevant helps for undergraduate-level studies, goal setting and time management obtained.	i) Gap in pre-tertiary English grammar and comprehension bridged; ii) students acquire advanced writing skills; and able to: ii) identify the appropriate form of language (i.e. register) suitable for different audience types and purposes; iii) write with concision and coherence, using logical methods of development; and iv) construct sentences that are consistent with intention and stylistic choice.

Appendix D

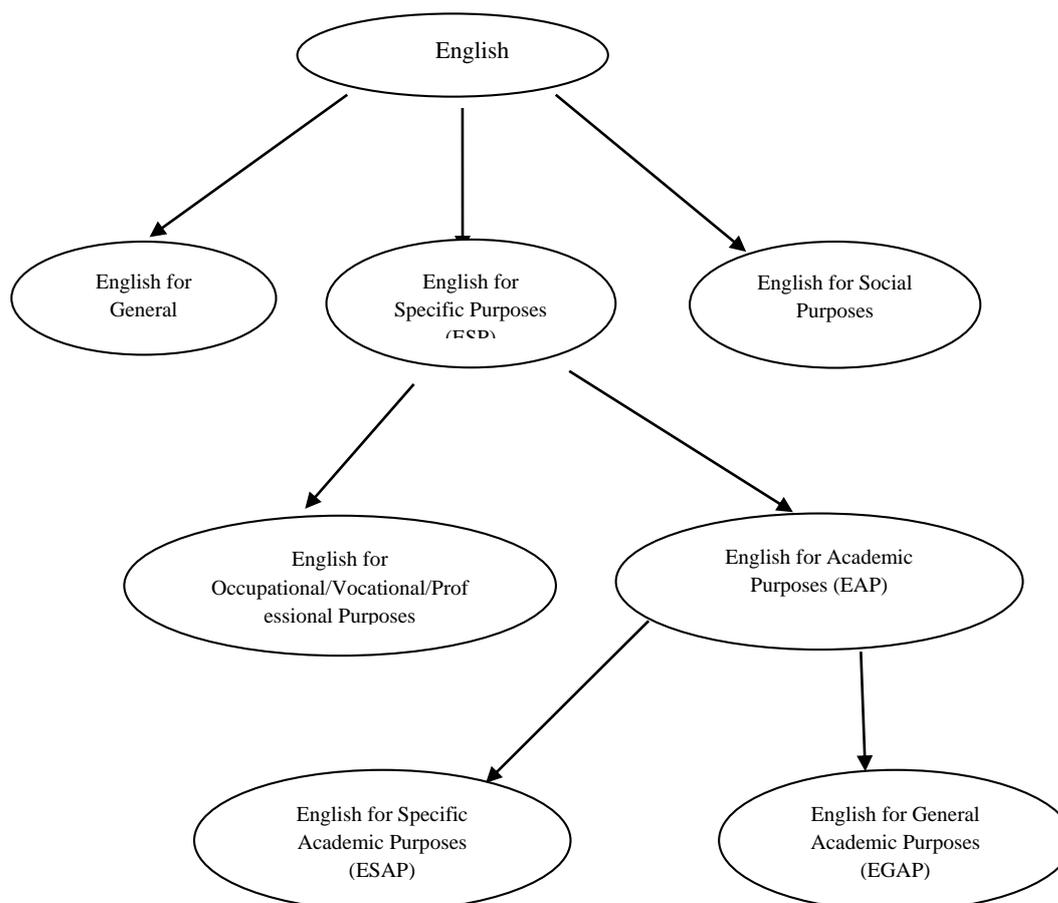


Figure 1. Classification of English Language Education for Different Purposes
 (From Lee, 2003, p. 197)