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Oral skills development in pre-sessional EAP classes and student transition to academic disciplines: an investigation in Anglophone and non-Anglophone EMI settings

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Oral skills development in pre-sessional
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and student transition to academic disciplines:
an investigation in Anglophone and non-
Anglophone English medium instruction settings

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and K McKeown**

Acknowledgements

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Abstract

The change in higher education (HE) pedagogical approaches to more active learning has resulted in increasing demands on students in terms of their academic speaking skills. In an English medium instruction (EMI) university context, students who have English as a second or foreign language may find these demands particularly challenging. Although many institutions provide pre-sessional language support courses, the transition from these courses to disciplinary studies has not yet been investigated with a focus on academic speaking skills, leaving a research gap which is surprising given the importance of academic speaking skills for degree success.

This study investigated to what extent pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes prepare students to meet the oral skills demands in their disciplines in EMI contexts. Two different EMI contexts were explored.

- Anglophone EMI contexts where pre-sessional English support classes take place over the summer preceding the start of the academic year. Once immersed in their disciplinary studies, pre-sessional students study on degree courses with native English speakers as well as non- native English speakers.

- Non-Anglophone EMI contexts where pre-sessional classes constitute either semester- or year-long sessions before the start of disciplinary studies. Most pre-sessional students share a first language and there are few, if any, native speakers of English present.

The results of this investigation have informed recommendations about how students' academic speaking skills can be better supported in the pre-sessional English support classes. Similarly, the results have shed light on how disciplinary tutors can better support students' language development in the disciplines. In conclusion, this study advocates the need for disciplinary tutors and EAP specialists to work together to provide support for the development and maintenance of students' academic speaking skills.

Key words: EMI; academic speaking; oracy skills; pre-sessional; disciplinary studies.

Highlights

- HE today requires strong oracy skills from students due to more interactive teaching and learning approaches.

- There is little examination of pre-sessional students' proficiency and confidence in academic speaking in their transition to disciplinary studies.

- An oracy skills framework was used to identify differences in stakeholder perspectives on the importance of academic speaking dimensions.

- In pre-sessional classes, students are in a 'protected' space in which they receive formative feedback, often individually, on their academic speaking. They leave this 'protected' space when they move into disciplinary study.

- Results suggest that disciplinary tutors, EAP tutors and students have different perspectives on the importance of certain dimensions of oracy skills.

- In particular, students placed high importance on grammar and pronunciation, while disciplinary tutors placed high importance on asking questions and argumentation.

- Qualitative data suggest there exists a gulf between disciplinary tutors, and students, and EAP tutors in terms of understanding the content and the purpose of pre-sessional support classes.

- This gap needs to be bridged to provide students with better support in their disciplinary studies.

- Disciplinary tutors need to be exposed to good teaching practices to support their ESL students for academic achievement.

Abbreviations

EMI: English as a medium of instruction

ELF: English as a lingua franca

ELFA: English as an academic lingua franca

ELTRA: English Language Teaching Research Awards

ESP: English for Specific Purposes

ESAP: English for Specific Academic Purposes

CLIL: Content and language integrated learning

GPA: Grade point average

HE: Higher education

IELTS: International English Language Testing System

L1: First language

L2: Second language

UoSU: University of Surrey

UoSO: University of Southampton

BU: Bilkent University

ZU: Zayed University

ESL: English as a second language

Contents

1

Introduction

The changing nature of pedagogy in higher education (HE) to more active learning approaches inevitably places demands on students in terms of speaking skills (Doherty et al., 2011). Lectures are becoming more interactive (Roberts, 2017; Heron, 2019), and seminars require a high level of verbal participation (Engin, 2017). Oral assessment is also prevalent in the UK (Gillett and Hammond, 2009), with presentations becoming a particularly common form of assessment (Joughin, 2007) and effective group work participation often being a prerequisite for a final assessed assignment (Doherty et al., 2011).

Pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programmes aim to prepare students for these practices in their disciplinary studies. The main aim of pre-sessional programmes is to equip students 'with the communicative skills to participate in particular academic and cultural contexts' (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002, p. 2) and to teach institutional and disciplinary practices (Gillett, 1996). Pre-sessional programmes vary in length, but generally they are seen as intensive study with the aim of finding 'the quickest, and most efficient and effective ways to equip students to perform appropriately in academic settings' (Alexander, 2012, p. 99). Given the centrality of speaking for learning (Walsh, 2011), and for negotiation of meaning in the classroom and beyond (Mauranen, 2012), academic speaking plays a vital role in students' academic performance and achievement, and in developing disciplinary knowledge.

However, there are few empirical studies which explicitly focus on how students transfer pre-sessional skills to their disciplines. A notable exception is that of Green (2015), who found that students often did not transfer their learning from the pre-sessional programme to their disciplinary studies. However, the study did not specifically investigate oral skills, and other studies which do follow students from pre-sessional to their disciplinary studies generally focus on academic writing (Shrestha, 2017). We thus see a need to further explore what students learn in pre-sessional programmes in terms of speaking skills and whether these are adequate and relevant for the various spoken discourses in which students are expected to engage in their disciplinary studies.

2

Literature review

2.1 EAP teaching methodology

EAP teaching methodology is generally based on the communicative approach (de Chazal, 2014) and pre-sessional English support classes are small, often with no more than 20 students per class. As a result, EAP teachers are able to deploy a variety of active learning strategies and encourage classroom interaction. The EAP literature has also identified the need for EAP tutors to provide high challenge with high support (Alexander, 2012) and the need to support student motivation through feedback and encouragement (Wilson, 2016). In this setting, students are able to practise and develop their speaking skills in a protected environment, with the help and support of their peers and experienced English language teachers. Upon leaving the pre-sessional classes, students are, however, subjected to a variety of disciplinary practices which a general EAP course, such as pre-sessional, may be unable to sufficiently account for (Dippold, 2014). Furthermore, students will find themselves in a classroom context in which factors such as other speakers, the tutor's approach and course materials impact on their ability and confidence to interact and, ultimately, be successful.

2.2 Research into oral skills demands in higher education

A growing body of literature in both HE research generally and applied linguistics and English language teaching (ELT) specifically has identified considerable challenges students face in participating in spoken discourse in their disciplinary studies, in particular in an Anglophone context that involves the participation of native speakers (Aguilar, 2016; Basturkmen, 2016; Engin, 2017; Ryan & Viete, 2009). Reasons for these difficulties have been reported as lack of linguistic resources, an increased cognitive load, and lack of familiarity with participation structures and routines of interaction (Engin, 2017). Part of this relates to students' awareness and understanding of specialist disciplinary terminology which is key to learning content (Basturkmen, 2018). Studies also point to an inability of students to ask disciplinary tutors questions (Halenko & Jones, 2011), which again can inhibit classroom interaction opportunities. Other studies (summarised by Macaro et al., 2018) show that lecture comprehension is an important factor in learning through English as a medium of instruction (EMI), suggesting that listening is an important element in discussions of academic speaking.

In an Anglophone context, English as a second language (ESL) students may find the interaction challenging due to the participation of native English speakers (Aguilar, 2016; Başturkmen, 2016; Engin, 2017; Ryan & Viete, 2009). An implicit expectation of native speaker norms may exist (Jenkins, 2014), resulting in students feeling disempowered and that their contributions lack gravity and legitimacy (Liddicoat, 2016). There may also be negative attitudes towards English non-native speaker varieties (Dunne, 2009; Peacock & Harrison, 2009). As a result, interpersonal relationships with peers tend to suffer when oral skills demands are high, for example in international group work (Turner, 2009; Robinson, 2006; Osmond & Roed, 2010, Dippold et al. 2019). It is thus perhaps not surprising in this context that international students reported that both non-native speaker lecturers and non-native speaker students were easier to understand than native English speakers (Jenkins, 2014; Dippold, 2015). Moreover, research shows that, given the diversity within the 'international student' label, negative attitudes and comprehension difficulties also exist in interactions involving only non-native English speakers (Doubleday, 2018).

2.3 Research into English as an academic lingua franca in EMI settings

There is some debate over the definition of EMI. Macaro et al. (2018) define EMI as:

The use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English.

This definition has been contested, with Baker and Hüttner (2019) arguing that Anglophone HE institutions share many features of the internationalised HE institutions in other parts of the world, where both the student and faculty cohort have English as a second language, and English is often used as a lingua franca. In fact, this is fair considering that the linguistic outcomes for English non-native speakers are the same as those in non-Anglophone EMI contexts (Humphreys, 2017).

Research into English as an academic lingua franca (ELFA) has suggested that, to ensure mutual intelligibility and successful negotiation of meaning, students and tutors draw on a wide range of pragmatic strategies (Björkman, 2014; Hynninen, 2011; Kaur, 2012). However, the ability of monolingual English speakers to accommodate non-native English speakers through the application of such strategies and to develop attitudes facilitative of English as a lingua franca (ELF) has been questioned (Jenkins, 2011; Björkman, 2011). In an Anglophone environment, native English speakers can thus present a significant barrier to former pre-sessional students' ability to transfer and apply oral skills from pre-sessional classes into their disciplinary studies.

For this study we adopted the approach taken by Murata and Iino (2017) who state that EMI is:

Conducted in the context where English is used as a lingua franca for content-learning/teaching among students and teachers from different linguacultural backgrounds (p. 404).

We investigate and compare former pre-sessional students' oral skills use and their transfer into disciplinary studies in two different EMI settings: an Anglophone setting in which native English speakers are likely to be present, and a non-Anglophone environment in which they are not (or not in large numbers). This allows us to provide a comprehensive and contextualised account (Macaro et al., 2018) of the issues surrounding oral skills development and the transfer of these skills into disciplinary practices.

2.4 Research into key stakeholder perspectives

Research into the perspectives of key stakeholders in the development of key academic skills, including speaking skills, has so far primarily considered disciplinary tutors and students.

A number of key issues have been identified from the disciplinary tutor's perspective. The first and most prominent/widely discussed is the challenges of low proficiency in English. Macaro et al. (2018) found that although tutors could not define the most appropriate level of competence, there are nonetheless serious concerns about students' ability to study a subject through English. Awareness of the linguistic and academic challenges of second language (L2) students in EMI varies across studies. In a Spanish content and language integrated learning (CLIL) context, Arno-Macià and Mancho-Barés (2015) found little awareness among content teachers, but teachers working with an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) 'tandem' teacher were able to recognise the challenges students face. This reflects the crucial role a language specialist can play in supporting not only students but also the disciplinary teacher.

Similarly, Jenkins et al. (2019) in an Anglophone context found varying levels of awareness among disciplinary tutors in terms of students' linguistic challenges, the proficiency levels signified by IELTS and pre-sessional programmes, and which pedagogic approaches would support students. Concern over students' proficiency to study in an L2 is reasonable considering research has shown that language proficiency and student achievement are highly correlated. Thorpe et al. (2017) found that students who started their disciplinary studies with the required IELTS score were academically stronger than those who had taken the pre-sessional. Similarly, Schoepp (2018) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) context also found that there was a strong correlation between IELTS scores and GPAs in the content courses. It is no surprise therefore that students themselves have highlighted that linguistic proficiency is the key challenge in an EMI context (Soruç & Griffiths, 2018).

A further challenge has been content disciplinary tutors' perceptions of their role in supporting students' language development. Despite the challenges described above, there is a general reluctance of content tutors to take responsibility. Several studies have found that they feel the teaching of English is not their job, stemming from their perception of being a content teacher not a language teacher and the belief that responsibility for language proficiency and development lies with the student (Dearden, 2014; Dearden & Macaro, 2016). There is some nuance here in terms of responsibility, as it is unlikely the content teacher can explicitly teach English, but studies have found that encouragement can support confidence, leading to greater fluency and proficiency (Belhiah & Elhami, 2015).

In terms of students' experiences of studying in an EMI context, a key theme has been the challenges they face in learning their discipline in an L2. In the UAE context, Belhiah and Elhami (2015) note that students struggle to learn their discipline due to low language proficiency. Studies conducted in the Turkish context by both Kilic (2018) and Kahvecioglu (2019) found that students mostly feel that the English language preparation in the pre-sessional programmes did not prepare them for the challenges of studying a discipline in English. In a study at Southampton University, Jenkins et al. (2019) report that students felt that the use of English was good for future work, but they also felt that the L2 was a barrier to learning and they were concerned about the need to use 'correct' English. In a study of postgraduate students in Australia, Terraschke and Wahid (2011) found that students also worried about embarrassing themselves and lost confidence when they were not understood. Several students also commented that they did not like asking questions. It seems, therefore, that students may be well supported in the pre-sessional programme, but as noted above, the context of the disciplines is largely different and can make academic speaking a 'high-stakes' event.

2.5 Conclusion

As the review above highlights, there have been several studies which explore pre-sessional students' transition to disciplinary studies. However, to our knowledge, there has been no research which explores transitions from three key stakeholder perspectives: the student, the disciplinary tutor and the EAP tutor. Furthermore, the spoken academic English needs of pre-sessional students in their disciplinary studies have largely been ignored. The growth of EMI contexts in non-Anglophone countries is rising sharply (Macaro et al., 2018). At the same time, there is growing recognition of the relationship between language proficiency and academic achievement (Schoepp, 2018), as well as between understanding of disciplinary terminology and conceptual understanding (Başturkmen & Shackleford, 2015).

3

Research design

3.1 Theoretical framework

To better understand the dimensions of academic speaking skills we drew on a framework of oracy skills developed by Mercer, Warwick and Ahmed (2017). The Oracy Skills Framework draws on theories from second language acquisition such as communicative competence (discourse competence, linguistic competence, sociocultural competence and strategic competence), as well as notions of accuracy, fluency and complexity. Perhaps the most significant feature of the Oracy Skills Framework is its development through extensive feedback from practitioners and professional experts (Mercer et al. 2017). It has been chosen for this study because of

its application to practice and its comprehensibility and accessibility to teachers and students. Ultimately the Oracy Skills Framework represents the different skills needed for effective spoken communication and represents a range of oracy skills that students might need to draw upon in different academic and social contexts. In identifying these dimensions, the authors point out that different spoken tasks will require different spoken skills. The framework can therefore be flexible to adapt to a variety of contexts and does not represent any particular cultural bias. The four areas of skills required for effective spoken communication are presented in the left column of Table 1, and their description in the right column.

Table 1: The Oracy Skills Framework (Mercer et al. 2017)

Physical • Voice • Body language	• Fluency and pace of speech, tonal variation, clarity of pronunciation, voice projection • Gesture and posture
Linguistic • Vocabulary • Language variety • Structure • Rhetorical techniques	• Appropriate vocabulary choice • Register, grammar • Structure and organisation of talk • Metaphor, humour, irony, mimicry
Cognitive • Content • Clarifying and summarising • Self-regulation • Audience awareness	• Choice of content, building on the views of others • Seeking information and clarification through questions, summarising • Maintaining focus on task, time management • Giving reasons to support views, critically examining ideas • Taking into account level of audience
Social and emotional • Working with others • Listening and responding • Confidence in speaking	• Guiding or managing interactions, turn-taking • Listening actively and responding appropriately • Self-assurance, liveliness and flair

3.2 Aims

The study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What types of speaking skills do pre-sessional EAP students need in their respective disciplinary studies (to include both in-class and out-of-class settings, seminars, presentations, group work, communication with lecturers)?

2. What are students' perceptions of their speaking skills (e.g. how successful/effective do they believe they are? Which factors facilitate and limit success and skills development?)?

3. What are students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the pre-sessional for preparing them for their respective disciplinary studies?

4. What are disciplinary tutors' perceptions of the speaking skills of former pre-sessional students (i.e. how successful/effective do they believe they are? How do they think students should be supported?)? Which factors limit or facilitate success?

5. What informs pre-sessional EAP tutors' practice in teaching and advising pre-sessional EAP students on speaking skills?

3.3 Data collection methods

The study relied on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Table 2 summarises what data were collected at each of the collaborating institutions to answer the research questions above.

3.4 Participants

Participants in the study included students from all four institutions, disciplinary tutors, and EAP tutors in the two Anglophone contexts. Table 3 summarises the numbers from each site.

Participants for the interviews were contacted through 'insiders' working at the institutions (Baker & Hüttner, 2017), and the researchers in all four sites were disciplinary and EAP teachers in those institutions, offering the study an emic perspective.

Table 2: Research questions and methods

	UoSU	UoSO	BU	ZU
Research Question 1: Surveys				
EAP tutors	X	X	X	X
Disciplinary tutors	X	X	X	X
Students	X	X	X	X
Research Questions 1, 2 and 3: Interviews with students				
End of pre-sessional	X			
End of semester 1	X		X	X
End of semester 2	X		X	X
Research Questions 1 and 4: Interviews with disciplinary tutors				
	X	X	X	X
Research Questions 1 and 5: Interviews with EAP tutors				
	X	X		

Table 3: Summary of participants

Questionnaire	Students	Disciplinary tutors	EAP tutors
Total	165	137	90
UoSU	10	55	17
UoSO	39	36	34
BU	23	21	24
ZU	93	25	15

Interview	Students	Tutors	EAP tutors
UoSU	8/6/3	5	3
UoSO	0	7	5
BU	7/5	4	0
ZU	5/5	5	0

3.5 Ethics

Ethical approval was granted by all four institutions. Participants were informed and consent was obtained. Due to the multisite methodology, all institutions were responsible for the transcription of interviews and any identifying information was redacted from the transcriptions before sharing as anonymous documents with the research team. Data was processed and stored in line with current data protection regulations.

3.6 National contexts

3.6.1 UK

In the UK university system, students who do not meet the English language requirements of the university are required to study in a pre-sessional course prior to starting their disciplinary studies. These courses can vary in length depending on the level of the student at application. For example, at the University of Surrey pre-sessional programmes can run for either 12, eight or five weeks. At the end of the pre-sessional, the institution carries out its own assessment. If students reach the required grade, they are considered to have met the English language requirements.

3.6.2 Turkey

Bilkent University requires students to sit an institutional English language proficiency exam, which has been validated to be at the CEFR B2 level, or submit an IELTS score of 6.5 or a TOEFL IBT score of 87, to be able to start their disciplinary studies. If they fail to achieve this, they are placed in the English Language Preparatory programme according to their proficiency exam scores or a placement exam. They may study the pre-sessional programme for anything from one semester (16 weeks) to two academic years.

3.6.3 United Arab Emirates

Zayed University requires students to submit an IELTS score of 5 to progress to the Liberal Arts programme which is pre-disciplinary studies. If students do not have an IELTS score of 5 or above, they are expected to take the Academic Bridge Programme, a preparatory programme of anything from one semester to two years depending on where they are placed. At the end of their programme they are expected to pass the in-house proficiency exam as well as gain 5 or above in IELTS.

3.7 Data analysis

3.7.1 Questionnaires

The survey data were analysed using SPSS. Cronbach alpha of data was 0.89 to indicate the sample size was adequate and that there is an underlying relationship among items. An Independent Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test was carried out to test if there were differences among characteristics of the participants regarding the four different dimensions of the Oracy Skills Framework. We specifically focused on the differences in the perceived importance of the skills relating to the four main oracy dimensions. The second focus of the analysis lay on the perceived importance of different in-class and out-of-class activities, such as giving presentations, listening to lectures, etc.

The qualitative comments within the surveys were analysed using thematic analysis through grounded NVivo coding. This resulted in a list of themes which are able to support and verify the quantitative results from the survey.

3.7.2 Interviews

The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis in NVivo. In doing so, the principal investigator, co-investigator and UK research assistants coded samples of the data independently and then met to compare, discuss and agree on codes and themes. We used a staged approach applying both deductive and inductive thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). While some codes and themes were informed by the oracy framework, others emerged through grounded analysis and revealed often surprising, unexpected themes in the data.

4

Results and discussion

In this section we discuss the results based on the research questions.

4.1 Research Question 1

What types of speaking skills do pre-sessional EAP students need in their disciplinary studies?

For the purpose of the surveys, and to make the terms of the oracy framework more accessible to students, they were renamed as follows:

- Physical ⇨ Delivery skills
- Linguistic ⇨ Language skills
- Cognitive ⇨ Organising ideas
- Social and emotional ⇨ Social skills

Table 4: Students' perceptions of needs

Oral skills	Items	Not important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Important	Very important	Median	Overall median
Delivery skills	Volume of voice	1	10	32	46	76	4	4
	Body language	2	12	24	54	73	4	
Language skills	Correct pronunciation	0	5	25	55	80	4	4.5
	Correct grammar	3	8	29	49	76	4	
	Correct vocabulary	2	5	14	59	85	5	
	Organisation of talk	0	5	17	53	90	5	
Organising ideas	Using own ideas	2	6	26	63	68	4	4
	Referring to others' ideas	5	8	44	57	51	4	
	Asking questions	2	15	32	63	53	4	
	Managing time	1	7	23	60	74	4	
	Justifying and supporting ideas	1	3	16	73	72	4	
	Awareness of other	4	9	28	61	63	4	
Social skills	Working with others	6	12	24	52	71	4	5
	Listening and responding	2	5	18	51	89	5	
	Confidence	0	3	15	43	104	5	

4.1.1 Students' perceptions

As can be seen in Table 4, students believed that the most important oracy dimensions were language and social skills. In particular, students felt that accurate pronunciation, vocabulary and structure of talk were key and confidence was also highly important. Within social skills, students deemed confidence, and listening and responding to be key for engagement in spoken interaction with teachers and peers.

4.1.2 Disciplinary tutors' perceptions

However, in contrast, disciplinary tutors believed that accurate language skills – including pronunciation – were less important. A key dimension of oracy was seen in the importance of organising ideas, in particular justifying and supporting ideas. This is not unsurprising given that the tutor's role is to develop students' understanding of the disciplinary content and, in general, assessment is of the content.

Table 5: Disciplinary tutors' perceptions of needs

Oral skills	Items	Not important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Important	Very important	Median	Overall median
Delivery skills	Volume of voice	4	5	27	69	32	4	4
	Body language	11	20	35	46	25	4	
Language skills	Correct pronunciation	3	20	37	56	21	4	4
	Correct grammar	3	16	34	56	28	4	
	Correct vocabulary	1	7	17	50	62	4	
	Organisation of talk	1	2	19	50	65	4	
Organising ideas	Using own ideas	1	14	55	67	137	4	4
	Referring to others' ideas	2	2	14	56	63	4	
	Asking questions	0	4	15	59	59	4	
	Managing time	0	2	19	59	57	4	
	Justifying and supporting ideas	1	1	11	45	79	5	
	Awareness of other	4	5	25	61	42	4	
Social skills	Working with others	2	4	23	49	59	4	4
	Listening and responding	0	3	9	55	70	5	
	Confidence	0	9	36	53	39	4	

4.1.3 EAP tutors' perceptions

Similarly to disciplinary tutors, EAP tutors believed that content was an important dimension, in particular justifying and supporting ideas, and managing time. This is not surprising, given the emphasis in EAP provision on argument structure and development in speaking and writing. EAP tutors also rated listening and responding highly, but they rated confidence less highly than the students. Their assessment of the importance of language skills, however, differed to that of students.

Table 6: EAP tutors' perceptions of needs

Oral skills	Items	Not important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Important	Very important	Median	Overall median
Delivery skills	Volume of voice	2	15	45	26	88	4	4
	Body language	1	2	18	39	28	4	
Language skills	Correct pronunciation	1	2	22	49	14	4	4
	Correct grammar	0	5	19	45	19	4	
	Correct vocabulary	0	1	5	40	42	4	
	Organisation of talk	1	0	6	39	41	4	
Organising ideas	Using own ideas	0	0	5	39	44	4.5	4.75
	Referring to others' ideas	0	1	4	31	52	5	
	Asking questions	0	4	10	36	38	4	
	Managing time	0	0	8	30	50	5	
	Justifying and supporting ideas	0	0	2	17	69	5	
	Awareness of other	0	3	12	40	33	4	
Social skills	Working with others	0	1	8	42	36	4	4
	Listening and responding	0	1	6	33	48	5	
	Confidence	0	0	12	45	31	4	

4.1.4 Comparison

A Kruskal–Wallis test was performed to identify oracy skills by status. The test is conducted at 0.05 level of significance; therefore, p-values for all tests are significant ($p < 0.05$). The p-values show statistically significant differences in mean ranks for all skills (Table 7).

The same information is presented in Figure 1.

Table 7: Comparison of perspectives

Oracy skills	Status	Mean rank	P-value	Results
Delivery skills	Student	219.85	0.00	significant
	Disciplinary tutor	159.03		
	EAP tutor	206.63		
Language skills	Student	223.88	0.00	significant
	Disciplinary tutor	164.72		
	EAP tutor	190.22		
Organising ideas	Student	169.9	0.00	significant
	Disciplinary tutor	200.24		
	EAP tutor	236.12		
Social skills	Student	209.01	0.02	significant
	Disciplinary tutor	174.92		
	EAP tutor	202.21		

Figure 1: Comparison of perspectives (by mean rank)
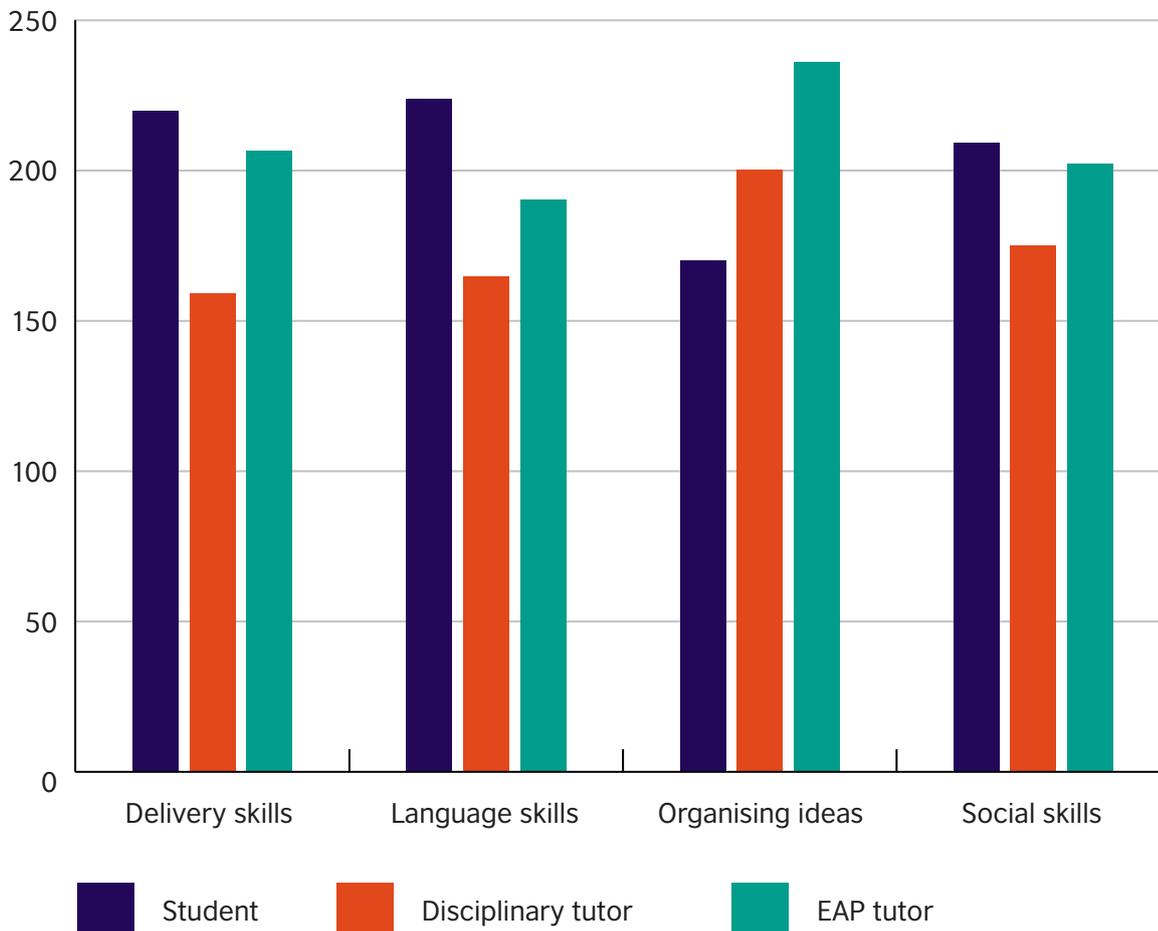
As can be seen in the graph, there is dissonance between perceptions of importance of skills among students, disciplinary tutors and EAP tutors.

- **Delivery skills:** The highest variation in importance of skills between disciplinary tutors and EAP tutors is for delivery skills. This may be due to the weighting in the EAP pre-sessional curriculum given to oral assessments such as presentations and discussions. The difference in perceived importance of delivery skills for students and disciplinary tutors is also highest among all skills as it is considered most important by students and least important by disciplinary tutors. Again, this reflects the time allocated to real presentations in pre-sessional studies.

- **Language skills:** As outlined previously, there is significant variation in the importance given to language skills by all stakeholder groups, with students rating them most highly. This may be due to students constructing their identities first and foremost still as 'language learners', and EAP tutors likewise as facilitators of language development.

- **Organising ideas:** This is perceived as the most important skill by both disciplinary tutors and EAP tutors, yet least important skill by students. This is probably due to the focus on linguistic rather than content skills in the pre-sessional, and the fundamental aim of a pre-sessional which is to prepare students linguistically for their content studies.

- **Social skills:** Students place higher importance on social skills than disciplinary tutors do. As explained previously, confidence seems to be the main trigger for a perceived social skills gap, and this is most profoundly felt by the students.

4.2 Research Question 2

What are students' perceptions of their speaking skills and their development?

In interviews, students reported on their confidence regarding academic speaking vs other skills – writing, reading and listening. As follow-up interviews were conducted with some students at the end of semester 1 in the two non-Anglophone settings) and additionally the end of semester 2 (Surrey only), we are able to see developments in students' perceptions of their speaking skills.

As there were distinct differences in students' perceptions of their speaking skills and their development across the three settings, we will discuss them here separately.

4.2.1 Bilkent University

At Bilkent university, the majority of students report feeling least confident about speaking and most confident about writing. One student who reported speaking as his least confident skill suggests lack of speaking practice in the pre-sessionals and the gap between everyday English and academic English as reasons for this lack of confidence:

There's not enough activity for speaking. Yes, we do lot speaking activity but it's not like one by one or it's not like something about daily issues, for example, my teacher asked me, 'What is the most important issue in the world?', and I said, 'Education', so she said, 'Why?', but for example in IS [sl] the examiner asked me, 'Do you watch Sky?', and I feel uncomfortable because I never speak something about Sky or something about daily issues in bustle [sl] and the only speaking activity I have ever had in Bilkent.

In the follow-up interview, when students were already studying in their disciplines, lack of opportunity for speaking is reported by many students. This leads to students feeling that their skills are stagnating or even declining:

And because of my grades I think OK I can write something. But if I am going to speak about speaking, I am still the same way the same level.

I don't use speaking there. But you know what, I feel like my speaking skills are not as good as it was when I first came here. I don't know why. Well maybe I'm just being paranoid but I feel like I'm not as good as when I came here the first time.

However, some Bilkent students report being confident in speaking English. What is common to these students is that they report extensive engagement in English-speaking media prior to even starting the pre-sessional:

I think it's because I always watched TV series in English with my family when I was a young child [laugh], so I can listen to them and it's made me similar to me to speak like that. My speaking is maybe because of this and reading is, I don't know, I do have a practice, I did a lot of practice.

4.2.2 Zayed University

At Zayed, students' perceptions at the outset are similar to Bilkent in that most students report being more confident about writing and reading than listening and speaking in particular. This is often because of a perceived lack of preparation for speaking at school:

Because in school we don't practice speaking a lot, so I guess I'm not prepared.

However, in a distinct difference to Bilkent students, Zayed students report their speaking skills to be improving during the course of their degree programme(s):

I improve more than I expected and I've been talking more confident academic words.

What is common to students from both non-Anglophone settings is that they perceived the command of subject-specific vocabulary to be the gatekeeper to better engagement in speaking:

To be confident, [inaudible] and learning new vocabulary, so when you talk will say new words.

4.2.3 University of Surrey

Mirroring the non-Anglophone results, students' perception of their speaking skills at the end of the pre-sessionals is generally quite negative:

Before I arrive in the UK I think the spoken and the listening is better than the reading and the writing, yeah. Also because the writing skill that I should take the pre-sessional course but when I arrive here I find the spoken and listening is also not good [laugh].

Interestingly, in many cases students' self-perception of their speaking skills changes directly as a result of the pre-sessional and feedback received through it, for the better or for the worse:

Yeah, because before I come here I think my speaking is really well, I speak very well, but after I got out the maths sheet from the tutors from the PS 12 I just think that, 'Oh, I'm very poor at speaking'.

As students transition into degree classes, their perception of their speaking skills and their confidence in speaking are heavily shaped by comparing themselves with native speakers and others perceived to be stronger speakers:

I don't want to do a mistake. I would feel ashamed. So, I used to think a lot about my question, I shall say in this order, ask it this way, yeah.

But I'm also poor compared to other country because mostly I will go to like Singapore and other [inaudible]. So, I just compare with them, so I think I'm not bad but when I was here, I think I'm very bad [laugh].

Not surprisingly, in the subsequent interviews, the development of a positive self-perception in speaking was heavily linked to opportunities for speaking, which can be limited by assessment types and classroom formats used in the degree. For example, one student responded to a question about which situations they had to use spoken academic English in their degree classes so far with:

I haven't faced this situation so far.

Subsequently, the student explained further that the only opportunity for speaking in their degree subject (science, engineering, technology or maths) was in labs. This student's first academic speaking opportunity was two presentations at the end of semester 2, one of which was a poster presentation, for which they drew on skills learned in the pre-sessional:

How to introduce yourself, how to move from point to point during the presentation, reversing [inaudible] a style, how to mention the first while you are speaking. Yeah, I found myself better than my colleagues or they didn't talk this course, even native people, yeah, because they didn't know this trick because it was first time and they like to do poster and I had an experience and I had feedback and I looked at feedback and I avoided stare [inaudible]. I avoided the mistake that I have done before [laugh].

Another barrier to the development of better speaking skills is the composition of classes, in particular in subjects which are populated by many students who share the same native language. The number of speakers with the same native language made a big difference to students' perception of their academic speaking skills:

Speaking, you know we talk about in the lecture that most Chinese students like to gather together, so I have seldom opportunity to speak English, so that's why I want to know more people from other countries to communicate.

It is also evident that confidence in their own speaking skills, and consequently positive self-perceptions of speaking skill, is co-constructed, with successful interactions with native speakers or others perceived to have better skills playing a major role (tutors, other students):

I don't know what it develop, but maybe I feel more confident when I speak to the other people and they understood me. They don't ask me, 'Pardon? Pardon? Pardon?', so I feel more confident and I be careful the [inaudible], this mean I be careful about the sound, how I pronounce.

Later in this interview, conducted at the end of semester 2, the same student remarked that it was 'the environment that improve us'.

What unites the Surrey students with those from non-Anglophone countries is the perception that a good grasp of disciplinary vocabulary provides access to the discipline and develops good speaking skills, in particularly fluency:

I think the most important achievement for myself is that sometimes I cannot find a very appropriate, very complicated word to describe this, then I can use some simple sentence to translate it. So, that will make my conversation more fluent. I don't want to think about this word, 'Er, er, er …', like have too many pauses in these conversations, so that will make the people I'm talking to think, 'Your English sucks' [laugh], and I think that's better to use some simple words.

In summary, our analysis of students' self-perception of their speaking skills suggests that these are shaped heavily by their environment. In all three institutions, most students start out with a less positive assessment of speaking than the other skills. Subsequently, opportunities for practice of speaking during the degree course appears to be the main facilitating factor for confidence in speaking. This can be provided by formal opportunities to use spoken academic English in class, or by opportunities to speak English in a mixed group. In addition, positive interactions with others – having the perception of being understood – is also an important factor, in particular in the Anglophone world.

4.3 Research Question 3

What are students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the pre-sessional for preparing them for their disciplinary studies?

The data revealed how the pre-sessional had been helpful, as well as highlighting frustrations and need for further support. We will discuss some of these themes in more detail below.

Students felt that the pre-sessional had prepared them to use academic vocabulary in their academic speaking. The student below comments on the opportunity to learn new words as well as the opportunity to use English only in the class. While this was a positive experience for the student below, further in this section we highlight how the lack of opportunities was a challenge and source of frustration:

Maybe by learning some new words, vocab words. Umm, talking to the teacher all the time in English.

Students also mentioned that feedback in their pre-sessional classes was supportive in developing their speaking skills. For example, the student below comments on the opportunities for practice:

I think I'm much better than I was, especially after four times speaking test, I think it's one group presentation and one seminar, sorry three, three times, and one individual presentation. I think that gives me a lot of opportunities to practise my spoken academic language.

One other major theme relating to the effectiveness of the pre-sessional was tutor support:

We need to practise and we need the guidance from the tutor and the pre-English section just give us the opportunities to the get their guidance from the tutor and they give us many positive opinion.

However, there were also some areas of dissatisfaction. For example, there was a perception that writing support was better than speaking support:

I think maybe [inaudible] I can go to [inaudible] with spoken English because I have to do a lot of practice about this because in here actually we don't have enough time to practise about speaking. We largely focus on the materials, readings, listenings and writing essays.

The lack of multilingual groups was frustrating for some students, echoing the comments above in 4.3. Monolingual groups, which were evident in both

the Anglophone and non-Anglophone contexts, restricted students' opportunities to practise English. This is reflected in the comment below:

Actually for me now I want to know more and more native speakers, not only the native speakers, just some foreign students they speak English, not the Chinese because Chinese like to speak Chinese together.

This led to the perception of a lack of readiness for disciplinary study, in particular as students were aware that, in entering their disciplines, they would leave the supportive environment of the pre-sessional classes:

The tutors, they know that we are not the native speakers, they speak very slowly to make us understand her. So, it's not like the normal conversation.

In summary, students recognise that the pre-sessional offers an environment which is characterised by high support, but that this may not reflect entirely the reality of classroom study they would meet in their disciplines.

4.4 Research Question 4

What are disciplinary tutors' perceptions of the speaking skills of students? How successful/effective do they believe they are? How do they believe they should be supported?

A key theme running through the interview data was concern over students' proficiency. Tutors believed that the stronger the students' English, the more successful they were in learning the content. It was also noted that if their English level was high, they were more likely to contribute to the class discussion:

I don't think it's any more than that, to be honest with you, and normally the students who need that, if they don't have a good mastery of the language they rarely do very well.

So, I had one student today who I know has a lot to say, but she couldn't say it because from the beginning she just had poor English.

Multilingual groups were seen as key to supporting students, particularly in the non-Anglophone contexts. This point is reflected above in 4.3 and 4.4. Clearly the need for multilingual groups is seen as a great advantage for L2 students, as an opportunity to practise their English, and for tutors to encourage use of English. Mixed L1 groups encouraged the students to use English, and tutors talked about

how they manipulated and organised groups to maximise this potential. Particularly in non-Anglophone contexts there was a recognition that the presence of international students in the group can encourage students to use English:

I think if we can have more international students in classes, that would help tremendously.

I know we try at times to get them to mix in and I think if their speaking skills were more confident they might feel more ready to mix in with others.

Where students from certain backgrounds tend to speak to each other and when they're speaking to each other they're not speaking to each other in English, which kind of defeats the whole purpose. So, we're actually going to actively break up the groups.

Another main theme was attitudes to use of first language (L1) in the classroom and recognition of the multilingual context in which students and teachers were operating. Whilst some tutors supported use of L1 in certain circumstances, others were not supportive of any L1 use. Generally, tutor comments show that tutors had to develop classroom policies bottom-up due to the absence of top-down policy and guidance on the use of L1.

For example, support for the use of L1 is represented here by the tutor below:

My feeling is that if they're talking to people who speak their language and it's just that group and actually that's going to help them clarify something, I'm very happy for them to talk in their home language.

Whereas another tutor, this time in a non-Anglophone context, commented:

They are not allowed to say it in [language]. Some of them because of this do not ask any questions, they only ask during the breaks where they can come to my office they can speak in [language].

In both Anglophone and non-Anglophone contexts disciplinary tutors ranged in their understanding and awareness of the linguistic challenges that L2 English speakers face in their disciplinary studies, and consequently in their perceptions of what support should be offered to them. While some disciplinary tutors displayed high levels of engagement in supporting students, others saw language support as completely separate to disciplinary study:

Yeah, so the main aim is the content really and you don't see that as your role, to look at the language unless it affected the communication and meaning, potentially?

I feel the questions are really geared more towards language learning. I don't teach language, I teach content courses, for which obviously they need to speak language and I get a lot of international students, but I don't organise speaking activities.

I teach law in English. I am not an English teacher.

I expect students to have a certain level of English to understand and take part in lectures. I do not offer additional support as this is something that I feel is the responsibility of the institution and student. The university does offer enough support to students; it is up to them to take advantage of that.

Consequently, there was considerable range in tutor comments about the support given for oracy skills development. Some tutors shared excellent practice, while others felt that supporting students' English proficiency was not their responsibility, similar to the findings of Dearden (2014) and Dearden and Macaro (2016). For example, one tutor talked about how they supported students through group work and building on confidence:

I try to plan speaking activities in ways that encourage students to have confidence in their speaking. For example, starting with pair/small group work, and then getting the pairs/small groups to feed back their ideas to another pair/ small group. Students can be quite reluctant to discuss ideas in front of the whole group.

Another talked about practice which recognises the linguistic challenges students might face:

Providing reading material, reference material, lecture notes, recorded lectures, glossary of technical terms. Speaking slowly, clearly, succinctly. Not use colloquialisms, slang, metaphors, nuance and avoid black humour. Provide visual images, illustrations and familiar examples they will understand. Allow sufficient time for students to read literature and answer questions. Allow the use of recognised dictionary and thesaurus apps.

In summary, the analysis of disciplinary tutor interviews suggests that tutors' practices are guided by their individual understanding of students' needs, and not by any institutional policy on the matter. It is also clear that a range of support is provided to students depending on the tutor's perspective on their role.

4.5 Research Question 5

What informs pre-sessional EAP tutors' practice in teaching and advising pre-sessional EAP students on speaking skills?

One of the main themes emerging here across the four contexts was a focus on students' language level and needs. Language level was defined according to their IELTS score, their needs (either perceived needs or results of a needs analysis), results of speaking exams, and their accuracy and fluency. These needs were also determined by observations of performance in activities, exam results and task requirements. Future needs were also referred to. For example, one teacher mentioned:

I think that the teaching needs to include authentic tasks (i.e. something that students see will be a part of their future use of English, whether on campus or in future employment).

The second key theme was the curriculum informing the EAP tutors' practice. As is common in many pre-sessionals, the course requirements are explicit and there is generally a structured course outline or plan. Many teachers referred to the curriculum as informing practice. For example, teachers referred to 'course materials', 'scheme of work' and 'level objectives'. The course outline was prescriptive in many cases with little opportunity for flexibility. In interviews, an EAP tutor summed up how the content was structured:

We mainly use materials from a book, we use a text book [name of book], and that's supplemented a bit with some of our materials written by the programme leaders. Then the tutors have a bit of flexibility, provided we're covering the scheme of work, to supplement with other things. But I would say there is very much a central scheme of work and that's what people follow.

In the same vein, another tutor commented:

We have a scheme of work which we are very much encouraged to stick to. So for the morning classes as a listening and speaking tutor, the [name of book] book. Then in the afternoon for research skills and grammar focus, we use a book by [author], which is essentially how to put together an academic essay with a lot of emphasis on the importance of correct referencing and so forth. So having to fit in the required units, exercises and so forth on a daily basis pretty much takes up all our time.

Although not all pre-sessional courses were organised according to discipline, teachers were aware of students' future academic goals. As mentioned above, this included professional as well as disciplinary work. For example, in a non-Anglophone institution one teacher noted: 'I consider the speaking tasks students are going to perform in their majors.' Other teachers referred to 'future needs', 'students' degree studies', 'onward programme', and 'the courses they will go on to'.

However, there was also some recognition of a lack of convergence of the pre-sessional with the discipline:

> *For example, with the [inaudible] we also used to have a look at different referencing systems because the one we use in pre-sessional isn't the one they're going to use in their target course, so we do sort of have a little look at things like that. Some of the academic conventions are in here and they tend to focus on task, choice of content and structure and organisation.*

Some EAP tutors also recognised the existence of an evidence and information gap between pre-sessionals and the disciplines:

> *Interesting you ask. I've never really, apart from the social aspect, I've never really asked them, you know: 'Did you feel this really helped you with your writing? Did it help you with your oral skills? Were you able to participate better in tutorials?' No, I never ask those type of questions, maybe I should.*

Group dynamics were another major theme informing teaching practice, including concerns for students' confidence levels, prior learning, nationality, educational background, and willingness to communicate. EAP tutors were particularly sensitive to the class atmosphere and ensuring students felt comfortable participating verbally with their class peers. This meant that sometimes the students were formed into mixed groups according to L1. Part of this awareness was also an acknowledgement of the teaching styles students might be accustomed to:

> *For example, if students are from a teacher-centred style of academic culture, I am aware I must teach not only speaking skills in terms of grammar, fluency, etc., but also facilitate discussion in general.*

In summary, EAP tutors tend to be highly aware of students' needs upon joining the pre-sessionals (their language needs, their prior experiences of learning and teaching). However, while there is a general awareness of disciplinary destinations, tutors also follow a fairly general curriculum (EAP rather than English for Specific Academic Purposes) and recognise the existence of a gap between pre-sessional and disciplinary study. A further point is that EAP tutors are sensitive to students' confidence and focus on classroom dynamics. However, as is seen in 4.2, students do not experience this supportive environment once they start their disciplinary studies.

5

Discussion and conclusion

5.1 Summary

Using mixed methodology, this study has identified student, disciplinary tutor and EAP tutor perspectives on the transition from pre-sessionals to disciplinary study, with a particular focus on the speaking skills. The analysis suggests that, despite the focus on two very different settings – Anglophone and non-Anglophone EMI – the issues raised in the two environments are largely similar. The analysis has also shown that there are differences between the levels of importance EAP tutors, disciplinary tutors and students attach to the different oracy dimensions. In addition, interviews with disciplinary and EAP tutors raised issues regarding the responsibility of the different actors for supporting speaking skills development.

5.2 Recommendations

- There is a need for a 'distributed responsibility' (Arkoudis & Doughney, 2014) or 'interdisciplinary collaboration' (Li et al., 2019) in which disciplinary tutors and language specialists work together after pre-sessional courses to support students' language development. In such a relationship, students are better provided with focused and appropriate linguistic and conceptual support (Arno-Macià & Mancho-Barés, 2015; Lasagabaster, 2018). This involves co-operation and take-up from top management as well as all those involved in learning and teaching.

- There is a need for more explicit discussion of the issues raised in this study and, in particular, recognition and acknowledgement of the key role academic speaking plays in developing disciplinary knowledge.

- There is thus a need to develop better policy, in particular guidance for disciplinary tutors. In the absence of any institutional policy on EMI and speaking skills support, tutors are largely left to their own devices to develop policy and practice 'bottom-up', leading to wide disparities in practice, with some tutors being very supportive of oracy skills demands and others denying any responsibility for it.

- Consequently, there is a need for explicit training for disciplinary tutors in supporting non-native English-speaking students in their academic speaking skills. This may be in the form of institutionally organised workshops, and as part of larger professional development such as, in the UK, the PG Certificate in Higher Education. We also recommend the development of teaching guides, online resources and other materials for tutors' reference.

5.3 Dissemination

The results of this research have been disseminated in a number of ways.

- A one-day workshop on supporting ESL students in their disciplinary studies took place on 26 November 2019 and was attended by more than 15 disciplinary HE teachers, EAP tutors and other HE staff, for example academic developers. The workshop introduced colleagues to the oracy framework and provided a platform for discussing the challenges in supporting speaking skills. The English Language Teaching Research Awards (ELTRA) investigators shared the key findings from the project. In the afternoon, participants spent time in groups to share good practice in supporting students in developing disciplinary terminology, and to create ideas for how disciplinary tutors and EAP tutors can work together to develop students' oracy skills.

- A good practice guide was created from the results of the interviews and open questionnaire items in the research. Participants at the one-day workshop also participated in the development of this guide.

- One member of the team presented a workshop entitled 'Spoken academic English in the HE curriculum: reflections on the oracy dimensions' at a conference organised by the British Council in Tashkent, Uzbekistan on 15–16 October, entitled 'The role of English in higher education and its impact on graduate employability'.

Future dissemination will include publishing selected aspects of the analysis in academic journals.

5.4 Impact

We anticipate this study informing policy and practice in the following ways.

- This study will support a more coherent match between students' needs and EAP provision and greater efficiency of pre-sessional language support courses.

- This study will allow for the development of policies of speaking support and for better embedding of speaking support in the curriculum. In turn, this will support disciplinary tutors in developing good practice for supporting students' oracy skills development.

- The study will inform more effective support and training for disciplinary and EAP tutors.

5.5 Conclusion

This study set out to investigate issues arising from students' transitioning, in both Anglophone and non-Anglophone EMI settings, from classes which have a focus on language development to those in which the focus is on disciplinary content. Our particular interest was in how oracy skills are viewed in terms of their importance for disciplinary study, and to what extent tutors and students believe that the pre-sessional prepares them for disciplinary study in terms of their academic speaking skills. Questionnaire data revealed that disciplinary tutors, EAP tutors and students hold divergent perspectives on the importance of oracy dimensions for successful disciplinary study. Furthermore, interviews with tutors highlight the range of pedagogic practices provided to support students' academic speaking in both the pre-sessional classes and the disciplinary classroom. Finally, interviews with students have shown that the transition from pre-sessional to disciplinary study is by no means smooth for many students, in particular as they grapple with developing the necessary vocabulary which provides them with access to the discipline.

The study has revealed that there remains a gap in supporting effective transitions, which needs to be filled by better top-down policies and improved bottom-up practice. Training and development of disciplinary tutors will be crucial to meeting these needs, and students in both Anglophone and non-Anglophone EMI will be able to equally benefit.

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