EAP Courses in Joint-Venture Institutions: A Needs Analysis Based on Learner Perceptions

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
  	With the increase in English medium instruction (EMI) in non-English-speaking countries, the role of EAP in preparing learners for the academic tasks that they will face is enhanced. Joint-venture universities (JVUs), institutions formed in collaboration between foreign universities and universities in the host country, pose even greater challenges for EAP programs. Learners in JVUs are expected to meet the requirements of the collaborating institution while simultaneously developing skills in an additional language. Critical to the success of EAP programs in JVUs, then, is the careful analysis of learners' needs and wants. The present study aims to provide insights into the needs and wants of EAP students at a China-based JVU by focusing on the perceptions of learners who have completed their EAP studies. Data were obtained through a narrative research method based on semi-structured interviews with 16 former EAP students and compared with stated program goals in an effort to discover areas in which students' perceptions aligned or did not align with program goals. The paper presents cases of alignment and cases of mismatches. An analysis of the mismatches leads to the following pedagogical implications for EMI programs in JVUs: (1) Programs may better cater to learners' interests by implementing a semi-negotiated curriculum; (2) programs may better cater to learners' discipline-specific needs by providing broad writing topics for learners to refine in accordance with their particular disciplines; (3) programs may better promote the integration of EAP students and international students by consciously providing the initial "push" toward integration.

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1. Introduction

As English for academic purposes (EAP) programs are specifically designed to address learners' English-related challenges within a target institutional context, needs analysis is seen as fundamental to the success of such programs (see Feng et al., 2019; Gaffas, 2019).

The exact nature of this needs analysis, however, varies considerably, with well-financed institutions perhaps conducting analyses of needs for particular disciplines and others relying on standardized test scores to infer general needs (De Chazal, 2014; see also McKinley et al., 2021). The global surge of English medium instruction (EMI) in non-English-speaking locations necessitates a further emphasis on needs analysis. Learners in these contexts are expected to grasp course content and improve language skills simultaneously, and studies reveal that such learners tend to require significant language support in order to fulfill EMI requirements (Evans & Morrison, 2011; Galloway & Ruegg, 2020; Zhang & Pladevall-Ballester, 2021). In cases of joint-venture (or transnational) EMI institutions (i.e., those formed in collaboration between foreign, often Anglophone universities and universities in the host country), the stakes may be even higher for EFL learners as they are expected to meet standards that are just as stringent as those of the collaborating foreign university (McKinley et al., 2021). Hence, a clear understanding of these learners' needs becomes paramount for the success of EAP programs offered in joint-venture EMI universities (hereafter JVUs).

The existing research regarding transnational education in China has tended to focus on EFL learners' needs rather indirectly. Hence, McKinley et al. (2021), in comparing unnamed transnational institutions in China to other Chinese universities implementing EMI (two from China's elite C9 group, two Class A institutions, and two language-oriented institutions), find that only the transnational institutions provide language courses specifically designed to "cater to disciplinary needs" (p. 245; see also Galloway & Rose, 2021). The transnational institutions, incidentally, are also the only ones to provide out-of-class language consultations in the form of writing centers or "drop-in sessions" (p. 245). Additionally, classroom innovations have revealed a focus on learner needs. Ergenc (2020), recognizing that some of his Chinese learners feared speaking out in class, implemented a peer-group format in which local students were mixed with international students for the purpose of small-group discussions. The result was that the Chinese students began to participate more freely and that Chinese and international students began to work cohesively to fulfill learning goals. Hiller (2021), noting that EMI policies may present "a danger of artificially separating languages and creating monolingual environments" (p. 2), presented course tasks that promoted *translanguaging*, the assemblage of all available language resources for meaning-making, and observed that such tasks "have the potential to contribute to students' cultural knowledge, writing and communication skills, and intercultural communication and awareness" (p. 9). Adding to the focus on intercultural communication, Reynolds (2021), citing De Costa et al. (2020), acknowledges that EMI policies can sometimes be considered a sort of gateway to participation in knowledge acquisition (see also Arnold, 2016; Ayash, 2016;). To avoid the gateway effect, he proposes that transnational higher education should be "a site of encounter and debate where a heightened sense of difference and social power allows critique and reimagination of how societies everywhere function" (p. 262).

As indicated above, some focus on learner needs is revealed in recent studies of JVUs. Yet research specifically related to the needs analysis of EAP programs in China-hosted JVUs is lacking. The present study sought to fill this gap by examining Chinese learners' reflections on/perceptions of the relevance of their first-year study of EAP to their study in other courses at a Sino-US JVU. While needs analyses often seek to determine relevant coursework before curriculum implementation (see Nation & Macalister, 2010), a needs analysis carried out after several iterations of a curriculum carries some advantages. The after-the-fact analysis allows

for the elicitation of opinions from participants who have a relatively complete picture of the relevance of the EAP curriculum to their other study (see Ferris, 2018; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). By allowing for such a picture and by focusing on students' perceptions, the analysis provides data for consideration of ways in which the curriculum might better satisfy its primary stakeholders (see Ferris, 2018).

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the student's overall attitude toward their EAP courses?
2. How do students view their learning in their EAP courses in light of the requirements of their other courses?
3. How do students view their EAP courses in terms of the process of adapting socially to a multicultural environment?

In addressing the three research questions, the study sought to compare students' perceptions with stated program goals as spelled out in course syllabi, course assignments, and *The Teacher's Guide to EAP 101 and 102* (an unpublished manuscript henceforth referred to as the *EAP teacher's guide*). Such a comparison would inevitably reveal cases in which students' perceptions aligned or did not align with course goals. Incidences of perceptual mismatches would then indicate areas for program improvement (see Kamali & Behjat, 2018; Kumaravadivelu, 1994).

2. Literature Review

Research aimed at providing a needs analysis of EAP programs has taken various forms. Several early studies (e.g., Bridgeman & Carlson, 1984; Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Johns, 1981) surveyed faculty across the disciplines to determine the academic language skills deemed necessary for success in university courses. Horowitz (1986) analyzed the actual writing assignments given to students in the disciplines. Much later, Cooper and Bikowski (2007) reviewed course syllabi from 20 academic departments to determine the frequency of various types of writing assignments across the university curriculum. Such research has obvious contributions to the field of EAP. Horowitz (1986), for example, was able to infer from his analysis that the student writer's main requirement was "to find, organize, and present data according to fairly explicit instructions" (p. 455). He was, therefore, able to raise useful questions about the relevance of common EAP course assignments that focus on "psycholinguistic, cognitive, and affective variables" and thus do not "take into account the many forces outside of an individual writer's control which define, shape, and ultimately judge a piece of writing" (p. 446). However, what analyses of faculty opinions and course assignments do not reveal is the English language learners' own perceived *needs* (i.e., skills required for academic success) and *wants* (i.e., skills desired but perhaps not required) in an EMI environment (see Christison & Krahnke, 1986; Gaffas, 2019).

By taking into account learners' *needs* and *wants*, researchers have produced findings that conflict with the goals implied in EAP programs and voiced by faculty members in the disciplines. Leki and Carson (1997) found that students perceived little connection between the personal-experience writing of their EAP program and the demands of other courses, which tended to require text-responsible prose (i.e., work based on or including references to published sources). In a later study, Gaffas (2019) found that Saudi learners wanted their EAP courses to provide a greater emphasis on vocabulary building so that they might fully appreciate their major courses, a finding that is also reflected in a Chinese context (Evans &

Green, 2007; Li & Ruan, 2015). In a study with Japanese learners, Ellwood and Nakane (2009) discovered that, contrary to assumptions held by both EAP instructors and content-course lecturers, students did not prefer to remain silent in class but were simply unfamiliar with their Western classmates' method of participating.

One case in which students' perceptions seem to have affected EAP program change is discussed in Ferris (2018). Noting that student feedback improves the practices of both instructors and administrators, the author surveyed to elicit the opinions of students who had completed a re-designed EAP program. Participants were least positive about peer review procedures and varied tremendously in opinions concerning in-class grammar practice. Student feedback prompted faculty meetings dealing with the improvement of peer review practices and the design of grammar lessons intended for whole-class use or for self-study. As the author points out, "Students' voices are essential because they are the reasons that our programs exist at all" (pp. 34-35).

The studies reviewed here, though not in themselves related to joint-venture institutions, illustrate the benefits to be gained from an analysis of student perceptions of EAP programs. The impact of instruction, ultimately, depends just as much on students' perceptions of that instruction as on the guiding principles of the instruction itself (Kumaravadivelu, 1994).

3. Research Methodology

As discussed previously, the present study aimed to gain insights into learners' reflections on/perceptions of the relevance of their EAP courses to their study in other courses at a Sino-US JVU. To obtain such insights, the researchers opted for a qualitative, narrative approach (see Creswell, 2013). As Bignold and Su (2013) note, narrative research allows research participants to share "their lived experiences with the researcher [and thus to] reconstruct the past with reference to how they understand the present" (p. 3). This reconstruction of the past (i.e., experiences in EAP courses) with reference to the present (i.e., the relevance of EAP courses to later study) clearly aligned with the researchers' goals.

3.1 Institutional Context and Participants

The study was conducted with undergraduate students at a Sino-US joint-venture institution in southeast China. The undergraduate program began in the Fall Semester of 2018. At present, roughly two-thirds of undergraduate students are Chinese and one-third international. The majority of Chinese students complete a one-year, required EAP program, with the few exceptions being those who have completed their secondary education in international schools. As international students fulfill their language requirement with courses in Mandarin Chinese, EAP courses consist solely of Chinese students. The first semester of EAP (EAP 101A and EAP 101B) has a content focus on language learning motivation, and the second (EAP 102A and EAP 102B) on culture learning and intercultural communication. Each semester is divided into two seven-week courses (commonly referred to as "sessions").

As the institution has a strong interdisciplinary focus based on principles of a liberal arts education, and as students do not declare majors until the end of their second year of study, all students need to write in multiple disciplines, not just in their major discipline. Hence, the EAP program necessarily needs to train learners in English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) as opposed to English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). The three areas of

difficulty that the program seeks to address revolve around the skills of (a) academic writing, (b) academic reading, and (c) academic discussion. Matters of academic presentations also play a significant role in the program.

Sixteen students were chosen for the study. To apply, students responded to an announcement sent through e-mail and posted on WeChat, a popular social media platform in China. The criteria for applying were the following: (a) successfully completed all EAP courses, (b) willing to participate in a 45-minute interview, and (c) available for a follow-up meeting if necessary. All 16 students happily agreed with the criteria and signed consent forms. Data concerning the student participants is provided in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Data Concerning Participants

Second-year Students		
S#	**Gender**	**Prospective Major**
S1	F	Applied Mathematics
S7	F	Political Economy
S8	F	Media & Arts
S9	F	Ethics & Leadership
S10	M	Data Science
S12	F	Political Economy
S15	F	Ethics & Leadership
S16	M	Environmental Science
Third-year Students		
S#	**Gender**	**Major**
S3	M	Media & Arts
S4	F	Applied Mathematics
S5	F	Applied Mathematics
S6	F	Data Science
S13	F	Applied Mathematics
Fourth-year Students		
S#	**Gender**	**Major**
S2	F	Data Science
S11	F	Data Science
S14	M	Media & Arts

3.2 Data Collection

Following the narrative approach outlined above, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews to allow participants to reflect on their EAP experiences and to relate those experiences to later studies. By starting from a set of guiding questions (e.g., *How would you compare your EAP writing assignments to the writing assignments given in other courses? | How could your EAP courses have helped you better to adapt to a multi-cultural environment?*), the interview format allowed the interviewer (the first researcher) to maintain a degree of uniformity from one interview to the next and simultaneously provided ample space for him to probe deeply into matters emerging from the interview itself (see Dörnyei, 2007). It also allowed the participants to freely express their perceptions of their EAP courses. For these reasons, the interview format was chosen over other possibilities, such as surveys or focus groups. In a survey format, respondents are likely to skip open-ended questions (Krosnick & Presser, 2010). Hence, feelings are likely not to be expressed. In a focus-group format, lack of privacy may lead to a lack of disclosure of one's true thoughts (Sim & Waterfield, 2009). Semi-structured interviews, then, appeared best to lend themselves to the obtainment of thick,

honest reflections. Assessment of participants' learning, though common in needs analysis, was considered to be outside the scope of a study dedicated to learners' perceptions.

As Table 1 (above) reveals, the 16 student participants were from different stages of their undergraduate study. Logic dictates that second-year students would have a fresh memory of their EAP learning and would thus have a relatively clear notion of the ways in which their first-year study of EAP had (or had not) aided them in their other courses. Participants in their third or fourth year of study would have a clear picture of the interdisciplinary nature of the entire university curriculum and would thus be in a position to provide insights into the overall benefit of their EAP courses. For participants in their third or fourth year, however, the passage of time post-EAP could lead to some inability to associate commonly used academic language skills specifically with skills acquired in EAP courses (see Hill, 2020; James, 2010). By choosing eight second-year participants and, collectively, eight participants in their third and fourth years, the researchers aimed to achieve a balance between fresh memory on the one hand and global curriculum understanding on the other.

Before recorded individual interviews of approximately 45 minutes were conducted with each of the participants, two pilot interviews were conducted. These interviews revealed a tendency for interviewees to engage in a question-answer session as opposed to a narrative. To remedy this problem, the first researcher decided to meet, briefly and informally, with the 16 participants before the actual day of the scheduled interview in order to establish greater camaraderie between himself and the participants. At the time of the interview, the interviewer encouraged participants to discuss what they wanted to discuss and not to rely on the interviewer's questions. These two strategies proved highly successful in enabling the construction of in-depth narratives as participants felt free to elaborate or digress in accordance with their thoughts on the topic at hand.

3.3 Data Analysis

3.3.1 Interviews

The data from the interviews were transcribed and then coded separately by the two researchers. Each researcher categorized participant comments according to their relevance to the research questions (i.e., questions dealing with overall attitude toward EAP, the relevance of EAP to other coursework, and the relevance of EAP to adaptation to a multi-cultural environment). In the coding of any particular participant's comments, any one researcher may have been more detailed than the other, yet there was always an overall consensus between the two.

 After careful reviews of the data and the emerging themes therein, the researchers concluded that participants' comments could first be divided along a *benefits/drawbacks axis* (i.e., perceived benefits of EAP study/perceived drawbacks of EAP study). The benefits and drawbacks were then categorized according to the reasons underlying the participants' perceptions (e.g., the benefit of aiding the participant in writing assignments for other courses, and the drawback of not preparing the participant for participation in multi-lingual classrooms). In discussing their overall attitude toward their EAP courses and the relevance of EAP to other coursework (i.e., the first two research questions), participants consistently focused on matters of academic writing and academic speaking. Hence, these two skills, along with adaptation to a multicultural environment (RQ3), were the chosen themes to be emphasized in this study.

3.3.2 Contextualizing Documents

In order to triangulate data from recorded interviews, interview comments were viewed in the context of program-related documents such as course syllabi, course assignments, and the *EAP teacher's guide*. Such contextualization enabled the researchers to consider whether participants' comments were or were not congruent with EAP program goals. Cases of perfect or near-perfect congruence did not necessarily mean that program goals were being successfully met. Rather, such cases meant that former EAP students viewed the program in the way that was intended. Obviously, cases of severe mismatches meant that former students did not perceive the program as it was intended to be perceived. Hence, consideration of participant comments in light of program and course materials was undertaken with the aim of identifying possible areas of mismatch between student perceptions and program goals. More importantly, the inclusion of *contextualizing documents* in the study helped to situate the narratives within the particular experiences (i.e., EAP courses) about which the participants narrated.

4. Findings

The report on the results of the study takes the following format: (a) The research question under consideration is given; (b) a table showing the participants' general perceptions is provided; (c) data from the participants' narratives illustrate the findings provided in the table in terms of the *benefits* and *drawbacks* of the EAP program under consideration; (d) each report of benefits and drawbacks is followed by a comparison of participants' comments with course goals as indicated in *contextualizing documents*. Such a procedure is undertaken in order to show the ways in which participants' perceptions of the EAP program aligned or did not align with stated program goals. In a study of students' perceptions, cases of alignment and/or misalignment are after all of the primary importance (see Allwright, 2005).

4.1 What is the student's overall attitude toward their EAP courses?

A general summary of students' overall attitude toward their EAP courses in terms of academic writing and speaking is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Overall Attitude Toward EAP Courses

EAP writing		EAP Speaking	
benefits	drawbacks	benefits	drawbacks
• citation skills • academic essay structure • analytical thinking	• topics unrelated to students' interest • assignments not challenging	• confidence building • presentation skills	• lack of class time devoted to discussion skills lack of motivation to speak English in L1 environment • lack of engaging topics for discussion

As academic writing is the primary focus of EAP courses at the research site, it is not surprising that study participants, when asked about their overall impressions, first concentrated on matters regarding writing instruction. *Benefits* related to RQ1 tended to emphasize an initiation into a style of academic discourse that differed from high school writing oriented largely around the *Gaokao*, the Chinese College Entrance Exam. Comments tended to relate to citation practices and to the general essay structure required in English academic writing.

S8, a second-year student, provided a particularly telling commentary related to citation practices:

> *[EAP] was really helpful in the first session when I had literally no knowledge of what academic writing should be looking like. So, at the time, [my instructor] told us a lot about formatting and especially how to avoid plagiarism. That was a very important notion because a Chinese student coming from the Gaokao system doesn't have the awareness of abiding by academic integrity issues.*

S8 referred to "the first session"—that is, to EAP 101A. Her comments largely echoed the EAP 101A goals concerning citing and quoting given in the *EAP teacher's guide*:

- ❖ Learning the basics of when and how to cite sources from which ideas are taken.
- ❖ Learning when and how to use direct quotes.
- ❖ Learning how to do properly formatted reference lists.
- ❖ Learning what citation styles are (e.g. Chicago, APA, CSE, MLA), and where to find information and models for proper citation in these systems.
- ❖ Learning what does and does not constitute plagiarism and how to avoid it (p. 7).

While input such as that provided above indicates that participants did indeed gain a useful orientation into the norms of academic writing, additional input fell into the *drawback* category of the *benefit/drawback axis*. The drawbacks consistently addressed course content and assignments based on that content. Comments from S9, a second-year student, revealed participants' perceptions:

> *I didn't see many...enough content there. So, like, especially for Session 1, I think the only thing I got is how to use MLA or like APA format. But then [the course] just asks us to do a story writing...writing a story. But it's not that demanding, you know. .... And I think it repeated a lot. Like...for the whole Session 1 and Session 2, it's talking about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. So...we were a little bit tired, especially in Session 2.*

The concern about "*just writing a story and using the right format*" was also mentioned by S1, a second-year student, and the concern about course content was rather strongly made by S3, a third-year student, in his comments related specifically to the second semester of EAP courses: "*For me, the feeling is...you just insert the cultural thing into this course.*"

Such comments related to course content and to assignments based on that content would seem to represent a clear mismatch between students' perceptions and stated program goals. According to the *EAP teacher's guide*, the inclusion of content related to language-learning motivation and culture learning is specifically intended to promote engagement among students, even in cases in which students are not particularly interested in improving their academic skills. Apparently, the participants cited above did not find the content especially engaging. Likewise, as shown previously, EAP course goals seek to lead students to produce text-responsible prose based on the appropriate use of academic sources, yet participants focused on the writing of stories. These perceptions may stem from the fact that students start their EAP journey by writing a reflection of their language-learning experiences and end their EAP journey by writing a reflection on their EAP experience. Additionally, summary-response tasks often emphasize the personal element—as the excerpt below from a summary-response assignment based on "English and Me: My Language Learning Journey" (Lin, 2010) reveals:

> After you have written the article summary, write a one-page response (a little more, a little less is OK) to the ideas in the article. In this section, you will reflect on the ideas you have come across in the article and connect them to your own thoughts and/or relate them to your own experiences. This section is your own personal reflection, so you can write more freely. Subsequent paragraphs will focus in detail on matters that you consider to be of particular importance in your language-learning history.

Granted, in writing the summary part of the assignment, students are in fact expected to engage in text-responsible prose and thus to use such skills as paraphrasing, quoting, and citing. Nevertheless, in looking back at their EAP experiences, participants recalled more about personal-experience writing than about academic writing. Like Leki and Carson's (1997) participants some 25 years ago, participants in the present study seemed not to see the connection between personal-experience writing in EAP and academic writing in the disciplines.

Benefits related to speaking in English tended to revolve around the building of confidence and the development of presentation skills. S2, a fourth-year student, specifically pointed out the usefulness of EAP presentations in helping her get over her fear of speaking English:

> *After graduating from Chinese high school, the thing we are not good at is spoken English. [High school] is more about writing something or the use of English for…like…examinations. So, [EAP] gave me…like…many opportunities to practice the presentation. So, after doing it again and again, I'm familiar with that, and I do not scared of that anymore.*

Along with noting the increased confidence gained through EAP presentations, participants also pointed out useful skills gained from EAP instruction regarding presentations. Matters regarding the rate of speech, effective use of PowerPoint slides, and means of catching attention were repeatedly mentioned.

The finding that students developed confidence and acquired skills through their EAP oral presentation are not surprising since all EAP courses allot 10% of the course grade to presentations and oral reports. Class activities such as critiquing others' oral presentations and analyzing successful and not-so-successful PowerPoint slides are commonplace. Hence, it may be said that participants' appreciation of presentation skills obtained in EAP aligns quite well with the stated program goals.

The same overall positive attitude did not apply to perceptions regarding academic discussion skills (one of the areas that the program specifically seeks to address). The participants attributed their relative lack of improvement in this area to a lack of class time devoted to it and to a lack of motivation (on their part) to take advantage of discussion opportunities. In discussing how she would like to have benefitted more from her EAP courses, S15, a second-year student, pointed out the time factor:

> *I think it's the participation and discussion skills because…. I've talked to my one of my EAP teachers about this…. He told me that it's hard to achieve just within seven weeks because there are many other contents need to cover. So…this is something that needs to…. It takes time to improve. So…EAP course maybe not lay very much emphasis on this part. But it's something I really want to improve.*

Other participants felt that opportunities for improving discussion skills were available but not utilized. A common thread throughout the interviews dealt with students' tendency to remain silent in class or to speak in Chinese. S5, a third-year student, after pointing out that EAP courses were required only for local students, simply stated the following: "*I don't think EAP class is very engaging,*" thereby revealing a lack of interest in speaking English in a group consisting only of L1 Chinese speakers.

As the content focus of EAP courses is intended in part to provide students with provocative material for discussion (according to the *EAP teacher's guide*), and as a focus on discussion skills appears in the syllabi for all four seven-week sessions of EAP courses, the participants' perception that their EAP courses did not help develop discussion skills must be considered a rather serious mismatch between students' perceptions and stated course goals.

4.2 How do students view their learning in their EAP courses in light of the requirements of their other courses?

As Table 3 reveals, participants' views concerning the relevance of their EAP courses to other courses overlap significantly with their overall attitude toward their EAP courses. Nevertheless, as the goal of preparing students for success in other courses lies at the heart of EAP, it is worth considering students' perceptions related specifically to the relevance of their EAP courses to their other courses.

Table 3: EAP Learning in Light of Other Courses

EAP writing		EAP Speaking	
benefits	drawbacks	benefits	drawbacks
- essay structure - taught in EAP often relevant to other courses - research paper writing	personal nature of EAP assignments is not applicable to more evidence-based assignments of other courses	- presentation skills - conducting interviews - leading discussions	unpreparedness/unwillingness of EAP students to participate in classes with international students

In terms of academic writing, participants felt that basic EAP skills regarding overall essay structure were applicable to other courses (though there were some exceptions, as Table 3 indicates). S7, a second-year student, simply stated the following: "*In terms of processing the papers, it's basically the same, but with different topics.*" S14, a fourth-year student, was more specific:

> *The most obvious thing is how to...how to...like...kind of connect each paragraph. You need to...like...for example, in the first paragraph, you need to give your...uhmm...the central statement of the whole essay. And...also...you need to give...like...those transition words...like...**however, as, therefore**. So...that would definitely help me to show my logic in any...any writing.*

In commenting on the structure of particular academic genres, participants noted that the research report, typically written in the third seven-week session of the EAP program, was especially helpful. S13, a third-year student, when asked how her EAP coursework aided her with other coursework, specifically addressed the research report:

> *I think it's the very structural process of writing a research paper. First, you need to select the topic. You design the questionnaire. And you have some reflection on that and make some conclusions from your questionnaire, and then you start to write to your research...construct a whole [research report]. So...that's a really structural process...and very useful for the future.*

The fact that participants would consider their EAP courses to have provided them with a "*really structural process*" in terms of writing their papers reflects a rather strong alignment between EAP goals and students' perceptions. As an excerpt from an assignment concerning generalizations (or stereotypes) of Chinese culture reveals, students are in fact taught a very precise structure:

Table 4: Sample Writing Assignment Guidelines

Writing Assignment Guidelines

Work within the following basic format:
○ INTRODUCTION (*one paragraph*)
   • Hook: Catch the reader's attention.
   • Background: Explain your chosen generalization (or stereotype) and give your interpretation as to why such a generalization (or stereotype) would exist. Define the term that you use—generalization OR stereotype.
   • Thesis: Provide your statement of whether or not the generalization (or stereotype) is appropriate or misguided.
○ BODY (*two or three paragraphs*)
   • Refutation/partial refutation: Mention the generalization (or stereotype) about Chinese people and Chinese culture and agree, disagree, or partially agree with it. (*one paragraph*)
   • Your argument to support your thesis:
     ▪ You may take from your own experience.
     ▪ You may use published sources.
○ CONCLUSION (*one paragraph*)
   • Short commentary in which you re-state your thesis and provide a general comment about the rationale behind your thesis.

While such detailed specifications may be viewed as relying on a prescribed formula for argumentative writing (see Hirvela, 2021), they must also be viewed as providing students with a "*really structural process.*"

In spite of the benefits mentioned above, the interviews also revealed drawbacks. These drawbacks revolved primarily around a perception that writing skills acquired in EAP more readily transferred to courses requiring reflective writing than to courses requiring a more rigorous evidence-based product. According to S2:

> *The EAP professor asked us to write something about ourselves. So, that is the process of reflecting on ourselves, maybe for some certain topics. .... That is the thing that we also need to do for some other classes. So, for example, the class I'm currently taking--that is the Ethics and Leadership class---and I also need to...like...reflect on whatever I've done and write it down.*

S14, a fourth-year student, after acknowledging the transferability of overall essay structure, contrasted the more reflective style of EAP writing with the more evidence-based writing by saying that "*they are just two different areas,*" a view that seemed to be shared by S5, a third-year student: "*EAP doesn't help me with my lab report at all.*"

Although EAP goals, as stated in the *EAP teacher's guide*, note that EAP courses should help learners in their ability to make claims and support claims, and although the syllabus of EAP 102A specifically requires an evidence-based report, it seems that participants paid more attention to the reflective nature of EAP assignments than to the evidence-based nature of them. This drawback, in turn, led participants to express some doubts about the applicability of their EAP assignments to other courses.

In discussing the ways in which their EAP courses aided their speaking in other courses, participants consistently mentioned, once again, presentation skills. According to S10, a second-year student:

> *EAP courses helped me because they have...like...a lot of presentations. I remember, and in the first presentations, I was...like...really prepare for presentations. I even write a script for my speaking. And this is all. I just read a script because it's like safer...in case I get stuck with stuff. .... In recent presentations, I rarely write a script. I write...maybe I will write flashcards and stuff.*

Though S10 did not directly attribute his getting out of the habit of memorizing a presentation script to his EAP courses, the insinuation is clear that the practice obtained in EAP enabled him to move beyond simple rote memory. In other words, the practice and training in EAP (mentioned in the discussion of RQ1) would appear to have transferred to presentations in later courses.

Participants' comments revealing *drawbacks* in terms of the relevance of EAP speaking to other courses somewhat echoed the drawbacks mentioned in response to RQ1. For the participants, the sharing of the same L1 background stood out as the main concern regarding the transfer of EAP-acquired speaking skills to other courses. S8, a very confident speaker of English, essentially summarized the general feelings of local students in classes shared with international students:

> *[The international students' participation] process was a stress for Chinese students in the same class because, even if [the Chinese students] have points to raise, they don't know if they can win over the international students in raising their hands and getting noticed by the professor. .... Every time they want to speak out, someone else would just start to speak...even sometimes without raising hands. So...they're just getting this...uhmm...like...attack...in class and their passion for class participation even decreased after such experiences.*

It must be acknowledged that the "drawback" discussed above may not in fact be a real one. There is, after all, no reason to believe that relative extraversion is inherently better than relative introversion. The point here is that participants *perceived* their relative introversion in class discussions as an obstacle that their EAP courses had not helped them overcome. The *EAP teacher's guide* notes the following:

> While most [Chinese learners] can communicate adequately in English for basic interaction, many do not speak fluently and are not very comfortable speaking in English. This means many avoid speaking up in class, and also avoid after-class social conversations in English (p. 2).

According to S8, Chinese students felt somewhat defeated in their attempts to participate in multi-lingual classes. S8's comment, then, points to a rather large mismatch between students' perceptions and stated program goals.

4.3 How do students view their EAP courses in terms of the process of adapting socially to a multicultural environment?

Table 5 indicates participants' overall perceptions of the ways in which their EAP courses aided (or did not aid) them in their adaptation to a multicultural environment.

Table 5: EAP learning in process of adapting to a multicultural environment

Benefits	Drawbacks
• respect for cultural differences • preparation for dealing with intercultural conflict • encouragement to have more contact with international students	• lack of clarity of purpose of intercultural communication focus in EAP courses

The data indicate that *benefits* in terms of multicultural adaptation were of both an ideological and social nature. Regarding the former, participants' comments indicated the development of a degree of intercultural awareness that may have been previously absent. Having received their high school education in local Chinese high schools, participants embraced the aid that their EAP courses gave to them in terms of recognizing and respecting different opinions and practices. According to S2:

> *The principle of [adapting to a multicultural environment] is to adapt to different opinions. So...like...before...I will feel like I always adapted to a right...right answer...a defined answer for something, and I follow my own...like...living mode. .... But starting from the EAP class, I found that everyone is different. .... So....at that time, I started to learn to...like...adapt to others' opinions and...like...make myself be used [to] dealing with different kinds of people.*

S14 provided a similar view in saying that, "*to learn better and to live better,*" adaptations to cultural differences needed to be made. He went on to say the following: "*If you have no EAP course, you need to learn that point by yourself during these four years.*"

Along with the ideological knowledge gained from EAP courses, participants also mentioned that these courses had motivated them to engage socially with international students. This engagement at times stemmed from EAP assignments—as S4, a third-year student, pointed out:

> *[EAP] is the most helpful class that helped me adapt to this [multi-cultural] environment. Since the...the instructor always asked us to interview some international students about their culture, their perspectives,...so many things. So...this gave me the opportunity to talk with them. And I made all my international friends because of the EAP course.*

In other cases, difficulties in EAP courses appeared to lead participants to reach out to international students. Hence, as S8 noted, a relationship of mutual aid evolved:

> *Like...sometimes we had some questions related to course content. If we didn't understand it well during the course, we would just go ask some international students. And they had that training in high school, so they could just answer that very well. And there was a very interesting exchange of Chinese learners and English learners...like we are teaching Chinese to them, and they're teaching the EAP-related things to us.*

The comments provided above indicate that participants gained valuable intercultural communication skills in their EAP courses. A stated goal of the EAP 102 courses, as noted in the syllabi, is to prepare students "for a world in which people from different cultural backgrounds will not only often encounter each other but even work and live together." By encouraging learners to make *mindful generalizations* of people from other cultures, the courses prepared learners for intercultural encounters. By encouraging learners to interact with international classmates through interview assignments, the courses provided opportunities for students to put their intercultural awareness into practice.

Curiously enough, in spite of the absence of international students in EAP courses, no participants felt that their EAP courses had not aided them in their adaptation to a multicultural environment. An interpretation of the data, however, suggests that some participants' lack of engagement with the topic of intercultural communication may have led to a lack of learning in this area. As mentioned previously, S3 viewed the topic of intercultural communication as something simply inserted into the course. S7 appeared to feel that the topics of motivation and culture mainly served the purpose of providing a common topic that all students could talk about:

> *I understand why professors of EAP chose those kinds of topics of languages and cultures...because everyone could have something to say about that. Like...it's not so...like...expertise in some specific area. So...everyone could have some ideas on that. .... It's kind of hard to choose a topic that everyone could have something to say.*

In short, it must be acknowledged that some participants did not seem to feel that the cultural element in their EAP courses comprised a significant learning opportunity. It is therefore, unlikely that these participants benefitted significantly from EAP instruction in terms of their adaptation to a multicultural environment. However, the findings also reveal that those participants who more readily embraced both the topic of intercultural communication and the available opportunities to interact with international students appeared to benefit from their EAP courses in terms of adapting to a multicultural environment.

5. Discussion and Pedagogical Implications

The findings presented above indicate that study participant perceived that their EAP courses had satisfied many of their academic *needs* and *wants,* with *needs* defined as skills required for academic success and *wants* as skills desired but perhaps not required. Specifically, participants viewed their EAP courses as beneficial in terms of a basic introduction to the norms of academic discourse, the acquisition of some transferable writing and presentation skills, and (in most cases) the provision of aid in adaptation to a multicultural environment. As Lee et al. (2018) point out, such matters as correct citation and referencing stand as a central component of academic writing and thus are essential for students. And as Levrai and Bolster (2015) note, the successful delivery of an academic presentation stands as a central component in almost all academic disciplines in EMI institutions. Hence, the successes of the EAP program under study here must be acknowledged. Yet the findings also present significant mismatches between students' perceptions of their EAP courses and stated program goals. These mismatches involve (a) a lack of inspiring course content that might lead to greater development of discussion skills, (b) a lack of assignments clearly related to writing in the disciplines, and (c) a lack of successful integration of EAP students and international students (in some cases). Such mismatches need to be addressed as students

are, after all, a program's primary stakeholders (see Ferris, 2018; Xiao & Wilkins, 2015). These mismatches represent challenges for the EAP program under consideration here. The challenges are the following:

1. How can EAP content better cater to learners' diverse tastes and interests and therefore better promote the development of discussion skills?
2. How can EAP programs feasibly cater to learners' discipline-specific needs if learners have not declared a major before taking the course?
3. How can EAP programs better promote the integration of EAP students and international students?

5.1 How can EAP content cater to learners' diverse tastes and interests and therefore better promote the development of discussion skills?

Liu et al. (2011), in a study to determine what motivates Taiwanese students' willingness to enroll in English courses, found that students' necessities (which, for the authors, include students' *wants*) are "complex, variable, and conflicting" (p. 277). The authors specifically note that "learners' wants influence self-efficacy" and thus should be taken into account (p. 273). As the results of the present study have shown, participants often did not show much desire to talk or write about the topics on which their EAP courses were based. Of course, satisfying all wants in terms of topics presents a fairly tall order as it is unlikely that any particular topic will inspire all learners. This difficulty is magnified at institutions in which EAP is offered to freshmen with undeclared majors (i.e., at institutions such as the site of this study) as the lack of declared majors makes it almost impossible to determine students' interests prior to their enrollment in the course. Nunan's (1988) approach to the *negotiated curriculum*, however, may provide a remedy.

Nunan (1988) defines the *negotiated curriculum* as one in which at least some curriculum activities are derived through "negotiation and consultation between teachers and students" (p. 36). A face-value interpretation of this definition would suggest that "negotiation and consultation" would take place with each group of learners and that new courses would then be quickly designed according to the results. Given the huge amount of work that automatically goes into the teaching of EAP, instructors are unlikely to be able to create, starting from zero, new courses every time. Besides, in a program based on seven-week courses (i.e., a program such as the one studied here), very little time is available for the necessary "negotiation and consultation." At the program level, then, a plausible option would be to identify, over the course of several seven-week sessions and through questionnaires and/or focus-group discussions, topics of interest to students. These topics could then become the content options for "successive intakes of students" (Nunan, 1988, p. 62). This option, of course, would require periodic new analyses to keep up with changes in learner interests. The point, ultimately, as Dörnyei (2001) points out, is the following: "*Find out what your student's goals are and what topics they want to learn about, then build these into your curriculum as much as possible*" (p. 63, italics as in original).

5.2 How can EAP programs feasibly cater to learners' discipline-specific needs if learners have not declared a major before taking the course?

The question of whether or not to cater to learners' discipline-specific needs may at first glance seem merely to revolve around the EGAP versus ESAP issue (see Hyland, 2006). The issue becomes more complex, however, when institutional realities are considered. As

mentioned previously, the research site for the present study adopts an interdisciplinary, liberal arts format, and students do not choose majors until the end of their second year. The writing demands of different disciplines along with the lack of declared majors, make an ESAP approach clearly unfeasible for such institutions. Nevertheless, it must be taken into account that participants described writing for EAP as "story writing" and noted that writing for EAP and writing in the disciplines were "just two different areas" (S9 & S14, respectively). Such a disconnect between EAP writing tasks and discipline-specific requirements seems to have a long history still in place today (see Feng, et al., 2019; Leki & Carson, 1997). Keefe and Shi (2017) provide a fairly recent example of the phenomenon. In their study of international students in an EAP program in Canada, the authors acknowledge that their participants considered EAP courses to be "fun" and "carefree" in comparison with their discipline-specific studies (p. 12). Logically, EAP programs face the challenge of addressing this seemingly long-standing disconnect.

Even without officially declaring a major, students at the institution under consideration here appear to offer a solution to the problem. Keenly aware of the institutional context, participants noted that they began to lean toward specific disciplines during their second semester of EAP study. As S8 observed in commenting on her second semester of EAP:

> *It was like the end of our journey of exploration because people need to start thinking about which major they would like to declare. So, there was a kind of focus that [was] gradually emerging.*

This "*gradually emerging*" focus would seem to allow for possibilities for more discipline-specific writing—especially in terms of choices of writing topics.

Benesch (2001) notes that "offering students a choice of topics does not guarantee that they will all be strongly attached to the one they select" (p. 81). It is no doubt true that, given the freedom to choose a writing topic, some learners will be inclined to settle for something that is convenient instead of something that is, for them, intellectually engaging. After taking into account this limitation, Benesch (2001) goes on to point out the benefits of having learners choose their writing topics and then submit them to class scrutiny: Students become aware of the flaws in their topic choices and subsequently refine them. Such a process does not appear to stray too far from the goals of the EAP 102B of the program under study here. One of these goals, incidentally, is to have learners narrow down broad topics and subject the refined topic to the scrutiny of the instructor and classmates. Given a larger range of content topics (see subsection 5.1 above), students could more freely gear topic choices and topic refinement toward the disciplines in which they are interested. In other words, learners would be given the "specific conditions" that allow them to take advantage of the learning opportunities provided by the program (Crabbe, 2003, p. 18).

5.3 How can EAP programs better promote the integration of EAP students and international students?

As reported in the results section of this paper, study participants stated that their EAP courses had aided them in integrating into the multicultural environment of a China-based JVU. This finding is significant as previous research has indicated, somewhat anecdotally, that Chinese students tend to stick together both in EMI institutions in China and in study-abroad contexts (see Ross & Chen, 2015; Zou & Jiang, 2021). Still, participants in the present study often felt a lack of motivation to participate in EAP class discussions due to the lack of any

perceived need, and they also felt that they could not "compete" with the international students when they were expected to participate in non-EAP courses. Such feelings would seem to suggest that EAP courses should take on a more active role in the integration of EAP students and international students. The study participants themselves provided useful insights as to what this role might be.

Participants in the present study acknowledged that the "push" given to them by instructors requiring the interviewing of international students was quite beneficial in terms of adapting to a multi-cultural environment. Such interviews, at present, stand as assignments given by only some instructors. Given participants' appreciation of these interviews, the program as a whole might wish to consider making these assignments a standard part of the EAP curriculum, thus providing all EAP students with this added "push." Also, as mentioned in the results section, one student pointed out the useful exchange obtained between EAP students and international students in terms of help with language difficulties. This student and some of her classmates took the initiative to reach out to international students for help with EAP-related issues. Logically, at the program level, such exchanges could be promoted through scheduled classroom visits in which invited international students share difficulties related to Chinese learning and EAP students share difficulties related to EAP matters. In short, since "[s]tudents do not happily and automatically engage in the kind of activity they later deem valuable" (Christison & Krahnke, 1986, p. 75), the program may need to do more to promote activities that have proven to be valuable (see Byram, 2018).

Granted, the above-mentioned responses to the three challenges presented in the study data do not serve as a perfect fix. It must be acknowledged, once again, that no EAP topic is likely to inspire all EAP learners. Efforts to allow for discipline-specific writing in EGAP programs are sure to run into obstacles when it comes to very specific genres such as lab reports. Factors related to cultural, educational, and linguistic backgrounds may continue to prevent EAP students from "competing" and/or socializing with their international classmates (see Keefe & Shi, 2017). The responses mentioned above, however, do indicate possibilities for minimizing the mismatches between students' perceptions and stated program goals.

6. Conclusion

This study has provided a retrospective needs analysis of the EAP program of a China-based JVU by focusing on participants' post-EAP reflections on/perceptions of the relevance of their EAP courses to other courses. In doing so, it has sought to gain insights from students who are in a position to analyze their EAP courses in relation to the overall university curriculum. The assumption throughout the study has been that students' *needs* and *wants* may differ from those predetermined by curriculum designers and that a consideration of students' perceptions may therefore reveal opportunities for program improvement through identification of mismatches between students' perceptions and stated program goals. Specifically, the study has focused on the following: (1) students' overall attitude toward their EAP courses, (2) students' views of their EAP courses in light of other course requirements, (3) students' views of their EAP courses as an aid to adaptation to a multi-cultural environment.

While the study reveals that students have generally positive perceptions of their EAP courses in terms of the three criteria investigated, it also points to some challenges regarding the manner in which EAP courses may most effectively cater to students' interests, the manner

in which EAP courses (specifically, EGAP courses) may most effectively cater to students' discipline-specific needs, and the manner in which EAP courses may better promote the integration of EAP students and international students. Accordingly, suggestions have been given regarding these issues. These suggestions propose an ongoing needs analysis to identify topics of interest to students, a greater emphasis on student selection of writing topics so as to allow for more relevance to discipline-specific needs, and a more active program-level intervention to promote increased interaction between EAP learners and their international counterparts.

In their efforts to prepare learners for study in an EMI environment, EAP programs in JVUs must balance multiple concerns, not the least of which is that of maintaining the standards of the collaborating, foreign institution while at the same time maintaining an acute awareness of the cultural and educational backgrounds of students from the host country. Clearly, then, the findings of a study such as the present one must be considered in light of the overall cultural and institutional context in which the study was carried out. Simply stated, no conclusions based on one set of circumstances may be mapped onto an institution dealing with other circumstances. Nevertheless, the findings of the present study, while pointing out some challenges faced by an EAP program within one China-based JVU, may shed light on possibilities for program development in other, similar institutions with similar circumstances.

Needless to say, the study does have its limitations. As data collection involved only 16 participants, one may only speculate as to the degree to which the findings are representative of the institution's EAP population as a whole. A follow-up, duplicate study (with different participants) or the inclusion of more participants in the original study would of course help ensure the reliability of the results. This limitation, along with the previously mentioned importance of taking into account the particular cultural and institutional context of the study, suggests a need of similar studies both in the current context and in others to increase the generalizability of the findings.

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