

Coping with barriers towards good CEFR level in academic English

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Abstract: This paper explores learning barriers faced by technology lecturers to reach TOEFL ITP/TOEFL iBT/IELTS score equivalent to CEFR level B2 as a minimum standard of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) skills generally expected from an internationally qualified lecturer. Quantitative and qualitative methods conducted the study whose respondents were 48 technology lecturers in an IT institute chosen on purpose collected in four months. The quantitative data includes quantifying the lecturers' perspectives gathered by a closed-ended questionnaire into Likert Scale's composite scores. The qualitative data were the results of open-ended questionnaires. The main finding is lecturers with TOEFL ITP/TOEFL iBT/IELTS score equivalent to below level B2 of CEFR have considered ineffective learning experience as a result of ill-delivered learning methods as their main hindering. The results have implicated to a new learning model suggestion, *Tech-Enhanced 4 Gogy Mixed Models* focusing on Andragogy approaches to boost the lecturers' learning autonomy.

Keywords: CEFR level; methods; perspectives; scores

Introduction

Faculty members also speakers of English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) should pass a minimum cut score international English for Academic Purposes(EAP) tests to continue to a good university for their career (Geisingerand McCormick, 2010; Yasuda, 2015, pp103-104). The scores are used to determine if prospective ESL students have sufficient English-language skills to be admitted (Chapelle, Enright, and Jamieson, 2008; Cho & Bridgeman, 2012). GeneralEAP tests include America's administered TOEFL ITP/TOEFL PBT, TOEFL iBT (Saudelli, 2015, p161) and Britain's IELTS

(Gillet, 2011). Scholarship providers DIKTI, LPDP, BUDI-LN, British Chevening Award and Fulbright, require minimum scores of TOEFL ITP/PBT ≥ 550 (TOEFL iBT ≥ 79) and IELTS band ≥ 6.5 .

The EAP test scores should be linked with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) as the most influential descriptions of language proficiency levels(CEFR; Council of Europe, 2009, p7-16). Carlsen and Deygers (2014) noted B2 level is the most common requirement for admissions into universities employing English as the primary mode of instruction.

Table 1 CEFR level in a link to International EAP test score range

CEFR level	TOEFL ITP score	TOEFL iBT score	IELTS band
A1-A2	337-459	0-60	0-4
B1	460-542	77-78	4.5-5
B2	543-626	79-120	5.5-6.5
C1	627-677	79-120	7.0-9.0

Data of 23 of 48 technology lecturers expected to continue study in an institute in a remote area of

North Sumatera in May 2017 showed results of TOEFL ITP score of 383-547equivalent with CEFR

level A1-B1 impeding them to get prestigious scholarships. It means low academic English level faced by most lecturers in Indonesia (Anwar, 2016) still occurred to them

The barriers to EAP learning have been long studied showing various results. Al-Mahrooqi's (2012, p268) analysis shows Oman students' negative perspectives on EAP learning have adversely impacted on their EAP skills. Ahmadi and Bajelani (2012, p795) noted barriers to EAP learning in Iran includes textbook inefficiency, the teaching methodologies of EAP textbooks and limited teaching time. Borjian's interview with the teachers (2015, p167-171) turns up their Mexican-origin students' low self-confidence and motivation to have been obstacles for their learning academic English. Liu (2016) reveals the respondents of her study, undergraduate Chinese international students at American universities feel struggled with their academic English due to intercultural communications and multi-lingual teaching English barriers.

My preliminary study in June 2017 showed 40 out of 48 or 83.33% of those lecturers have positive perspectives on the role of academic English, so the barrier in reaching targeted CEFR level B2 is far from the lecturers' negative perspective on the importance of English in their career. This study, therefore, attempts to find out specific barriers failing the lecturers to accomplish international EAP test scores equivalent to at least CEFR level B2, including developing learning methods reducing the barriers to be adopted by lecturers with scores below the expected CEFR level, still uncovered in previous studies.

The study yields a descriptive analysis of the obstacles deterring lecturers with EAP test scores of CEFR level A1 to B1 to meet the minimum required CEFR level. The study also offers lecturers below targeted CEFR level blended learning methods based on the perspectives of lecturers with CEFR level B2 to C1 on specific learning methods they have opinionated to have enabled them to accomplish EAP test scores at least at CEFR level B2.

Methods

The 3-point Likert scale was used as the quantitative method to explore the barriers and certain EAP learning methods based on the lecturers' perspectives. The 3-point Likert scale is valid and reliable to measure individuals' attitudes, opinions, and perspectives on a subjective question or statement (Jacoby & Matell, 1971, Riduwan, 2009, p12). To further explore the barriers the qualitative method by analyzing the lecturers' opinions collected from the open-ended questionnaire was conducted.

The research was initiated by disseminating a closed-ended questionnaire on the responses of 48 participants of the study on the role and learning experience of EAP. The respondents were 48 technology lecturers at least holding master's degree from ivy-league national or foreign universities already getting a certain TOEFL ITP/TOEFL iBT/IELTS cut score in 2016. All data were collected from early March to July 2017.

The participants' responses were quantified based on 3-items Likert Scale criteria's composite score for the percentage (%) index and categorized by interval measurement formula to yield interpretations to the lecturers' perspectives. The results were tabulated to simplify analysis for generalization (Tika, 2005, p66). The lecturers' qualitative opinions on barriers to EAP learning were filtered and tabulated to show the proportion.

Findings and Discussion

Primary barriers to achieving an international EAP test cut score at CEFR level B2 and how to cope with it

First, this study showed lecturers sorted by their TOEFL ITP/TOEFL iBT/IELTS score range linked to CEFR level have various perspectives and opinions on the barriers to learning EAP described on Table 2-3.

Table 2. The perspective of lecturers on barriers in learning EAP to reach CEFR level B2

Barriers	A1-A2		B1		B2		C1	
	N =9		N =20		N =13		N =6	
	%	Persp.	%	Persp.	%	Persp.	%	Persp.
1. Due to instructors' directing the learning process with traditional learning methods (-)	44.44	Neutral 1	53.33	Neutral	41.03	Neutral 1	72.22	Positive
2. Due to instructors' choosing improper teaching methods to deliver materials (-)	48.15	Neutral 1	50	Neutral 1	43.60	Neutral 1	72.22	Positive
3. Due to ineffective learning methods for reaching high TOEFL/IELTS scores (-)	55.56	Neutral 1	61.67	Neutral 1	74.40	Positive	55.56	Neutral 1

Lecturers level A1 to B2 gave neutral responses on traditional methods of instructors' directing the learning process and their choosing teaching methods, shown by the percentage index scaled point of 44.44% - 48.15%, 50% - 53.33% and 41.03-43.60 respectively, representing 50% of each group has deemed ineffective learning experience to help them score high on EAP international tests was due to the instructors' failures.

More specifically, 50% of lecturers level A1 to B1 by the group neutral perspectives on the lack of ineffective learning methods for reaching high TOEFL/IELTS scores showed with percentage index

scaled point of 55.56% and 61.67% have negative perspectives on numerous academic English learning methods ever applied. However, lecturer level B2 disagreed with a statement no. Three interpreted as positive perspective with index scaled point of 74.40%.

Unlike their CEFR level, A to B colleagues, all lecturers level C1, with percentage index scaled point of 72.22% disagreed with a statement no. 1-2 interpreted as their positive views on the instructors' competency. However, the index scaled point of 55.56% showing neutral perspective on statement 3 indicating 50% of them consider the failure for EAP international tests' scores equivalent CEFR level B2 at least due to suitable learning methods.

Table 3. Lecturers' opinions on the barriers for CEFR level B2

Barriers	A1-A2 (N = 9)	B1 (N = 20)	B2 (N =13)	C1 (N =6)
	%	%	%	%
Time constraints	44.44	30	38.5	16.67
Incompetent instructors	11.11	20	15.4	0
No intensive EAP classes	33.33	15	30.8	0
Limited technology	11.11	50	76.9	0
No peer groups	55.56	25	30.8	83.33
Low motivation	22.22	25	30.8	16.67
No English competitions	11.11	5	7.69	0

Based on the content analysis of lecturers' opinion, 5 of 9 lecturers level A (55.56%) and 5 of 6 lecturers level C1 (83.33%) marked that no peer groups for collaborative studying the obstacle, while 10 of 20 lecturers level B1 (50%) and 10 of 13 lecturers level B2 (76.9%) detail the main barrier is learning-enhancing technology shortage. Time constraint becomes the second barrier noted by 4 of 9 lecturers level A (44.44%), 6 of 20 lecturers B1 (30%) and 5 of 13 lecturers B2 (38.5%).

Thus, the challenge is to discover a general learning framework covering methods helping lecturers with CEFR level below B1 to increase their score. The positive perspectives of lecturers with CEFR level B2-C1 on available learning methods can be used to form the more effective learning framework.

Table 4. Perspectives of 14 lecturers with TOEFL ITP/ TOEFL iBT /IELTS score range 550 - 677/ 79- 120/6.5 – 9.0 on the effectiveness of EAP learning methods

Model	Learning Methods and Models	% index	Lecturer's Perspective
Pedagogy	Oral Approach	92.86	(+)
	Direct Method	90.48	(+)
	Audio-Lingual Method	69.05	(+)
	Handbook based instruction	66.67	Neutral
	Grammar Translation Method/Pattern Drills	64.3	Neutral
	Translation Method	42.86	Neutral
	Extensive and Intensive Reading Strategy	100	(+)
Andragogy	Situated and Embodied Cognition Model	95.24	(+)
	Lexical Approach	88.09	(+)
	Collaborative learning	88.09	(+)
	Integrative learning	83.33	(+)
	Talking Education	80.95	(+)
	Non-technology enhanced independent	73.80	(+)
	Technology-enhanced learning instruction	90.48	(+)
	Competency-based Instruction	100	(+)

Table 4 shows these lecturers count Andragogy methods to have been very positive on improving their English academic skills as most of them have ticked methods carried out in the models yielding index of 73.80%-95.24%. Meanwhile, CBI mixing the four stages models are regarded as positive to improve English academic skills at the index at 100%.

Unlike lecturers level A1 -B2, they perceive learning by handbook method effect neutrally on

advancing their English skills at the index of 66.67%. They perceive non-technology enhanced instruction, indexed at 73.80%, to be a lot less useful than technology-enhanced learning indexed of 90.48% despite its similar individualized learning oriented. The effectiveness of active participation in authentic situations based on social interactions approach, especially for listening and speaking like Situated and Embodied Cognition Model, Integrative Learning, and Lexical Approach has been strongly agreed at index 83.33% - 95.24%.

However, this group also agrees with the effectiveness of improving listening and speaking using authentic audios and videos at the high index of 80.95% through lower than Situated method at the index of 95.24%.

Two pedagogic methods Direct Method and Oral Approach indexed of 90.48%-92.86% yet are considered to have been utterly effective at helping their academic English listening and speaking skills. High index is particularly tagged on methods for increasing speaking skills as Oral Approach indexed of 92.86% indicating these lecturers tend also to practice speaking by drilling particular sentence patterns. However, the effectiveness of pedagogic methods concerning grammar acquisition like Grammar Translation Methods/Pattern Drills has been neutrally perceived with the index at 64.3%. Translation Method as a pedagogic reading learning method is very low in its efficacy indexed at 42.86% much less impactful than andragogy practice Extensive and Intensive Reading indexed at 100%, though it is still at neutral perspective.

Based on the perspectives of lecturers whose international academic English test scores have met the minimum requirements of the institution, scholarships' providers and CEFR level, the learning framework adopted by other lecturers should focus on Andragogy methods in a networked education coined as Tech-Enhanced 4 Gogy Mixed Models.

It is a blend of Andragogy methods: Collaborative learning, Lexical Approach, Talking Education, Situated and Embodied Cognition Model and be enhanced with the most up-to-date technology network and products to promote learner's autonomy and creativity. As Lead beater (2008), Redecker et al. (2011), and Ó Grádaigh (2014) arguments in Scott (2015) the learning designs fit the 21st century education facilitate new ways for creativity and innovation taking place in a blended way between school and connectives system (online/open education) through peers, inter-generational partnerships and community relationships. Networked education will enable learners to participate in more personalized and equitable learning opportunities, through collaboration with their

communities and teams of learners separated by time and distance.

Conclusion

The results reveal fruitless learning experience as a result of improper EAP learning methods teaching by incapable instructors, no peer groups for collaborative studies and limited technology-friendly learning tools as the main barriers for some groups of technology lecturers in a technology institute at a remote area to reach international EAP test scores at least of CEFR level B2.

The study contributes for an alternative learning innovation proven effective for adult learners, whose professional jobs are not in social sciences and English to meet even surpass the minimum internationally recognized EAP test cut scores indicating the general English competence of an EFL. However, a further study like control and experiment classes with the below expected CEFR lecturers as the learners should be conducted for higher validity on the effectiveness of the new learning framework.

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