

DESIGNING EAP COURSES: BRIDGING STUDENT NEEDS
AND ACADEMIC DEMANDS

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The design of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses is crucial for bridging the gap between the diverse needs of students and the academic demands they face. Needs-based course design tailored to specific disciplines effectively aligns language instruction with academic goals, ensuring students gain the skills necessary for both oral and written communication in their fields. This paper explores the transition from traditional to needs-driven EAP syllabi, focusing on their tailored approach and adaptability for master’s students.

Traditional EAP courses often rely on general academic skills and materials unrelated to students’ specific fields of study, leading to a mismatch between course content and students’ academic or professional requirements (Spector-Cohen et al., 2001). Earlier research by Spector-Cohen et al. (2001) illustrates the effectiveness of Complementary Pyramid Syllabus Design (CPSD). This needs-based syllabus integrates discrete language instruction, reading strategies, academic genres, and criterion tasks. These components allow instructors to adjust course focus based on student proficiency and field-specific demands, creating a meaningful learning experience (Spector-Cohen et al., 2001).

When considering linguistic, cultural, and experiential learning aspects, researchers support the idea of integrative EAP curricula. Carter (2023) advocates for collaborative learning tasks, experiential opportunities, and community connections to improve learning. These elements are particularly relevant for master’s students, who must adapt to complex academic cultures. For example, Skipp (2024) highlights the lack of structured guidance on encouraging communication and collaboration across fields. The study introduces a tool based on Karl Maton's Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) to address this issue. The tool enables students to adapt their discipline-specific language and knowledge to communicate effectively with diverse audiences, fostering awareness of discipline interdependencies while maintaining disciplinary identity (Skipp, 2024).

In addition, an effective EAP syllabus prioritizes specificity by aligning with English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) principles, which emphasize the unique discourse, genres, and literacies of individual disciplines. For instance, Hulme

(2021) highlights the importance of collaboration with subject specialists in designing ESAP courses, enabling instructors to integrate discipline-specific content. Similarly, Yeung and Mah (2023) describe a negotiated syllabus for internationally educated nurses that integrates nursing-related themes, illustrating the value of learner input in shaping curricula. Through a case study of ESAP practices in the Economics Sciences department, Hennoun (2023) explores the interplay between teacher practices, curriculum design, and student experiences. The study discusses the challenges teachers face, including the absence of standardized ESAP materials and the complexities of conducting needs analysis. Findings note that teachers’ personal experiences and professional development significantly shape curriculum design, affecting both course effectiveness and student motivation (Hennoun, 2023).

In conclusion, creating effective, needs-driven EAP courses for master’s students requires a balanced approach combining academic depth and practical relevance. We suggest that educators need to prioritize ESAP over EAP courses to better meet the unique needs of students in specialized academic fields. By focusing on the specific language and skills required in particular disciplines, ESAP courses can provide more targeted and effective support, helping students succeed in their academic and professional careers. This approach ensures that the curriculum is aligned with the practical demands of each discipline, making the learning experience more relevant and impactful for students.

References

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