

RGC Ref. No.: <u>UGC/FDS12/H02/15</u> (please insert ref. above)
--

**RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR**

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)

Completion Report

(for completed projects only)

<p><u>Submission Deadlines:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Auditor's report with unspent balance, if any: within <u>six</u> months of the approved project completion date. 2. Completion report: within <u>12</u> months of the approved project completion date.
--

Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)

1. Project Title

Academic discourse socialization of EFL students: A holistic approach to teaching speaking for academic purposes in a self-financing institute in Hong Kong

2. Investigator(s) And Academic Department(s) / Unit(s) Involved

Research Team	Name / Post	Unit / Department / Institution
Principal Investigator	MAK, Ho-yan Sabina	Centennial College
Co-Investigator(s)	NA	
Others	NA	

3. Project Duration

	Original	Revised	Date of RGC / Institution Approval <i>(must be quoted)</i>
Project Start Date	1 Jan 2016	NA	
Project Completion Date	30 June 2018	NA	
Duration <i>(in month)</i>	30 months	NA	
Deadline for Submission of Completion Report	30 June 2019	NA	

Part B: The Final Report

5. Project Objectives

5.1 Objectives as per original application

1. To design an EAP course on enhancing learners’ competence for mastering academic discourses, catering for the needs of the undergraduates in Hong Kong’s self-financing degree sector;
2. To investigate the extent to which the participants are socialized into oral academic discourses in the course;
3. To investigate the learners’ perceptions of their roles in the academic communities, identities, and willingness to communicate, and if there is any change in the course;
4. To investigate the participants’ perception of various course components on their development, and the potential impact on their participation in opinion-exchange activities in other content-based courses; and
5. To investigate how students of different levels of proficiency and disciplines would respond and react in the above areas.

5.2 Revised objectives

Date of approval from the RGC: NA

Reasons for the change:

5.3 Realisation of the objectives

(Maximum 1 page; please state how and to what extent the project objectives have been achieved; give reasons for under-achievements and outline attempts to overcome problems, if any)

The five project objectives have been achieved:

Objective 1 (Phase 1):

A needs analysis for EAP course design was conducted and the results were reported in the *Applied Linguistics Association of Australia (ALAA) Conference* (Objective 1). Quantitative and qualitative data (e.g. questionnaires and semi-structured interviews) were collected from the third-year undergraduates and their content-based course instructors in the College. Both the students' and the instructors' perceptions of oral academic skills (e.g. presentation), their expected roles in oral academic activities and their perceived problems/ challenges were investigated. Drawing on the findings, a framework for EAP course design catering for the needs of the students was developed, the details of which were published in a peer-reviewed book chapter, entitled, "Developing academic presentation competence in EAP classroom."

Objectives 2-5 (Phases 2-4):

An advanced EAP speaking course, developed based on the results of the needs analysis, was then implemented. This compulsory course was designed for senior undergraduates of all disciplines who had completed two introductory EAP courses in the College. To investigate to what extent the participants were socialised into oral academic discourses (Objectives 2 & 5), their perceptions of their roles, identities and willingness to communicate in the course (Objectives 3 & 5), an evaluation of the oral performances of all the students enrolled in the course (N=81) was conducted both in the beginning and at the end of the course, and questionnaires on their perceptions of oral academic skills and expected roles were administered. In addition, a multiple-case study of 27 students from different disciplines and of various proficiency levels were conducted, including classroom observations and semi-structured interviews carried out in the beginning, during, and at the end of the EAP course as well as in the following semesters.

The students' perception of the impacts of various course components on their development and their participation in opinion-exchange activities (e.g. presentation, discussion) in other content-based courses were also investigated, involving data collected from classroom observations about students' participation and performances in these activities in both the EAP course and content-based courses, pre- and post-course questionnaires, semi-structured follow-up interviews and the participants' written reflections in self- and peer-evaluations, assessment materials and visual aids used in presentations (Objectives 4 & 5).

The results regarding Objectives 2-5 were reported in two international conferences in the U.S.A and Singapore (*TESOL International Convention & English Language Expo* and *53rd RELC International Conference*). A journal article reporting the findings of the study has also been submitted for review. Overall, the findings indicated that academic language socialisation had taken place in the course of the study; statistically significant improvement was found in the oral presentation performances of the three proficiency groups (high achievers, average-learners and low-achievers) at the end of the EAP course. Positive changes in the participants' perceptions of their roles, identities and willingness to communicate were identified, and the transfer of learning from the EAP to other content-based courses was reported to have taken place. The effective EAP course components (e.g. discourse-analysis tasks, modes of peer and teacher feedback) perceived by the participants were also identified. The details of the findings are reported in Section 6.1.

5.1 Summary of objectives addressed to date

Objectives <i>(as per 5.1/5.2 above)</i>	Addressed <i>(please tick)</i>	Percentage Achieved <i>(please estimate)</i>
1. To design an EAP course on enhancing learners' competence for mastering academic discourses, catering for the needs of the undergraduates in Hong Kong's self-financing degree sector	✓Completed	100%
2. To investigate the extent to which the participants are socialized into oral academic discourses in the course	✓Completed	100%
3. To investigate the learners' perceptions of their roles in the academic communities, identities, and willingness to communicate, and if there is any change in the course;	✓Completed	100%
4. To investigate the participants' perception of various course components on their development, and the potential impact on their participation in opinion-exchange activities in other content-based courses	✓Completed	100%
5. To investigate how students of different levels of proficiency and disciplines would respond and react in the above areas	✓Completed	100%

6. Research Outcome

6.1 Major findings and research outcome

(Maximum 1 page; please make reference to Part C where necessary)

Needs analysis for EAP course design (Objective 1):

The findings revealed a gap between students and their content-based course instructors in understanding their expected roles and performance abilities, gaps in student understanding of the performance requirements of EAP and content-based courses, and weaknesses in their use of relevant linguistic and discourse features when expressing their own voice on a topic (e.g. demonstrating their stance, interpretation and original thoughts with academic support). It was found that the students needed more training on:

- Research and metacognitive strategies for conducting in-depth analysis
- Structuring the results of analysis and presenting them with a clear flow of ideas to facilitate audience's comprehension
- Delivery for enhanced audience communication
- Speaking in a conversational / participatory style

An EAP instruction framework for developing ESL/EFL learner competence in oral academic tasks and the assessment rubrics were also developed.

Implementation of the designated EAP course (Objectives 2-5)

The findings indicated that academic language socialisation had taken place in the course of the study. The results of the pre- and post-course performance tests showed that all the three proficiency groups, consisting of students from different disciplines, improved significantly in all

the three areas of academic presentation competence: *Content & organisation, Language use & pronunciation, and Fluency & visual aids*. Their improvement in the area of *Content & organisation*, in particular, demonstrated their increased abilities to demonstrate their stance, deliver quality content and give a logical flow of ideas.

The findings of the multiple-case study further revealed positive changes in their identities and expected roles in engaging in oral academic discourses (e.g. presentations and discussions) and increased willingness to communicate in opinion-exchange activities. In the beginning of the EAP course, most participants were not prepared to adopt roles expected by the academic community, such as their roles as relative experts in generating new ideas or knowledge and in facilitating audience comprehension. As they learnt more presentation and discussion skills, their identities as relative experts began to be constructed and reinforced through the course activities.

The post-course questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews showed some effective EAP course activities perceived by the participants: awareness-raising activities, discourse-analysis tasks, follow-up speaking practice and audience-oriented activities, which are aimed to make learners aware of the gaps in their knowledge, understand how the rhetorical structure, linguistic and discourse features of the genre are applied to achieve the expected outcomes and develop their skills in facilitating audience comprehension. Feedback activities that are aligned with the assessment outcomes and that provide opportunities for face-to-face interactions were reported to be useful in raising their awareness of the audience's needs and developing quality content. All participants reported use of some skills and strategies learnt in the course. Transfer of learning from the EAP course to other content-based courses was also reported, although the extent to which it took place was found to be influenced by their perceived practice in their disciplines, the assessment requirements given in their content-based courses, learning experiences and feedback gained on the application of the skills, and their own education values.

6.2 Potential for further development of the research and the proposed course of action (*Maximum half a page*)

This study focused on a holistic approach to teaching speaking for academic purposes; a pedagogical framework was developed and adopted in the design of an EAP course in the study. Significant improvement in the participants' oral academic performances was found at the end of the course, and various components and types of activities were perceived to be effective by the participants. Future research could focus on investigating the effectiveness of individual task types or course components, particularly those that aim to develop learners' ability in the use of relevant linguistic and discourse features in expressing their own voice on a topic. The applicability of the pedagogical framework in other ESL/ EFL contexts could also be explored.

7. Layman's Summary

(Describe in layman's language the nature, significance and value of the research project, in no more than 200 words)

To acquire competence in oral academic discourses (e.g. presentations), university students not only have to learn about the conventions and practices of their discourse communities but also engage in a learning process, involving exchange of opinions, negotiation of meaning and interactions with peers and experts (e.g. instructors); it is a dynamic, complex, and socially-constructed process by nature. While research on ESL learners in English-speaking countries has been conducted recently, little is still known about how undergraduates are socialized into oral academic discourses in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, where there are relatively fewer opportunities for exposure to and scaffolding by English-speaking peers, and its relationship with English for academic purposes (EAP) course design. To fill this gap, this study investigated how a group of EFL undergraduates were socialized into oral academic discourses and the potential impacts of an EAP course, developed based on a holistic approach to teaching of speaking, on their development in a self-financing institute in Hong Kong. The findings from the quantitative and qualitative data revealed their learning needs and challenges, the perceived effective task types, positive changes in their identities and perceived roles in oral academic activities and the factors influencing learning transfer.

Part C: Research Output**8. Peer-Reviewed Journal Publication(s) Arising Directly From This Research Project**

(Please attach a copy of the publication and/or the letter of acceptance if not yet submitted in the previous progress report(s). All listed publications must acknowledge RGC's funding support by quoting the specific grant reference.)

The Latest Status of Publications				Author(s) (denote the corresponding author with an asterisk*)	Title and Journal / Book (with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified)	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this Report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the institutional repository (Yes or No)
Year of Publication	Year of Acceptance (For paper accepted but not yet published)	Under Review	Under Preparation (optional)						
2018				Mak, Sabina Ho-yan*	“Developing academic presentation competence in EAP classroom.” In L.-T. Wong & W. L. H. Wong (Eds.), <i>Teaching and learning English for academic purposes: Current research and practices</i> . Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publishers.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
		2019		Mak, Sabina Ho-yan*	“Needs analysis of EFL/ESL learners in developing academic presentation competence” (Journal article)	No	Yes	Yes	No

9. Recognized International Conference(s) In Which Paper(s) Related To This Research Project Was / Were Delivered

(Please attach a copy of each conference abstract)

Month / Year / Place	Title	Conference Name	Submitted to RGC <i>(indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)</i>	Attached to this Report <i>(Yes or No)</i>	Acknowledged the Support of RGC <i>(Yes or No)</i>	Accessible from the institutional repository <i>(Yes or No)</i>
Dec 2016	Developing EFL learners' competence in oral academic discourses	Applied Linguistics Association of Australia (ALAA) Conference 2016	Yes (Abstract submitted in the progress report Dec 2016)	No	Yes	Yes
Mar 2017	Developing identity in oral academic discourses in an EFL context	TESOL International Convention & English Language Expo	Yes (Abstract submitted in the progress report Dec 2017)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mar 2018	A genre-based approach to developing academic presentation competence in an EAP classroom	53 rd RELC International Conference	In this report	Yes	Yes	Yes

10. Whether Research Experience And New Knowledge Has Been Transferred / Has Contributed To Teaching And Learning

(Please elaborate)

The results of the needs analysis conducted in the study were applied into the design of an advanced EAP speaking course for the undergraduates in the College. Since then, the designated speaking course has been offered as a compulsory course for all undergraduates at the College. The teaching methodology and course materials were shared with other teachers, such as in the form of seminar, and some of the task types and materials have also been adopted into the design of other EAP courses in the College. The student participants have also reported transfer of learning from the EAP course to other content-based courses.

The results of the study and the pedagogical framework for EAP course design developed in this study were reported and shared with EAP teachers and professionals in international conferences. Positive feedback and reports on the potential impacts on their teaching were received from teachers in other Asian countries, such as Singapore.

11. Student(s) Trained*(Please attach a copy of the title page of the thesis)*

Name	Degree Registered for	Date of Registration	Date of Thesis Submission / Graduation
NA			

12. Other Impact*(e.g. award of patents or prizes, collaboration with other research institutions, technology transfer, teaching enhancement, etc.)*

The research project helped to cultivate a research atmosphere in the College. Several undergraduates and graduates were trained as part-time or full-time research assistants throughout the project.

13. Public Access Of Completion Report*(Please specify the information, if any, that cannot be provided for public access and give the reasons.)*

Information that Cannot Be Provided for Public Access	Reasons
Appendices: 1. Published book chapter 2. PowerPoint slides of conference presentations 3. Information on the paper submitted for review	<p>The publisher of the book chapter has not granted the right for online public access. However, the public can gain access to it from the PI's home institute.</p> <p>The data presented in the conferences have been/ will be published in papers and available for public access. The paper submitted has to undergo a double-blind peer-review process. Anonymity has to be ensured.</p>

**RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR**

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)

Completion Report - Attachment

(for completed projects only)

RGC Ref. No.: UGC/FDS12/H02/15

Principal Investigator: MAK, Ho Yan

Project Title: Academic discourse socialization of EFL students: A holistic approach to teaching speaking for academic purposes in a self-financing institute in Hong Kong

Statistics on Research Outputs

	Peer-reviewed Journal Publications	Conference Papers	Scholarly Books, Monographs and Chapters	Patents Awarded	Other Research Outputs (Please specify)
No. of outputs arising directly from this research project [or conference]	1	3	1	NA	NA