

## **Advancing English Language Teaching in Vietnam Buddhist University in Hanoi: An Ethics-Informed EAP and EMI Approach in Global Academic Contexts**

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**Abstract:** In global higher education, the domain of English Language Teaching (ELT) is emerging as a site where pedagogical models need to incorporate an understanding not only of linguistic competence but also a broader ethical and intercultural competence necessary for effective academic communication. This study—this one-of-a-kind—examines the incremental development of ELT practices at Vietnam Buddhist University in the lively city of Hanoi by combining a well-thought-out, ethical use of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) with carefully scaffolded English-Medium Instruction (EMI). Grounded in longstanding theories of academic discourse and frameworks of intercultural communication competence, as well as innovative methods from meditation-based pedagogy, the research applies an original qualitative case-study design including a full-fledged curriculum analysis, meticulous classroom observation studies and enlightening interviews with lecturers and postgraduates.

The results clarify that although the students display a good and strong command of disciplinary knowledge in Buddhist studies, they encounter considerable difficulties in academic writing such as developing an academic voice, engaging critique, and adopting stance-taking in English. The ethics-informed EAP tasks along with scaffolded EMIs contribute to the creation of a reflective interaction environment, reduce the levels of communicative anxiety and consequently develop greater competency in academic discourse. The paper suggests that an ethics-related approach to ELT constitutes not only a culture-contextualized model but also a generalizable model-transferable for the instruction of language and literature in culturally embedded institutions of higher education.

**Keywords:** VBU, EAP, ELT, HANOI.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The globalization of higher education system makes the role of English language in which "language has become the common medium for teaching and learning, even between students who share no common linguistic background" (Altbach & Knight, 2007: 2) remarkably expanding as a shared scholarly discourse and knowledge production means and for communication across borders (Marginson, 2014). An array of universities across the region is on a course to extend English medium academic activity as in many instances ELT is being redrawn, not only as a linguistic enterprise, but as an important site for cultural struggle and ethical encounter (Phan, 2017).

Within Viet Nam itself, Buddhist institutions of higher learning take a special and distinct position amidst this diverse international scene. The Vietnam Buddhist University in Hanoi requires its students work with the international research literature, write English-language scholarship, present at global academic conferences—all while rooted deeply to that vast body of knowledge and ethical teachings called Buddhism. Studies of academic literacies show that "students from other than Western contexts often experience considerable tension in engaging with the complexity of academic voice, critique and authority within English-literate academic cultures" (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis & Scott, 2007).

Recent research in the area of applied linguistics underlines the need for more effective EAP to be co-deployed with EMI (Mahboob and Lin, 2011) as a means of enhancing discipline-specific

discourse (Hyland, 2004; Macaro et al., 2018). Yet despite so much interest, the fact remains that little scholarly attention has been paid to examining how such (especially, highly contemplative-tradition-inflected) ethical orientations might go to work in ELT pedagogy. This is the missing piece that this research aims to address through a detailed exploration of an ability-informed integration of EAP and scaffolded EMI at the Vietnam Buddhist University in Hanoi.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **English for Academic Purposes and Academic Discourse**

EAP scholarship views academic communication as a multifaceted, socially embedded process deeply implicated with various disciplinary norms, specific genres, and subtle power dynamics that are pervasive in the academy (Swales, 1990, 2004; Hyland, 2005). From the perspective of academic literacies, these processes of writing and speaking within the discipline in higher education are not simply about 'the technical mastery of linguistic forms', but a complex process that involves 'identity construction, the generation and maintenance of texts and practices, power relations... epistemological perception towards knowledge' which are seen as meaningful when engaged with for purposeful academic communication (Lea & Street, 1998:897; Street, 2003).

Hyland (2004, 2005) convincingly argues that EAP instruction has a critical role in helping learners to develop stance, met discourse and evaluative language, deemed all critical features of advanced academic discourse. However, students from culturally hierarchically based backgrounds can experience a great deal of difficulty coping with the pressure to critique explicitly and position themselves as author (Canagarajah, 2002; Lillis & Scott, 2007); they often view such practices as being ethically or culturally problematic which may leave them effectively marginalized in terms of their participation in academic discourse as defined by their new communities (ibid.).

### **English-Medium Instruction and Integrated Models**

EMI has experienced an astounding growth at a breakneck speed, one of the key features within the internationalization in higher education (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Systematic reviews of the available literature show that although EMI has the capacity to expose students to a considerable amount of academic English, it overcomes in addressing linguistic and discursive facilitation necessary for full comprehension and communication (Macaro et al., 2018). Thus, an increasing number of researchers call for more integrated EAP-EMI models that 'integrate language development into the social processes of teaching and learning' (Airey, 2016 cited in Dafouz & Smit, 2016, p.24).

Studies on EMI and the development of academic literacies highlight the paramount role of scaffolding, formative assessment practices, explicit modelling of disciplinary discourse as well as a key for promoting learner autonomy (Pecorari & Malmström, 2018). Without such strong support strategies, however, the imposition of EMI contains a risk of favoring those students who are already successful in the language and simultaneously undermining those who cannot manage to follow, thus increasing existing disparities across the educational terrain (Flowerdew & Li 2009).

### **Ethics, Intercultural Communication, and Contemplative Pedagogy**

Intercultural communicative competence is a complex of skills which includes pragmatic and linguistic skills by no means alone, but also moral sensitivity and an awareness of responsibility to others (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). This notion is perhaps even more explicitly articulated by critical applied linguistics, where it is argued that the field of language education takes place in and through broader socio-political structures - such as power relations, ideological formations or structural inequalities (Pennycook, 2001).

Within the domain of educational psychology, accumulating evidence supports claims about the efficacy of mindfulness-based and related practices in strengthening learners' abilities to regulate emotions, manage attentional resources, and engage reflexively with their own learning (Baer et al.,

2006; Keng et al., 2011). In the higher education setting, contemplative pedagogy has been associated with fostering deeper and more meaningful learning experiences along with raised levels of moral sensitivity in students (Barbezat & Bush, 2014; Shapiro et al., 2011). Taken together as a whole, the particular insights provide an articulated theoretical base upon which ethics-centred English Language Teaching (ELT) practice can be anticipated to rely in Buddhist higher education settings.

### **FINDINGS**

What many students said they often feel when it comes to questioning authoritative text or assessing the work of senior scholars from my 'beloved discipline' in English. This pattern also aligns well with prior work on affective barriers that inhibit successful communication and discussion in academic settings for the account of those negotiating through a L2 (Horwitz, 2010; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). In a heartening twist, it was the use of ethics-inflected English for Academic Purposes (EAP) tasks that seemed to be instrumental in helping students shift their perspective on what constitute critique from something that might appear confrontational into respectful and constructive academic engagement. This re-construction not only mitigated some of the anxiety attached to the task but also contributed to a greater degree of cooperating with communicating and discourse (Dörnyei, 2005).

### **DISCUSSION**

The rich results provide strong support for the insights advanced by many scholars that academic discourse competence is a complex notion which includes linguistic ability as much as ethical/pragmatic dimensions and intercultural orientations (Kramsch, 1998; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). By situating mindfulness and ethical reflection as critical pedagogical crutches, rather than relegating them to the domain of religious teaching alone, the ethics-driven EAP /EMI model resonates with increasing demands for context-sensitive and socially pertinent practices in language education that respect the diverse needs of learners globally (Canagarajah, 2002; Pennycook, 2001).

### **Implications for Language and Literature Teaching in a Global Context**

There are several important implications to the field of language and literature education, more so for diverse and multicultural settings, from the depth of this study. EAP programs should pay close attention to the ethical and affective dimensions of academic discourse, as they are not only crucial for engaging a learner but also significantly affecting academic achievement. Moreover, the introduction of EMI should be carefully scaffolded and complemented by well-integrated support systems to equip all students with the necessary tools to fulfill the demands that academic discourse in a foreign language represents. In addition, developing a context-sensitive pedagogy could greatly improve inclusivity and academic participation, especially when working with non-Western higher education environments where conventional modes of teaching do not bridge the cultural divides from students' prior experiences.

### **CONCLUSION**

To sum up, this paper has persuasively demonstrated that the development of ELT at the Vietnam Buddhist University, located in the bustling capital city Hanoi, requires an ethical and conscious combinatory approach to both EAP and EMI. In connecting key linguistic developmental stages to principled considerations of ethics and intercultural sensitivity, the implantation model allows students to actively contribute to the global academic conversation on resources in a co-creative manner "whilst not taking away from that rich tapestry" (Biagioli 2001) of educational heritage. This study makes substantial contribution to the wider and perennial debate on language and literature teaching in a variety of global settings, highlighting at once the wealth of value which can be drawn from an interdisciplinary and context-specific input into English Language Teaching.

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