

# Chinese EAP teachers' graduate-level English academic writing instruction and their professional development

**Yongyan Li & Xiaohao Ma**

University of Hong Kong (Hong Kong, China), Jilin University (China)  
yongyan@hku.hk, xiaohao@jlu.edu.cn

## Abstract

In China, it has been widely recognized that graduate students urgently need to develop capabilities in engaging in academic communication at the international level, above all through writing and publishing their research in English. This educational need has stimulated the growth of EAP and the teaching of English academic writing (EAW) to graduate students across disciplines at Chinese universities. In this paper we report an interview-based study which focused on understanding Chinese emerging EAP teachers' graduate-level EAW instruction and their endeavors of professional development (PD). Our study adds to the limited existing literature on EAP practitioners' contextualized teaching practices and their professional development, and generates insights that can be drawn upon by EAP professionals in other contexts.

**Keywords:** graduate writing support; teaching academic writing to graduate students; transition from general English to EAP; EAP teachers' education and professional development.

## Resumen

*La escritura académica en inglés en niveles de posgrado: acerca de la instrucción y desarrollo profesional de los profesores chinos de inglés para fines académicos*

En China está ampliamente reconocida la urgente necesidad que tienen los estudiantes de posgrado de desarrollar capacidades de comunicación académica a nivel internacional, sobre todo por medio de la redacción y publicación de su investigación en inglés. Esta necesidad educativa ha alentado el auge del inglés para fines académicos y de la enseñanza de la escritura académica en inglés para

estudiantes de posgrado de multitud de disciplinas en las universidades chinas. En este artículo ofrecemos los resultados de un estudio basado en una serie de entrevistas que trata de comprender cómo se produce la instrucción de la escritura académica en inglés en el nivel de posgrado llevada a cabo por profesores chinos noveles en la enseñanza del inglés para fines académicos y cuáles son los esfuerzos que realizan en su desarrollo profesional. Nuestro estudio ofrece una aportación a la escasa bibliografía acerca de las prácticas docentes contextualizadas de los profesionales de inglés para fines académicos y de su desarrollo profesional y ofrece conocimientos de los que pueden servirse los profesionales del inglés para fines académicos en otros contextos.

**Palabras clave:** apoyo en la escritura en posgrado; enseñanza de escritura académica para estudiantes de posgrado; transición del inglés general al inglés para fines académicos; educación y desarrollo profesional de los profesores de inglés para fines académicos.

## 1. Introduction

In parts of Asia such as China, EAP and English academic writing (EAW) instruction for students across disciplines are largely absent in the traditional English curriculum. However, the high expectations on students and academics to publish internationally have stimulated the rise of EAP (Cheng, 2016) together with EAW instruction in particular for graduate students (Li & Ma, 2018). Insights into graduate-level EAW instruction and the emerging EAP teachers' professional development (PD), as we aim to obtain through an interview-based study to be reported in this paper, will have wider implications beyond the local story. In the following, we will first outline relevant literature and sketch the context to provide a rationale for our study.

There has been a burgeoning of reports on courses designed to teach academic writing to graduate students, featuring a variety of geographical and institutional contexts. One understanding that emerged from these reports is that institutional support is crucial for the initiation and sustainable provision of graduate writing support. A holistic institutional response can be deterred by managers failing to understand language teachers' work or graduate students' needs for formal instruction on academic writing (beyond an apprenticeship model) (Chanock, 2017; Simpson, Caplan, Cox, & Phillips, 2016). Conversely, where there is recognition of the linkage between writing instruction and a university's overall mission, a system-level approach and faculty-level initiatives are more likely to be seen (Gustafsson, Eriksson &

Karlsson, 2016; Lappalainen, 2016; Starfield, 2016). In addition, within an institutional context, it seems it is often the language teachers/academic literacy staff who lead the local commitment to academic support for graduate students, irrespective of their training background (ESP/EAP, TESOL, writing or rhetoric studies, language studies, or even literature) and their institutional location (Language/Writing Centre or a language education department). They face various challenges; but having to teach mixed-disciplines classes is a challenge they commonly face (Gustafsson et al., 2016; Lappalainen, 2016).

In regard to the types of graduate-level writing instruction, apart from the setups that provide thesis/dissertation writing support (Starfield, 2016), an increasing number of courses are designed to build students' capacity in research writing or writing for publication, targeting in particular doctoral students (e.g. Aranha, 2009; Huang, 2014; Lappalainen, 2016). The courses often adopt genre-based pedagogies to raise students' rhetorical consciousness of the research article genre, with Swales and Feak's book *Academic Writing for Graduate Students* (1994/2012) sometimes used as a course text (Aranha, 2009; Huang, 2014). At the same time, journal articles from the students' own disciplines (Cheng, 2018), sometimes incorporating corpus methods (Burgess, Martín, & Balasanyan, 2019; Cargill, Gao, Wang, & O'Connor, 2018; León Pérez & Martín-Martín, 2016), are employed as a crucial source of class material, for students' "individualised learning" (Costley & Flowerdew, 2017: 5) in a heterogeneous class. Other than the instruction oriented to research writing or writing for publication in students' disciplines, there are also reports of writing instruction focusing on providing support to students' (including international students') graduate study (e.g. Fredericksen & Mangelsdorf, 2014; Tribble & Wingate, 2013). In the courses that principally target Master's students, a range of genres may be addressed, such as course assignment, oral presentation, research proposal, research report and thesis/dissertation.

While the literature on graduate writing instruction rarely addresses the issue of the instructors' PD, the question of to what extent language teachers can successfully meet the challenge of teaching academic writing to graduate students across disciplines, and what training they need, should be asked (Cheng, 2018). This links to the broader issue of EAP teachers' training and PD, an issue which has been under-represented but is gaining prominence in the literature (Ding & Bruce, 2017). It has long been observed that part of the professionalization process for an EAP practitioner is to develop

“specialized knowledge”, or knowledge of how a target discipline (of their students) conceptualizes, investigates and represents the world (Ferguson, 1997). For new EAP teachers, transitioning from teaching English for general purposes (what they were often trained to do previously) to teaching EAP and acquiring the necessary specialized knowledge can be a challenge (Ding & Bruce, 2017). Yet what trajectories of PD are followed by new EAP teachers in tackling the challenge is still little known, despite some existing research, which has revealed that teachers during the transition, by entering an unfamiliar field of teaching, can feel insecure and “deskilled” (e.g. Campion, 2016).

## 2. The Chinese context

At Chinese universities, since the early 2000s there has been growing dissatisfaction with the traditional “time-consuming and inefficient” College English teaching (for undergraduate students and similarly for graduate-level instruction) (Cai, 2010: 306). An influential argument is that the traditional skill-focused and examination-oriented English teaching should be re-oriented toward an EAP paradigm, for it is EAP, rather than the traditional College English, that would meet the university students’ needs for using English effectively in their academic disciplines and future workplaces (Cai, 2010, 2016). On the front of pedagogy, various “academic English” textbooks (e.g. Cai, 2014; Shi, Wu & Liu, 2013) have mushroomed. In addition, the Western traditions of genre pedagogy (Hyon, 1996) were introduced onto the Chinese scene in the late 1990s (Qin, 2000); the notions of genre, genre analysis and genre pedagogy have been frequent topics, in particular in recent years, in Chinese journal articles on English language education. A survey of the Chinese literature indicates that there has been growing interest in the ESP genre pedagogy (Cheng, 2018; Swales, 1990) and the Australian approach of genre pedagogy (Feez, 1998).

Concurrent with the ongoing EAP-turn (although the trend is not without opposition; see Cheng, 2016, for a review) we find the endeavors of the new EAP teachers, who have generally had no formal training in EAP, seeking PD to transition from teaching general English to EAP. To understand the EAP-turn and the transition, insights gained directly from the emerging EAP teachers themselves through interviews are likely to be informative and can lay some groundwork for further research. Recent developments in the

Chinese EAP landscape have also made it feasible for us to conduct such an exploratory study. For instance, China EAP Association (CEAPA) has hosted annual conferences since 2015, attracting large numbers of English teachers from all over the country; other EAP-related events, including PD programs for EAP teachers, are regularly hosted at universities (Li & Cargill, 2019a). These events enabled us to meet potential participants from a wide spectrum of geographical and institutional backgrounds in captive samples (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). As will be shown in the following section, we availed ourselves of the opportunities provided by such EAP events to conduct our study.

### 3. Methods

Our study aimed to answer the following two research questions through interviews with a sample of emerging EAP teachers from various Chinese universities:

1. What is English academic writing (EAW) instruction to graduate students across disciplines like at Chinese universities?
2. How do Chinese EAP teachers engage in professional development (PD) to support their EAW teaching?

We identified our teacher participants at three EAP events: two EAP conferences (hosted respectively by CEAPA in May 2017 and by a university in Hong Kong in June 2017), and one PD program (hosted by CEAPA in January 2018). Our target participants were those who were teaching or had recently taught EAW to graduate students (either Master's or doctoral students) across disciplines at their universities at the time of our study. A total of 20 participants (16 female and 4 male teachers) were selected and invited to participate in one-on-one semi-structured interviews with informed consent. Table 1 presents a profile of the 20 participants.<sup>1</sup>

Teacher	Gender	Highest degree (specialization)	Academic rank
T1	F	MA (Second Language Acquisition)	Associate Professor
T2	F	PhD (Applied Linguistics, focusing on teacher development)	Associate Professor
T3	M	PhD (Applied Linguistics, focusing on ESP)	Associate Professor
T4	F	PhD candidate (Foreign Linguistics & Applied Linguistics)	Lecturer
T5	F	MA (English Language & Literature)	Associate Professor
T6	M	PhD (Neurolinguistics)	Professor
T7	F	PhD (Economics)	Lecturer
T8	F	MA (English Language Education)	Associate Professor
T9	F	PhD (American History)	Associate Professor
T10	F	PhD (World History)	Associate Professor
T11	F	MA (Translation)	Associate Professor
T12	F	PhD (Foreign Linguistics & Applied Linguistics)	Professor
T13	M	MA (Foreign Linguistics & Applied Linguistics)	Lecturer
T14	F	MA (International Business)	Lecturer
T15	M	PhD (Literature)	Associate Professor
T16	F	MA (English Language Education)	Lecturer
T17	F	PhD (Foreign Linguistics & Applied Linguistics)	Associate Professor
T18	F	PhD (Foreign Linguistics & Applied Linguistics)	Associate Professor
T19	F	PhD (Psycholinguistics)	Lecturer
T20	F	PhD (World History)	Professor

Table 1. A profile of the 20 participants.

The participants came from 18 different universities located in 11 Chinese cities (T5 and T6 were in the same university; so were T17 and T18). The universities included ten comprehensive universities, four polytechnic/science and technology universities, two agriculture and forestry universities, one medical university, and one petroleum engineering university. The interview questions were designed to address our research questions. Specifically, to understand what EAW instruction was like at a teacher participant's university, we first asked about the origin and changes of the instruction and key factors that influenced the changes; we then asked about the teacher's teaching of EAW, including the target students, class size, teaching materials and methods, and assessment. To learn about the participants' PD, we asked about institutional support for that if any, what they had been doing in seeking PD, and what they aspired to do in their future development. The interviews were conducted by the second author together with several fellow students, who were pursuing PhDs in EAP-related areas of research in Hong Kong at the time of the study.<sup>2</sup> Mandarin

Chinese, the first language of both the interviewers and the interviewees, was used for all the interviews. The interviews lasted between 20 and 90 minutes, or 45 minutes on average, and were audio-recorded.

The interview recordings were transcribed by two research assistants and checked by the second author against the recordings. The Chinese transcripts were then coded by the first author in QSR International's NVivo11 software, following the method of typological analysis (Hatch, 2002), and with the main topics covered in the interviews used as predetermined typologies. Within the typologies which served as higher-level codes, patterns, relationships and themes were looked for, which led to the creation of lower-level codes. Over the duration of three months, the codes were repeatedly checked against the data and a code and re-code strategy was applied; in the process the codes were revised and reshuffled so as to bring out the most important aspects of the dataset that were both commonly shared across the participants and relevant to our research questions. Where necessary, clarifications were sought and additional information was gathered from some of the participants via email or WeChat, a free messaging app. Table 2 summarizes our final coding scheme addressing the two research questions.

The coding scheme	
<b>English Academic Writing Instruction</b>	
	Initiation of EAW instruction as part of a curriculum reform process
	Potential structural and curriculum challenges
	An integrated approach to teaching "academic English" to Master's students
	Teaching writing for publication to doctoral students
	Using journal articles from students' own disciplines
	Aiming to raise students' genre awareness
<b>Professional Development</b>	
	Continued learning
	Overseas visits on scholarship
	Aspirations for future development
	To specialize in teaching students from particular disciplines
	To collaborate with content teachers
	To undertake EAP research

Table 2. The coding scheme

The coding scheme will serve to structure our findings section below. In the findings section, the interview data extracts included were all translated from Chinese into English at the time of composing the present text; the translations were checked against the original Chinese version to ensure accuracy.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. English Academic Writing Instruction

#### 4.1.1. Initiation of EAW instruction as part of a curriculum reform process

Without exception, EAW at the participants' universities was reported to be an institutional response to a system-wide need to reform the English teaching curricula. When recounting the origin of their graduate-level EAW instruction, our participants often described an evolutionary reform process, whereby a previous general English course was gradually transformed into an EAP-oriented one, with EAW instruction taking on more weight over time. At T2's university, for instance, the driving force was a national graduate curriculum reform project overseen by the Graduate School, which prompted the streaming of students into a regular and an advanced group in 2015, with the latter group receiving more EAP-oriented training, including training in academic writing. T13 shared that his School started to build an ESP-EAP website and form an EAW teaching team around 2010. In addition, several participants reported multiple rounds of reforms at their universities. T10 talked of three stages of reform: an initial reform around 2008, focusing on exploring the possibility of an EAP orientation for graduate students; a second stage, during which different EAP-oriented elective courses were created, including a writing course; and the latest stage, characterized by a more extensive focus on EAP curriculum. T17 and T18's university, after likewise undergoing rounds of reform, gradually developed an EAW course system that covered undergraduate students all the way to doctoral students (from Level 1 to Level 3) (see also Li and Ma, 2018).

A few participants mentioned the importance of leadership in installing EAW instruction. A range of leading figures were mentioned. Most often, a director's role was highlighted: with such a person initiating a course called Paper Writing and Publication in the mid-2000s (T17), designing a reformed EAW course for doctoral students (T19), overseeing the compilation of a textbook to meet the students' needs (T8), and being the main instructor of an EAW course, while employing some materials brought back from a visit to the U.S. to facilitate the compilation of a textbook on medical writing and publishing in English (T4). There was also sometimes a supportive school dean who "was keen on playing a leading role in curriculum reform" (T8), and a university president who had a vision that doctoral students should be able to use English for academic purposes and who led the creation of a



streamlined EAP curriculum model that connected the undergraduate, Master's, and doctoral English education, incorporating the notions of “task-based” and “output-oriented” teaching (T11).

#### 4.1.2. Potential structural and curriculum challenges

EAP teachers' institutional locations, their class sizes, the reduced teaching hours allocated, as well as the extent to which their classes are multidisciplinary are implicated in the potential structural and curriculum challenges they face. Most of our participants worked in a Department of College English, which is a department responsible for teaching non-English majors across disciplines; a few worked in the College English Unit within the Department of English (where the majority specialize in teaching English majors). It has been observed that at Chinese universities, the teachers in the Department of College English “are often perceived as instructors rather than academics and as having a lower professional status than that of their colleagues in the Department of English who teach English majors” (Cheng, 2016: 98). Overall, it can be suggested that our participants, as emerging EAP teachers in China, who focused on teaching students across disciplines, traditionally had a lower institutional status compared with their counterparts in content disciplines as well as their colleagues teaching English majors (see also Li & Cargill, 2019a).

Some of our participants reported affiliation to a Graduate English Teaching and Research Section in their department (T4, T8, T10, T17, T18 and T19). The section may only have around 10 teachers; yet their target student population was often large, comprising many hundreds/thousands of students at the university level (Li & Ma, 2018). The class size varied from 20-30 (T2, T11, T13, T14, T15, and T19), through 30-plus (T9, T16, and T17) and 40-plus (T4, T14, and T16), to 50-plus (T2, T14, and T8), 60-70 (T3), and even up to 80 (T4). EAW instruction was usually offered for Master's and doctoral students in their early candidature. It could be installed as one of three segments on writing taught over the duration of one semester (the other two being “basic writing” and “practical writing”); it could also be part of a semester-long EAP course that covered reading and translation. The teaching hours allocated to EAW instruction were often less than what the teachers would have preferred. There was also mention of a trend of institutional mandate for cutting down on the hours of English classes: T20 recounted her team having to reduce the teaching hours of an Academic English course (including an EAW component) for Master's

students from 180 hours to 120 hours and then to 40 hours, with the target being 20 hours only (for 1 credit at her university), in response to the Graduate School guidelines.

Teaching a multidisciplinary class seems a norm for the participants. Such disciplinary heterogeneity was experienced even by teachers who taught students from the same broad discipline (Cheng, 2018, p. 26). For example, it was reported by T19 who only taught medical students in her university, by T4 who worked in a medical university, and by T1 who taught at an engineering university. All three participants pointed out that there were wide differences in the sub-disciplines among their students. There were institutional attempts at setting up discipline-based classes: at T13's university, EAP (with EAW being a component) was taught to classes formed according to the broad divisions of engineering, medicine, humanities, social sciences, and sciences; T2 similarly talked of a distinction between humanities/social sciences classes and sciences classes. T8, however, had a mixture of science and social science students in her class. It was commented that free selection of courses at the university level for graduate students contributed to the dominance of multidisciplinary classes (T9, T11, and T17) (Li & Ma, 2018).

### **4.1.3. An integrated approach to teaching “academic English” to Master’s students**

The teacher participants aligned their work with an EAP orientation, or commitment to supporting students’ disciplinary study and publication in English in the long run. As T16 put it:

*The main purpose of the course is to help students use English as a medium of study in their discipline. It is not about learning English for the sake of learning it; not about learning College English for general communication. EAP is in big demand during the stage of graduate study, as the students are expected to publish in English. (T16).*

The teachers who mainly taught Master’s students often used an “academic English” textbook published in China for teaching. The textbooks usually adopt an integrated approach to developing students’ reading/writing and listening/speaking skills for academic communication. For example, T2 used a theme-based textbook (i.e. Cai, 2014), whose units cover such themes as “Global Warming”, “Urbanization”, “E-business”, and “Cultural

Awareness". Following this book, students learn writing skills such as paraphrasing and summarizing, developing topic/supporting sentences, and achieving coherence in writing. T8 and T14, who worked in two different agriculture and forestry universities, used one textbook (i.e. Shi, Wu, & Liu, 2013) that contains theme-based units such as "Forestry Management", "Biodiversity", and "Wetlands". Like students in T2's university, their students practiced writing skills such as how to write concluding, cause and effect, and definition paragraphs. Additionally, the textbook also introduced students to some skills for reporting results (e.g. describing graphs, processes, dimensions and shapes) and writing abstracts for research articles.

T14 believed "only teaching the materials from a textbook no longer appeals to the students", so she and her colleagues tried to supplement additional materials, including EAW content. Yet she reported that with a textbook to cover, the additions were limited. T16 likewise observed that textbooks could be a restriction: "Whether we can truly help the students (in their goal of publishing in English) has a lot to do with our textbook and teaching content. I think the existing textbooks have restricted our teaching." It is hard to assess to what extent these teachers were required to cover a textbook, as there may be institutional differences. Additionally, given the typically large enrollment of Master's students in a cohort at a Chinese university (Li & Ma, 2018), several teachers may be involved in teaching parallel classes, which may reduce the flexibility of any one instructor straying away from a textbook. Notably, T16 reported that in the next academic year they would aim to guide students to "combine English with their discipline". They would do so, for instance, by requiring students to submit as part of the assessment a research proposal that is connected to their ongoing research. This indicates an attempt to go beyond a textbook and to make academic English instruction more discipline-specific.

#### **4.1.4. Teaching writing for publication to doctoral students**

About half of our participants, who seemed to focus on teaching doctoral, as opposed to Master's, students, talked about teaching writing for publication. During interviews, these teachers tended to refer to the notion of "genre" (T3, T4, T11, T15, and T18) and the name of "Swales [John Swales]" (T3, T4, T5, T6, T11, T15, and T18). Focusing on the genre of research article, they used journal articles from students' own disciplines in teaching, and aimed to raise students' genre awareness.

#### 4.1.4.1. Using journal articles from students' own disciplines

The participants who talked about teaching writing for publication tended to report using journal articles from their students' own disciplines as an important source of teaching materials (T3, T4, T6, T11, T12, T13, T15, T17, T18, and T19). Where a textbook was involved, it was not a general academic English skills book but a genre-based textbook focusing on the genre of research article or conference presentation (or a combination), and the textbook only played a supplementary role in instruction. For example, T17 and T18 reported using a broad framework from a textbook on international conference communication in English (i.e. Hu, Shen & Fan, 2000); while T19 mentioned borrowing some ideas from a chapter on research paper writing in a textbook on medical writing (i.e. Sun, Tang, & Wang, 2012) but the textbook was not used in class. In their very first teaching session, T3, T17 and T19 would give students an assignment of finding journal articles in their own disciplines. T3's students were divided into groups based on disciplinary proximity and were expected to send journal articles to him by groups. Each of T17's students was expected to find 5-10 articles preferably written by native-English-speaking authors (for the sake of learning language) from top journals in their field of study to send to her. Likewise, T19 shared: "I asked each student to send me 10 papers from their target journals; my teaching examples will come from those articles." T18 described how journal articles from her students' disciplines were used in class:

*We aim to connect to their disciplines. We use the early part of the class time to talk about the structure of the different sections of a research article; then ask the students to study articles in their own disciplines. (T18).*

Using journal articles from students' own disciplines helped T2, T8, T11 and T18 to handle their heterogeneous classes. In T8's multidisciplinary class of 50-plus students, there were more science and engineering students than economics and management students. Adopting an approach similar to T18's, she chose to "focus more on science and engineering" but still aimed to address both streams of students:

*After lecturing on the Introduction or Methods section, I ask the students to check journal articles in their own discipline to compare with what has been said in class. Then for the presentations in the next session, I may pick one science student and one social science student and ask them to demonstrate a comparison of the analysis of their articles. (T8)*

Finally, corpus methods were occasionally used. For example, each of T12's students was expected to build a small corpus of 20 articles selected from high-impact journals. T3 talked about showing corpus evidence generated from a concordancer to students in class. However, corpus use was limited. T19 observed that “building a corpus is quite useful” but her medical students “are very busy” and “there is also not much time in class”; “they may prefer to read a few more papers than building a corpus”.

#### 4.1.4.2. Aiming to raise students' genre awareness

Several participants pointed out that their publication-oriented EAW instruction consisted less of writing practice than of rhetorical consciousness raising through genre analysis. Although T4 required submission of an abstract based on the students' own (planned) research as part of the course assessment, she pointed out that her writing course did not focus on “training in writing itself”, but on “genre analysis” instead. “We hope reading-based awareness raising can feed into students' written production”, she said. Similar comments were made by T3 and T17. T17 explained:

*In fact, I do not ask them to write much; but mainly read and analyze to study the characteristics of an article. Given the limited class time, I emphasize to the students that this is in fact a “methodology” course, where they learn a method of analysis, to understand what is a good paper, what is a bad one, and how they should write. Then they can practice when it's time for them to write later. (T17)*

Likewise, T3 reported: “I present a more generic model [of genre analysis], drawing students' attention to structure and language; then I direct their attention to differences across disciplines.” He also expected the students to “accumulate lexical resources from the papers they selected” and apply those to their own writing in the future.

Drafting a research article for future submission was not mentioned as a course assignment by any of the participants. Instead, they reported assigning a range of “preparatory” tasks designed to raise students' genre awareness. Analysis of the moves, steps and linguistic features of different sections of journal articles in students' disciplines was a common assignment. T17's students had “at least 10 such assignments” over a semester and these smaller tasks “do not create much pressure and can be done quickly.” For T19, who taught a class of medical students from various sub-disciplines, it was challenging to find a common ground to engage all

students in class. Thus she asked them to select topics of general interest (such as “The relationship between smartphone use and sleep quality among college students” and “Investigation on the willingness of organ donation among medical students”) and conduct research by using the method of questionnaire survey, and practice writing different sections of an IMRD (Introduction, Method, Results and Discussion) paper over time (see also Li, Ma, Zhao & Hu, 2020). Building a discipline-orientation into assignments, T8 asked students to submit a research proposal on a topic in their discipline and a final paper of 2000 words in an IMRD-structure by reference to the format of a target journal. T11, like T4 mentioned before, required students to compose an abstract for an article that they wanted to write. T17’s students also needed to submit an end-of-semester writing project, which was a group-produced program book for a mock international conference.

## 4.2. Professional Development

### 4.2.1. Continued learning

Echoing the voice of the Chinese teacher participants in an EAP PD program in an earlier study (Li & Cargill, 2019a), the teachers almost unanimously stressed the necessity of engaging in continued learning for PD. Their general lack of previous experience with EAP and their deeply felt need to develop EAP knowledge were described by T7:

*EAP is still a relatively new phenomenon in China. Previous training received by teachers had very little EAP element. Those of us who now engage in EAP teaching are probably those who can recognize the value of EAP. But to truly understand EAP and improve one’s EAP competence, I think we still need to invest a large amount of time and effort. (T7)*

T7’s perceptions were echoed by others and helped to explain the teachers’ observation that teaching EAW to graduate students required much preparation and brought them extra workload (T2, T3, T7, T8, T9, T12, T13, T15, T16, and T19). T10 commented on their challenge as follows:

*The biggest challenge is you should keep learning new things to keep your teaching up to date, and to motivate students and stimulate their interest in learning. Teachers at our age are under big pressure on the fronts of job, promotion, and family; but if you stop learning, you will be left out. The need for updating our knowledge is urgent. (T10)*

The fact that we met our participants at two EAP conferences and one EAP PD program indicates that, as busy in-service teachers, they did try to invest “time and effort” (T7) to capture PD opportunities in one way or another. This required overcoming practical constraints such as family duties, busy teaching schedules, and sourcing of funding.

#### 4.2.2. Overseas visits on scholarship

In China, scholarships to sponsor university teachers' short-term overseas study come from various sources, including the China Scholarship Council (<http://www.csc.edu.cn>), provincial governments and institutions. Fifteen of our participants (i.e. 75%) had capitalized on such opportunities of being short-term visiting scholars at overseas universities, with visit duration ranging from one month to one year. Of these teachers, ten reported that their overseas visits impacted upon their subsequent EAP/EAW teaching or research, as summarized in Table 3.

Participant and host country	Aspects of learning that impacted upon subsequent EAP/EAW teaching
T1 (New Zealand)	Learned about academic discourse analysis; and communicated with other visiting scholars on curriculum design
T2 (US)	Took courses on pedagogy, academic reading and writing, and research methods; learned how to conduct literature research, write literature review, and avoid plagiarism
T3 (UK)	Learning about the research on multilingual scholars' international publishing
T5 (US)	Attended a discipline-embedded writing course facilitated by the host university's Writing Center and observed how the Center operated
T6 (UK)	Collaborated with the host university's colleagues in research and writing for publication
T7 (Australia)	Visited the host university's Language Center and took an EAP course
T13 (Singapore)	Took courses on ELT, research methods, second language writing research, and genre analysis
T15 (UK)	Took EAP courses and gathered teaching materials during the visit and gained access to various resources
T17 (US)	Took EAP and academic writing courses for graduate students at the host university
T18 (US)	Learned about corpus building and corpus-based research

Table 3. Ten participants' overseas visits that influenced their EAP/EAW teaching.

T15 spoke of how her overseas visit stimulated her action: “Three months after I was back from the UK, I applied for a grant to set up an online platform for our academic writing course. I planned to introduce genre pedagogy.” T3 and T6's overseas visits, unlike the other participants', were more research-focused. For T6, the experience of co-authoring research articles with his British colleagues during his visit both informed his teaching of a new writing for publication course to doctoral students and provided authentic examples to draw upon in his teaching.

### 4.2.3. Aspirations for future development

The teachers expressed aspirations for future development. Three targets were highlighted: to specialize in teaching students from particular disciplines, to collaborate with content teachers, and to undertake EAP research.

#### 4.2.3.1. To specialize in teaching students from particular disciplines

Three teachers (T3, T7 and T14) expressed hope for an institutional policy that would designate them to teaching students from particular disciplines:

*Every semester I teach two classes of Master's students. Students' disciplines change all the time for me; but I prefer to focus on teaching students from certain disciplines to know these disciplines better and go deeper in my teaching. (T3)*

*Teachers need to develop deep understanding of research article writing in a particular discipline. (T7)*

*I hope there is a policy to match teachers with particular Schools. [...] Choose a discipline, then study the literature in the discipline. [...] There may be some common core across disciplines but teaching across disciplines is not helpful for your improvement. (T14)*

The three teachers all hoped to focus on teaching students in particular disciplines. Interestingly, the teachers' wish coincided with the preference of some students, as we found in a previous study (Li & Cargill, 2019b). For this to happen, the students believed there should be both "push" from the schools of content disciplines and availability of teachers of English who are willing to pursue disciplinary specialization (Li & Cargill, 2019b). The teachers' views quoted above show that there are such willing teachers.

#### 4.2.3.2. To collaborate with content teachers

Despite accounts of informally providing English editing or consultation to content specialists on a personal level (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T8, T9, T10, T11, T13, T14, and T19), little teaching-related collaboration between our English teacher participants and content teachers existed. In T13's vivid description, "There seems to be a natural minefield between disciplines in Chinese universities. English language is regarded as a tool, without a disciplinary home."



Nevertheless, the idea of such collaboration was supported by all of our participants. As T8 put it, “There has been no such collaboration. But I’m interested. Like visiting their lab or inviting them to talk to us English teachers. All very good. It would help us to learn about their disciplines.” At the same time however, various concerns were cited as working against the collaboration: content teachers being too busy (T9, T12, T13, T16), hard to access (T19), perhaps more interested in quick results (T13), and less-than-interested in communicating with English teachers as a result of perceiving their teaching as marginal or unnecessary (T16). Additional concerns/problems were: lacking opportunity for collaboration (T10), lacking institution-level support mechanisms (T7, T10, and T15), such collaboration being not cost-effective but bringing extra workload for English teachers (T15), and mixed-disciplines classes posing a barrier to collaboration (T16). T13 related a case of potential collaboration. In preparing to teach an English for Mass Communication course as one of a series of ESP courses being initiated at his university, he sat in the class given by a teacher in Mass Communication in the first semester; then in the second semester the content teacher also came to attend his English class regularly. Yet from T13’s perspective, “I think there’s no need for much communication on the teaching itself; he (the content teacher) teaches his course and I teach mine.” Despite this stance, one wonders if the growing series of ESP courses at T13’s university might facilitate pedagogical collaborations between language and content teachers in the long run.

#### **4.2.3.3. To undertake EAP research**

At least two of the teachers (T8 and T9) mentioned that their own lack of international publication experience was a drawback in their EAW instruction, expertise-wise and confidence-wise (Li & Cargill, 2019a). At the same time, a good number of our participants showed an interest in moving beyond their previous specialization (as shown earlier in Table 1) to conduct EAP research. The pressure of periodic appraisal, which was connected to their academic promotion (T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T9, T13, T15, and T16), was cited as a factor. Apart from such extrinsic motivation, quite a few voiced a genuine interest in EAP research. As T8 put it, “I want to do EAP research. I think it’s valuable and it’s a future direction; and I believe it can truly inform the teaching of writing to students.” For T9, an aim of her attending EAP conferences was “to see what kinds of EAP research others are doing”;

while T16 felt that her teaching of EAW, conducting related research, and catching PD opportunities were “forming a benign cycle”.

The teachers had a variety of research plans. T4 had started to conduct pre- and post-course comparisons to evaluate her teaching and planned to follow several students to study long-term effects. T7 was interested in finding out about content teachers’ EAP requirements for their students. T8 had written a research proposal on studying the discourse features of research articles in agriculture and forestry. T13 intended to set his research against the backdrop of the launching of a series of ESP courses at his university and study course design and teacher development. T10, T15, and T16 believed that their future research would be focused on EAP/EAW instruction. Likewise, centering around her own EAW teaching, T19 planned to follow up on her earlier needs analysis research with a comparative study of peer and teacher feedback on writing. Finally, T1 and T18 were both preparing to build a corpus of research articles in engineering disciplines. Inadequacy in research training could be a potential concern (Li & Cargill, 2019a), as T16 commented on the case of her colleagues in general. Nevertheless, our teacher participants generally spoke with hope when they talked about their research plans.

## 5. Discussion

In the above we presented results from an interview-based study to address two research questions, which focused on understanding Chinese EAP teachers’ EAW instruction to graduate students across disciplines, and the teachers’ endeavors concerning PD. In the following, we will highlight aspects of our findings for a discussion with reference to the Chinese context and relevant literature.

Firstly, within-institution leadership facilitates the transformation of the traditional general English curriculum to an EAP curriculum. Local leadership mediates the climate of educational reform (Riley & Louis, 2000). Compared with the university-level managers, the school-level, department-level, or section-level leaders probably have a deeper understanding of the urgency and direction for change. From our limited experience of observation at some Chinese universities, unit-level leadership or its absence can have a significant impact on the development of EAP or the lack of it for a prolonged period of time, as well as on the teachers’ morale and career paths. On a separate note, it is also worth pointing out that in the Chinese

context, beyond the institutional level, individuals (including leading figures) are adding impetus to the EAP-turn in the country, through publishing, initiating EAP events, organizing conferences and PD programs, or posting in WeChat EAP interest groups. The affordance of WeChat, a free messaging app widely used in China, has fostered the dissemination of an “EAP spirit” among university English teachers.

Secondly, the reports of our participants suggest a distinction between Master-level and doctoral-level academic writing instruction. This echoes a potential distinction shown in the literature between the writing support for Master's students (e.g. Fredericksen & Mangelsdorf, 2014; Tribble & Wingate, 2013) and that for doctoral students (e.g. Burgess et al., 2019; Cargill et al., 2018; Huang, 2014). That is, there tends to be more focus on teaching generic academic writing skills at the Master-level but a greater concern for preparing students to write for publication at the doctoral level. The proliferation of “academic English” textbooks in China and their use with Master's (and undergraduate) students seems worth examining in future research. More broadly, the adequacy of the existing published resources for teaching EAW (in China or a different context), and how EAP teachers use or adapt them in the classroom, need to be assessed. For teaching writing for publication to doctoral students, our teacher participants were keen to align their teaching with ESP genre pedagogy (Cheng, 2018; Swales, 1990; Swales & Feak, 1994/2012); yet the details of the instructional practices and possible localization of the genre pedagogy still need to be studied (but see Li et al., 2020). Our participants reported limited corpus use in their classrooms. Yet with a growing interest among Chinese EAP teachers in corpus methods (e.g. Chen & Xiang, 2015), these can be expected to be more widely used, for instance, as the teachers learn through PD how corpus methods can be used effectively (see Li & Cargill, 2019a). It was further found that, unlike some reports on writing for publication courses in the literature (e.g. Matarese, 2013), writing an article by sections over time aimed for publication was not set as a course requirement for students by the teachers in our study. This apparently had to do with the time, resources and capacity available for providing guidance to students for such a purpose. Participation of content teachers in the instructional and feedback processes can make a difference, although achieving language—content partnership is a challenge, as we will note below.

Thirdly, our study reveals that Chinese EAP teachers, like their international counterparts (e.g. Campion, 2016), are keen to engage in PD in making the

transition from teaching general English to teaching EAP. Their modest institutional status is likely to become a driving force for them to engage in continued learning to meet new challenges, although it is also likely to disadvantage them in the deployment of resources for PD. Notably, a good number of our participants had made sponsored overseas visits where they took EAP courses at the host university, visited its Language/Writing Center, had access to resources, or collaborated with overseas colleagues on research. These seemed efficient forms of PD. In the coming years, exchange of EAP experience and expertise between China and other countries should be promoted. This can be achieved, for instance, through the collaboration between China EAP Association (CEAPA) and counterpart associations overseas, such as BALEAP (British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes) (“Collaboration with CEAPA”, 2018).

Our participants’ aspirations for future development, concerning specializing in teaching particular disciplines, collaborating with content teachers, and undertaking EAP research, all point to the issue of professionalization of EAP practitioners. Focusing on teaching students from a small range of disciplines will enable EAP teachers to study the genres and discourses of those disciplines in depth and develop “specialized knowledge” (Basturkmen, 2014; Ferguson, 1997) in a process of professionalization. Likewise, collaboration with content teachers is also a key feature of EAP practitioners’ professional identity (Dudley-Evans, 2001). Yet in China (Li & Cargill, 2019a, 2019b) and many other contexts (e.g. Chanock, 2017), language—content collaboration remains a challenge (see Li, 2019, for a review). Finally, our participants’ taking actions to become EAP practitioner-researchers, or to contribute scholarship to the knowledge base of EAP, is exactly what has been called for in the recent literature (Basturkmen, 2014; Ding & Bruce, 2017). In the Chinese context, enhancing research training for in-service and future EAP teachers would be necessary (Li & Ma, 2018; Li & Cargill, 2019a).

## 6. Conclusion

Our exploratory study was based on one-off interviews mostly conducted at conference sites. It thus has methodological limitations which undercut the depth and richness of the data. Nevertheless, a number of implications of the study can be suggested. Firstly, the study brought forth the voices of a

sample of Chinese emerging EAP teachers which can be compared with the accounts of EAP teachers in other contexts (e.g. Campion, 2016). Secondly, as EAP practitioners' education and PD starts to receive the attention that it deserves (Basturkmen, 2014; Ding & Bruce, 2017), findings from the research like ours can be drawn upon to inform both the theorization and the practice in this connection, as the research sheds light upon emerging EAP practitioners' lived experiences during a paradigm shift toward EAP. Thirdly, the description and analysis presented in this paper can potentially encourage EAP instructors, whether novice or more experienced, to share and reflect upon their own experiences in their community of practice. Finally, our exploratory study has laid some groundwork for follow-up research, which can take the forms of case studies (e.g. of classroom EAW instruction) (Li et al., 2020), longitudinal tracking of individual teachers' PD, and questionnaire surveys on a large scale.

The theme of The 2018 TESOL China Assembly held in Shanghai, China (July 19-22, 2018) was "English Education in China: Striding into a New Era". The theme reflects a truthful picture. The Shanghai Declaration issued by the Assembly proclaimed: "We are determined to take more energetic and sustainable joint action to inject fresh vigor and impetus into English education in China". It can be anticipated that EAP will crucially contribute to the fulfillment of this mission in the years to come. Meanwhile, Chinese EAP practitioners need exchanges with their counterparts from around the world. We hope this paper will encourage moves in this direction.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and Guangwei Hu for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this paper, and thank the editor, Dr. Carmen Sancho Guinda, for her kind support. The project was funded by a Seed Fund for Basic Research from The University of Hong Kong, China (Project Code 201611159043).

Article history:  
 Received 14 January 2019  
 Received in revised form 6 May 2019  
 Accepted 23 April 2020

## References

- Aranha, S. (2009). "The development of a genre-based writing course for graduate students in two fields" in C. Bazerman, A. Bonini & D. Figueiredo (eds.), *Genre in a Changing World*, 465-482. Fort Collins, CO: The WAC Clearinghouse.
- BALEAP. (3 May 2018). "Collaboration with CEAPA". URL: <https://www.baleap.org/news/collaboration-with-ceapa> [25/08/2018]
- Basturkmen, H. (2014). "LSP teacher education: Review of literature and suggestions for the research agenda". *Ibérica* 28: 17-34.
- Burgess, S., P. Martín & D. Balasanyan (2019). "English or Spanish for research publication purposes? Reflections on a critical pragmatic pedagogy" in J. N. Corcoran, K. Englander & L.-M. Muresan (eds.), *Pedagogies and Policies for Publishing Research in English: Local Initiatives Supporting International Scholars*, 128-140. New York & London: Routledge.
- Cai, J. (2010). "Guanyu woguo daxue yingyu jiaoxue chongxin dingwei de sikao [Reflections on repositioning China's college English teaching]". *Waiyu Jiaoxue yu Yanjiu [Foreign Language Teaching and Research]* 42(4): 306-308.
- Cai, J. (2014). *An Integrated Academic English Course* (1). Shanghai: Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press.
- Cai, J. (2016). "Dianfuxing de jiaoxue li'nian he jiaoxue fangfa: Guanyu Xueshu Yingyu -Ligong (di'er ban) bianxie li'nian [A radical change to teaching beliefs and methods: On the rationale behind the compilation of *Academic English - Science & Engineering* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)]". *Zhongguo Waiyu Jiaoyu [Foreign Language Education in China]* 9(1): 20-28.
- Campion, G.C. (2016). "'The learning never ends': Exploring teachers' views on the transition from General English to EAP". *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 23: 59-70.
- Cargill, M., X. Gao, X. Wang & P. O'Connor (2018). "Preparing Chinese graduate students of science facing an international publication requirement for graduation: Adapting an intensive workshop approach for early-candidature use". *English for Specific Purposes* 52: 13-26.
- Chanock, K. (2017). "Learning specialists working with faculty to embed development of academic literacies in disciplinary subjects" in S. Plane, C. Bazerman, F. Rondelli, C. Donahue, A.N. Applebee, C. Boré, P. Carlino, M.M. Larruy, P. Rogers & D. Russell (eds.), *Research on Writing: Multiple Perspectives*, 243-262. Fort Collins, CO: The WAC Clearinghouse and Centre de Recherche sur les Médiations (CREM).
- Chen, Y. & X. Xiang (2015). "Jiyu yuliouku de xueshu yingyu xiezuo jiaoxue yanjiu [Teaching English academic writing using corpora]". *Xiandai Jiaoyu Jishu [Modern Education Technology]* 25(12): 84-89.
- Cheng, A. (2016). "EAP at the tertiary level in China: Challenges and possibilities" in K. Hyland & P. Shaw (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of English for Academic Purposes*, 97-108. London & New York: Routledge.
- Cheng, A. (2018). *Genre and Graduate-level Research Writing*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Costley, T. & J. Flowerdew (2017). "Introduction" in J. Flowerdew & T. Costley (eds.), *Discipline-specific Writing: Theory into Practice*, 1-11. London & New York: Routledge.
- Ding, A. & I. Bruce (2017). *The English for Academic Purposes Practitioner: Operating on the Edge of Academia*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan / Springer.
- Dudley-Evans, T. (2001). "Team-teaching in EAP: Changes and adaptations in the Birmingham approach" in J. Flowerdew & M. Peacock (eds.), *Research Perspectives on English for Academic Purposes*, 225-238. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Feez, S. (1998). *Text-based Syllabus Design*. Sydney, NSW: National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, Macquarie University.
- Ferguson, G. (1997). "Teacher education and LSP: The role of specialised knowledge" in R. Howard & G. Brown (eds.), *Teacher Education for Languages for Specific Purposes*, 80-89. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Fredericksen, E. & K. Mangelsdorf (2014). "Graduate writing workshops: Crossing languages and disciplines" in T.M. Zawacki & M. Cox (eds.), *WAC and Second-Language Writers: Research towards Linguistically and Culturally Inclusive Programs and Practices*, 347-367. Fort Collins, CO: The WAC Clearinghouse.
- Gustafsson, M., A. Eriksson & A. Karlsson (2016). "Facilitating writing in the tension between the quasi-generic and the multidisciplinary: Chalmers University of Technology" in S. Simpson, N.A. Caplan, M. Cox & T. Phillips (eds.), *Supporting*

- Graduate Student Writers*, 255-271. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Hatch, J.A. (2002). *Doing Qualitative Research in Education Settings*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Hu, G., Y. Shen & H. Fan (2000). *English for International Conference Communication*. Beijing: Higher Education Press.
- Huang, J.C. (2014). "Learning to write for publication in English through genre-based pedagogy: A case in Taiwan". *System* 45: 175-186.
- Hyon, S. (1996). "Genre in three traditions: Implications for ESL". *TESOL Quarterly* 30: 693-722.
- Lappalainen, P.H. (2016). "Pedagogical design promoting writing productivity on the doctoral level—A case study from Finland". *Journal of Academic Writing* 6(1): 108-121.
- León Pérez, I. K. & P. Martín-Martín (2016). "On the importance of a genre-based approach in the teaching of English for Medical Purposes". *CercleS* 6, 1: 95-117.
- Li, Y. (2019). "Language-content partnership in higher education: Development and opportunities". *Higher Education Research & Development* 39(3): 500-514. DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2019.1685947.
- Li, Y. & M. Cargill (2019a). "Observing and reflecting in an English for Research Publication Purposes 'master class': Learning and thinking about application" in J.N. Corcoran, K. Englander & L.M. Muresan (eds.), *Pedagogies and Policies on Publishing Research in English: Local Initiatives Supporting International Scholars*, 143-160. New York & London: Routledge.
- Li, Y. & M. Cargill (2019b). "Seeking supervisor collaboration in a school of sciences at a Chinese university" in K. Hyland & L. Wong (eds.), *Specialised English: New Directions in ESP and EAP Research and Practice*, 240-252. New York & London: Routledge.
- Li, Y. & X. Ma (2018). "Teaching English academic writing to non-English major graduate students at Chinese universities: A review and a transnational vision" in X. You (ed.), *Transnational Writing Education: Theory, History, and Practice*, 222-243. New York & London: Routledge.
- Li, Y., X. Ma, J. Zhao & J. Hu (2020). "Graduate-level research writing instruction: Two Chinese EAP teachers' localized ESP genre-based pedagogy". *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 43, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2019.100813>.
- Matarese, V. (2013). "Using strategic, critical reading of research papers to teach scientific writing: The reading-research-writing continuum" in V. Matarese (ed.), *Supporting Research Writing: Roles and Challenges in Multilingual Settings*, 73-89. Cambridge, UK: Chandos.
- Qin, X. (2000). "Ticai Jiaoxuefa shuping" ["A review of genre-based pedagogy"]. *Waiyu Jiaoxue Yu Yanjiu [Foreign Language Teaching and Research]* 32(1): 42-46.
- Riley, K.A. & K.S. Louis (eds.) (2000). *Leadership for Change and School Reform: International Perspectives*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Shi, B., J. Wu & Z. Liu (2013). *Modern Agriculture & Forestry English*. Beijing: China Renmin University Press.
- Simpson, S., N.A. Caplan, M. Cox & T. Phillips (eds.) (2016). *Supporting Graduate Student Writers: Research, Curriculum, and Program Design*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Starfield, S. (2016). "Supporting doctoral writing at an Australian university". *Writing & Pedagogy* 8(1): 177-198.
- Sun, Q., W. Tang & S. Wang (2012). *Practical Medical English Writing*. Shanghai: Fudan University Press.
- Swales, J.M. (1990). *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Swales, J.M. & C.B. Feak (1994/2012). *Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Teddle, C. & F. Yu (2007). "Mixed methods sampling: A typology with examples". *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 1(1): 77-100.
- Tribble, C. & U. Wingate (2013). "From text to corpus – A genre-based approach to academic literacy instruction". *System* 41(2): 307-321.

**Yongyan Li** is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education, University of Hong Kong, China. Her research focuses on second language writing in disciplines, scholarly research and publication, and English for



Research Publication Purposes pedagogies. She has published in such journals as *Ibérica*, *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* and *Science & Engineering Ethics*.

**Xiaohao Ma** is an English instructor in the School of Foreign Languages Education at Jilin University, China. She is interested in the research of English for Academic Purposes, academic language and literacy development, and English as a Foreign Language academics and students writing in English.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> It was difficult to clearly distinguish among our participants between the teachers teaching Master's students and those teaching doctoral students, as some taught both groups of students. But it seems many of our participants tended to focus on teaching either Master's or doctoral students, as the interviews indicated.

<sup>2</sup> Involving a team of interviewers potentially has downsides. However, the use of a Chinese-version interview protocol and detailed written instruction on the procedure of the interviews from the project leader (the first author) to the student interviewers helped to enhance consistency in the topics covered across the interviews.