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Article

Bright or Gloomy? Some Speculations on the Future of EAP

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Abstract
As with many other disciplines within contemporary Higher Education, the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is now finding itself in a state of considerable flux. Changing attitudes to the role and wider purpose of tertiary education; an ongoing move towards privatization and outsourcing; the recent emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) and global changes to the demographics around international student mobility are just some of the issues continuing to have an impact on EAP's forward trajectory. Offering a critical evaluation of these and several other factors, this paper speculates on what the coming years might hold for EAP and considers whether the future prognosis for the discipline is most likely to be bright or gloomy.

Keywords
EAP, neoliberalism, privatization, Gen AI, international student mobility, linking research and practice

1 Introduction

At time of writing, my personal involvement in EAP now spans some 25 years, or if I were to frame that statement slightly differently, a period of about a quarter century. What this sustained connection with EAP has afforded me is a genuine interest in the different ways in which the discipline has developed; its various strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; the challenges and issues it continues to face; as well as a healthy curiosity about its ongoing trajectory. In keeping with the overarching theme of this special edition of IJTS, in this opinion paper, I will try to speculate on what I think the foreseeable future might hold for EAP. With the disclaimer that my views are naturally going to be subjective, as supporting evidence for the various points I will go on to make, I will be drawing on some of the qualitative interview data I originally gathered for my doctoral thesis, *Practitioners, Pedagogies & Professionalism in EAP. The Development of a Contested Field* (Bell, 2016), as well as some of the data I collected more recently for a newly published monograph, *English for Academic Purposes: Perspectives on the Past, Present and Future* (Bell, 2024a).

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Before I begin my discussion though, as I have commented recently elsewhere (Bell, 2024b), perhaps the first thing to be said about EAP is that as academic disciplines go, it is still a relatively young field. While individual accounts of when and how EAP emerged may slightly differ, most post-Millennium writers (e.g., Bruce, 2011; De Chazel, 2014; Ding & Bruce, 2017; Hamp-Lyons, 2011; Hyland, 2006; Jordan, 2002) seem happy to place its birth as having taken place in the late 1960s or early 1970s. For anyone hoping to comment on EAP's historical trajectory and future prognosis in 2025, this fairly compact timeframe of EAP's existence makes the task significantly more manageable than it would be for say TESOL or English Language Teaching in general, which clearly have much longer and rather more complicated developmental histories. At this juncture, however, I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge that the emergence and continued development of EAP has largely taken place within my own lifetime, and that in many ways, this further serves to fuel my interest and strengthen my sense of personal connection with the field.

2 Six Specific Areas for Commentary

To help me keep the focus of this paper within manageable borders, I would like to frame my discussion around six specific areas for commentary, each of which I believe to be highly pertinent to EAP's future trajectory. Some of these areas I see as being externally imposed and therefore largely *etic* in nature, while others come from within EAP itself and are drawing on perspectives which are perhaps better categorized as *emic* (Harris, 1976).

Under the sub-headings which follow, I will now consider each of these areas in turn.

2.1 Neoliberal attitudes to higher education

Neoliberalism has been defined as *'the financialization of everything…'* (Harvey, 2005, p. 33). In essence, it operates under the premise that everything we do can be commodified and assigned a price tag. When it comes to Higher Education, the adoption of neoliberal attitudes has led to a significant change in the way that universities are now being conceptualized. Whereas in the past, the acquisition of knowledge was generally seen as having intrinsic value and something worth pursuing for its own sake, when it is viewed from neoliberal perspectives, knowledge has now been repositioned as a commodity which can be bought and sold.

Professor Gregory Hadley provides the following very helpful clarification:

> A neo-liberal university… is defined as a self-interested, entrepreneurial organisation offering recursive educational experiences and research services for paying clients. In such institutions, academics become managed knowledge producers who should ideally follow prescribed sets of organizational processes. Their research and pedagogic output must be justified as beneficial to the university through quantitative measures. Students are recast into the role of knowledge consumers and have a voice in determining the manner in which educational services are packaged and delivered to them.
>
> (Hadley, 2015, pp. 5-6)

Several of the issues which Hadley raises here are worth commenting on further. His points that academics are now expected to follow *'prescribed sets of organizational processes'* and that their research and pedagogic output *'must be justified as beneficial to the university through quantitative measures'* certainly highlight a significant sea-change when compared with how academia used to

operate traditionally. Even within the fairly recent timeframe of my own academic career, claims about the gradual curtailing of individual freedom and the move to a metrics-dominated system, under which each and every activity must be logged, justified and quantitatively accounted for, all sound depressingly familiar. Indeed, few could now deny that instead of being seen as a largely benign and altruistic service for the greater public good, academia these days has become a tightly-run business, judged using a plethora of different performance metrics and predominantly driven by market share and profit margins. When we speculate on what the future might hold, continuing to operate under this neoliberal paradigm is clearly going to have very important consequences for Higher Education in general. In the specific case of EAP, however, the neoliberal repositioning of students as fee-paying customers has directly contributed to a significant increase in the delivery of EAP by private providers, an issue I will consider in more detail below. Concomitantly, it must also be said that the prevailing neoliberalist attitudes to EAP have massively contributed to a sense of precarity in the workplace (Joubert & Clarence, 2024; McCulloch & Leonard, 2024; Kouritzen, Ghazani, Ellis & Nakagawa, 2023) causing a marked reduction in permanent employment for EAP professionals and a preponderance of fixed-term contracts. As Joubert & Clarence (2024) explain, 'the rise of neoliberal managerialist cultures and practices…has meant that universities…behave more like corporations and less like publicly funded institutions'. In the neoliberal workplace, the introduction of non-permanent contracts has thus come to be seen as an effective means of reducing labour costs, resulting in what Kouritzen, Ghazani, Ellis & Nakawawa (2023) have termed 'adjunctification' (p. 1519). As Marcotte (2020) has acidly blogged, this neoliberal practice essentially means hiring 'as many adjuncts (part-time, non-benefitted employees) as possible to teach courses at a lower rate and without job security'. As McCulloch & Leonard (2024) justifiably lament, not surprisingly, all of this can and does have a negative, though often largely hidden, impact on student support and EAP delivery.

2.2 The privatisation and outsourcing of EAP

The privatization and outsourcing of EAP was first identified as a potentially worrisome trend in the early 2000s. In a highly prescient article, Mary Ann Ansell (2008) had drawn attention to 18 cases of in-house university EAP operations being replaced by private providers. Some 8 years later, when I revisited Ansell's research as part of my doctoral thesis, I discovered that these 18 cases had significantly expanded to a much more alarming 61 (Bell, 2016). While space considerations now preclude a more detailed profiling of each individual operation, I noted at the time that these particular cases of outsourcing were spread across five major providers. The names of each private provider and the specific universities they had entered into partnership with are reproduced in the table below.

Building on my original findings, in his more recent research, Lowton (2020) identified a total of 63 UK universities operating with an openly declared private partnership for the delivery of their EAP/foundation provision. However, it should be noted that this total would actually rise to 69, if institutions with more than one private partnership are included. Four years further on, it is certain that the number of private-provider partnerships in the UK has continued to rise and also that this trend does not seem likely to be reversed. All of this strongly suggests that in-house EAP provision at British universities is steadily and inexorably being replaced by private-provider operations, a development which I personally find worrisome on several levels. There is also some evidence that similar cases of such outsourcing and privatisation are taking place in other English-speaking countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States, although it must also be said that this move towards private EAP provision does not yet appear to have become a pressing issue in non-Anglophone locations. In the coming years, it will be interesting to see if the phenomenon of privatisation and outsourcing will start to impact EAP delivery worldwide.

Study Group (18)	Kaplan (13)
University of Huddersfield	University of Aberdeen
University of Law, London	University of Birmingham
University of Leeds	University of Brighton
University of Leicester	University of Glasgow
University of Lincoln	University of Liverpool
University of Sheffield	University of Salford
University of Strathclyde	University of the West of England, Bristol
University of Surrey	University of Westminster
University of Sussex	University of York
Instituto Marangoni, London	Bournemouth University
Keele University	City University, London
Kingston University, London	Cranfield University
Lancaster University	Nottingham Trent University
Leeds Beckett University	
Liverpool John Moores University	
Royal Holloway, University of London	
Trinity College, Dublin	
University College, Dublin	

Navitas (10)	CEG (10)	INTO (10)
University of Hertfordshire	University of Central Lancashire	University of East Anglia
University of Northampton	University of Sunderland	University of Exeter
University of Portsmouth	Birbeck, University of London	University of Manchester
Anglia Ruskin University	Coventry University	University of London
Birmingham City University	Goldsmiths, University of London	University of Stirling
Brunel University, London	London South Bank University	City University London
Edinburgh Napier University	Queen Mary, University of London	Glasgow Caledonian University
Plymouth University	Royal Holloway, University of London	Manchester Metropolitan University
Robert Gordon University	Royal Veterinary College, University of London	Newcastle University
Swansea University	The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London	Queen's University Belfast

(Bell, 2016, pp. 92-93)

As I have argued elsewhere (Bell, 2022), my main personal concern regarding the steady global rise in private-provider EAP provision is simply that I believe it serves to further weaken EAP's already

precarious professional status in the academy. I will discuss what I see as being some of the main issues around the professional and academic status of EAP in more detail under a subsequent sub-heading, but for now, I merely wish to stress that it is principally for *this* reason that I see privatisation in EAP as a negative development. In the greater scheme of things, surely anything which is likely to detract from EAP's academic standing can only be considered as being detrimental to the security of its future trajectory within Higher Education. As indeed Alex Ding, Bee Bond and Ian Bruce have recently commented:

> Privatisation of EAP is a blight and an existential threat to EAP as a discipline, a field and to its practitioners. It threatens not only employment, status, and opportunities for practitioners, it diminishes the educational and academic roles and impact that EAP can and should aspire to. It risks rendering EAP as an avaricious, profit-seeking service without status, recognition and impact and risks an impoverished future for EAP. The EAP community needs to address this urgently and begin to articulate collective values as well as developing a clearing house of expertise and experience in combating privatisation.
>
> (Ding, Bond & Bruce, 2022, p.26)

As these authors have eloquently pointed out, the outsourcing of EAP provision is problematic for the future of the discipline because it reduces EAP's academic role and impact. After all, most universities worldwide make a very clear distinction between their academic and non-academic units and this division of labour is then reflected in the drawing up of employment contracts and specifications around working terms and conditions. Allowing EAP to be outsourced and delivered by private providers thus immediately moves EAP's professional status from academic to non-academic. This in turn then has several important ramifications for how EAP will be more widely perceived within the academy, a point I will be returning to below. As Ding, Bond and Bruce have warned, unless the EAP community takes more direct action to offset this privatisation of their offerings, then it seems fair to predict that over time, EAP's relegation to non-academic status in universities, and all the potential negatives which I believe that such a designation is likely to entail, can and will only increase. It is also worth noting, however, as Bao, Hu and Feng (2024) have recently documented, that even in universities where privatisation has not yet taken place, there can still be a tendency for EAP to end up being given non-academic status. In this sense, it might be argued that privatisation and the outsourcing of EAP are only serving to expedite and aggravate an existing condition. Nonetheless, in the ever-dwindling number of institutions where EAP professionals *are* still afforded academic status, it must also now be said that once a certain tipping point has been reached- and in the UK context, some might even argue that this has already occurred- it will then become almost impossible for EAP practitioners to reverse matters and return their professional standing to the academic status it once enjoyed.

Somewhat paradoxically, formal discussion of the effects of privatisation in the mainstream EAP research literature has remained surprisingly limited (aside from the sources already cited, see also Bell, 2021, 2018; Ding & Bruce, 2017; Fulcher, 2009; Hadley, 2015) although the topic continues to surface more informally at conferences, in blogs, on personal webpages and in professional discussion lists. When I speculate on what the future is likely to hold for EAP, it seems to me that this issue of privatisation is undoubtedly going to play a significant role, which suggests that the matter should therefore be receiving far more urgent and critical attention in the EAP professional literature than is currently the case.

2.3 The academic status of EAP

Unlike the issue of privatization, I think it would be fair to say that the status of EAP and its practitioners has received, and indeed continues to receive, considerable attention in the academic literature (e.g. see Bell, 2016, 2017, 2021; Ding and Bruce, 2017; Ding, 2019; Ding and Monbec, 2024; Hyland, 2018;

Macdonald, 2016; Pennington, 1992; Taylor, 2024). All writers on this subject generally seem to agree that when compared to other subjects and disciplines in the academy, EAP usually finds itself being afforded lower professional status. Indeed, as Ding and Bruce (2017) have commented, rather than it being treated as an equal player, EAP tends to be positioned instead as a discipline which only belongs on the margins of academia. As I reported some years ago, this inherently poor status of EAP was also flagged as a matter of grave concern by several of my original doctoral thesis interviewees (Bell, 2021, pp. 2-3):

> I think that teachers of EAP and language teachers within the institute were seen as, umm, lower down the pecking order… and I think that is definitely still a widespread problem. I think it [EAP teaching] never was seen as being on a par with degree level teaching, or that EAP teachers were ever seen as full academics in the same way as other colleagues were.
>
> *'Adam': a retired Associate Professor formerly based at a university in the UK*

> My feeling is that in a lot of UK institutions, there's still a massive gap between the sort of academic members of a faculty and the sort of EAP tutors… who are not very well supported, who are working often on different contracts and who have, umm, very different working conditions. And I don't think the situation's getting any better. A lot of EAP practitioners are not given enough recognition within the academy… you're always having to establish the fact that teaching is a legitimate area to be interested in. Certainly, within universities in the UK, there is a real problem with status and people just being treated differently in terms of pay and conditions and nobody could argue that that's not the case.
>
> *'Simon': an Associate Professor based at a university in the UK*

> In the disciplines, they seem to think that you're just the grammar guy.
>
> *'Jack': a full Professor based at a university in Hong Kong*

> It's not the same kind of subject in terms of its respectability as others. I think that's a pity… not having *any* acknowledgment that you were doing something that was academically respectable; being treated as just 'skills' providers…
>
> *'Sandra': a retired Senior Lecturer, previously based at a university in the UK*

> I see EAP as a profession that has poor pay; I think it's very badly paid; I think it's very insecure. It's an insecure profession, and the last few years have just been dreadful. Also, there's a low status with who they [EAP professionals] are in the university. If you think about a research-based university…. if you look at those research-based, research-led universities… you've got the superstars who do all the research, and are world-famous for this, that and the other, but where are the EAP teachers? They're at the bottom of the heap, aren't they? I mean, they're not even in the middle; they're right at the bottom. So, as I said, there's a very low status, I think, associated with EAP.
>
> *'Martha': a full Professor based at a university in the UK*

As reflected in several of these comments, the reasons for EAP's poor professional status in the academy are in fact multi-faceted. One issue is the sad but now ubiquitous truth that EAP practitioners tend to be seen as mere language mechanics, only to be called upon when there are linguistic errors needing to be fixed. As the Hong Kong-based professor 'Jack' pointed out, from the perspective of academics based in other disciplines, he typically found himself being written off as merely 'the grammar guy' and there is

more recent evidence from Hong Kong which suggests that issues around the pedagogical recognition and generally poor status of EAP practitioners seemingly still persist there (Trent, 2024). Similar concerns were also echoed by the UK-based academic 'Sandra', in her remark that those involved in EAP are generally considered to be 'just skills providers'. As I have commented above, if EAP is not perceived to be a legitimate academic subject on a par with other disciplines in the academy, then it becomes all the easier for it to be relegated to non-academic status and assigned the ancillary, and much less prestigious, role of service provider.

I would argue that another reason for EAP's poor status has to do with the fact that in terms of its qualifications base, in most educational contexts EAP remains at best a Masters as opposed to a PhD-based discipline. As long ago as 1992, the problems associated with this, and the myriad of issues around EAP practitioners being treated as second-class citizens which have accrued as a result, were flagged for attention in a seminal article by Professor Martha Pennington. As I commented in my doctoral thesis some twenty-four years later (Bell, 2016), when we are considering the future trajectory of EAP, then surely it does not bode well to note that concerns such as these, which were already identified as being detrimental to EAP decades ago, have largely remained unchanged and unresolved. While I would readily acknowledge that the expectation of EAP practitioners holding a PhD will not serve as an instant cure for all ills, I still find myself in strong agreement with Professor Pennington that working collectively to raise the required academic qualification base for those involved in EAP- and in so doing, bringing them more in line with other members of the academy- would nonetheless do much to improve EAP practitioners' wider standing and academic status.

2.4 Some legacies of Covid-19 and post-pandemic international student mobility

Prior to 2019, it would have been almost unthinkable to suggest that all teaching would have to be delivered online, or that there would be huge restrictions placed on both domestic and international student mobility. For anyone involved in Higher Education during the Covid-19 pandemic, the image of large online classes populated by faceless and largely unresponsive students no doubt remains a very raw memory. However, while teaching in universities has for the most part now returned to face to face delivery, it must also be said that a few residual legacies of the Covid-19 era sadly still remain. I am aware, for example, of several institutions worldwide which despite the passing of the pandemic have continued to rely on online delivery for aspects of their EAP programmes, simply because these are perceived as being easier and more economically attractive to administer. After all, from a university finances department point of view, why should institutions have to worry about the rising costs of providing physical offices and student learning spaces if they can arrange for the delivery of large-scale teaching online? Legacies of the Covid-19 pandemic such as these are clearly potentially very damaging for the longer-term stability of EAP, particularly as the (cheaper) option of offsite online delivery only serves to fuel the ongoing trend towards privatization and outsourcing. Of course, as I must acknowledge, there are also some positives to be gained from conducting teaching online- widening the scale of student access being perhaps the most obvious- but I would caution that it is always worth keeping in mind that the decisions which drive changes to traditional pedagogic delivery may sometimes conceal far less altruistic motives.

In the case of international student mobility, there can be little doubt that many of the traditional demographics are rapidly changing and it would be very unwise indeed to assume that the order of play which has prevailed up to now is going to remain the same in the future. In the case of my own current geographical location China, for example, the boom in domestic institutions providing tertiary-level EMI (English Medium of Instruction) courses is undoubtedly now having a demonstrable impact on the number of students choosing to further their studies overseas. In the not-so-distant past, anyone in China wishing to study for a degree through the medium of English would have most probably chosen to

apply to universities in the UK, America, Australia or one of the other major English-speaking countries. However, as more and more international Higher Education providers enter into deals with Chinese partners and establish franchised degree programmes which can then be delivered *in situ*, the need for overseas academic travel exponentially decreases. In a country like the UK, where in recent decades most universities have been extremely *laissez-faire* in allowing themselves to become heavily financially reliant on admitting large numbers of Chinese students, this change in international student mobility is now becoming a very real cause for concern, as evidenced by the growing number of degree-programme closures and academic staff redundancies currently sweeping across the UK HE sectors (Foster, 2024; Rowsell, 2024).

In this specific case of UK-based EAP, the downturns in international student recruitment are, not surprisingly, a particularly acute source of worry, as by their very nature, EAP courses owe their existence to maintaining a healthy intake of international student applicants. Reduced numbers of international students in general, coupled with the UK's over-reliance on the Chinese market, was flagged as a serious threat to EAP's future existence by 'Professor Jones', one of the people I had originally interviewed for my doctoral work in 2014, and with whom I spoke again more recently in 2023:

> In terms of more threats [to EAP], well, this next one is blindingly obvious, and yet it's not clear that British universities are doing anything about it. And what I'm talking about now is the unhealthy reliance of British universities on overseas students, especially on Chinese students. I mean this is so obvious, isn't it, it's not rocket science. I'm not conversant with the exact figures, but I see what's happening around me. And I know that if the overseas students' revenue was withdrawn, then lots of universities would go to the wall in Britain. It's as simple as that. If we look at the world around us, and we look at what's happening politically, if there was some kind of military or political outrage, either from the Chinese side, or from the Chinese perspective looking at the British side, and China as a country overnight told its students that they were not able to go to the UK, then what on earth would UK universities do? As I say, they'd go to the wall. And of course, this isn't just connected to UK universities generally, it's connected to EAP in particular, because most students on EAP programmes in the UK are Chinese. So that would be two massive sources of revenue which would be just cut from under us. To my mind, I think there's no doubt that this is a major threat. What would EAP do if Chinese students stopped coming to Britain?
>
> ('Professor Jones', interview with the author, 2023)

Given the current economic and educational climate, Professor Jones' closing question must now represent a very tangible concern for anyone considering the future trajectory of EAP at universities in English-speaking countries. I would add to this by saying that as long as EAP in these locations remains as an activity which is only offered to international students, a point I will be returning to below, it will continue to be vulnerable to the vagaries of international student mobility and the longer-term stability of its future will therefore naturally remain precarious. However, to close this section on a rather more upbeat note- and in so doing consider the future of EAP more *globally*- it must also be said that the need for EAP in many non-Anglophone countries has actually been expanding. Locations such as Iran (Kaivanpanah, Alavi, Bruce & Hejazi, 2021), South Korea (Hong & Basturkmen, 2020) and the Arabian Peninsula (Gu & Almanna, 2023) all report a growing need for EAP, largely perhaps due to their burgeoning developments around EMI. Indeed, as I have recently argued (Bell, 2024a), these linkages between EMI and EAP may yet do much to help safeguard EAP's global future.

2.5 The emergence of generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI)

Since first appearing in 2022, Chat GPT and similar forms of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) are now having a predictably significant impact on the global Higher Educational landscape

(Blackie, 2024). In many cases, universities have been forced to completely re-think their approaches to assessment, as Gen AI can now all too easily be used by students as a means of circumventing traditional extended writing tasks, opening up a host of potential issues around academic misconduct and false authorship (Cotton, Cotton & Shipway, 2024).

Given the linguistic nature of their role, it seems to me that EAP and academic literacy practitioners are arguably ideally placed to be leading the charge on how the capabilities of Gen AI can be legitimately and ethically harnessed when producing academic work (Anson, 2024). In this regard, while it is probably a more common reaction for mainstream academics to see Chat GPT and Gen AI in general as a potential threat, from an English Language teacher or EAP practitioner's perspective, they may in fact represent a considerable pedagogic opportunity (Edmett, Ichaporia, Crompton and Crichton, 2023).

As Gen AI and related technologies are developing so quickly, it is hard to predict with any degree of certainty what exactly the future will hold (Bell, 2024c). In the case of EAP however, I would speculate that Gen AI is undoubtedly going to play a very important role in the ways that future generations of university students will approach their learning. At the very least, EAP as a discipline therefore needs to be flexible enough to embrace, move with and capitalize on those changes. As just one example of this, in the wake of new technological developments, the instruction typically provided by EAP departments on what constitutes plagiarism and academic misconduct must now be upgraded to include guidance on the ethical and institutionally acceptable uses of Gen AI.

2.6 The nature of EAP research

One of the emic areas in which I feel EAP is likely to change in the future is with regard to the nature of its research. As I have argued elsewhere (Bell, 2022), the main focus of EAP's research in recent decades has been on what I have termed the 'what' of EAP i.e. the language of academic discourse. As a keyword search of journals such as JEAP or ESPJ all too quickly proves, there has certainly been no shortage of articles dealing with ever more rarified aspects of genre analysis, such as identifying the move structures of different discourses, or categorizing lexical bundles. However, I believe that this emphasis on the 'what' has to quite a large extent come at the expense of paying inadequate attention to the 'who' and the 'how' i.e. there could be rather more research interest given to the nature of EAP practitioners and their approaches to pedagogy. This was also flagged as a concern by one of my original doctoral interviewees, the sadly now late Dr Alan Waters:

> I've stopped reading anything other than only very occasionally, the table of contents of the EAP and ESP journals because I find the subject matter of the articles to be so, err, how can I put it, umm, *specialized*, and generally much more to do with advanced aspects of language analysis, rather than anything else. I mean, yes, all of that's got its place, definitely, but I think there should be a much more central concern with methodology really, and with pedagogy in general… There's no point in knowing about some rarefied aspect of English, if you lack a good understanding of how to put that knowledge over in the classroom; so, I think that a good understanding of classroom methodology must definitely come first and foremost. I think a lot of the time, we've got things the wrong way round basically *[laughs]*… There's been an inversion of the real priorities…
>
> (Waters, 2014 cited in Bell, 2024a, p. 139)

A decade has now passed since these comments were made and to be fair, in the intervening years, there does seem to have been rather more research interest shown in the EAP practitioner and in what goes on in EAP classrooms. Some of the recent work on genre, for example (see Tardy et al, 2022) is evidently taking a much more applied approach to how linguistic analysis might translate into teachers' classroom practices and there has also been a more explicit focus on what EAP teachers think and do

(e.g. Karimpour and Mazlum, 2024; Jakonen and Duran, 2024; Gozdawa-Gołębiowski, Foryś-Nogala and Walenta, 2024). My personal view is that applied research of this nature is to be applauded and I very much hope that this more practical trajectory will continue. In this regard, it can be interesting to contrast the ongoing development of EAP with the historical trajectory of English Language Teaching more generally, a point which was perspicaciously flagged by Dr Helen Basturkmen, another of my doctoral interviewees from 2014:

> …for many years people thought it was all about linguistic description- you know, what's a sentence- and then, of course, people said, 'yeah, but *teachers* are important' and then, 'oh yes, learners are important in all of this *too*.' [In the future] I think there will be increasing interest in the teaching and learning aspects of EAP as well. I think it will end up being more rounded and not so much just the language or the linguistic description, but thinking about teaching and teachers, and learners and learning, and bringing it all together.
>
> (Basturkmen, 2014 cited in Bell, 2024a, p. 63)

If Dr Basturkmen's predictions are correct, then I would suggest that in the coming years, we can expect to see the research base of EAP continuing to become even broader and more inclusive, a development that I would personally see as being all to the greater good. Aside from serving to make EAP pedagogy better informed and enhancing its academic credibility, reducing the gap between EAP research and EAP teaching would arguably also have some positive knock-on effects for the wider professional status of EAP practitioners and help to offset several of the negative issues which I have already discussed above.

3 So Where Do Things Go From Here?

I would be the first to admit that the future for EAP as I have portrayed it above is probably now looking decidedly gloomy. However, this is not to suggest that things cannot nor should not be turned around. In this final section of the paper, I would therefore like to briefly consider some of the things which might yet help to make the future of EAP look a little brighter.

The first point I would raise is that in order to help safeguard EAP from some of the etic issues I have identified in this article, such as the economic downturns caused by fluctuations in international student recruitment, EAP as an academic discipline needs to widen its scope and become a more centrally embedded feature of university life. One way of doing this is to reposition the knowledge and skills offered by EAP professionals as outcomes which can benefit *anyone* entering Higher Education, not just international students. In some institutions worldwide, this is in fact already happening, with EAP providers joining forces with academic literacies (Wingate, 2022; Wingate and Tribble, 2012), and offering their services to *all* students in the university, not only those for whom English is an additional language. If EAP can be seen as adding value to the academic community in this way, then I believe its future role, *raison d'être* and academic status within universities would be considerably strengthened. As I have already suggested above, as an integral part of this shift, raising the required qualification base for EAP practitioners from Masters to doctorate would further help to give EAP practitioners greater academic credibility and allow them to move in significantly more from the margins. I believe that implementing these two changes alone would go a long way towards alleviating several of the issues I have flagged under sub-headings 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4 above.

In terms of the challenges I identified under sub-headings 2.5 and 2.6, I think the short, and possibly for some still rather unpalatable, answer is that EAP practitioners will ultimately need to take more direct agency themselves. With regard to academic research, I firmly believe that there needs to be more practitioner-based outputs with a closer relationship between EAP research and actual EAP practice. The widening gap between research and practice in EAP, and indeed in English Language Teaching more generally, has already been flagged as a very real concern (e.g., Davis, 2019; Rose, 2019) but it is to be

hoped that in the future, more EAP practitioner-researchers will take heed of this and start rallying to the call. Linking back to the comments made by Dr Alan Waters, this may involve some rethinking of EAP's priorities but the longer-term benefits for both EAP practitioners and EAP as a discipline stand to be considerable. In the case of Gen AI, its emergence marks a seismic shift in the way that Higher Education will operate in the future and the dust on this has not yet settled. As I have argued above, this means that for those with the right mindset, there are undoubtedly some exciting opportunities to be had. Probably the *worst* thing that EAP practitioners could do would be to ignore the changes that are being brought about by Gen AI and continue to offer academic language and literacy support in the traditional modes which they have followed up to now. I believe that doing so would run the risk of EAP as we currently know it gradually becoming obsolete, a very real possibility given the changing nature of how students are now approaching their learning.

In this paper I have tried to speculate, admittedly highly subjectively, on what I believe the future may hold for EAP. While the predictions I have made may or may not ultimately come true, of one thing I remain absolutely certain: the current wider landscape of international Higher Education will continue to flex and change, possibly in ways that we have not yet envisaged or even imagined. Looking to the future, those involved in the research, management and delivery of EAP would therefore be well-advised to remain ever-mindful of this and keep their eyes very firmly on what is now becoming a fast-moving ball.

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