# Developing Four English-in-the-Discipline Courses for University Studies in Hong Kong


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**Abstract** This chapter discusses the development of English-in-the-Discipline (ED) courses offered to students of four disciplines: Education, Information Management, Speech and Hearing Sciences, and Applied Child Development at The University of Hong Kong. These courses aim to help students develop their critical reading, report writing, and oral presentation skills for disciplinary studies and academic purposes. Students conduct a small-scale research project on a self-identified topic in their discipline, interview information-rich professionals, and present their findings in the form of a research report and an academic oral presentation. As developers of these courses, we present the course design principles (e.g., genre and experiential learning approaches, and assessment for learning) and sample teaching materials. In light of student feedback, we reflect upon the strengths of the courses in developing students' academic literacy for university studies and the challenges we experience in relation to (a) specificity in disciplinary communication, (b) collaboration with subject teachers, and (c) language teachers' expertise in teaching ED courses.

**Keywords** English-in-the-Discipline · Academic literacy · Course development · Teacher reflection

## 1 Introduction

Secondary school leavers entering universities assume *new* roles and identities as members of *new* communities and engage with knowledge in *new* ways. They are expected to learn the ways in which discourse is structured and presented in order to navigate and participate effectively in their respective academic and professional domains (Hyland, 2017b, p. 24). This process not only entails developing general academic literacy skills in synthesizing information from reliable sources and

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making cautious claims in spoken and written texts, but also requires communicative competence in a range of genres typical of a particular discipline, for example, a medical bulletin article in pharmacy, a problem-question answer in law, and a case report in business. As language teachers, we aim to provide active, discipline-specific, and sustained support to students by analyzing the linguistic features, discourse patterns, and communicative functions of the texts as well as their acceptable variations, making them explicit and guiding students toward the expression of their own voices and identities as "budding scholars" (Duff, 2010, p. 169) in academic and disciplinary communities over time.

At The University of Hong Kong (HKU), where English is the medium of instruction, two credit-bearing English courses are offered by the Centre for Applied English Studies (CAES), to facilitate the socialization process of undergraduate students into their target academic communities. The first course, Core University English (CUE), is for all first-year students unless they are granted exemption based on their public examination results in English. CUE supports students' transition from secondary school to English-medium university study by developing their general academic skills. Specifically, it assists students to communicate a clear and critical stance in essays and reports and in tutorial discussions by using and synthesizing academic sources appropriately. The second English language course, English-in-the-Discipline (ED), is taken by all students in their second, third, or fourth year, depending on the curriculum of individual faculties. The ED courses are tailor-made to provide target support to students in the development and effective use of English in their disciplines, for example, teaching students how to write assignments expected in their subject areas. Currently, CAES offers 33 ED courses to students of various disciplines, including:

- Communication course for architecture students
- English for clinical pharmacy
- Language and style of narrative journalism
- Technical English for medical engineering
- Writing psychology: Text and context

A full list of the ED courses can be found at http://caes.hku.hk/home/courses/undergraduate-courses/. The majority of these courses are run in composition with faculty courses and focus on the literacy of a particular discipline rather than a specific course, and a few are adjunct to subject courses where students study related materials in both the ED course (for discourse features) and the subject course (for content) (Hyland, 2017a, p. 20). While the effectiveness of these two types of course provision on students' learning at university is worth researching, the purpose of this chapter is to introduce the development of four ED courses that adopt a composite model. These ED courses are offered to students of four disciplines in the Faculty of Education at HKU: Applied Child Development, Education, Information Management, and Speech and Hearing Sciences. While these four disciplines are housed under the same faculty, each differs considerably in terms of its disciplinary nature and content. However, some key academic language skills are common among these disciplines, namely critical reading, research report writing and oral

presentation skills. We were, therefore, able to follow the same composite model when we developed the four ED courses for disciplinary studies and academic purposes.

In the next section, as developers of these courses, we present the course design principles (e.g., genre and experiential learning approaches, and assessment for learning) and sample teaching materials. In light of student feedback, we reflect upon the strengths of the courses in developing students' academic literacy for university studies and the challenges we experience, in relation to (a) specificity in disciplinary communication, (b) collaboration with subject teachers, and (c) language teachers' expertise in teaching ED courses. We hope that our experience and reflection can provide initial insights on how English for Specific Purposes (ESP) practitioners in similar contexts can design courses and materials and develop professionally at the same time.

## 2 Developing Four ED Courses at HKU

As one crucial feature of ED courses is to provide target, discipline-specific academic literacy support to students, instead of offering one ED course which deploys generic materials, offering different ED courses to cater for four different disciplines (see Sect. 1 for details) enables course teachers to design and tailor-make discipline-specific reading materials and writing tasks that best suit the unique academic language learning needs of the students of a certain discipline. In these four ED courses, students conduct a small-scale research project on a self-identified topic in their discipline, interview information-rich professionals, and present their findings through written and spoken tasks using appropriate organizational and rhetorical features.

Every academic year, approximately 120 Education and 60 Speech and Hearing Sciences students take their respective ED course in their second-year of study at HKU, while 60 Information Management and 30 Applied Child Development students take their ED course in their third year, with a class quota of 20 students for a language course at the University. Students' English language proficiency varies, but most are of an upper-intermediate level (with an overall IELTS score of 7), Cantonese being their first language. Each ED course has three contact hours each week for face-to-face teaching, and students are expected to accomplish 80 h of out-of-class learning, for example, by reading academic sources and writing up their project reports. With reference to learning and teaching materials developed, this section discusses the principles behind the design of the courses.

## 2.1 Course Design Principles

To maximize the effectiveness of the course and reflect research-informed pedagogical practices, we have followed five major principles in designing these courses, namely collaboration with disciplinary teachers, genre approach, use of authentic texts, experiential learning, and assessment for learning.

### 2.1.1 Collaboration with Disciplinary Teachers

Based on the notion that fostering a collaborative relationship with disciplinary teachers is most important for their input in the content area (Hyland, 2017b, p. 39), we have collaborated with disciplinary teachers in many ways at various stages of course development.

Before we started developing these courses, supplemented with the details on the program's website, we interviewed program coordinators of Applied Child Development, Education, Information Management, and Speech and Hearing Sciences, respectively, about their curriculum requirements, course provision and students' profiles (e.g., their entry qualifications, English proficiency, and general demographic information). With disciplinary teachers' help, we also collected samples of student writing (e.g., essays, literature reviews, reflective writings, and final year project reports) and analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of their work. After a careful analysis of students' academic language learning needs (Dudley-Evans, 2001, p. 131), we identified two essential skills for students' academic and disciplinary studies to focus on in our ED courses, namely, research report writing skills and academic presentation skills. To better understand and respond to students' needs in these two areas, enrich our disciplinary knowledge (Shulman, 2018) and develop suitable learning and teaching materials, we regularly attend students' final year project presentations and faculty seminars.

We maintain contact with faculty teachers so that these ED courses can align with the students' program curriculum. Since ED courses are designed to help students master the linguistic conventions of their own discipline, any curriculum changes are likely to alter the academic literacy skills needed (Dudley-Evans, 2001, p. 131). A few years ago, we were informed of a major change in the curriculum of Speech and Hearing Sciences to which we had to respond by prompt revision of content. Had we not established a close working relationship with faculty teachers, we probably would not have been able to do so.

Informed by research on using corpora as useful databases of authentic language use for ESP teaching and learning (Belcher, 2006, p. 138; Dudley-Evans, 2001, p. 134), we built a database of research articles for each of the four disciplines. To ensure that the database contains research articles suitable for students to join their target academic community (Duff, 2010, p. 169), we approached the program coordinators for a list of key journals in their field. Although we could use other means to obtain this list, for example, via Web of Science, this purposeful involvement of

faculty teachers is likely to enhance the credibility of the courses and demonstrate their relevance to students' learning experience. Based on the suggested lists, we selected over 50 articles for each discipline to build the database, which forms the basis for developing materials to teach research report writing. The articles for the database were chosen carefully, following the criteria recommended by Tomlinson (2012, p. 145) and Krashen (2011), including (1) relevance, (2) level of difficulty (in terms of argumentation and language use), and (3) teachability (as good examples of language use, features, and structure). Since their development, the four databases, which are updated regularly, now contain over 200 research journal articles and have been employed for both in-class and independent learning. These four databases can be accessed via the links presented below:

- Applied Child Development
- https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B0IQTlnsqlLlNFRsNVZUcG1NLTg
- Speech and Hearing Sciences
- https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B0IQTlnsqlLlX0lDelhxNm1QWTA
- Education
- https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B0IQTlnsqlLlUVBDT1ZjemlIckk
- Information Management
- https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B0IQTlnsqlLlUVNwbk1hYm5ISEU

### 2.1.2 Genre Approach

In various academic and professional contexts, the term *genre* refers to the recognizable and recurring patterns of texts (Hammond & Derewianka, 2001, p. 186) or the way writers typically use language in a particular culture (Hyland, 2018, p. 2359). Genre approach has been used extensively for analyzing and teaching specialized communication patterns. The genre that students of these four disciplines frequently engage with for both comprehension and production purposes is research reports. A research report documents the complex enquiry process of the researchers in understanding a phenomenon, with typical structural and rhetorical characteristics. Pedagogically, we have adopted move analysis (Swales, 1990, p. 141) in delineating the structure of a report or a section of a report such as introduction, methods, findings, and discussion. Table 1 presents an excerpt of a text that we use for students to identify the moves in discussing findings.

We have also analyzed other integral elements that define a research report such as lexis, grammar, and register. Tables 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 show samples of text analysis demonstrating different linguistic features for presenting and interpreting research findings in the area of speech and hearing sciences. When discussing these sample texts with students, we also highlight some commonly used formulaic expressions specific to a particular section of a research report and discuss their functions, such as the use of "this is consistent with the previous study that …" in the discussion section to show comparison.

**Table 1** Sample text for move analysis

| [Sentences are numbered for ease of reference] |
|---|
| Some parents reported that, particularly in relation to autism advisors and medical doctors, they saw the information provided as accurate but of limited use because it lacked detail about how the interventions would relate to their child [S1]. This was consistent with the data collected in the recent evaluation of the HCWA package, where it was reported that although the majority of families were satisfied overall with the advice and support provided by the autism advisor service, a large proportion of families also reported that even with advice from the autism advisor it was difficult to understand what service would be best for their child/children (ARTD Consultants, 2012) [S2]. This indicates that the information provided to parents regarding interventions may be too general and lacking specific guidance [S3] |
| ***Move analysis*** |
| S1: Summarize the main research findings |
| S2: Relate the findings of the current study to previous studies |
| S3: Account for the findings |

**Table 2** Referring to interview data

Parent L *explained* that other parents were reliable sources of information: "… simply because they have tried it, and if they say that it's worked for their child it might work for my child, and they have actually tried it so that rates quite high for me". …

***Parent C, for example, described that the information provided by autism advisors, while accurate, lacked the detail to make it useful***

> … they give you all of this information and it's like, ok, you've got to go and pick what the best treatment is for your child and there's not really enough help to tell you **"this treatment does this", "this treatment does that"** … you've got to do a lot of the research yourself, and it's really lacking in that area. It's like, "Here's your money, you just go and spend it", but they don't tell you, "This would suit your child" or "That would suit your child".

Parent E *held* a similar opinion: "I think they gave us very broad information. …." Some parents also *reported* that medical sources provided information of limited use. Parents F and I both *stated* that they needed to advise their doctors about what to do …

***KEYS***
*Reporting verbs in simple past tense*
Short direct quotes
Skip the part that is unnecessary in a quote
***A brief overview/summary of the essence of the quote***
A long quote (of 40 or more words) → a standalone block of text; do not use quotation marks
**Use double quotation marks to enclose any quoted material within a block quotation**

**Table 3** Using hedges in interpreting findings

| |
|---|
| In the present study, parents who had first-hand experience with interventions were seen as trustworthy sources by a number of participants. This *appeared to* be linked to the feeling of reassurance offered to participants by knowing that somebody else had been in a similar situation to them, which *may* have provided a sense of hope for the future outcomes for their child. It *may* also be related to the power of anecdotal stories over scientific evidence, which was described by Newman (2003) in reference to decision-making in general … This *indicates* that the information provided to parents regarding interventions *may* be too general and lacking specific guidance. With regard to information provided by medical practitioners, Lynch (2004) and Loomis (2007) both reported that parents felt frustrated that some medical professionals did not provide them with information about CAM interventions for ASD. This is *one possible reason* that the information provided by medical professionals *may* be seen as limited in its usefulness |

**Table 4** Comparing results with specific examples

| |
|---|
| *A number of parents* identified the fact that sources were parents of children with ASD who had first-hand experiences of interventions as reasons for trusting or believing them. *Parent L* explained that other parents were reliable sources of information… *Parent A* identified the fact that her service provider was also a parent of children …<br>*Not all parents, however*, appeared to trust a source simply because they were a parent of a child with ASD. When asked to rate the reliability of other parents, *Parent G* commented …<br>*Many parents* commented on the limited use of information provided by sources, particularly autism advisors and medical sources. *Parent C, for example,* described that the information provided by autism advisors, while accurate, lacked the detail to make it useful… *Parent E held a similar opinion*: 'I think they gave us very broad information …<br>*Some parents* also reported that medical sources provided information of limited use. *Parents F and I both* stated that they needed to advise their doctors about what to do. Parent I saw this as related to the nature of general practice, noting "You need a specialist nowadays for anything that's wrong with you." Other sources that were identified by parents as providing information of limited use were media programs (*Parent F*), service providers (*Parent J*), and the Raising Children Network website (*Parent L*) |

**Table 5** Relating findings of the study to previous research

| |
|---|
| Themes emerged regarding why parents trusted certain sources more than others. *This topic has not been explicitly examined in previous research* on parent decision-making regarding ASD interventions. In the present study, parents who had first-hand experience with interventions were seen as trustworthy sources by a number of participants. ..... *It may also be related to the power of anecdotal stories over scientific evidence, which was described by Newman (2003) in reference to decision-making in general …*<br>Parents' views of the usefulness of sources, again, are *an issue not commonly explored in previous research*. Some parents reported that, particularly in relation to autism advisors and medical doctors... ***This was consistent with*** *the data collected in the recent evaluation of the HCWA package* … (ARTD Consultants, 2012). ... *With regard to information provided by medical practitioners, Lynch (2004) and Loomis (2007) both reported* that parents felt frustrated that some medical professionals did not provide them with information about CAM interventions for ASD...<br>Parents described feeling that they had inadequate information to make decisions, yet were expected to do so. *Valentine (2010),* in a study focusing on choice and engagement of parents…, ***also*** *identified* that parents in her study felt that they were forced to make decisions. *Another theme* ***common*** *to both the present study and Valentine (2010)* was that some parents felt overwhelmed with the amount of information provided to them |

**Table 6** Using words for thematic unity

| Factors related to impressions of *reliability and trustworthiness* of sources |
|---|
| A number of parents identified the fact that sources were parents of children with ASD who had firsthand experiences of interventions as reasons for *trusting or believing* them … Parent A identified the fact that her service provider was also a parent of children with ASD as a reason for *trusting the information* she provided about other interventions and services. … When asked to rate the *reliability* of other parents, Parent G commented: "… people like to talk a lot and they like to believe in some imaginary things" … Parents identified that their perception of the intentions of the person providing the information were important in *establishing trust*. When Parent L was asked to identify *reliable sources* she stressed the importance of the source not appearing biased toward a particular approach or type of intervention |

### 2.1.3 Use of Authentic Texts

Instead of creating our own, we use authentic texts to help students understand the discourse conventions of their discipline because these texts familiarize students with their target academic community (Belcher, 2006, p. 138) and showcase the kind of discourse that professionals use for communication in real contexts. Since our ED courses focus on research report writing, we have selected authentic journal articles as source texts for teaching. The majority of the articles we adopt in class come from the databases we specially develop for these ED courses. They provide meaningful exposure to language and therefore have a motivating effect on learners toward the learning of a language (Tomlinson, 2012, p. 161). With the principle of *compelling* comprehensible input (Krashen, 2011), we have selected articles that are interesting and engaging to students contextually, cognitively, and linguistically. They also demonstrate the lexico-grammatical and discursive patterns that we aim to teach. We recognize the fact that there are variations and stylistic differences among writers; therefore, instead of presenting students with only one text, we have deliberately included several texts for analysis. From these articles, we have extracted relevant content and designed instructional tasks to support students' learning, for example,

1. Research designs illustrating how to plan small-scale research projects (Table 7), and
2. Verb choices to state objectives of a study (Table 8).

### 2.1.4 Experiential Learning

One distinctive feature of HKU's undergraduate curriculum is experiential learning as the University offers both credit bearing and non-credit bearing courses to students and provides opportunities for diverse learning experiences such as overseas exchange, internship, and real-life projects in and outside Hong Kong (University of Hong Kong (HKU), 2018). To give our students the best learning experience possible, these ED courses integrate an experiential learning component which allows students to make sense of the theoretical knowledge that they have acquired from,

**Table 7** Research design—outlining a research plan

| Authors | David Carless and Ricky Lam |
|---|---|
| Topic | Assessment |
| Issue(s) to focus on | The perspectives on assessment of lower primary school students in Hong Kong |
| Project title | The examined life: Perspectives of lower primary school students in Hong Kong |
| Main points and arguments of existing literature | • Testing exerts power over students' behaviors and experiences, and how they are perceived or classified as individuals. It can not only lead to feelings of satisfaction or achievement but can also prompt anxiety or generate threats to self-esteem |
| | • Reay and Wiliam (1999) show the powerful impact of standardized tests on children's lives in Britain. Drawing on classroom observations, individual and focus group interviews with year 6 students, they develop a picture of strong currents of fear and anxiety related to testing, with students expressing a perception that a test can make a single definitive statement about the sort of person they are |
| | • High school students in Queensland revealed that they were mainly positive about their assessment experiences in primary schools but over the course of secondary schooling, they became increasingly negative about the nature of assessment and concerned about its impact on their lives (Moni, Van Kraayenoord, & Baker, 2002) |
| | • Students in Hong Kong do indeed generally work hard, but they seem to do this in order to obtain good examination scores and appease significant family members, more than due to interest in learning for its own sake (Pong & Chow, 2002) |
| | • Internal school assessments are generally taken very seriously by schools, teachers, students, and parents in Hong Kong. It has been claimed that there is an almost religious fervor surrounding examinations in Hong Kong (Kennedy et al. 2008) |
| Research gap(s) | • The modest literature in relation to assessment in Hong Kong primary schools has mainly focused on teacher implementation of formative assessment (e.g., Carless, 2005; Tang et al. 2010), with little quality research on the student response to assessment |
| | • Few studies have focused on lower primary school students |
| Research objectives | • To identify the perspectives on assessment of a sample of lower primary school students in Hong Kong |
| Research significance/ justification for the study | • Individuals are defined and dominated by tests (Hanson, 1993). In view of trends internationally for more accountability and more testing (Black & Wiliam, 2005), the issue of how students respond to tests is highly relevant to the international educational community |
| | • How lower primary school students react to testing is particularly important because if early experiences of assessment or schooling are negative, this can impede young learners from developing the capacities and dispositions required for a successful school career |
| | • There is a consensus that assessment can afford students a sense of success in that high levels of achievement often lead to positive self-esteem (Black, 1998). However, despite performing well on international tests of achievement, such as TIMSS or PIRLS, students in Hong Kong seem to carry perceptions of low self-efficacy (House, 2003; Shen & Tam, 2008). This potential disjunction between high achievement and a low sense of self-worth makes the perspectives of Hong Kong students particularly worth exploring |

(continued)

**Table 7** (continued)

| Authors | David Carless and Ricky Lam |
|---|---|
| Research questions | • How does a sample of lower primary school students in Hong Kong perceive their experience of assessment? |
| Research methods | • Semi-structured focus group interviews |
| | • Picture drawing |

**Table 8** Writing research objectives: Choice of verbs

| Examples of research objective statements |
|---|
| • The purpose of this study was to examine an insider's perspective on communication in multiple sclerosis (MS), a disease of the central nervous system in which scattered lesions or plaques produce varying combinations of motor, sensory, and/or cognitive impairments |
| • The aim of this grounded theory study was to explore adult patients' experienced meaning of living with CIs. The aim was also to gain a deeper insight into the subjective experiences of the effects of CIs on the quality of life |
| • The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe and understand the communicative impact of perceived experiences of laypersons listening to one of six speech samples of an adult male reading the first paragraph of the Rainbow Passage. Further, this study was designed to discover and understand how perceptions were generally encoded as well as changed across various levels along a fluency-disfluency continuum |
| When developing purpose statements, avoid using biased verbs such as ***demonstrate***, ***prove*** and ***show***. Use unbiased verbs such as ***compare***, ***describe***, ***develop***, ***discover***, ***explore***, ***test*** and ***understand***. |
| ✓ The purpose of the study was to ***explore*** the effects of music therapy on speech recovery in … |
| ✗ The purpose of the study was to ***prove*** that music therapy improves speech recovery in … |

| Examples of research objective verbs | |
|---|---|
| Qualitative methods | Quantitative methods |
| ***Ethnographic***<br>Assess, describe, examine, understand | ***Correlation***<br>Determine, examine, identify, understand |
| ***Grounded theory***<br>Develop, extend, identify, validate | ***Descriptive***<br>Compare, contrast, describe, identify |
| ***Phenomenological***<br>Describe, develop, generate, understand | ***Experimental***<br>Determine, examine, investigate, measure |

Houser, J. (2015). *Nursing research: Reading, using, and creating evidence* (3rd ed.). Burlington: Jones & Bartlett Learning

for example, their major courses and examine it from a real-world perspective. This provides them with an opportunity to see things in a practical light by conducting a small-scale research project and listening to the stories of information-rich professionals in their field (see the project description in Table 9).

In the 2017–2018 academic year, students conducted empirical research on a wide range of disciplinary topics by interacting with professionals such as teachers, parents, speech therapists, and web designers to gain valuable insight on how theory is integrated with practice. Titles of some research projects conducted are presented in Table 10.

**Table 9** Project description in ED for Information Management Students

| |
|---|
| Individually or in groups of two to four, you will conduct a small-scale research project in the field of Information Management. You may want to identify an interesting, important, and/or controversial issue relevant to your interest, learning, and/or personal experience. Here are some areas you may work on: |
| ✓ E-textbooks and e-learning |
| ✓ Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) |
| ✓ Online social networking sites |
| ✓ Mobile applications |
| ✓ Database systems |
| ✓ Digital libraries |
| ✓ E-commerce |
| ✓ Data-mining |
| ∗*For more research ideas, please refer to the journal articles in our online database (https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B0IQTlnsqlLlUVNwbk1hYm5ISEU)* |
| You will explore the issue by interviewing two or more information-rich people related to your chosen topic, for example: |
| ✓ Students and teachers in primary or secondary schools |
| ✓ Researchers and academics in tertiary institutions and other organizations |
| ✓ Graduates of BSc (IM) |
| ✓ Librarians |
| ✓ Designers of mobile apps |
| ✓ Online shoppers |
| ✓ IT specialists and security administrators |
| *Individually*, you will analyze the information you collect and present your findings in an oral presentation and in a formal report |

It is worth noting that during the process of conducting these investigative projects, students manage their own learning, evaluate their own efforts and devise further plans. These projects have considerable potential to enhance students' meta-cognitive skills by giving them an opportunity to conduct a qualitative study from the beginning to the end, thereby providing them with an experience that helps build their knowledge.

Experiential learning generally refers to "learning by doing." Kolb, in his book, "Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development" (1984), defines learning as the process whereby "knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it" (p. 41). According to Kolb's cyclical process of experiential learning, concrete experiences, such as the ones students engage in during the process of their research—identifying and reaching out to interviewees, drafting interview questions, conducting interviews, recording and transcribing interviews, adhering to research ethics, etc.—provide the linguistic (e.g., language of interviewing) as well as non-linguistic information (e.g., about independent learning or time management) about their ED course that serves as a basis for reflection.

**Table 10** Titles of selected student research projects (2017–2018)

| | |
|---|---|
| Education | • Assisting newly-arrived students from mainland China in Hong Kong schooling effectively: Teachers' perspectives |
| | • The power of proximity: Peer influence on students' learning in the classroom |
| | • English as medium of instruction: Difficulties encountered in content subjects by secondary school students in Hong Kong |
| | • Will teaching passion decay—fresh teachers' and experienced teachers' perspectives in Hong Kong |
| | • Effects of expectations of teachers and parents on students' academic performance |
| Information management | • The impact of the use of telegram on friendship |
| | • Hong Kong students' perceptions on massive open online courses |
| | • Experience of researchers in the use of Scopus vs web of science |
| | • Order via screen: Exploring the perceptions and factors influencing customers' intention to use self-service kiosks in catering service |
| | • Hong Kong university students' perceptions on WeChat pay |
| Speech and hearing sciences | • Perceptions of students with hearing impairment in Hong Kong mainstream and special secondary schools |
| | • Parents' perspectives on dyslexia treatment and intervention in Hong Kong |
| | • Impacts of sign language on academic studies and social engagement of deaf adolescents: An educator's perspective |
| | • How do parenting styles affect the effectiveness of social skills interventions for children with autism spectrum disorder? |
| | • Hong Kong adolescents who stutter: What hampers the treatment process? |
| Applied child development | • Attributes of good kindergarten teachers in Hong Kong |
| | • Kindergarten teachers' reflections on their interaction with children after introducing a tablet into the classroom |
| | • Therapeutic value of art on children with autism |
| | • Parents' strategies in handling children's behavioral problems |
| | • The practice of empathy and global citizenship in Hong Kong kindergartens |

Students often reflect on these experiences not only on their own but also while discussing their project with their teacher and peers, and even while formally presenting their research. From these reflections, they can assimilate the information they gain and consequently form abstract concepts about language, their discipline as well as the world at large, which are not identical to what is taught in the classroom but tweaked with their own particular experience-based outlook. Students then use these to develop their own unique theories, which they test through other activities in different situations. Hence, the experiential learning dimension of these ED courses provides the conditions where students can explore new knowledge in a safe environment, reflect on their learning, and get guidance from their teachers and peers to integrate experience with reflection.

**Table 11** A summary of the assessment tasks

| Research project | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Written report | | | Oral presentation | | |
| Research plan | Draft | Final | Practice task | Rehearsal | Final |
| (500 words) | (1250 words) | (2500 words) | (10 min/pair) | (6 min) | (6 min) |
| (Week 3, 0%) | (Week 7, 20%) | (Week 12, 50%) | (Weeks 1–6, 0%) | (Week 11, 0%) | (Week 12, 30%) |

**Table 12** Oral presentation practice task

| This task is designed to help you |
|---|
| 1. Identify your strengths and weaknesses in academic oral presentation; |
| 2. Understand the grading criteria for the assessed oral presentation in Week 12; and |
| 3. Enrich the knowledge of your audience about a particular topic in your discipline |
| You will work in pairs and **present a research article in your discipline**. You shall talk about |
| 1. What was the purpose of the research? |
| 2. How was the research conducted? |
| 3. What were the major findings? |
| 4. What are the major conclusions and implications? |
| 5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the research? |
| You can choose **one article** the database of articles in your discipline at https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B0IQTlnsqlLlNFRsNVZUcG1NLTg |
| Each pair has **10 min** for this presentation and **5 min to answer questions** raised by the audience. You may use **visual aids** |

### 2.1.5 Assessment for Learning

Good practices in assessment, such as aligning assessment tasks in an ED course with students' academic language needs in their disciplinary studies, form an important basis for effective teaching and learning (Dudley-Evans, 2001, p. 135). With a focus on research report writing and academic oral presentation skills in the course learning outcomes, these four ED courses assess students' performance in a range of writing and speaking tasks. These tasks include writing a research plan, a draft report, and a final report as well as oral presentation practice, presentation rehearsal, and presentation assessment (see Table 11 for an overview of the assessment tasks).

To assist students to produce quality work and achieve the necessary standards in the assessed components of the course, we have designed many reading, writing, and speaking activities which target the course learning outcomes to support students' learning throughout the course. Examples include formulating researchable topics related to the discipline, practicing techniques for researching the topic, analyzing linguistic and stylistic features of academic reports, strengthening arguments through in-text citation and referencing, and presenting academic ideas coherently in spoken discourse. Table 12 presents an oral presentation practice task that prepares students for their assessed oral presentation at the end of the one-semester course.

**Table 13** Research report (draft) checklist

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Preliminary matter* | | | |
| Title | Research area + research focus + research context/participants | Yes | No |
| | An informative and concise title | Yes | No |
| *The main body* | | | |
| Sections | All sections have clear headings and sub-headings | Yes | No |
| Introduction (and literature review) | Background of the research topic—a significant, meaningful, interesting, problematic, and/or controversial topic | Yes | No |
| | Definition of key terms (using in-text citation) | Yes | No |
| | Rational/need for the project (Previous research → Research gap)<br>– Up-to-date literature reviewed<br>– Both local and international studies reviewed | Yes<br>Yes<br>Yes | No<br>No<br>No |
| | Purpose of the project/Research questions | Yes | No |
| Methods | Sources of data | Yes | No |
| | Interview: *format, language used, duration, recorded?* | Yes | No |
| | Profile of the interviewee: *who and how they were selected, relevant information such as years of working experience and qualifications* | Yes | No |
| | Major questions/issues covered | Yes | No |
| Findings and discussion | Major findings organized logically (themes or research questions) | Yes | No |
| | Relevant information and representative examples (e.g., quotes) from the data presented to illustrate arguments | Yes | No |
| | Voice of researchers (analysis and interpretation of findings with reference to subject knowledge, including previous literature and the research context)<br>– Linking, comparing, confirming, refuting, explaining | Yes | No |
| *End matter* | | | |
| References | APA format (Surname, initials of names. (Year)… Publisher/Journal (vol. issue, page no.) | Yes | No |
| Appendix | Interview guide | Yes | No |
| *Language* | | | |
| Accuracy | Carefully proofread | Yes | No |
| Style | Academic/formal | Yes | No |

Following the principle of assessment for learning, we provide formative feedback (in several stages for each assessment) before the summative assessment. For example, we read students' draft reports and provide extensive constructive feedback as to how they can improve the quality of their work. We also organize face-to-face consultations with them either individually or in pairs to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their work. When reading the drafts, we use a checklist that displays the key features of a research report (see Table 13). While discussing students' work with reference to this checklist, we often address individual student's specific questions about these features. Information gathered about students' strengths and weaknesses in report writing in these meetings are then taken into

**Table 14** Student evaluation of course quality

| Course quality questions | Mean |
|---|---|
| *Learning outcomes:* | |
| *After completing this course I am better able to-* | |
| • Communicate an argument to an academic audience in report writing with appropriate organizational and rhetorical skills | 78.2 |
| • Identify, evaluate, and synthesize appropriate academic sources in an academic report | 79.4 |
| • Articulate coherent ideas with appropriate linguistic devices in an academic oral setting | 79.7 |
| *Activities:* | |
| *The following course activities were useful in helping me to learn-* | |
| • The online database of research articles in Education is useful | 76.5 |
| • The oral presentation practice task is useful | 77.0 |
| • The materials for research design are useful | 78.4 |
| • The materials for report writing are useful | 80.4 |
| • The materials for oral presentation skills are useful | 76.5 |
| • Conducting a small-scale project is helpful for my disciplinary studies | 78.2 |
| • Writing a research plan is helpful | 78.2 |
| • Writing a report draft is helpful | 80.1 |
| • Consultation with the teacher is useful | 87.3 |
| • Teacher's feedback on my work is useful | 88.2 |

consideration for subsequent instructional decisions, supporting teaching, and learning in a natural and engaging way (Black & Wiliam, 2009, p. 9).

## *2.2 Student Evaluation of Courses*

Student evaluation of course effectiveness, which takes into account learning outcomes and activities, written and online materials, assessment tasks, relevance of courses to the subject areas as well as transferability of the skills taught in these courses to their disciplinary studies, has been consistently high at approximately 80% (cf. around 70% for CAES average for all English courses offered to students of HKU in an academic year). As an example, student evaluation of the ED course for Education students, taken by 117 students in the first semester of the 2016–2017 academic year, is presented in Table 14.

The following qualitative feedback from students illustrates their views on key aspects of the course.

1. **Overall course design and teaching approaches**

   - *Comprehensive and useful course materials. Useful research report checklist.*
   - *Very good and useful research samples in the course booklet.*

- *The database is well organized and easy for us to search for articles.*
- *Can enhance our writing and presentation skills.*
- *Useful report writing skills.*
- *A lot of opportunities for us to speak English and discuss our academic writing with the course teacher. I like the report writing skills taught in this course.*
- *This course does effectively enhance students' ability to write an academic report by teaching very specific academic English skills. I really appreciated it.*
- *The course was well-developed and I got so much improvement in report writing and oral presentation.*
- *Good training on our critical and logical thinking.*
- *Learned to conduct a small-scale study.*
- *Gained more knowledge about doing research.*
- *The assessments of this course were highly related to the content covered in class, thus giving us the opportunity of applying our knowledge and skills.*
- *We are given specific guidance and instructions throughout the course for further learning.*
- *The course has given clear and thorough guidelines in guiding the students to complete the required tasks.*

2. **Course design/content in relation to disciplinary studies**

- *Providing an insight for students to conduct a small-scale educational project.*
- *The content is very specific to our major, so everything learnt will be useful in the future.*
- *The overall contents are specific to education students and highly relevant to our disciplinary studies.*
- *Very useful content. Can immediately apply to other courses.*
- *I learn how to use different techniques to do a report which I can apply in different courses.*
- *The opportunity to investigate something related to Education was also helpful in our roles as prospective teachers.*
- *Rich and helpful materials. The topics are related to speech and hearing sciences and interesting.*
- *Preparing me to write a research paper later in my chosen major.*
- *The strategies and mechanism taught were useful to my final year project.*
- *I was able to research on a speech-related topic of my own interest.*
- *It helps me to explore more in the speech and hearing fields.*

3. **Teacher feedback and consultation**

- *There are many feedback sessions from the teacher, which improved my writing.*
- *Consultation sessions offered by the lecturer helped me spot my weaknesses.*
- *The drafts and rehearsal were useful for collecting feedback. The draft, being a kind of formative assessment, provided students with useful feedback.*

- *Feedback provided before the final assessment prepared us for the final presentation and report.*

Students have also identified a few areas for improvement in these courses. A recurring suggestion is the provision of examples of student work in addition to the sample journal articles analyzed in class (which are written by scholars and expert writers). This suggestion is highly sensible, given that student work can demonstrate the reality of language use in the genre of *student* research report that they are expected to produce. We have accordingly annotated some A-grade student reports and made them available to students (see one such example in Table 15).

## 3 Course Developers' Reflections

Since the launch of these ED courses in September 2012, it has been observed that although they could provide sufficient language support to students, there are significant challenges in developing and running these courses. The challenges center on the issue of specificity in disciplinary communication, collaboration with faculty teachers, and language teachers' expertise.

### *3.1 Fostering Specific Academic Literacy for Disciplinary Studies*

The four ED courses introduced in this paper aim to develop students' research report writing and academic oral presentation skills using authentic disciplinary research articles as sources of input. Although research reports and oral presentations are two essential genres that students of these four subject areas need to master, this focus also means that these courses are not fully able to address issues of discipline specificity (Hyland, 2017a, p. 5) as conventions of academic communication in language patterns and discourse practices differ considerably across disciplines. Other types of genres, for example, reflective journals and classroom English in education, reports on quantitative research in speech and hearing sciences, and acquisition of specialist terms in information management, are not covered in these courses. Even in the teaching of research report writing itself, finer features specific to a particular discipline, such as the use of self-mentions, boosters, and attitude markers are often not analyzed. We plan to include these features when we next revise the courses while bearing in mind the packed schedule and intense nature of these courses.

**Table 15** A-grade student report with teacher comments

| **Title of the report:** |
|---|
| Significant internal factors leading to the success of academically high-achieving high school students in Hong Kong: from students' perspective |
| **1. Introduction** |
| [Para 1] A great deal of research has been carried out to investigate the relationship between students' high academic performance and internal factors [S1]. The internal factors which the current article focused on are academic self-concepts, personality and learning attitude, which are the major and controversial ones (Ayodele, 2016) [S2]. Finding out the internal factors is pivotal as it well predicts students' academic achievement so that different teaching strategies can be developed (Gian, Michele, Guido, Maria, & Claudio, 2011), while understanding how these factors lead to students' academic success helps students to improve their performance [S3] |
| [Para 2] Although the topic has received a lot of attention, there is no consensus among scholars on the significant internal factors that affect students' academic achievement [S4]. A number of previous studies found that academic self-concepts (e.g. Williams & Williams, 2010), students' personality (e.g. Mari & Satu, 2015), and learning attitudes (e.g. Li, 2012) significantly correlate with their academic achievement by affecting their behavior (Dramanu & Balarabe, 2013), self-regulation (Komarraju & Karau, 2005), and academic aspiration (Gian et al., 2011) [S5]. Yet, some researchers do not regard these internal factors as significant predictors of students' academic performance (e.g. Otunuku & Brown, 2007) [S3]. This has sparked a heated debate on the major internal factors that contribute to high academic achievement and thus further research is needed [S6] |
| [Para 3] The aim of this paper is to identify what the major internal factors leading to students' high academic achievement are and how they lead to students' academic success by interviewing Hong Kong students who got 30 marks or above in their best 5 subjects in HKDSE [S7]. They are regarded as high achievers as only approximately 1.5% candidates could get 30 marks or above in HKDSE (e.g., HKEAA, 2013) [S8]. Despite the fact that the three major personal factors were well investigated overseas, there is still disagreement among the various studies and the situation in Hong Kong is under-explored [S9]. This study therefore focuses on Hong Kong context so as to contribute to the current studies by filling these gaps [S10] |
| **Teachers' comments:** |
| • Title is clear but could be more concise, for instance, 'Hong Kong High Achievers, Academic Success and Role of Internal Factors: A Students' Perspective'. Try to use nominalization |
| • S1 serves as the background showing how much research attention this topic has attracted and consequently its significance. Note that the writer highlights the significance of the research in several sections, and often several times in one section. This is expected but has to be done without seeming repetitive. The introduction section of this report succeeds in doing so |
| • S2 clarifies the meaning of 'internal factors' and in doing so also implicitly defines the term |
| • S3 highlights the significance of the research |
| • Use 'plenty of' or 'much' rather than 'a lot of' in S4. Academic writing is formal. |
| • S5 overviews existing literature while presenting competing perspectives on the issue |
| • S6 explains the controversy/debate in the field emphasizing the importance of the topic |
| • Para. 3 is extremely well written. Note how the writer presents the research aims, methods, selection criteria of participants, significance of the research as well as the research gap, i.e. the area that has been relatively neglected by scholars. As the last paragraph of the intro section it simultaneously provides a brief overview of the report to inform readers about the scope of the study and what's coming next |

### *3.2 Collaboration with Disciplinary Teachers*

The input of disciplinary staff is clearly central to the development of these ED courses, and we will continue to strengthen the collaboration with them and seek their input into course objectives and content that serve to reflect subject area needs. Researchers (e.g., Dudley-Evans, 2001, p. 135), however, have reminded that we, as ED or more generally ESP teachers, should not only interpret the way that faculty teachers communicate information in lectures or interpret their expectations and practices when marking assignments. Instead, we could advise disciplinary teachers on the effectiveness of their communication and also enable students to clarify/question points that lecturers have not made clear (135). More importantly, ED/ESP courses should not be regarded by the University and faculty teachers as subordinate to content courses or subordinate to research in light of the worldwide tendency to attach excessive importance to research in tertiary institutions. We have taken measures to promote the value of our courses by visiting faculties and showing the centrality of academic literacy to teaching and learning in university.

### *3.3 ED Teachers' Expertise*

In writing about the kinds of knowledge and skills that distinguish teachers from other professions, Shulman (2018) has recently proposed the notion of *pedagogical content knowledge* and *pedagogical context knowledge*. Both kinds of knowledge are essential for teachers to acquire, analyze, and teach the conventional discourse patterns used in academic and professional communities. They also exert profound influence on the supervision of students' experiential learning projects where teachers are expected to guide students in conducting a small-scale research study in their subject area, including identifying a researchable topic, collecting information from participants, writing about data and making claims. Although as developers and teachers on these courses we are mostly trained and experienced in the field of education, our modest knowledge of the other three disciplines, i.e., information management, early childhood education, and speech and hearing sciences, point to the urgent need for active teacher learning in these areas with appropriate institutional support.

## 4 Conclusion

The development of these four ED courses exemplifies how faculty teachers contribute to needs analysis and material production, and how the genre approach with text analysis assists students in learning the ways of structuring and presenting discourse in a particular discipline. It also illustrates how the project-based experiential

approach enriches students' learning in the target communities. In order to increase the language support made available to students for their socialization into academic and professional communities, we will further explore features of other genres (e.g., reflective writing, classroom English, and lab reports) and interactive devices (e.g., self-mentions, boosters, and attitude markers) that students need to master for comprehension and production purposes. We will also continue to seek constructive feedback and input from subject teachers and help language teachers develop expertise in teaching these ED courses. Future research can examine the effectiveness of these ED courses on students' learning at university with a focus on students' abilities to transfer the skills they have learnt in these courses to their disciplinary studies.

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