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EAP IN LATIN AMERICA

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Introduction

Latin America is a huge and heterogeneous region that stretches from Mexico south to Chile. If we go by the definition that Latin America is the region of the Americas where Latin languages are spoken, the continent consists of twenty-one countries. Its languages are Portuguese (Brazil), French (French Guyana and Haiti), and Spanish in the remaining eighteen countries. In some countries other languages are also spoken: for example, English in Guiana and Jamaica, and Dutch in Suriname. This linguistic situation is part of the legacy of the colonization of the continent by European powers starting in the sixteenth century. The first influential Latin American universities were founded in the sixteenth century in the colonial centers of Santo Domingo, Lima, and Mexico City.

The four most scientifically productive Latin American countries and those that harbor the greatest number of top-ranking universities and postgraduate programs – where the bulk of academic research is conducted – are the four countries classified as upper-middle income by the World Bank (2014): Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, and Chile. The remaining countries lag far behind, producing less than 0.1 percent of the world's share of science journal article output (Lillis and Curry 2013). Moreover, Brazil remains the region's only country to devote more than 1 percent of its economy to research and development, twice that of Argentina and Chile and four times that of Mexico (Van Noorden 2014). These data are important because they will help understand the results of the present research and their ensuing discussion.

Characteristics and emergence of English for specific purposes in Latin America

Characteristics of ESP/EAP in Latin America

According to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), the language in which content courses are taught determine English for academic purposes (EAP) course contents and methods. These authors defined four different EAP contexts, the fourth corresponding to countries where content courses are taught in the national language and where English is an auxiliary language taught within or in preparation for the students' academic studies. This is the situation in Latin America. Martínez (2011: 44) labeled it the "Latinate situation" where EAP

practitioners are generally non-native English speakers who teach EAP courses in the national language, and where *undergraduate* students not only share the same native Romance language (either Spanish or Portuguese), but also generally come from the same academic discipline. Moreover, they need the same highly specific skill, either reading or writing (Martínez 2002; Holmes and Celani 2006). These students, then, tend to form highly homogeneous groups in terms of L1 and academic and linguistic interests. The situation is somewhat different at the *postgraduate* level where students, although sharing the same L1 and linguistic interest, may come from different academic disciplines.

It should be noted, though, that it is only in the late 2000s, with the advent of L2 writing courses in the scientifically most productive Latin American countries, when the concept of EAP started being used in the region. This is why we will refer to “EAP” for late onset courses only.

Birth of the ESP movement in Latin America

In 1969, Ewer and Latorre, two English teachers from the Department of English of the University of Chile, wrote *A Course in Basic Scientific English*, the purpose of which was to teach students of scientific subjects (including medicine, engineering, and agriculture) the basic language of scientific English. Without doubt, that book marked the beginning of the ESP movement in Latin America. As a matter of fact, the father of education in English for specific purposes (ESP) is generally acknowledged to be Ewer. As Howard and Brown (1997: 22) emphatically put it: “In his pioneering work in EST [English for science and technology] teacher education at the University of Chile in the 1960s, Ewer laid the groundwork for the kind of expertise an EST practitioner must have.”

It was in the early 1980s when ESP teaching started spreading in the region as a reaction to the demands of an increasing number of pure and applied science departments at Latin American universities for specialized English courses (Holmes 1985; Celani et al. 1988; Celani et al. 2005; Holmes and Celani 2006; Ramos 2008). Indeed, in Latin America as elsewhere, the ESP movement has first and foremost been a practitioners’ movement devoted to determining learners’ needs through pedagogically oriented research (Johns 2013). In 1977, the British Council organized the ESP International seminar that was held in Paipa, Colombia. It was the first time an ESP event took place in the region. Key figures of the English language teaching (ELT)/ESP profession of the time (L. Trimble, M.T. Trimble, and Widdowson) and pioneers of the ESP movement in Latin America (Celani from Brazil; Latorre, Harvey and Horsella from Chile; and Castaños from Mexico) were among the participants.

In the following decade, Brazil undoubtedly began to stand out as the leading country in the further development of ESP activities in the region. As Ramos (2008) explains, as a consequence of the growing request from Brazilian universities for specialized (scientific) English courses and for advice on the design and implementation of such courses, Celani (then the Coordinator of the Applied Linguistics Program at the Catholic University of São Paulo) designed a project at the national level. That project involved twenty universities and four technical institutes. A bid was then put in to the Brazilian Ministry of Education for financial support in 1977. Three years later, in 1980, Celani put another bid to the British Council for three Key English Language Teaching (KELT) posts who were responsible for ESP teacher development, research, and materials production.

A large needs analysis was then carried out throughout Brazil. Its results showed the necessity for ESP teacher training and materials production, the paramount importance

of the teaching of *reading* for students and researchers who had to consult English-written scientific literature, and the urgency of setting a Brazilian resource center to serve as a channel of communication for ESP teachers who were separated by immense geographical distances. That resource center, called CEPRIL (an acronym in Portuguese for Center for Research and Information in Reading) was – and still is – equipped to offer advice, resources, and teacher education for Brazilian universities (Celani et al. 2005). CEPRIL turned out to be extremely useful and valuable not only for Brazilian ESP teachers but also for ESP teachers from other Latin American countries. The principles underlying the setting of CEPRIL are described in Holmes (1985), and the book written by Celani et al. (2005) is an excellence reference for teacher training and for understanding how methodologies develop.

The Latin American ESP Colloquia

Among the different ESP meetings held in Latin America, there is no doubt that the favored and most renowned ones were the Latin American ESP colloquia that used to be held every two years in a different Latin American country. The first one was celebrated in 1988 in Brazil and the last one in 2007 in Argentina.

These colloquia were held as forums of discussion where ESP practitioners from different Latin American countries could share their teaching experiences and ongoing research projects. The British Council used to sponsor British key speakers, and the USIA (United States Information Agency) sometimes made it possible for one invited key speaker from the United States of America to attend. Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Colombia, and, to a much lesser extent, Venezuela, were the countries with the greatest number of participants, which is not surprising since these are the countries with the greatest number of high-ranking/most productive universities (see Introduction). “The contributions of the participating countries have no doubt made an impact on the teaching of English in the region,” assert Horsella and Llopis de Segura (2003: 66). The Proceedings of the second Latin American ESP Colloquium that took place in Santiago (Chile) in 1990 were published as a special issue of *English for Specific Purposes* (Harvey and Horsella 1992).

Horsella and Llopis de Segura (2003) analyzed the titles and abstracts of the 289 papers that were presented at these colloquia between 1988 and 2000 in order to determine the most frequent ESP issues addressed. As Figure 9.1 shows, almost 70 percent of the papers focused on very practical areas, such as course design/materials development and needs analysis, by far the two most frequent concerns of ESP teachers at that time.

This confirms that needs assessment is central to ESP curriculum design – as it is in EAP curriculum design (Hamp-Lyons 2010) – and represented the core of the Latin American ESP practitioner’s work. Most needs analysis research, moreover, corroborated the paramount importance of the reading skill (not shown on Graph). Unfortunately, no follow-up study was conducted, and because of lack of financial support from both national and international organizations, these colloquia stopped in 2007.

Survey of current practice

As a follow-up study of Horsella and Llopis de Segura (2003), and in order to assess the current state of ESP in Latin America, we emailed a survey to ESP practitioners who 1) attended the last three Latin American ESP colloquia; 2) were recommended by those who attended these colloquia (snow-balling method); and/or 3) the authors of this chapter personally knew or had email contact with.

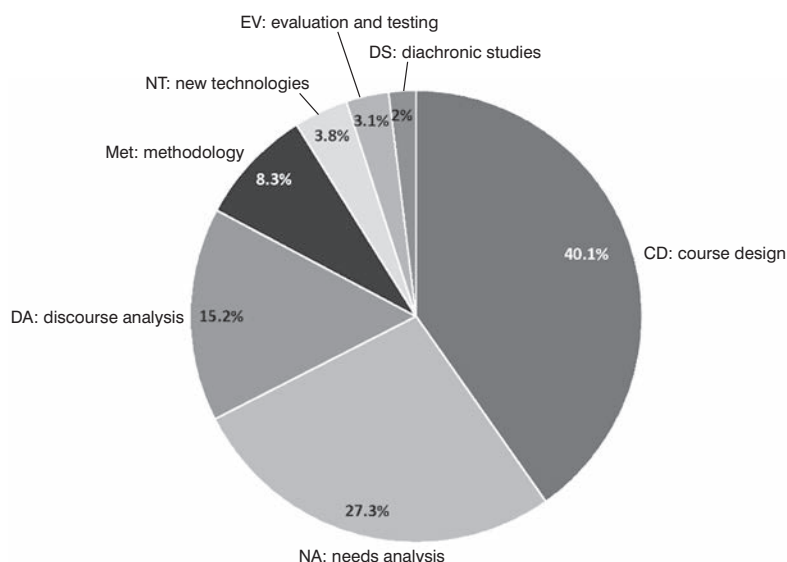


Figure 9.1 Topics covered by the papers presented at the Latin American ESP Colloquia (1988–2000)

The survey consisted of eighteen questions, such as demographic data; the date of onset of ESP courses in the surveyees' respective countries; the problems encountered (if any); the disciplines and the level (undergraduate/postgraduate) at which these courses are taught; their purpose; the materials used (self-designed or purchased); the research (if any) conducted by the EAP staff; the frequency of EAP-related seminars and/or workshops (if any); and the publication of ESP newsletter(s)/journal(s) (if any). Surveyees were encouraged to write whatever comments they wanted to make in relation to the ESP situation at their respective university or in their country.

The survey was sent to 255 ESP teachers from nine Latin American countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. We know that ESP courses used to be taught in Guatemala and San Salvador, but we were unable to contact ESP practitioners from these countries. Except for Cuba and Nicaragua, the nine countries mentioned above have the largest number of universities among the top 300 in the region¹ and are, as a consequence, the greatest Latin American actors on the world stage of knowledge production and exchange. The larger the number of universities in a country, the greater the number of surveys sent. Finally, in case a survey was not returned after two weeks or in case the email was returned, the survey was emailed again. If it was not returned after that second attempt, it was classified within the "no reply" survey category.

Findings of EAP practices

Response rate

Eighty ESP practitioners (31.3 percent) from eight Latin American countries responded to the survey, which means that 68.7 percent of the surveys remained unanswered (Table 9.1). The only country we did not obtain any replies from was Costa Rica. Satisfactorily, two of the four scientifically most productive Latin American countries (Brazil and Argentina) were

Table 9.1 Number of surveys sent/returned and number of participating universities in each one of the nine Latin American countries

<i>Country</i>	<i>N surveys sent</i>	<i>Number and percentage surveys returned per country</i>	<i>Percentage surveys returned over total number surveys received from the nine countries</i>	<i>N universities</i>
Argentina	58	28 (48.3%)	35.0%	19
Brazil	55	27 (49%)	33.7%	21
Colombia	35	3 (8.6%)	3.8%	2
Mexico	32	6 (18.8)	7.5%	4
Venezuela	30	9 (30%)	11.2%	5
Chile	25	2 (8%)	2.5%	1
Cuba	10	3 (30%)	3.8%	2
Nicaragua	8	2 (25%)	2.5%	1
Costa Rica	2	0		0
Total	255	80 (31.3%)	100%	55

very well represented: almost 50 percent of the surveyees in both countries replied, followed by Venezuela and Cuba with 30 percent of surveys returned.

We expected a higher overall response rate, but what surprised us most was the very low frequency of returned surveys from Mexico, Colombia, and Chile. These countries are indeed not only among the most productive ones in the region, as we stated before, but they also used to be among the strongest in ESP and were, as a consequence, always very well represented at the Latin American ESP colloquia. Our assumption is that, since the last colloquium held in 2007, many ESP practitioners had either retired (and not been replaced) or died, as we found out in a few cases.

The surveys received from Argentina and Brazil account for almost 70 percent of the total number of returned surveys. Forty different universities and/or technological institutes from these two countries are represented. Then follows Venezuela with 11.2 percent and five universities, and, far behind, lag the remaining five countries with less than 10 percent and the representation of eight different universities.

As for the 55 universities that took part in the study, they correspond either to the largest and most productive ones in each Latin American country – mainly located in the largest states – or to smaller institutions located in less populated states. Whatever the size of these 55 universities, we can assert that they form a representative sample of the institutions where ESP teaching takes place and where academic research is conducted. They also adequately represent the different regions of the nine countries that participated in this research. Overall, the data displayed in Table 9.1 reflect the relative contribution of these countries to worldwide knowledge production (see Introduction).

Onset and provision

Fifty-two surveyees (95.6 percent) reported that ESP courses are currently being taught in their respective countries. As Figure 9.2 shows, 16.7 percent of them – mainly from Mexico, Chile, and Argentina – reported that in their countries, ESP courses started in the 1970s.

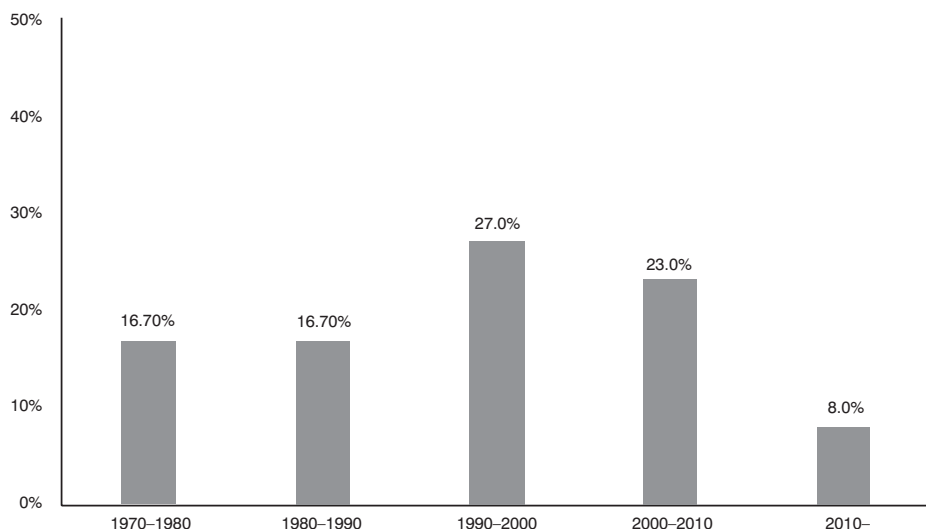


Figure 9.2 Onset of ESP courses in Latin America

This period coincides with the publication of Ewer and Latorre's book in Chile where an enthusiastic group of ESP practitioners organized seminars and other activities to promote the authors' work. Another 16.7 percent of the surveyees, mostly from Brazil and Venezuela, indicated that ESP courses were launched in their countries during the 1980s, the decade when the Brazilian ESP Project was in full bloom. But, the majority of ESP courses in Latin America (50 percent) started between 1990 and 2010 after the Brazilian ESP project had ended. In all likelihood, this is a consequence of the wealth of information that the project had produced, and of the numerous publications in the form of journal articles and books on topics related to ESP teaching published in the rest of the world, mostly in English-speaking countries. These two decades also correspond to the boom of the ESP Latin American colloquia that attracted ESP practitioners from all over the continent.

Figure 9.2 shows that only 8 percent of the ESP courses in the region started after 2010. As we will see later, the focus of these later courses differs from that of earlier ones: it is only by then when ESP started adopting an EAP flavor. As a matter of fact, it is around that time that the concept of EAP emerged and that the first issue of the *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* was published. We should lastly mention that the compulsory or optional character of these ESP/EAP courses mostly depends on the discipline and on the institution. Even within the same university, some schools may offer ESP (reading and/or writing) courses as a compulsory subject matter, whereas others do not.

Three surveyees reported that ESP courses used to be taught at their universities but no longer are and that more reductions are expected to come. The main reasons are lack of funding –hence, lack of teaching staff – and lack of interest from program coordinators. Indeed, although ESP courses are sometimes considered important by university authorities, they are not considered a *priority*. What is more, quite a few surveyees commented that ELT as a profession has a low status in their country, and that ESP is not recognized as a fully acknowledged area of expertise in teaching and research.

Two recent *intercontinental* ESP projects should be mentioned. The first one, called "Connecting continents through English," was conducted by ESP specialists from three Spanish universities who organized a series of ESP teachers training seminars in Nicaragua

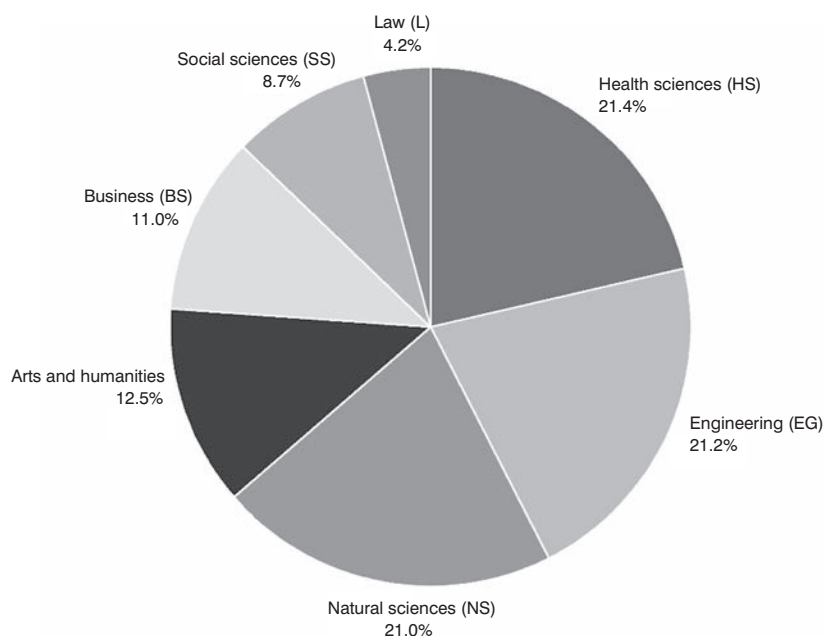


Figure 9.3 ESP courses and academic disciplines

between 2008 and 2012. The second one was the three-year-long European project (2009–2011) named “Network of Collaboration Between Europe and Latin American-Caribbean Countries” that aimed at spreading knowledge on the methods of scientific writing and open access publishing in the health sciences in Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries.

ESP and disciplines

Figure 9.3 shows that it is in the health sciences (21.4 percent), engineering (21.2 percent), and the natural sciences (21 percent) where ESP courses are most frequently taught. It is in these disciplines too that ESP used to be taught in San Salvador, Costa Rica, and Guatemala, but, as we explained above, we do not know whether they still are. The arts and humanities come in third position (12.5 percent) followed by business (11 percent), and, quite far behind, the social sciences (8.7 percent), and law (4.2 percent).

The prevalence of ESP courses in engineering and the natural and health sciences reflects the fact that these fields have a long, robust, and uninterrupted research tradition with postgraduate programs (MAs and PhDs) being taught at the major Latin American universities. In Argentina, some of these postgraduate courses date back as far back as the late 1890s (Martínez 2011). By contrast, research tradition in the social sciences, the arts, and humanities is rather incipient.

Skills taught

About 90 percent of the ESP courses are one-skill courses taught over one or two semesters only (Figure 9.4) because classes are usually too crowded to try to do anything else. It is therefore important to *optimize* the teaching/learning situation.

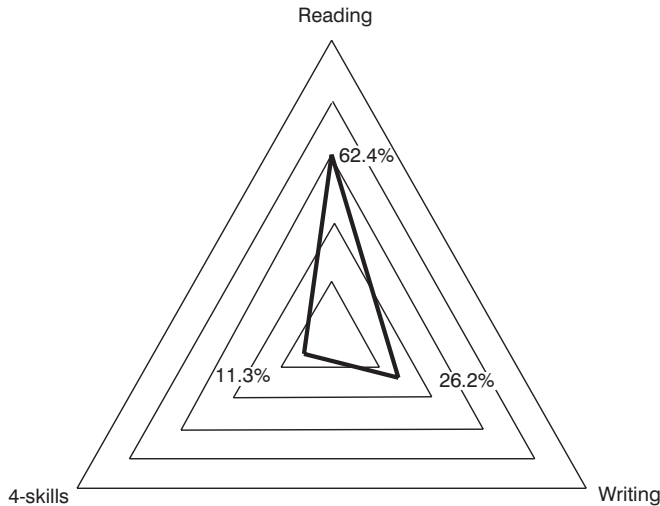


Figure 9.4 ESP courses and skills taught

The efficiency of concentrating on one skill only at a time is illustrated in Holmes and Celani (2006). Over 60 percent of these one-skill courses focus on reading comprehension and 26.2 percent on academic writing. Four-skill courses make up 11.3 percent only of all the ESP courses taught.

Reading

Reading, then, by far remains the most frequently taught skill. Several reasons account for this persistent predominance. First of all, undergraduate students in engineering, natural sciences, and health sciences are frequently exposed to English-written materials. Second, a reading competence in scientific English is a requirement for entering most postgraduate programs in these disciplines. That proficiency is measured by an exam that forms part of the selection process, which explains why preparation courses for the L2 reading comprehension test are in high demand.

In the humanities, arts, and social sciences, by contrast, competence in reading academic English is not a frequent requirement to enter postgraduate programs. As a surveyee from Argentina explained, though, in these disciplines, students do feel the need to develop a reading competence of the language but only when they conduct their literature reviews for their MA theses.

Regarding the methodology used in ESP reading courses, the comments made by some surveyees revealed that in the early years of the ESP movement (early 1960s–late 1970s), particular emphasis was put on the teaching of discipline-specific vocabulary and on the development of reading skills and strategies that enhanced the learners' awareness of the reading process. The Brazilian ESP Project produced a wide range of sample materials on these topics. As Ramos (2008) states, after almost thirty years, this approach is still the preferred one throughout Brazil and the one that has been adopted in almost all Latin American countries (cf. Celani 2008).

ESP reading courses underwent major changes in the late 1990s, though, when a growing interest in *genre* engendered a shift in their design, especially in Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela (Martínez 2002; Vasconcelos 2007; Aranha 2009). The almost exclusively

skills- and strategies-based pedagogy converted to a more genre-based approach that aimed at developing learners' genre awareness of the two most frequently consulted and intimately related academic genres: the research article abstract and the research article itself. Emphasis then started being made on the distinctive linguistic and rhetorical features of these two genres. These ESP reading and writing (see below) courses generally follow, adopt, or adapt Swales' findings on research article introduction and move analysis (Swales 2004; Swales and Feak 2004). Interesting pedagogical proposals for the use of genres in ESP courses can be found in Martínez (2002), Ramos (2000 and 2004), and Salager-Meyer (2005).

Writing

Most of the EAP writing courses started being taught in the late 2000s. A surveyee from Mexico reported that on-line academic writing courses are currently being developed to overcome the shortage of instructors and the difficulties the interested parties have to attend face-to-face writing courses. The two following contextual factors explain why EAP writing courses are of relatively recent onset.

First of all, as time has gone by and with the increase in the number of postgraduate courses, particularly in the natural and health sciences, as we stated before, the demand for materials to help students with more advanced studies – mainly academic abstract and research article writing – started emerging. Some of these programs consider publications in English as a requirement for obtaining the degree. This is the case in major Mexican and Brazilian universities in disciplines such as dentistry, molecular biology, and genetics, where students must have published papers in English by the time they are about to finish the program (Aranha 2009). It is interesting to mention here that, in certain scientific disciplines, several Brazilian journals publish articles written in English only. For example, *Ciência e Cultura* (Science and Culture), the journal of the largest Brazilian scientific association – the Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science – has now switched to English. Among the more recent scientific journals that are published in English only, we can mention the *Journal of the Brazilian Chemical Society*, the *Journal of the Brazilian Computer Society*, and the *Brazilian Journal of Chemical Engineering* (cf. Menezes de Oliveira e Paiva and Pagano 2001).

The problem is that although Latin American postgraduate students – especially those from the scientific and technological disciplines – are generally proficient *readers* of English language scientific texts, and although they are equipped with deep knowledge of their subject-specific disciplinary content, they are rarely proficient *writers* of such texts (Aranha 2009; Martínez 2002, 2011). As research has shown (Eisterhold et al. 1990), L2 reading to L2 writing skill transfer does not operate in a straightforward fashion. Some MA and PhD students may have some experience in writing scientific papers in their L1, but the transfer from L1 to L2 writing skills is not a straightforward process either. Specific instruction is thus needed to enable them to master the linguistic and rhetorical constraints of English-medium scientific abstracts and research articles (Swales and Feak 2009). A body of research has demonstrated, though, that individual English proficiency alone is not always the key factor to achieve success in English-language publishing. As Englander (2006) and Curry and Lillis (2014) rightly point out, larger social practices, power negotiations, politics, networks, and resources involved in academic publishing are also at stake, but such issues are beyond the scope of this chapter.

EAP writing courses are also taught in the social sciences and the humanities, but to a much lesser extent not only because, as we stated before, in these disciplines postgraduate programs have a much more recent history and a young research tradition, but also because

research results in these fields tend to be published in national and/or regional publications that are written in the country's national language.

The second factor that accounts for the rather recent onset of EAP writing courses in Latin America is the one that emerges as a consequence of the well documented “publish-or-perish” mantra imposed on scholars almost all around the world, especially on those from scientific disciplines. Scientists from the leading Latin American countries in terms of scientific productivity are certainly no exception (Englander 2006; Vasconcelos 2007; Salager-Meyer 2008; Aranha 2009; Martínez 2009). Indeed, since the late 1990s, for career promotion, scholars from these countries have felt obliged, by their national research assessment systems, to publish their research results in “high-status,” “elite” *English-language* journals indexed in center-based international databases. It should be stated here that a considerable number of Brazilian and Mexican scientific journals that used to be published in the national language have now switched to English, and some newly launched ones are published in English only.

One of the aims of EAP writing courses is thus to help these researchers succeed in academic publishing, a teaching context called ERPP (English for research and publication purposes; see Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002, and the special issue of *JEAP* 7/2). Since 2011, for example, the UNAM (Universidad Autónoma de México) has been holding three-week-long immersion courses for faculty and graduate students. Participants work with their draft manuscripts and get individualized support through a focus on publishing culture, genre knowledge, and L2 writing skills. To what extent the “publish (in English)-or-perish” culture engenders the outflow of research to mainstream journals is another issue that has been dealt with elsewhere (Welch and Zhen 2008; Salager-Meyer 2008). It should be stated, though, that because of the rapidly growing presence in the Web of Knowledge of Latin American bibliometric databases (e.g. CONACYT, Redalyc, and Latindex in Mexico; CAICYT in Argentina; REVENCYT in Venezuela; and SciELO in Brazil), these indexes are increasingly being used by government bodies and academic institutions to assess researchers' productivity.

Four-skill courses

As Figure 9.4 shows, four-skill ESP courses are very rare and of rather recent onset as well. They are mainly taught at business schools (international relations and negotiations) and in workplace and occupational settings, such as the hotel industry, tourism, courses for bilingual executive secretaries, and taxi drivers (especially during the preparation for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil!), and for pilots and air traffic controllers. These courses focus on the teaching of the tasks performed in real-life situations (Ramos 2008).

A very interesting – and, we would say, unique – case of “blended teaching” between occupational and academic purposes was reported by an ESP practitioner from Cuba where English is a compulsory subject matter for two years in most universities, and where ESP is strategically linked with the specialties. In the healthcare sciences, for example, ELT extends to four or five years of the medical undergraduate curriculum, one or two of which are fully devoted to ESP (MacLean et al. 2000).

ESP courses are taught nearly twice as frequently at the undergraduate level than at the postgraduate level (Figure 9.5). Since there is a strong association between the number of postgraduate programs and scientific output (Martínez 2011), it is not surprising that the integration of EAP writing courses into disciplinary curricula – especially at the postgraduate level, as we have seen before – is greater in Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina than in other Latin American countries.

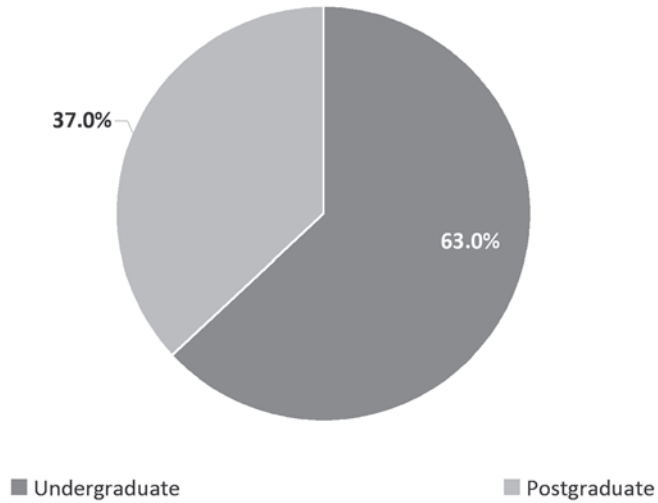


Figure 9.5 ESP courses: undergraduate and postgraduate level

EAP materials: genre-based, authentic, and specific

As shown in Figure 9.6, in the immense majority of the cases (64.2 percent), ESP practitioners write their own (ad-hoc) materials, 32 percent use both their own materials as well as purchased ones, and 3.7 percent use purchased textbooks only.

All the surveyees commented that, at the undergraduate level, because of the learners' characteristics (homogeneity in academic interests and common L1), the class material used is authentic and specific to the students' academic discipline. This allows the ESP instructor to concentrate on the specific vocabulary of the discipline that has been shown to be highly restricted (Chen and Ge 2007; Hyland and Tse 2007; Martínez et al. 2009). In Hyland's parlance (2002: 385): "... EAP practitioners must teach the literacy skills which are appropriate to the purposes and understanding of particular academic and professional

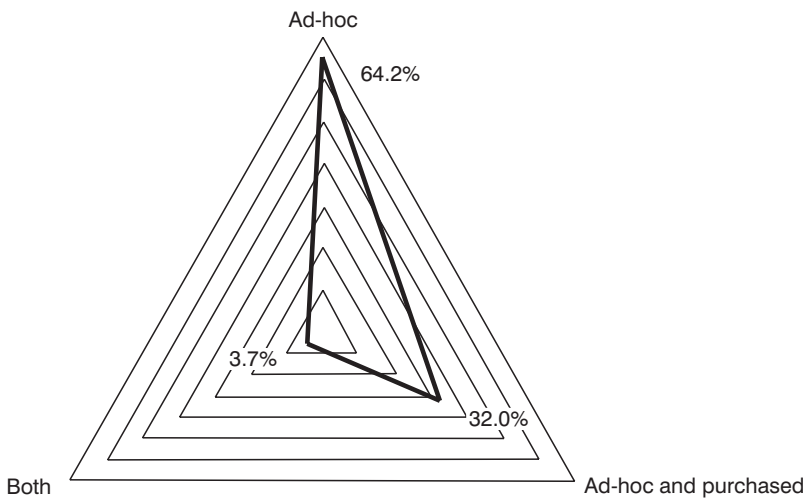


Figure 9.6 ESP materials

communities.” It is, moreover, well known that the use of authentic and specific materials increases motivation, reduces comprehension problems, and allows students to contribute their disciplinary knowledge, creating thereby an atmosphere of confidence.

At the postgraduate level, where learners tend to form more heterogeneous groups (see above), a collaborative approach is generally adopted: the learners – content experts – interact with the EAP teacher – the language expert – by providing the teaching materials that almost always consist in research articles from their disciplines. EAP teachers are then in a better position to design highly motivating genre-based materials.

Research, seminars, and journals

Overall, ESP research in the region is rather weak and is mostly conducted at TOEFL (test of English as a foreign language) or Applied Linguistics MA and/or PhD programs. Of the different areas where ESP research is carried out, Figure 9.7 interestingly, and somewhat surprisingly, shows that practical problem solving very much remains the most pressing concern of Latin American ESP practitioners. Indeed, research into course/material design, practice, methodology, and needs analysis makes up almost 80 percent of all the research presently being conducted.

Although, as we have seen before, Latin American ESP practitioners increasingly apply the concept of genre both in their reading and writing classes, only 12 percent of the ESP research is conducted in that area. The three remaining areas together account for 10 percent of the ESP research carried out in the region.

Our findings clearly show that research and pedagogical practice are still very closely linked, at least in Latin America where ESP fundamentally remains a practitioner movement. ESP practitioners are both researchers and pedagogical materials writers. As Johns (2013: 19) expresses: “ESP researchers will continue to view themselves as taking one or several professional roles.” Our results also corroborate Hamp-Lyons’ remark (2010) that assessment is the least developed research area of the field, very likely because it involves many variables that are difficult to control.

Communities of ESP practitioners and scholars get together at least annually in the majority of the countries surveyed not only to cater for professional growth (especially

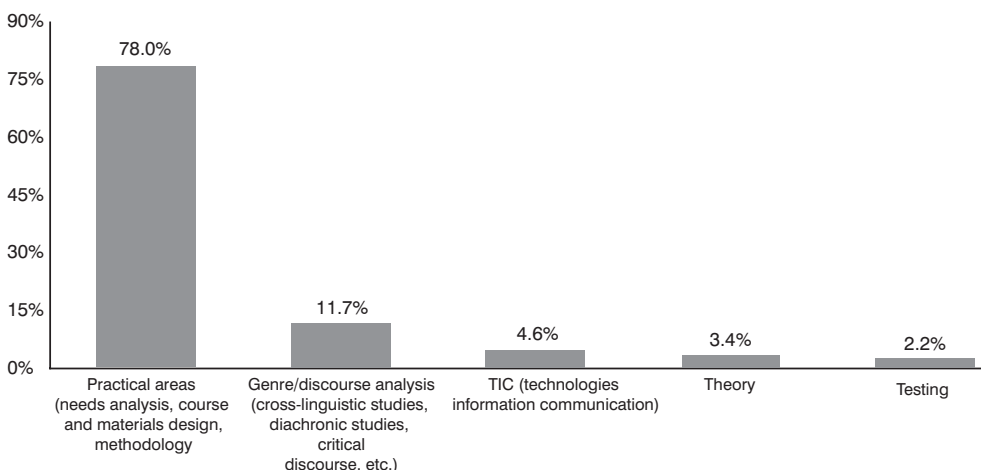


Figure 9.7 EAP research

teacher development), but also to try to find a consensus on teaching practice, mostly for reading comprehension courses. Since 2006, ESP teacher development seminars are offered on-line twice a year in Brazil. Hamp-Lyons (2010: 100) claims that “these local or regional home-grown professional communities can be a great asset to established and novice EAP teachers and researchers.”

Moreover, for the reasons we explained above – especially because of the “publish-or-perish” mantra – workshops on English academic writing are becoming increasingly popular, particularly in Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico. It is interesting to mention that quite a few surveyees lament the lack of explicit academic literacy skills (mostly writing) in the learners’ L1 because, in general, postgraduate students have great difficulties producing academic texts in their native language (let alone in a foreign language). Such courses exist, though, at some universities in Venezuela, Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil. Figueiredo and Bonini’s (2006) academic writing course in Portuguese is a good example of such L1 writing courses.

The Brazilian-based journal *The ESPecialist* is the only journal in the region that mainly publishes ESP research results. It is indexed in international databases, appears twice a year, and publishes papers written in Portuguese, Spanish, English, and French. Other journals, such as *Núcleo* (Venezuela), *Approach: A Journal of Foreign Language Teaching* (Cuba), and *Argentinian Journal of Applied Linguistics* (Argentina), only occasionally publish ESP-related articles.

Conclusions

The results we have discussed in this chapter are based on an, admittedly, small survey of Latin American ESP practitioners and so may not be representative of the continent as a whole. However, when combined with our thirty years of experience as teachers and researchers of EAP in different countries in the region, we feel confident that they represent an accurate picture of the ESP/EAP state-of-the-art situation in Latin America.

All in all, the panorama described above clearly shows that ESP is still alive in Latin America, although in better health in some countries than in others. ESP reading comprehension courses are still being taught at most major Latin American universities both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels to help students cope with their university requirements. But EAP is also concerned today with academic courses aimed at providing researchers with the linguistic and rhetorical tools that could allow them to participate in the ongoing English-medium international dialogue of science.

Regarding the teaching of English academic *writing* per se, some sporadic efforts are in progress despite the scarcity of human and economic resources for such a demanding task. These efforts would be more fruitful and more EAP research would be carried out if there were institutional policies for their development. The problem is that, in Latin America, formal training in English is not part of the academic culture, and policy-makers appear to take English proficiency for granted in the development of science policies.

We strongly believe that improving both the L1 and L2 academic literacy skills (especially the writing competence) of Latin American scholars should not be a minor issue in policy-making. Increasing the number of researchers who are fully proficient academic writers will help enhance international awareness of this region’s scientific contributions. These issues call for urgent government attention, but not enough is being done in this respect.

The future

The findings of our EAP survey also lead us to conclude that research is needed in the following areas:

- 1 *Needs analysis surveys* should focus on EAP oral skills in all disciplines, and on the L2 reading and writing needs of social sciences, humanities, and arts students
- 2 *Testing*
- 3 *Materials and course design*
 - for academic literacy courses in the students' *L1* both at the undergraduate and the postgraduate level. This is important especially because having papers published in Spanish or Portuguese (less frequently in English) is a requirement for graduation in most Latin American doctoral programs;
 - in situations that require computer-mediated communication;
 - for *on-line writing courses* both in *L1* and *L2*.

This research could involve genre, corpus linguistics, concordances, and lexical bundle analysis.

The following suggestion is not directly related to EAP research but is important nonetheless: we strongly believe that more workshops and seminars at national and regional levels should be organized. As Hamp-Lyons (2010: 100) expresses: "It is to be hoped that local or regional homegrown professional communities will grow and spread around the world."

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Further reading

Hanauer and Englander (2013); Krzanowoski (2008); Olson (2014)

Related chapters

- 2 General and specific EAP
- 3 Academic literacies
- 14 Acquiring academic and disciplinary vocabulary
- 19 Genre analysis
- 38 English for professional academic purposes
- 42 Needs analysis for curriculum design
- 45 Assessment for English for academic purposes

Note

- 1 www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings-articles/latin-american-university-rankings/top-10-universities-latin-america-2014 (accessed August 12th 2014).

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