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## **Student Reflections and Recollections: Key Outcomes of a Post-Secondary English for Academic Purposes Program Moved Online**

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### **Abstract**

As an alternative to standardized testing, English for academic purposes (EAP) programs provide a language development pathway to higher education for students working towards meeting English language proficiency requirements. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these programs moved online; however, the outcomes of that move and the relationship with additional language learning are still to be fully explored. Based on student reflections and recollections, this study identifies key outcomes related to their online EAP program experiences. Nine participants completed an online questionnaire, with three taking part in interviews. Using a qualitative thematic approach, data were coded and gathered into the following themes: academic and interpersonal skills, network creation, language development, and knowledge building. These findings are presented as building blocks in the additional language socialization process and underscore the potential of online teaching and learning along with the importance of holistic and general approaches to EAP curriculum development and program planning.

### **Résumé**

Les programmes d'anglais à des fins académiques (AFA) sont une alternative aux tests standardisés. Ils offrent un parcours de développement linguistique vers l'université pour les étudiants multilingues. Ces programmes étaient en ligne pendant la pandémie de COVID-19. Or, les conséquences de ce changement et son lien avec l'apprentissage de langues additionnelles ne sont pas entièrement explorés. Cette étude, basée sur les réflexions et les souvenirs des étudiants, identifie les principaux résultats liés à leurs expériences du programme d'AFA en ligne. Neuf participants ont rempli un questionnaire en ligne, et trois ont été interviewés. Cette étude a utilisé une approche thématique et qualitative. Les données ont été codées et regroupées par thèmes, dont les compétences académiques et interpersonnelles, la création de réseaux, le développement du langage, et l'acquisition de connaissances. Ces thèmes contribuent à la socialisation linguistique et démontrent le potentiel de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage holistiques et généraux en ligne pour les étudiants dans les programmes d'AFA.

## Introduction

English for academic purposes (EAP) programs offer an alternative to standardized testing as a way of fulfilling a post-secondary institution's English language proficiency requirements. While varied, these programs work to develop students' English as an additional language (EAL) skills for educational settings where English is the language of instruction, administration, and day-to-day life (Corcoran et al., 2022; Douglas & Landry, 2021; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002; MacDonald, 2017). The goal is for students to navigate the "formal, extended, unpredictable, and challenging situations typical of ... universities" (BC Council on Admissions and Transfer, 2022, p. 12). These programs are generally offered in person; however, during the COVID-19 pandemic, they moved temporarily online. Understanding the move online can provide insights into a process in which students learn English while interacting with others, encountering resources, developing skills, and becoming community members (Duff, 2007, 2012; Duff & Anderson, 2015). With the return to physical classrooms, it is a good time to look back at students' experiences and gain understanding with the following research question: Based on students' reflections and remembered experiences, what were the key outcomes related to taking part in an online EAP program?

## Background and Theoretical Framework

### English for Academic Purposes

EAP programs can be a time of personal, academic, and social growth for students (Crossman, 2018; Douglas et al., 2022; Ranson, 2016; Van Viegen & Russell, 2019). These programs can positively impact students' English language development (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Fox et al., 2014; Keefe & Shi, 2017) and introduce them to a range of new learning strategies (Fox et al., 2006). Students can leave these programs with stronger friendship networks (Lee & Wesche, 2000; Tweedie & Kim, 2015). They also have better academic outcomes than their peers who enter via other means (Crossman & Pinchbeck, 2012; Dyck, 2013; Fox, 2005; Johnson & Tweedie, 2021).

Despite these benefits, there may also be some cautions. English language skills may need further development (Bayliss & Raymond, 2004; Tweedie & Kim, 2015). There could also be possible mismatches between program content and student needs, such as wanting more socio-cultural learning outcomes (Boz et al., 2018; Cheng & Fox, 2008; Douglas et al., 2022; Raymond & Parks, 2002). These mismatches can lead to challenges transitioning to other programs or interacting with other students (Haggerty, 2019; Keefe & Shi, 2017).

### Online English for Academic Purposes

Web-based EAL teaching and learning can offer a number of benefits, with students having positive impressions related to the experience (Famularsih, 2020; Sowapruks & Piamsai, 2023; Salih & Omar, 2021; Yim, 2011). For example, there can be less monopolization by particular students, more practice opportunities, greater equality among students, useful digital tools to support interactions, more processing and response time, and improved opportunities to develop writing skills (Yim, 2011). Online asynchronous

modules have been found to grow skills, cultivate intercultural communicative competence, increase self-reflection, and improve time management (Landry, 2019, 2023a, 2023b; Surtees & Yamamoto, 2021). Learning management systems and video conferencing software have increased in importance since the pandemic, with teachers showing innovation and resilience related to facilitating meaningful student interactions and encouraging positive engagement while managing online environments and web-based interactions (Chojczak & Starford, 2023; Foug et al., 2022; Moorhouse et al., 2023; Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021). New modes of learning, such as breakout rooms and collaborative writing tasks, have become useful ways to practise productive language skills (Chojczak & Starford, 2023; Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2022). Through all these innovations, the positive effects teachers can have on students' cognitive, emotional, and social engagement have been key. These effects can be the result of carefully planned instruction and support, with students who experience this instruction and support typically being more engaged with the online teaching and learning process (Luan et al., 2023).

Despite these positives, there have also been drawbacks—particularly at the onset of the pandemic. Pusey and Nanni (2021) found that online EAP teachers reported challenges related to a lack of non-verbal communication and body language, decreased motivation, lower engagement, and increased academic misconduct. There were also reports related to the physical challenges of online teaching and learning and worries about general well-being. Changes to the curriculum, materials, and learning experiences were made under pressure, and there were sometimes emotional and practical barriers challenging teachers (Pusey & Nanni, 2021). Multiple time zones could be a challenge, with students possibly located in far away locales (Chojczak & Starford 2023). In synchronous classes, it was sometimes hard for teachers to monitor breakout rooms, with discussions taking longer and excessive screentime generating fatigue (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2022).

### **Additional Language Socialization**

Additional language socialization is a multidirectional process in which newcomers interact with people and resources as they learn an additional language (Duff, 2007, 2012; Duff & Anderson, 2015). In this process, learners develop over time as they engage the social, cultural, and cognitive processes that underlie additional language learning (Duff, 2010; Duff et al., 2019; Duff & Kobayashi, 2010; Mao, 2021; Ochs & Schieffelin, 2008; Vickers, 2007). Interaction is key, and newcomers can start to create shared understandings, find commonalities, and work through their differences with others (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Friendships may result (Duff et al., 2019), with friends providing an entry into a local community and exemplifying the multidirectional nature of the process (Douglas et al., 2022). The process is further accompanied by the development of other skills and knowledge. It is a time of self exploration, social, and cultural growth (Douglas et al., 2022; Duff et al., 2019; Talmy, 2012). By taking part in activities, uncovering norms, understanding expectations, gaining knowledge, and recognizing cultural systems, newcomers become part of a new community (Duff, 2007; 2012; Duff & Anderson, 2015; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; Vickers, 2007). Language skills help day-to-day community engagement, and this engagement is integral to learning an additional language (Duff, 2010; Duff & Kobayashi, 2010; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986).

However, it is challenging to make broad generalizations (Haggerty, 2019). Language development depends on context (Vickers, 2007), and newcomers undergo a

process of navigating between what they bring with them and what they encounter (Duff & Kobayashi, 2010). In particular, the process falters without enough time, interactions, mentors, supports, or other opportunities (Douglas et al., 2022; Duff, 2010, 2012; Duff & Anderson, 2015; Duff et al., 2019). While newcomers have influence and control (Duff & Talmy, 2011; Ochs & Schieffelin, 2008; Zuengler & Cole, 2005), left to their own devices, it can be hard to determine how to navigate that process and interact with the local community (Okuda & Anderson, 2018).

### **Online Additional Language Socialization**

Online teaching and learning experiences can also play an important role in post-secondary EAL students' additional language socialization. For example, teachers and students in an online course can model and facilitate the process of additional language socialization by making comments that create connections within the online classroom community and support a friendly learning environment (Yim, 2011). The process of additional language socialization in academic contexts is also relevant to Surtees and Yamamoto's (2021) creation of a series of online modules to support international students at a Canadian university as they developed their EAL skills, gained new sociocultural knowledge, and took part in and learned more about their academic programs of study. Their online modules incorporated multimodality, accessibility, representation, and interaction to support the additional language socialization process. Key to the students' socialization into academic practices, such as presentations, classroom discussions, and essay writing, was their ability to find these new resources available and online to direct their own additional language socialization. Also at a Canadian university, Landry (2023b) has found that online asynchronous modules with a focus on intercultural communication were instrumental in the process of additional language socialization on campus and in the surrounding community for post-secondary EAP students. These online learning experiences impacted students' EAL development, transitions to new learning environments, interpersonal networks, life on and off campus, and interactions with other people—all key factors of their additional language socialization. The online modules were an effective space for focusing on intercultural communicative competence while freeing up program time elsewhere for other essential skills and knowledge (Landry, 2023b).

However, additional language socialization in online teaching and learning contexts can have a number of challenges. Multilingual learners in an online academic literacy and writing course during the pandemic reported challenges working, interacting, and making friends with other students. They also reported trouble developing their English language skills and academic literacy—all important elements of the process of academic discourse socialization in a post-secondary context. Other identified challenges related to students not wanting to turn on their cameras and not saying anything in breakout rooms. In online teaching and learning contexts, there is a need to foster meaningful interaction and collaboration in order to facilitate the socialization process (Marshall et al., 2023).

## Methods

### Context

This study took place at a university in Canada with the pseudonym Pacific Interior University (PIU). Due to COVID-19, the EAP program at PIU was temporarily moved online. Students entered either Level 1 or Level 2 of the program based on submitted English language test scores. Each level represented one semester (approximately 12 weeks). Successful completion of Level 2 fulfilled the university's English language proficiency requirements. Each level was worth three credits, which could be applied towards an undergraduate program. The EAP program was housed in a department that was part of one of the core faculties at PIU.

Delivered through an online learning management system, students engaged in a combination of asynchronous and synchronous teaching and learning that added up to around 20 hours per week. Six to eight of those hours were facilitated synchronously through video conferencing software (Zoom). About 70% of each level was dedicated to reading/writing and listening/speaking equally, with a different instructor for each pair of skills. These instructors were supported by undergraduate and graduate teaching assistants. Students further attended online language labs and tutorials with the teaching assistants for the remaining time. Students had the option of taking one or two additional first-year courses. These courses were also online.

The program adopted a general approach to teaching EAP that drew on communicative, task-based, and content-based language instruction (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011), with students working their way through thematic units related to subjects such as education, technology, business, and geography. In addition, the labs were an opportunity for students to get together virtually with each other and their teaching assistants to talk about what they were learning, other topics of interest, and to build their study skills and local knowledge. Students were further provided with one-on-one support when needed, flexibility over due dates, and a general focus on their overall well-being.

### Data Collection

The study began after ethics approval was received. Data collection was qualitative and open-ended (Creswell, 2015; Mills & Gay, 2016). Students who had completed Level 2 of PIU's online EAP program in the academic year before the study took place (approximately eight to 12 months earlier) were invited via email to complete an online questionnaire. Level 2 students were invited because the goal was to learn more about their experiences at PIU both within and after the program. The questionnaire was designed to generate data related to the participants' online EAP program experiences (see Appendix A). The questionnaire also invited participants to take part in a further interview. The semi-structured interview, which took place a month or two later, sought information on similar topics in greater depth (see Appendix B).

### Participants

In the focus period for this study, there were 57 students enrolled in PIU's EAP program. Nine completed the questionnaire. These nine participants came from a variety of

backgrounds, with three having Mandarin, two Portuguese, and one each Kannada, Arabic, Japanese, and Persian as a first language. The participants were undergraduate students, with five identifying as male and four as female. They were in a range of programs, such as computer science, psychology, management, data science, economics, engineering, and biology. Three of the nine participants agreed to take part in an interview. These three participants chose pseudonyms: Jake (Male, Age 20, Japanese Speaker, Data Science), Lara (Female, Age 19, Portuguese Speaker, Biology), and Terence (Male, Age 19, Kannada Speaker, Computer Science).

## Data Analysis

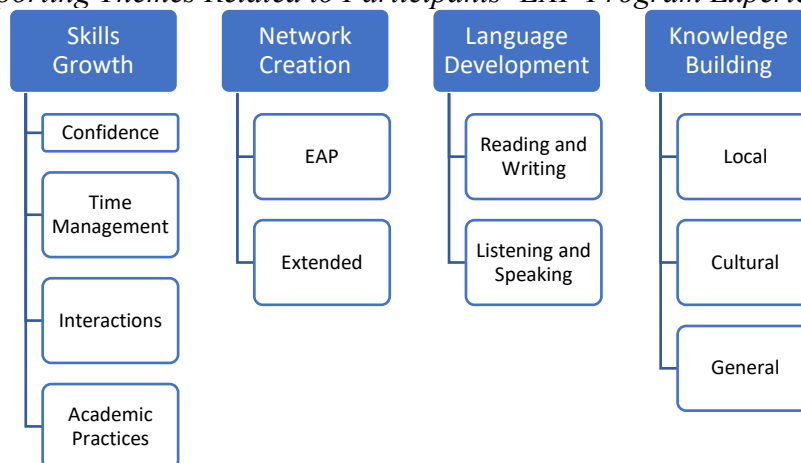
A qualitative thematic approach was used to analyse the data (Creswell, 2015). Once the questionnaire responses had been gathered and the interviews transcribed, the data were reviewed multiple times to identify topic-related extracts. The extracts were put in a spread sheet and assigned non-predetermined descriptive codes (Creswell, 2015; Saldaña, 2013). As this iterative, flexible, and recursive process was taking place, the extracts and their codes were organized and reorganized multiple times to identify patterns and gather extracts into themes and supporting themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022; Mills & Gay, 2016). Consensus was achieved through discussion among the researchers (Creswell, 2007, 2015). In the findings, quotes are woven together in a composite manner. Thus, relevant representative quotes from different participants are brought together to illustrate particular themes or supporting themes in a narrative. Throughout, the representative quotes are left in the participants' words, with minor edits related to spelling, punctuation, repetition, and filler words.

## Findings

Based on participants' reflections and remembered experiences, the findings point to academic and interpersonal skills growth, network creation, language development, and knowledge building as key outcomes of the participants' EAP program experiences. Figure 1 provides an overview of the key and supporting themes identified in the data.

**Figure 1**

*Key and Supporting Themes Related to Participants' EAP Program Experiences*



## **Academic and Interpersonal Skills Growth**

### ***Confidence***

Five of the questionnaire participants reported confidence gains. One participant wrote, “it gave me a little more confidence to speak in English,” and another elaborated, “I became more willing to initiate communication with others.” It seemed “EAP improved the confidence that you could talk on the campus as well.” Questionnaire participants reported not being “afraid to speak” and being “not very nervous.”

During the interviews, Terence spoke about how he felt more confident. In the EAP program, he said that the teaching assistants and the instructors “give confidence, just living like just putting ourselves out there more so then they just gave the confidence for future courses.” In fact, he stated, “if there was anything that helped me from EAP the most” it was “just being able to communicate more frequently and more confidently.” He continued, “not just with the students, but professors, without worrying about how I sound or what the professor might think of me.” Terence had “more confidence to ask anything to the professor, whether it was something related to academics or just generally getting to know the professor better, or even other students.” Confidence was “a good starting point.” Terence reflected how instructors in other courses don’t usually make the first attempt to initiate interaction and confidence is needed. He advised, “if we really wanted TAs [teaching assistants] and professors to open up the doors, we have to be the first ones to of course go and talk to them.” He said, “I have to make the first move to talk to them in order for them to open up.” However, he assured, “professors and TAs were naturally quite open. I don’t think that would be a problem.”

### ***Time Management***

Time management was another key finding. On the questionnaire, it was noted the EAP program “has a lot of assignments so [it] helped me with time management skills.” In addition, students wrote about “doing assignments at your own pace,” and having “more time to study” and “more time for myself.” This need to organize schedules contributed to time management.

Time management outside of class was also important in the interview data. Thinking about group work activities outside of class, Jake recounted, “in order to do those we had to come up with like same exact time, and we were in a different locations. So we had to figure out what time is good for us.” Terence also spoke about organizing his time. He said, “I think I did learn how to manage my time better.” He remembered, “two particular essays we had to write for EAP, and I remember how I was managing my time.” He continued, “I remember setting up a particular period of time when I was going to get it done.” To evaluate his new skill, Terence said, “I think the best way to put it is when I see the amount of progress I made each day ... among all those days when I spend to work on that assignment ... I think that’s how I know that I’m managing my time well.” The key was to “put a decent effort in each assignment ... that way felt like I also got to do assignment at my own pace.” Terence was continuing to apply the skill of time management “even in the other courses,” and he said, “I think I don’t really seem to have a problem with that, even now.” Terence feels he has learned “how to balance life and study.”

### ***Interpersonal***

Interpersonal skills were also salient in the questionnaire data. For example, working “as teams” and “group work” were noted, and one participant wrote “the group work really helped with the social interactions.” During the interviews, interpersonal skills were also mentioned. For example, Lara spoke about how she and another student “took the leadership in the group. So we had to talk to people like ask ‘what do you think about this? Is this working for you?’ this and that.” Lara and the other student “would adjust things, put it together. We made a PowerPoint together once—that was good communication.” The interpersonal skills Lara gained in the EAP program were also helping her in other classes: “I have a group project coming in, then we’re going to do a podcast type of thing.” Jake also noted how in the EAP program, “we had lots of groups. We were assigned to do group work.” For Jake, working with other people was new for him. However, after the EAP program, he said “I have to take computer science and my friends helping me, and physics.” Finally, Terence spoke about topics related to interpersonal skills. He said, “I don’t think I really had a problem with having [conversations with] multiple students, more than two students. Because I think we were still able to, it was still not a problem to hear other people’s opinion.” Terence continued, “I didn’t feel like it was too much. It was still sufficient for everyone to share their own opinions.”

### ***Academic***

There were also new academic skills. For example, in the questionnaire in relation to writing essays, two participants wrote about learning “how to look for papers and reliable sources” and “how to find peer reviewed and reliable sources from the library.” Participants also mentioned note taking skills, with one participant writing, “my notes become more organized.” Other aspects related to having more control over their learning. By studying online, one participant wrote about “learning English by myself more.” Another student recalled, “when teaching online, some of the materials and recordings are published on the [learning management system] so that we can check the missing areas at any time.”

The building of academic skills was also evident in the interviews. Lara spoke about a project she was doing in one of her current classes. She said, “we are putting together information. We are going to have to write down a script and keep it ten minutes. We have to keep everything ten minutes, which is going to be kind of hard.” However, despite the challenges, she felt that what she learned in EAP was helping her: “Especially on the looking for articles part of it—how to find the resources, you know, the trusted sources and everything.” Looking back, Lara thought “the common knowledge of how to search for articles, sources, and are they trustworthy or not, can I cite this, how to cite this and everything” was useful.

### **Network Creation**

#### ***EAP Connections***

The analysis of the questionnaire data identified interpersonal networks that participants often characterized as friendships. One participant wrote, “I definitely made

some good friends in the EAP course.” It appeared that it was “easier to make friends” in the EAP classes, and that in the EAP classes, students could “find a friendly community to don’t feel lonely in university.” The EAP program was a good start for the participants because the “EAP program is the first class I have in university. I made some friends there. That’s important for my social [life].” The online nature of the EAP experience was also commented on: “I got to meet people and make friends while still at the comfort of my own home.” In addition, the curricular content of the EAP program seemed to contribute to this network building: “I remembered that a unit in EAP is called ‘community.’ That’s the most important part.”

The participants’ interviews also underscored the role of their EAP program experiences in building up their networks of friends. Jake thought, “it was such an intense course that I got to know lots of people ... people who became friends, like I had so much easier time. I already trust them so much more than regular person online.” For Terence, the EAP program was his first course at PIU. He recalled, “it was all online in a different time zone, and just getting to see faces of people sort of just made me feel less lonely and that was there for us, on the course.” The way the EAP classes were taught also seemed to contribute to this network building. Terence noted, “EAP was probably the only course where you got to get to know students in person and also got to see their faces because none of the other courses allowed you to see the faces of other students.” He also said, “the EAP course was a much smaller course so it’s easier to know each student.” Furthermore, in the EAP classes, the teachers tried to “shake it up a bit and, you know, have different students and meet them and just generally get to know them better. That really worked.” The shared sense of purpose and being part of a community also contributed to building strong networks. Jake remarked, “I don’t know if it’s EAP, but I just enjoyed being there. Like first year, I don’t know anybody in the university and then it was kind of building a community, like that too.” For Jake, “we all were aiming to pass the course” and “we’re in this together so let’s get it over with or let’s do it together ... we are the same level.” Lara also alluded to this sense of community: “we worked together well, could do stuff, could communicate easily, that was good.” She recalled, “I liked working with the same people because I already knew them.” There were other opportunities. Jake shared an anecdote, “I made friends from EAP. One guy from EAP and also [name of instructor] had a problem with Zoom or YouTube or I don’t know, and one guy he was like ‘Control A’ or something like that, and obviously I know maybe he’s good at computers and now I got to know him.” Cross-cultural friendships were cultivated in class for Jake: “one of my good friends from international countries. I did but, you have to actually put some work into getting to know each other.” All in all, for Jake, it “turned out it was okay [EAP] because I met some friends.”

### *Extended Connections*

The networks participants created in their EAP program extended beyond that first semester of studies. According to one questionnaire participant, EAP students started “meeting students face to face” in their other courses. This theme of building networks beyond EAP was also evident during the interviews. Lara shared, “I do have some friends from EAP though. Actually, there is one person that is taking physics. We took it, we’re taking it right now in the same course, and we took math last term also.” Terence also saw friends he made in EAP in other classes. Terence recalled, “I met them first in the EAP

course, but then later on I remember there were also the same students in my other courses and that way it made it easier for me to communicate with them about the topics related to or stuff related to the other courses.” For Terence, “just knowing students from the EAP made it easier for me to communicate with other students ... given that they were also students who were in my EAP course and also other courses.” Terence mentioned, “there are students I still meet today” and that “when we came to [Name of City] we were able to meet each other in person, and just sort of be there for each other. If you feel a little bit lost, we could help each other out.” In fact, “after the EAP class was over, meeting up, one of the EAP students decided to have weekly conversation with each other so that way we could stay in touch, even after EAP.” Because of the EAP program, Terence said, “I actually knew a couple students—mostly the students from EAP, and I still continue with them. And now at least I know some people here. I don’t feel completely lost so that way I can like find my way around here.”

During the interviews, some participants reported being able to meet people who were not part of the EAP program. After the EAP program, Terence said, “I don’t really have a problem communicating with students whether I know them or not.” Jake also thought, “being in EAP helped me ... if you’re in EAP ... then you’re always speaking with other people so maybe being in EAP will help learn, making friends in the future.” The participants were able to meet new people through their EAP friends. For example, Terence said, “through [EAP students] I got to meet other students whom I had never met at the EAP, so that way it helped me get to know more people than I had known before.” The topics covered in the EAP program also were a catalyst for network creation. Jake recounted visiting other departments on campus once he arrived in person: “I’m kind of exploratory. So I went to explore Indigenous person’s place [PIU’s Indigenous Students’ Centre]. I think in [name of building] where Indigenous students gather. And I went there like ten times. [They were] welcoming and giving food, like soup one time, and pizza.”

EAP program content also contributed conversation topics. Lara shared how she made a friend at her part-time job and how this friend was talking about “the beaches and everything, how everything is beautiful here around summer and how I have to get to know every single beach here because they’re all great and everything.” Lara was able to say to him, “I heard about the beaches, actually the main lake downtown [in my EAP class].” Lara has also learned in the EAP program that the local area was famous for fruits and vegetables. When she arrived in Canada, she “talked to a friend about it. Because I asked her where to buy good vegetables and fruits, she told me ‘oh it’s winter now, so not a lot of places have good ones, but over the summer we a lot of these fruits and berries and everything.’” Lara also found out from a friend the name of a local grocery store that had good selections of fruits and vegetables. Another topic covered in the EAP program was geography. Terence planned on using this information to make friends. He shared, when “I need to know someone who has been living here for a long time ... I could certainly learn more from them about the different Canadian cities and their cultures, but I can also share my own knowledge, what I know.”

## Language Development

### *Reading and Writing*

In relation to reading skills, Jake recounted how the EAP program helped him with his philosophy class because "... in EAP we learned lots of short stories ... so ability to read and comprehend, because in philosophy there was much more complicated, the language they used, the books were written by people [a] long time ago ...". Also related to developing reading skills, Lara shared the strategy of "overall, just looking for key words, like key concepts instead of trying to read the whole thing, and summarize it by yourself, just look for key words and concepts, put it together, and paraphrase it too. So useful."

Writing skills development also stood out. One questionnaire participant commented how the EAP program provided practice in writing, and another wrote, "mostly, EAP helped me learn how to write a good essay, which is helpful for all of my previous and following courses." This assertion was picked up during the interviews. Related to an English class he took after EAP, Jake said, "EAP helped me." Jake shared how this class was mostly "about learning composition, learning how to write." He said, "It's really similar to the EAP course." Jake also felt that the EAP program taught him how to use citations, a skill he could apply in his current English course: "I don't think I completely mastered in the EAP. But some of them, more and more of those ones in [the English course I am taking now], but at least I have the basics."

Terence also felt learning about how to write an essay had been "the most recent help to me now." When talking about whether the program had helped him in other courses, he asserted, "I think, of course." In particular, he thought that the skills he learned in the EAP program were beneficial for his electives: "One thing for sure the EAP helped me with was to write in an academic manner, especially for the humanities courses I'm taking as electives, and learning to write in academic way such as through MLA or APA." Terence went on to say, "and that certainly helped. And also having a proper structure for writing certainly helped me prepare for those kind of things for future courses." For some participants, the writing skills they gained in EAP also helped in science courses. For example, Lara recounted, "most of biology courses, they have a lab. And in the lab we have to write down a formal lab report, like a final type of grading thing. So I had to write two or three maybe, up to this point on my studies."

In reflecting back on how writing skills were developed during the EAP program, Lara remembered, "we had a long time to do it [write an essay], had a lot of resources. We had a lot of people to call for help." The people Lara remembered being helpful were the teaching assistants and instructors. She said, "we had the whole crew there. I would take an email, just type it up and send it. So that was helpful, a lot of people to help." This help was important because Lara felt the skill she needed "the most support with is writing for sure." In particular, she recalled receiving "help on how to look for the articles and how to cite them." She said, "that was really good and that helped me improve my writing and even researching." All in all, Lara felt there were "just the right amount of essays" in the EAP program. Terence also felt that the EAP classes helped him with his writing skills: "they taught me important concepts, but you know I also have to apply them on actual assignments. So that helped."

### ***Listening and Speaking***

Speaking skills were mentioned five times on the questionnaire. A participant commented how the EAP program provided practice in speaking, and this was echoed by other participants who wrote about “speaking with students and the teachers,” and “speaking and interaction with classmates.” In an online setting, the breakout rooms were a particular space where this practice took place, such as when one participant wrote, “In many breakout rooms, I improved my ability to communicate with others.” There was also an appreciation in the questionnaire data for the “casual chat in breakout rooms.”

Part of this development of listening and speaking skills might have been related to what Lara referred to in her interview as transition time. She felt that “EAP was really helpful” because “it felt like a transition.” Lara said, “as an international student ... because I was still home, everything was kind of Portuguese around me.” However, she continued, “I was starting to talk in English more often, and hearing more often as well, and started to take notes in English and everything, which was very helpful.” Previously, she reported, “I used to only watch stuff in English, like TV shows and movies. I don’t take notes on TV shows and movies. I don’t learn from them like that.” Her conclusion was that taking notes while listening to people using English “was another way it [EAP] was really helpful.” Lara also recounted, “EAP definitely helped my communication as in working with people.” She thought, “the casual conversations were good, and the assignments... overall they did help a lot, like presentations, yeah.”

Terence too felt his EAP program experiences had a positive impact on his speaking skills: “I remember all of [the EAP instructors and TAs] giving the support and not trying to judge or criticize, just trying to help us improve our way of speaking.” Terence remembered how, “we were always sent to breakout rooms with different groups of students and to discuss about topics that were taught in the class.” In the breakout rooms, Terence felt, “we were not only allowed to improve our way of speaking English, but also we were allowed to use our own creativity, share our own ideas with other students.” According to Terence, students used the breakout rooms to “communicate with each other and discuss the topics.” He said, “One thing I enjoyed was when we do some kind of mini activities like share our hobby or our favourite movies or things like that. That was just, made us feel bit more engaged with the class.” All in all, for Terence, “it’s not only just about learning the material, but also expressing ourselves a bit more.” Jake also liked how in “EAP courses you communicate with different types of people and some of them got accents.” As a result, Jake learned some useful speaking strategies such as asking, “can you say that again?” Lara also commented on making oral presentations, saying “I would say for sure keep the presentations ... they are helpful.” In fact, Lara even said she had to do a presentation in another class that she was taking at the same time as her EAP course.

### **Knowledge Building**

#### ***Local Knowledge***

In terms of local knowledge, questionnaire participants remarked how they had learned a lot about local geography even though they were studying online. This local knowledge was built up in synchronous class times through reading local news and talking about the city, surrounding area, and life in Canada. One participant recalled how they were

exposed to “day-to-day life and local news.” This sharing of local news was mentioned by other participants who similarly referred to “the news that teachers read during the class.”

The increase in local knowledge also came up during the interviews. Lara thought that showing a local website “every week with the news and everything [and] going over it ... was really helpful and nice to learn a little more about it.” In fact, Lara was still looking at that local website “now and then.” Jake was also surfing the same local news website, even after the EAP program. Jake recounted an anecdote in which he saw a reporter from that website in real life. Jake said, “I didn’t know who she was at the time, but she had the vest, the word [name of website] was written on her vest, so I know the [name of website].” The EAP program further benefited participants’ free time. For example, Lara went hiking when she arrived in Canada, and she felt that what she learned in EAP “was still good for hiking. [It] was sort of helpful.” Lara looked at the local websites she heard about in class to look for places to visit “especially now the summer is coming up, and spring and everything, so around the beaches, just get to know them, and some restaurants, maybe some hiking spots.” Another thing Lara learned during the EAP program was that “there is a lot of orchards and stuff like that. It is a very fruit place all summer, so there is a good variety of it.” Jake also started to explore the places he learned about in his EAP program, and shared, “me and my friend, my roommate from Vietnam, we went to a museum in downtown [name of city], and there was people, [name of local First Nation].”

### ***Cultural Knowledge***

Questionnaire participants recounted how they built up their cultural knowledge. One participant reported that “the labs really helped to learn about the local culture and community.” In addition, their teaching assistants in the EAP program “talked about these subjects [related to culture]” and another participant shared how they wrote “research papers about Canadian culture.” In particular, one participant stated, “I learned a lot of local culture from Prof. TA, and other classmates.”

Increased cultural knowledge also came up during the interviews. Terence felt that “we learned about Canadian culture through EAP, given that we were attending a university in Canada, so it’s great to know what the culture is like.” He thought, “[the EAP program] definitely helped me with Canadian culture.” By way of an example, Terence shared, “I remember we also learned, for example, about Canadian culture too because I had to write an essay comparing two different Canadian cities, so [it] helped me learn more about Canada.” The participants also learned about each other’s cultures, as evidenced by Jake remembering, “in the EAP class there was only international students ... that made me good sense of what international students are like.”

### ***General Knowledge***

Finally, the analysis pointed to participants building up their general knowledge about a range of subjects. For example, one questionnaire participant wrote, “the professors and TAs were really helpful with all the information and experience they brought in.” More specifically, the topics covered in class seemed to help with knowledge building, as in the words of another participant “as a student of the management department, the business topic really helps me a lot.”

In the interviews, Canadian geography was a key aspect of their new general knowledge. Terence recalled, “we were reading about different provinces and the geography locations of different provinces.” He also shared, “I think the fact that we had to do the research by ourselves certainly helped me learn more about the different cities in Canada and how they’re different from each other.” Discussion was another way participants built up their general knowledge, as recounted by Terence: “I remember there was this one assignment where we need to have a conversation with other students and to find out the differences between separate Canadian cities, and I think that certainly helped.” He also said, “different students sharing our own opinion or our own knowledge about different Canadian cities helped me learn better.” Along the same theme, Jake shared, “I think we learned lots about environmental [issues] like fire, forest fire, and that made us conscience about local communities and how sustainable we should be.”

### Discussion

Although this study focused on an EAP program that moved online during the COVID-19 pandemic, the findings corroborate previous findings related to face-to-face programs in a number of ways. Confidence, getting along with others, friendship networks, and language skills are key areas of congruence between the online program in this study and other face-to-face programs (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Douglas et al., 2022; Fox et al., 2014; Keefe & Shi, 2017; Lee & Wesche, 2000; Ranson, 2016; Tweedie & Kim, 2015). The transition time to develop these skills has also been previously found in face-to-face settings, with students in this study gaining new cultural knowledge during that transition (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Crossman, 2018; Douglas et al., 2022; Fox et al., 2006; Keefe & Shi, 2017). It appears that key aspects related to the participants’ EAP program were not negatively impacted by the move to online teaching and learning.

In addition, the current study expands on previous findings and addresses mixed findings. In particular, this study provides a counternarrative to mismatches between what students may encounter in an EAP program and what they need, want, and expect (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Haggerty, 2019; Raymond & Parks, 2002). This counternarrative is evident in the data related to the theme of academic and interpersonal skills growth, particularly in the supporting themes related to time management and academics. For example, improvements in time management were something that stood out as benefiting from the online experience. The participants in this study favourably reported working at their own pace, having more time to study, and organizing their schedules across different time zones. The participants further appreciated how materials were posted online to be accessed at their own pace and schedule. They demonstrated control over the learning process by taking the initiative to learn on their own, a factor Fount et al. (2022) identified as contributing to student success. Time management is a useful skill that can be supported through online modes of learning (Landry, 2019, 2023a, 2023b).

Researchers examining face-to-face contexts have found EAP students may have trouble interacting with other students and a lack of interpersonal and sociolinguistic outcomes (Boz et al., 2018; Douglas et al., 2022; Keefe & Shi, 2017; Tweedie & Kim, 2015). In the current study, even though classes took place online, the inclusion of opportunities for interaction was noted a number of times by participants. For example, the breakout rooms were an opportunity for students to practise their productive language skills and highlighted the importance of meaningful online interactions (Kohnke & Moorhouse,

2022; Moorhouse et al., 2023). New interpersonal skills also carried into other classes, such as when one participant was able to find helpful friends in his computer science and physics courses.

In some face-to-face learning contexts, EAP students may risk experiencing feelings of isolation (Douglas et al., 2022; Haggerty, 2019). However, in the current study friendship networks were strong, despite the EAP program being online. For some participants, being online was a benefit because they could meet, learn to trust, and make friends from the comfort of home. While other studies have brought up the challenges of students living in multiple time zones (Chojczak & Starford, 2023), participants in this study reported they were able to manage their time and seeing different faces online helped them to feel less lonely. It appears that participants in the current study were in the habit of turning on their cameras and getting to know each other that way. The interactions and curricular content of the EAP program helped students make and sustain friendships, and their online experiences in their EAP program set them up for later success during in-person encounters. These findings counter studies in some face-to-face contexts where having an overfocus on academic language and literacy may have contributed to sociolinguistic challenges, disengagement, and feelings of loneliness (Boz et al., 2018).

While some studies have reported not much impact or the underdevelopment of EAL skills (e.g., Bayliss & Raymond, 2004; Boz et al., 2018; Tweedie & Kim, 2015), participants in this study felt their language skills were improving. The online EAP program seemed to be important for developing communication skills, learning new speaking strategies, and interacting with others. The breakout rooms stood out in the data, where students felt they were improving their ability to engage in casual chat. The online program also offered a transition time for participants. Working on EAL skills while still at home was preparation for subsequent moves to in-person learning. While other studies have concerns regarding students' speaking and reading skills (Douglas et al., 2022; Tweedie & Kim, 2015) and difficult transitions to other academic programs (Haggerty, 2019), these concerns were not evident, despite the online context.

Previous research has noted the drawbacks of online teaching and learning during the pandemic. For example, decreases in motivation, increases in academic misconduct, and worries about student well-being have been identified (Pusey & Nanni, 2021). It has also been noted that it can be hard to monitor breakout rooms online, students may be less willing to speak, and excessive screen time can tire students out (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2022). However, these issues did not appear to come up in the current study. Some factors that might have mitigated these challenges for PIU's online EAP program might be how the program took place after a summer of preparation for the approaching semesters. In addition, the program benefited from a team of instructors and undergraduate and graduate teaching assistants who were working under a university wide concern for student well-being and a mandate to lead with compassion and caring. The way the program was divided into 30% synchronous and 70% asynchronous learning may have also contributed to lessening screen fatigue. Instead, the participants appeared to look forward to synchronous screen time as an opportunity to catch up with their new friends.

### **The Building Blocks of Additional Language Socialization**

The English language skills of EAP students can be conceptualized as developing through a process of additional language socialization in which they encounter a range of

sociocultural affordances, make use of general learning abilities, and engage underlying cognitive resources. Within this process, interactions are a catalyst for those changes (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; Talmy, 2012). For the current study's participants, the skills they gained through their EAP program experiences, and particularly their interpersonal skills, seemed to play a role in facilitating meaningful interactions. In turn, networks formed both inside and outside of their EAP courses, creating community, at first through the internet and later face to face. Friendships were formed and these friendships strengthened the process of additional language socialization (Douglas et al., 2022; Duff, 2007; Duff & Anderson, 2015; Duff et al., 2019). The process continued, with language skills improving as participants became members of a new community and as participants' skills, networks, language, and knowledge improved and provided more opportunities for further community engagement and language learning (Duff, 2010; Duff & Kobayashi, 2010; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Various kinds of knowledge grew along the way (Duff & Talmy, 2011), and participants gained new social and cultural understandings (Douglas et al., 2022; Talmy, 2012). In the case of the current study, it appears that EAP programs that create the conditions for EAL learning, along with social and cultural learning, support additional language socialization (Duff et al., 2019)—even if they are online.

Academic and interpersonal skills growth, network creation, language development, and knowledge building all play a role in the additional language socialization process. These building blocks of additional language socialization are presented as separate themes, but considered as a whole, they can be conceptualized as interconnected and interactive with one another. The development of one building block relates to the development of other blocks, and vice versa. For example, better time management skills might lead to increased feelings of confidence. These increased feelings of confidence might impact the formation of extended friendship networks. As students interact with these extended networks of friends, opportunities for using English increase and impact students' English language development. Developing English skills provide access to new knowledge, with this new knowledge possibly impacting academic performance, and so on. The development of one building block relates to others, demonstrating how taking all of these building blocks into account when designing an EAP program is key to facilitating the additional language socialization process. Figure 2 illustrates the interrelatedness of the themes and supporting themes in this study.

**Figure 2**

*Interactive Building Blocks of Additional Language Socialization in an Online EAP Program*



## Implications

This study points to the benefits of an EAP program having a holistic approach to teaching and learning that includes outcomes related to building students' academic and interpersonal skills, networks, language, and knowledge as part of adopting an overall framework of additional language socialization to inform curriculum development and educational programming. To implement such an approach, educators can start by reimagining the overall goal of an EAP program away from a narrow focus on academic language and literacy, a move also called for by Boz et al. (2018), towards a wider understanding of living well in a new place. With this goal, new learning outcomes become apparent. While learning outcomes related to English language skills remain a core part of the EAP curriculum, other learning outcomes such as enhancing community engagement, fostering intercultural understanding, developing a sense of place, gaining new study skills, supporting student wellbeing, building general knowledge, and including Indigenous knowledges and perspectives also contribute to students living well in a new place. For example, in regards to Indigenous knowledges, the *First Peoples Principles of Learning*

(First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2006/2007) are an informative beginning for EAP educators looking for guidance related to curriculum development and teaching.

The findings further point to the utility of online modes of teaching and learning for promoting a wide range of learning outcomes. Despite studying online, the participants in this program reflected positively on their experiences and were able to share a number of beneficial outcomes. With the return of face-to-face teaching, ways to carry forward what worked well online can be explored. For example, breakout rooms and interactive group work were elements that fostered interpersonal skills, developed friendships, and improved interactive speaking skills. Finding time for students to interact with each other and work in groups as part of in-class activities could continue these benefits. Another element of the participants' online experiences was the effort teachers and teaching assistants put into helping them learn about the place where the EAP program was based. Sharing local news, identifying sources of information, and learning about the geography and relevant aspects of where they would eventually be living all contributed to building up the participants' local knowledge and sense of place. Rather than leaving place-making to chance, building students' local knowledge is something impactful to carry forward. Finally, maintaining online elements as part of overall EAP programming might also continue some of these beneficial outcomes. For example, Landry (2023a) found that online modules within a face-to-face EAP program contributed to students' additional language socialization, indicating the utility of incorporating online elements into an EAP program.

### **Limitations and Future Studies**

This study is about a specific time for a particular group of participants. In addition, the participants in this study are not representative of the program as a whole. There were 57 students enrolled in PIU's EAP program at the time of this study, but only nine responded to the call for participants by completing the questionnaire, and out of those nine participants, only three went on to take part in an interview. There is also the risk of response bias (Creswell, 2015). Thus, the findings in this study are not generalizable. However, the findings are presented to better understand what happened to those particular participants at that time (Mills & Gay, 2016). Some aspects of this study might resonate with readers, and other aspects might provide an interesting counterfoil to what is happening elsewhere. By providing a peek into one EAP program in Canada, the study provides a more layered and nuanced understanding of online EAP in the post-secondary context and adds deeper understanding to the wide range of EAP programs that can be found across Canada (Douglas & Landry, 2021; MacDonald, 2017). Future studies might contribute another layer to that understanding to explore the relationship between EAP program experiences and academic outcomes through both qualitative and quantitative means. In addition, having input from EAP students as to what they thought was missing or needs to be improved could also play a role in developing more robust curriculum and programming.

### **Conclusion**

Gaining new academic and interpersonal skills, creating networks, developing language competence, and building knowledge were key outcomes related to taking part in an online EAP program. In turn, these outcomes contributed to the participants' ongoing

process of additional language socialization. This process was facilitated by an online EAP program that was holistic and general in approach, underscoring the vitality of curriculum and programming that goes beyond narrow definitions of academic language and literacy to include wider understandings of teaching and learning to facilitate living well in a new place and benefit multilingual students all round as they embark on post-secondary studies in English.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Online Questionnaire**

#### **Section 1: Background Information**

What is your first language?

What year were you born?

What is your gender identity?

How long have you lived in Canada?

What is your program of study?

#### **Section 2: Studying EAP [Level 2] Online**

For each of the questions below, please base your answers on your experiences in EAP [Level 2].

1. What helped you the most to develop your English language skills?
2. What helped you the most in your other courses?
3. What helped you the most to increase your general knowledge?
4. What helped you the most with your social interactions?
5. What helped you the most to learn about the local community and culture?
6. What helped you the most to improve your general study skills?

#### **Section 3: General Feedback**

1. What was the most beneficial aspect of studying EAP [Level 2] online?
2. What is one suggestion for improving future EAP [Level 2] online courses?
3. Do you have anything else you would like to share about studying EAP online?

**Appendix B**  
**Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

1. What experiences in EAP [Level 2] helped you to develop your English language skills in general?
2. What language skill did you develop the most in EAP [Level 2]? Why was that?
3. What experiences in EAP [Level 2] helped you in your other courses?
4. What experiences in EAP [Level 2] helped you increase your general knowledge?
5. What experiences in EAP [Level 2] helped you improve your social interactions?
6. What experiences in EAP [Level 2] helped you learn about the local community and culture?
7. What experiences in EAP [Level 2] helped you improve your general study skills?
8. What was the most beneficial aspect of studying EAP [Level 2] online?
9. What is one suggestion for improving future EAP [Level 2] online courses?
10. Do you have anything else you would like to share about studying EAP online?