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Engaging with quality via the CEM model

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Engaging with quality via the CEM Model: enhancing the content and performance management of postgraduate in-session academic skills provision.

Abstract

This research contributes to practice in the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) by demonstrating how business management approaches and tools can enhance the content and performance management of in-session academic skills provision. It was the result of a teaching and research collaboration between a Business Management (Logistics) lecturer and an EAP lecturer. The framework used in this research to evaluate student engagement with in-session provision is the CEM Model (authors) (Conceptualisation, Embedding and Mapping), and forms the basis for an evaluation, using a Best-Worst Discrete Choice Survey, to uncover from a student perspective the most valued academic skills content. From the Business Management perspective, the findings led to a reconceptualization of the CEM Model as a balanced scorecard, a strategic performance measurement tool to assess levels of student, staff and institutional engagement. For EAP practitioners the findings inform identification of in-session EAP provision to support international postgraduate students through enhancing the content and performance management of in-session EAP provision.

Keywords: Student engagement, in-session EAP, CEM Model, Best-worst survey

1. Introduction

Student engagement is understood as the interaction that a student has with their learning environment and the resources in terms of time, effort and degree of involvement on the part of students, teachers and institutions which can support or hinder their learning (Bryson

and Hand, 2007; Schuetz, 2008; Solomonides, 2015). Positive engagement is seen as essential for enhancing the student experience, supporting successful outcomes for the student and enhanced reputation for the institution (Bryson and Hand, 2007; Thomas, 2012). Research interest in this area has grown considerably, prompted by widening access to higher education for students from non-traditional backgrounds who are the first in their family to go to university (Haggis, 2006; Bryson and Hand, 2007; Schuetz, 2008; Zepke, Leach and Butler, 2010). Postgraduate international students, the focus of this research, can also be described as having non-traditional backgrounds since their experience of studying in another education culture at undergraduate level may result in assumptions about effective study strategies, which may not fit their new postgraduate study environment. For non-traditional and international students, university can easily become an alienating environment (Haggis, 2006; Wimpenny and Savin-Baden, 2013; Ashwin and McVitty, 2015).

Mobility figures for international students have doubled from the 2.1 million in 2000 and tripled from 1990 (ICEF Monitor, 2015), which also identified ‘There are more than five million students travelling abroad for education and when you factor in the huge numbers pursuing language studies: two million students are engaged in language travel today, of whom roughly two-thirds study English.’ UKCISA identifies that 46% of students studying at postgraduate level in the UK are now from outside the European Union and 38.4% study in the Business and Management discipline (UKCISA, 2015). Within EAP literature Fenton-Smith (2015, p. 2) states: ‘The unique needs of postgraduate EAL [English as an Additional Language] students remains under-researched.’ Responding to this call within the EAP literature, this research contributes to this debate with the aim: *to identify students' perceptions of their academic skills needs and facilitate effective planning and delivery to enhance the content and performance management of postgraduate in-session academic skills provision.*

2. Context

The research context was [institution in city] which aims ‘to deliver world-leading, research-informed education and to be recognised globally for the high quality of our graduates’ (Learning & teaching Strategy, 2013). It claims to be the most internationally diversified university in the UK with one third of the on-campus population in [city] coming from outside the UK. It also has campuses in [country] and [country] and a programme of inter-campus transfers to enable undergraduate students to study in all three locations. Nevertheless, along with many other institutions in the UK (THE, June 2016), the university is failing to compete for a share of the international student population with numbers of these students falling in recent years. One of the university’s priorities for the immediate future is to develop postgraduate programmes with an emphasis on delivery at scale. The provision of high quality academic skills support at taught postgraduate level is one way to make this offering more attractive to the international student market.

Academic skills support for taught postgraduate programmes in [school and institution] takes the form of adjunct workshops (two hours per week), which have been delivered during the first half of semester 1 each academic year since 2009. However, the workshops are not compulsory and must compete in a crowded timetable for students’ attention and time. Many students choose not to engage with the workshops, even though their lecturers publicise and endorse these.

The workshops take an Academic Literacies approach, going beyond language and skills training to make the values and attitudes of higher education explicit to students (Lea and Street, 1998; Haggis, 2006; Wingate, 2006, 2012a). The intention is to develop students’ sense of research mindedness, enabling a wider more analytical perspective on individual practice. This is achieved by modelling for students the skills of critical reading, the appropriate use and acknowledgement of sources and synthesis of ideas, e.g. in an essay or literature review, using carrier content (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998) from a core course on each postgraduate

programme. Students work with the reading lists and assignment tasks from this core course, through which they are guided to critically evaluate essay instructions to uncover their lecturer's assumptions and expectations, find, select and read academic sources strategically, and use these to develop arguments in an essay. Swales *et al.*, (2001) adopted a similar approach within an EAP course for masters of architecture students and noted the potential for critique of academic practices and greater empowerment of international students (p443). Lea & Street (1998, p. 158) in their seminal paper make the point that

‘... addressing specific skills issues around student writing [...] takes on entirely different meanings if the context is solely that of study skills, if the process is seen as part of academic socialisation, or if it is viewed more broadly as an aspect of the whole institutional and epistemological context.’

Lea and Street (1998) call for further research in relation to three themes, of which this paper addresses the first and second:

‘The first is focused on the student and suggests that students lack a set of basic skills that can be dealt with primarily in a remedial study skills or learning support unit. This takes no account of the interaction of the student with institutional practices and is based on the underlying principle that knowledge is transferred rather than mediated or constructed through writing practices. The second, identified most clearly by students, is derived from the interaction of student and tutor and is concerned with issues such as student and tutor assumptions and understandings of assignment titles, tutor feedback on students' written work and, for the students themselves, the importance of their own 'identity' as writers rather than simply the acquisition of skills in becoming an academic writer.’

Acknowledging the key themes emerging of understanding institutional practice and student understanding, these link to the aim of this research in supporting the collaboration between

EAP and subject specialists to explore how business management approaches and tools can help *identify students' perceptions of their academic skills needs and facilitate effective planning and delivery to enhance the content and performance management of postgraduate in-session academic skills provision.*

The next section of this paper will review the concept of engagement and outline an existing framework supporting engagement in academic skills delivery, before presenting the methodological basis for the data collection approach (Best-Worst Discrete Choice Survey) used in this research.

3. Literature

3.1 The Concept of Engagement

Student engagement places 'Students at the Heart of the System' as the title of the 2011 UK Higher Education White Paper (BIS, 2011) demonstrates. The UK National Student Satisfaction survey and the Teaching Excellence Framework, aim to '... ensure all students receive an excellent teaching experience that encourages original thinking, drives up engagement and prepares them for the world of work' (THE, 2015). Engagement continues to be a key driver of quality in both UK and USA Higher Education. Kuh (2009, p.683) defined student engagement for the purposes of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), developed in the USA, as '...the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities'. However, the NSSE focuses mainly on behavioural and cognitive aspects of engagement (Solomonides, 2015), whereas other researchers suggest that student engagement is a much more dynamic and multi-faceted construct, involving transient states of interest, which occur within broader processes of interaction between students and the engagement objects or resources within their learning environment (Bryson and Hand, 2007; Leach and Zepke, 2011; Wimpenny and Savin-Baden, 2013). These interactions change over

time and can occur on cognitive, behavioural, emotional and sociocultural levels. A considerable amount of research has gathered student and staff perspectives, supporting a variety of frameworks within which to understand the processes of student engagement (Leach and Zepke, 2011; Kahu, 2013; Ashwin and McVitty, 2015; Solomonides, 2015). These studies suggest that the emotional and sociocultural levels of engagement seem most salient for students.

Among the key drivers for positive engagement are students' perception of the attitudes of academic staff in terms of enthusiasm for their subject and willingness to interact with genuineness and understanding towards the struggles and uncertainties students experience in their learning (Bryson and Hand, 2007; Wimpenny and Savin-Baden, 2013). Equally important is a welcoming institutional culture, which values diversity and offers a variety of services including learning or writing support (Zepke and Leach, 2010). Students who are successful at university tend to develop a sense of belonging, identity and agency in their academic community. They feel competent to achieve success (Schuetz, 2008; Leach and Zepke, 2011; Thomas, 2012) but can display a remarkable level of resilience through periods of isolation and alienation (Wimpenny and Savin-Baden, 2013). International students, by contrast, who may lack the support of a wider community of family and friends in the new academic environment, can find it difficult to cope with 'challenges to their learning, their lifeworld and their current meaning systems'. (Wimpenny and Savin-Baden, 2013, p 321).

Disengagement can result from a mismatch in the perceptions held by academic staff and students about the purpose of university study. Widening access to higher education has resulted in a more diverse range of students with a wider variety of instrumental or vocational study purposes (Haggis, 2006). Traditional views held by some disciplinary specialists, which position 'intellectual exploration "for its own sake" [as] being superior to engagement with study for reasons connected to work' (Haggis, 2006 p. 527) have the potential to alienate

students. However, now that students are responsible for some or all of their funding, it is to be expected that they will see themselves as consumers and look for value for money in their degrees (Thomas, 2012). Haggis recommends accepting students' initial motivations for seeking a qualification but then 'seducing' them gradually into interest and commitment to the discipline (Haggis, 2006 p 528).

3.2 The CEM Model (Contextualization, Embedding and Mapping) (Authors, 2010)

This mismatch between the expectations of students and their lecturers about the value and purpose of higher education is also reflected in their different assumptions about the acquisition of core study competencies required for success on an English-medium degree. Students can assume that the language and skills they acquired to pass an English entrance exam will be sufficient; while subject staff may adopt a deficit and remedial approach to poor student performance (Lea and Street, 1998; Haggis, 2006; Wingate, 2006), problematizing this as a language issue and handing the problem to EAP staff to deal with. Waters and Waters (2001, p 377) distinguish between study skills, the surface techniques required for effective study, and study competence, the underlying capacity for study 'consisting of attributes... such as self-confidence, self-awareness, the ability to think creatively and critically, independence of mind'. The development of these graduate attributes can lead to greater self-motivation and engagement (Schuetz, 2008; Zepke, Leach and Butler, 2010).

One approach to encouraging student engagement, specifically with in-session academic skills workshops, is to enhance their perceived validity by establishing strong working partnerships between EAP staff and subject lecturers through a framework known as the CEM Model (Authors, 2010). Figure 1 shows the three elements of the model (Contextualization, Embedding and Mapping), which promote partnerships between subject lecturers and EAP staff (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998; Harris and Ashton, 2011; Fenton-Smith and Humphreys, 2015) to enable timely support for students within a discipline-specific

context (Hyland 2009; Harris and Ashton, 2011; Wingate, 2012a). The CEM Model can be used to assess the strength of the connections between academic skills provision and the management and delivery of academic content on degrees.

Insert Figure 1

The CEM Model aims to enhance student engagement by contextualizing academic skills delivery within the texts and coursework tasks that students are required to submit on their degrees. Contextualization positions the academic skills workshops as specific to the discipline (Hyland, 2009) and also contributes to students' perception of the relevance of the workshop content to their studies (Kember and Ho, 2008). It supports the development of students' identity and agency as members of their academic community (Schuetz, 2008; Leach and Zepke, 2011). The use of assessment tasks from the core course on the degree has the potential to establish a transfer climate (James, 2010) in which 'near transfer' (James, 2014, p.2) of learning outcomes between similar situations is more likely to occur.

The Embedding element of the CEM Model aims to make students aware that academic skills provision is embedded into the programme structure and team (Authors, 2010), thus demonstrating the willingness of staff to engage with the struggles and uncertainties students experience in their learning (Bryson and Hand, 2007; Wimpenny and Savin-Baden, 2013). The intention is to counter negative perceptions of the status and worth of academic skills on the part of academic subject staff and students. The highest level of embedding is team teaching of subject content and academic skills but this is difficult to achieve (Fenton-Smith and Humphreys, 2015). Instead, institutions usually offer adjunct tutorials, which 'scaffold the content while focusing on the academic skills that should be transferable to other courses in the program' (Fenton-Smith and Humphreys, 2015, p. 52).

The third element in the CEM Model as originally conceived is mapping. The aim is to enhance student engagement with academic skills by providing a variety of support at the time

it is most needed, e.g. unpacking coursework instructions at the beginning of a semester when these are given to students, and discussing exam strategies close to an examination diet. Mapping can also refer to the flexibility of support. The Academic Language and Literacy (ALL) specialists in Fenton-Smith and Humphreys' (2015) research considered that individual consultations were also highly effective in addressing needs. These may suit less confident students who find it difficult to have their needs addressed in larger groups.

At [institution], developing study competence as opposed to study skills (Waters and Waters, 2001) and exploring how students are expected to write within their disciplines (Lea and Street, 1998) have been the main aims of in-sessional academic skills provision since its inception in 2009. The CEM Model was introduced in [institution] in 2009 (Authors, 2013) to assess its transferability to a new context. It has provided an effective framework for an internal action research project to evaluate and enhance in-sessional provision for taught postgraduate programmes. It has facilitated closer collaboration between subject lecturers and the EAP staff who teach academic skills, raising awareness of the Academic Literacies approach, and leading in some cases to enhanced status and embedding of the in-sessional provision within the programme team, for example, with team teaching of workshops and joint marking of coursework. It has also made possible this cross-disciplinary research project between an EAP lecturer and a Business Management (Logistics) lecturer, who delivered a core course in Strategies for Supply Chains, exploring how approaches and tools employed in Business Management research can provide fresh perspectives to *identify students' perceptions of their academic skills needs and facilitate effective planning and delivery to enhance the content and performance management of postgraduate in-sessional academic skills provision.*

3. Methodology

Authors (2010) offered a framework for ensuring that lessons learned from implementation of the CEM Model at [institution] were not lost in the transfer to other contexts.

In the transfer and implementation of the CEM Model to [institution] (Authors, 2013) the authors noted the importance of further engaging with the student body to identify what students prioritise as the most important content they wish to be delivered in the academic skills workshops.

Students' perceptions of the value of activities within the academic skills workshops and the impact on their performance are difficult to elicit. A variety of evaluation instruments, based on the CEM Model, have been applied to successive student cohorts at [institution] since 2009, before, during and immediately after delivery of academic skills workshops in the first semester. Students were asked about their motivation for attending and the value added to their degree using open-ended questions. Their responses were compiled into sets of statements to be ordered, by subsequent cohorts, according to their perceived importance, using ranking tasks and Likert Scales. The problem with these types of evaluation is that they are descriptive and can generate conflicting results (Balcombe *et al.*, 2014). Likert scales indicate the importance of individual activities but do not provide direct comparisons. Ranking exercises become psychologically difficult if they involve more than five items (Balcombe *et al.*, 2014). Although the evaluations identified improvements that could be made at the programme structure level, of direct relevance to this research, no clear ranking between different activities at the level of course design and delivery emerged.

This research investigates whether the different activities that comprise academic skills workshops could be ranked more precisely, and students' preferences for activities which contributed most to their success could be identified. Once these preferences were identified, they could be used to facilitate effective planning and delivery to enhance the content and performance management of in-session academic skills to promote enhanced engagement (Bryson and Hand, 2007; Leach and Zepke, 2011; Wimpenny and Savin-Baden, 2013). Discussions with a Logistics lecturer, who was a co-author of the paper by Authors (2006),

suggested a new way of evaluating academic skills provision in terms of student preferences. The survey instrument, known as a Best-Worst Discrete Choice Survey (henceforth Best-Worst Survey) was proposed by Louviere *et al.* (2008, cited in Lanscar *et al.*, 2013) and is relatively well-known in the disciplines of marketing, sociology and health (Authors, 2006; Lanscar *et al.*, 2013; Balcombe *et al.*, 2014) but is new to EAP.

Best-Worst Scaling is based on a theory of human decision making in which an individual will compare alternatives and make a choice involving trade-offs between components of the alternatives presented. Survey respondents are forced to make a choice between best and worst with no option to rank items as ‘middling’ as in Likert scales (Balcombe *et al.*, 2014). The method also avoids differences of interpretation of labels such as ‘quite’ or ‘very’ or tendencies to use or not use certain parts of the scale (Balcombe *et al.*, 2014). It is beyond the scope of this article to explain the statistical theory underpinning the method and detailed explanations can be found in Authors (2006), Lanscar *et al.* (2013) and Balcombe *et al.* (2014). Respondents are presented with a series of blocks of five statements and are asked to select the most important and least important statements in each block. Best and worst choices are then weighted to provide an implied preference ordering for the activities described in the statements. The twenty-one activities used to construct the survey, shown in Appendix A, were derived from the literature (see for example Haggis, 2006, p. 525; Wingate, 2012b, p. 155), from the content of academic skills workshops, and also from student responses to open-ended questions in previous evaluations of academic skills provision at [institution].

In addition, evaluations of the provision were usually conducted at the end of Semester 1 when students are only just becoming aware of the criteria for success on a master’s degree (Kelly and Moogan, 2012). Thus, reflective in-depth interviews were also conducted during the following summer by the subject lecturer. These were triangulated with the survey results

to develop a richer understanding of what students perceive to be the most important components of academic skills workshops.

3.1 Research sample, design and data analysis for the Best-Worst Survey

The research was carried out in [institution] in the academic year 2013-2014. The students who took part were following one of three Business master's level degree pathways: International Business Management (IBM), Strategic Project Management (SPM) or Logistics and Supply Chain Management (LSCM). A total of 165 students completed the Best-Worst Survey: IBM (61), SPM (55) and LSCM (49). As the data analysis requires a minimum of 35 responses for statistical significance, the responses from the 165 students could also be grouped according to students' first language to determine whether preferences differed depending on prior education experiences. Northern European, comprising English, Scandinavian and German students (42) were assumed to have similar prior experience of university studies and might, therefore, have similar preferences for academic skills activities. Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese students (74) constituted a second group with a variety of other nationalities (49) making up a third group.

Best-Worst Survey Instrument: An example of one choice set from the survey instrument is shown in Appendix B. The 21 statements from Appendix A were compiled into 21 choice sets each comprising five statements such that

- each statement appeared the same number of times in the survey (in this case five times);
- each statement only appeared once in combination with each of the other statements (this allowed trade-offs in the selection of the statements);
- each statement only appeared once in each of the five positions in the set in the survey (this circumvented choice bias related to the position of the statement)

The surveys were administered on paper at the end of Semester 1, during one of the core courses for each of the degree programmes listed above.

3.2 Data analysis

The pair of items chosen in each set maximises the difference in utility (in this case preference) between them. The relative ordering of the 21 items is proportional to the number of times each is chosen best or worst. Empirically, this is ‘a complete block factorial design’ (Burgess and Street, 2004, cited in Authors, 2006) which requires that each value from least important to most important is multiplied by 2^n , where $n= 0, 1, 2, 3, 4$ for a block of five choices. Since only the least and most important choices are of interest, they are multiplied by $2^0 = 1$ and $2^4 = 16$ respectively. In order to arrive at an implied ordering for the 21 activities, the results are calculated as the square root of weighted best divided by weighted worst. The graph of these results will show a change of slope of the line, with activities above the change of slope being most preferred or salient. Activities below the change of slope are not necessarily activities that are not important. They may be activities already addressed by the course, or activities that the students already know how to do. The highest values are the activities that if addressed properly will create the greatest positive perception of value for the students.

3.3 Semi-structured interviews

A convenience sample (Creswell, 2014, p 158) of 24 students from LSCM (14 men and 10 women representing 35% of that cohort) completed a semi-structured interview with one of the researchers, who was also their lecturer and mentor, during Semester 3 while they were working on their research dissertations. Students in the IBM and SPM cohorts had dispersed, some back to their home countries, for fieldwork and thus were not available for interview. Approximately half the students had attended an academic skills class. Figure 2 shows the nationalities of interviewees compared to the nationalities in the LSCM cohort.

Insert Figure 2

Semi-structured interviews: The interviews aimed to triangulate the data collected from the Best-Worst Survey in order to gain a deeper understanding of the students' experience and attitudes to academic skills. The interviews were semi-structured (Creswell, 2014, p. 190) around the following themes: students' motivations in studying their postgraduate degree; their expectation of the challenges of that degree; the support they received from academic skills workshops (if they attended these); their understanding of the meaning and importance of critical evaluation for their degree. The interviewees were encouraged to develop the discussion along any themes that were interesting for them. Thus, the length of interviews varied from about 10 to over 50 minutes. Each interview was digitally voice recorded, transcribed, and then imported into NVivo for further analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Best-Worst survey

Figure 3 shows a summary of the Best-Worst Survey results for the combined group (165 students) and clearly identifies the first four items as important content that the students prioritise for delivery in the academic skills workshops.

Insert Figure 3

There was some considerable variation in the ranking of these four activities depending on the degree cohort and the nationality group as shown, for example, in Figures 4 and 5 and summarised in Table 1.

Insert Figure 4

Insert Figure 5

Insert Table 1

This variation in preferences may reflect differences in the emphasis placed on the activities by the academic skills lecturer and the subject lecturer for the core course in each degree. The three nationality groupings showed clearly different weightings for the four main

preferred activities. This difference may reflect prior understandings and expectations of postgraduate English-medium study for the different nationality groups. Nevertheless, the clear indication by in-session students that understanding critical evaluation was an important element for success on their taught masters programme suggests that this aspect could be used to label the content of the academic skills workshops more clearly to reflect student priorities. The challenge is then to frame the in-session provision for new students who have not yet experienced the masters taught programmes in order to make them aware of this requirement for critical evaluation on their degree. At [institution] this is done with promotional material for in-session provision which encourages students to ‘achieve the grades you deserve’ by exploring and challenging their assumptions about effective study strategies. Critical evaluation is now highlighted in the promotional leaflet for in-session provision as a potential gap in their understanding, which the content of the academic skills workshops can address.

4.2 *Semi-structured interviews*

Findings from the interview data supported the survey results, suggesting that accurate labelling and promotion of academic skills provision needed to be strengthened and that more flexible modes of delivery should be introduced. From the coding of interview data, a number of themes emerged: expectations and assumptions about what study on a postgraduate degree involves; expectations and assumptions about the content, pace and timing of academic skills provision; evaluation of this provision; understanding of what critical evaluation involves; reflections on how this understanding developed. These themes are exemplified below with student comments.

The wide variety of linguistic competence amongst those interviewed did not necessarily correlate with understanding of what postgraduate study involves. Students who were native speakers of English, either from the UK or USA, tended to have a surface view of academic skills as relating to referencing, proofreading or *using ‘carry’ words like furthermore,*

moreover (Interview 1). This may be because their understanding of study competence is tacit and they are not used to reflecting on what they know and can do. The native English speaker in interview 1 thought that the academic skills workshops would be *maybe a bit more of an English literature class*. However, one German speaker noted that

... it helped to get used to the new [education] system... to understand the questions for coursework and ... to write in an academic style (Interview 8)

Similarly, there was a variety of understanding of the purpose of the academic skills workshops from Thai and Chinese speakers. Some students had attended a pre-session course prior to the start of their degree and assumed that they would not learn anything more from the in-session workshops. However, several comments from other pre-session students pointed to the value of the workshops in consolidating their understanding:

Even if though I studied 12 weeks [the pre-session course], it's like ... to cover me [remind me] again for this course.

it's like a lot of toolkits for me to keep ... helping my ability to deliver (Interview 5)

my problem is what is critical evaluate, I don't know this before, before I take the academic skill..., but after I attend this, so I know what is that. (Interview 7)

Students commented on the mode and pace of delivery with some suggesting the structure of the workshops was inefficient or should go at a faster pace:

I would advise not having it throughout the year. I would advise having it - especially all the assignments based stuff, all at the beginning, just fire it all off (Interview 20)

it was done at a far too slow pace. Like, I said the first one had some interesting points and the second one was ridiculously slow (Interview 21)

In evaluating the academic skills provision, some students commented on whether they enjoyed writing in class or preferred to write on their own at home or in the library. Many students commented on the need for more flexible modes of delivery:

I would prefer smaller classes and one-to-one work on own writing (Interview 12)
the classes need to be, like, more focused on, like, you know, individual people
(Interview 16)

So when you've got so many students, I think it's very hard to get the message across in
order for them to understand (Interview 17)

for me it's always easier to write something longer when I'm on my own in the library
or whatever, but not sitting in a class and just writing there. (Interview 24)

Students began their degree programme with varying levels of understanding of critical evaluation, identified as the top perceived need by this cohort overall through the Best-Worst Survey. Some students had learned and applied critical evaluation in previous studies:

... you need to create something from your head. ...you need to find some other
knowledge to support you. I think this is very helpful for me ... and for my future,
(Interview 2)

To examine each individual idea or individual point and elaborate and ask how, why
and what in order to differentiate. (Interview 14)

However, others had limited or superficial understanding:

it's quite difficult to understand what critical evaluation is and many Thai students all
talk about it (Interview 5)

It means that you can say your opinion and understand the different opinions that you
read. (Interview 9)

it's more about after reading the different articles and papers just to say what you think
about them. And obviously summarise; that's what I thought at the beginning.
(Interview 18)

Students reported that their understanding of critical evaluation was extended and solidified through a combination of factors, which included

- explanation and activities in academic skills, especially comparison of good and poor examples of student work;
- reading a lot of journal articles;
- completing coursework assignments and receiving feedback from lecturers (although students commented that the depth and quality of feedback varied greatly between lecturers);
- comparison of their marked assignments during informal conversation with classmates.

4.3 Implementation and evaluation of changes to academic skills provision

It was intended that insights gained from the Best-Worst Survey and interviews carried out in 2013-14 would be implemented in the following academic year. However, in 2014-15 a number of changes occurred which interrupted the implementation and its evaluation: the management and delivery of the academic skills workshops passed to different EAP staff, the Logistics lecturer left the institution and the curriculum for the taught postgraduate programme in [school] was significantly restructured to provide more choice within the degrees.

EAP staff involved in delivering the workshops in 2014-15 required time to establish new partnerships with the subject lecturers and to feel confident with the academic skills workshop materials. Some changes were introduced that year by making one-to-one or small group consultations available during and immediately after the workshops. The result was that attendance was not monitored in 2014-15 and the recommended changes were not fully implemented until 2015-16, when student attendance was again monitored and an online evaluation survey was carried out at the end of the first semester in 2015. This evaluation asked students whether they attended the workshops and reasons for not attending and whether the activities in the workshops were contextualised, embedded and mapped to the requirements of the core course. Students were asked to say which of the four salient activities from the Best-

Worst Survey were important to them and to comment on their preferred mode of academic skills provision (lecture, workshop, small group, one-to-one or online).

In 2015-16, the number of workshops for each core degree subject was reduced to five, delivered between weeks two and six with a workshop on exam strategies in week ten of the semester. Individual consultations were made available throughout the semester. The content of the first five workshops was revised and communicated to the students as follows:

1. Writing for a critical reader – critical evaluation of example essays (obtained from the subject specialist)
2. Critical research strategies – understanding essay questions (obtained from the subject specialist) , finding, evaluating and selecting sources appropriate to essay purpose
3. Critical reading of a research paper (identified by the subject specialist) – using structure to read efficiently and find ideas
4. Critical evaluation of contested concepts – identifying perspectives
5. Critical evaluation of research – linking theory to practice

The CEM Model continued to form the basis for designing content and evaluating the provision so the example essays, essay questions, research papers and contested concepts were all drawn from the content of each core course. As new EAP staff established relationships with the subject lecturers on their core courses, embedding was enhanced by obtaining the lecturer's permission to introduce a menu item labelled Academic Skills into the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) for each core course. This meant that emails and announcements about the workshops reached all students, raising their awareness of the link to the core course. All materials for the workshops were uploaded to the VLE for students who were unable to attend. A number of Frequently Asked Questions were posted there as well. EAP staff attended some subject lectures and discussed the provision with the lecturer to develop a more consistent academic skills message for students. This enabled better mapping of the content of workshops

to the assignment deadlines in the core course. It also raised students' awareness that the subject lecturer and academic skills teacher were collaborating in providing additional support for the programme.

Following the changes to the labelling of the in-session provision, attendance records (Table 2) at the end of Semester 1 in 2015 showed that for IBM and LSCM cohorts students were attending about the same number of workshops but were taking advantage of the one-to-one consultations, thus increasing attendance overall. Attendance for SPM fell, possibly because this programme was most affected by the curriculum changes introduced in 2014-15. The provision was extended into Semester 2 from 2014-15 with the core course for workshops being Research Philosophy and Practice, which all Business Management students were required to take to prepare for their dissertation research. Individual consultations were also available throughout the second semester.

Insert Table 2

4.4 Analysis of 2015 online evaluation survey

The online evaluation survey at the end of Semester 1 in 2015 was completed by 68 students with the following response rates: IBM (27%), SPM (9%) and LSCM (29%). Reasons given for not attending workshops included overlap with other classes in the timetable, previous study on a pre-session course and time management. Some students commented that they had not known in-session support was available, although it was widely advertised and promoted through emails from the VLE, while others regretted that they had not taken advantage of this support. The majority of students reported that they perceived the academic skills provision to be contextualised and embedded within the core course and that support was available at the time they needed it to meet deadlines. The respondents ranked the four most important activities identified overall in the Best-Worst Survey in a similar order:

- *Understanding what critical evaluation involves*

- *Learning how to write in an academic style*
- *Learning what my lecturers expect in coursework*
- *Understanding how to structure an essay*

Fifty-five percent of respondents preferred one-to-one or small group consultations with a tutor as opposed to workshops, lectures or online self-study formats for this type of support. The preferred timing was one hour every one-two weeks. Respondents preferred to receive feedback on their writing by email (46%) or online platforms (16%) or face-to-face (34%). 87% indicated they would like further support for their writing in semester 2.

4.5 Reconceptualization of the CEM Model

From the EAP perspective, the changes to the postgraduate taught programme curriculum and the handover of academic skills teaching and management in 2014-15 pointed to the difficulty of maintaining quality in academic skills provision against a changing context. Swales *et al.* (2001) note the vulnerability of in-session courses to such ‘changes within the broader educational context’ (p. 455). The CEM model was designed to enhance the quality of academic skills provision by evaluating the level of engagement of students, academic staff and academic managers with in-session provision. It ‘supports university practice at a micro level, informing the design of strategic learning and teaching policy at a macro level’ (Authors, 2013 p. 285).

An implication of the findings in this research is that the CEM Model might also act as an important vehicle for knowledge transfer if it was reconceptualised as a balanced scorecard, a type of performance management tool for setting, implementing and evaluating strategic goals, which has been applied at programme and course level to increase student engagement and achievement (Fredin *et al.*, 2015). Balanced Scorecard approaches have been introduced in higher education institutions as a result of pressure from internal and external sources to measure institutional performance (see Taylor and Baines, 2015 for a review) and although

there is some resistance to the use of such performance measurement techniques, their introduction, at the institutional level, reflects ‘a desire to enhance corporate quality, efficiency and accountability’ (Taylor and Baines, 2015, p. 116). Balanced scorecards typically include ‘a balance of measures from different perspectives’ (Fredin et al., 2015, p. 50), with ‘lead’ indicators, which in the case of the CEM Model are the three elements, contextualisation, embedding and mapping, that are the drivers for enhancing student engagement, and ‘lag’ measures of actual performance, for example, students’ attendance and their responses to surveys evaluating the provision (Taylor and Baines, 2015). Balanced scorecards also contain different levels linked to the overall objectives. Reconceptualising the CEM Model as a balanced scorecard enables the strategic needs of specific groups of stakeholders in a learning and teaching context to be considered in parallel: students, academic skills lecturers, subject lecturers and academic managers. Appendix C shows an example of a Balanced Scorecard based on the CEM Model.

5. Conclusion

This article contributes to the EAP literature and supports the EAP practitioner through addressing the aim to: *identify students’ perceptions of their academic skills needs and facilitate effective planning and delivery to enhance the content and performance management of postgraduate in-session academic skills provision.* A Best-Worst Discrete Choice Survey (after Authors, 2006) was used to uncover those activities in academic skills workshops that were most valued by students. Once they were identified, these activities were used to inform both the content of academic skills provision and to promote this to subsequent cohorts of students. This promotion aimed to raise students’ awareness of gaps in their understanding of the expectations of postgraduate study in the UK and to highlight critical evaluation as a concept they would often encounter in lectures but may not necessarily understand.

Findings from the research are consistent with studies by Jones, et al. (2001), Harris and Ashton (2011) and Fenton-Smith and Humphreys (2015) which sought the views of Academic Language and Literacy (ALL) specialists in Australian institutions. Academic skills provision was perceived by ALL specialists to be most effective the more it was contextualised within the target degree, embedded within the programme structure and team and mapped to students needs in terms of the timeliness and flexibility of delivery. In the present research, students who participated in the Best-Worst Survey and interviews in 2013-14 and those who attended the revised academic skills provision in 2015-16 and completed the evaluation agreed on the need to provide more flexible modes of delivery (workshops, one-to-one consultations, material in a VLE) to better target a wider range of student needs. The Best-Worst Survey also highlighted four aspects of the academic skills provision that were most salient for all students. These are aspects that enable students to understand the assumptions and expectations of their academic community so that they can begin to develop a sense of identity and agency within that community and feel competent to succeed. These salient aspects are at the heart of the Academic Literacies approach (Lea and Street, 1998, Haggis, 2006, Wingate, 2012a) and confirm the appropriateness of this approach for in-sessional provision.

Jones *et al.* (2001) noted the crucial importance of partnerships in maintaining the profile of in-sessional academic skills provision within an institution. The present research was based on an effective partnership between subject (Logistics) and EAP specialists, which contributed a critical perspective on practice through scholarly enquiry, demonstrating how business management approaches and tools can enhance the performance management of in-sessional provision. One outcome of this research was the reconceptualization of the CEM Model as a balanced scorecard (Appendix C), a performance management tool for setting and implementing strategy for in-sessional provision and monitoring its effectiveness. The model has the advantage of bringing together all stakeholders involved in enhancing student

engagement and success. The Model has been expanded to include a fourth element, communication, to give students clearer information about the content of the in-sessional provision. These four elements are the drivers for student engagement; by focusing on each one in turn, institutions can assess which aspects of in-sessional provision might require strategic enhancement.

One challenge faced by EAP staff more generally in providing academic skills workshops and by the authors of this research in particular was the impact of the unstable and changing nature of the Higher Education context and the fragility of EAP interventions within that (Swales *et al*, 2001) with a consequent ‘increase in ignorance about what we do and why it is important’ (p. 455). The CEM Model, reconceptualised as a balanced scorecard, can function to raise the profile of the method of delivery of in-sessional provision within an institution by encouraging the involvement of all stakeholders and by highlighting the strategic partnerships required for student engagement. It can also be an important tool in managing change. Both partners in this collaboration have since moved to other positions within the institution or elsewhere. Nevertheless, the CEM Model has continued to form the basis for ensuring continuity in content, delivery and evaluation of in-sessional provision.

Insert Appendix A Statements used for the Best-Worst Survey

Insert Appendix B Instructions for the survey with an example choice set

Insert Appendix C CEM Model as a Balanced Scorecard for Optimising EAP Academic Skills Provision (contextualisation element illustrated, full table available from (author – email))

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