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## Towards a Better Understanding of Social Acculturation: International Students in British EAP Universities

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### Abstract

This study explores the role of social acculturation (social and cultural adaptation to university life in and outside the classroom) in a British EAP (English for Academic Purposes) classroom setting and to situate this within broader debates about the complex relationship between the concepts of language and culture. It argues that, with its overall focus on academic language and disciplinary acculturation, EAP pedagogic practices can overlook the dimension of social acculturation, which is also an equally important skill for students' learning. For its theoretical framework, this paper presents a review of the literature that considers the significance of social acculturation and intercultural competence in the EAP curriculum. Drawing on this body of literature review as a methodology, this study proposes pedagogic practices such as Intercultural Approach and Sheltered Instruction that can be implemented in EAP seminar classes to develop international students' social acculturation. The seminar genre is suggested for students to practice the social acculturation process and hence improve their intercultural competence. This is because seminars provide an effective setting to prepare students for their new environment, allow them to interact with each other and practice their intercultural - as well as linguistic and disciplinary - skills.

**Keywords:** EAP; language; social acculturation; intercultural; social adaptation

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### Introduction

The U.K. has been a popular place for international students for their graduate and postgraduate studies as it has some of the top-ranking *universities in the world*. With their growing number each year, they comprise almost half a million students from across the globe (Cardwell, 2016). As a result of the globalisation of English, there is a growing body of work that considers the importance of intercultural competence and the impact of socio-cultural features on cross-cultural communication in L2 (second language) oral production (Aquilar, 2018; Royal, 2017; Tweedie & Kim, 2015; Kasper & Roever, 2005). With the acceleration of globalisation and an increasing interest in learning English as a second language, teachers are often considered central drivers in multicultural learning environments where 'learners need to obtain knowledge about the culture of the disciplinary discourse community to which they belong or are preparing to enter' (Li, 2020, p. 12).

Additionally, the issue of the different academic expectations of international students, and the processes of acculturation that they go through as they adjust to the culture of university life and particular academic norms, has been highlighted in several studies (Royal, 2017; Tim and Kim, 2015;

Shi et al., 2017; Casanave 1995; Cheng & Fox, 2008;). Due to their different cultural experiences and expectations, international students often find it challenging to adjust to university social and cultural life (Royal, 2017; Hardy & Clughen, 2012). When arriving in a new country, they must adapt to 'new ways of knowing: new ways of understanding, interpreting and organising knowledge' (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 158). They are also expected to adapt to an English-speaking academic environment and demonstrate their understanding and knowledge through appropriate academic discourse (Hardy & Clughen, 2012).

In relation to different expectations of international students and the impact of this situation - inadequate attention to social acculturation in EAP - on their performance in class, Hyland (2006, p.43) points out that one of the neglected aspects in EAP classrooms is 'the potential for culturally divergent attitudes to knowledge to influence students' language production and how we understand students' progress'. This means the expectations and knowledge of international students may differ, and thus, this could affect their learning and performance in classrooms. For example, the education system in the U.K. tends to encourage and reward critical thinking, questioning and assessing sources to construct opinions and arguments. This issue has often been the focus of attention in the literature that has explored the experiences of students from Asian backgrounds. On the one hand, some researchers claim that the perception of Asian students as passive learners lacking critical thinking and having difficulty adjusting to cultural differences in the U.K. education system is a misconception based on stereotyping (Ryan, 2010). On the other hand, some researchers argue that students from Asian backgrounds are more likely to be used to a framework in which they are expected to internalise what is taught to them through memorising material and by maintaining a certain reverence for canonical, traditional and existing knowledge (Hyland, 2008; Reynolds, 2018). *It is often claimed that Asian educational pedagogy still places heavy emphasis on 'rote memorisation of required knowledge'* (Shambaugh, 2016), which means that, without developing skills in critical analysis and knowledge of referencing, students from Asian backgrounds (here, Chinese students are given as examples) can be 'at risk of academic failure' in the U.K. context (Reynolds, 2018). One of the implications of such studies is that, without taking such cultural factors into account, teachers may look at students' work unfavourably and be more likely to perceive it in terms of plagiarism, as a form of imitating others' ideas, or even as 'naïve and immature' writing (Hyland, 2006). Such literature suggests that there is a need to, at the very least, acknowledge the impact of such cultural factors on the academic experiences of students.

These observations demonstrate the idea that 'language teaching is [also] culture teaching' (Purba, 2011, p. 47), and integrating culture into language teaching is essential for learners to improve their intercultural competence and communication performance in and outside of classrooms. In order to better understand the links between culture and EAP, the next section will present a brief discussion on the definition of culture and its impact on language learning. This section also explains why the seminar genre is selected for this study. The following section will present a literature review on theories and approaches to academic and social acculturation in EAP and seminar classes. What follows is a discussion on some of the common issues of international students related to EAP seminar classes. The last section will present several suggestions for developing students' social acculturation in seminars and some pedagogical practices to improve students' intercultural competence.

## **Culture and EAP**

Culture is one of the most complex and controversial terms with many different definitions. 'Water is the last thing a fish notices' (cited in Steers et al., 2020, p.34), said the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, suggesting water as a metaphor for culture. The idea here is that we are too close to our culture that we often fail to see its impact on our ways of thinking or behaving, and we realise our cultural norms, biases and judgements only when we are 'out of the water'. According to Hofstede, culture is 'the

collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group from another' (cited in Steers et al., 2020, p.34, p.43). Meanwhile, other definitions maintain the influence of culture within shared norms, identities, customs and attitudes transmitted across generations (see, for example, Kluckhohn, 1951; House et al., 2004). Considering culture from an ethnolinguistic and institutional perspective, Hyland (2006) focuses on the impact of culture on education and students, noting that culture affects not only the expectations of the academy that requires them to write and speak in particular ways but also the ways of speaking and writing that students bring with them to their educational institutions. In relation to this definition, Hyland refers to certain ways of communication and genres we develop in the academy by engaging in those genres and communicative practices.

Acknowledging such links between culture and language supports the premise of this study that EAP seminar classes can potentially create an environment where students can enhance their academic language and performance, social acculturation, and intercultural skills. Furthermore, this can also be considered essential for students to 'develop tolerance to diversity, ethno-relativism and intercultural sensitivity at their home university' (Aquilar, 2018, p.28).

### **Seminars as a Setting for Developing Social Acculturation**

One of the primary aims of EAP seminar activities is to help students improve their intellectual and critical thinking and deepen their understanding of a particular subject area (see, for example, Oxford EAP, the aim of seminars, 2016). Students are encouraged to use 'academic seminar language' (for example, taking part in discussions, using intonation, giving and responding to feedback, asking and answering questions about purpose and method, and agreeing/ disagreeing) (see, for example, Oxford EAP 2016; Access EAP, 2010). Thus EAP seminars provide useful settings for speaking activities as they lead to student interaction. Although this is not always the case, international students tend to find EAP seminar classes beneficial as preparation for the seminar classes that they take when they start their degree; furthermore, research conducted in 2015 on the effects of EAP seminars on the development of international students' speaking, a considerable number of international students stated that EAP seminar classes helped them to improve their communication skills and 'become more culturally aware' (Tweedie & Kim, 2015, p. 46).

Aquilar (2018, p. 36) has suggested that EAP seminar classes be used to improve students' social acculturation and intercultural skills, summarising the potential benefits of EAP seminars as follows:

- In a multicultural classroom, students can be encouraged to reach areas of 'consensual agreement' on a particular topic and learn how to take a 'team stance', despite any conflicting ideas they may have
- They can write a summary and evaluation of their discussion and the decision taken in terms of intercultural competence (role plays, distribution of responsibilities such as the one who presents the topic or summarises the main issues, turn-taking and non-verbal behaviour)
- Students can interact, agree/disagree, and negotiate with culturally divergent students in English in 'quasi-naturalistic' communicative environments.

Through interaction and participation during these activities, students can gradually learn about their different interpretations and expectations of academic and social culture and improve their intercultural skills (Royal, 2017, p. 237). In doing so, they can gain some experience operating within a multicultural community and develop some of the required academic behaviour during and after their education (Planken et al., 2004, p.312).

## **Literature Review: Academic and Social Acculturation in EAP**

With its particular ways of communicative practice in the academy, EAP is seen as 'teaching English to assist learners' study or research in that language' (Hyland, 2006, p. 1). Going back to Lea and Street's work (1998), three broad areas of learning in EAP were proposed: study skills, academic literacies and academic acculturation (cited by Hyland, 2006, p.1). From this perspective, despite different and changing expectations around EAP in different contexts recently, the main focus in EAP at various institutions still tends to be on academic acculturation and linguistic skills to help international students to adapt to the academic expectations and requirements of the universities they study at (Dooey, 2010; Gottardo et al., 2014; Tim & Kim, 2015). Looking at the learning objectives of some of the EAP programmes, for example, improving students' academic communication both in spoken (for example, seminar/presentation) and written (for example, writing a report, essay, article) discourses are considered among the most important objectives of EAP (*Introduction to EAP programme*, Reading University website, 2020; The learning outcomes of the [EAP] course, Sussex University website, 2020). In general, the overall focus is placed on improving students' academic English and appropriate study skills before they start their degree courses at the university.

In EAP, there is a growing body of research on the significance of academic acculturation, focusing on academic skills and strategies that international students need to learn for effective learning of the target language and successful participation in the classroom. Much of the research on these themes heavily emphasises EAP and teachers' role in academic language and disciplinary acculturation (Shi et al., 2017; Hagan, 2004; Yoon, 2008). Academic acculturation can be defined as adjusting to the culture of academic ways of thinking and representing (e.g., Cheng & Fox, 2008). Recent studies (Huang, 2017; Campian, 2016) have shown that teachers in universities are making efforts to help international students overcome the difficulties they face during their acculturation transition and improve their linguistic competence in the academic context at the same time. However, Dervin (2010) aptly points out that good linguistic competence, on its own, is inadequate for success in academic and social contexts. This leads us to an equally important yet underrepresented element in EAP pedagogies: the role of social acculturation on students' learning (Tweedie & Kim, 2015).

Schumann (1986, p.379) defined social acculturation as the 'social and psychological integration of the learner with the target language (T.L.) group'. It is about learning a new behaviour or set of behaviours 'that is appropriate for the new cultural context' (Berry, cited by Graves, 1967, p.13). During the social acculturation process, people often try to adapt to their new academic and social life either by imitating the way locals behave or by trying to find a way 'in-between' that feels comfortable but also acceptable (Steer, 2020). When used within EAP discourse, social acculturation can refer to international students' intercultural competence and its role in helping them to fit into the society and culture of university life. Similarly, international students often receive assistance and support from their more experienced peers or receive some training sessions usually conducted at the beginning of the course (such as library sessions for locating books and articles, using computer resources, etc.). There are also some informal gatherings that international and home students are encouraged to attend to share their experiences as international students with each other. The aim here is that such interaction could help 'L2 learners to negotiate their understanding of the interlocutors' values and that of themselves to establish solidarity' (Nguyen, 2011; Nunn, 2007 cited by Rashidi & Meihami, 2016, p.3). These intercultural skills would also assist them in overcoming their adjustment problems in their different learning settings (Shi et al., 2017).

Several studies have emphasised the link between social acculturation and successful language acquisition (Jia et al., 2014; Jiang et al., 2009; Lybeck, 2002). In addition, several researchers have pointed out the significance of acquiring intercultural competence as a skill of social acculturation processes and its impact on developing effective communication between international and home students (Knight, 2004; Bocanegra-Valle, 2015; Soria & Troisi, 2014; Holmes & O'Neill, 2005). They have pointed out that for successful language acquisition, it is crucial for students to identify with and construct psychological integration and social involvement with the target language's culture. Such work has added weight to the evidence that adapting to a new cultural environment and identifying with the culture of the target language is significant for effective language acquisition (Schumann, 1986; Jiang et al., 2009; Masgoret & Gardner, 1999; Jia et al., 2014; Lybeck, 2002). Despite this growing weight of empirical support, however, more attention should be paid to intercultural competence skills in EAP curricula in practice (see, for example, Aquilar, 2018). Similarly, some recent research (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Tweedie & Kim, 2015;) maintains that with its heavy emphasis on academic acculturation in the EAP curriculum, the role of social acculturation can easily be overlooked in pedagogical applications.

### **Issues Related to Lack of Social Acculturation in EAP Seminar Classes**

In his discussion of the impact of cultural expectations on the knowledge, interpretation, and performance of international students in spoken language, Hyland (2006, p.43) has identified some common areas where misunderstandings – and hence issues both for students and teachers – occur. One of the most recognised areas where potential differences occur is 'different learning experiences/classroom expectations. Referring to the significance of 'understanding attitudinal and emotional language functions' in spoken languages, Myles (2009) also highlights the significance of 'understanding attitudinal and emotional language' (p. 13) and illustrates that miscommunications can often occur between native and non-native students because of the 'subtle connotations' integrated with meanings (Myles, 2009, p. 13). Similarly, I have also observed misunderstandings, embarrassment, and confusion among my students - for example, around students' prior perceptions of plagiarism or the role of the teacher in the classroom - because of their different levels of social acculturation in particular settings, such as during seminar discussions. This may raise important issues in terms of how language is learned.

In relation to these themes, and based on my personal observations, this study identified some common challenges faced by international students in relation to seminar classes in EAP. These discussions will be developed in the section below, which will build on some of the issues related to the different cultural expectations of international students and the aim of developing social acculturation within EAP seminars.

### **Choice of Materials and Themes**

In discussing the impact of socio-cultural conventions and practices, Canagarajah (1999, cited by Hyland 2006) draws attention to the selection of materials/textbooks used in classrooms and argues that some materials or themes can be inappropriate for students due to their cultural background. He provides an example from university students in Sri Lanka. He remarks that they expressed their subtle resistance to the (Western) ideologies integrated into their syllabus by writing their views/values in the margins of their English textbooks. For Canagarajah (1999, cited by Hyland 2006, p.76), this indicates the students' 'solidarity against the perceived lifelessness and reproductive tendencies of the course...[and their] shared frustration with the textbook and curriculum'.

## **Cross-cultural Pragmatic Failure**

Cross-cultural pragmatic failure is considered one of the common sources of issues in seminar discussions. Robatiazzi (2008) remarks that communicating successfully is one of the main purposes of language learning. Since communication always involves a context, it is impossible to separate communication and culture from each other. Considering this connection between culture and language - and hence the significance of adjustment to cultural expectations - it is claimed that socio-pragmatic failures 'may lead, in the long term, to resentment, which, in turn, may lead to ethnic (cross-group) stereotyping and negative labelling' (Kasanga, 2009, p.253). Without considering students' different cultural expectations and by ignoring their need to learn the culture of the target language (in a given context, as in seminar classes), the expected interaction between students in terms of their academic and social behaviour would hardly lead to successful and effective group discussions among students.

During seminar discussions, for example, some students may find it easy to interrupt or evaluate their peers' performance, whereas this may be considered inappropriate for other students. These different expectations during face-to-face interaction between students may result in 'cross-cultural pragmatic failure' (Thomas 1983, cited in Adams et al., 1991, p. 6). This - cross-cultural pragmatics - is an area of research that explores the use of speech acts across cultures (Rose and Kasper, 2011, cited by Roever, 2010, p.257). It draws attention to the significance of power relations between speakers (such as the age and gender roles of the speakers) and degrees of social distance which can, across cultures, create differences in the use of language (Roever, 2010).

Some of the common issues that can be related to 'cross-cultural pragmatic failure' and different cultural expectations (hence, lack of social acculturation in a given context as in seminar classes) can be listed as follows:

### **Engagement in Discussions**

One of the issues that often arises due to 'cross-cultural pragmatic failure' and different expectations and levels of social acculturation is a lack of engagement in discussion by students. A review of the literature over the last 40 years on the relationship between culture and communication in language emphasises the affinity between language and culture (Johns & Johns, 1977; Furneaux, 1991; Adams et al., 1991; Kasanga, 2001; Geeraerts & Cuyckens, 2010). They also highlight how this affinity affects face-to-face communication in multicultural environments. A survey conducted at Birmingham University, for example, revealed that although some students claimed to find seminars the most challenging aspect of their learning experience, they often considered oral communication to be the easiest (Johns & Johns, 1977; cited by Lynch et al., 1993). This apparent discrepancy suggests that there is not always a consistent relationship between 'difficulties with oral communication in general and difficulties in seminars' (Johns & Johns, 1977; cited by Lynch et al., 1993, p.89). Charles (1984, cited by Furneaux et al., 1991, p.76) refers to this discrepancy as being a result of the 'socio-pragmatic uncertainty of [...] students in [...] activities.'

Several common causes for these discrepancies are often related to their linguistic competence, such as (a lack of) readiness to speak, listening comprehension and fluency (Royal, 2017; Furneaux et al., 1991). However, other problems are related to students' levels of social acculturation and conflicting cultural expectations from seminars. For example, based on the interviews they conducted with students from China in the USA, Sun and Chen (1997 cited by Wang & Zuo, 2017) noted that although some of these students received high TOEFL scores, some major social and academic communication problems were observed in encounters between American and Chinese students. In another study, it is pointed out that the perceived norms of politeness and

appropriateness of their host culture, for example, are not always followed by these Chinese students in their speech acts (Hass & Neu 1996, cited by Myles & Cheng, 2003).

### **Teacher/Student's Role**

Students' (mis)perception of teacher/student roles in EAP seminar discussions can be another example of cross-cultural pragmatic failures. Since Chinese students are regarded among the many international students studying in the U.K. (Leedham & Fernandez-Parra, 2017, p. 66), the role of cultural differences and their impact on the interaction between teachers and Asian students, in particular, has been noted in several studies (Wang ad Zuo, 2017; Yoo 2014;). Some scholars have suggested that Asian societies are often perceived to be characterised by a 'collectivist' culture (Pouliasi & Verkuyten, 2012; Leedham & Fernandez-Parra, 2017) and dominated by a 'traditional Confucius ideal' in which the teacher is seen as 'the most respected profession' (Yoo, 2014, p.174). Referring to Hofstede's *power distance* dimension, Yoo (2014, p.173) argues that in Korean society, for example, it is often regarded as taboo to challenge someone with senior social status, like a teacher. Thus, in terms of teacher-student roles, studying in a society which is considered an 'individualistic' society ( Hofstede, 1980, cited by Leedham et al., 2017) - where tertiary education tends to encourage students to challenge and scrutinise knowledge and to develop critical thinking - can be quite confusing/challenging for many Asian students.

In some seminar classes, the author has also observed similar situations – quiet students who often give little or no answer to the questions asked in EAP classes and take notes when the teacher speaks. This often seems to be a case of misunderstanding on the part of the international students as to what was expected of them during seminar classes, especially since this tended to occur more during the beginning of the term (which indicated to me that they were still not hesitating about how to behave during the seminar discussion although they have been instructed and often encouraged to join the discussions). However, after conducting individual tutorials with them, the author began to see that some of these situations in the classroom were also a result of their prior conception of the role of teacher and students: the teacher, for most of my students from an Asian background for example, tends to be viewed as an authority figure who gives information while students listen and take notes. This notion of teachers as authority figures who lead and educate students has been noted in other international student studies (see, for example, Yoo, 2014; Smith & Zhou, 2009).

Another common problem the author has observed that emerged due to cross-cultural pragmatic failure during seminar exams in EAP courses is plagiarism. During seminar discussions in EAP classes, referring to texts and acknowledging the sources - provided for students in advance to read and prepare for speaking exams - to support their arguments in their spoken language is considered an important skill. Although plagiarism is regarded as academic misconduct or 'cheating' in the U.K. education system, it is still possible to see some international students refer to other sources without providing appropriate references during their seminar exams discussion. Although students can be often warned of the pitfalls when this occurs, a student, for instance, who has done research and read on the topic, may still fail to acknowledge the sources of her or his ideas.

Although the issue of plagiarism is often seen to be related to academic acculturation and inappropriate academic behaviour (Bloor & Bloor, 1991), one possible cause for this can be students' previous learning background (Hyland, 2006, p. 77), and therefore something that can be linked to their level of social acculturation. It has been suggested that this may not always be a case of 'cheating' consciously but may result from the impact of their culture and previous learning experiences (Hyland, 2006; Reynolds, 2018). In other words, students' previous learning experience and classroom expectations may not have prepared them adequately for the kinds of learning styles, topics, group discussions or seminar language that often characterise EAP classes.

## **Avoiding Peer Review**

Peer review is a common mode for organising the end of seminar classes in EAP. It is often seen as an effective pedagogy in EAP instruction in terms of encouraging students to interact with each other while they are required to comment on their classmates' work. It also effectively provides opportunities for students to express alternative points of view on a particular subject under discussion. I often use this peer evaluation strategy, especially after discussions in seminars, to help them envisage their audience more effectively. However, some students often tend to be quiet or avoid providing 'negative' feedback to their classmates. Hyland (2006) has suggested that one factor behind this is that criticising/providing negative comments can be considered inappropriate in the kinds of collectivist societies that students from Asian backgrounds are often used to, for example. Carson and Nelson (1996, cited by Hyland, 2006, p.43), for example, have noted:

Chinese students' primary goal for the group was social – to maintain group harmony – and that this goal affected the nature and types of interaction they allowed themselves in group discussion [...] This self-monitoring led them to avoid criticism of peers' work and to avoid disagreeing with the comments of peers about their own writing.

In research conducted to explore some of the challenges faced by international students in seminars at British universities, Furneaux et al. (1991) argued that, based on an analysis of interviews with their students, the majority of the interviewed students were aware of the importance of students' participation and the use of seminar language during group discussions. However, a considerable number of students still excluded words such as 'interaction' or 'discussion' from their definitions of seminars (Furneaux, 1991, p.78).

In relation to these potential challenges mentioned above, the next section will present some suggestions for developing students' social acculturation in seminars and pedagogical practices to improve students' intercultural competence.

## **Recommendations**

### **Materials and Themes**

One possible approach to address some of the issues discussed above in EAP classrooms could be the choice of materials that students would welcome. Undoubtedly, choosing appropriate material/textbooks is a complicated process based on various factors such as the methodology used in class, students' professional and social expectations, their academic context and a divergent expectation of the disciplines they are studying. Here, for this study, the impact of the cultural element on selecting materials and methodology is the main focus. It is important to choose materials/texts that do not conflict with students' cultural backgrounds (Hyland, 2006, p.76). Halliday (1994, cited by Graves 2008, p.77), for example, who researched a teaching project in Egypt, also concurs with this idea by suggesting that in 'non-Anglo' contexts, the implementation of culturally unfamiliar pedagogic practices may lead to tension and put tutors in conflict with students. Developing this theme, Bocanegra-Valle (2015, cited by Aquilar 2018, p. 29) analysed ten textbooks from different disciplines and found two reasons for this: First, materials do not seem to integrate intercultural competence as 'a learning outcome'. Second, he notes that it is important to provide training in methodologies for EAP teachers to develop the intercultural skills of international students. Referring to the challenges EAP teachers often face in dealing with issues related to students (lack)of social acculturation in general – and intercultural skills in particular - Byram (2014, cited by Aquilar, 2018, p.29) claims that they tend to prioritise 'culture-free content and grammatical accuracy' more than the integration of intercultural skills.



One possible and practical suggestion here is offered by Royal (2017), who conducted research into the need to incorporate intercultural competence in an EAP curriculum at a Western Canadian University. She remarks that she designed the curriculum focusing on role-play activities and problem-solving tasks related to themes/topics relevant to students' lives. Within this framework, she suggests several themes to be discussed by students in group discussions. Some of the themes in the curriculum were as follows:

- Academic life
- Plagiarism
- English only policy
- Cultural and Social Life:
  - Culture Shock;
  - Experiences of discrimination/bullying/isolation;
  - Family life;
  - Canadian multiculturalism
  - Gendered violence

Royal (2017, p.238) sustains that an analysis of the feedback from the students based on the interviews and classroom interactions unveiled that students found the pedagogy very helpful and meaningful as they not only improved their linguistic skills but also learned about Canadian culture and its social expectations.

### **Intercultural Approach and Sheltered Instruction**

The Intercultural Approach is one method to use in EAP seminar classes to improve cross-cultural understanding between students. It aims to improve students' linguistic competence and socio-cultural awareness of the language they are learning (Chlopek, 2008, p.10). Reading texts and watching films or programmes of the target language (in this case, English) before seminar discussion could be some of the suggested stages for seminar classrooms. Another important purpose of this approach is to encourage students to expand their learning beyond the target language's culture and look at/understand other cultures around the world (Chlopek, 2008). This would help them increase their intercultural skills, hence their social acculturation.

Closely related to this is 'the Language and Cultural Awareness' teaching model, which states that 'learning to discover another culture' improves language learning and encourages acceptance and tolerance (Brewster et al., 1992, p.32). For example, *Story Grammar* – a teaching method that aims to improve learners' speaking (as well as reading) comprehension and their understanding of different cultures through stories (Zidan, 2014) - could effectively promote cultural awareness, intercultural competence and thus social acculturation. Thus, using different stories from cultures relevant to students' backgrounds can promote social acculturation and create a positive atmosphere in an EAP seminar class. This view is also in line with Hallidayan's discussion of genre and text, which 'views language as whole texts (spoken and written) that are embedded in social contexts [...] to achieve social purposes' (Graves, 2008).

*Sheltered Instruction* can be another effective pedagogical framework to encourage interaction, thus promoting social acculturation among students. It encourages group work for students to *interact* with each other and provides opportunities for 'natural' dialogues between them. It promotes strategies such as conversational tasks, including elaboration, questioning, debating, and

summarising ('*Components of Sheltered Instruction*', 2020). To understand better how Sheltered Instruction and EAP could work together to help address some of the challenges of social acculturation (and language learning) that international students face, Shi et al. (2017) conducted a case study of graduate students in a university setting. Participants place a heavy emphasis on the value of learning culture with native speakers and value a free learning environment where they can find opportunities to engage with local people as well as teachers (Shi et al., 2017). Informed by the same pedagogical framework, I suggest implementing similar practices inside and outside the classroom to support the development of international students' intercultural competence and social acculturation.

This strategy addresses two particular needs of international students in terms of their social acculturation: firstly, the interaction between students, in particular between international and home students (both inside and outside of the classroom) and, secondly, supplementary materials to help them learn more about the social and cultural life of the university they study at. This pedagogy also draws attention to graduate-level content area instruction, hence promoting academic English development.

In line with these needs, Sheltered Instruction encourages interaction and engagement between students while promoting 'comprehensible input, cooperative learning, explicit connections to student background and experiences, formative assessment and use of a variety of supplementary materials' (Shi et al., 2017, p.30). For the purpose of this study, I will refer to two pedagogical aspects of Sheltered Instruction: cooperative learning and the use of supplementary materials.

- a) **Cooperative learning:** Considering international students' desire to connect with home students and local people, they would benefit from this strategy which endorses the implementation of group work activities with the objectives of shared responsibilities, such as group projects, group discussions and group presentations. Some group projects involve conducting interviews with local people outside the classroom. Most international students find this activity very useful for gaining confidence in their interactions with local people. Interaction between international and local people helps students develop their social acculturation skills, improve their cooperation skills, and gain experience in the co-construction of knowledge (Shi et al., 2017). With the integration of activities that would foster more group activities in EAP curricula, students could find more opportunities to socialise with their local counterparts and improve their academic English and mutual understanding with local students. With these considerations for curriculum design, EAP courses can address both social and academic acculturation needs for international students.
  
- b) **Supplementary materials:** Supplementary materials (in addition to course materials used in classrooms to improve intercultural skills) could also promote social acculturation. In EAP, materials (in particular texts/readings for seminar discussions) tend to favour 'culture-free' content in a way that often misses an opportunity to integrate the cultural dimension into students' learning (Byram, 2014, cited by Aquila, 2018). In addition to course materials, supplementary materials could also be uploaded on Moodle to encourage students to read and do extra activities, such as exchanging their opinions and reflections on various aspects of their own cultures and posting these comments on discussion platforms in Moodle as an element of their weekly tasks or in their own time.

## Conclusion

This paper has argued that social acculturation in EAP plays a vital role in EAP classrooms. Regarding the intersections between language learning and social acculturation, it is essential to consider how these dimensions can impact the improvement of international students' intercultural competence and performance, particularly in seminar classes. The paper has also argued that textbooks and methodologies used in EAP seminar classrooms need to be culturally sensitive and flexible to improve students' social acculturation. Drawing on the findings in the body of literature that has been considered here, such considerations can play an essential role in addressing various socio-cultural issues and cross-cultural challenges in the learning process of international students.

Given that EAP approaches and theories continue to evolve, no particular methodology would guarantee success for effective teaching in every seminar class. Because of the complexity of learning languages, 'no one approach can be fully responsive to learners' needs' (Graves, 2008). Rather than adopting one specific method or using the same materials for every seminar class, it is essential to consider the changing needs, motivations and linguistic and social skills when we as teachers select our materials and methodologies. However, these elements fall beyond the scope of this study. Thus, the above methodological suggestions are certainly not exhaustive. Based on my personal experiences and the literature review discussed above, this study has argued that the methodologies suggested above might be beneficial in identifying, understanding and addressing the socio-cultural issues that can emerge in seminar classrooms.

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