

Language specialists' views on academic language and learning support mechanisms for EAL postgraduate coursework students: The case for adjunct tutorials

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Language specialists' views on academic language and learning support mechanisms for EAL postgraduate coursework students: The case for adjunct tutorials.

Abstract

Large numbers of international students are enrolled in postgraduate coursework degrees in English Medium of Instruction (EMI) destinations such as Australia and the UK (AUSSE Research Briefing, 2011; HEFCE, 2014), most of whom have English as an Additional Language (EAL). However, there is a dearth of literature on the types of academic language and learning (ALL) support that best suit this cohort, and few accounts of sustained strategies implemented specifically for them, particularly university-wide. This paper is an account of one university's attempt to fill this gap in terms of both research and practice. The institution's senior executive commissioned a survey of the views of higher education ALL practitioners across Australia ($n = 42$) on the potential effectiveness of nine archetypal ALL support mechanisms for postgraduate EAL coursework students. Findings took the form of a quantitative rating of the nine mechanisms as well as qualitative comments on pro and con factors. As the paper describes, this data fed into the formation of an executive-mandated academic language enhancement strategy for postgraduate coursework EAL students in the form of a two-year trial of adjunct tutorials within core coursework units.

Keywords: academic language and learning (ALL); English as an additional language (EAL); postgraduate; support mechanism; adjunct tutorial

1. Introduction

In 2012, four and a half million students were enrolled in tertiary institutions outside of their country of citizenship (OECD, 2014). Australia has the largest percentage of international students among tertiary enrolments globally and is the fifth most popular destination of international students after the US, the UK, Germany and France (OECD, 2013). Over the last two decades, Australia has seen “historical rates of growth” (Chaney, 2013, p.2) and by 2011 the average percentage of international students enrolled in Australian universities was 21.3 per cent (Chaney, 2013). Because English is an additional language (EAL) for the majority of these students, their academic language and learning (ALL) abilities have come under scrutiny. In Australia, this focus is evidenced by the publication of the *Good Practice Principles for English Language Proficiency for International Students in Australian Universities* (AUQA, 2009) and the *English Language Standards for Higher Education* (AUQA, 2012). National symposia have been convened to highlight related matters (AEI, 2007; IEAA, 2013) and the national regulator, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), has flagged attention in this area (TEQSA, 2013).

A large number of international students are postgraduates. Nearly one third of all international students in Australian higher education are enrolled in postgraduate¹ coursework degrees (AUSSE Research Briefing, 2011). Numbers are similarly high in other English Medium of Instruction (EMI) contexts. In the UK, postgraduate masters courses are

¹ The term “postgraduate” has varying connotations in different educational contexts. In this paper, we are referring to Master’s level programs, in which the degree is awarded after successful completion of components that are solely or predominantly coursework courses/units, i.e. we are *not* concerned with learning support provided for Master’s dissertations/theses.

increasingly reliant on international entrants and, in the period 2012-3, 74 per cent came from other countries (HEFCE, 2014). New Zealand saw an 11 per cent increase in postgraduate international students between 2012 and 2013 (Expatform, 2014) and the US is also experiencing an increase in postgraduate international enrolments, mainly from India (HEFCE, 2014). Research into postgraduate student trends is forecasting increased bilateral flows, especially from India and China, with the US alone expected to host over 400,000 postgraduate students in the next decade, and Australia and China expected to have the highest annual average growth in inbound postgraduate mobility by 2024 (British Council, 2014).

2. Context

The current study was undertaken at a comprehensive multi-campus university in Queensland, Australia, where one quarter of the student population is international with English as an additional language (EAL), and around half of these EALs are postgraduate coursework students. As well as the national focus on academic language and learning matters noted above, institutional concerns had prompted the implementation in 2008 of a whole-of-university approach to supporting EAL students. This institutional strategy is consistent with a growing call for university-wide approaches (Arkoudis, & Doughney, 2014; Dunworth, Drury, Kralik & Moore 2014; Gunn, Hearne & Sibthorpe, 2011; Kennelly, Maldoni & Davies 2010; Murray & Nallaya 2014; Sheridan, 2011; Wingate, 2006). Dunworth et al. (2014), for example, report “an overwhelming sense that a whole of institution approach was the most effective way of achieving progress” (p.11) while Arkoudis and Doughney (2014) cite it as critical to make ALL support the core business of university teaching and learning to assure graduates’ English language proficiency outcomes.

Despite the comprehensive nature of this institutional strategy, postgraduate coursework EAL students had not been fully catered for in its first iteration. In order to make evidence-based decisions with the imprimatur of the University Executive, the authors were therefore tasked by the University's English Language Working Party (ELWP) with identifying an effective mechanism for supporting them. The working party was chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) and comprised senior discipline academics, administrative managers, and ALL experts. Three strands of research were commissioned: (i) post-entry language testing of a sample of EAL postgraduate coursework students, (ii) interviewing discipline academics on their perceptions of EAL students' ALL needs, and (iii) surveying ALL expert practitioners nationally on their perceptions of effective support for this cohort. Together the triangulated data from this mixed methods design would offer a rich picture to aid decision-making (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009). The literature suggests that consultation with experts is a key ingredient for success in planning an all-of-university approach (Dunworth et al., 2014) and it is for this reason that the views of situated ALL experts who have worked extensively on such matters were solicited and constitute the focus of this paper.

It is within this context that the present paper seeks to determine effective mechanisms for supporting the academic language and learning of EAL postgraduate coursework students from the perspective of the ALL expert.

3. Support for postgraduate coursework students in the literature

The unique needs of postgraduate EAL students remain under-researched. The limited literature suggests that the discipline-specific critical writing and reading skills that underpin postgraduate study are not always issues of language (Abasi & Graves, 2008; Handa &

Fallon, 2006; McCulloch, 2013; Melles, 2008; Phakiti & Li, 2011; Reid, 2011; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011; Woodrow, 2006), because postgraduate students need to develop strategies to develop critical thinking and appraisal skills that evidence the higher cognitive objectives expected of them (Arambewela & Maringe, 2010; Storch & Tapper, 2009; Tran, 2008). The transitional challenges that EAL postgraduates face have also been highlighted (Guilfoyle, 2005, 2006; Novera, 2004; Singh & Armstrong, 2006; Tian & Low, 2012; Zhou & Todman, 2009). The literature also suggests that developing language and academic literacies is a long-term approach which needs to be considered within an overall framework of development and support across the curriculum.

There are only piecemeal examples in the literature of instructional support specifically for EAL postgraduates. These have usually only been trialled within one course, program or faculty (Boughton, Halliday, & Brown, 2010; Harris & Ashton, 2011; Jones, Farrell, & Goldsmith, 2009; Melles, 2008; Stratilas, 2011; Storch & Tapper, 2009), or only delivered for one or two semesters (Baik & Greig, 2009), and there are relatively few case studies that evidence an integrated/embedded approach at the postgraduate level. Moreover, the perceived effectiveness of support mechanisms specifically for postgraduates has received little attention.

4. ALL support mechanisms defined in the literature

This paper considers support mechanisms related to academic language and learning that are offered to postgraduate coursework EAL university students. The literature defines and categorises such mechanisms in a number of ways, though the Jones, Bonanno & Scouller (2001) continuum is commonly cited in the Australian context. On this continuum (see Figure 1), support ranges from 'adjunct' to 'embedded'.

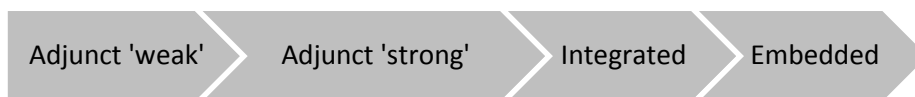


Figure 1. Continuum of support mechanisms after Jones, Bonanno & Scouller, 2001

An ‘adjunct’ support mechanism is defined as one that is developed separately from the discipline content and added on to it (also referred to as ‘bolt-on’). Adjunct support can be further divided into ‘weak’ and ‘strong’. An example of ‘adjunct weak’ would be an ALL support mechanism that is available to any student from any degree subject (e.g. a workshop on general essay writing skills). ‘Adjunct strong’, on the other hand, would be connected to a specific course or assessment item, or targeted at a specific group of students. There has been a general move away from adjunct support in recent years because it tends to be generic rather than discipline-specific and because of its documented limited success (Hyland, 2011; Lea & Street, 1998; Watt, 2006; Wingate, 2006; Wingate, Andon & Cogo, 2011; Wingate & Dreiss, 2009). Some hybrids of adjunct support within disciplines have, however, been found to be effective such as the trial at the University of Melbourne of an adjunct English language tutorial program for first year undergraduate architecture students, which suggested positive learning outcomes and long-term academic benefits (Baik & Greig, 2009).

Integrated and embedded approaches located further along the Jones et al. continuum (see Figure 1) are often described as ‘built-in’ because the academic language and learning is delivered seamlessly to the content. ‘Integrated’ mechanisms are discipline-specific and integral to students’ courses but typically delivered by language specialists, perhaps in the form of a workshop. ‘Embedded’ refers to collaborative curriculum design which places ALL skills at the heart of a content course, and is typically delivered by discipline specialists.

Integrated/embedded approaches receive much attention in the literature and are widely considered to be the most effective way to connect skills and content (Chanock & Horton, 2011; Harris & Ashton, 2011; Harris & Bretag, 2003; Jones, 2009; Stappenbelt & Barrett-Lennard, 2008; Wingate & Dreiss, 2009). In this more holistic approach, the ALL component becomes invisible and indistinct from the rest of the content so as to apprentice students into the relevant academic discourse community (Harper, 2011; Melles, 2008; Roberts, 2008). However, this approach has been criticised for being resource-intensive, and therefore less sustainable (Kokkinn & Stupans, 2011; Roberts, 2008; Scott & Moses, 2011).

5. Archetypal ALL support mechanisms

For this study, a list of nine possible support mechanisms was compiled from the literature and from institutional examples in Australia. The list is not exhaustive and it is axiomatic that, in creating it, we have over-simplified the options available as well as the scope of each mechanism. However, it was created to allow commentary on the perceived effectiveness of a set of archetypal and clearly differentiated support mechanisms in relation to postgraduate EAL students. Table 1 lists the nine mechanisms identified with a description of each, followed by referenced examples.

Table 1

Nine archetypal support mechanisms

No.	Support mechanism	Description	Further information and example/s
1	Diagnostic assessment (e.g. PELA)	Post-entry language/learning assessment (PELA) conducted towards the beginning of studies to ascertain ALL competence. PELAs offer a way to diagnose needs for appropriate follow-up support. This assessment may be available to all or selected students, and can differ in design, content, mode, or feedback.	Dunworth, 2009, 2013. Ransom, 2009. Read, 2008. Degrees of Proficiency website: http://www.degreesofproficiency.aall.org.au/post-entry-language-assessment
2	Generic skills workshops	Workshops offered as a series or one-off to support ALL needs of EAL students but not tailored to a discipline or field (e.g. how to write an essay).	Dunworth, 2013. Harris & Ashton, 2011. James Cook University:

			http://www.jcu.edu.au/grs/new/JCU_097307.html
3	Discipline-specific workshops	Workshops offered as a series or one-off on discipline-specific ALL matters (e.g. how to write a lab report for science students).	Boughton, Halliday & Brown, 2010. Stratilas, 2011
4	An ALL consultation service	A service offering individual (or small group) consultations by an ALL specialist. Attendance is typically voluntary, though referrals by discipline academics may also occur. The focus of the consultation is driven by the student but often by assessment tasks. This service may be centralised or located within faculties.	Chanock, 2007, 2011. University of Adelaide: http://www.adelaide.edu.au/writingcentre/
5	Self-access (e.g. online) discipline-	Resources to support ALL matters made available to students on a self-access basis, either in hard copy (e.g.	Drury & Jones, 2010. Mort, Drury, Calvo, Skinner, McEwan, Levy,

	specific ALL resources	in a learning centre) or online.	<p>Molina & Mitrajit, 2010.</p> <p>University of Sydney:</p> <p>http://learningcentre.usyd.edu.au/wrise/</p> <p>University of Western Australia:</p> <p>http://www.student.uwa.edu.au/learning/studysmarter/online/english/developing</p>
6	An adjunct ALL tutorial in a degree course	A tutorial timetabled in addition to the regular delivery mode, it is designed to focus on the academic language or learning required in the unit/course. It may be offered to all students or those identified as requiring additional support in the course/unit based on specific criteria. It provides extra time and focus on ALL matters tied closely to the course content.	<p>Baik & Greig, 2009.</p> <p>Dunworth & Briguglio, 2010.</p> <p>Harris & Ashton, 2011.</p> <p>Stappenbelt & Barrett-Lennard, 2008.</p>

7	A non-credit-bearing ALL course as a bridge to the degree	A unit/course that is undertaken prior to commencement of the degree proper and which does not attract credit points. The content focus is academic language or learning. It may be discipline-specific but typically is not.	Cargill, 1996. Jones, Farrell & Goldsmith, 2009.
8	A credit-bearing ALL course as part of their degree	A unit/course within a degree program that attracts equal credit points to any other unit/course but which focuses on academic language and learning. It may be discipline-specific; it may be delivered by an ALL specialist or discipline academic or team taught.	Melles, 2008. Storch & Tapper, 2009. Humphreys, Haugh, Fenton-Smith, Michael, Lobo & Walkinshaw, 2012. University of Canberra: http://www.canberra.edu.au/coursesandunits/unit?unit_cd=6695&version_number=6&rownum=629
9	ALL	A course/unit/workshop that is co-delivered by both the	Harris & Ashton, 2011.

	specialists team-teaching with academics within degree courses	discipline academic and the ALL specialist. The amount of collaboration can vary widely as per the Dudley- Evans framework (1998).	Stappenbelt & Barrett-Lennard, 2008.
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6. Research questions

The purpose of the broader research project was to identify an effective and operationally viable mechanism to support the ALL needs of EAL postgraduate coursework students across the University. This identified mechanism would be added to the whole-of-university strategy described earlier. To achieve this broader goal, this paper surveyed ALL specialists to ascertain data on two research questions:

1. What do language specialists perceive to be the most effective support mechanisms for improving the academic language and learning abilities of postgraduate coursework EAL students?
2. What factors are perceived by language specialists to contribute to, or impede, the effectiveness of support mechanisms for the academic language and learning of postgraduate coursework EAL students?

7. Methodology

7.1 Participants

Approval was sought and obtained from the University ethics committee prior to the commencement of data collection. As it was necessary to recruit participants with as much knowledge and experience of all nine learning support mechanisms as possible, a “purposeful selection” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 88) approach was adopted. Individuals were invited to partake in the study because they were known to have extensive professional knowledge of current ALL practices at Australian universities, including committee members of the national Association for Academic Language and Learning (AALL), authors and presenters of conference papers on ALL practices, and ALL practitioners at universities who were known or recommended to the researchers as a result of their active involvement and recognised

expertise. 74 ALL practitioners from 24 Australian universities (out of a total of 43) from all States/Territories except the Northern Territory were selected and contacted, with 42 taking part in the research, representing a 58 per cent response rate. As the survey was purposely anonymised, the number of institutions represented in the received responses cannot be confirmed but, based on the high return rate, we can be confident that a range of institutions and active practitioners' views is represented.

7.2 Data gathering

A survey was devised and piloted with four experienced ALL practitioners from two institutions who took no further part in the project. Pilot respondents' feedback was considered and the wording of the items was amended for clarity. The final version was deployed to the participant pool via the online questionnaire tool SurveyMonkey. An introductory statement made it clear that the project focused on EAL postgraduate coursework students, not higher degree research students. This paper reports on two questions from the survey (see Appendix for the instrument):

- In general, how effective do you think the following types of support can be in improving the ALL abilities of postgraduate coursework students?
- If possible, please comment on why you think any of the strategies are particularly effective or ineffective.

The first question was a closed-response item asking individuals to rate the nine archetypal ALL support mechanisms (see Table 1) on a five-point scale from "extremely effective" to "not effective" with an additional option of "I don't know". While gradations of perceived effectiveness would be relative to each individual's interpretation, five options on the scale were provided to allow the researchers the flexibility to report the responses separately or

collectively. The “I don’t know” option allowed respondents to indicate a lack of familiarity with the mechanism. The second question allowed for unlimited open responses, although the annotation “1-4 sentences is sufficient” was added to encourage a higher aggregate of responses.

7.3 Data analysis

For the first (closed) question, average ratings for each of the nine mechanisms were calculated to obtain an overview of perceived effectiveness. Specific results for each of the mechanisms were also tabulated. For the second (open-ended) question, the data were exported to NVivo 9 for thematic analysis (Beekhuyzen, Nielsen, & von Hellens, 2010). A grounded theory approach was adopted involving the grouping of concepts based on the participants’ perspectives after several iterations of coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Maxwell (2005, pp. 96-8) refers to coding as “the main categorising strategy in qualitative research” and distinguishes three types of categorisation:

1. Organisational: the broad issues or topics established or anticipated prior to the collection of data.
2. Substantive: categories that help to explain “what’s going on” and are derived from the participants’ own output; they are often subcategories of organisational ones, but are generally not formulated *a priori*.
3. Theoretical: categories that are formulated by the researcher prior to data analysis, typically derived from an accepted or self-produced theoretical framework.

The first two types are relevant here. Organisational categories equate to the nine support mechanisms that informants were invited to remark upon. As such, it was a relatively simple task to match comments to mechanisms. Substantive categories, being more interpretive, referred to the threads of reasoning that emerged in participants’ observations for and against

the mechanisms. These were not premeditated by the researchers and were arrived at through a process of collaborative coding (Saldaña, 2009). Initially, a sample of responses was coded separately and then compared for interpretive convergence. This gradually led to the solidification of categories through intensive discussion. Intercoder agreement on the coding of data within these categories was similarly achieved through an iterative process of autonomous coding, cross-checking, negotiation and harmonisation.

Illustrations of the two category types are provided in Table 2. In these instances, both informants use the issue of student uptake (substantive category) to question the viability of two mechanisms: online resources and workshops.

Table 2

Organisational and substantive categories in data coding

Informant's comment	Organisational Category	Substantive Category
We find online materials are rarely used, with many students under-utilising even the course Blackboard site.	Online resources	Student uptake
Workshops can be very useful but probably need to be mandatory workshops or the students who most need those skills may not necessarily attend.	Workshops	Student uptake

8. Findings and discussion


The presentation and discussion of findings are divided into two parts. First, we present the overall picture; that is, the support mechanisms are compared in a single 'league table' informed by an inventory of the major factors that influence the effectiveness of support strategies in the opinion of the participants. Second, we present a finer grained analysis of the perceived effectiveness of each mechanism, using qualitative data to interpret quantitative results.

8.1 Overview

By converting the survey ratings options to a points scale (1 = extremely effective; 5 = not effective), it is possible to rank the nine strategies. Table 3 presents these results from most to least effective for postgraduate EAL students in the opinion of the ALL professionals.

Table 3

Ranking of the nine strategies

Rank	Strategy	Average Rating	Most effective
1	Have ALL specialists team-teach with academics within degree courses.	2.03	
2	Provide a credit-bearing ALL course as part of their degree.	2.23	
= 3	Provide adjunct (i.e. supplementary) ALL tutorials built in to one of their degree courses.	2.29	
= 3	Provide an ALL consultation service.	2.29	
5	Provide discipline specific workshops specifically for postgraduate students.	2.43	
6	Conduct diagnostic assessment (e.g. 'PELA') of the ALL abilities of postgraduate students.	2.79	
7	Provide self-access (e.g. online) discipline specific ALL resources for postgraduate students.	3.16	
8	Provide a non-credit-bearing ALL course as a bridge to their degree.	3.34	

9	Provide generic skills workshops specifically for postgraduate students.	3.36	
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Team-teaching, credit-bearing ALL courses, and adjunct tutorials were rated the most effective, while generic skills workshops and non-credit-bearing ALL courses were rated the least effective.

We will discuss the findings for each mechanism in section 8.2 below, but in order to do so we first need to understand the factors at play in the ratings in Table 3. A thematic analysis of substantive categories in the participants' open-ended responses suggests that seven key concepts underlie the participants' choices: course integration, student uptake, engagement by academics, discipline-specificity, individualisation, course credit, and effect over time.

Although not prefigured by the researchers, this list is likely to be unsurprising to experienced ALL practitioners and scholars. The concepts may be less familiar, however, to those who jointly formulate ALL policy but who are not ALL experts, such as university executives, administrators and discipline specialists. This was, indeed, our experience as members of the multi-stakeholder ALL working party. It is one thing to argue from personal experience or expertise, it is another to argue from a survey of expert voices. That said, it is interesting to consider which factors could have been raised by the informants but were not, such as the cultural and/or socioeconomic background of students, institutional feasibility (especially human/financial resources), and the impact of time on task.

Figure 2 displays the number of discrete comments from the participant pool about each concept (y-axis). Although we cannot interpret these totals as indicators of the importance of the concepts relative to each other due to the qualitative nature of the data gathering process, the figure is a useful snapshot of how the data ‘fractured’ into meaningful categories (Maxwell, 2005; Strauss, 1987).

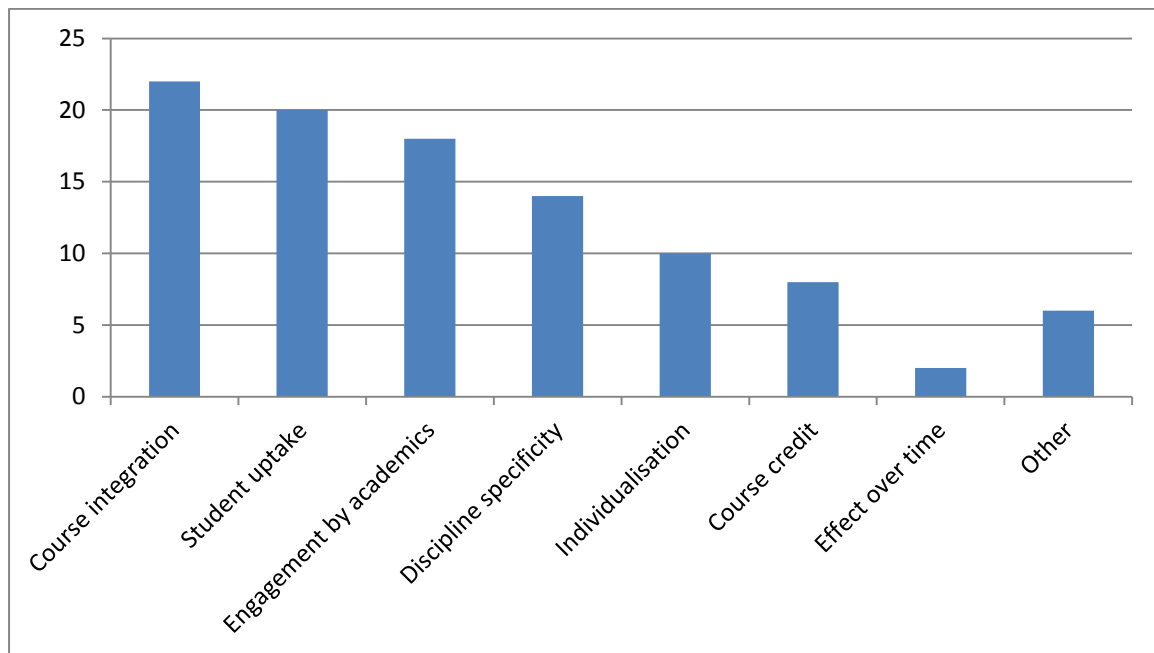


Figure 2. Factors underlying effectiveness of support mechanisms (number of comments)

Based on the participants’ responses, each of these concepts is defined below.

- Course integration

This concept equates to the Jones et al. (2001) notions of ‘integrated’ and ‘embedded’ whereby mechanisms are built in to content courses, not ‘bolted on’ or adjunct to them. Given integration, participants predict success, since it encourages collaboration between ALL and content specialists, leads to heightened discipline-specificity, and stimulates student engagement. Compared to undergraduates, postgraduate coursework students may

have less time for, and interest in, activities outside their designated courses and be more focussed on completing their degree. As one participant stated: “relevance to what they are doing is highly valued, so if you can fit in with their course, it's more relevant for them”.

- Student uptake

Most ALL professionals believed that only mechanisms which are compulsory or integrated would be accessed by postgraduate students. There were many comments of this type, such as “students just cannot care enough about going to a session in the library at lunchtime” and “students most in need do not seek assistance”.

- Engagement by academics

The consensus view was that strategies work best when discipline instructors are involved, since this can create a uniformity of purpose between the content specialist and the ALL expert, improving both course content and delivery. However, the participants also reported difficulties in working with content specialists. One reported that uniformity of purpose does not always result: “confusion arises when different academics have different opinions on what an 'essay' is or how students should show 'critical analysis’”.

While one person observed that it “takes time to build relationships”, another noted how easily relationships are lost: “collaboration between discipline academics and ALL staff has to take into account the potential effects of quick and significant changes in staffing”.

- Discipline-specificity

It was to be expected that discipline-specificity emerged as a key factor, since postgraduate students have chosen to further their studies in a discipline with which they are likely to be already acquainted. In the words of one participant:

Postgraduate students are specialising in certain areas of study. Therefore ALL needs to address their specialised needs, such as unpacking complex academic language, interpreting, analysing genre specific information, synthesising the information, formulating and justifying opinions and delivering difficult concepts in English.

As this quotation indicates, ALL practitioners did not assume that EAL postgraduates were already familiar with, or competent at deploying, the discourse features of their chosen discipline, despite the possibility that they had studied the discipline previously, perhaps in their mother tongue. On the contrary, discipline-specific approaches were viewed as effective because of the “identified need [of] familiarising students with the concepts and language of their discipline”.

- Individualisation

ALL professionals were concerned about the capacity of certain mechanisms to cater to the individual needs of postgraduate students given differences in previous disciplinary knowledge, cultural background, first language influence, and second language proficiency.

- Course credit

Course credit refers to whether engagement with a support mechanism counts towards the completion of a degree program. Most suggested that for-credit activities are naturally

more attractive to postgraduate students than non-credit-bearing ones. As one person put it, “credit-bearing means investment of time and effort is worth it for students”. This is particularly the case for postgraduate coursework students, who often pay high fees and require urgent completion due to professional demands.

- Effect over time

A few comments were made in relation to whether any of the strategies have an impact that is maintained over time. The comparatively short timeframe of postgraduate degrees is a likely reason that it was not mentioned more.

8.2 Specific mechanisms

Having considered the implicit conceptual framework applied by the participants, we now consider the evaluations for each mechanism in turn.

8.2.1: Have ALL specialists team-teach with academics within degree courses.

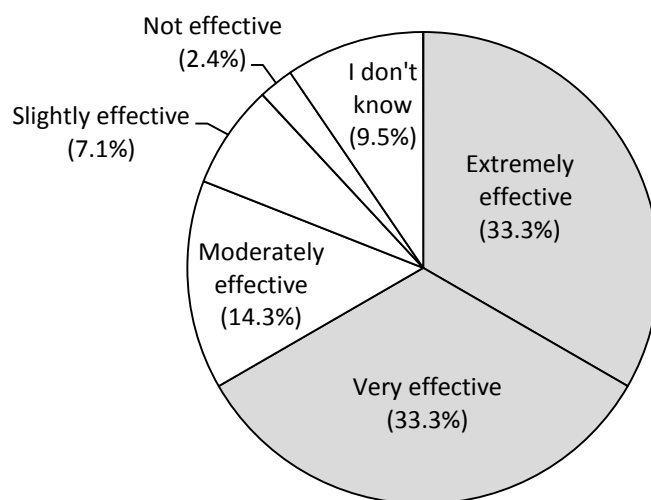


Figure 3. Ratings for team-teaching

Team-teaching was rated extremely effective or very effective by the highest percentage of respondents (66.6%) in the survey (see Figure 3). The primary reason was that team-teaching, more than any other mechanism, is viewed as facilitating course integration, as evidenced by these comments:

Within-discipline programs are much more effective because they are not seen as 'remedial' but as part of the course itself - and helps students 'get' the link between language use and disciplinary competence.

Collaboration with subject area specialists leads to alignment of curriculum and assessment as well as appropriate scaffolding of assessments from both a language and content perspective.

A second reason for supporting team-teaching was that it “has the potential to impact teaching practices”. This could mean gaining a better understanding of EAL students:

Team teaching with academics would be especially effective to ensure greater awareness amongst course deliverers across a range of issues affecting EAL students.

It could also refer to content instructors incorporating ALL approaches into the way they teach: “Team teaching is a good basis but could then move towards the ALL adviser training lecturer/tutors to embed these skills in the course themselves”. On the negative side, it was noted by some that collaboration is not always a smooth and successful process as it “presents issues of how to work collaboratively to embed when those in the disciplines tend

to think of ALL as adjunct skills which can be bolted on”. Team-teaching also had the highest “I don’t know” rating of the strategies (9.5%), which suggests that it occurs the least.

8.2.2: Provide a credit-bearing ALL course as part of their degree.

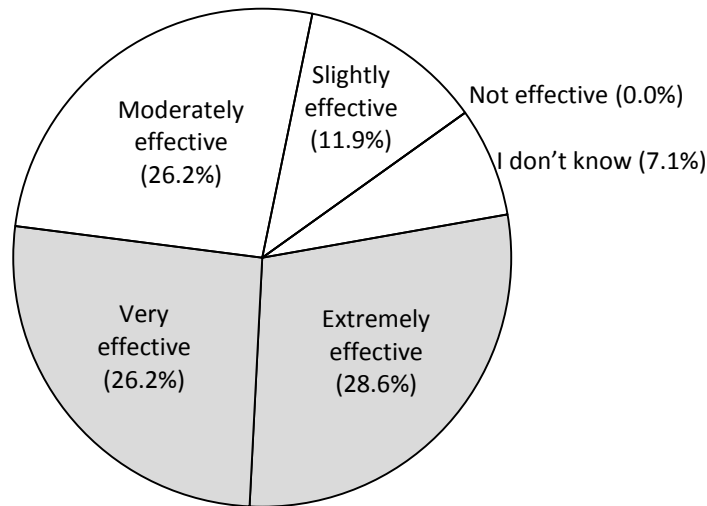


Figure 4. Ratings for a credit-bearing ALL course

Figure 4 shows that credit-bearing ALL courses were viewed as very/extremely effective by more than half the respondents; few rated it negatively (one of the few mechanisms that no-one rated “not effective”). The credit-bearing factor was attractive to several participants. As one put it, “students tend to like rewards for effort [and] credit-bearing courses are rewards”. Others were optimistic about the potential for this model to be highly targeted, either in terms of discipline-specificity (“embedded within the discipline that the student has chosen”) or program integration (“specifically developed and resourced to give post-grads scaffolded practice in the skills needed for their coursework”).

8.2.3: Provide adjunct (i.e. supplementary) ALL tutorials built in to one of their degree courses.

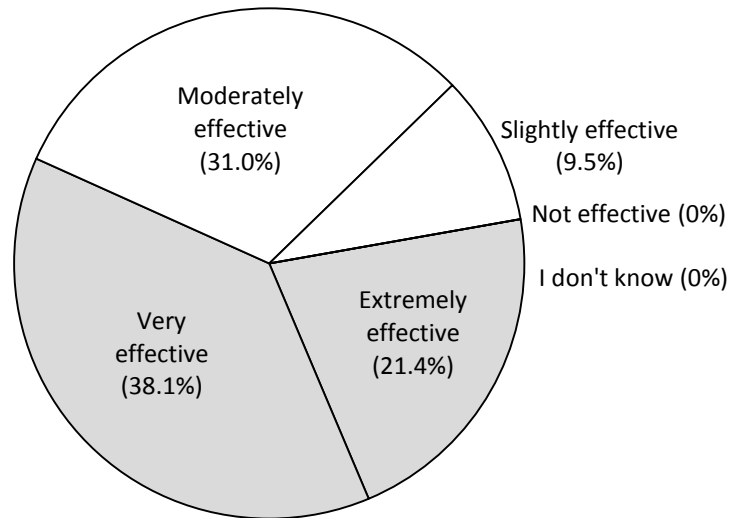


Figure 5. Ratings for adjunct ALL tutorials

Nearly 60 per cent of respondents rated adjunct tutorials very/extremely effective and no-one rated them “not effective” as shown in Figure 5. The fact that this strategy is oriented towards course integration (though technically adjunct) was seen as a positive. However, one respondent’s comment that “supplementary courses generally need to have some credit value to ensure attendance”, shows that the exact manner in which this strategy is ‘supplementary’ or ‘adjunct’ would have to be carefully considered. It may be challenging to convince busy postgraduate students of the worth (credit-wise, academically or otherwise) of additional, voluntary classes.

8.2.4: Provide an ALL consultation service.

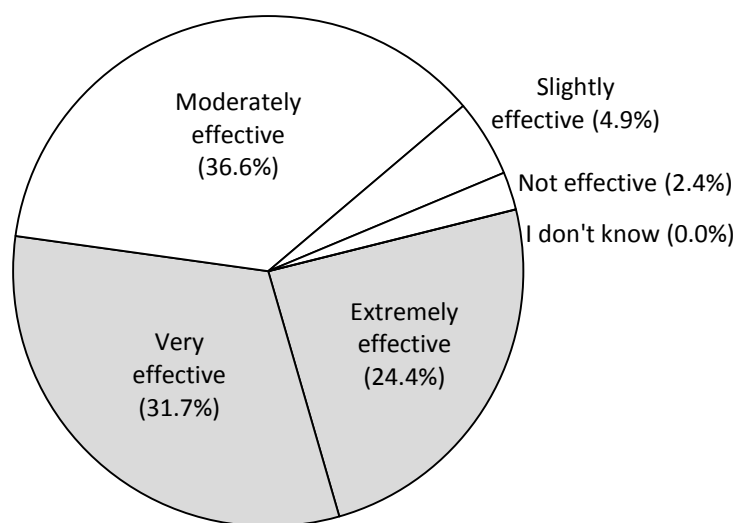


Figure 6. Ratings for one-to-one consultations

Consultation services were also highly regarded, as shown in Figure 6, with more than half the respondents rating them very/extremely effective. It had the lowest number of negative assessments. Its strength was individualisation: “the student takes notice as it relates to their individual needs and [learning] is retained”. Several participants believed that postgraduates could make significant progress if pushed to analyse their own language output:

... it was only through grappling with the issues in terms of their own writing that they learned to write far more successfully and to critically evaluate their own work.

If links could be made to “what they have learned in class”, this strategy was seen as doubly effective, because it then combined individualisation with course integration. One respondent put it this way:

I also strongly believe in the learning experience that takes place in individual consultations, especially if these are delivered in conjunction with knowledge of lecturer expectations, etc.

Another advantage is the more private nature of this service: “postgraduate students like one-on-one ALL assistance, e.g. in consultations, so they can ask questions in a non-threatening environment”. It was also pointed out that because many postgraduate coursework students eventually go on to complete a dissertation, either as a research extension of their coursework or in a subsequent PhD, one-to-one tutoring on their writing is particularly valuable before attempting long-form composition.

However, consultations are typically voluntary, which raises the issue of student uptake. One person suggested that “We've noticed significant progress with students who come regularly”, begging the question of what happens to those who attend sporadically or not at all, as well as the sustainability of a resource-intensive service like this if regular attendance is required for improvement to occur.

8.2.5: Provide discipline-specific workshops specifically for postgraduate students.

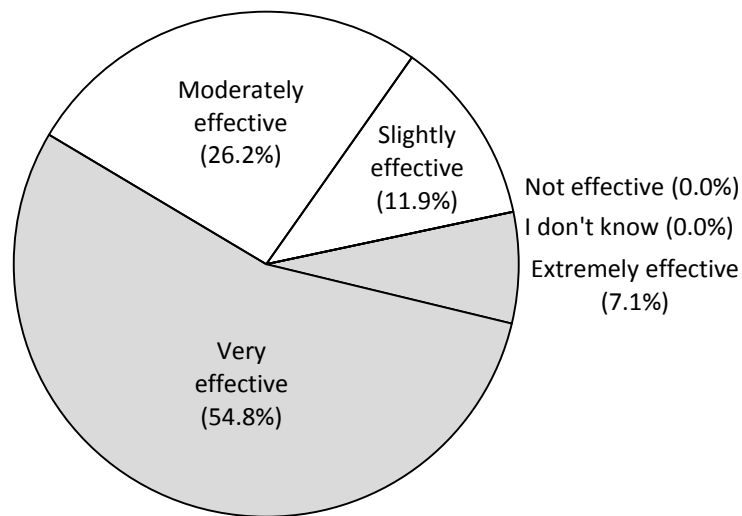


Figure 7. Ratings for discipline-specific workshops

Figure 7 shows that a large percentage of respondents (54.8%) rated discipline-specific workshops as very effective but a relatively low percentage rated them extremely effective. The possibility of combining discipline-specificity with course integration was viewed as a particular advantage:

Discipline-specific workshops can be a useful strategy as the workshop can provide specific relevant information linked to assessments and learning objectives of the course.

One person did comment, however, that although “discipline-specific workshops would help them get through the subject”, they would “have less long-term effect”, either because such an approach would be too narrowly focussed on issues pertaining to one course or perhaps because students find it challenging to transfer the skills to another context.

8.2.6: Conduct diagnostic assessment (e.g. 'PELA') of the ALL abilities of postgraduate students.

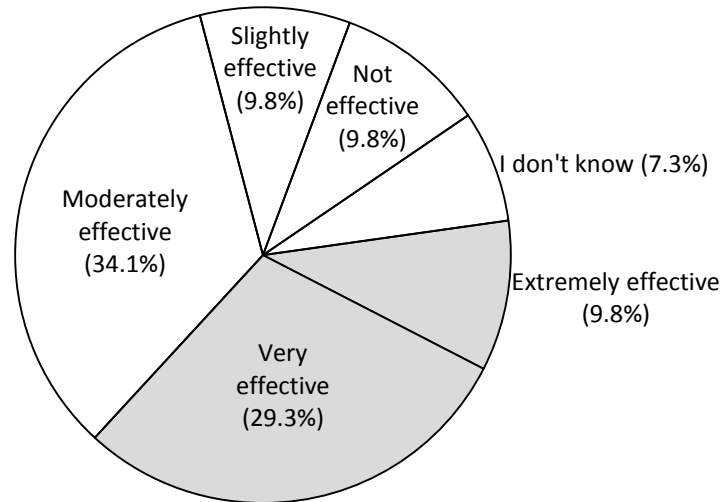


Figure 8. Ratings for diagnostic assessment

There were mixed views on diagnostic assessment (see Figure 8). One third of respondents rated it very/extremely effective, one third rated it moderately effective, twenty per cent viewed it as slightly or not effective, and the remainder were unsure. Follow-up comments explained this variance. The upside to PELAs is that they can highlight the fact that not all students who gain entry to postgraduate study have the requisite academic language skills:

Diagnostic assessment could be very useful in terms of establishing actual ALL ability, rather than assuming it's satisfactory because students have been through an undergrad degree.

However, it was widely recognised that the effectiveness of diagnostic assessment is only determined by the ensuing support:

The PELA is only effective if it is followed up with support, in which case it would only be as effective as the support offered. On its own, it achieves almost nothing.

The manner in which the assessment is administered was also viewed as a factor in its effectiveness. One view was that “PELAs are only useful as a diagnostic if they are discipline specific”, i.e. attempts to diagnose generic academic language ability are not useful. Another view was that assessment would be most accurate if carried out within a content course: “a PELA that is not a stand-alone assessment but integrated with students' first assignments would be of more value”. Another pointed out that diagnostic assessment is administratively burdensome: “Negative effects of PELA administration can override visible (to students) benefits”.

8.2.7: Provide self-access (e.g. online) discipline-specific ALL resources for postgraduate students.

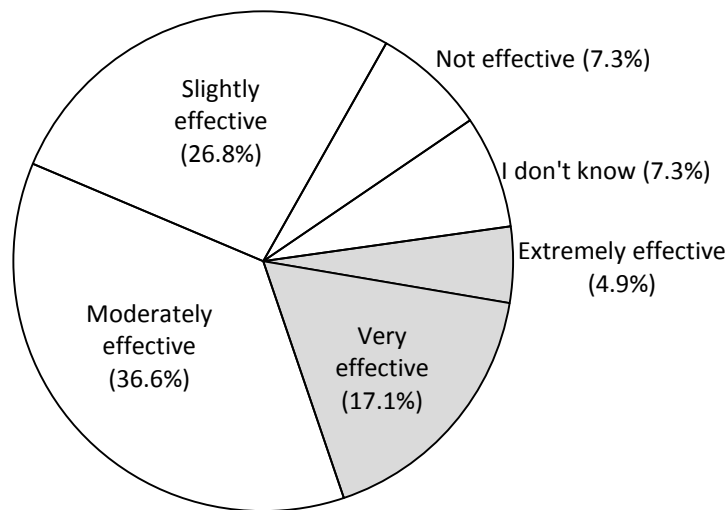


Figure 9. Ratings for self-access resources

Figure 9 shows that support for self-access resources was lukewarm, with over seventy per cent of respondents rating them as moderately, slightly or not effective. Only two people rated this option extremely effective, the lowest figure for that category. Although one person acknowledged that self-access resources “allow [students] to support their own learning as and when they require”, the consensus view was that such resources “will be more likely to have an impact if they are integrated with support”. There were several comments that alluded to the less-than-successful implementation of online resources in the participants’ own institutions:

We find online materials are rarely used, with many students under-utilising even the course Blackboard site.

Websites [...] can be very useful but unless there is an incentive or requirement or some need to use the self-access materials, I am unsure of how effective it may be.

Although these comments call into question the effectiveness of online resources, it is important to note that the participants did not eschew online learning per se. Their point was that self-access mechanisms, on their own, are not popular with students (e.g. placing resources online devoid of a learning and teaching framework). However, structured online learning need not be self-access, and self-access learning need not be unconnected to formal curricula.

8.2.8: Provide a non-credit-bearing ALL course as a bridge to their degree.

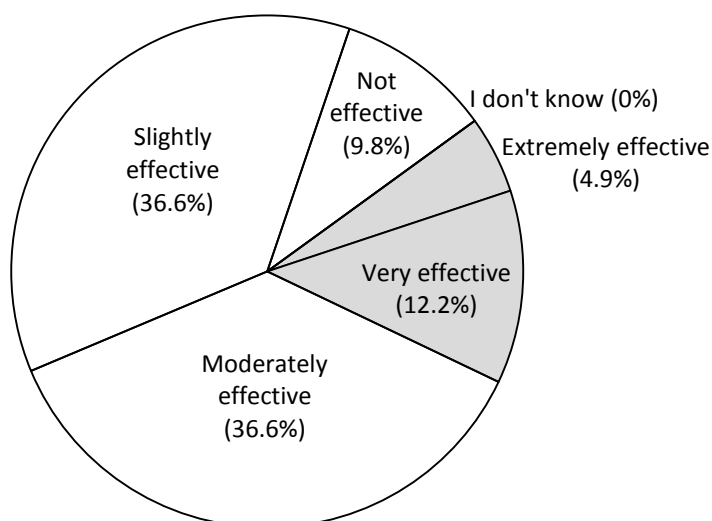


Figure 10. Ratings for a non-credit-bearing ALL bridging course

Figure 10 evidences little support for non-credit-bearing bridging courses, with most respondents viewing them as only slightly or moderately effective and a comparatively high 9.8 per cent rating them as not effective. This mechanism had the lowest collective rating for very/extremely effective (17%). As we saw, the closely-related option of a *credit-bearing* ALL course was strongly endorsed, so it is no surprise that the major flaw of bridging courses

in the minds of several participants was that students would not see any value in taking it. It was also pointed out that, as with a credit-bearing course, attention to individual needs may be lacking and course integration would be unlikely: “support/guidance that is immediately relevant to the particular assignments of their degree subjects is seen to be more valuable to these students than a separate ALL subject”.

8.2.9: Provide generic skills workshops specifically for postgraduate students.

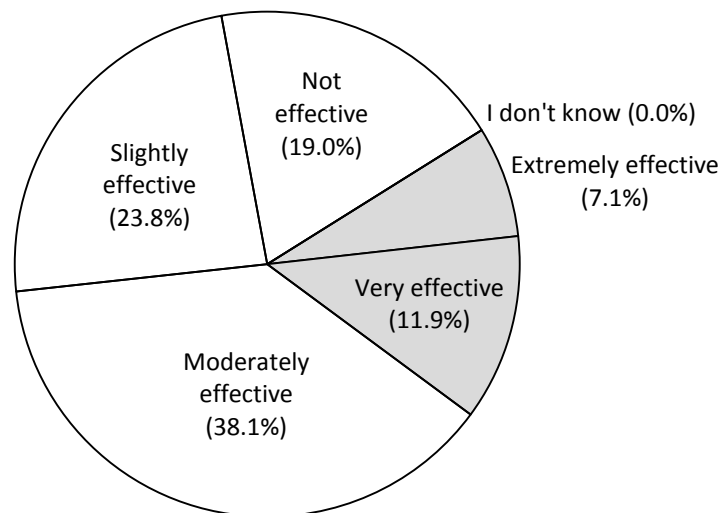


Figure 11. Ratings for generic skills workshops

Generic skills workshops were not rated highly (see Figure 11). Only 19 per cent of respondents viewed them as very/extremely effective and they had the highest “not effective” rating, at 19 per cent. One person’s comment that “my experience of providing centralised, generic sessions or resources has been pretty depressing, to be honest” was indicative of generally negative observations. However, as we have already seen, discipline-specific workshops were positively appraised, suggesting that the workshop delivery mode *per se* is

not the issue. The pessimism surrounding this model is captured in this comment: “Generic workshops may attract few participants and be too general to be of real help”. Workshops suffer from low attendance (they are typically non-compulsory), and lack both course integration and discipline-specificity.

9. Summary of findings

This paper investigated the views of academic language and learning specialists on the suitability of nine archetypal ALL support mechanisms for postgraduate EAL students. The first research aim was to establish which mechanisms were viewed as the most effective for improving the ALL abilities of postgraduate coursework EAL students. Clear and relatively consistent views emerged, with five of the mechanisms receiving strong endorsement: team-teaching, credit-bearing ALL courses, adjunct tutorials, ALL consultation services, and discipline-specific workshops. Three mechanisms were clearly not favoured: self-access resources, bridging courses and generic workshops. Respondents did not suggest alternative support mechanisms to those in the list, despite having the opportunity to do so.

The second research aim was to shed light on the factors that are perceived to contribute to, or impede, the effectiveness of the support mechanisms. Qualitative analysis revealed that seven issues were viewed by the language specialists as having a bearing on effectiveness: course integration, student uptake, engagement by academics, discipline-specificity, individualisation, course credit, and effect over time.

10. Limitations

Although a strength of these findings is that they represent the situated experience of ALL specialists, the perceptions of ALL experts inevitably only tell part of the story and it was

also necessary to consider other stakeholders' views prior to making an institutional decision. It is not unexpected that ALL experts would support mechanisms in which they tend to be highly involved, though this does not invalidate the relevance of such views. We are also aware that we solicited the views of just 42 ALL practitioners via a questionnaire, that a larger sample might have been desirable, and that follow-up interviews would have yielded more detailed responses. A further limitation was that this study elicited views of practitioners from just one EMI context (Australia).

11. Conclusion

This research was not conducted in a vacuum. It was commissioned by the executive management of the authors' university in order to enhance the academic language and learning of its EAL postgraduate coursework students in a wider institutional strategy. The language specialists' insights constituted one component of a wider report that also took into consideration the views of discipline lecturers and student results on an academic English language screening test. The ensuing report was duly considered by the University's English Language Working Party and a decision was made to proceed with a two-year pilot of the adjunct tutorial model. We conclude by explaining the rationale for this choice.

Although team teaching was the most highly rated strategy by ALL experts, it proved unpopular when presented to discipline instructors. Moreover, it may have required a prohibitive level of staff training, possibly an overhaul of current teaching practices. Credit-bearing ALL courses were also highly rated by the ALL experts, but were deemed impracticable by the working party due to the restructuring of programs that would be required, and the lack of space for additional courses in postgraduate degrees, which are already short in comparison to undergraduate programs. An ALL consultation service,

already operating successfully, would continue, but was not considered sufficiently comprehensive in itself. Other mechanisms were deemed inadequate for reasons already mentioned in section 8.2.

Despite the overwhelming message that this was complex with no simple solution, a decision had to be taken. The adjunct tutorial model, third choice of the ALL experts, was a pragmatic option that offered many of the advantages of the two ranked above it, but without the impracticality. It did not require significant buy-in from, or training of, discipline academics, nor did it require the restructuring of programs. The model also ticked many of the language specialists' 'good practice' boxes (see Figure 2, section 8.1).

A two-year trial of adjunct tutorials is underway (2014-2016) within a modest number of postgraduate degree programs in which there are high EAL enrolments. In each program, a core course has been selected to run with an adjunct tutorial that scaffolds the content while focusing on the academic skills that should be transferable to other courses in the program. One full-time ALL instructor with PhD qualifications was employed to manage the project and deliver the tutorials. The project's trial status has lent it the freedom to experiment with different variables, with the view to possible university-wide roll-out after two years. The effectiveness and practicality of adjunct tutorials are therefore still to be determined; numerous challenges are currently being worked through such as identifying which students to target/exclude, how best to diagnose students most in need, ensuring attendance and buy-in from students, timetabling the adjunct tutorial to maximise attendance, and managing differing levels of engagement from academics.

The purpose of this paper was to provide a state-of-the-art overview of language specialists' views on the constraints and affordances of a range of mechanisms, and to show how this knowledge informed the development of a purposeful strategy for enhancing the academic language and learning of EAL postgraduate coursework students in a real context. The next stage is to evaluate the effectiveness of the chosen mechanism.

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Appendix: Survey Instrument

1. In general, how effective do you think the following types of support can be in improving the ALL abilities of postgraduate coursework students?

	Extremely effective	Very effective	Moderately effective	Slightly effective	Not effective	I don't know
Provide a credit-bearing ALL course as part of their degree.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provide a non-credit-bearing ALL course as a bridge to their degree.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provide adjunct (i.e. supplementary) ALL tutorials built in to one of their degree courses.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have ALL specialists team-teach with academics within degree courses.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provide an ALL consultation service.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provide generic skills workshops specifically for postgraduate students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provide self-access (e.g. online) discipline-specific ALL resources for postgraduate students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conduct diagnostic assessment (e.g. 'PELA') of the ALL abilities of postgraduate students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

2. If possible, please comment on why you think any of the strategies are particularly effective or ineffective. (1-4 sentences is sufficient.)