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Practices and Reflections from a Distributed  
Network in East Africa**

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## **Reimagining Online and Blended Provision of English for Academic Purposes: Practices and Reflections from a Distributed Network in East Africa**

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## Abstract

The online and blended delivery of courses through the use of technologies has attracted attention and research. The teaching and learning of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in multilingual contexts such as in Africa has also been given prominence in research, as well as the benefits of technology in EAP programmes.

The pressing need for technology – supported educational practices has been evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic that affected most educational systems around the world. Although there is an increasing body of research on the integration of technology in education emerging from developing contexts, most proposed models still come from high-income countries. Therefore, there is a need for more critical and contextually relevant approaches to the integration of technology in education.

Based on the authors' narratives of their lived experiences as teachers of EAP in a university in East Africa, this article aims to describe and reflect on the practices related to design and delivery of online and blended courses to university students, including in a teacher education programme. It is hoped that this work will contribute to discussions on how to make online and blended teaching practices of EAP more contextually relevant and how exogenous resources can be adapted to the realities of students in multilingual developing contexts.

**Keywords:** blended, educational technologies, English for Academic Purposes, higher education, online, teaching and learning



## Introduction

The current COVID-19 pandemic has evidenced, perhaps as never before, the importance of the role of technology in education. Although this trend is not new, the pressing need for technology-supported educational practices (resulting from a pandemic that affected most education systems in the world) has become a reality in all kinds of educational contexts, including resource-abundant and resource-constrained ones. As UNESCO (2020) documented on their website, which was referred to in the call for papers for the special issue of this journal, there is an effort to “mobilize and support learning continuity”. One of the central themes in the publication is connectivity, the others being gender and teachers. The new reality, or “new normal” as it is widely referred to, calls for stakeholders in all educational fields to reassess, reflect and adapt – in other words, to reimagine their practices.

For some time now the online and blended delivery of courses through the use of established and emerging educational technologies has attracted much attention and research (Dziuban et al., 2015). There has also been more interest and research on the role of technology, specifically in the teaching and learning of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) (Asoodar et al., 2014; Lawrence et al., 2020; Aborisade, 2013), and in EAP in multilingual contexts (Bitchener et al., 2017; Mpofu & Maphalala, 2021).

Although a growing body of research and practices related to the integration of technology in education has emerged from developing contexts, such as from Africa (Ezumah, 2020; Meda & Makura, 2017), most proposed models, resources, products and research still hail from high-income countries (Truncano, 2014). Therefore, the need for more critical and contextually relevant approaches to education in general, and the integration of technology in teaching and learning in particular becomes even more urgent. The main aim of this work is to describe and reflect on the practices related to the design and delivery of online and blended EAP courses to undergraduate and graduate students, including courses delivered to students in a teacher education programme. Based on the authors’ narratives of their lived experiences as teachers of EAP in a university in East Africa, this article hopes to contribute to discussions on how to

make online and blended teaching practices contextually relevant and how exogenous models and resources can be adapted to suit the realities of students in developing contexts.

## **Background and context of the study**

The background and context of the practices reported in this study relate to work that has been conducted for the Aga Khan University's (AKU) Network of English Language Enhancement (ELE\_net) in East Africa from 2017 to the present. AKU is an international university that has campuses in East Africa (Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda), in Pakistan and in the United Kingdom. ELE\_net was set up to offer university support services for the development of English language skills to students, faculty and staff across all campuses, and the network relies heavily on online and blended provision due to its nature as a distributed network working across campuses in different geographical regions. One of the authors was based in Tanzania between 2017 and 2019, and the other has worked from the campus in Karachi, Pakistan, since the establishment of ELE\_net in 2014.

Both authors were involved in the provision of EAP and worked on the design and teaching of online and blended courses offered to students enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (School of Nursing and Midwifery in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda), and the Master of Education (Institute for Educational Development East Africa, in Dar es Salaam). These courses included modules such as 'Introduction to Academic Reading and Writing'; 'Integrating Academic Reading into Writing'; 'Academic Presentation Skills'; 'English for Research'; 'Language Accuracy in Writing'; to name a few. Most of these modules were offered fully through the online mode, and some were offered through a blended mode. The authors' experience at designing and delivering these online and blended courses, the challenges faced, and their adaptation to the new ways of teaching and learning prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic have driven this study. Moreover, the multilingual context of the practices reported in this work is especially relevant in this study. Most of the students in AKU programmes in East Africa speak Kiswahili (especially students from Tanzania and Kenya where it is a national or official language), one or more local East African language, and also English. In addition, the two EAP teachers (authors of this study) have languages other than English as their mother tongue (Portuguese

and Urdu).

## Methodology

Drawing on insights from phenomenology and based on the authors' narratives of their lived experiences as teachers of EAP in the contexts described above, this work adopts a reflective approach towards the practices carried out – not only in consideration of the role of technology in the processes of teaching and learning, but also, as mentioned above, with regard to the multilingual nature of the students and teachers involved in the programmes. The multilingual nature of contexts is important for all pedagogical practices, and especially in the case of language programmes such as EAP. For the authors of this paper, the roles of both technology and multilingualism have become essential when reflecting upon the practices of their work. The need to think about technology and pedagogy at the same time is echoed by Fawns (2022) and confirmed by Omidire (2020, p. 157): “The derived knowledge and lived experiences of teachers working in multilingual classrooms and the methods used to navigate the challenges in these spaces, whether perceived or real, become pertinent.”

According to Creswell (2013), the basic aim of phenomenology as a method is to describe the nature of a phenomenon. Insights from phenomenology resonate with this present work, as a phenomenological design analyses the lived experiences and perspectives of an individual (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). Moreover, and in line with the purposes of this study, “exploring lived experience does not only allow the researcher to ascertain a series of events through time but also aims to elicit the meanings and interpretations that people attribute to these experiences” (Frechette et al., 2020).

In addition, Adams (2014, p. 54) posits that the “always-too-late backward turn to lived experiences” can be achieved by the collection of descriptions of memories and occurrences from individuals who lived the studied phenomenon. Citing Van Manen's (1997, 2014) work, Adams (2014) furthermore asserts that the phenomenological study of practice is useful for revealing and promoting practical insights and communicative attentiveness in teaching practices, and that thematic analysis is one of the techniques to explore their lived experiences and memories. Therefore, the data collection process focused on identifying the themes that emerged from each of the participants'



memories and recollections and were analysed during their mutual discussions and reflections. Furthermore, exchanges during the writing process were essential for the development of reflections on the identified themes. As Van Manen (1984:41) remarked, “[f]or indeed, to do research in a phenomenological sense is already and immediately and always a bringing to speech of something. And this thoughtfully bringing to speech is most commonly a writing activity”.

Ethical considerations were also taken into account in this work. Natvik and Moltu (2019, para. 25) point out that “[r]esearch drawing on the first-person perspective is occasionally understood as a “good” and ethical approach in itself”. Nevertheless, even though this work is based solely on the authors’ reflections and narratives of their own lived experiences as teachers of EAP in the context of this study, it is important to point out that the anonymity of the course participants or other parties involved in the programmes mentioned has been preserved at all times. Moreover, another important consideration on the purposes of this study – from our point of view – is that “strengthening the ethics of research into learning and teaching with Web 2.0 offers the potential to (...) [e]ncourage reflective practice among educators and give greater research status to their endeavours in this field” (Chang & Grey, 2013, p. 162).

In the next sections, through themes identified as important aspects of our teaching practices, this article provides descriptions related to the design and teaching of EAP courses to students in our context in East Africa. It also includes reflections and discussions on how these processes can become contextually more relevant and how (in our perspective) they can contribute to the practices of teachers working in similar contexts.

## **Description of practices**

As mentioned above, ELE\_net practices involve the planning, design and teaching of online and blended EAP courses to students across all the university’s campuses. For the purposes of this paper, the authors focus on their practices conducted as support services offered to two institutions – the School of Nursing and Midwifery (SONAM) in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, and the Institute for Educational Development East Africa (IED-EA) in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The latter offers the Master of Education (MEd) degree annually, and receives teachers from Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda as course participants.



Most courses were offered as a non-credit-bearing support service. However, at the request of faculty and programme coordinators, some were integrated into the academic units' official programmes. A case in point is the 'Integrating Academic Reading into Writing' course, which was incorporated as an online component into the 'Academic Writing and Critical Thinking' course offered at the School of Nursing and Midwifery in Kenya in 2018 and 2019, bearing 20% of the course weight. The same course was also offered annually to MEd students in Dar es Salaam as a continuation of their induction programme. This was done through the blended mode, along with an Information and Communication Technology preparation course offered by the IED\_EA.

Online courses such as 'Introduction to Academic Reading', 'Introduction to Academic Writing', 'Introduction to Academic Speaking' and 'Language Accuracy in Writing', were offered regularly to students across all campuses, including to students from East Africa. In addition, courses such as 'Integrating Academic Reading into Writing' and 'English for Research' (1 and 2) were also offered periodically through the blended mode at locations where ELE\_net had a physical presence. In the case of East Africa, this took place in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Currently, these are courses are offered online, with weekly synchronous sessions facilitated via the Zoom platform.

## Course Design and Delivery

The authors' practices related to the design of the EAP courses had the support of other ELE\_net team members. The design process involved the choice of topic and content based on students' needs identified by academic units, research work conducted by the university's Language Policy Thinking Group (Aga Khan University, 2017), and discussions within ELE\_net. Our work first of all involved the writing of the course proposals (stating course name, description, rationale, learning outcomes, content and structure, delivery, assessment and evaluation). These proposals were subsequently submitted for scrutiny and approval by the other members of the team and the group's Director, who would suggest amendments and improvements when necessary and provide additional ideas for course implementation. After approval, our work would focus on the development of the proposed courses in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), which in the case of the University was the Moodle



platform. This involved the selection of materials for the creation of asynchronous Learning Objects (LOs), the recording of tutorial videos or screencasts, and the creation of discussion forums, PDFs, quizzes, assessment, course announcements and other resources. These components would eventually be added to the specific Moodle course site and structured under the topics for each course week.

Regarding the delivery of online EAP courses, team discussions would be conducted to find the best time of the year for them to be offered. The courses were available to students in all of the university's geographical locations, and they would be added to ELE\_net's annual calendar. In due time, the courses would be advertised on the University's website and sent out through student mailing lists to advertise the courses and gain a maximum number of registrations across the different campuses. Initially, the online courses were only offered asynchronously, with the teachers sending weekly course announcements, posting on discussion forums and providing feedback on activities. However, later we started offering weekly real-time Zoom sessions, during which we went over the course materials and clarified any points that needed attention. Participation in these sessions was optional. Due to students being in different time zones and possible clashes with their other classes, it was difficult to find a suitable time for all course participants. The sessions were usually recorded and posted on the course site so that all students would be able to access them at a convenient time.

As for the blended courses offered on campus in Tanzania, the appropriate dates and times of the face-to-face sessions were discussed with the faculty management and heads of departments of IED-EA and SONAM to ascertain whether the target groups would be available to attend. The students would have access to the materials that were made available on the Moodle platform on the course site. This is where they were expected to complete the instructional activities and attend the weekly face-to-face sessions. These weekly in-person sessions incorporated not only some of the materials from the course site, but also other materials from EAP coursebooks, academic articles (Magesa et al., 2011), PowerPoint presentations and discussions. However, they followed the online course structure and aimed to cover the same content. To illustrate, one example involved the assignment of an instructional activity in which MEd students were asked to access LOs from the course site that covered presentation and practice of paraphrasing techniques. This was done in class and was followed by discussions that required students to analyse examples of paraphrasing

from their own assignments written for the Med courses. Similarly, when taking the blended ‘English for Research’ (1) course, SONAM students were asked in face-to-face sessions to identify, in selected sections of assigned academic articles, phrases with the same purpose as found in the Academic Phrasebank (University of Manchester, 2021). The latter’s link was provided on the course site.

As described above, the processes of online and blended course design and delivery involved the utilisation of numerous technological tools. The next section describes the materials and resources used in our teaching practices.

## Materials and resources

The main platforms used for the design and delivery of our courses were Moodle and Zoom. All the online and blended EAP student courses were hosted in the University’s VLE on the Moodle platform. Each course site hosted the instructional activities, quizzes, course documents, discussion forums and assignments. Although some communication with students was conducted through emails, weekly announcements posted on the course sites provided information pertaining to the assignments for that specific week, reminders, or the schedule for face-to-face or synchronous video sessions.

The Zoom platform was used for synchronous lessons in the online courses. This made it possible for us to offer weekly sessions to present or revise course content and material, to promote interaction among students, and to increase participation in and motivation for the online courses. Whenever possible, the ‘Breakout rooms’ feature on Zoom was used to promote interaction and pair/group work, and this feature was especially favoured in courses that involved an academic speaking component. Unfortunately, the use of such features was not always possible. For example, for the course ‘Academic Presentation Skills’ offered to SONAM students in Nairobi and facilitated by the teacher in Dar es Salaam, all course participants had to sit together in their classroom during the time appointed for the live-online lessons. Students were able to access the video platform through their own devices, but they were not able to unmute them to interact simultaneously, as their close proximity caused sound interference. This problem was mitigated by the use of another external resource,



Flipgrid. On this platform we were able to record and reply to video messages, and students could record sections of their own academic presentations that were being studied and developed in the course.

Another example worth noting was the Zoom synchronous sessions conducted for the ‘Integrating Academic Reading into Writing’ course delivered to first-year SONAM students, also in Nairobi. Since class interaction via the video platform’s ‘Breakout Rooms’ feature could not be promoted due to the classroom arrangement, the teacher projected the tasks on the screen and asked participants to share the findings of their discussions through the forums on the Moodle course site in real time. The patterns of interaction during the synchronous sessions, as described in the two examples above, represent some of the challenges that we faced in the delivery of these online courses.

Initially, the learning activities that provided the main content for the courses were taken from an EAP Toolkit (University of Southampton, 2021). These LOs (obtained by ELE\_net under licence from the University of Southampton) covered a wide range of EAP skills areas, including writing, reading, speaking, grammar and vocabulary. The objects also focused on specific topics such as plagiarism, quoting and paraphrasing, describing trends in graphs and tables, to name a few. The instructional activities were selected and embedded into the Moodle sites in accordance with the course objectives. They offered presentation and practice of the relevant academic English areas and skills that needed to be worked on in each course week. The LOs were useful in giving students a degree of hands-on, interactive practice with the content they covered. After completing the activities, learners could check their answers automatically, and access further explanations and clarification. Furthermore, the students could independently use the LOs as self-directed learning activities in the online courses, in the blended face-to-face sessions, as well as in class activities.

In 2019, ELE\_net decided to stop using the licensed materials from the EAP Toolkit. As an external resource embedded into the online courses, teachers could only attest from the Moodle course data that those LOs had been accessed by students; they could not confirm that the activities had been completed, and could not track the learners’ performance in doing them. Thus, it was decided that teachers would develop their own LOs for content presentation and practice, and make more use of

the internal Moodle quizzes and assignments functions so as to better try and track students' progress. Another external resource, H5P – an open-source tool that allows for the creation of interactive presentations and tasks as well as their integration into Moodle – was consequently brought into our practices for the design and delivery of EAP content.

Many other external tools and resources have been used in the courses and embedded into the Moodle sites. These include YouTube videos on academic skills and language, the creation of screencasts through Screencast-O-matic (a free screen recording tool), activities on Padlet (a kind of interactive bulletin board tool), Mentimeter and Kahoot! (interactive presentation and quizzes tools), as well as specific references to EAP online materials from the 'Using English for Academic Purposes' website (UEFAP, 2022) and the 'Academic Word List' (Victoria University of Wellington, 2022). The use of all these exogenous resources and technological tools provided a wealth of materials and approaches through which teachers could prepare and enrich their course content. Using the resources and tools also facilitated the processes of design and delivery of our EAP courses. However, the need for them and our dependence on their use (different from the traditional face-to-face approaches to teaching and learning) were a source of anxiety for the teachers involved, due to the implications of the time consumed, the learning curve and challenges faced. A great effort was needed (and achieved with varied levels of success) to adapt and make these resources relevant and useful to the students in our contexts, so that their learning experiences could be grounded and effective in the online and blended teaching environments.

## Reflections and Discussion

Reflectivity is an essential component of teachers' greater awareness of their teaching, themselves and their contexts. It fosters an examination of assumptions and understanding related to their practices to change and improve teaching and learning processes (Zeichner & Liston, 2013). Our reflections on our online and blended EAP practices are categorised according to themes that stood out when we recollected the process of design and delivery of the courses, the incorporation of the wide range of technological tools, and the use of online materials as described earlier. Mainly, these reflections focus on our context where the necessary technological infrastructure –



reliable internet connection and power supply, as well as an IT team that could offer support to teachers and students – were present on the different campuses.

We are, however, aware that in many contexts this is not the case, and many of our students face serious difficulties when trying to work online off-campus. The four themes discussed next emerged as strategies to make the courses more contextually relevant, meaningful and accessible to our students. They do not only have implications for the teachers involved and for the wider academic units of the university, but also resonate with practices of other teachers and institutions in similar multilingual developing contexts.

## **Contextualisation of practices and adaptation of resources**

Considering all the resources that were available in the design and teaching of our EAP courses, we started our reflection by asking how we could adapt such resources and materials to our context. One way was to include instructional activities and assignments that would allow the use of students' current work for other disciplines too, rather than to rely only on the practice exercises included in the activities on the Moodle site. Although in line with Sibomana's (2019, p. 20) remark that they "indicate to the learners, who are teaching themselves (or learning on their own), what is expected of them in the materials and, to an extent, what successful learning means", those learning activities were thought to have their learning potential maximised by being applied directly onto the students' own work and contextualised within the programme of studies they were undertaking at the university. For example, in the 'Integrating Academic Reading into Writing' blended course, students used the introduction section of assignments they had written for programme-specific MED courses to check the structure, use of sources, paraphrasing, and other textual elements that were covered in the LOs 'Structuring your writing' and 'Introduction to quoting and paraphrasing'.

Similarly, the use of peer review strategies allowed course participants to work with others to check if points from instructional activities (e.g. signposting language and describing trends) had been integrated into their own work. This involved preparation and discussions to suggest to students that all collaborative work should aim at improvement and not be judgmental, as this creates a more comfortable atmosphere in which learners can share and discuss their work. It was also agreed that

this process would benefit all involved in such activities, as affirmed by Knight and Steinbach (2011, p. 94): “Peer review benefits both the reviewer and the reviewee by involving them in active learning and focusing on higher order learning involving synthesis, analysis, and evaluation.”

A further example of a strategy to contextualise teaching and learning comes from the ‘Research Writing’ course offered to SONAM students in Tanzania. As mentioned earlier, published health sciences articles written by local authors on local contexts (such as by Magesa et al., 2011) and publications from Kenya’s and Tanzania’s pages on the website of the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) were used for academic writing and structure work, in an attempt to bring the topics and materials closer to home.

Our reflections on how to use the wide range of online exogenous materials in our practices led us to be grateful for the availability of the infrastructure and resources we had at our disposal. However, we were also led to consider the difficulties that our students faced when working online off-campus, and the realities of teaching and learning that takes place in institutions with access to fewer resources. Moore et al.’s (2018, p. 1) definition of the digital divide refers to “the gap between people who have sufficient knowledge of and access to technology and those who do not” and which “can perpetuate and even worsen socioeconomic and other disparities for already underserved groups”. Therefore, when thinking about our own use of some of these resources, we considered ways in which they could be adapted in situations where resources such as internet connection and devices are scarce. In resource-constrained contexts, the format of materials can be adapted and less expensive technology such as projectors, WhatsApp groups and SMS texting can be used when possible. Some of the uses of these technologies have been reported in research (Madge et al., 2019; Viljoen et al., 2005).

As an example of its use in a possible EAP teaching context, material from the Academic Phrasebank can be adapted and projected onto a white screen or wall for whole class work, or it can even be shared in other formats such as handouts or worksheets. Similarly, the lengthy Academic Word List is available as a .pdf document from the University of Victoria’s website, to be downloaded, printed and incorporated into class work whenever necessary. Other possibilities include the use of WhatsApp groups to host online discussions, share content, and even serve as academic speaking



practice through the use of the audio recording feature. SMS texting can also be used to some extent, and one possible idea is the sharing of the ‘words or phrases of the day/week’ by means of this technology. Of course, our wish as teachers is that all our colleagues and their students everywhere should have access to state-of-the-art equipment and facilities, but since this is not feasible in the present reality, we believe that, with teachers’ ingenuity, technology can still be used when available and needed.

## **Inter-departmental collaboration**

In our experience, one of the main differences between online and blended courses was the levels of student engagement. The numbers of students who completed the online courses offered as a free and independent support service across the University, were remarkably lower than for those who attended blended courses or the online courses that were embedded into the degree-leading programmes. This was probably because when students saw the courses as part of their degree programmes, they were more likely to dedicate themselves and felt under pressure to complete the courses. This was true both for the courses that carried a percentage of credits (e.g. the ‘Integrating Academic Reading into Writing’ course offered to SONAM students in Nairobi) and the non-credit-bearing courses that had the support of the academic units’ faculty (e.g. the ‘Academic Presentation Skills’ course offered to SONAM students in Nairobi and the course offered at IED-EA as part of the MEd students induction). The support of the degree-leading programme’s faculty ensured that students would complete the self-directed activities in the course, interact more actively in forum discussions and faithfully submit their assignments. This was not the case in the majority of online courses that had been offered as an independent support service. In these courses, the drop-out rates were high, due to competing priorities. Students would always naturally favour work that was exclusive to their degree-leading programmes.

Our findings have shown a real need for inter-departmental collaboration and support. In some cases this was forthcoming, especially when faculty management discussed with us the aims, schedules and content of courses and shared with us some of the difficulties that students faced. The latter involved the following of their courses of study in English and producing academic essays and articles, as well as making oral presentations. Such collaboration became effective when we managed to embed our online and blended courses within the faculty’s programmes, as well as



share class times and approaches towards assessment. We can even quote an example of collaborative teaching. This occurred while nursing students in Dar es Salaam were taking the ‘English for Research Writing’ course, and the ELE\_net teacher was invited by a faculty member to work collaboratively and help students develop academic English writing skills. In a joint face-to-face class, the teacher introduced the Academic Phrasebank (University of Manchester, 2021) by projecting the website on the board. They worked through the useful phrases for introducing work, describing methods, discussing findings, writing conclusions and signalling work. During this practice, students gave instant feedback on the material’s usefulness for the work they were writing at the time. The faculty member also pointed out that learning about this resource was quite useful for herself. All these points show us that the support of the discipline-specific faculty and departments is essential for the success of the EAP practitioner. Such collaboration also holds great benefit for the students and the teachers involved.

## Expanded roles of the teacher

Another theme that emerged from our reflections on the design and teaching practices that we used included the expanded roles of teachers working through the online and blended modes. Some of the extra roles required in our practice included those of material designer and e-moderator. Despite the rewarding experience of seeing the results of a well-designed online activity, observing students interacting in the courses and having successful outcomes and positive feedback, teachers who work through and with technology face challenges and anxieties that are typical of the transition from the traditional classroom environment. As Morgan (2008, p. 28) stated with regard to the context of Australia, “the rapid uptake of online learning has placed increased demands on the traditional role of educators”. The same was true for our teaching context in East Africa and for most teachers who found themselves in similar circumstances all over the world. Morgan (2008, p. 28) further affirms that online learning places greater expectations on “students’ own initiative, self-motivation, and resourcefulness” and, as e-moderators, teachers need to promote reflective and creative thinking skills in their practices. The same author also posits that substantial demands are made on higher education institutions, as they need to provide the infrastructure, professional development and support to allow for web-based teaching and learning.



These expanded teacher roles call for support through effective continuous development initiatives. In the case of our practices these were available to us through attendance of free MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) on online teaching and learning, and the possibility to attend specialised courses offered by outside institutions and initiatives organised in-house. The experience gained from attending some of these courses, coupled with discussions with other colleagues in our department, helped us to reflect on our practices and to learn about approaches and resources that could be incorporated into our teaching and learning practice. It also aided us in coping with the stresses and anxieties related to the demands of our work.

## Multilingual contexts

The final (and by no means least important) theme that emerged from our reflections was related to the multilingual nature of our teaching and learning context. As stated earlier, it is essential to consider the multilingual nature of local and foreign languages and the roles that they play in the context of teaching and learning. According to Omidire (2020, p. 159) there are no doubts about the challenges of language in education in multilingual contexts, and she affirms that “[t]eacher education in sub-Saharan Africa needs to foreground the training in context-specific strategies that speak to the multilingual nature of the environment”. In our contexts where students from Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda speak several languages – including home or local languages – and where English is sometimes the third or fourth language, ignoring the linguistic landscape is not an option. Focusing on the teaching and learning of EAP should not mean disregarding the linguistic resources that students and teachers bring into the teaching and learning process. On the contrary, these can be used to facilitate learning, tackle linguistic prejudice, and instil motivation for the learning of a global language such as English and the access that its appropriate academic uses may offer. However, for teachers to be able to do this, it is necessary to include this “shift in thinking regarding multilingualism in paradigm and ideology”, in teacher education and professional development, especially “through distance education” (Omidire, 2020, p. 159).

We believe that the experiences gained from our practices and reflections can be fostered in the teaching and learning process by promoting open discussions about language use, the roles of dominant and minority languages in the contexts, as well

as the global and local (“glocal”) contemporary role of English. Furthermore, the role of English in academia and in scientific writing must be foregrounded in these discussions, so that all involved can reflect, contribute and feel more included in the learning process and course objectives. Student involvement and issues surrounding language ownership in these discussions are very important in English language programmes, as the approaches that are usually adopted are those based only on native speaker models, even though they do not always reflect the contemporary uses and role of the language. This is especially important in EAP courses, as English plays a dominant role in academia, as mentioned above. According to Mauranen et al. (2020, p. 184), “if the vast majority of readers and writers are not native speakers of English, perhaps qualities such as clarity and effectiveness in communication should be considered from their perspective rather than that of the native speaking minority”. As they concluded – “[t]here are no native speakers of *academic* English”.

Our reflections on the multilingual context of our work and on the insights gained from interacting with literature that highlights the importance of raising our own as well as students’ awareness of the roles of languages in our lives and work, helped us to place greater value on the linguistic resources that our learners and ourselves bring into the everyday teaching and learning practices. We agree with Omidire (2020, p. 157) who concluded that “[t]eachers’ language proficiency, classroom participation norms, teaching experience and attitudes towards home languages can all shape how learning transpires”.

## Conclusion

This article attempted to describe our practices as EAP teachers in East Africa. Our reflections emanate from the process of designing and delivering online and blended courses in a university setting that relies on technology for the deployment of instruction to students in different geographical locations. These reflections reinforced in ourselves the need for an emphasis on reflective practice in the teaching and learning processes. In current times, when a global pandemic makes explicit (more than ever) the need for alternative ways of teaching and new approaches to education, the sharing of practices, concerns, ideas and possible solutions among educational



practitioners and stakeholders becomes increasingly important. In this scenario, our practices and reflections confirm the need for an ever more contextually relevant approach to teaching. The latter adopts a critical perspective on content, materials and resources, and on how they can be used and adopted in the classroom or online environment to create a more effective learning environment.

In the specific case of our EAP courses offered through online and blended modes, our reflections emphasised the special attention to be given to inter-departmental collaborations, the promotion of teachers' professional development, and considerations on the multilingual realities of the contexts in which teaching and learning occur. Although we understand the multiplicity of contexts in which EAP takes place through online and blended teaching and learning does not allow for expansive generalisations, we hope our reflections may be useful to EAP practitioners and any other teachers working in similar contexts. In reimagining our practices in terms of the use of technology in education in developing contexts, we need to consider the reality of the “digital divide”. We agree with Aborisade (2013, p. 40) who concluded that “[t]he gap can be bridged by teachers who are daring and resourceful and students can be sources of expertise. Change is possible: we can help students speak English more and better, interact more and learn more independently”.

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