

Programme Identity in Academia: The Case of One EAP Unit in the Arabian Gulf

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Abstract

Researching the identity of language education programmes in academia is critical because of the pivotal role these programmes play to induct students into the academic communities of their disciplines. Despite this criticality, there is markedly very little research activity in the area. Viewed as remedial rather than academic and peripheral rather than central to university education, these programmes sit uncomfortably in today's higher education, and their identity is often in tension and in a state of conflict. Principally set to survey departmental faculty regarding English for Academic Purposes requirements using a needs analysis framework, this research partially reports on doctoral research regarding the identity of one English for Academic Purposes unit at one higher education institution in the Sultanate of Oman. Qualitative data were collected from interviews, programme and institutional document review, and observation of the setting. Using an ethnographic approach, the paper situates the identity of the EAP unit within historical and contemporary discourse which became most visible at a time of institutional change. The status of the EAP unit, constructed and mediated through power, was discernible in both discipline (i.e., that the language programmes are remedial in nature solely existing to cover language-related gaps reminiscent of school level) and enterprise (i.e., that teaching English is not characteristic of academia). The paper ends by offering future research on identity a possible model for researching language education programmes in higher education.

Keywords: EAP, higher education, identity, Oman, status

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