

EDUCATION RESEARCH GROUP OF ADELAIDE

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1st Year Arab Muslim Students Negotiating the Western Academy

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(Currently: Adelaide Graduate Centre)

Profile: UAEU Students

- All students are Muslims, predominantly Sunni.
- 95% of UAE female high school graduates and 80% of male high school graduates go on to higher education
- Predominantly 1st Generation Students.
- Only 15% of respondents reported that they used a language other than Arabic regularly in their home.
- The majority of students test into either level one or two at an adequate elementary level of English.
- High level of repeaters and dropouts

(Bielenberg 2005; Morrow 2005)

Higher Education Issues in the UAE

- Internationalization of Higher Education

Yet

- Retention of Arab/ Muslim Identity

(UAEU 2006)

Developmental Foundation Program

- Based on American 4-year college programs.
- Focus on preparing students for university life.
- Course consists of: Arabic study skills, English Communication, Mathematics and Computer Literacy.
- Includes "campus life" program.
- After level 3, IELTS examination (4.5 score provides entry into the faculties)
- Faculties classes with ESP Academic Writing Course.

Problems with the Program

- Contested "academy"
- 4.5 IELTS score problematic
- Students "colonized" by Western Academia
- ESP course is EGAP rather than ESAP.

Views of Academic Literacy

- Study skills (atomised skills for example, grammar, paragraph structure)
- Academic socialisation (students are acculturated into 'the academy')
- Academic literacies (contested academy where students are encouraged to "switch practices")

(Lea and Street 1998)

Study Skills Lens 1

- Comparison of lexical items in the UGRU/AWC corpuses with lexical items in a student corpus of AWC survey projects.
- Used lexical items on the Updated Version of the General Service List (Bauman, J & Culligan, B: 1995) and Academic Word List (Coxhead: 2000).

Findings

- “Academic word list” items used even more frequently than “General Service List” items
- Use rather determined by:
- Repetition in the corpus
 - Occurrence in “chunks”
 - Practicality/ tangibility
- Problems with metalanguage no matter whether the words are “academic” or “general”.

Implications for Teaching

- Teach students lexical “chunks”
- Frequently repeat (recycle) target lexical items.
- Make lexical items as tangible as possible
- Do not fear “academic” lexis.

Research on Academic Socialization Model

- Learner Strategy Questionnaires
- Learner Motivation Questionnaires
- Analysed student course evaluations
- Conducted interviews with students
- Conducted interviews with faculty

Findings

Student Reported Data:

- High motivation in ESP course/ lower motivation in foundation course
- Felt that they used most learning strategies
- Felt that they were being prepared for their future careers
- Felt their writing skills had improved
- Enjoyed being taught “step-by-step”

Findings continued

Faculty reported data:

- Felt students were totally inadequately prepared for studies in the faculty
- Felt that the ESP course required a reading rather than writing focus.
- Felt that students had no idea on how to work with content (plagiarism issues)
- Felt that the “sheltered writing” approach in ESP course improved students’ writing and editing skills.

Implications

- Need to apprentice students into the process of writing academically “step-by-step”.
- Need to apprentice students into the process by which knowledge is created in their particular field.
- Need for close communication between faculty and foundation program.
- Need for “sheltered” reading programs within faculties.

Academia and Islam in the Arab World

- Traditional Islamic view of the world does not separate religion and state or religion and knowledge (Ahmad, 2004; Lewis, 2002)
- It views knowledge (ilm) as a unified concept including both “sensory and intelligible realms” and “the realm of the spirit” (Asraf, 1996: 4).

Opposing Views

- | | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• English should just be taught to give students access to “modern day knowledge”• English teaching should be “Islamized” | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students require “communicative competence” which includes acculturation into Western ways of thought. |
|--|--|

(Asraf 1996)

(Hadley 2004)

Compromise

- Islam has a long history of scholarship
- Student conceptual problems result from academic rather than religious background
- Academic literacies approach allows students to “switch practices” “mushfak”

(Gee 2002)

Research in the Academic Literacies Model

- Examined students narrative
 - Examined course and curriculum documents
 - Examined student writing
- For Discourses (ways of thinking, feeling, being in the world)
- Critical thinking
 - Academic “voice”

A Critical Thinker is...

- A person who has an ability to question deeply their own or others’ framework of thinking
- Critical thinkers are thinkers who are aware of their own biases, misconceptions, and prejudices, and are willing to critique them

(Paul 1995)

What is the academy?

I like ESP and UGRU... I like thinking...I can give many opinions and reasons and results...but in Islamic studies, I must not think, only memorize. I am good at thinking, but my memory is so bad... I don't get a good mark...in Islamic studies... but it is important because it is Allah's knowledge...knowledge about Allah and English and my other subjects is man's knowledge and I can think about it and give my opinion... (Respondent 4: 2004)

Voice and Academic Ownership

- use of examples from own experience/ life
- use of own words
- evidence of paraphrase and summary of ideas rather than copied or plagiarized text
- evidence of personally composed definitions rather than direct quoting
- use of own words for headings and subheadings
- providing a structure (that is different from others)
- appropriate use of technical vocabulary
- evidence of synthesis of different ideas
- evidence of adoption of a position or making of a judgment
- critical discussion of technical vocabulary, ideas, models and theories and research from the literature.

Reflecting views of knowledge...

A majority of all respondent said that they are happily married. However, they say the main reasons for the problems in marriage between husband and wife are illiteracy and communication. Therefore I recommend that if any people think about marriage, they should understand what is marriage and they should know how to communicate. In addition, parents should chose husbands carefully for their daughters and then, if Allah is wills it, their marriages will be happier in the future.

The Value of an Academic Literacies Approach

"I feel I can change things... and I learn how can I can write many true words"
(Respondent 6, 2005)

"I learn many things like how I start to be researcher and how I can write important information".
(Respondent 3: 2005)

Implications

- Students require assignments that value their own experience rather than merely the synthesis of others' opinions
- Students require apprenticing into the processes of knowledge creation
- Students require the opportunity to examine their own attitudes as well as those of the academy critically.