

A perspective on ELICOS in an independent school

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This paper examines the relevance of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) in independent schools, and discusses how schools can develop the curriculum framework, organisational qualities and pedagogical approaches to implement English language intensive courses for overseas students (ELICOS). A variety of ELICOS institutions in the private, university and TAFE sectors offer ELICOS but few Australian schools in the independent education sector conduct their own programs. The paper offers a perspective on operating ELICOS as a TESOL service in one independent school to illustrate how it renewed its curriculum using ELICOS to prepare full-fee-paying international students for further education studies in Australia. The discussion focuses on designing curriculum for high school and foundation studies preparation and on developing an ELICOS program in the context of an independent school.

Introduction

In establishing English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Student (ELICOS) as a school-based operation, schools in the independent education sector engage in an academic enterprise involving course accreditation, business planning, program management and overseas marketing. These are pivotal to the service provision to teach English to speakers of other languages. Although there has been an increase in the number of ELICOS operations in secondary schools (National ELT Accreditation Scheme 2003-2004), there remains paucity in the literature on school-based programs and on how ELICOS is offered in schools as a service for teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). Consequently, schools continue to question how to operate ELICOS effectively in school settings and what programs adequately prepare international students for high school and further studies in Australia (Glew 2001a).

This paper originates from my professional journey in designing and implementing an ELICOS program at an independent school in Sydney. The case study school is identified by the pseudonym EastWest. In utilising a case-study approach, the paper draws on my experience as a Director of Studies (DoS) and on my research on English language education for international students (Glew 1998; Glew 1999; Glew 2001a, Glew 2001b; Glew 2004).

The paper first discusses the global context for English language education in which the case study school operates. Second, it explores the national context of ELICOS operations and discusses perspectives on the use of examinations, programs and reporting for international students. Lastly, the paper examines components of the ELICOS operation at EastWest and describes aspects of the program that are relevant to schools considering the establishment of ELICOS. By drawing on qualitative data derived from an actual ELICOS program, the paper provides insights into the implementation of ELICOS in a “real” school setting. However, given the paper’s focus, it does not examine ELICOS in other schools. Consequently, generalisations made about ELICOS would be limited to similar school settings.

Perspectives on English Language Education - A Global Perspective

The demand for English language teaching (ELT) services and products has increased in the global market (Singh 2000). During the next decade about two billion people worldwide are expected to begin learning English and some three billion people will speak English (Newsmonth 2005). Already, ELT education in Australia for full-fee-paying international students is a profitable export, paralleling trends in places such as the United Kingdom (Brown backs English boom 2005; West 1998). Singh (2000:12) argues that ‘The international market for TESOL courses is very competitive’ with some organisations marketing English language education using a brand image in order to gain a global advantage. Nevertheless, as academic and administrative enterprises (Savage 1996), ELICOS institutions that provide TESOL as a service (Walker 1998) have a responsibility toward their students who, as both customers and clients, are owed ‘a debit of satisfaction’ (Crichton 1994:8).

A National Perspective

Providing ELICOS as a TESOL service involves engaging in a dynamic global market and a ‘commercially orientated environment in which many Australian ELICOS businesses operate’ (O’Loughlin 2002:18). In 2004, ELICOS was provided by two hundred and twenty six institutions in the university, TAFE, private college and school sectors in Australia (National ELT Accreditation Scheme 2003-2004). These ELICOS operators are competitors in the ELT marketplace and ‘With the globalisation of production and markets has come the need for Australian TESOL providers to develop innovative global marketing strategies’ (Singh 2000:13). However, prior to considering innovations the paper first discusses some of the existing issues in ELICOS education involving examinations, programs and reporting.

One of the methods for promoting ELICOS is through its provision of programs that prepare international students for English language examinations and study in Australia. International students with a first language other than English (FLOTE)

(Kirkpatrick, 1994) are usually required to demonstrate a satisfactory proficiency in English for admission into post-secondary education courses. Results from examinations such as the International English Language Testing Systems (IELTS) (IDP Education Australia: IELTS Australia 2001) are used as an admission criteria by tertiary and TAFE institutions. The English proficiency requirement for international FLOTE student visas generally ranges from Academic IELTS 5.0 to 6.0 (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 2005). However, 'The cost of acquisition of English language proficiency, coupled with the now virtually compulsory International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score for entry to Australian institutions comes at a high price, and demand drives the price and the value upwards rather than otherwise' (Zeegers 2002:18).

The proliferation of programs that prepare international students for further studies in Australia has resulted in tertiary institutions and secondary schools having to determine the readiness of international students for admission based on results from a wide range of programs. 'The number of such programs is growing, the English language provision within them is diverse, and it is becoming difficult for institutions to assess their effectiveness in preparing students to study successfully' (Leask, Ciccarelli & Benzie 2003:18). Moreover, although examinations such as the IELTS have been commonly used in the entry criteria for admission to courses in foundation studies, TAFE and tertiary programs (IDP Education Australia: IELTS Australia 2001), there is uncertainty about the effectiveness of IELTS courses as they 'do not in themselves generally constitute adequate preparation for the complex academic language demands made on students in higher education' (O'Loughlin 2002:18).

Although the linguistic and academic demands of secondary school subject studies require English proficiency, international students have gained admission into high school studies without demonstrating English proficiency on tests such as the IELTS (Glew 1999; Glew 2001b). Reports from ELICOS institutions and overseas schools have been used by independent schools in determining the admission of international FLOTE students to high school (Glew 2001a). However, interpreting reports from overseas schools can be problematic. Further, the lack of common protocol in ELICOS reporting in Australia makes it difficult for schools to compare the English course results of students from different ELICOS institutions (Carroll 1995-96). In addition to these issues, even though an international student can complete an English course at an ELICOS institution in Australia, the student may still lack the English proficiency to understand discipline content in high school subjects (Glew 2001a). Consequently, on commencing at a school the student may not have the specialist language skills in English to be able to successfully meet the linguistic demands of content-based subject studies (Glew 1999; Glew 2001b).

The EastWest Experience

In preparing international students for high school studies, schools such as EastWest have moved beyond the implementation of familiar mainstream curriculum to incorporate ELICOS. However, operating National ELT Accreditation Scheme (NEAS) approved ELICOS courses in an Australian school context raises a number of questions. In particular:

- In which ways can the organisational structure of a school accommodate ELICOS?
- How does a school manage the development and delivery of ELICOS?
- What pedagogical approaches are used to implement ELICOS in a school context?

The Organisation of ELICOS at EastWest

On enrolling full-fee-paying international students at EastWest in the mid 1990s, the school initially attempted to integrate the students directly into high school classes by providing intensive English support. However, on assessing the progress of the students it became evident that their success in content-based subject studies at high school was dependent not only on a motivation to learn but also on proficiency in English (Glew 1998; Glew 1999; Glew 2001b). The student profiles for international students at EastWest contained similar characteristics concerning English proficiency examinations, ELICOS studies, and academic reports. First, the students had not demonstrated English proficiency through a recognised examination such as the IELTS. Second, the students had completed between ten and twenty weeks of high school preparation at an ELICOS institution. Third, the admission of the student into high school at EastWest was based on academic reports from overseas schools and Australian ELICOS programs with academic standards and reporting procedures that were not readily comparable. Consequently, students commenced at EastWest with vastly different abilities in English and often with a proficiency in English that was unknown prior to arriving at the school. Therefore, it became essential to establish entry criteria for high school. EastWest selected IELTS results as one of its admission criteria. For example, the school required an overall Academic IELTS Band of 5.0 for entry into the Year 11 NSW Preliminary Higher School Certificate (HSC) and the Global Assessment Certificate (GAC) foundation studies course.

Monitoring student entry into high school and intensive English withdrawal lessons is achievable with small groups of international FLOTE students. With a steady increase in the number of international students enrolling at EastWest it became necessary to organise programs for more structured intensive English studies (Glew 2001b). In 2000 the school established an ELICOS college on the existing school campus.

The ELICOS program commenced with only 14 students but by 2002 the number of students had increased to 120 (Glew 2001a). With the increase in the number of ELICOS classes for international students at EastWest the ELICOS college was relocated in 2003 to a second school campus. This facilitated the further organisation and development of international programs at EastWest with the second campus offering courses in ELICOS and foundation studies as well as student accommodation in a fully catered residential boarding house.

Managing Program Development

In order to accommodate the operation of an ELICOS institution at a school NEAS requires that 'the institution has an effective management structure' (National ELT Accreditation Scheme 2002:21). However, the management of ELICOS as a TESOL service in schools has received little attention in the literature. Walker (1998:35) argues that 'There remains a dearth of research into TESOL management in general and into TESOL service management in particular'. Therefore, on attaining accreditation as an ELICOS provider, schools such as EastWest have had to independently explore what it means to conduct ELICOS programs that incorporate appropriate management and curriculum in order to be educationally viable in a school context (Glew 2001a; Glew 2004).

To operate an accredited ELICOS program one of the key teaching and management roles is that of the Director of Studies (DoS). A DoS must be 'committed to achieving the institution's educational goals through the development, implementation and review of curriculum, the management of the educational resources and the provision of guidance to the teaching staff' (National ELT Accreditation Scheme 2002:29). As well as knowing how to manage students and staff, the DoS has to understand the processes of language learning, the practice and theory of TESOL and school organisation. At EastWest the DoS is not only involved in managing ELICOS curriculum, organising courses and promoting the program but also in working with school departments to develop study pathways for students from ELICOS into high school, foundation studies and further education in Australia.

The DoS is responsible for the 'academic management' (National ELT Accreditation Scheme 2002:29) of an ELICOS operation and is involved in a variety of administration and reporting tasks. For instance, the DoS ensures that student records, assessments, reports and attendance complies with NEAS requirements (National ELT Accreditation Scheme 2002) as well as with the national code (Department of Education, Science and Training 2002). As with all ELICOS operations, EastWest is required to provide staff 'with appropriate working conditions and inservice professional development opportunities' (National ELT Accreditation Scheme 2002:29). The DoS is responsible

not only for assisting ELICOS teachers with teaching, learning and classroom management strategies but also for organising professional development that fosters improved teaching skills, student assessment and a knowledge of TESOL.

Managing Program Delivery

In delivering ELICOS a school engages in a process of organisational and educational change. For instance, the delivery of ELICOS in a school, familiar only with the education of Australian students, would involve adjustments in administration, enrolment procedures and processing student information. State and Federal legislation on the education of international students contribute to the unique requirements of ELICOS operations (Department of Education, Science and Training 2002; Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 2005; English Australia 2005). The course of study for students enrolled in ELICOS needs to be tracked by the number of weeks and comply with a required twenty-five hours of instruction per week. Data on course length, commencement, completion, attendance and academic outcomes for each student must be monitored and ELICOS administrators need to ensure that visas, fees and course enrolments comply with the national code (Department of Education, Science and Training 2002).

The delivery of a school-based ELICOS program is influenced by the provider's understanding of how ELICOS operates in providing a TESOL service. The service characteristics of TESOL involve the learner's participation as a student and a customer in contributing to the production and consumption of the service. The teaching activity in the classroom is not unlike the production of a service with the core values of the service presented through the program delivery. Walker (1998:32) argues 'When the student (customer) is able to capitalise fully on the skills, knowledge and experience of the TESOL professional (service provider)' there is the production of the core value of the service.

Curriculum

Constructing appropriate and effective curriculum is necessary to manage an ELICOS program. For example, the ELICOS curriculum at EastWest caters for the different ability levels and language learning needs of students preparing for high school and foundation studies. The curriculum includes an English for Further Education (EFE) course for students preparing to enter non-compulsory studies in Years 11 and 12 as well as foundation studies and pre-tertiary courses. It also includes an English for high school preparation (EHSP) course for students preparing for entry into compulsory high school studies in Year 7 through to Year 10.

In order to construct and deliver effective school-based ELICOS courses both the curriculum designer and the teachers need a sound understanding of pedagogical

approaches, content matter and assessment processes for school curriculum and TESOL. As the courses incorporate the knowledge, skills and pedagogy of content-based subjects, the curriculum designer and teachers need to draw on a cross-curriculum knowledge involving disciplines such as Science, Mathematics, Technology and Computing, Geography, History and Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (Glew 2001a).

In designing the courses at EastWest the interaction model of curriculum design has been employed (Brady 1992). This model links the content, objectives, learning outcomes, and evaluation to allow flexible movement between curriculum components and to create an interactive framework for ELICOS curriculum. In meeting the language learning needs of the students the curriculum incorporates the approach of a text-based syllabus design that focuses on systematic variations in language (Feez 1999). Further, the delivery of curriculum content utilizes a genre-based approach that involves text deconstruction and the interpretation of texts as they connect to social contexts (Mackay 1995).

Pedagogy

The pedagogy of ELICOS is complex as it operates in the midst of cultural diversity with teachers and students from different ethnic backgrounds and languages interacting in a classroom context. As teaching and learning processes vary for different cultures, this can complicate the work of school-based ELICOS. In a school context, for instance, the pedagogy for high school subjects is not readily applicable to teaching and learning in ESL (Glew 1998). Therefore, ELICOS work occurs in the context of difference and other perplexities of cultural values. These complexities 'can be due to different social positions of teachers and students in the two societies, to differences in the relevance of the curriculum for the two societies, to differences in profiles of cognitive abilities between the populations of the two societies, or to differences in expected teacher/student and student/student interaction' (Hofstede 1986:301).

Nevertheless, pedagogy is especially important in ELICOS. Learning English in a classroom context involves not only language instruction but also the development of the learner's communicative skills through the work of negotiation and feedback (Glew 1998; Lyster & Ranta 1997). The production of language by the students and the use of feedback from teachers to the students are important. ELICOS instruction needs to include pedagogical strategies that utilise the visual support of diagrams, illustrations and pictures. The existing knowledge of students needs to be activated through activities and questions that assist them to express their understanding of topics and prepares them to learn new information. The pedagogical strategies need to draw the attention of the learner to the form and function of the language in order to

learn the meaning and grammatical structures of the language (Doughty & Williams 1998). Moreover, in a school-based program the students need opportunities in the classroom to engage in activities that promote communicative language learning as well as focus on the acquisition of English for the content-based knowledge of school subjects (Glew 1998).

There is a need for further research on curriculum and pedagogical approaches for ELICOS in schools. This research may involve gathering responses from students 'to questions about the quality or value of the coursework in the program, about the interactive experience between faculty and students and among the students, and about the continued usefulness of the program in satisfying market needs' (Sink 1991:199). The research needs to take into account the perplexities of the different cultural values of students in ELICOS settings, as these can be problematic for research work when relying on the participation of students (Zeegers 2002). For instance, the issue of 'approval tendency' (Oliver & Ratcliff 1998:48) can influence student responses due to the relationship between students and teachers and result in students only offering information that they consider meets with teacher approval.

CONCLUSION

This paper addresses a notable gap in the literature on TESOL education in schools involving ELICOS as a program for full-fee-paying international students. It discusses issues that arise for Australian schools in determining the English proficiency of international students for high school entry and the readiness of the students to undertake secondary school courses that involve content-based subject studies. By drawing on the experience of conducting ELICOS at EastWest as a case study school, the paper offers some insights on how ELICOS is managed and delivered as a program in a school and highlights some of the processes involved in complying with various accreditation requirements. In examining ELICOS at EastWest the paper reveals a need for further research into ELICOS in schools and for more in-depth investigation on the delivery of ELICOS as a school-based program. The research needs to consider both a global and a national perspective on ELICOS for schools and to further address the issues of English proficiency testing, preparation courses for high school and protocol in ELICOS reporting. Further discussion is also called for on the development of ELICOS curriculum for schools and the pedagogical approaches involved in implementing school-based programs.

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