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PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPACT OF EMBEDDED IN-SESSIONAL EAP: LOOKING BEYOND STUDENT PERFORMANCE TO STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Abstract

Embedding in-sessional provision within disciplines is increasingly being recognised as the most effective method of developing students' academic language and literacy. Impact studies in this area have mainly focused on academic performance, and there is limited research into the impacts on the overall student experience, and limited differentiation between home and international students. This study aims to investigate the impact of embedded in-sessional provision on the student experience in the School of Food Science and Nutrition at the University of Leeds, on both international and home students, to extend impact research in this area. Through a series of anonymous questionnaires and focus groups across an academic year, students reported positive impacts in three areas: academic impact in both academic language and literacy and assessment literacy, sense of belonging, and emotion in enjoyment and confidence. Between home and international students, subtle differences were noted only in the area of academic impact. It is argued that embedded in-sessional provision should be open to all students, and practitioners should take a holistic approach, with sense of belonging and emotion both feeding into and supporting academic performance.

Key words

EAP, in-sessional, student experience, academic performance, sense of belonging, emotion.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, there has been a growing interest in embedded in-sessional provision within English for Academic Purposes (EAP), with it being viewed as the most effective method of developing students' academic language (Goldsmith et al., 2022). This is especially important as ensuring students have the ability to meet the academic language and literacy (ALL) requirements of their academic programme is a challenge that many universities are facing (Edwards et al., 2021). Due to this growing interest, there has been an increase in research evaluating the impact of embedded in-sessional provision, in line with the move towards impact scholarship in language education (Ding, 2016), and findings have demonstrated a positive correlation between embedded in-sessional provision and academic performance (e.g., Goldsmith et al., 2022; Storch & Tapper, 2009). However, there are limited studies looking at the impact of this provision on the overall student experience and, furthermore, studies tend not to differentiate between the voices of home and international students (O'Neill et al., 2022).

At the University of Leeds (UoL), in-sessional provision is embedded across seven faculties, within a range of schools, with EAP lecturers working closely with content lecturers on the ALL of a particular discipline and adhering to the aims and principles of UoL provision (University of Leeds, 2024a). This paper is part of a larger UoL Language Centre project (e.g, Hulme & Evans, 2025) to evaluate and measure the impact of this embedded in-sessional provision, taking into account a range of perspectives of those involved. This particular study aims to investigate both home and international student perceptions of the impact of embedded in-sessional provision, with the objective of going beyond academic performance and extending impact research in this area. Through this, it will also investigate whether one of the principles at UoL, which states that EAP provision "is holistic and embodied, acknowledging cognitive, emotional and social factors of learning" (University of Leeds, 2024a), is being met.

To achieve this aim, the paper will discuss previous research in the areas of embedded in-sessional provision and student experience, before outlining the context of the study. The methodology will be presented, followed by key findings from the results being discussed and suggestions for embedded in-sessional provision provided.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Defining embedded in-sessional provision

There is no single definition of embedded in-sessional provision; instead a number of models have been proposed. One, that of Jones et al. (2001 as cited in Maldoni &

Lear, 2016), defines in-sessional provision along a continuum – adjunct, integrated and embedded – where adjunct provision is provided outside the discipline, integrated provision is taught by EAP providers working collaboratively with subject academics, and embedded provision is designed collaboratively but taught by the subject academics. A second example, Murray (2022), follows a similar model termed 'hard and soft', where hard embedding is the delivery of the ALL of the discipline by the content lecturers, and soft is the teaching of ALL by EAP lecturers, aligning the delivery to the curriculum and, therefore, responding to the ALL needs of the students at particular points throughout the year. A third model, and the one most appropriate to this study, is that by Dudley-Evans (2001), which categorises provision into three levels: cooperation, collaboration and team teaching. Cooperation describes non-discipline specific in-sessional, collaboration discipline-specific adjunct classes designed in collaboration with subject academics, and team teaching is fully embedded provision, co-taught by EAP lecturers and subject academics. These differing models demonstrate the lack of a standardised framework across the sector, often due to in-sessional being context specific and influenced by the needs of the student cohort alongside the nature of their disciplines. However, although practices may differ, it is generally agreed that embedded in-sessional provision is seen as best practice (Bond, 2020; Tibbetts & Chapman, 2023).

This view is due to a number of recognised benefits, which are centered on motivation and socialisation to the discipline. It has been suggested that embedded in-sessional provision is more motivating than adjunct provision, as it is contextualised (Goldsmith et al., 2022) and connected to programme goals (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001), thereby enabling students to see the relevance of the provision and make connections (Tibbetts & Chapman, 2023). Furthermore, Edwards et al. (2021) claim that embedding academic language development not only within the discipline, but also within subject and assessment specific discourse, is when it is most successful. When tailored to assessment specific discourse, it can help provision to be seen as appropriate for all students, regardless of L1, rather than as remedial (Bassett & Macnaught, 2024), thereby increasing motivation.

From a systemic functional linguistics (SFL) angle, socialisation is also a key benefit of embedded in-sessional provision, with the argument that those with effective and appropriate use of language within a discipline are able to participate and socialise within that discourse community (Murrey & Muller, 2018). This is also an argument for making embedded in-sessional open to all, rather than just targeting international students, as all students need to master, and may not be familiar with, the practices of their discipline (Murray, 2022). SFL would argue that all students require the ability to make meaning, as how this is made differs from discipline to discipline (Bassett & Macnaught, 2024), although it is important to note that Academic Literacies would argue that it should be the discourses of the academy, rather than the students, that are transforming, in line with student experiences and identities (Coffin & Donohue, 2012).

2.2. In-sessional impact studies

As mentioned previously, impact studies are increasing in language education. This is often attributed to an increased demand by institutions for impact to be both documented and measured (Ding, 2016) in order to provide accountability to stakeholders, to improve programme effectiveness (Newcomer et al., 2010), and to aid with understanding student motivation (Fouché et al., 2016). Many of the embedded in-sessional impact studies are discussed in Bassett and Macnaught's (2024) systematic review of 20 papers, which included a mix of both qualitative and quantitative research. The majority focused on student and tutor perceptions of the impact on academic performance, reflective of impact studies in this area. Studies have also analysed student work as an indicator of impact. For instance, Wingate et al. (2011) evaluated the impact of embedded writing instruction with Applied Linguistics first-year undergraduates, using questionnaires, interviews, text analysis of the students' writing and feedback comments, and notes on classroom interactions. Initial findings were that the provision was seen to be useful. Storch and Tapper (2009) evaluated the impact of a credit-bearing in-sessional module on postgraduate writing, through an analysis of in-class writing, which demonstrated an improvement throughout the term.

As seen, impact studies tend to focus on academic performance, rather than the student experience as a whole. Although the concept of 'student experience' incorporates academic learning and performance, it extends beyond this, being defined by Jones (2017, p. 1041) as "a complex series of interactions between a student and the various component parts of their environment which can result in student learning," both academic and personal. Bronfenbrenner (1999) claims that this learning is a by-product of these interactions, which become progressively more complex. Under the umbrella of student experience sits student belonging and emotion, areas underexplored when looking at the impact of embedded in-sessional provision.

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2.3. The student experience

2.3.1. Belonging

Sense of belonging, students' feelings of being accepted, included by and connected to their institutions (Goodenow & Grady, 1993) is increasingly being recognised as an important element of higher education. Peddler et al. (2022) note a correlation between sense of belonging, and student motivation, academic engagement and self-confidence, and Ahn and Davis (2020, p. 622) build on this, claiming sense of belonging also has a positive impact on social acceptance and recognition, and "social and psychological functioning." This social acceptance can then influence both academic progression and achievement (Jones, 2017). Jones (2017) also argues that

there is an increased risk of students withdrawing from programmes where sense of belonging is limited, due to lack of identification, and therefore interaction, with university life, and highlights the importance of belonging on both emotional wellbeing and social learning.

The literature discusses a number of approaches to increase sense of belonging. Van Gijn-Grosvenor and Huisman (2020) focus on the importance of interactions and interpersonal relationships with both staff and peers, with an increased significance for international students, who place a higher importance on peer networks due to being away from friends and family. It has also been argued that making friends is regarded as one of the most important aims of students at university, providing support academically, emotionally and socially (Wilcox et al., 2005). Friendships and social connections are often viewed as being adjacent to learning. However, Felton and Lambert (2020 as cited in Goldsmith et al., 2022) argue that these connections are central to engagement, due to feeling a connection to staff and peers and, therefore, belonging, with Jones (2017) claiming that these relationships can influence both students' academic and personal development.

Sense of belonging is seen as a key component of in-sessional provision. Goldsmith et al. (2022, p. 12) argue that in-sessional provision is about "making connections, building relationships, engaging with others." There is also a noted correlation between sense of belonging and language development. Edwards et al. (2021) and Felton and Lambert (2020 as cited in Goldsmith et al., 2022) claim that a sense of belonging can enhance a student's academic language and literacies, due to increased self-confidence and being a member of a community, and vice versa, with stronger language skills enabling students to strengthen their connections.

2.3.2. The role of emotion

From a sociocultural perspective, emotion is as important as cognition in the learning process, due to the impact on areas such as attention, memory, self-confidence and agency (Peddler et al., 2022), as well as encouraging risk-taking and curiosity in learning and promoting a willingness to interact (Richards, 2022). Student emotions can include feelings about themselves, their tutors and other students. Pekrun and Linnenbrink-Garcia (2014) propose two dimensions of emotion in education: *valence*, the positive and negative states, and *activation*, physiologically activating and deactivating states. These two dimensions intertwine to create a 2 x 2 taxonomy where emotions fall into one of four categories: positive and activating, positive and deactivating, negative and activating and negative and deactivating, thereby influencing how students learn and engage.

Academic enjoyment, a positive and activating emotion, is one area which can be enhanced when students see an activity as valuable, with academic effort and motivation being seen to be strengthened with this enjoyment (Peddler et al., 2022). Dewaele et al. (2017) found a negative correlation between enjoyment and anxiety, and a positive correlation with achievement, highlighting the importance of a positive

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emotional atmosphere in the classroom on learning. They suggest a positive atmosphere both among students and between students and tutors can support developments in students' second language. Richards (2022) adds to this, arguing that a positive environment reduces stress and increases engagement, thereby creating an optimal state for learning. This is important as Ahn and Davis (2020) note a connection between student success and retention, and engagement. It is important to recognise, however, that positive emotions unrelated to classroom tasks, such as relaxation, can both reduce enjoyment and distract students' attention (Pekrun, 2014).

In the past decade, there has been an increase in the recognition of the impact of positive emotions on second language acquisition, with a focus on creativity, interest and motivation (Shao et al., 2019). Goldsmith et al. (2022) highlight the importance of emotion in language teaching, with Peddler et al. (2022) discussing the necessity to focus on both cognition and emotion in language development, enabling students to enter the discourse community of their discipline.

3. THE STUDY

3.1. Context

This study focuses on student perceptions of the impact of embedded in-sessional provision, in the form of collaboration (Dudley-Evans, 2001) in the School of Food Science and Nutrition (FSN) across an academic year. Initially embedded in FSN in 2018 for six hours per week of contact, the provision has grown to four days per week in semester one and two days per week in semester two. The provision includes weekly workshops of 1.5 hours, one for each of the five MSc programmes, weekly language clinics and one-to-one bookable appointments. It is open to all taught postgraduate students, regardless of L1, a decision made due to the recognition that all students may need support socialising into their particular discipline (Murray, 2022) and that home students often share similar characteristics, in terms of preparation for Master's study, as international students (Maldoni & Lear, 2016). This is also in line with the principle at UoL that provision is "available to all students and values the diverse nature of the student cohort and works to be inclusive of all" (University of Leeds, 2024a). The workshops are compulsory for the first five weeks of semester one, as students work towards a written formative assessment, and then become optional for the remainder of the year, capped at 25 students per MSc programme.

Adhering to the EAP principles (University of Leeds, 2024a), the syllabus is designed in collaboration with the FSN Director of Student Education, the MSc programme leads and the students, and is flexible, with students being able to request changes throughout the academic year. Due to the fact that workshops are optional, the main focus is on assessment literacy, taking a genre approach, in order

to encourage students to attend, and to see the relevance to their MSc programmes (see Appendix 1 for an example syllabus). As Edwards et al. (2021) note, there is a link between taking a genre approach and students' motivation and engagement, especially in writing, and Wingate (2018, p. 74) argues for a genre analysis approach, discussing the many benefits, including understanding "not only the linguistic and rhetorical features of texts but also their social function and communicative purpose." The materials are written based on the assignment briefs, core disciplinary texts and lectures from the students' MSc programmes, with communication and active learning being central.

3.2. Method

Due to the challenges involved in measuring the impact of in-sessional provision on students' academic knowledge and the number of confounding variables (Edwards et al., 2021), and to capture impacts on the student experience beyond their academic performance, it was decided to focus on student perceptions, meaning this study was qualitative. A mixed method approach was taken as this can "provide greater insight into an intervention's performance and can inform future use" (O'Neill et al., 2022, p. 39).

Students were asked to complete anonymous mid- and end of semester questionnaires (see Appendix 2) with a focus on impact, followed by end of semester focus groups, in order to explore the themes that arose from the questionnaires in more detail. Participant numbers for each data collection method are shown in Table 1. The focus groups were promoted to the whole cohort, with students volunteering to participate through Microsoft forms. The participants from the first focus group were then invited back to the second. They were held online, via Microsoft Teams, and the generated scripts were edited to ensure accurate transcription of the discussions.

Data collection method	Participants
Mid-semester 1 questionnaire	134
End of semester 1 questionnaire	46
Mid-semester 2 questionnaire	55
End of semester 2 questionnaire	54
Focus group 1 (February 2024)	12 (10 international, 2 home (5 & 11))
Focus group 2 (June 2024)	8 (6 international, 2 home (5 & 11))

Table 1. Participant numbers per data collection method

Data from both the questionnaires and the focus groups were coded inductively, to enable the data to drive the key impacts and themes, rather than any preconceived ideas of those that may be generated.

3.3. Ethical considerations

This project was granted ethical approval under the block ethics form for the larger UoL Language Centre project, evaluating and measuring the impact of this embedded in-sessional provision, FAHC 18-097. Due to the nature of the project, there were a number of ethical considerations. Firstly, as this is a study on student perceptions, rather than student learning validity needs to be considered (Fenton-Smith et al., 2018). As Bassett and Macnaught (2024) note, perception studies are often not supported by a triangulation of data, such as changes in assessment grades or an analysis of student writing. This was particularly true of this study, due to the fluctuating attendance at the workshops, and the number of group assessments in the School of FSN. The group assessments meant that if grades had been collected, improvements could not necessarily be correlated with attendance at the workshops, as numerous students were involved in the writing process. Furthermore, students who regularly attended the workshops changed in semester 2, impacting continuity in terms of questionnaire respondents and focus group attendees.

A second ethical consideration is that those who participated in the study had voluntarily chosen to attend the workshops. Continuous attendance at optional workshops suggests that students would be positive and see the value in the provision. This is connected with a commonly recognised issue with in-sessional provision that those who often need it the most tend to be those who do not attend (Edwards et al., 2021). To try to gain a more balanced view, a questionnaire (see Appendix 2) was sent out to the students who did not attend and received 22 responses. The most common reasons were linked to feeling that they did not need the sessions, often due to English being their first language, or a lack of perceived time in keeping up with their MSc programme. The most common response, however, was due to the workshops being at 9am, which was due to the in-sessional provision being the last to be timetabled and, therefore, receiving the only available time slots, another common issue with in-sessional provision.

As the study focused on students that attended, another ethical consideration was that of power and dependency. There was no assessment, due to this being optional provision, meaning the power imbalance was not related to academic success, but a number of students may have felt dependency due to the support and development in their academic language and understanding and, therefore, felt a need to participate in the study. To alleviate this, the project was explained in person in the workshops, and students were provided with the participant information sheet in advance of signing up to the project. There was also an opportunity for any interested participants to have a one-to-one conversation about any questions they may have had.

Finally, the focus groups were small, with only thirteen participants out of a possible 263 students. Therefore, it is important to recognise that the findings cannot be generalised to all students in the 23/24 cohort.

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4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From analysis of the questionnaire responses and focus groups, three clear themes emerged, adding to and going beyond academic performance to other areas of the student experience. These were: (1) academic impact, (2) sense of belonging, and (3) emotion.

4.1. Academic impact

Within the theme of academic impact, students reported on three areas: improvements in their ALL and assessment literacy, and an alignment with their MSc.

4.1.1. Improvement in ALL

One of the main aims of embedded in-sessional provision at UoL is "to enable students to develop their ability to achieve the 'appropriate arrangement of both content information and language in order to create extended spoken or written discourse'" (Bruce, 2008 as cited in University of Leeds, 2024a). The aim here was to focus on the ALL of FSN and it was, therefore, positive that students reported this as an impact.

Students reported noticing improvements in all areas of their ALL. In the end of year survey of 54 students, 98% reported an improvement in their academic language, 96% in their reading and writing, 94% in their listening and 91% in their speaking (see Appendix 3). These findings correlate with those from the focus groups, with the most reported impacts being on their language, reading and writing (examples 1-4):

(1) "I think for Master's like ours, what you need most be communication skills...and these workshops [...] focus on that. So we get these skills from the workshop and then we are able to fit it into our modules." (Participant 2)[1]

(2) "It has helped me gain many insights on reading and writing and I feel like my writing skills have greatly improved after attending these workshops." (Participant 3)

(3) "It makes me feel much more confident in my ability to write and get something started because I've been given the opportunity to practice it and get feedback." (Participant 11)

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[1] Student responses obtained through a focus group are marked "Participant 1-13", while those obtained from a questionnaire are marked "Anonymous".

(4) "I've been able to learn a lot of things, including grammar, which I thought I was confident in but really not because writing a scientific paper, it's different from writing a story." (Participant 12)

Academic skills were also discussed, including structure (example 5), critical thinking (example 6) and referencing (examples 7 and 8):

(5) "You went through all the processes from abstracts through the proposal development. When I give my proposal to my supervisor, he was very much impressed about how we've been able to summarise things." (Participant 1)

(6) "Fill those critical skills and other knowledge gaps that maybe a normal module cannot cover." (Participant 3)

(7) "I've developed a lot through referencing, how to structure a paragraph, communication skills." (Participant 4)

(8) "Before the workshop, I was confused about how to write assignments, how to do referencing and after this I am clear about everything and I am confident enough to write one." (Anonymous)

These findings support claims by Goldsmith et al. (2022) that the most effective method of developing students' disciplinary ALL is through embedded in-sessional provision, and by Sloan and Porter (2010) who state that best practice is in-sessional provision which is contextualised, embedded and mapped. They also support findings in previous research, such as Storch and Tapper (2009) and Murray and Muller (2018), where students reported an increase in their ALL in embedded in-sessional provision. As Tibbets and Chapman (2023) note, the main aim of in-sessional provision is linguistic development, often with a focus on developing writing skills and enabling students to navigate the academic discourse of their community. Through taking a genre approach, this provision was focused on developing students' ALL in particular types of discourse in FSN, thereby supporting them in becoming part of their discourse community.

4.1.2. Assessment literacy

As mentioned previously, the syllabus was designed with a focus on assessment literacy. Students reported feeling supported in approaching and writing their assessments, with 100% reporting an improvement in their assessment literacy (see Appendix 3). This was firstly due to understanding the task (examples 9-11):

(9) "Through these workshops, I'm able to meet the requirements of the assessments, like what you supposed to do, how we are supposed to structure it." (Participant 2)

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(10) "I have incorporated almost everything that I've learned in these sessions in all my assignments." (Participant 3)

(11) "It helps me gain more understanding about how to finish my assessment...like step by step." (Participant 7)

Students also felt that the workshops helped to improve their marks (example 12), due to both an improvement in the quality of their writing (example 13) and by looking at areas in which they could gain additional marks (example 14):

(12) "From my first semester marks, I could able to see some changes in my second semester." (Participant 6)

(13) "It was giving you that extra information to get those like extra marks that you sometimes miss out on, say with formatting or with referencing." (Participant 11)

(14) "These sessions [...] help to improve the quality of my writing, which has a significant impact on the grade." (Anonymous)

Students suggested that the workshops helped them to understand what was expected in the assignments (examples 15 and 16):

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(15) "You have paved a path to us to explain very clearly what the school is expecting from us and how we need to prepare." (Participant 6)

(16) "We have different assignment models, so I actually don't know how to do a like Leeds assignments actually, so I learned a lot." (Participant 8)

Finally, it was reported that the workshops were the only chance to get feedback before submission (examples 17 and 18):

(17) "We get a chance for a review and a feedback before submission." (Participant 2)

(18) "I think, to be honest, it's the only feedback we get, on anything. So to be able to bring some of our work in and have some interactive feedback is good." (Participant 5)

These findings are in line with the literature in this area. Bamber et al. (2017) claim that subject lecturers have expectations around assignments but often do not articulate these. Through the in-sessional workshops, students had an opportunity to focus on understanding the assignment briefs and the expectations around these. Furthermore, Hunter and Tse (2013) claim that subject lecturers often assume students have an understanding of the principles around the ALL of their discipline, as well as assessment requirements and structure, and therefore only implicitly document these in assessment instructions. The in-sessional workshops, therefore,

enabled students to gain an understanding of these principles and requirements, and provided an opportunity for discussion and examples to analyse before and during writing, thereby positively impacting their confidence in approaching the assessments.

4.1.3. Aligned to MSc throughout

In order to ensure the provision was as relevant as possible to their academic programmes, the syllabus was designed to support students throughout their MSc, ensuring that the content aligned with their assessments at particular points throughout the year. As Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) note, this increases student motivation in improving their EAP, as it is mapped to their programme goals. Students noted this as an impact (examples 19 and 20):

(19) "It was directly relevant to the things that we were studying...it was very relevant to our goals, work and our assignments." (Participant 3)

(20) "These sessions went hand in hand with whatever was happening with our modules...I think you did a great job aligning the topics very well for us because supposing we had a presentation next week, then this week we would have presentation skills sessions." (Participant 4)

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This is also supported by the literature, where Murray (2022) highlights the importance of responding to the academic literacy needs of the moment, thereby increasing motivation to attend.

4.1.4. Differences within the cohort

In the area of academic impact, the overarching themes were the same across the home and international participants, with perceived positive impacts on their ALL and assessment literacy. However, within these were subtle differences. For the two home students, improvements in ALL focused on recognising differences between academic language and everyday English (example 21), and the workshops enabling them to receive additional marks which they may not have gained previously (example 22):

(21) "It's like a different language, academic literature." (Participant 5)

(22) "I feel like these sessions can help you to understand why you might not be getting those extra marks, especially in regards to the language you use." (Participant 11)

However, it was also recognised that these impacts were additional and not attending would not have had a significantly detrimental effect (example 23):

(23) "These sessions feel like added information that's really important but if I don't have it, it's not going to be the end of the world." (Participant 11)

For the international participants, the impacts were wider, with a focus on their overall ALL developments (examples 24 and 25):

(24) "I think my language has greatly improved since the first assignment." (Participant 3)

(25) "It taught me a lot of academic words and also like how to write academic paper." (Participant 13)

With assignment literacy, the differences were also subtle. For the home students, the impact came in understanding the expectations of specific assignments within their MSc (example 26), whereas for the international students, this extended to also covering the expectations of studying at a UK university, with areas such as criticality and referencing mentioned. This was mainly due to the differences between their previous educational experiences and studying an MSc at Leeds (examples 27 and 28).

(26) "There's expectations about how it should be, but nobody really explains it to you and you just have to kind of work it out for yourself. Being able to get a bit of explanation about what's expected and what we have to do is very useful." (Participant 5)

(27) "In terms of assessments as an international student, these are not the standard or the grade at which I was doing assessments back in India." (Participant 3)

(28) "Being from a different country, we have different formats." (Participant 12)

Although slight differences emerged, it is important to note that overall, the impacts were very similar for both groups. This indicates that, regardless of L1, all students can benefit from embedded in-sessional provision that focuses on developing both ALL and assessment literacy, in line with Bassett and Macnaught (2024), with all students becoming familiar with the academic discourse of their chosen discipline. Furthermore, it supports Tibbetts and Chapman (2023, p. 141), who highlight that "enabling students to perform to their potential in their studies" is the role of in-sessional. In fact, it was noted by participants that regardless of level, the workshops were suitable for all students (example 29).

(29) "It doesn't depend on your level in terms of academic writing [...]the workshops seem to accommodate your strengths and your weaknesses." (Participant 2)

4.2. Sense of belonging

Looking at student experience, one of the most commonly reported impacts was sense of belonging. There were a number of reported factors which students claimed positively impacted this, and which were echoed by Hoffman et al. (2003), who identified perceived faculty and peer support, isolation, empathy of the faculty and classroom comfort. Many of the reported impacts, such as peer support and environment, were directly connected to the smaller class sizes, with the workshops being the only small group activity on their timetables throughout their MSc. This may have also fed back into the academic impacts, with Shima (2007) noting that interaction with others supports learning through increased participation. It may also account for the absence of any discernible difference in the impact on sense of belonging for home and international students as the workshops were the only in-class opportunity to both engage with active learning and to speak with their peers, due to the number of MSc students.

The first reported positive of the small group learning was being comfortable enough in the setting to contribute to class (examples 30 and 31):

(30) "I kind of need that interaction to be able to really cement what I've learned." (Participant 5)

(31) "I have the chance to speak out instead of a big group that I would be too embarrassed or shy to speak or answer your questions. But if there's more like small group, then I have more, I'll be more willing to answer and I will have the feeling that I really participate in the class." (Participant 7)

Students also mentioned that the small group environment enabled them to connect with their peers and to make friends (examples 32-34).

(32) "The workshop brought us all together. Able to make friends. Able to communicate freely to each other. The few friends I made, I think were all from the workshops. The normal lectures everybody's busy, so I think you creating a platform for me to make some friends." (Participant 1)

(33) "We can chat about things and we're all reminded that we're all sort of in the same boat." (Participant 11)

(34) "The course give us a lot of chance to talk with our [...] classmates, and we can interact with each other." (Participant 13)

Students highlighted the welcoming atmosphere (example 35) and approachable lecturer (examples 36 and 37) as adding to their sense of belonging, and their feelings that the workshops were inclusive.

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(35) "I personally have felt very comfortable [...] opening up and asking any doubts that I had." (Participant 4)

(36) "You have been very approachable and welcoming again, and that was really good in my experience." (Participant 3)

(37) "I love the environment and the vibe in the class because students, we talk to each other, and you are really friendly." (Participant 13)

Finally, students recognised the collaboration and co-creation when designing the syllabus (example 38), again adding to their sense of belonging due to being partners in their education. Students as partners is a key pillar at the UoL where, "We strive to build a community of trust [...]. We want you to be co-creators in your education and experience" (University of Leeds, 2024b).

(38) "It's really good that you can modify the lectures according to our list. Like if we want to talk about this, we need this help. Then you're you're willing to modify it for us." (Participant 7)

Sense of belonging is a priority for UoL, working to both enhance students' confidence and create meaningful and supportive contact between staff and students (University of Leeds, 2024c), and within the EAP provision, with one principle stating provision acknowledges "social factors of learning" (University of Leeds, 2024a). The findings of this study suggest that the in-sessional workshops enhanced the students' sense of belonging, due to peer connections, interactions, the atmosphere within the sessions and the approach of the lecturer. These are similar to the findings of San Miguel et al. (2013), who reported an improvement in students' well-being, due to both making friends with their peers in class, and the attitude of the lecturer.

Students noted that the in-sessional provision provided an opportunity to connect with and, therefore, create friendships with their peers. They also recognised the importance of connecting with their tutor in developing their sense of belonging. Van Gijn-Grosvenor and Huisman (2020) note that positive interactions with staff can lead to students feeling supported, respected and valued. This was made possible due to small groups of no more than 25 students, allowing for those connections to develop.

As Peddler et al. (2022) note, those connections and relationships are also a key part of academic language development. This was recognised by the students who noted the in-sessional provision provided opportunities for, and the confidence to, participate in peer-to-peer communication, which is often not possible in a lecture or workshop setting. Furthermore, students highlighted that this communication actually aids their learning and development, aligning with the claims of Jones (2017) that sense of belonging can lead to both academic and personal development.

4.3. Emotion

The final theme of student experience that arose was that of emotion, specifically enjoyment and confidence. A number of students commented on how the sessions added enjoyment to their academic studies (examples 39-42):

(39) "The side conversations we do have, things to lighten the mood and then after a whole stressful weekend, when you look forward to such conversations." (Participant 2)

(40) "If I can say that English grammar is fun you must be doing something right, because it isn't." (Participant 5)

(41) "This class is my favourite and the one I go to, I went to the most often." (Participant 13)

(42) "The workshops have not only been knowledgeable but at the same time it's fun and engaging. It's one of the best things I look forward to at the end of the week." (Questionnaire)

Finally, students noted how the workshops made them feel more confident in their ALL (examples 43 and 44), both for their current studies (example 45) and beyond (example 46), with 98% reporting an improvement in their confidence (see Appendix 3).

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(43) "It helped me become more confident when it comes to presentation." (Participant 1)

(44) "I feel more confident in completing the next assessment and it also helped me more to try to read English papers." (Participant 9)

(45) "[The workshops] gave me more confidence that I did actually know what I was doing." (Participant 11)

(46) "I would look at this class beyond food science, so it's giving me a lot of skills that I think will be useful going forward in terms of writing styles and presentation styles." (Participant 5)

It could be argued that the responses from students on the welcoming nature of the provision and the comfortable atmosphere fall under both sense of belonging, allowing students to feel connected to one another, their tutor and the institution, and emotion, with students feeling relaxed and comfortable in the workshops. Again, in this theme, there was no identifiable difference between the home and international participants. This could be due to the workshops focusing on supporting and increasing the students' confidence in the ALL of their discipline, and

being designed to be communicative and active, thereby increasing enjoyment when compared to the traditional lecture. In fact, this was commented on by both home (example 47) and international (example 48) students:

(47) "We have the big lectures, but then it they're just like loads of people, one big lecture screen and there's not really the opportunity with that volume of people to ask questions and interact." (Participant 5)

(48) "I think one hour is like it goes really fast instead of like other lecture, just listening to the professor. Like the time really slowed, but in this class [...] I think the time is too short." (Participant 7)

One principle of in-sessional provision at UoL is that provision acknowledges "cognitive, emotional [...] factors of learning" (University of Leeds, 2024a). Emotions are now increasingly recognised as being central to cognition (Swain, 2013) and when analysing these findings with the two dimensions of Pekrun and Linnenbrink-Garcia (2014), the emotions mentioned, enjoyment and confidence, are positive and activating, which can have a positive impact on learning. As Pekrun (2014) notes, enjoyment is a beneficial emotion for the majority of students and, these findings were in line with those of Peddler et al. (2022) who found a correlation between enjoyment, effort and motivation. Furthermore, as students reported a positive impact on both their ALL and emotion, it could be suggested that these findings correlate with those of Dewaele et al. (2017) who found a positive correlation between enjoyment and achievement.

Richards (2022) argues that through a positive environment, the brain is in an optimal state for learning. The in-sessional workshops were optional, and a number of students noted that their attendance was due to enjoyment of the sessions, which therefore influences the other areas of impact, due to them being in class in the first place. As Peddler et al. (2022) note, academic enjoyment can be enhanced when students see an activity as valuable, which was recognised by the participants, and this enjoyment can support language development.

5. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

5.1. Overview of findings

This study aimed to investigate home and international students' perceptions of the impact of embedded in-sessional provision in the School of FSN on student experience, in order to extend impact research in this area, and to investigate whether one of the UoL principles, that in-sessional provision "is holistic and embodied, acknowledging cognitive, emotional and social factors of learning" (University of Leeds, 2024a), was being met. Using questionnaires and focus groups,

reported impacts fell into three categories: academic impact, sense of belonging and emotion, indicating that the impacts of embedded in-sessional provision go beyond academic performance into academic experience, meeting the UoL principle.

Although the findings were divided into three areas of impact on the student experience, in fact these three areas are intertwined. For instance, it has been discussed how an increased sense of belonging and positive emotions such as enjoyment and a comfortable environment can have a positive impact on learning, demonstrating the importance of a holistic approach to in-sessional provision, looking beyond academic performance to other areas of the student experience. In doing so, this can lead to both academic and personal learning for the students.

Furthermore, the differences in impact on both home and international students were discussed. It was found that there were subtle differences when it came to academic impact, but no discernible variances in terms of sense of belonging or emotion. The differences in academic impact suggested that although all students perceived impacts on their ALL and their assessment literacy, these impacts were broader for the international participants. These findings support those of Murray (2022), that all students, regardless of L1 and educational background, need to understand the practices of their chosen discipline. Furthermore, they provide evidence in the discussion highlighted by Tibbetts and Chapman (2023) on whether in-sessional provision should be targeted at both home and international students, with the home students both commenting on how the workshops supported their academic language development. However, it is important to take into account the small sample size of only two home and eleven international participants.

Although this study focused on the impact of embedded in-sessional provision, the instructional variables may have played a role in these findings and may also account for no noticeable differences in the perceptions of all students in sense of belonging and emotion. The year this study was conducted was a particularly high year in terms of student numbers, with 263 students studying an MSc in FSN. This led to the majority of disciplinary teaching taking place in large lecture theatres, whereas the in-sessional workshops offered small group learning, with no more than 25 students at one time. Having small groups allowed for the provision to be tailored to those specific students and to be communicative, with a focus on active learning, in contrast to the passive nature of lectures. Although students were not asked to compare their experiences, this may have impacted their perceptions.

5.2. Recommendations

In order to continue to positively impact the student experience, there are a number of recommendations that come out of this study in terms of embedded in-sessional practice. As mentioned above, the key takeaway is to take a holistic approach to the provision, focusing on multiple areas of the student experience when designing and delivering in-sessional provision, with each identified area feeding into one another.

Furthermore, where possible within the parameters of an institution, it is recommended to embed the provision within disciplines and to make it available to all students, regardless of L1 or previous educational experiences.

Looking at the three areas individually, in terms of academic impact, reported improvements in ALL and assessment literacy were connected to a focus on assessment genres and alignment of the syllabus with the MSc, enabling students to see the relevance and to focus on their needs at particular points throughout the year. In order to achieve this, collaboration with disciplinary programme and module leads is central, with EAP practitioners having access to module materials, assignment briefs and, where possible, previous assessment exemplars. This enables in-sessional content to take a genre approach, with a focus on assessment literacy. Reports of an increase in sense of belonging were due to the students feeling confident to speak out and having an opportunity to connect and interact with the lecturer and their peers within their disciplinary community. This was as a result of having small groups, with a focus on communication and active learning, and highlights the importance of continuing to push for small groups in an environment where practitioners are often asked to do more with less. Students also appreciated the flexibility in the syllabus and the role of students as partners, being able to contribute to syllabus design and it is suggested to consult with students when planning provision where possible. Finally, it is important to acknowledge the role of emotion in embedded in-sessional provision, where emotions such as enjoyment and confidence can lead to increased motivation and academic learning, and support language acquisition. The majority of participants discussed their enjoyment levels directly correlating to their attendance at the workshops and often linked this to the more active nature of the classes when compared to their disciplinary provision. With in-sessional classes often being optional, motivation to attend has a higher importance, and this is aided by provision that is both targeted and enjoyable, with a focus on communicative and active teaching methodology.

Taking the above into consideration, future studies should focus on triangulating the data where possible, to continue to evaluate the impact of this provision on the student experience, and to work with a larger sample size, with both home and international students, to evaluate the impact of these two areas on academic performance. Furthermore, as the impacts on the student experience include both academic and personal development, with students recognising skills that go beyond academia, such as being part of a community, there is a link with educational gain. It would be useful, therefore, to investigate the educational gain derived from embedded in-sessional provision.

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Appendix 1

An example of an in-sessional syllabus - semester 1

Learning outcomes
- develop your academic language and literacies.
- enable you to identify and understand the academic requirements and expectations of your master's programme.
- help you to respond effectively to assessment requirements.
- help you to become a more autonomous learner.

These workshops will support you to:
- improve your academic language and skills.
- be able to use your language and knowledge more effectively in an academic context.
- be able to better organise your learning.
- enhance the outcomes of your Master's programme.

MSc Food Science and Nutrition – Semester 1

Week	Focus	Aims/objectives
1	Understanding assignments. Intro to the Academic Integrity summary task: finding and evaluating sources	• To map out assignments for the semester • To understand the academic integrity summary assessment • To examine how to find and evaluate sources • To choose a source for the academic integrity summary
2	Reading and note-making	• To continue to work on the academic integrity summary • To develop reading and note-making skills • To look at developing vocabulary through reading
3	The writing process and academic style	• To continue to work on the academic integrity summary • To better understand the writing process • To understand what is meant by academic writing in Food Science and Nutrition
4	Using sources in writing	• To continue to work on the academic integrity summary • To understand how to write a summary • To develop an understanding of how to use sources in writing
5	Paragraphing and cohesion/editing and proofreading	• To finalise the academic integrity summary • To develop paragraphing and cohesion in writing • To edit and proofread the final summary
6	Using GenAI and criticality	• To understand how GenAI can (and cannot) be used in academia • To gain an understanding of criticality in academia and how to apply this, both in reading and writing

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7	Writing a lab report and task feedback	• To review feedback for the academic integrity summary task and create an action plan • To better understand the lab report task for module xxx and how to write a lab report; content, structure and language
8	Writing concisely and cautiously	• To continue to develop academic style in Food Science and Nutrition • To better understand how to write concisely and cautiously
9	Presentation skills (1)	To develop and practice your presentation skills, including: • Understanding the task • Developing your understanding of an effective academic presentation • Examining and using useful phrases in presentations
10	Exams	To discuss preparing for exams: • What to revise • How to revise • Planning your time To focus on doing an exam: • Strategies in exams • Types of questions • Managing stress

Appendix 2
Questionnaires

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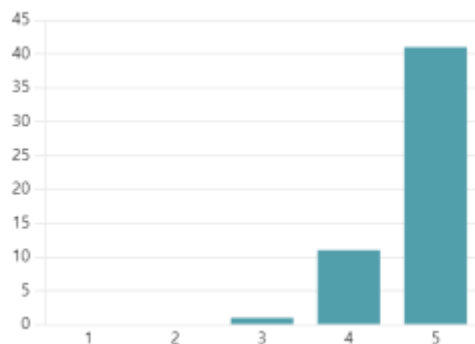Questionnaires used in the study can be accessed here: Questionnaires.docx
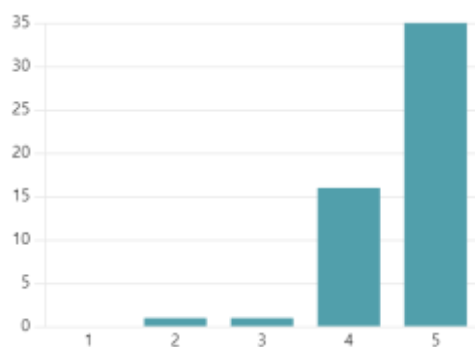
Appendix 3

Semester 2 feedback

1. On a scale of 1-5, how much have these workshops helped to improve your confidence? (1=low, 5 = high)
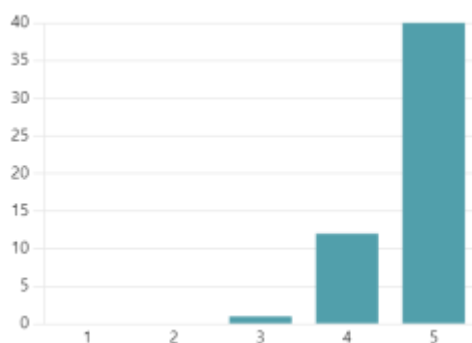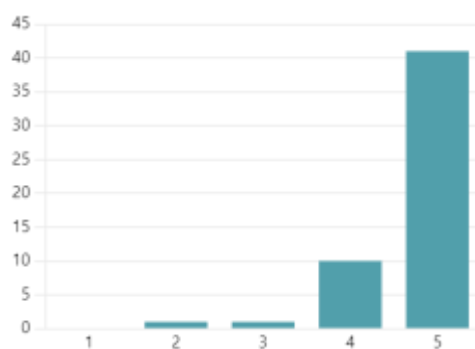
2. On a scale of 1-5, how much have these workshops helped to improve your academic language, including grammar and style? (1=low, 5 = high)
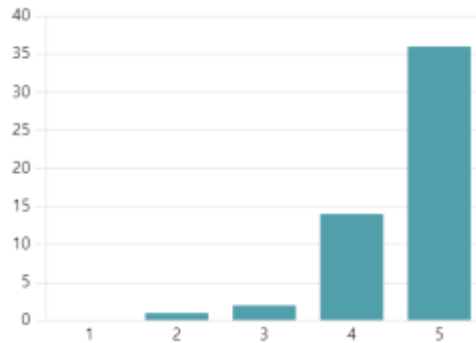

3. On a scale of 1-5, how much have these workshops helped to improve your reading skills? (1=low, 5 = high)
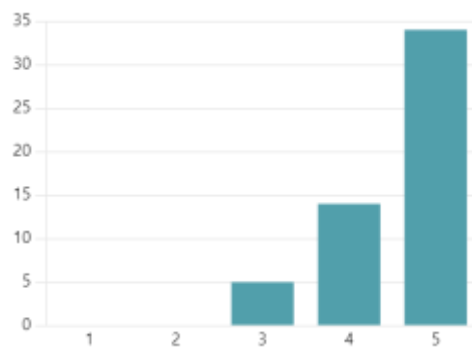
4. On a scale of 1-5, how much have these workshops helped to improve your writing skills? (1=low, 5 = high)

5. On a scale of 1-5, how much have these workshops helped to improve your listening skills? (1=low, 5 = high)

6. On a scale of 1-5, how much have these workshops helped to improve your speaking skills? (1=low, 5 = high)

7. On a scale of 1-5, how much have these workshops helped to improve your understanding of assessment requirements (assessment literacy)? (1=low, 5 = high)