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Higher Education Students' Acceptance and Attitudes toward PowerPoint Presentations as Learning Tools of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Context of North- East-Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated English for academic purposes (EAP) higher education students' attitudes toward the use of PowerPoint presentations in EAP instructions in North-East- Thailand. Explicitly, the study set out to explore the nature of factors that would encourage the EAP students to use PowerPoint presentations for EAP learning or demoralize them from such use. The researcher applied mixed-methods research design, including surveys and in-depth interviews, to address the perceptions of a sample group of EAP students (N=137).

Based on the evidence provided by the researcher, there are several potential obstacles to the use of PowerPoint technology in EAP courses. However, the findings confirmed that the EAP students perceived PowerPoint as a beneficial and useful learning tool. While EAP instruction is based on learner-centered and student-oriented approaches to pedagogy, future EAP courses must be developed based on what EAP students perceive as required for and relevant to the facilitation of their learning.

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PowerPoint presentations have been employed extensively in higher education. Educational experts suggest that there will be an increase in students' learning using tools that are sensory, visual, inductive, and active compared to devices such as lectures, which are more verbal, deductive, and passive (Trindade, Fiolhais & Almeida, 2002). Respectively, there has been a substantial emphasis on the integration of new types of courseware and a computer-based genre into EAP instruction since there is a close connection between EAP and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) (Plastina, 2003). Specifically, experts in the field of EAP have recommended including PowerPoint presentations in EAP instruction since this

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courseware would have several merits for both EAP students and instructors (Bulter-Pascoe, 2009; Cullen & Pudwill, 2002; Knight, 2012).

Bulter-Pascoe (2009) argues that PowerPoint slideshows are useful pedagogical tools to be used in ESP instruction. PowerPoint helps EAP/ESP instructors provide visual and oral explanations of specific contents and concepts for their students. Additionally, through using PowerPoint slides, EAP instructors can express critical issues and thoughts in EAP reading activities, as well as teach vocabulary and language explanations. Using online slideshows would likely create a cooperative atmosphere in the classroom, in which students and instructors would be prepared to interact efficiently. Cullen and Pudwill (2002) believe that PowerPoint presentations are useful in EAP instruction and are an appropriate substitute for handout posters. Cullen and Pudwill further make recommendations on how to prepare PowerPoint presentations for EAP courses. They point out that the real challenge for EAP instructors is to create a balance between enhancing students' communicative skills and improving students' specialized language of academic English when employing presentation tools.

Knight (2012) states those PowerPoint presentations would provide scaffolding for EAP students to learn effectively. Besides, PowerPoint presentations would increase EAP students' access to academic language and concepts as well as essential academic vocabulary. Similarly, Hsu (2006) believes that educational software and courseware tools such as PowerPoint are beneficial and useful both for EAP students and instructors. He argues that different types of courseware tools should be used in EAP instruction. Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002, p.7) points out that "the appearance of new genres would create new challenges for all educational Stakeholders, while EAP instructors should provide pedagogical responses for these challenges. Hyland and Hamp-Lyons further mention that these new genres are useful and should be used, taught, and identified in EAP courses".

2. Literature Review

Even though the overabundance of studies has been conducted on the use of PowerPoint in different educational fields, there is a paucity of empirical research done on this issue in the EAP/EFL contexts. For instance, in Malaysia, Anh (2011) reported on a study about the attitudes of EFL students toward the use of PowerPoint presentations in EFL courses. The results of the survey showed that students preferred PowerPoint presentations over other methods of lecturing. It was also reported that the students held positive attitudes toward the application of PowerPoint in EFL courses. On the efficacy of digital PowerPoint lecturing in undergraduate classrooms, Szabo and Hastings (2000), in a survey, found no significant difference in the results of a one-week mock test using three modes, i.e., a lecture in which traditional overhead slides were used, a PowerPoint lecture, and a PowerPoint lecture with lecture notes.

Moreover, two cohorts had two identical lectures using either overheads or PowerPoint. The differences in grades were caused by the level of lecture difficulty on the two mock tests. It was suggested that there is no universal pattern for the efficacy of PowerPoint lecturing. The study provided evidence for students' positive attitudes toward PowerPoint lectures.

Apple and Kikuchi (2007) investigated the use of PowerPoint project groups for EFL courses. Three methods of using PowerPoint, i.e., using pictures, creating travel plans, and using simple research projects, were adapted. The findings revealed that using PowerPoint project groups were perceived to be motivating and exciting for both EFL instructors and students. Some suggestions concerning assessment using PowerPoint project groups and the benefits of the use of these projects were presented by the researchers as well. Similarly, Kobayashi (2003) stresses the use of PowerPoint to provide peer-support for EFL students. The results of his case study on three EFL students indicated that the use of PowerPoint projects gave EFL students a kind of I shared a focus and made it easy for them to practice second language production cooperatively.

More recently, Seth, Upadhyaya, Ahmad, and Moghe (2010) investigated the perceptions of medical and dental students of the use of PowerPoint presentations. The results of both questionnaires and interviews revealed that the majority of medical students had positive attitudes toward the use of PowerPoint presentations, while dental students did not have very positive reactions. Kahraman, Çevik, and Kodan (2011) carried out another study on the application of PowerPoint presentations to educational contexts. The results presented statistically no significant difference in the attitudes of the students according to gender, but that academic units were essential indicators of differences in students' perspectives. In general, the positive reactions of the students were reported in the study.

In the EAP context, Knight (2012) assessed the attitudes of EAP students toward PowerPoint presentations in an EAP course for students of business. The results of the survey indicate that the EAP students had positive attitudes toward the use of PowerPoint. The students believed that PowerPoint presentations improved both their language and content learning. However, the use of PowerPoint was not an indicator of increasing student confidence. Furthermore, it was indicated that the EAP students' examination scores did not change as a result of using PowerPoint presentations. Janulevičienė and Kavaliauskienė (2011) explored the attitudes of EAP students toward PowerPoint presentations in EA. This study indicates that EAP students adapted positive attitudes toward the use of PowerPoint presentations, they were not skilled in using the PowerPoint software. They were not well prepared to use PowerPoint for their academic purposes.

In Thailand, there is considerable emphasis on the inclusion of EAP courses in the curricula of higher education. However, EAP courses in the North-East-Thailand are mainly based on traditional approaches to learning. Accurately, the courses rely mostly on printed textbooks and final examinations. All undergraduate engineering students are supposed to attend two English courses, including an EAP course and an EFL course. The textbooks which are used in these courses are developed and published by the Thai publication companies. e.g. (PUBAT Publication). Minimal attention has been directed to the issue of the use of technology and CALL in Thai's EAP courses.

Similarly, in the North-East-Thailand, there is only limited research on the suitability and applicability of PowerPoint to EFL/EAP courses. However, the following two studies show the significant impact of PowerPoint on higher education students' learning:

1. Tabatabaei and Makaber Bandari (2012) conducted a study on the attitudes of Iran students toward PowerPoint. A total of 60 MA students of TEFL participated in the study. The findings suggested that the use of PowerPoint had positive effects on students' class discussions and blog usage. There was no improvement noted on students' note-taking skills or class attendance by contrast. The students perceived their instructors' performance in a class using PowerPoint as average.
2. Also, Adib-Hajbagheri (2009) conducted a qualitative study on the use of PowerPoint by students of nursing. The participants perceived PowerPoint presentation as either useful or unsuitable, depending on how the software is used. They believed if PowerPoint presentations are used in line with the goals of teaching and learning, they will be beneficial. In contrast, if the technology is used to present the contents quickly and without careful preparation, perhaps using slides that are not suitable, PowerPoint might be distracting and ineffective as a teaching tool.

A critical literature review on the application of the PowerPoint technology in EAP/ESP/EFL contexts indicates that PowerPoint has the potential to be a powerful language learning and teaching tool. Besides, it appears that the majority of EAP learners and instructors hold positive attitudes toward the use of PowerPoint presentations in EAP courses. While PowerPoint can have benefits for EAP students in Thailand, only a few studies have been conducted on this issue. Moreover, the report from Office of the Education Council (2011) showed that the skills of Thai university graduates were not suitable for the

workplace and the changing of ICT organization even though the previous survey in 2008 about the use of ICT in academic from National Statistical Office (2009) found that percentage of using ICT in higher education was high compared with other academic levels. The survey also stated that only 26.9% of teachers used ICT in the classroom and used ICT just 9.6 hours/week for presenting content. Therefore, the current study conducted out to address this lack. Categorically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of EAP students toward the use of PowerPoint in EAP courses?
2. What are the perspectives of EAP students on the obstacles to the use of PowerPoint in EAP courses?
3. What are the preferences of EAP students for the structure and format of PowerPoint slides used in EAP courses?

3. The Study

While the present study was an investigation into EAP students' perceptions on the use of PowerPoint presentations, a qualitative-quantitative mixed-methods study was deemed useful for the specific purposes of this study. Therefore, surveys and in-depth interviews were adapted as the instruments of this study. The survey utilized in this research was designed on a critical and comprehensive literature review and analysis of the applications and affordances of PowerPoint for educational and language teaching contexts. The content of the items was carefully examined by seven senior university instructors of EFL and computer sciences. The four-point Likert scale survey study comprised three sections, namely EAP students' attitudes toward the application of PowerPoint presentations in EAP courses (17 items, Cronbach Alpha=0.81), EAP students' perceptions of the obstacles to the use of PowerPoint presentations in EAP courses (8 items, Cronbach Alpha=0.87), and EAP students' preferences for the structure and format of PowerPoint in EAP courses (8 items, Cronbach Alpha=0.89). The data received from the survey were analyzed descriptively. Mean and standard deviation provided for the analysis of the responses from participants of each item of the questionnaire. The study of the survey data was carried out using the SPSS statistical software package version 16.

Besides, the study benefited from in-depth semi-structured interviews lasting 10 minutes. In the interviews, the purpose of the study was explained to students. Participation was voluntary. Seven senior university instructors of EFL and computer sciences examined the suitability of the interview questions. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English. The main themes which emerged from each interview question were coded and reported. Excerpts from students' interviews were also incorporated in the study. The following items were asked:

1. What are the benefits of PowerPoint presentations for EAP learning?
2. How often is PowerPoint presentations used in your EAP courses?
3. To what extent are you familiar with PowerPoint software?
4. What kind of PowerPoint-based facilities are available in your EAP courses?
5. What obstacles are there to the use of PowerPoint presentations in EAP courses?
6. What is your preference for the structure and format of slides of PowerPoint presentations used in EAP courses?

3.1. Sampling

The participants of this study were 137 EAP undergraduate students who took part in the survey study. Both males (53) and females (84) were included in the sample. Participants' average age was 21. The Participants had either taken an EAP course prior to the study or were taking one at the time of data collection. According to students' reports in questionnaires, the majority (56.73%) of participants were at

an elementary level of general English proficiency (GEP). A total of 35.8% of participants were at pre-intermediate or intermediate levels, and 7.47% were at an advanced level of proficiency. Also, 93.19% of students had worked with the PowerPoint software tool previously, while 6.81% had not used the software themselves but were exposed to PowerPoint presentations in classes, conferences, etc. The sample group was selected from three Thai universities in the North-East-Thailand. Also, a sample group of 37 EAP undergraduates of software engineering participated in the interviews.

4. Findings

4.1 The Students' Attitudes Toward the Application of Powerpoint Presentations in EAP Courses

4.1.1 The Questionnaire Data

A mean score of more than 2.5 shows that the EAP students have a positive perception of the given item regarding each of the PowerPoint presentation features that were investigated. Accordingly, EAP students perceived PowerPoint presentations useful in terms of user-friendliness, attractiveness, variety, the use of Internet sources in PowerPoint presentations, time and cost efficiency, the possibility of sending PowerPoint files via emails, easy access, and promotion in students' participation and motivation (Table 1).

Table 1.

Attitudes of EAP Students Toward the Application of PowerPoint in EAP Courses

Items	Mean	SD
Using PowerPoint is attractive	2.73	0.64
PowerPoint is rich in terms of services available	2.95	1.01
Internet materials can be used in PowerPoint presentations. It is easy to take notes	2.67	0.89
PowerPoint presentations is cost-effective	2.54	1.03
Working with the PowerPoint software is time-saving	2.97	0.78
PowerPoint files are transferable via e-mail	3	0.8
It is possible to use audio-visual features in PowerPoint presentations	2.95	0.54
The PowerPoint software is accessible	2.74	1.03
It is easy to use and create PowerPoint slides	2.83	1.02
The use of PowerPoint enhances my participation in the classroom	2.17	0.83
The use of PowerPoint enhances my motivation	2.90	0.96
PowerPoint presentations can be used for different class activities	3.14	0.91
Written mistakes will be reduced compared to using the board	2.01	1.07
PowerPoint slides are easily downloadable from websites	2.26	0.73
PowerPoint files are convertible to HTML webpages	2.26	0.96
The PowerPoint software is user-friendly	1.92	0.90

Likert scales: 1. strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Agree, 4. strongly agree

4.1.2 The Interview Data

In the interviews, several benefits of PowerPoint presentations, including ease of creation, easy access to the PowerPoint software, user-friendliness of PowerPoint, and attractiveness of PowerPoint, were reported. Some students further believed that the use of PowerPoint presentations in EAP courses will improve their competence in using language skills such as speaking and listening. Some students stated that the use of multimedia in PowerPoint presentations will facilitate their academic English

learning. Most students perceived the use of PowerPoint in EAP courses as useful and beneficial for their studies. This emerges clearly from the statements of EAP students below:

Well, PowerPoint presentations are very useful if they are presented in English. In EAP courses, PowerPoint presentations will improve our English. (Student 13) I believe that we will learn easier when PowerPoint presentations are used. We can see the kind of academic vocabulary that we need. The other benefit is that we can listen and speak English in our presentations. (Student 46)

Different versions of PowerPoint are available for all EAP students, and all of us can use them in our learning. I guess PowerPoint can help us learn academic words and topics easily. (Student 23)

I think creating PowerPoint slides is very easy, and everyone can create slides even if he/she create one for the first time. You can also copy and paste different texts to your PowerPoint slides, and this makes the job really fast and easy. Creating slides for learning academic English is a good idea because we learn easier when English lessons are taught via PowerPoint slides. (Student 26)

I have used PowerPoint software, but I have mostly created slides in Thai. In my view, both learning and teaching will be improved if PowerPoint presentations are used in EAP and EFL classes. (Student 48)

As far as I am concerned, PowerPoint is a software tool that can be found on every computer nowadays. This is the most essential benefit of PowerPoint; I mean easy access to the software. (Student 50)

The most important benefit is that EAP students be prepared for conferences in which English should be spoken when presenting PowerPoint slides. As a result, PowerPoint presentations can help EAP students improve their speaking and listening skills at the same time. (Student 19)

In PowerPoint slides, we can use educational videos, pictures, and audio files. The possibility of using videos, texts, and audios at the same time is beneficial for learning different academic concepts in English. (Student 44)

4.2. Students' Perceptions of the Obstacles to the Use Of Powerpoint Presentations in EAP Courses

4.2.1 The questionnaire Data

As is shown in Table 2, EAP students expressed a couple of limitations about the use of PowerPoint presentations. There was general agreement that the use of PowerPoint has some limitations, including students' and instructors' inexperience of the PowerPoint software, lack of PowerPoint-based facilities at universities, and low resolution of the projector output.

Table 2.
The EAP students' perceptions of the barriers to the use of PowerPoint

Items	Mean	SD
I am unable to use the PowerPoint software	3.42	0.86
There is a lack of computers and video projectors at universities to use PowerPoint	3.35	0.95
EAP instructors are inexperienced in working with PowerPoint	3.29	0.76
It is hard to work with the PowerPoint software	2.95	1
The PowerPoint software is limited	2.08	0.93
There is a possibility of errors occurring while using the software	2.05	1.2
Buying the PowerPoint software is costly	1.84	0.88

PowerPoint slides or video projector output has low resolution	2.31	1.1
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Likert scales: 1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Agree, 4. Strongly agree

4.2.2 The interview data

The EAP students mentioned that PowerPoint presentations are not used by the majority of instructors or students in EAP courses. The majority of EAP students asserted that they use PowerPoint even though their familiarity with it is limited. The majority of the students expressed their need for training on different aspects of PowerPoint. Besides, the students believed that their instructors lack the necessary skills to use it. Lack of technology facilities, including PowerPoint, at universities, was reported as a severe challenge for the majority of participants. These points were apparent in students' statements:

There are not video projectors in classrooms. Most of the projectors are usually out of order. There is a need to provide facilities to enable us to use PowerPoint for our EAP learning. (Student 43)

I think most of these video projectors do not have high qualities. We need to have updated technology in our EAP classrooms. (Student 32)

The most crucial problem is that we are not encouraged or forced to create PowerPoint presentations for our EAP and other academic courses. Personally, if I am inspired by my instructors to use the software, I will use it in my learning experiences. (Student 15)

I am not quite sure if all of our instructors can use PowerPoint software themselves. How do you expect that we, as students, should use them in our EAP courses? (Student 4)

I hardly know how to use PowerPoint software. I have used it, but not for my academic purposes, I think I need to know more about the details of the software, and I need to know how to create effective and academic PowerPoint slides and presentations. (Student 27)

Perhaps we need to know more about PowerPoint technology and its application in EAP courses. I think we need specific skills to use PowerPoint for EAP learning. (Student 39)

Both instructors and students must learn about the unique features of the PowerPoint Technology. Without an in-depth knowledge about the services of the software, the instructors and students of EAP cannot use software efficiently and suitably. (Student 33)

4.3 EAP students' Preferences for the Structure and Format of Powerpoint Slides Used in EAP Courses

4.3.1 The questionnaire Data

Table 3 depicts that the EAP students preferred using pictorial, video, and audio features in PowerPoint presentations, bright backgrounds, addresses of websites, and various font colors in PowerPoint slides.

Table 3.

EAP Students' Preference for the Structure and Format of Powerpoint Slides

Items	Mean	SD
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Using images in PowerPoint presentations	3.05	1.07
Using audio features in PowerPoint presentations	3.23	0.87
Using single-colored fonts in PowerPoint presentations	2.96	1.01
Including video slides in PowerPoint presentations	2.21	0.71
Using dark backgrounds for slides	2.18	1
Using bright backgrounds for slides	3.11	0.66
Using the addresses of websites in PowerPoint presentations	3.19	0.86
Using various font colors in PowerPoint presentations	3.34	0.75

Likert scales: 1. Do not prefer, 2. Rather prefer, 3. Prefer, 4. strongly prefer

4.3.2 The Interview Data

The findings revealed that the EAP students preferred the inclusion of materials and resources from the Internet in PowerPoint slides and presentations. The majority of students asserted that if audio files are included in PowerPoint slides, they will have more opportunities to improve their academic listening skills. As was pointed out in the questionnaire section, a large number of participants preferred the inclusion of multimedia features in PowerPoint presentations. The participants also stated that they preferred English presentations and slides with short texts included in each slide. These points were apparent in students' statements:

I like slides that have been created by the use of videos and audio files. The use of multimedia will make the slides more appropriate. (Student 41)

PowerPoint slides with long texts are really dull for me. Short texts should be used in different slides of PowerPoint presentations. (Student 27)

Since our English proficiency is not that high, it's challenging to follow presentations that are full of hard vocabulary and long texts. I suppose short and simplified texts are better to be included in the slides. (Student 31)

Many excellent slides and materials can be downloaded from the Internet and be included in each slide. (Student 11)

5. Discussion

To reports from findings of this study, it was mentioned that several key findings might help EAP providers to identify the technological needs of their EAP learners in Thailand and other parts of the world. The research appears to have illustrated that the EAP students considered the PowerPoint technology a powerful and useful learning tool. One significant reason for this positive perception seems to be the fact that PowerPoint software is extremely user- friendly. This property of PowerPoint enables EAP students and instructors to make use of the software after receiving a short period of training on how to use the software. The participants were also of the opinion that it is easy to use essential features of PowerPoint, while they reported that they needed training on how to use its more advanced features. Easy access to the software might also be the other reason for the positive perceptions of the EAP learners on PowerPoint use. Other researchers have similarly pointed out the positive attitudes of EFL students toward the use of PowerPoint for language learning purposes (e.g., Janulevičienė & Kavaliauskienė, 2011; Knight, 2012).

As for the other merits of PowerPoint presentations for EAP learning, the EAP students referred to the increase in students' participation in in-class activities. Apple and Kikuchi (2007) and Kobayashi (2003) have also suggested that the use of PowerPoint presentations might motivate students to participate more actively in EFL classes. As EAP teaching methodology strongly supports learners' active participation in the classroom, this benefit of PowerPoint could likely help EAP course designers and instructors create a learner-centered atmosphere. PowerPoint slides would facilitate the use of Internet resources. EAP students can use the Internet to create slides and presentations both in the offline and online modes. Through using PowerPoint slides, EAP students and instructors can save significant amounts of preparation time and effort. Moreover, PowerPoint slides and tasks can be easily shared by

the use of email. Therefore, EAP students can exchange the slides on the Internet in a straightforward manner.

Also of note was that several obstacles were identified, which might impede the use of PowerPoint in EAP courses. One of these is that some EAP instructors do not use PowerPoint presentations. Instructors need training and control of course materials if curriculum developers wish to include technology in EAP courses (Murday, Ushida & Chenoweth, 2008). Even the EAP students did not have the required level of computer competence to create useful PowerPoint slides and presentations. This lack of computer competence may explain the limited use of technology in EAP instruction (Kuo, 2008).

Moreover, given that PowerPoint is not a recent innovation; it appeared that the participants attributed the lack of PowerPoint use to a lack of PowerPoint-related facilities at universities. Similar types of limitations regarding the use of technology in EFL courses have been reported by other researchers (e.g., Egbert, Paulus & Nakamichi, 2002; Lee, 2000). The existence of these obstacles would prevent EAP students and instructors from adapting computer-based and technology-enhanced approaches to teaching and learning.

According to the results of students' preferences for the structure of PowerPoint slides, the participants valued the application of Internet resources in PowerPoint presentations. EAP students also expressed their preference for using multimedia and audio-visual features in PowerPoint presentations. The students preferred bright backgrounds and the use of various font colors in PowerPoint slides. This finding confirms Fisher's (2003) statement, which stresses the efficiency of colored texts, images, and sounds used in PowerPoint presentations. This variety of multimedia in PowerPoint presentations is a crucial factor in motivating students (Lee, 2000). Wong and Cheung (2003) suggest that well-designed visuals might motivate students since they help students to be more attentive.

6. Conclusion and Implications

The findings have provided insights into the integration of technology in the EAP course design. It can be concluded that most EAP students are well aware of the possible benefits of PowerPoint presentations for their EAP learning. It is also evident that the majority of students are explicitly aware of the reasons for the use of PowerPoint presentations in EAP courses. Given that EAP instruction should be based on students' needs and purposes for learning, PowerPoint might be one of those needs that should be taken into account by EAP providers in course design. More importantly, the implementation of CALL in EAP courses can introduce significant learning opportunities for EAP students. The results seem to support the use of PowerPoint presentations in EAP courses, while the actual use and application of PowerPoint presentations should be investigated to evaluate the efficiency of the technology for EAP instruction and learning. At present, minimal attention has been directed at exploring the use of PowerPoint in EAP contexts.

To roundup and confirm the insights provided by this research, it might be appropriate to carry out further research regarding the suitability of the use of PowerPoint and other presentation tools from the perspectives of other EAP stakeholders, including course designers, instructors, and materials developers. This study provided several findings based on the reports of EAP students. The perceptions of stakeholders other than students could usefully be taken into consideration.

Next, this study suggests that PowerPoint cannot be applied in EAP courses unless the obstacles to its use are dealt with. Improvements should be made to EAP instructors' technology competence. Currently, both students and instructors do not have adequate skill levels to use different technological tools for their learning and teaching purposes. EAP providers should further equip EAP students and

teachers with technical facilities that reflect students' needs. To use PowerPoint effectively, instructors and students need to have the relevant facilities and equipment.

Lastly, the findings of this study have shed light on EAP students' preferred genre and structure of PowerPoint slides. Besides, it is recommended that similar studies should be conducted in other contexts, to evaluate the perceptions of a broader range of EAP students. Therefore, future research should be concentrated on the preferred structure of PowerPoint slides from the perspective of EAP students and instructors of different contexts and areas.

7. Declaration

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