# English for Academic Purposes in EFL Contexts: The Needs for Integrating Reading and Writing Skills

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## Abstract:

This paper aims at discussing an interesting issue about the needs for integrating reading and writing skills in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in EFL contexts. After experiencing teaching several EAP courses, I come to a conclusion that the integration of reading and writing skills is the most crucial and significant objective of teaching English at several study programs at universities in EFL contexts. In order to know how to do this, in this ideational paper, I share ideas to all readers the bases and reasons behind the ideas, the types of tasks for the integration, and some problems as well as challenges of the integration. I focus my analysis firstly on the significant roles and reasons of both skills to be integrated in accordance to some research findings. Secondly, I present readers problems and challenges in integrating reading and writing in EAP classroom. At last, this paper discusses the types of tasks the students should do in integrating these most important academic skills.

*Key words*: English for specific purposes (ESP), English for academic purposes (EAP), reading and writing skills, integrated skill.

## 1. Introduction

English for specific purposes (ESP) currently has tended to be practical sides, both English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes EOP. ESP practitioners are mostly interested in investigating needs, designing courses, preparing teaching materials, devising appropriate teaching methodologies, and looking for ESP assessment and evaluation models. Perhaps because of the early British influences on its development, it has been less broad questions of theory and ideology. Articles currently published in the ESP Journal are rarely about issues of ESP theories. ESP practice has thus remained essentially pragmatic; practitioners have interpreted their role as attempting to provide the maximum possible support in the limited time available. ESP teachers often find themselves in situations where they have to compete for timetable slots and students' attention. In these circumstances, priority has been given to discovering the expectations of the academic or professional community of which the students of the ESP class hope to become full members and then reducing that information to teachable units taught over a specified time period.

The teaching of EAP in the EFL contexts is then a very interesting topic to discuss for its specific tendency to pragmatism. Indeed, the very pragmatic nature of EAP has, I believe, led to a readiness to draw on new ideas, and review its practices where necessary. In Indonesian academic settings, EAP should have been introduced to the students of undergraduate up to postgraduate levels. However, there have been a lot of problems as well as challenges for several reasons. These include the need for large and academically oriented technical vocabularies, the background knowledge and skill on general English, a set of language learning strategies when working with difficult ideas, and ability to combine reading and writing skills to learn and display contents. A lot of English subjects offered to the university students, in reality, are not EAP or EOP but English for General Purposes (EGP) for some reasons. Mostly, their entry level of English mastery is poor. Consequently, their English teachers refuse to teach them EAP. It is strange, however, since the name of the English course is English for Chemistry, English for Legal Purposes, or English for Mathematics. By the names, they are English for

Specific Purposes (ESP) courses but in content, they are EGP. Some other English courses have been considered ESP in content, but not for academic purposes.

In this paper, I focus on my view on reading and writing integration for EAP students at universities in EFL contexts such as in Indonesia. Reading and writing integration is, in my opinion, an area that is relatively underexplored even though it is commonplace in most EFL academic contexts and very critical issues for academic success. The discussion will begin from what we have learned from researches on EFL reading/writing integration. Then, the reasons why reading and writing skills are very important for academic purposes will follow the discussion. The discussion in the third part of this paper will be about the problems and challenges of EAP in EFL contexts. The next discussion is centered on the common types of tasks the students should do in integrating the two skills. At last, I will end this paper with a synthesis of the future EAP in EFL contexts.

## 2. The Basis: Researches on Reading and Writing Integration

Some ESP researchers have carried out different researches on the important of the integration of reading and writing skills in EAP classroom following the conceptions of what EAP is by Jordan (1997). Several studies have shown that teachers, institutions, and students all recognize the importance of learning to write from reading input of various types. In the 1980s, a survey by Horowitz (1986) identified a number of commonly assigned writing tasks in academic settings, most of which were reading based. In the 1990s, surveys by Hedgcock and Atkinson (1993); Hale et al. (1996); and Rosenfeld, Leung, and Oltman (2001) highlighted academic tasks that required a combination of reading and writing skills as critical for academic success of university students.

Over the past decades, several studies have shown that students at all university levels are expected to engage in a range of common academic reading/writing tasks (Hale et al., 1996; Johns, 1997; Leki & Carson, 1997; Rosenfeld et al., 2001). These results have been verified in qualitative studies indicating that common reading/writing tasks were seen as extremely important by both university faculty and students (Spack, 1997, 2004; Zhu, 2004). The reading/writing tasks also reflect typical experiences of university teachers in a number of contexts.

It is already proved by several researchers that learning to write from textual sources (e.g., integrating complementary sources of information, interpreting conceptually difficult information) is a challenging skill that even native speaking students have to work hard to master. Using textual resources in academic writing tasks also represents a major challenge for students, especially when these tasks are not practiced sufficiently. Tasks that require reading/writing integration, such as summarizing, synthesizing information, critically responding to text input, or writing a research paper, require a great deal of practice. Unfortunately, opportunities to learn and practice reading/writing connections seldom happen in EFL settings (Hedgcock & Atkinson, 1993; Leki & Carson, 1994, 1997; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Tardy, 2009).

As an example of research on the integration of English reading and writing skills of EAP students, Kim (2001) studied the English summary writing of 70 South Korean university students who were asked to summarize two texts at different levels of reading difficulty. Students produced significantly better summaries after reading the easier text. Yu (2008) studied English summary writing among 157 Chinese university students studying EFL and found that students' summarizing abilities were significantly related to their reading proficiency levels. Similarly, Baba (2009) studied 68 Japanese university students and found that students' English summarizing abilities were related to their reading comprehension skills and also to their vocabulary knowledge. One of the consequences of limited vocabulary knowledge and comprehension skills, as well as limited practice in related writing tasks, is that EAP students at lower proficiency levels commonly copy much more than students at higher proficiency levels.

Another example was Keck (2006). She studied 153 summaries written by English L1 and L2 university students. She found that ESL students used significantly more long copied strings from the original text when they were paraphrasing. Similarly, Kim (2009) found that less proficient EAP students engaged in significantly more direct copying, whereas more proficient EAP students made much greater use of moderate revisions (see also Johns & Mayes, 1990; Petric, 2012). These studies provide empirical evidence that less skilled ESL summary writers employ direct copying as a means to complete summary writing tasks. These results suggest that students do the best they can with the skills and resources they have available to them.

One issue associated with copying while summarizing is whether direct copying of the appropriate main-idea sentences is an acceptable practice in students' native cultures. For example, Shi (2006) interviewed 46 ESL students at a Canadian university and found that the students from China, Japan, and South Korea did not practice citation and quotation skills in their own countries. Whereas the concept of plagiarism may have been understood by these students, it may not have been reinforced by their L1 literacy practices. At the same time, copying sentences during a summary activity with a text known to both the teacher and the student is not the same act as intentionally handing in someone else's work as one's own. It is likely, therefore, that many cases of direct copying while summarizing reflect difficulties in coping with the reading and writing demands of the summary task. In many cases, EAP students may not see the harm in copying sentences directly from source texts into their summaries. However, it is also clear that EAP students, as they become more skilled, engage in much less direct copying of longer sequences of words from source texts.

A recent study has examined the effects of synthesis writing instruction with EAP students. It was carried out by Zhang (2012). The goal of the research was to see if direct explicit instruction in synthesis writing, combined with extensive practice in the task over the course of a 15-week semester, would lead to significant differences in comparison with a matched group that followed a standard textbook curriculum for reading and writing instruction. He taught both an experimental and a matched control ESL reading and writing class. The experimental class emphasized explicit instruction in synthesis-paper writing, provided examples and models of synthesis writing, and practiced five cycles of the synthesis-paper process (while still following most of the reading and writing textbook curriculum). The control group followed the reading and writing curriculum defined by the course textbook. Both classes completed a series of pre- and post-course measures of their reading and writing abilities. At the end of the research, the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group on overall quality of a synthesis writing task as well as on measures of better organization in writing and better use of text information from reading resource materials.

This study demonstrates that students can be given explicit instruction in how to synthesize information from two different texts effectively. The students may be given sufficiently intense practice to greatly improve their synthesis writing skills. The students are also made more aware of the task demands and the writing processes involved in synthesis writing. The study accomplished these goals while also carrying out almost all of the tasks in the standard reading and writing course curriculum. Additional training studies on reading/writing integration need to be carried out to strengthen the argument and implications for more effective reading/writing instruction.

## 3. How to Integrate Reading and Writing in EAP Classes

Integrated reading and writing skills in EAP classroom can be realized in several important types of academic task. Some of them are taking notes from a text, summarizing text information, paraphrasing textual resources, synthesizing information from multiple text sources, comparing multiple points of view from written texts and producing a critical views, answering essay exam questions from various reading texts in comprehensive writings, writing

an extended research paper or literature reviews, and responding to assigned texts through making summary or giving critical view points.

Writing from what is being read is an effective learning strategy and an excellent means of monitoring and improving comprehension. It is, in fact, many successful persons almost always read with a pen in hand ready to mark, annotate, paraphrase, summarize, or draw map to show relationship among ideas a writer encodes through his writing. Those activities are some examples of how important is integrating reading and writing skills in academic setting.

Writing during and after reading is basically advantageous. Writing helps readers to focus attention since they force to keep their mind on the topic. Writing after reading forces readers to think for they have to decide what is the most important information and understand relationships and connections among ideas. Writing as follow-up activities of reading also facilitates learning which is supposed to be one requirement of EAP classrooms.

In this short paper, I particularly address two specific types of academic writing tasks that require integration of English reading and writing skills: summarizing and synthesizing information across textual resources. These tasks are common for university students for which they are very useful for them in writing research reports (paper, thesis, or dissertation). They represent tasks that students typically have difficulty with. Besides, they are tasks for which useful research has been carried out in EFL contexts. These reading-based academic writing tasks also raise issues of direct copying, citation use, and plagiarism as serious problems for EAP students.

Effective summarizing abilities are considered to be quite difficult for the students as they develop their EAP skills. EAP students often do not have strong enough vocabulary knowledge to paraphrase effectively. For certain students taking particular study program, comprehension of reading material in their content courses create a limitation on summary performance. Their more limited composing skills pose difficulties when producing summaries (including extensive direct copying of sentences), and their more limited opportunities for practice with summarizing lead to less effective summaries. All of these issues have been shown to affect the students' summary writing performance. This is the core reason for the EAP teachers to focus developing the students' academic skill by teaching them how to use reading and writing skills integratively.

A more demanding reading/writing task that is commonly assigned in academic settings is one that combines information from two or more texts (Hirvela, 2004). This sort of task can involve, for example, a comparison of information or ideas from multiple texts, a set of textbased solutions to address a set of text based problems, a set of texts that identify multiple aspects of an issue, or a set of texts that require the writer to form an argument The development of writing skills that allow students to use multiple textual resources to synthesize and interpret text information is a quintessential academic task. It is also a difficult writing task to master, even for many L1 students (Horning, 2010; Shanahan, 2009).

Empirical evidence for the development of synthesis writing skills among EAP students is quite limited. In a series of studies, Plakans (2008, 2009, and 2010) examined the synthesis writing of 12 ESL students in U.S. universities. In her 2009 study, she found that better students used more "mining" and global reading strategies than less skilled students did. That is, students who wrote more effectively looked for additional specific information that would be appropriate to include in their writing (a mining strategy); they also looked back over their writing and considered their goals for writing (global strategies). Plakans (2010) analyzed the same students' task representations of independent personal opinion writing and synthesis writing and found that many students did not interpret the two types of tasks differently, suggesting that synthesis writing should be explicitly taught to ESL students.

Qin (2009) carried out a study of argument writing from two source texts among 242 university EAP students in China. She found that most of the students could explain the conflicting arguments from each of the two texts, but the more skilled writers used counter arguments and rebuttals, indicating more sophisticated use of text information in their synthesis writing.

Two key longitudinal qualitative studies of university-level ESL student writers were carried out by Spack (1997) and Leki (2007). Spack followed a Japanese university student for 3 years as the student learned to write academic papers. Perhaps most interesting for the present review, the student believed that good writing in U.S. university contexts was opinion based rather than a careful interpretation of information from assigned texts, even though teachers were pleased with her more objective synthesis writing. The student thought that she wrote poor-quality papers when she merely combined information from multiple texts. This finding indicates that teachers need to be explicit about teaching writing expectations in university contexts where personal opinions are not highly valued in synthesis writing assignments across many disciplines.

Leki (2007) followed four ESL university students, from four different majors (engineering, nursing, business, and social work), through their 4 years of undergraduate studies. Although each student had a very different university experience, she found that the students' writing assignments commonly involved a combination of reading/writing skills. Leki also found that the amount of writing done varied considerably across the four majors. In some cases, surprisingly little writing was required. She also noted that the four students each experienced major problems with limited vocabulary knowledge and limited reading comprehension skills throughout their 4 years.

The main issue for synthesis writing as well as for summary writing is how students use and misuse source text information. Different terms have been used by researchers to refer to instances of misuse, including plagiarism, text borrowing, and text appropriation, even though researchers have been cautious in accusing students of plagiarism when they misused source information (Li & Casanave, 2012). Studies by Shi (2012) and Li and Casanave (2012) highlight the complexities that students encounter in learning to paraphrase and refer to textual information appropriately. It is not viable simply to accuse students of plagiarism when they misuse sources in their writing; rather, instructors need to (a) be consistent about what counts as appropriate vs. unacceptable source text use; (b) convey their expectations explicitly to students; and (c) devote more time to teaching students to quote, summarize, and paraphrase source information (Li & Casanave, 2012; Pecorari & Shaw, 2012; Petric, 2012).

It is important to note that in neither research on summary writing nor on synthesis writing have there been well controlled training studies in which one group received extensive practice in one or more reading/writing tasks while a control group followed a more standard reading and/or writing curriculum. Such controlled training studies are needed to help confirm insights from the cross-sectional studies and case studies reviewed earlier.

## 4. Problems and Challenges in the Integration

Students from different study programs mostly feel English as a difficult subject including ESP. In academic contexts, they face a wide range of difficulties related to English reading and writing which come from limited reading and writing proficiency, the challenge of reading long passages, a lack of fluency in reading and writing, limited background knowledge, and relatively little experience (and practice) integrating reading and writing skills for academic purposes. The students also face challenges with reading and writing tasks that require a large amount of inferencing.

A number of studies have sought to identify the academic reading and writing challenges faced by university students by comparing their circumstances with those of EAP students (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Paltridge & Starfield, 2013; Silva, Leki, & Carson, 1997). These explorations are synthesized by Ferris (2009), with a fairly detailed set of issues facing university students in academic settings. I list nine of those key issues (drawn from Ferris, 2009, pp. 13–41) to highlight challenges for EAP students:

- 1. Less writing practice with academic writing tasks
- 2. Weaker and widely varying reading skills in English
- 3. Limited experience with extensive reading

- 4. Limited vocabulary knowledge
- 5. Limited grammatical accuracy
- 6. Differing motivations for being in a classroom requiring reading/writing tasks
- 7. A relative lack of tacit knowledge about how texts are (should be) organized
- 8. Limited fluency in English writing
- 9. Less cultural and background knowledge of English speaking countries to draw on

All the nine factors reflect the great, and sometimes overwhelming, demands placed on the university students in academic EFL settings. Given these challenges, three key questions for EAP literacy instruction are addressed here:

- 1. What reading/writing tasks must EAP students learn to carry out successfully?
- 2. What have we learned from research on EFL reading/writing integration?
- 3. What research implications and instructional practices can we work with to provide EFL academic reading/writing support?

EAP teachers might justifiably say that teaching reading and writing together creates complexities in their classes. One of the most useful ways to address this problem is for groups of teachers to explore how to integrate reading/writing tasks with larger instructional goals. Teacher groups can begin with a set of teaching issues (such as those listed in Table 1) and prioritize which ones are most important to address. They can experiment in small ways with teaching ideas and report back to their group on difficulties and successes. Discussions among teachers, over time, are likely to lead to useful techniques and tasks that will make a difference for students who are struggling with both reading and writing.

Based on the studies reviewed earlier, we note a number of useful ideas that can lead to instructional applications. Multiple studies have highlighted the need for well-developed reading comprehension skills; students with better reading abilities performed better on writing tasks. A lot of studies have pointed out the serious limitations that students experience with academic vocabulary knowledge. For more advanced reading/writing tasks in EAP classes, students need a large academic vocabulary to be successful. Other studies have also pointed out the need for many opportunities to practice reading/writing tasks. All of the studies reviewed suggest that teachers and curricula need to focus explicit attention on reading comprehension activities with the texts that students must use in writing tasks. In addition, EAP students need many practice opportunities to become more comfortable with the expectations of EAP reading or writing tasks.

Studies have also highlighted the importance of EAP student awareness of tasks on the real and carrier contents and corresponding expectations. Thus, EAP students need to become aware of the skills needed for reading/writing tasks and how to carry out writing processes about their major effectively. EAP teachers can raise students' awareness by integrating models of writing from-sources into their instruction, reinforcing the importance of being responsible for text source information rather than relying on personal opinions. EAP teachers can also raise awareness about the importance of effective paraphrasing as they guide students in developing their writing skills about their specific content area.

In addition, awareness of relevant cultural, topical, and world background knowledge helps EAP students become successful with reading/writing tasks. In particular, students should learn to ask about cultural and topical information and reading/writing assumptions hidden in the task and texts (Johns, 1997). Teachers must show students explicitly how to integrate reading/writing tasks so that students make use of this skill in other classes. A loosely related awareness theme is the need for students to have practice with discussions about text information as a way to use information from texts on their specific content areas more effectively.

A further implication of this paper is the recognition that a number of university students in EFL contexts will have great opportunities to understand the concept of plagiarism. With EAP students, instruction on plagiarism should focus more on proactive teaching that leads students toward the correct use of source texts than on post writing punishment (Li & Casanave, 2012; Petric, 2012). Efforts should be made to work explicitly on teaching paraphrasing skills to help EAP students use text information more appropriately. Running through much of this research review is the need for students to have the time to develop their reading/writing integration skills. University students are simply not going to have the same levels of exposure to reading and writing tasks. University students need both to be taught how to engage in academic writing tasks but also to have sufficient practice to make the task a skill that can be used effectively in academic settings. The best general approach to instruction, therefore, is to begin instruction on reading/writing tasks much earlier, much more explicitly, and with much more iterative practice. Such thinking requires some creativity on the parts of teachers, curriculum developers, and materials writers.

In order to help EAP students succeed in their academic tasks, I suggest that EAP teachers: use guidances to develop students' reading strategies in order to: facilitate students' reading comprehension better, focus students' attention on text organization (rhetorical patterns) that signal main information, focus some attention on key thematic/ technical vocabularies, encourage students to engage in extensive reading, assign students to do reading journals, model and scaffold integrated reading/writing tasks, provide many opportunities for students to practice reading/writing tasks, and use peer feedback guidelines that have explicit directions.

## 5. Conclusion

This small paper has been presenting some basic ideas from some research findings to scaffold the needs for integrating reading and writing in EAP classroom. Some ideas on how to integrate both reading and writing skills have also been discussed followed by some possible problems and challenges. At the end of this paper, the implications of the integration have also been acknowledged to be the basis for further discussion.

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