
A Mixed-Methods Study on International Students' Perceptions of EAP Writing Programs-- "To What Degree It Could Help Me"

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Abstract

U.S. universities host the most international students worldwide, including those whose first language is not English. When these students do not meet their university entry requirement regarding their English proficiency, they are usually required to take English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses, including EAP writing courses. Despite the huge number of international students in the U.S., relatively few research studies have been conducted focusing on EAP writing courses for this student population. Having noticed this subgroup of underrepresented students, we used a mixed methods research design to explore the perceptions of international students in relation to their EAP writing courses and the effect they had on their subject fields. Thirty international students were recruited from a southern university in the U.S. and were asked to complete questionnaires and share their thoughts in interviews. Our findings, which drew upon students' opinions about the holistic benefits of EAP writing courses, revealed that the courses led to a noticeable improvement to their English skills and coursework. Recommendations for future EAP writing courses could contribute to curriculum and research of EAP writing programs.

Keywords: mixed methods; learning transfer; exploratory; case study

Introduction

Over a million international students have enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities since 2015 (Institute of International Education, 2018). Such a large and continually growing

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number of international students have established the United State as the first host country of overseas students for years. Many of these students who are non-native English speakers are required to take English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses, particularly, EAP writing courses, because their English language proficiency do not meet university entry requirement (Dooey, 2010). The majority of U.S. universities adopt discipline-general EAP writing courses (James, 2010), along with or before international students' academic studies. However, are those international students who have taken generic EAP writing courses well prepared for their specific academic studies? Are these students satisfied with the settings and content of their EAP writing classes? How do they apply writing skills they have learned in their EAP writing classes to their subject fields? International students' perceptions of their EAP writing classes and the effect of the classes on their subject fields need to be explored and examined as an important factor in international students' academic performance. To explore this population's perceptions of their EAP writing courses, we conducted a mixed methods case study in a southern U.S. university. This case study will provide input from international students on the current EAP writing courses; it may help fill the literature gap concerning international students' EAP writing courses in U.S. universities; it would make a significant contribution to research studies of EAP writing in general.

Literature Review

English for Specific or General Academic Purposes

English-for-general-academic-purposes (EGAP) and English-for-specific-academic-purposes (ESAP) are two sub-categories of EAP. James (2010) stated that EGAP needs far transfer and ESAP needs near transfer, in terms of learning transfer, which means "prior learning affecting new learning or performance" (Marini & Genreux, 1995, p. 2) and refers to the effect of writing in the participants' EAP writing course on their writing in other academic courses. Therefore, near transfer means "closely related contexts and performances" and far transfer means "rather different contexts and performances" (Perkins & Salomon, 1992, p. 6452). EGAP courses are intended to teach common language elements such as learning strategies and their main goal is to help learners to master necessary knowledge and skills to complete assignments in general academic contexts, whereas ESAP courses are designed to select language elements needed for a particular subject, such as biology, and their contents include genres, vocabularies, language structures, and special skills that are required for the area of study (Jordan, 1997).

James (2010) remarked that EGAP writing programs appear common in the U.S. universities, despite the mentioned challenge. James (2010)'s statement echoes with Hyland (2002)'s observation that many universities chose to move away from ESAP toward EGAP programs with respect to EAP instruction, including EAP writing.

EAP Writing Course

EAP courses focus on facilitating learners' study or research in higher education settings or academic contexts (Hyland, 2002). EAP courses include vocabulary, grammar and the four skills – reading, writing, speaking, and listening. All the courses are intended to meet the academic study needs of English language learners (ELLs).

With the development of second language writing research and the request for English as an international academic communication tool, EAP writing has become a relatively new field for English learning and teaching research (Hyland, 2002). EAP writing has been regarded as one of the most important factors for students' success (Huang, 2010). ELLs take EAP writing courses either prior to or simultaneously with their academic studies to better prepare themselves for academic success in their academic fields (James, 2010).

Empirical Studies on EAP Writing Courses

As the largest host country of international students, the U.S. has many research studies on EAP writing courses that collected evidence of post-instruction gains. Storch and Tapper (2009), for example, gathered data from 60 international students' in-class writing and questionnaires and found that EAP courses can have a positive impact on international students' writing abilities, in terms of fluency, linguistic accuracy, academic vocabulary use, cohesion and coherence, and overall structure. In 2010, Deng, Cheng, Varaprasad, and Leng compared the essays that 31 participating graduates wrote before and after taking the EAP writing course and concluded that the participating students were able to use more academic words, were more knowledgeable about "academic writing conventions and summary and analytical skills" (p. 130), and gained confidence in writing academic research papers or other assignments in their fields of study. Similarly, Terraschke and Wahid (2011) compared students who completed an EAP course with those who did not and pointed out that the participants having taken an EAP course seemed to be more confident in "dealing with writing assessments" and "have a better understanding of the demands of their course" (p. 173). Another research conducted by Crosthwaite (2016) also

found that students' academic writing skills improved evidently after a semester of EAP instruction. Essays and reports submitted to the EAP writing course were collected, as data, and showed that specific progress included "a drop in the use of first person pronouns and the mechanical use of discourse connectives, alongside an increased emphasis on nominalization and more careful, hedged, presentation of stance" (p. 166). Although these studies seem convincing by providing abundant evidence, the results are actually limited due to a relatively narrow view of positive impacts. Most of the recent research studies, as above, mainly discussed the improvements in writing and neglected other possible gains, generally recognized as learning transfer.

Learning transfer is a popular topic in research in light of the efficacy of EAP writing courses. James (2010) analyzed interview transcripts and writing samples from 11 students and confirmed that various learning outcomes did transfer from the EAP writing course to other academic courses across diverse disciplines and task types; however, frequency may vary. In a similar vein, Zarei and Rahimi (2014) also collected series of data and indicated that the transfer of learning from an EGAP writing class did occur across tasks, disciplines, and the two languages of English and Persian, though inconsistently. As for research on the impact of EAP instructor's teaching methods on students' learning transfer to other disciplines, Green (2015) used Salomon and Perkins (1989)'s hugging-bridging framework and drew the conclusion that development of instructional strategies can promote transfer of learning. Most of current studies succeeded in gathering evidence of possible learning transfers from EAP writing courses. However, they did not explore the quality of the transfer occurred. Since "the question of what makes transfer positive or appropriate can be complicated, e.g., from whose perspective?" (James, 2010, p. 200), it is worth considering the quality of learning transfer from students' perspective.

The Study

Despite various papers indicating that the EAP writing courses are effective in enhancing students' writing competence (e.g. Storch & Tapper, 2009; Deng, Cheng, Varaprasad, & Leng, 2010; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011; Crosthwaite, 2016), fewer studies exist in investigating other improvements that EAP writing courses may bring. Furthermore, current studies usually focus on collecting evidence to prove the existence of possible gains or learning transfers from EAP writing courses, without studying on their quality. According to James (2010), this assessment will be possible if the research is conducted from the perspective of students.

Having noticed these mixed results and apparent gaps, the researchers conducted a case study to explore international students' perceptions of their EAP writing courses in a U.S. university. The primary research question in this study was: What are international students' perceptions of their EAP writing courses? The secondary research questions asked from the viewpoint of these international students were: Do they feel EAP writing courses are affecting their subject fields? If so, in what aspect is such an effect exerted? And why? What are their perceptions of EAP writing courses as to their strengths and weaknesses? The primary and secondary research questions focused on "what" it was about the writing courses that "worked" and did not work (Crosthwaite, 2016).

The purpose of this study was to inform curriculum designers, instructors and program administrators of strengths and weaknesses in EAP writing courses, in particular, the breadth, depth and quality of learning transfer from the course, if any, so that leaders and practitioners would reform EAP writing courses to better cater to international students' needs. This study will give more bottom-up voices from international students on the current EAP writing courses, which, along with other EAP courses, have been "subjected to calls for accountability" for years (Deng, et al., 2010, p. 120).

Methodology

The primary goal of the study was to investigate international students' perception of their EAP writing courses. To achieve this goal, we chose a mixed methods case study as our research design. The current research was a multiphase study within a single entity. 30 international students with EAP writing course experiences in a U.S. university were recruited. They shared the common learning experiences in the same EAP writing courses, thus the case was a "bounded system" (Stake, 2005, p. 444).

We implemented a combination of concurrent (or named as parallel) and sequential mixed methods design. A sequential mixed methods design has more than two phases. The first phase of the project can be either qualitative or quantitative (Newman, Newman, & Newman 2011, p.196). A concurrent mixed methods design has two strands, one quantitative and one qualitative (Newman, Newman & Newman, 2011). In our research study, the first phase was via a questionnaire which collected both quantitative and qualitative data from close-ended and open-ended questions. Findings from the first stage gave us clues to ask questions in the interview as the second phase. Based on findings from the two phases, a meta inference or meta interpretation was made. A meta inference, or a meta interpretation, refers to "the judgment a researcher makes about the data that is based

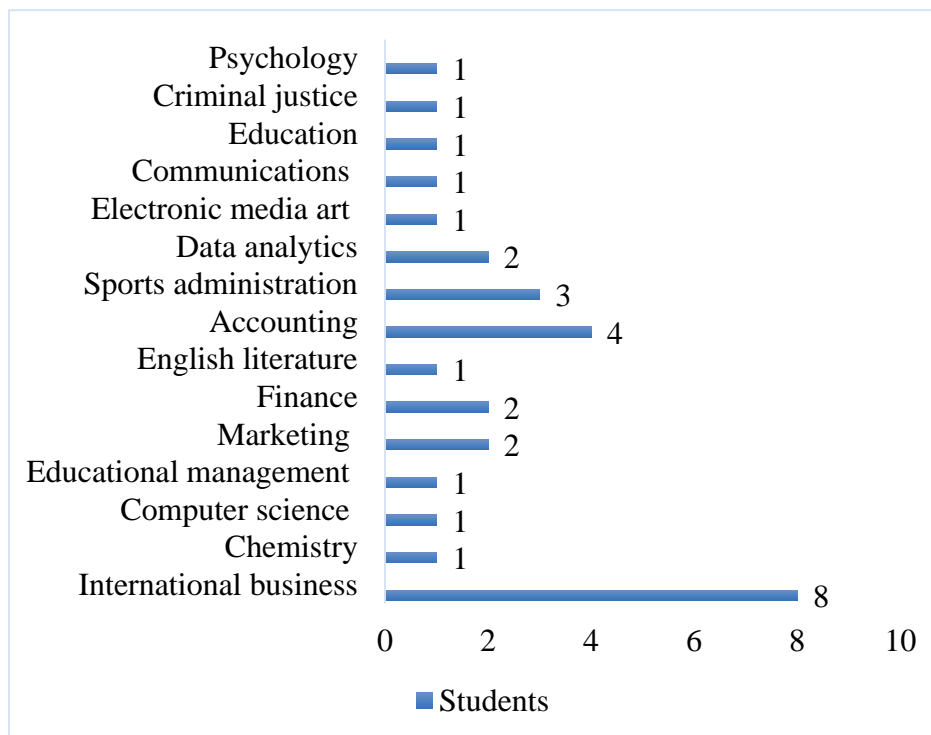
on the results of more than one study” (Newman et al., 2011, p.192). Such a mixed-methods design would help investigate both the primary and secondary research questions which focused on “what” it was about the writing courses that “worked” and did not work (Crosthwaite, 2016).

Recruitment and Participants

We employed purposive sampling to select participants for this study from a southern U.S. university. Eligible participants were international, non-native English speakers, who were currently enrolled in EAP writing courses or had completed them before the time of this study. Thirty international undergraduates and graduates from varying disciplines agreed to participate in the study. In compliance with the confidentiality agreement, each participant selected a pseudonym to use in the study.

Table 1

The Disciplines of Participants



In terms of demographics, 14 of the participants were undergraduates and 16 were graduates; 14 were male and 16 were female. In terms of nationality, there were two Venezuelan, two Russian, 23 Chinese, one French, one Thai and one from Saba Island (Netherlands Antilles). The disciplines of the participants are demonstrated as in Table 1.

Data Collection

The data were collected through two different formats: questionnaire responses and interview transcripts. Each participant was asked to complete a hard-copy questionnaire in a private room. The questionnaire was designed, mainly based on survey questions in the existing literature of Cooper and Bikowski (2007), Deng, Cheng, Varaprasad, and Leng (2010, pp. 135-136), and James (2010). There were twenty-seven questions on the questionnaire, including demographics, educational background, EAP writing experiences, and participants' expectations on future EAP writing courses. Among these questions, five are close-ended, 21 are semi closed-ended, and one is open-ended. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), semi closed-ended questions have both the advantage of open-ended questions to encourage responses and the advantage of closed-ended questions to not overburden researchers with information that needs to be coded. For the items referring to EAP writing experiences, 11 items were related to writing difficulties, nine items to writing tasks, and eight items to writing skills. It took participants approximately 20 minutes to complete all the questions.

Upon completion of their questionnaires, we conducted one-time semi-structured interviews with each of the participants. Each participant had a five-minute break before the interview. During this time, the researchers jotted down notes to a blank sheet to compose interview questions based on the participant's responses in the questionnaires to further explore their opinions about EAP writing courses. Tentative interview questions included: do you think the order of taking EAP writing classes prior to or along with your course of study matters? What kind of effect does EAP writing classes have on your academic writing in other courses? What kind of effect does EAP writing classes have on your other English language skills, including speaking, listening, reading, grammar, and vocabulary? Individual interviews were conducted after the break using an audio recorder in English or Chinese (to participants' preference, if applicable). The electronic recording and physical copies were kept securely for three years starting from the date of publication and will be discarded after that time frame. Each interview was audio-recorded and later transcribed for subsequent analysis. The 30 interviews ranged in length from 6 minutes to 22 minutes with an average of 14 minutes.

Data Analysis

All quantitative data were entered into an SPSS database and then analyzed to get the result of frequency of each choice option, to investigate participants' perceptions of the EAP

writing courses. Regarding qualitative data, analysis refers to giving meaning to first impressions of those texts (Stake, 2005). The primary investigator (PI) wrote down her first impressions on the margins of those input answers of the questionnaires, interview transcripts and translations (in the case of using Chinese to participants' preference). Different color highlights were used to categorize the coding. The coding categories were words and phrases which represented the regularities, patterns and topics the data covered. The first and second researcher pooled their coding together by making their own tables of themes and supporting quotes and then combined them, for instance, improvement in different language skills. After that, they categorized coding to find concepts and patterns and developed them into themes, such as, linguistic improvement, through thematic analysis to help answer the research question. Since their main focus was on transfer, they grouped transfer from the micro to the macro scale: linguistic, academic, cultural/social and psychological. To write up, they both threaded the draft with themes, and categorized answers and evidence from those analyzed data.

Findings

Participants' Experiences in EAP Writing Classes

The EAP writing classes that participants were taking or had completed before the time of this study were offered to all the international students who did not meet the university entry requirement in English proficiency. The EAP writing program had an introductory and an advanced class, which shared the same class sessions – two 90-minute-long classes every week. Both undergraduates and graduates were divided into two classes by their placement test scores, and the students being assigned to the introductory class had to take the advanced class in the following semester.

Among the 30 participants, 22 participants (73.3%) believed that they had English writing difficulties at the time of taking EAP writing classes and eight participants (26.7%) did not. Furthermore, 21 participants (70%) found EAP writing classes helpful in overcoming their English writing difficulties, eight participants (26.7%) did not, and one did not reply. 21 students believed EAP writing as a “necessary” and “prerequisite” course. The frequency of the aspects in which EAP writing classes were perceived as helpful in overcoming the participants' English writing difficulties is demonstrated as below in Table 2.

Table 2

Aspects of EAP Writing Class Helpful in Participants' English Writing

Aspects	Yes	No
a. Understanding the general characteristics of English academic writing	63.3%	36.7%
b. Applying the relevant English academic writing style used in discipline	50%	50%
c. Writing for the intended audience	20%	80%
d. Synthesizing key information in reading texts	30%	70%
e. Making use of sources in English writing	43.3%	56.7%
f. Presenting my arguments in a coherent manner	23.3%	76.7%
g. Presenting graphic information in a clear manner	16.7%	83.3%
h. Interpreting graphic information appropriately	16.7%	83.3%
i. Improving my English grammar accuracy	53.3%	46.7%
j. Improving my English language structure	43.3%	56.7%
k. Making use of expressions commonly used in English academic writing	34.5%	65.5%

As indicated in Table 2, the strongest aspect of EAP writing classes benefiting participants' English writing (63.3%) was understanding the general characteristics of English academic writing. The other benefit strongly identified by participants (53.3%) was improvement in accuracy with English grammar. The remaining benefits agreed included applying the relevant English academic writing style used in discipline (50%), making use of sources in English writing (43.3%), improving my English language structure (43.3%), making use of expressions commonly used in English academic writing (34.5%), synthesizing key information in reading texts (30%), presenting my arguments in a coherent manner (23.3%), writing for the intended audience (20%), presenting graphic information in a clear manner (16.7%), and interpreting graphic information appropriately (16.7%).

Transfer of EAP Writing to Writing in Major Courses

Thirty participants chose their common writing tasks in EAP writing courses and 28 participants chose their common writing tasks in major courses. The options of writing tasks were identical in the two questions; the participants' choices showed differences, demonstrated as below in Table 3 and 4.

Table 3

Writing Tasks in EAP Writing Class

Types	Yes	No
a. Library research paper (literature review)	66.7%	33.3%
b. Connection of theory and data	16.7%	83.3%
c. Report on a specified participatory experience	26.7%	73.3%
d. Summary	83.3%	16.7%
e. Research paper	76.7%	23.3%
f. Case study	33.3%	66.7%
g. Annotated bibliography	30%	70%
h. Essay test	60%	40%
i. Article/book review	36.7%	63.3%

Table 4

Writing Tasks in Major Courses

Types	Yes	No
a. Library research paper (literature review)	32.1%	67.9%
b. Connection of theory and data	14.3%	85.7%
c. Report on a specified participatory experience	14.3%	85.7%
d. Summary	50%	50%
e. Research paper	67.9%	32.1%
f. Case study	50%	50%
g. Annotated bibliography	17.9%	82.1%
h. Essay test	33.3%	66.7%
i. Article/book review	22.2%	77.8%

As indicated in Table 3, the predominantly common writing tasks in EAP writing courses were: summary (83.3%), research paper (76.7%), library research paper/literature review (66.7%) and essay test (60%); writing tasks that were less prevalent in the courses were: article/book review (36.7%), case study (33.3%), annotated bibliography (30%), report on a specified participatory experience (26.7%), and connection of theory and data (16.7%). As indicated in Table 4, the top three common writing tasks in major courses were: research paper (67.9%), summary (50%), and case study (50%); the remaining six types of writing tasks were less common-- essay test (33.3%), library research paper/literature review

(32.1%), article/book review (22.2%), annotated bibliography (17.9%), connection of theory and data (14.3%) and report on a specified participatory experience (14.3%). In comparison, half of the common writing tasks in EAP writing courses overlapped the tasks in major courses, excluding library research paper/literature review and essay test.

Perceived Weaknesses of EAP Writing Classes

One common weakness resembled from the interviews was insufficient instruction of diverse writing formats. Lyne, a female undergraduate in Accounting, stated that “especially (in) the literature and philosophy courses, they usually ask us for MLA. But I did not learn MLA from the EAP writing course”. Some students also complained that they had only learnt the APA format; nevertheless, their professors in their major courses required them to use other formats, such as MLA and Chicago.

In addition to format issues, eight participants (26.7%) identified at least one aspect in the EAP writing classes that was a waste of time. Their comments included: “Sometime there never something that not related to the class, but we have to do and learn about it”, “Some teacher was not responsible”, and “When I cannot take (major) course at same time”. On the contrary, 22 participants (73.3%) did not believe so.

Perceived Strengths of EAP Writing Classes

The majority of the interviewees asserted what they had benefited from their EAP writing classes. Such benefits were demonstrated in four aspects-- linguistic, academic, cultural and psychological.

Linguistic improvements

Writing

Twenty out of 30 interviewees spoke highly of EAP writing courses, with reference to their improved writing skill. Sun, a male graduate in Sports Administration, stated “writing summaries and the beginnings of a paper, something like an abstract...the structure of paragraphs, the beginning and the ending, and the format...” He elaborated on his improvement by saying “I didn’t know how to start writing in the past. But after taking the EAP writing class, I know how to start, which structure should be used for the paper, and what format or standard should be followed”. Eagle, a female undergraduate in Criminal Justice, discussed her strengthened academic writing skill many times in her interview response: “It make(s) me become more articulate writer”, “It helped me with

format ...be more organized when I am writing”, and “The transitioning in essay is from one paragraph to the other it helps with that as well”. Fox, a female undergraduate in Computer Science, listed what she had learned under the umbrella of writing skill in EAP writing course, “There are several things that are definitely learned. It was how to prepare and how to do citations, references, also how to use language in an appropriate way... Then how to use different formats”. Other participants, such as Rong (a female ED.D. in Educational Management and Leadership), Bo (a female undergraduate in Business Marketing), and Lyne, (a female undergraduate in Accounting) also mentioned format (i.e., APA) in their interview responses.

Summarizing Skill

Many students mentioned summarizing skill directly or indirectly, which is another skill closely related to writing. For instance, Grace, a female MBA graduate in Data Analytics, asserted the summarizing skill she had learned from EAP writing course:

...help my own thinking, help me to have my own thinking quickly from the reading article, and get the important part of this articles, so I can use them to in my paper or research to do some, to do some extension.

Jane, a female graduate in Communications, also recognized the EAP writing course in which she had learned how to summarize articles and write research papers.

Reading

A few students mentioned their improvement in reading skills, based on their belief that practice makes perfect. Ye, a male undergraduate in Marketing, attributed the prerequisite step in writing to reading, in his speech “Because before you write some essays, some way you have to understand the whole passage first. So, I think reading is a very important part of the writing”. Zoe, a female graduate in International Business, perceived her improvement in reading speed, thanks to “a lot of new vocabulary in the class”.

Speaking

Another benefit identified by students was improved speaking skills stemming from EAP writing courses. Mi, a male graduate student in Sports Administration, explained when he could improve his speaking by stating “...because in the class, the students have to talk about their ideas”. Franti, a male graduate in International Business, interpreted the “must” in the sense that “there are a lot of nationalities, so we are almost forced to speak English

among each other, and doing the interaction with the professors”. English was the only common language for communications among students and with professors in their EAP writing classes. Lyne, a female undergraduate in Accounting, and Jane, a female graduate in Communications, both thought that their oral presentation skill greatly improved, revealed from their comments “... to learn how to express ourselves, and how to speak in public” (Lyne) and “I learn how to do a presentation, how to prepare, and how to use my body language to show” (Jane). It can be inferred that the presentation skill was regarded as an essential speaking component by both undergraduates and graduates across disciplines.

Listening

A few students admitted that total immersion in EAP writing as an English-speaking course really helped them with their listening skill. Grace, a female graduate in MBA Data Analytics, stated that:

I think I take this class, the most time of this class we just listening form teachers and some opinions from other student and we talk about and also to do the presentation, so I think we are also be good listener after this class.

Lu, a male undergraduate in International Business, talked about his chance in practicing listening, in his reply “...the American teacher they only can speak English, so we must focus on him and listening what he said, so in this way we have to learn, we have to listening. So, we improved our listening”.

Grammar

Grammatical improvement was also recognized by some participants. Eagle, a female undergraduate in Criminal Justice, discussed her practice in grammar as “sentence completion... fit the right word into the sentence”. Jane, a female graduate in Communications, attributed her professor’s explicit feedback to her enhancement in grammar – “In her class, if you have grammar mistake, she will tell you and very detailed about the grammar mistake and how to change it”.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary was another language component that some participants perceived to have improved. Mark, a male graduate in Accounting, asserted that he learned “how to know the meaning of the new word, how to make new word and how to build my vocabulary”. Grace

and Zoe, both female graduates in MBA, talked about their vocabulary acquisition from article reading in and after class.

Academic acculturation

One of the new concepts many of the participants had learned from EAP writing classes was awareness to make citations and references and avoid plagiarism. Lucy, a Chinese undergraduate in English Literature, stated that:

...No, not only grammar, also about the structure of the paper and the citation, like the format, how we use APA, MLA. Because the citation is very important in America. We need to quote the source we used. And so, we can avoid plagiarism... Plagiarism is serious problem in writing, because we cannot use others' words in our paper. We need to cite the source we used... I don't know that (before taking EAP writing class); So, it's very important to take the EAP class...

Other respondents, who had completed their undergraduate studies in their home countries, also agreed on their raised consciousness of plagiarism and copyright violations. Take Jane's comparison as an example; Jane, a female graduate student in Communications, elaborated on references and plagiarism in her response:

I think another one is very good to teach us how to write the reference. Because every paper or essay or thesis need reference. It's a very hard part for me... if you plagiarize other's work, it's a very big problem or very big mistake. But in China, I know this one is not good, but in China, many people still do that because if your professor find that, maybe she or he just need you to rewrite again. But here you need to totally change it. It's really different. But I heard before in America, this part is very serious... I pay (paid) my attention, but not pay too much attention in this part...

These participants all spoke highly of their EAP writing courses stating that it helped them build up awareness to avoid plagiarism by making appropriate citations and references. They indicated that before the instructors in the EAP writing classes talking about academic dishonesty, they did not regard the plagiarism of others' work as a serious ethical problem.

Cultural adaptation

Because most of the international students were required to take the EAP courses at the university, the EAP writing classes essentially functioned as a platform of students from diverse cultural background where intercultural communications occurred. Bo, a female

undergraduate from Thailand, attributed cultural adaptation and making new friends to her EAP writing class, by stating “Because that’s my first year here in the United States. I don’t know about culture, about the classroom culture, about people, so that class is pretty good for me to learn new people and make some friends”. In the same vein, Mark, a Chinese graduate, reflected on his communications in his EAP writing course:

In my class I have some classmates from Venezuela... and Cuba. I talk to them and I can know a different culture from the country, and I can express Chinese culture to them... It can give me confidence to adapt the culture, and a lot of a lot of parts.

Some students also mentioned the EAP writing classes helped them to adapt to the “American style class culture”. For instance, Rong, a female graduate from China, compared American class culture with Chinese one, by remarking:

...the American class culture is different from the Chinese class culture. In Chinese, we just need to sit down and listen to the teacher and write some notes on what the teacher said, but when I have the American class I found all of the student can talk to the professor, and they argument with each other So many of us Chinese student when we found this, we don’t know how to tell about it. So maybe the EAP writing class always give us some opportunity to have a topic to discuss... and we have the chance to do the presentation with our research paper...

Psychological better beings

The most salient psychological benefit which the participants had gained from their EAP writing classes was self-confidence. Many participants mentioned the word *confidence* explicitly or implicitly. For instance, Fox, a female undergraduate coming from Russia and studying Computer Science in the United States, exemplified her confidence explicitly:

I would say more confident how to use English in academic level, academic level and appropriate way when it comes to writing, even to speaking because whenever you write, I mean when you read an article, whenever you do your research paper of course you gain more feedback, so I think writing, yeah, my writing part definitely improved and my speaking part as well.

Fiore, a female undergraduate from Venezuela with major in Psychology, expressed her holistic confidence in an implicit way, “... I don’t know. It’s like everything. I know how to write better, how to explain myself in a paper, that before I didn’t know how”.

Suggestions for Future EAP Writing Classes

To address the weaknesses of the EAP writing classes they had taken, the participants offered various suggestions for the future EAP writing classes.

Class and placement suggestions

Smaller class

Kalm, a male undergraduate majoring in Finance, suggested that future EAP writing courses should have smaller class sizes to help students get more attention from professors and to enable the professors to “prepare what the students really need and want”.

Identification and placement

Wendy, a female graduate majoring in International Business, stated that “Every student is different... So, do not mix everyone in one class. They are not in the same level”. Echoing with Wendy, many participants mentioned the necessity to divide students into different EAP writing classes based on certain criteria, including graduate/undergraduate levels and English proficiency demonstrated from the score in their English placement test. For instance, Lucy, a female undergraduate in English literature, suggested that:

To be more effective, students can be divided into groups depending on their different English skill levels. Thus, for those who are not good at English, they can catch up well; and for those who are good, it will not waste time to learn something easy.

In the same vein, Eagle, a female undergraduate in Criminal Justice, and Ye, a male undergraduate in Marketing, pointed out the mismatch of students’ language proficiency and learning experiences in their EAP writing classes. Based on these participants’ feedback and suggestions, precise placement of students into different groups or classes would help instruction be more targeted and efficient.

Procedural suggestions

Peer review

Mi, a male graduate in Sports Management, recommended peer review for the future EAP writing classes, “Because I think although at the first step we should follow like one, one format in summaries and something, but we need get more opinions from others. What my classmates think about my summaries, what is their opinions”.

Group work and more in-class interactions

Sun, another male graduate in Sports Management suggested more oral communications between teachers and students and among students in class and group discussions.

Coverage suggestions***Diverse formats and academic languages bridging their majors***

To balance general and specific EAP writing course, Grace, a female graduate in Data Analytics, provided an eclectic solution by having 14 weeks for EGAP and two more weeks for ESAP writing, with special focus on format. Eagle, a female undergraduate in Criminal Justice, echoed with Grace in her response “that EAP writing class should teach more kinds of format... should be a better variety of them with the teaching”. Nicky, a female graduate in MBA International Business, defined specification as academic vocabulary— “I think I need to be able to write a research paper, to identify many technique words. For example, I’m studying international business and I think I need more information, more words about business”. Nicky suggested two approaches, by either dividing class into small groups based on their fields or adding a few weeks of specific EAP writing classes.

More language skills included

A few students were aware of the connections of reading and speaking with writing and the importance of these language skills in their academic endeavors. Superwoman, a female undergraduate in Chemistry, defined speaking as presentation skill and would love to add the skill into existing EAP writing classes, by stating:

Because as I said the writing class, the ESL writing class didn’t have a lot of speaking part. So, the presentation might be a good example of doing the speaking part and learning how to speak and just practicing your way of talking.

Lyne, another female undergraduate in Accounting, agreed with Superwoman on the addition of speaking or presentation, by remarking “I think the EAP class can pay some focus on speaking. It can encourage students to speak more whether in class or the final presentation”. Lyne also included reading in to the addition list— “Reading is very important because reading is the input and writing is the output. I think if we want to write a good paper, the first important thing is to read as much as possible”.

Discussions

Holistic Improvements and Learning Transfer as Perceived

We discovered that 21 participants (70%) found that EAP writing classes are helpful in overcoming their writing challenges in English. The participating international students declared their noticeable improvements with their language skills (i.e., listening, reading, speaking, writing, grammar and vocabulary), presentation skill, academic and cultural adaptations, and self-confidence. These benefits received from their EAP writing courses echo with the previous research studies, including Deng, et al. (2010), Huang (2010), Storch and Tapper (2009), Terraschke and Wahid (2011). Most of the participants elaborated on their linguistic, academic, social and psychological improvements.

Due to their holistic improvements from the EAP writing courses, some participants spoke highly of the courses, with respect to learning transfer in general. Learning transfer happens as the effect of writing in the participants' EAP writing courses on their writing in other academic courses (James, 2010). Lucy, a female undergraduate in English Literature, commented "It will help international students get ready and well prepared before the major course". Similarly, Superwoman, a female undergraduate in Chemistry, attributed EAP writing to "an opportunity to more prepared for the course of study". Over half of the participants stated such transfer to their major fields.

"The Only Problem is to What Degree"

Lyne, a female undergraduate in Accounting, commented that "...it (EAP writing) helps, but the only question is to what degree", when asked about the EAP writing course she had taken. This brings attention to the course accountability and clearer scope. Similarly, Dooley (-2010) recommended that the EAP courses should focus more on improving students' academic literacy, which means "acquiring a range of linguistic skills over and above mastering the mechanics of the language itself" (p.197), than merely English language proficiency. This learning objective regarding academic literacy may help define the content of the course accountability in future EAP writing courses.

Suggested Combination of EGAP and ESAP

Despite the common practice of EGAP writing program (Hyland, 2002; James, 2010), participants, such as Grace, Eagle and Nicky, revealed their needs to have ESAP components. Their needs included both writing format and academic vocabulary in their major fields. Different major fields have considerable interdisciplinary variations in terms

of writing assignments, writing standards, goals, and professional expectations (Reid, 2001). Therefore, ideally, universities should adopt individual ESAP instead of unified EGAP writing programs to meet students' specific needs. However, the practical constraints, such as shortage of allocated time and resources, make the implementation of ESAP writing programs unfeasible (Reid, 2001). Thus, combining EGAP with ESAP, suggested by the participants in the current study, would be a solution. After the EGAP writing sessions, students can have a few weeks of ESAP classes based on their fields. Such an approach is expected to assist students to master both general academic and discipline-specific writing knowledge and skills. The proposed implication would warrant research into practice with logistical considerations.

Necessity to Know Students' Needs

As Cooper and Bikowski (2007, p. 219) suggested, it would be "very informative for the EAP profession to know which tasks are the most troublesome for international students", which was true of the current study. The participants perceived their EAP writing curriculum as top-down, with few chances for students to make their own voices heard. Eight participants (26.7%) believed that to some extent their EAP writing classes were a waste of time. Two of their comments, "Sometime there never something that not related to the class but we have to do and learn about it" (from Bo, a female undergraduate in Business Marketing) and "I think that teacher should just teach some important writing skills in EAP writing class and let the students practice these skills in their main courses" (from Ray, a male graduate in Accounting) highlighted the importance of needs analysis. Needs analysis should be "the primary step to be taken in the design and development of any educational program" (Kazar & Mede, 2015, p.2526).

To scrutinize the EAP writing program for further needs analysis, we found that the predominantly common writing tasks in EAP writing course were summary (83.3%), research paper (76.7%), library research paper/literature review (66.7%) and essay test (60%) and that the top three common writing tasks in major courses were research paper (67.9%), summary (50%), and case study (50%). Seen from above, some common writing tasks in EAP writing course, such as essay test, were not common in major courses and case study should have more weight in EAP writing course. With writing tasks more consistent and challenging writing tasks more informed, EAP writing course could better meet students' needs by providing stronger support and more learning transfer to their major courses.

Conclusion

The researchers employed a mixed methods case study to explore how international students perceive their EAP writing courses. Based on both quantitative and qualitative data collected from the questionnaires and interviews, most students perceived that the strengths of EAP writing courses outnumbered and outweighed their weaknesses and that the EAP writing courses did, in general, have a positive effect on their own subject fields linguistically, academically, socially and psychologically.

It should be noted that EAP writing courses would be more likely to be effective and welcoming, by analyzing ELLs' writing needs and incorporating the procedural and content modifications revealed from this current study. For future research studies, research interest might include the consistency and challenges of writing tasks in both EAP writing and major courses. It should be noted that expectations of EAP to be a mixture of EGAP and ESAP are new to the existing literature, which deserve more attention and considerate further exploration.

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