

A Method for Integrating Content into Academic Writing in a Business Management EMI Program

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Abstract

English Mediated Instruction programs (EMI) are university programs where English is used as the language of instruction for academic subjects in areas where the native language is not English. For students to be successful in these programs it is necessary to acquire academic English skills to complete the various reading, writing, speaking, and listening tasks assigned to them in their content classes. Although academic English classes can help students in this regard, students do not always understand the link between these classes and their content courses, which can have a negative impact on motivation and performance in the academic English classroom. In the context of academic writing, this can be problematic when students are set the arduous task of learning how to create a formal academic research paper if topics are not broadly related to the themes of their academic discipline. Given these difficulties, this paper proposes a method to introduce students to the process of writing a research paper through the integration of content from taught-in-English academic subjects into academic writing classes. In trials of this method, results showed that students appreciated having content from their core subjects integrated into their academic writing classes, and benefited in terms of acquiring valuable research skills and increased familiarity with literature directly relevant to their program.

Key Words

Academic English, Academic Writing, English for Academic Purposes, English Mediated Instruction, Business Management, Research Paper, Content and Language Integrated Learning

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Introduction

Higher education programs that use English as a medium of instruction (hereafter referred to as EMI), have become increasingly popular in recent years (Galloway, 2017). In particular, EMI has been growing in Japan, where it is seen as a strategy for dealing with a shrinking population of university age students, and persistently low English proficiency levels. Indeed, the Ministry of Education, Culture,

Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has promoted EMI as part of its Top Global University Project with a goal towards internationalizing Japanese universities and increasing Japanese university students' exposure to English (Aizawa and Heath, 2019). This paper is a case study of two academic English classes in a recently established EMI program at Chuo University. The study presents an analysis of a unique method for introducing research papers to first year students who have no previous exposure to this format of writing, and proposes a greater integration of subject matter from taught in English foundational courses into the first and second year academic writing classrooms.

1. Background

While the EMI format has been around for a while now, it has not come without issues. Macaro et al. (2018) caution that there is an insufficient amount of research showing that EMI benefits language learning or is detrimental to content learning. Bradford (2019) argues that an over-emphasis on the importance of English language proficiency leads to "barrier [s] to programme excellence", and that EMI programs would be better served by focusing more on pedagogy and the development of intercultural skills. Van Viegen, Saskia, and Bruce Russell (2019) suggest that "students need opportunities to develop both content and language knowledge within their discipline, and to practice understanding and producing written and oral communication adhering to the rhetorical norms of the academic community to which they aspire to belong." Contradicting research of language learning in other contexts, research by Heath et al. reveals that in EMI programs, motivation does not necessarily correlate with higher grades, and that students' perception of success is more related to "a combination of final grades, lecture comprehension, English language proficiency gains, and long-term career advancement." Despite this, in the context of EMI programs in Japan, findings from Heath, Rose, and McKinley (2018) indicate "a positive departure from older policy trends and the emergence of flexible, unique forms of English language education in Japan's universities."

In order to increase the chances of success in an EMI program, students need support in acquiring the academic skills, such as academic writing, discourse for discussion, listening and note-taking that are necessary to demonstrate an understanding of subject matter (Heath et al., 2020). Therefore, it is useful for an EMI program to have an academic English component wherein students can hone these skills and apply them in their content classes. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) involves teaching students how to use language effectively for academic purposes, usually in the context of higher education. An EAP program focuses on teaching students the abilities that are critical for success in an English academic setting across main topic areas they will encounter in university. It is also possible for EAP programs to focus more narrowly on the specific linguistic characteristics of a particular subject area. While some EAP programs are offered in so-called "pre-sessional" classes to prepare students for entry into university, others are taken concurrently with content courses, usually in the first and/or second year of studies. In the latter case, students will develop their academic English skills alongside their learning in other content specific courses, and it is hoped that the skills acquired in academic English classes will transfer to assignments and coursework throughout the rest of their undergraduate studies. However, there is very little understanding of how well students can apply these skills to work in other courses, and perhaps more importantly, to what extent students feel the academic En-

glish classes are relevant. According to Tann and Scott (2021), students “do not automatically understand the relevance of language support” that is presented to them in EAP classes, which is a serious problem given the amount of time and effort students may have to dedicate to these classes. According to the authors, this problem can be mitigated by “shifting knowledge practices” in the classroom, which can “help students to relate their knowledge about language to the discipline.” In other words, attempts should be made to “bridge” the skills learned in academic English classes to content from core subjects taught in English. This process entails explicitly using subject matter from content classes in academic English classes, which may be a preferable approach for students. In terms of academic writing, while some students may wish to pursue topics outside the domain of their program, others prefer topics related to their field of study so they can acquire hands-on experience reading and researching content within their chosen academic discipline in more detail (Clapham, 2001). The latter is the method that was pursued in this case study, and will be described in the following sections.

2. Academic English Classes at GLOMAC

Established in 2019, the Faculty of Global Management at Chuo University (hereafter referred to as GLOMAC) is an EMI program offering undergraduate degrees that can be obtained entirely (but not necessarily) from classes taught in English. In addition to compulsory foundational classes in economics, business management, and statistics, students must complete four semesters of academic English. In academic English classes at GLOMAC, students focus on four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The skills are divided into two classes: alpha for reading and writing, and beta for speaking and listening. In both classes, students are expected to learn and produce language in an academic idiom on subject matter determined largely by the teacher. In speaking and listening classes, students use a traditional ESL style textbook with topics based on world issues. In reading and writing classes, students use a writing textbook that is specifically focused on writing research papers. In these classes, students learn extensively about APA formatting and must produce one full length properly formatted research paper each semester. As for the topics, it is either up to the students to determine what they want to write about, or the teacher to determine the topics for them.

The process of creating a research paper is lengthy and difficult. In research by Dubicki (2015), students in an English major program reported that writing a research paper was “a daunting task”, “overwhelming”, “an arduous process” and “incredibly intimidating”. The process is even more difficult for students whose native language is not English, and have limited experience in formal academic English writing. In addition to using appropriate academic language, students need to learn how to group information logically into topics, sub-topics, sub-sub-topics, and so on, and how to structure and organize this information into a coherent multi-section composition that presents their own individual and original perspective. As mentioned above, the paper needs to be properly formatted with section headings, and it must contain a full reference list with multiple entries. Therefore, students spend a considerable amount of time not only learning the structural characteristics of a research paper, but also researching their topics and synthesizing the results into a logically structured argument.

One of the aspects of writing a research paper students find most difficult is topic selection. Finding a topic that is suitable for the requirements of a research paper is especially difficult when students

are introduced to this type of assignment for the first time, as knowing what a suitable topic is depends to a large extent on knowing what the requirements of a research paper are. Although many pedagogical approaches to writing in language learning classes stress the importance of learner autonomy which accommodates for the preferences, interests, and personal experiences of the learner, this can lead to difficulties when students undertake the lengthy process of reading and researching their chosen topic only to discover that the topic is too broad, or lacks supporting references. By this time, many hours may have been spent preparing to write, and given this “sunk cost”, the learner may be reluctant to start over, even though it would be the appropriate course of action. Nevertheless, it is important for the learner to take ownership of the tasks they are required to complete, and if the process of understanding how to create a research paper is too complex and time consuming to the point where it is preferable that the instructor select a topic for the students, there should still be some accommodation for learner autonomy somewhere in the process. It is with this in mind that the approach to teaching how to write a research paper to students in both first and second years of the academic English program was designed, and to which we shall now turn.

3. First Year Students

Upon entering university, first year students in general have had very little exposure to formal academic English writing. Although most students have had some basic English writing experience on the paragraph level, some have still not learned how to write a multi-paragraph essay. Thus, in addition to lacking academic writing experience, students in general have at best a foundational knowledge of the structural characteristics of multi-paragraph compositions. The students’ task, therefore, is to learn how to write in formal academic language, learn how to identify and select an appropriate topic for a research paper, learn the structural components and requirements of a research paper, and finally, to tie all of this together in a well-researched logically organized properly formatted final product in the space of 14 weeks. Given the amount of learning demands placed on students, a considerable amount of scaffolding is necessary.

Topic Selection The first step in constructing a research paper is topic selection. In order to select a topic, the writer either needs to already possess a certain amount of domain knowledge on a particular topic, or to acquire such knowledge through extensively reading and researching a topic of interest or one that is chosen on their behalf. As alluded to above, since students do not have sufficient knowledge early in the semester on the structural components of a research paper, it is difficult for them to select a topic that would satisfy these requirements. Therefore, the logical place to scaffold is in topic selection. This is also where content from taught-in-English courses, such as Business Management and Economics can be integrated into the academic English classroom. Both subjects are potentially a rich source of material from which to draw on for topic selection. However, since topic selection needs to happen early in the semester, at this point students still do not have a deep enough understanding of the subject matter of their introductory content courses to make an appropriate choice from this material. To compensate for this, a topic that is within the domain of business management, yet not too theoretically complex was chosen. A topic that seemed to fit these requirements for a number of reasons

was “motivation”. The reasoning behind choosing this topic is that motivation is a concept that students can naturally relate to and is applicable to the field of business management as demonstrated by its extensive coverage in the business management literature. This enabled students to navigate a subject that was not too abstract while exploring and familiarizing themselves with the relevant literature in their search for supporting material. The exact prompt students were given is stated below :

Your boss is concerned that the employees are not working as hard as they should. He wants you to research “motivation” in order to find the best practices for motivating his workforce. He is looking for scientifically proven theories and methods, which means you will need to read academic articles that have researched motivation. You need to present your findings in the form of a research paper in APA format. The research paper needs to be between 1000 and 1500 words (without references).

After acquiring a suitable amount of domain knowledge on the concept of motivation through a business management lense, students were required to logically group their information into three distinct and non-overlapping sub-topics in order to create the body of their research paper and produce a thesis statement, which will be described in more detail in the following section.

Thesis Statement Along with choosing a topic, another aspect of the research paper creation process that students find difficult is formulating a thesis statement. The thesis statement needs to announce to the reader the main topic and narrowed focus of the paper along with the supporting points that will prove the argument that the writer is making. As mentioned previously, in order to formulate a good thesis statement, the writer first needs to have enough supporting material that can be subdivided logically into multiple points, which will then form the basis of the main sections, or body, of the research paper. Students then needed to sort out some kind of argumentative angle on the topic, and prove that argument with supporting points. This is a key step in the learning process, where students need to understand subject matter well enough that they can critically analyze a topic and synthesize supporting material in a way that will logically prove their argument. For the topic of motivation, students needed to research it extensively and come up with three of the most important approaches that will motivate employees. To guide their research, the business management textbook was used as a launch pad for further reading in the search for supporting material. For example, one of the most common concepts surrounding motivation that students discovered in their research was extrinsic (or financial) motivation. While students may have been tempted to create a whole section of the research paper around employee salary alone, they came to realize that this was only one part of a broader form of motivation that included many other elements, such as bonuses, retirement contributions, and over-time pay. Each of these elements could then go on to become the basis for sub-sub topics within the sub-topic of extrinsic, or financial, motivation, with enough supporting research to draw on to constitute a deep and substantive paragraph for each. Some examples of thesis statements are listed below.

Example 1. In order to determine which method is best at motivating the workforce, managers should consider and satisfy 3 fundamental aspects in the workplace: the work itself (work),

worker's personality (people) and leadership (management). This paper first describes the correlation between each of these factors and motivation in business management, then discusses how it is correlated with intrinsic motivation or extrinsic motivation, and the final conclusion is made to determine which is the most important factor based on the comparison and fair analysis of each factor.

Example 2. To maintain employees' motivation, companies should focus on rewards, office environment, and communication. This paper illustrates why these three components are important to consider as a company by using what we have done in the past.

Example 3. In order to keep employees motivated, managers in an organization have to consider three different types of employee motivating factors; Financial reward system, non-financial reward system, and good working conditions.

Example 4. Motivating employees, which is important for any organization, can be achieved by improving their intrinsic motivation, working environment and mental health. This paper firstly describes the effects of employees' mental health, then describes the methods to improve employees' intrinsic motivation, and finally describes the effects of the working environment.

Typical topic groupings were financial (extrinsic) rewards, non-financial (intrinsic) rewards, and some other concepts, such as working conditions or working environment. As can be seen from the examples above, students needed to research all aspects of motivating employees and group them logically according to their conceptual similarities. Students were told to create three groups, which would then form the basis of the main body sections of the research paper, which will be explored more closely in the next section.

Body Once the students completed the task of breaking down the topic of motivation into subtopics, the next step was to create each section of the research paper one at a time. In a sense, a section of a research paper can be seen as an essay, consisting of an introductory paragraph, followed with a body, and wrapped up with a conclusion that ties all of the points together and summarizes the main argument being made. Approaching each section of the research paper in this way was useful for the students, as most of them had some experience writing an essay, and others who did not have such experience could quickly learn. Using the analogy of an essay, students used a subtopic from their thesis like the main topic of an essay and broke this down into two to four subtopics, and from there created a four to six paragraph essay which was on average approximately 500 words in length. Repeating this process two more times, students then had completed the body of the research paper, and most of the writing and hard work was finished. Approaching the research paper in this way allowed the instructor to focus more attention on important aspects of writing such as structure and cohesion, but also allowed for a critical and objective evaluation of the depth of research.

Approaching the creation of a research paper in the manner described above, students not only

learned what constitutes a properly structured and organized research paper, but also how to synthesize and logically separate information, and how to use this information to support and prove an argument. Furthermore, students benefited from exploring in great detail a topic that is directly relevant to their program. While researching and writing this assignment, students deepened their knowledge of a core business management topic, and learned how to research concepts that are directly related to their degree. A brief survey conducted at the end of the semester elucidates how students felt about this process. The survey consisted of four Likert scale questions with 1 representing “strongly dis-

Table 1

Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. The topic of the research paper (Motivation) helped me understand concepts I have been studying in my Business Management class.	0	1	0	2	3	7	7
2. The concepts I have been studying in Business Management helped me to write the research paper.	0	1	0	4	7	7	1
3. As a result of researching motivation, I have a better understanding of how to do research in the field of Business Management.	0	0	1	2	6	7	4
4. I was happy that the topic related to concepts I am studying in my Business Management class.	0	0	2	2	2	9	5

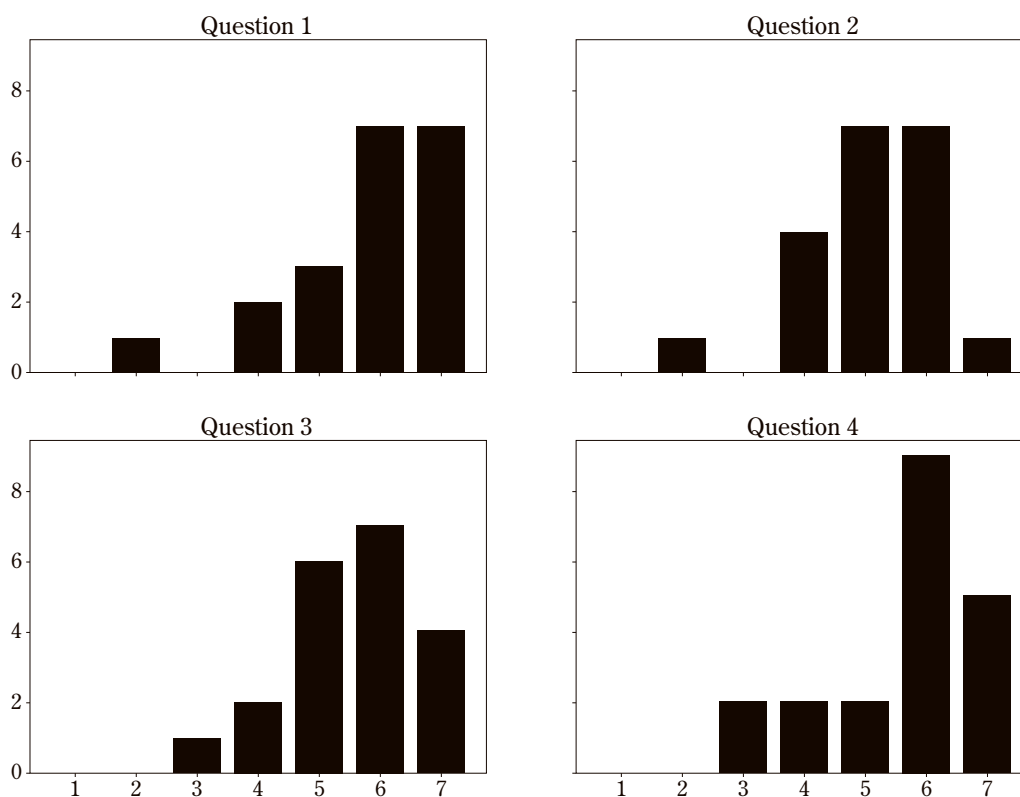


Figure 1

agree” and 7 representing “strongly agree”. The four questions and full results can be seen in Table 1 and Figure 1. There were 22 respondents.

As can be seen from both questions 1 and 2, a high degree of synergy between academic English and business management classes was achieved. Students seemed to overwhelmingly feel that researching for their academic English research papers helped them in their business management class, and the concepts they had been studying in business management likewise helped them with their academic English research paper.

In addition to this, results from question 3 indicate that students felt the process of constructing a business management themed research paper gave them a better understanding of how to do research in the field of business management, which is a useful finding as students will need to do research and writing of this nature for their graduation thesis. Finally, results from question 4 show that students were happy in general to have had the opportunity to engage in a topic related to the concepts they are studying in their business management class.

4. Second Year Students

Once students reach their second year, it is expected that they have a decent understanding of what constitutes a well-constructed research paper, and how to compose one of their own. However, given the significant challenges students face with this task in their first year, many still do not have a strong enough foundational understanding of the research paper creation process, and therefore require additional scaffolding. This can be accomplished with less intervention than in the first year by allowing students to choose from a carefully curated group of topics. Having completed the first year introductory courses in both economics, business management and statistics, students also have a much broader domain knowledge to draw upon to select their topic and guide their research and reasoning. Therefore, the topics need to be related to the foundational content courses, and be at a slightly more advanced level than the topic that was done in the first year. Students in second year were asked to select a topic from a list of three choices. The topics are stated below, exactly as they were presented to students:

Topic 1: Sports Economics

The city of Gotham (fictional) is considering a bid for the 2032 Olympics, but it is unsure about the potential benefits. Research the impact of the Olympics on the previous host cities from a social and economic point of view, and assess whether hosting the games is beneficial or not.

Topic 2: Workforce Diversity

Your boss has been hearing things lately about “Workforce Diversity”. Research the benefits of workforce diversity in terms of people management, business performance, and business strategy. Present your findings in the form of a research paper.

Topic 3: Fighting climate change

Research the most commonly proposed solutions to combat climate change and present your opinion about which is best. You should consider this from an economic/industrial perspective. There may not be a best solution ; it is possible to have solutions that are equally good.

The topics above were created carefully according to the following criteria :

- **The topics needed to be thematically related to either business management or economics.** Although a topic related to statistics could have been used, this field is more appropriate for a primary research paper, which is done in the fall semester. In the list of topics above, topics number one and two were more economically oriented while topic two was mostly related to business management.
- **The topics needed to be conceptually more advanced than topics introduced in the first year.** While this criterion was difficult to achieve, it could be managed by requiring students to incorporate more theoretical knowledge from their foundational courses, and higher expectations in terms of the quality of and depth of research.
- **The topics needed to be sufficiently narrow while containing enough depth to constitute a research paper of approximately 1500 to 2000 words.** This builds upon the requirements of the first year research papers which were expected to be between 1000 and 1500 words.
- **The topics needed to be relatively easy to subdivide into logically distinct and non-overlapping sections.** As can be seen with topic one, the main topic could be logically separated into sections relating to the social and economic merits (or demerits) or hosting the Olympics. Each of those two sections could also easily be divided further into sub-sections. The topic on workforce diversity presented students with the most easily identifiable route for subdividing the topic according to people management, business performance, and business strategy. Finally, the topic on climate change was conceptually slightly more difficult than the other two, requiring students to first research the topic extensively before having enough domain knowledge to make a choice on how it could be logically subdivided.

The second year students consisted of two different classes. One class was composed of high level students of mixed nationality. The other class was composed of mid to lower level students of exclusively Japanese nationality. There were slight differences in the topic selection of both classes. In the higher level class, nine students selected topic 1, six students selected topic 2, and five students selected topic 3. In the lower level class, fifteen students selected topic 1, seven students selected topic 2, and no students selected topic 3. Some examples of thesis statements are listed below :

Topic : Workforce Diversity

Example 1. Plenty of research has shown that workforce diversity will lead to benefits to organiza-

tions in terms of people management, organizational performance, and business strategy. This paper describes the benefits of workforce diversity from these three aspects one by one in detail.

Example 2. Workforce diversity can bring upon positive effects on companies since there are various advantages in terms of people management, business performance, and business strategy. This paper first describes the benefit of workforce diversity concerning people management, then discusses the benefits of workforce diversity in terms of business performance, and finally describes the benefit of it from a business strategy point of view.

Topic : Hosting the Olympics

Example 1. Hosting can be regarded as a reward since many eyes from different parts of the world will be on the host country. However, some Olympic hosts in the past have experienced many downsides throughout the entire course of the event. Olympic host countries need to take in account both the positive and negative effects on its finance, environment, and society before making a bid.

Example 2. The facts and data show that although holding the Olympics can bring a lot of beneficial effects, the disadvantages in terms of the negative impact on finance, society and environment are also extremely huge.

Topic : Fighting Climate Change

Example 1. To tackle the problem of climate change several effective solutions can be implemented, such as a carbon tax and carbon trading, eco-friendly technologies, and tree planting and carbon offsetting.

Example 2. Carbon tax, carbon offset and carbon trading, as well as technological innovations are effective and complementary ways to reduce carbon emissions and greenhouse gases.

Table 2

Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. The topic of the research paper helped me understand concepts I have been studying in my Business Management and/or Economics class(es).	1	1	4	9	7	9	5
2. The concepts I have been studying in Business Management and/or Economics helped me to write the research paper.	0	5	5	6	10	7	4
3. As a result of researching my topic, I have a better understanding of how to do research in the field(s) of Business Management and/or Economics.	0	1	5	2	11	12	6
4. I was happy that the topic related to concepts I am studying in my Business Management and/or Economics class(es).	1	2	4	4	7	11	8

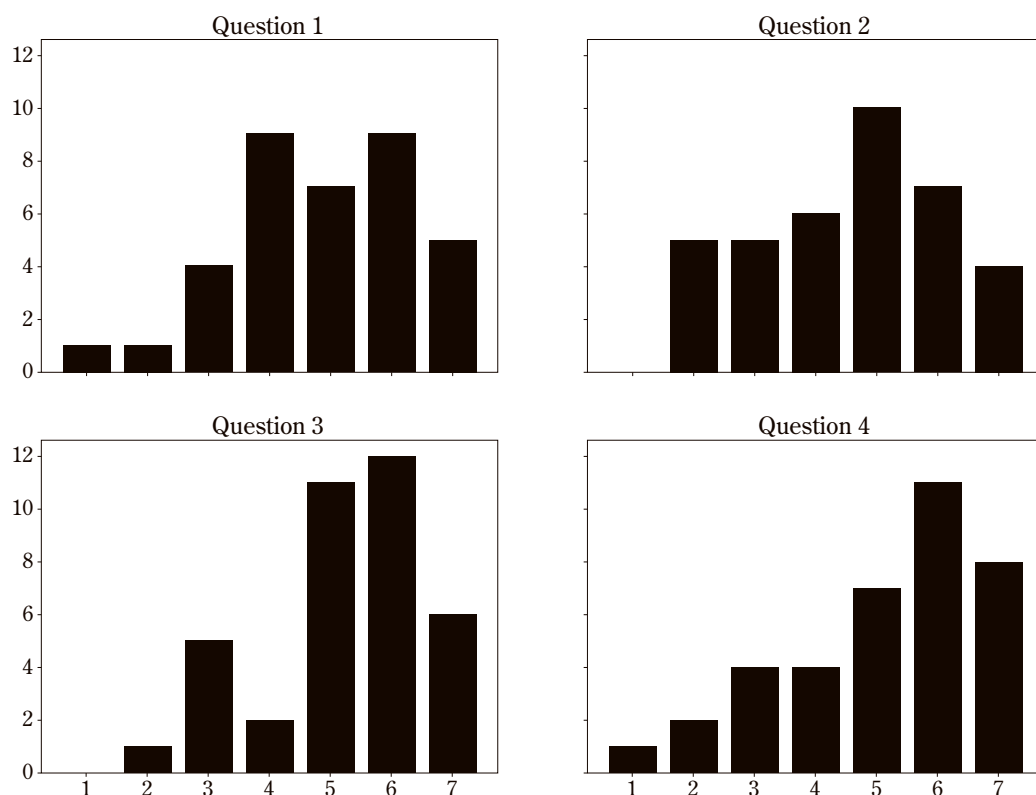


Figure 2

The examples above illustrate how students were able to take a critical position on their topic and to effectively break it down into three main points. The same survey was administered to second year students and the results can be seen in Table 2 and Figure 2. Similar to the first year students, feedback from third year students indicated how they were able to benefit from and draw upon their domain knowledge from content courses (questions 1 and 2), and how the process of researching topics that are related to their program helped them consolidate this knowledge (question 3). Additionally, students expressed satisfaction with engaging in a topic that was related to their main studies, albeit this response was slightly lower than the first year students (question 4).

Conclusion

Learning how to create a research paper is a considerable task for EFL students with little to no prior experience with academic writing. Nevertheless, it is important that students get up to speed with the research paper format as quickly as possible, as it is a critical component of an undergraduate university education. Therefore, providing scaffolding in the area of topic selection is an effective method for introducing students to this type of writing. Moreover, integrating content from foundational subjects is an efficient way to introduce students to literature that is directly relevant to their program while honing their research paper writing skills. As was demonstrated by the surveys, students were both happy to write on a topic related to their foundational courses, and benefited by consolidating their un-

derstanding of subject matter from their taught-in-English courses. Going forward, in order to increase the effectiveness of an approach to academic writing like this, some consultation and/or coordination with content course instructors would be ideal for two reasons. First, it would be helpful for content course instructors to know what topics are being covered in academic English research papers so as to avoid any unwanted duplication in assignments. Second, content course instructors could have useful input into the topics selected for research papers, which could lead to synergies in both classes, maximizing not only students' learning experience, but also any potential crossover effects from one class to another. Additionally, in order to accommodate students' interests as much as possible, it may be advisable to allow students to choose either the teacher appointed topic (s), or a topic of their own, provided the student can demonstrate a strong enough understanding of how to write a research paper, and that the topic is suitable for the assignment.

The research paper is perhaps the most important learning and assessment tool of an undergraduate education. In no other assignment are students critical thinking and research skills challenged to the degree they are when creating one. To be sure, it involves a considerable amount of time and effort, and as such, instructors must carefully consider the direction in which they take students on this challenging learning path. In the context of an EMI program, this paper has shown that students can benefit from researching and writing on topics that are closely related to their foundational content courses. In future semesters, more investigation is needed to understand which topics work best for first- and second-year students, and to what extent skills learned in the academic writing classes transfer into assignments in content courses.

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