

THE ROLE OF SUBJECT CONTENT IN DEVELOPING ACADEMIC WRITING COMPETENCE

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Abstract: In contemporary higher education, academic writing is no longer viewed as a purely linguistic skill but as a complex ability shaped by disciplinary knowledge and cognitive engagement. This study investigates how the inclusion of subject-specific content influences the development of academic writing competence among learners of English as a foreign language.

Keywords: academic writing, content-based instruction, EFL, higher education, writing development

Introduction. Academic writing plays a central role in students' success at the tertiary level, yet many learners struggle to produce well-structured and meaningful texts in English. One of the main reasons for this difficulty lies in the traditional separation of language learning from subject knowledge. When writing is taught without meaningful context, students often lack ideas and struggle to organize their thoughts effectively. An alternative perspective suggests that writing development can be enhanced through exposure to relevant subject content. In such contexts, language is not treated as an isolated system but as a tool for expressing disciplinary knowledge. Scholars have noted that meaningful content provides a natural environment for language use and supports more effective learning processes [1, p.2]. Therefore, integrating subject matter into writing instruction may offer significant benefits for learners.

Literature review. A growing body of research emphasizes the connection between academic writing and disciplinary knowledge. Hyland points out that writing in academic settings is closely tied to the conventions and expectations of specific fields, which means that students must understand both language and content to succeed [2, p.45]. Without this connection, writing instruction may remain superficial and limited in its effectiveness. In addition, content-oriented instruction has been shown to promote deeper cognitive engagement. When students work with meaningful subject matter, they are more likely to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information. This process contributes to the development of critical thinking skills, which are essential for academic writing [3, p.78].

Another important aspect is genre awareness. Swales argues that successful academic writing depends on understanding how texts are structured within particular disciplines [4, p.56]. Such understanding is difficult to achieve without exposure to authentic subject-related materials. Therefore, incorporating content into writing instruction helps students internalize the conventions of academic discourse.

The research focuses on undergraduate students from non-language majors and examines how contextualized instruction contributes to improvements in coherence, lexical choice, and argumentation. Using a mixed-method design, the study combines writing assessments with learner feedback. The results suggest that content-oriented instruction facilitates deeper understanding and leads to more structured and meaningful written output. These findings highlight the pedagogical value of integrating subject matter into language instruction.

Methodology. This research adopted a mixed-method approach to examine the impact of subject content on writing development. The study involved 40 undergraduate students enrolled in non-language majors. Their English proficiency level was approximately intermediate.

Participants were divided into two groups. The experimental group received writing instruction based on subject-related topics, while the control group followed a traditional approach focused on general language exercises. The study was conducted over an eight-week period. During this time, students in the experimental group engaged with discipline-related materials and completed writing tasks based on these topics. In contrast, the control group worked with decontextualized prompts.

Data collection included:

- Pre- and post-writing tests;
- Analytical scoring rubrics;
- Student perception questionnaires;

The writing tasks required students to produce short academic texts, which were evaluated in terms of coherence, vocabulary use, grammatical accuracy, and logical organization.

Results and discussion. The analysis of the collected data revealed clear and consistent differences between the experimental and control groups. While both groups demonstrated some level of improvement in their post-test results, the progress observed in the experimental group was significantly higher in almost all assessed criteria. In particular, students exposed to subject-specific content showed notable advancement in coherence, lexical richness, and the logical organization of their written texts. This finding suggests that exposure to meaningful content helps learners acquire vocabulary in context, making it easier to recall and apply in writing tasks. As noted in earlier studies, contextualized input enhances both retention and practical use of language [1, p.5].

Another important finding relates to students' ability to generate ideas. Many participants in the control group reported difficulties in starting their writing due to a lack of background knowledge. In contrast, students in the experimental group were able to draw on previously discussed subject content, which allowed them to develop their arguments more confidently and effectively. This supports the view that writing is closely connected to knowledge construction rather than merely language production [2, p.67].

From a cognitive perspective, the integration of subject content appears to reduce the mental effort required to generate ideas, thereby allowing students to focus more on organizing and expressing those ideas. This aligns with the concept that familiarity with content can lower cognitive load and facilitate more efficient learning processes [3, p.81].

Overall, the results confirm that integrating subject content into writing instruction not only improves linguistic performance but also supports cognitive and academic development. The combination of language and content creates a more holistic learning environment, where students are able to develop multiple competencies simultaneously.

Conclusion. This study demonstrates that subject content plays a significant role in the development of academic writing competence. By providing meaningful context, it helps students generate ideas, organize their thoughts, and use appropriate language. The findings suggest that educators should move beyond purely language-focused instruction and incorporate discipline-related materials into their teaching practices. Such an approach not only improves writing skills but also prepares students for real academic communication. Future research may explore the long-term effects of this approach and its application in different educational contexts. From a pedagogical perspective, the results suggest that educators should reconsider traditional language teaching methods that focus primarily on grammar and isolated exercises. Instead, greater emphasis should be placed on integrating meaningful content into instruction. This can be achieved through the use of authentic materials, discipline-related topics, and task-based activities.

In addition, teachers should provide guidance on how to organize ideas, develop arguments, and use academic conventions effectively. Combining content knowledge with explicit writing instruction can further enhance students' learning outcomes. Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations, including a relatively small sample size and a short intervention period. Therefore, future research is recommended to explore the long-term effects of content-integrated instruction and to examine its applicability in different educational settings and disciplines.

In conclusion, integrating subject content into writing instruction represents a highly effective approach to developing academic writing competence. It supports not

only linguistic development but also cognitive growth, critical thinking, and academic readiness.

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