Investigating business EFL postgraduate student writing in a UK university: a qualitative study

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Abstract: Student writing in university contexts, especially in the area of business, has relatively been under-researched in the English for academic purposes (EAP) literature. Many previous studies have only labelled the types of student writing in the academe. Although labeling is essential as a starting point to map out and understand student writing at university, we still need more research to move beyond labeling and further uncover the expectations and requirements underlying the production of these types of writing. This study duly attempts to fill this gap and it adopted a qualitative ethnographically oriented methodology combining both text and context analyses to explore the types, requirements and expectations of student writing in a business postgraduate programme in a UK tertiary context. Eight participants, students and lecturers took part in the study by allowing face-to-face tape-recorded interviews. In this paper, I will only report findings from the perspective of the lecturer participants. Results of data analysis showed that the type of writing lecturers required for their courses was library research paper. However, the requirements and expectations underlying the production of this paper significantly varied across the courses and among those lecturers. Pedagogical implications for EAP were presented and discussed.

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I am an applied linguistics and TESOL researcher practitioner with expertise in EAP and academic writing research and pedagogy. My research interests are primarily centered on English for academic purposes (EAP), academic writing and academic literacy, teacher education and the use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in higher education. I am actively engaged into a number of research projects in EAP, academic writing for students and professional writers as well as EMI in higher education. Some findings and pedagogical implications from these projects have already been shared and disseminated in international conferences and peer-reviewed journals. The research reported in this paper is part of my wider research projects in academic writing, academic literacy and student disciplinary socialization, particularly English as a foreign/second language (EFL/ESL) students enrolled on EMI programmes in higher education institutions in both English as a first language and ESL/EFL contexts.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Coursework essays are an integral part of assessment process in the English-speaking universities. International students pursuing their postgraduate study in these universities often come from different cultural and educational backgrounds where the writing of essays, as part of course assessment, is not commonplace. The findings and insights reported in this research paper are therefore aimed to raise awareness about and inform the teaching of the writing of academic essay to international students enrolled on various degree programmes, particularly business in the English-speaking universities. The study proposes a socio-contextual rather than solely cognitive approach to teaching academic writing. The paper argues that writing support pedagogies intended for international students should not solely focus on identifying the types of essays in academia, their composing and mechanical aspects, but they should also take into consideration the social surroundings. This would in turn help unpack the expectations and requirements of the essay as a common learning assessment.
1. Introduction

Student writing in university contexts, especially in the area of business studies, is relatively under-researched in the literature of genre theory and EAP, compared to expert writing. Many previous studies (e.g. Canseco & Byrd, 1989; Cooper & Bikowski, 2007; Zhu, 2004) attempting to investigate student writing in tertiary level, adopted survey methodologies through which data were obtained from the course syllabuses and the lecturers’ handouts with the purposes of analysing and classifying the types of writing assignments students are expected to write in these contexts. Accordingly, library research papers, article reviews and business reports have become common genre labels associated with the types of writing assignments students are expected to write in universities. Although this taxonomy is essential in mapping out the types of genres students are required to produce in the university settings, we, however, still need more studies that can move beyond the mere labeling of student genres and further uncover the different socio-contextual factors underlying the production of these genres. The current paper attempts to go this line and fill this gap both theoretically and pedagogically. The paper adopted a qualitative discourse-based interview approach through which interviews were conducted with the lecturers as the immediate student genre evaluators. The study, therefore, gained the insiders’ emic perspective into the investigation.

Despite the fact that coursework assignment is the most important genre students produce in university settings, it has remained less researched in the literature of genre theory and EAP (see, e.g., Conseco & Byrd, 1989; Dudley-Evans, 2002; Horowitz, 1986; Kusel, 1992). Horowitz’s (1986) much-cited study was the pioneering study that attempted to investigate this type of student writing. Horowitz’s and many other studies conducted on student witting assigned in university settings (e.g. Canseco & Byrd, 1989; Cooper & Bikowski, 2007; Gardner & Nesi, 2013; Hale et al., 1996), adopted survey methodologies. Through these survey approaches, researchers would collect course syllabuses and lecturers’ handouts to analyse and classify the types of different writing tasks faculty assigned to students in these contexts. These survey studies provided an essential taxonomy of the types of writing tasks students are expected and required to write. However, there have not many attempts been made in the literature towards the uncovering of these expectations and the requirements underlying the production of these types of tasks. Such an investigation would have only been possible if such studies had moved a step further beyond mere surveying course syllabuses and lecturers’ handouts, and enquired those lecturers through qualitative-based interviews about their held requirements, expectations vis-à-vis the production of these genres. Such qualitative ethnographic investigations would consolidate the textual analysis of the genres since lecturers are the evaluators of the genres that students are expected to produce. The current study therefore duly attempts to go that further step. The study was conducted at a business school (henceforth BS) in a large UK university located in the South of England with an excellent record in teaching and research. The focus was on the investigation of student writing on three courses in an accounting and finance postgraduate programme (henceforth ACCF) offered and taught by the BS. The courses are AC901: Issues in Financial Reporting, AC902: Corporate Finance and AC903: Management Accounting. The university provides both pre-and in-sessional EAP support including academic writing and study skills writing to the students to help them cope with their respective business studies. English is a second/foreign language for those students and academic writing training is viewed as an essential pillar to help them handle the various writing tasks assigned in the various courses of business. However, what seems to be missing is the consideration of the various socio-cultural issues surrounding the expectation and requirements of student writing in the discipline. Therefore, the overarching objective of this study is to draw the attention of both EAP and subject teachers to the importance of considering the various and multi-layered aspects of academic writing and thus informing their pedagogical support to students. The central hypothesis of the study is that raising awareness of both language
and content teachers about the various socio-cultural aspects of academic writing could better inform both writing and content pedagogies.

2. Literature review

The theory of genre analysis, since Swales and Bhatia’s research on academic and professional writing in the late 1980s and early 1990s, has been playing a central role in Applied Linguistics. It has been introduced to satisfy the need for the quest of text specificity for the professional and EAP pedagogical enterprises (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Swales, 2004; Swales & Feak, 2000). Through the uncovering of variations and specificities of writing and knowledge construction across knowledge disciplines and professions, research on genre theory has significantly been informing and developing the EAP and professional pedagogy, and instruction (Dudley-Evans, 2004; Hyland, 2002).

Genre theory is a multi-disciplinary, highly complex and elusive theory to be mapped and classified under definitive and discrete schools (Johns, 2006). However, some attempts have been made in the literature to identify three distinct but interrelated schools for genre analysis in relation to EAP. According to Hyon (1996), the literature of genre studies features three main schools to genre analysis. The systemic functional linguistics (SFL) approach which also known as the Australian or Sydney school; the ESP approach which also sometimes known as the Swalesian approach, and the New Rhetoric which is also known as the North American School. According to Hyon's taxonomy and Johns’ (2008) discussion and critiques on these schools in relation to EAP pedagogy, each of these traditions has its own theoretical, research interests and pedagogical orientations, useful implications as well shortcomings in the pedagogical applications. The current study fits within the ethnographic ESP and new rhetoric frames of genre analysis combining textual and contextual genre analyses.

Student coursework assignment genre in tertiary education seems to have relatively been under-researched in the literature of genre theory and EAP, compared to the research conducted on the other academic genres such as professional/expert writing research articles (RAs) or even to the research on the other somewhat advanced postgraduate genres in the same settings (i.e. Masters’ Dissertations and PhD theses) (Dudley-Evans, 2002). The investigation, therefore, of this genre and its underlying conventions and norms is equally important. On the other hand, writing on Masters’ level programmes where students engage into the epistemological and generic knowledge of their disciplines seems to more or less approximating them to the full-fledged membership of the discourse community of their disciplines whose gatekeepers are the immediate course lecturers (Becher, 1990; Hewings, 2004). Accordingly, investigation of the coursework assignment genre could help those students become aware and knowledgeable of the generic exigencies and expectations of those gatekeepers who are the assigners and evaluators of this genre.

Problems and difficulties English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) students encounter when they are engaged in writing into English-medium universities seem to have long been motivating research on writing in university settings. This research attempts to demystify and thus helping those students to cope with writing in these contexts (e.g. Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999; Canseco & Byrd, 1989; Cooper & Bikowski, 2007; Dudley-Evans, 2002; Hale et al., 1996; Horowitz, 1986; Kusel, 1992; Samraj, 2004; Zhu, 2004).

The main problem faced by ESL/EFL students when writing in English-medium universities, these studies seem to feature, is that the requirement of writing assignment itself is not familiar to those students nor are the conventions and the expectations of academic writing required by these contexts (Ballard & Clanchy, 1997, as cited in Paltridge, 2004). Moreover, following Casanave (2002), matters would even be more complicated when such students are encountered with the first writing tasks as they, at that stage, would have not yet been adequately initiated and socialised into these contexts nor have they yet explored their writing requirements and the expectations. So, it seems that for international students to successfully cope with their studies...
in these contexts, they need to effectively produce the genres as required by these contexts. Effective production, in turn, requires the knowledge of the requirements of these contexts and the surroundings where these genres are produced and communicated (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Johns, 1997; Paltridge, 2004). However, there is generally relatively less research on student writing in university settings that have attempted to demystify these genres and their contexts of production (Canseco & Byrd, 1989; Dudley-Evans, 2002; Horowitz, 1986; Kusel, 1992). Although there are studies, using different methodologies, attempted to investigate student writing in university settings in different subject areas on both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, business subject area, on the other hand, seems to have remained the less researched area in this literature.

Business studies as a subject area seem to be the most attractive area for international students compared to the other subject areas. However, student writing in this field has remained scarcely researched. Previous studies which attempted to investigate student writing in this field only focused on the classification of the writing assignments tasks (e.g. Canseco & Byrd, 1989; Cooper & Bikowski, 2007). Some studies investigated the writing types, the importance of writing in the field and the role of faculty in teaching writing (e.g. Zhu, 2004). Others focused on comparing student writing in the field with expert writing in the same field (e.g. Harwood, 2003). Yet, there are some studies attempted to investigate student writing on business courses in relation to the feasibility of applying expert writing genre approaches (i.e. Swalesian move analysis on RAs) to student writing genres in the field (e.g. Dudley-Evans, 2002).

Most previous studies that attempted to investigate student writing, whether on business or other fields on both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, adopted somewhat similar survey approaches. Through these surveys, the sources of data for analysis were the course syllabuses and the lecturers’ handouts on writing assignments (e.g. Canseco & Byrd, 1989; Cooper & Bikowski, 2007; Hale et al., 1996; Horowitz, 1986). But, fewer studies on student writing in university settings (e.g. Harwood, 2003; Kusel, 1992) attempted and used corpus-based studies including students’ actual product. The former study compared student and expert writing in the field of business and management while the latter studied the rhetorical organization of the beginnings and ends of student writing across different disciplines. Although these studies used student actual writing which is a new step that could more help in investigating the real features and norms of the genre, they did not enquire those students as genre producers nor did they enquire their lecturers the genre evaluators to add the insiders’ ‘emic’ perspective into their investigation. This is indeed necessary since writing in the discipline is viewed as fundamental in acculturating and socialising students into their disciplines and helping them acquire the disciplinary content and knowledge (Nallaya, 2018; Nesi & Gardner, 2012). However, some studies did that but still in different ways. Some studies whose investigation was mainly based on course syllabuses and lecturers’ handouts (e.g. Cooper & Bikowski, 2007; Moore & Morton, 1998), as cited in Paltridge, 2006, followed their analysis with interviews with faculty in general to support their analysis and the categories they reached through the analysis. Even studies that included actual student writing as main or part of their investigations (Hyland, 2004; Zhu, 2004), they asked lectures but they did not ask the same students who produced the text nor the same lecturers (e.g. Zhu, 2004). Hyland (2004), on the other hand, analyzed student actual writing and followed up his analysis with interviews with students and lecturers. Hyland interviewed students in focus group interviews to support the textual analysis of L2 students’ patterns of engagement in writing. But still, they were not necessarily the same students who produced the genre. Nor were they the same lecturers, with the case of faculty interviews, who assigned that genre.

Previous studies that researched student writing on business courses with other disciplines under social sciences/humanities category (e.g. Cooper & Bikowski, 2007) or as a separate field (e.g. Canseco & Byrd, 1989; Zhu, 2004); set the classification of the types of writing assigned on these courses. Thus, categories such as case studies, reports, article/book reviews, business reports, research papers, etc., have emerged and been associated with the writing assigned on
business courses in university settings. However, though such taxonomies are essential, the picture is still not clear about what kind of knowledge and structure, for instance, the case study writing type should contain and take, what skills and requirements set and/or held by faculty the successful writing of this case study should meet, and what understandings and beliefs student writers themselves hold about such requirements. Yet, which course and which discipline of business that exclusively or mostly features case study type of writing than other disciplines. Still, what purposes and functions the writing on such type of writing assignments realize or is expected to realize, and to what extent student writers and the linguistic, stylistic, rhetorical and structural features of the genre they produce for these types of writing are influenced by lecturers as audience to the genre (Kusel, 1992; Paltridge, 2006; Samraj, 2002, 2004).

It is indeed advisable for EAP researchers to ask such questions and take an approach to student writing analysis which could account for the social aspects of writing and of the performing of task requirements, given the fact that writing has increasingly become viewed as a social act and a socially mediated and constructed endeavour (e.g. Bazerman, 1988; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Freedman & Medway, 1994; Ivanić, 1998; Johns, 1997; Lillis, 2001, 2008; Paltridge, 2004; Samraj, 2004). For example, following Ivanić (1998), writing tasks required of students in the university setting are embedded in the social context with both aspects of the context of situation and specific purposes. Students writing tasks should, therefore, be viewed and analysed with the consideration that these tasks are “embedded in a particular social context which consists of particular courses, in a particular department ... set by a particular tutor, due on a particular date, and [they are] part of a developing social relationship between the student[s] and the tutor [s] who [are] going to read [them]” (Ivanić, 1998, p. 61).

Indeed, the social view of writing reminds us that writers write with an audience in mind and with the needs and requirements of that audience in mind. For example, L2 business management postgraduate students Sofie and Tara, in Harwood and Petrič’s (2012) case study on students’ citation behaviour reported that they had used citation in their writing assignments in a certain way such as citing to meet their lecturers’ perceived requirements and expectations as well their interests and ideological standpoints.

According to the classification of studies on business writing, one common type of writing assigned to students on the business courses on both under and postgraduate programmes is the library research paper. In order for student writers to achieve this writing task, they are expected to research the literature to synthesize the answer for the task question from various sources. However, these studies did not go beyond this classification and ask the genre assigners/evaluators of this type of writing task about which kind of engagement in the literature to synthesize, for instance, a student should follow or what structural pattern this library research paper should follow. Indeed, as writing for each of these business disciplines, which seem to have been taken by previous studies as a unified entity under the umbrella term of business courses, might still feature different requirements in different institutions for the successful completion of the writing assignments (Zhu, 2004). The present study will investigate student writing in business courses in relation to the writing inside the accounting and finance discipline. Having reviewed and situated the present study within the literature and given the lack of research on student writing in business courses particularly the lack of and socio-contextual research, the present study strives to address the following research questions with regard to students’ writing in the BS ACCF postgraduate programme:

1. What types of writing students are asked to produce on the ACCF?
2. In what ways are these types of writing similar and in what ways do they differ?
3. What requirements and expectations ACCF faculty place on student writers to produce these types of writing?
3. Methodology and design

3.1. Participants
The main study comprised both student and lecturer participants but here as I mentioned earlier I will only report on the lecturer participants part of the study. Lecturers from the BS teaching on the ACCF programmes were contacted to take part in the project. Three lecturers replied positively and agreed to take part in the study by allowing face-to-face tape-recorded interviews. Before the interviews were conducted, another email containing a general outline of the interviews was sent to the concerned participants. In the interviews, participant consent forms and written detailed outlines of the project and the expected implications were handed out to the participants. Participants were reassured that their participation was voluntary and that their data would only be used for research purposes and their identities would not be disclosed when reporting the findings.

3.2. Methods of data collection
The study used semi-structured interviews as the main method of data collection. Face-to-face tape-recorded interviews were conducted with the BS lecturers teaching the ACCF three compulsory courses (ACCFL1, ACCFL2, ACCFL3). Interviews also took a format of a discourse-based interview. That is, I referred the interviewees to certain pieces of information and asked them questions on these pieces. The pieces of information were prepared in form of prompt cards handed out to the interviewees to read and around which certain questions and probes and follow-ups questions were asked (see Odell, Goswami, & Herrington, 1983 & Lillis, 2001). Such a format of interviews would give more reliability for the data elicited as they evolve around texts and documents and therefore participants’ recall problems could be safely overcome.

4. Textual sources for the interview
I used some textual documents during the interviews in a discourse-based format. Firstly, Cooper and Bikowski’s (2007) taxonomy of writing assigned in university settings and a list containing the names and codes of the compulsory and some optional courses of the ACCF were handed out to participants. The purpose was to see how they would classify the writing assigned on ACCF courses in relation to this taxonomy. Secondly, I discussed the feedback those participants had given on the students’ assignments. I highlighted the salient points on the feedback documents namely, structure-signposting and analytical and critical evaluation. Lecturers were asked to elaborate and explain more about their requirements and expectations in relation to these points. The final documents, I used as a source in the analysis and for the discourse-based interviews, were the assignment sheets. Lecturer informants were given their own and their other colleagues teaching in the same programme assignments’ questions and instructions’ sheets. Questions on these sheets were intended to investigate the similarities and differences in the demands and the requirements of writing assignments between the participants’ own courses and the other colleagues’ courses. They were also used to discuss the lecturers’ requirement for critical evaluation in student writing.

4.1. Coding and analytical procedures
Interviews were transcribed and coded. An open thematic and inductive approach to coding was followed. Interview transcripts were segmented into categories with thematic codes. After transcribing the interviews and as I was already familiar with the data through the process of transcription, I made initial reading on the individual transcripts. I made some initial codes and placed them beside the text stretches of interview transcripts. Codes were refined many times throughout to ensure that they captured and represented the participants’ voices in the interviews. Following Coffee and Atkinson (1996), coding of qualitative data features a lot of strategies and it differs in complexity depending on the analysis intended on the data. Having my research question in mind and what I needed from the data, I then moved on to do more analytical coding on the interview transcripts in a way that addressed my research questions by linking up and connecting the themes in both a comparative and contrastive way to gain a multi-perspective analytical dimension. I always kept reading recursively through the coded transcripts so that I made sure
that the representative statements and quotes I used in my data analysis were accurately corresponding to the participants’ views. The analysis was based on the final themes, concepts and categories I could come up with from the coding procedure I used. The literature on coding did inform me, but it was my research questions and my sense of data that, in the end, determined my decision to code my data transcripts the way I did (Patton, 2002).

5. Results and discussion

Although the original study includes corpus data and interview data but here I only reported some of the results of the interview data analysis. Having in mind the three research questions I set earlier, the interview data on which the answers to these questions will be reported include the data obtained on the type of writing in the ACCF three compulsory courses. It includes the data on lecturers’ demands, requirements of students and expectations from the writing for these courses. It also includes the data on the similarities and differences found between writing for the ACCF three compulsory courses. I will be using quotes from the coded interview data to support my analysis and discussion. To anonymize the identity of the participants, the following acronyms were used: ACCFL1: lecturer of the issues in financial reporting course. ACCFL2: lecturer of the corporate finance course and ACCFL3: lecturer of the management accounting course.

Based on Cooper & Bikowski’s (2007) taxonomy of writing assigned in university settings and list of courses on the ACCF, participants described the type of writing assigned on the three compulsory courses of the ACCF as library research paper in the sense that student writers would research the literature and would synthesise from various sources to respond to the questions assigned:

For the last three years I’ve set a library research paper, that is I’ve chosen a question that can’t necessarily easily to be answered from one paper, they [student writers] have to go to a number of sources in order to answer the question’. (ACCFL1)

My understanding is that this is very similar on 902, that they [students] have a library research paper, but I do know on AC-903, at least last year, because I was the second marker, it was a research paper. But they had to choose a particular paper then analyse it, but then drawing on other sources as well. So, I think again on this taxonomy (Cooper & Bikowski’s 2007), they were writing a library research paper. (ACCFL1)

This finding confirms those of the previous studies (e.g. Canseco & Byrd, 1989; Cooper & Bikowski, 2007; Zhu, 2004) in that library research paper is one of the types of the writing tasks students are expected to produce in university settings. However, the methodologies through which these previous studies set this classification did not provide us with sufficient information on different other aspects, requirements and expectations the production of this library research-paper type places on student writers to effectively achieve in different disciplines of business courses for each of which writing might significantly vary (Zhu, 2004).

Furthermore, writing for the ACCF courses featured some variations and similarities. Although these courses belong to one business discipline which is accounting and finance, the writing tasks in them featured some variations and similarities. Whilst writing for AC-901 and AC-903 is critical, theoretical, subjective in nature, writing for AC-902 is statistical, mathematical and objective in nature. Topics for AC-901 and AC-903 writing tasks are set by the course lecturers and students do the task individually. For AC-902, however, it is the students, in groups, who choose the topic and then consult the lecturer:

It’s basically been mathematical and statistical methods that these papers are following. Because essentially this paper that I ask them to write is mostly quantitative in nature, it’s not qualitative. Figures and statistics and data, econometrics, etc. (ACCFL3)

AC-903 lecturer agreed with this assessment:
In corporate finance, it’s more mathematical. But in 901 and 903, no, it’s more of theory than practical problems. So, we tend to tell students to write critically and analytically. But in 902, you may not even write anything to finish, just make calculations and so on. (ACCFL2)

Lecturers also reported that the writing for some ACCF courses is more cross-disciplinary in nature such as that of AC-901 and AC-903. Writing for both courses requires students to import theories from other discipline and use them in their responding to the assignment questions:

You see in our own area; 901 and 903, we normally use theory to illuminate our problem, our solution. We use what we call sociological theories, anthropological theories, and philosophical theories. You see 901 and 903 tend to be interdisciplinary courses. (ACCFL2)

These findings on variations in the lecturers’ requirements and in the disciplinary nature seem to confirm Samraj’s (2002) and Thaiss & Zawacki’s (2006) findings on that student writing in university settings is surrounded by a multilayered context in which not only the discipline layer has different influences on the writing of the students, but also the individual faculty have different bearings and requirements on the rhetorical as well as the organizational ways through which student writers produce their texts. This seems to emphasize the importance of adopting more socio-cultural approaches to researching academic writing in the university setting to unpack the tacit lecturers’ expectations and requirements of successful disciplinary writing. Indeed, the contextual investigation of student writing in the discipline is indeed crucial, especially, when considering the view that such writing is by nature textually and generically unpredictable (see, e.g., Hüttner, 2008).

Writing for AC901, AC903 and AC902 requires different ways of approaching the literature. Although writing for the ACCF courses appeared to be a library research paper type in the sense of researching and synthesizing from various sources of the disciplinary literature, the writing of this paper, however, demands different ways of drawing from, approaching and researching this literature. While writing for AC901 and AC903 requires student writers to engage in the literature critiquing and interpreting, writing for AC902, on the other hand, requires more objective approaching of the literature as the task is more mathematical and statistical in nature.

Moreover, evaluation is an important requirement in ACCF students’ writing. Lecturers seem to focus on the evaluation in the critical evaluation requirement in student writing. Evaluation for them is a skill that students should know so that they can move beyond analysis. Student writers should not just confine themselves to the discussion of the pros and cons of the topic; they should be capable of stating their own reasoned opinion at the end:

[Critically evaluate] is not a phrase in the sense. The key thing is the ‘evaluate’. To critically evaluate I think the critically in there is to say you are taking a more a neutral view and it’s something beyond just analysis. It’s not just the advantages and the disadvantages. But saying why they are important and come to their own opinion in the end. I always say to my students that descriptive essays can only secure pass mark. (ACCFL1)

These variations, requirements and expectations of student writing in a single discipline lend support to similar findings (e.g. Nallaya, 2018; Nessi & Gardner, 2012) in that ethnographic and socio-contextual studies of student academic in writing is necessary given that students writing changes across different courses in different disciplines offered by different institutions and taught and assessed different lecturers who hold different expectations and requirements of student writing.

6. Conclusions and implications
Using a methodology which builds on but somewhat contrasts with the previous studies in the area, the study investigated student writing on three compulsory courses on a postgraduate business programme with the aims of uncovering the type, structural, rhetorical and epistemological requirements the writing for these courses places on student writers. The study also aimed at coming out with some pedagogical implications and insights for the EAP writing pedagogy. Overall,
the investigation showed that student writing assignments in university contexts cannot be fully uncovered through the use of methodologies that focus on the mere labeling of the genres of this writing as, on the other side of the coin, there are many structural, rhetorical as well as epistemological requirements which underlie the effective production of these genres. The investigation, moreover, showed that, at least in the study context, the writing type required in the ACCF programme, in relation to other business types of writing in university settings, is library research paper. However, ACCF faculty turned out to differ in their requirements on the content, structure, language and style this paper should characterize with.

The findings reached through the study have potential and significant implications and insights for the EAP. They could provide some insights for EAP teachers and curriculum designers to consider when designing syllabuses and teaching of academic writing programmes for students in the accounting and finance discipline. Based on the findings, below are some potential and significant implications and insights for the EAP.

Findings suggest that there is a need for bridging the gap between writing out and inside the discipline, teaching academic writing for accounting and finance students should be geared towards the requirements and expectations in the discipline (Hyland, 2002). EAP teachers could raise student writers’ generic and rhetorical awareness of the writing expected of them inside the discipline (Poltrridge, 2004; Samraj, 2002, 2004). To achieve that, EAP teachers could, for instance, use successful previous student papers and expert papers in the field as genre exemplars, with particular focus on the former as they serve as a direct and practical example of the writing expected in the discipline.

EAP teachers could also make some contacts with the ACCF subject specialists, ideally for team teaching, and interview them about the specific requirements and expectations of the writing that they ask students to do for their own courses. Such information could help EAP teachers gear their teaching in a way that matches with what is required by the faculty. By doing so, EAP teachers would be able to effectively raise students’ rhetorical awareness and expectations of what it is like to write inside the discipline and thereby help bridging the gaps found between writing out and inside the ACCF discipline. For example, since writing for the ACCF courses features generic variations and so do the faculty requirements, it would be more practical should ACCF and EAP teachers cooperate in a team teaching so that students learning to write on the ACCF could be more informed and thus appreciating these variations and requirements.

The findings on critical evaluation requirements by ACCF faculty in student writing also seem to necessitate that those students should know how to write critically and avoid merely descriptive writing. This, in turn, entails that EAP instructors should show students how to write critically. EAP teachers, in consultation with the ACCF faculty, could, for example, compare and contrast samples for descriptive writing, analytical writing and analytical and evaluative writing. Students learning to write on accounting and finance courses need them to be so critical and take a stance from the beginning on and yet some other courses need them to be more mathematical, statistical and objective when approaching writing for these courses. Such findings lend support to the call such as that of Johns (2008) for finding an EAP approach to teach genre in a way that promotes genre awareness and rhetorical flexibility among student writers. Because if it is difficult to teach the discipline-specifics into EAP classrooms, EAP instructors could, at least, rhetorically navigate with the students into these expectations of the community of practice (Bawarshi, 2003, as cited in Paltridge, 2006; Casanave, 2002).

Finally, the present study was limited to only one graduate programme and only three informants who participated in the investigation. So, caution should be taken when the findings of this
study are interpreted as it is not intended to generalize from findings obtained from such a small-scale study. However, the findings are still significant and illuminating in suggesting that researching student writing in the university settings need more than textual analysis confined to the final product. Studies should move further to investigate and uncover the contextual and socio-cultural surroundings of the expectations and requirements involved in the production of student writing. The investigation also showed us, as I mentioned earlier, that student writing assignments at university cannot be fully uncovered through the use of methodologies that only focus on the mere labeling of the genres of this writing and ignoring the other structural and rhetorical requirements which are also involved in the effective production of these types of genres.

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Appendies

Appendix A

Interview schedule: example interview questions

Here’s a classification of the different types of writing lecturers assign to students in university settings. Students take the following modules on the MSc Accounting and Finance scheme, so in relation to this classification:

How would you classify the types of writing assigned for these courses?

Now looking more specifically at your assignment sheet and at this classification of writing in university settings (Cooper and Bikowski’s taxonomy): could you tell me about:

- What kind of writing is your task in relation to this classification?

And what other demands and requirements does it place on students?

Now moving on to look at the following Accounting and Finance compulsory assignment titles:

- What are the similarities and differences between your writing task we have just discussed and these ones?

Looking at this feedback you attached to one of your students’ essay:

- What is exactly required of students to do so as to write in more “analytical’ and ‘evaluative’ than in” descriptive’ and “explanatory” ways for your coursework assignment?

- Can you tell me more about your emphasis in your feedback on the point that students should draw conclusions that directly addresses the question set?

If we take the two phrases critically evaluate, by using evidence to support and the instruction to students from the AC-903 assignment question sheet (Doc/card: A):

- What is required of students to successfully tackle these parts of the question? (Prompts: What kind of reading and evidence, for instance, should students do and provide?)

What other things are required of students to produce a successful answer to this question?

Finally, I’ve an open question for you: Do you want to add any comments on anything related to any aspect that we have talked about throughout the interview?

Appendix B

(1) Cooper and Bikowski’s (2007) taxonomy on writing in tertiary contexts

- Library research paper-case study-article/book review-report on an experiment/project-proposal/plan-journal article-essay-unstructured writing-annotated bibliography-summary/abstract-short task-essay test.

- Library research paper: A paper that incorporates and synthesizes information from multiple bibliographic sources.
- Case study: A piece of writing describing and analyzing a particular case situation.

- Article/Book review: A summary and reaction to/opinion of an article or book (film critiques are included).

Extracted from Cooper and Bikowski (2007) article: Writing at the graduate level: What tasks do professors actually require? Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 6(3). Pages: 206–221.

(2) Assignment sheets questions

- AC-902: Strategic Management Accounting Techniques of Activity-Based Costing and Quality Management currently receive much attention in the management accounting literature. While some authors have argued that such attention is due to new and convincing theory, others have argued that such attention is merely the result of persuasive rhetoric and not based on sound reasoning.

- Required: Critically evaluate the above arguments by using evidence to support your view in respect of one of the above two techniques.

- AC-901: Critically evaluate the extent to which the decision-usefulness of financial reporting would be improved if annual corporate reports were replaced by real-time, online financial reporting.

- A903: The coursework title can be found in this reading list [the lecturer gave students a list journals and books]. Choose any topic from the above and write an essay that should include the necessary theoretical and empirical evidence. This can be a group work. The maximum number of students in a group must not exceed the size of five. Of course, the minimum number could be one!

- There is a lot of literature in the academic journals on each topic. You are expected both to read the appropriate literature and to select for inclusion only the parts directly relevant to the topic. You need to form a judgment on what is directly relevant. Try searching Google Scholar for preliminary research.
