

**RESEARCH PAPER****Designing an EAP Course to improve Analytical Writing Proficiency of Graduate Level ESL Learners in the Digital Age****¹Ezzah Shakil and ²Dr. Sadaf Siddiq**

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to design an EAP analytical writing course for ESL learners studying at graduate level. In the age of digitalisation, ESL learners tend to rely blindly on internet material for the accomplishment of their academic writing tasks. This malpractice has posed serious threat to their critical thinking skills, analytical writing proficiency, and argumentative discourse. The design of the study is explanatory sequential mixed method involving theory triangulation at its various stages. In order to design the course, needs analysis was conducted, in the first phase, by using a closed-ended questionnaire consisting of 15 items. Convenience sample of 100 ESL learners studying at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur was selected. The statistical data of the study led to second phase of the study i.e. the qualitative phase. This research is situated within the footsteps of multifarious theoretical frameworks. Framework proposed by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) guided the questionnaire items. The principles of EAP course design proposed by Klimova (2015) and Brown (1995) were followed. However, the overall foundations of the study were informed by main tenets of "A Test of the Shallowing Hypothesis" by Anisette and Lafreniere (2017). The study recommends the implementation of the proposed EAP course, including its syllabus design, objectives, assessment, and evaluation criteria, for the improvement of analytical writing proficiency of ESL learners in digital age.

Keywords: Analytical Writing Proficiency, Critical Thinking Skills, Digital Age, EAP Course, ESL Learners, Shallowing Hypothesis

Introduction

Analytical writing has always been a difficult skill to master. Many studies like Rosenwasser et al. (2009) and Ucelli (2023) affirm that instructing analytical writing skills to ESL learners has always been a challenge. In the digital age, where students tend to rely on web sources for their academic assignments on grounds of ease of accessibility, the educators have observed a decline in their critical thinking skills, analytical writing proficiency, and argumentative reasoning. Hence, it has become the need of an hour to instruct students in order to augment their analytical writing proficiency and save the academia from digital natives who do not use their mental faculties for problem-solving and critical reasoning (Hassan, 2023). This study intends to design an EAP course for the improvement of analytical writing proficiency of ESL learners in the digital age. The prime objective of this study is to safeguard the cognitive capacity of students which is being damaged due to the misuse of digital writing platforms.

The type of writing that involves arguments to support various claims in analysis-based texts or topics by using valid argumentation, reasoning, and sufficient evidence is called analytical writing (Steiss, 2022). Analytical writing requires students to effectively use words, phrases, and clauses by keeping in mind syntactic rules and properties while also striving to create cohesion and coherence in the text. The texts exhibiting effective analytical traits also possess reasons, claims, evidences, and counterclaims. Vilar and Tolchinsky

(2022) mentions that analytical writing is a genre of academic writing that possesses the features of critical, expository, descriptive, and argumentative discourse. Analytical writing is an under researched area although this skill is an indispensable skill to learn in order to succeed in academia (Olsen et al., 2020).

The significance of EAP courses has been debated since decades. Studies like Shing and Sim (2011) have talked about the importance of conducting needs analysis and designing EAP courses to foster target skill acquisition in L2. EAP teachers play a pivotal role in ESL acquisition and work as a catalyst in the process of target skill achievement by ESL learners. EAP teachers can meticulously observe the needs of the students and then design their syllabi on the basis of these needs (Long, 2005). Some of the tasks that EAP teachers need to do are: developing a coherent course, sequencing of learning objectives, deciding appropriate tasks, pondering upon effective teaching methodologies, and striving to diminish students' difficulties in L2 acquisition. Hence, this study attempts to depict how to successfully instruct students about their analytical writing endeavours so that they can achieve their study goals.

It has become a necessity to understand the challenges that ESL learners face during analytical writing tasks at graduate level. This study aims to comprehend the deficiencies and linguistic needs of ESL learners by conducting a needs analysis and designing an EAP course based on the results of needs analysis. Developing a strong analytical writing proficiency in universities is an essential skill to attain academic achievement. In today's digital age, students rely on web sources and internet material blindly without critically evaluating the authenticity of the material. Majority of the ESL learners, in digital age, lack the knack of producing well-reasoned, coherent arguments, and analyses. Hence, this study endeavours to design an EAP course for digital natives in order to enhance their analytical writing proficiency. This research is significant as it will guide ESL learners to master an inevitable skill and excel in academia. This EAP course will not only foster the analytical writing proficiency of ESL learners but also their critical thinking skills and argumentative capabilities.

Literature Review

Due to rapid digitalisation, digital and AI writing tools have popularised in ESL environments. Because of this proliferation of digital writing platforms, ESL learners are facing new challenges of writing. The mushrooming of digital writing forums have brought a decline in analytical writing proficiencies of ESL learners. Students' over-dependence on technology is the chief feature of digital age. Sovern (2013) is of the view that the comprehension skills of ESL learners have been negatively affected because of the rapid permeation of internet. The skill of rewording and reframing the academic content by using analytical abilities is declining among ESL learners. The formal papers of ESL learners replete with textspeak, informal misspellings, slangs, and grammatical errors (Javed et al., 2021).

According to Mueller and Oppenheimer (2014), students who wrote by hand were more likely to describe the content in a better way but they produced least number of words while the students who wrote digitally, came up with a large reservoir of words but the subject matter or the content was not as good as that of the students who wrote by hand. However, the results of this famous research by Mueller and Oppenheimer (2014) were in favour of traditional paper-based writing because according to their study, digital writing negatively affects students' performance. Students who prefer digital writing compose longer texts but with meaningless content. On contrary, a student who writes in a traditional paper-pen way produces content with a substantial matter.

Moreover, typing can bring a decline to student's cognition and motor skills (Mangen, 2016). One solution suggested in Mangen's (2016) study is to integrate

handwriting and digital writing in early writing instructions of ESL learners in order to prevent negative influence on motor control. However, writing is a key competence and an individual, intentional, cultural, and a communicative event. Writing acts are made possible by the usage of different tools and resources for writing. With the onset of technology, the usage of digital resources is increasing. Nowadays, children learn to write by touching the screen of tablets and smartphone much before they learn to hold a pencil in their hand. Hence, it can be concluded from the above researches that digital writing is posing a threat to analytical writing proficiency of university students.

A study conducted by Tolchinsky et al. (2024) presents the Developing Analytical Writing (DAW) model which aims to understand how social expectations of analytical writing shape students' language skills. DAW suggests analysing text features across repeated writing tasks on similar and different topics by considering teaching influence and evaluating text quality from both the researcher's and reader's perspectives. This study by Tolchinsky et al. (2024) refines previous DAW approaches that focussed on lexical, syntactic, discursive, and structural aspects of analytical essays to enhance writing proficiency. Regression analyses conducted in their study confirmed the impact of these dimensions on text quality assessment. DAW helps identify evolving analytical features independent of teaching support. Moreover, their study also highlighted that analytical writing is a difficult yet significant skill to master by ESL learners.

Furthermore, one solution to this havoc caused by digital platforms is the development of an EAP course to improve analytical writing skills of ESL learners. Designing of EAP courses in ESL contexts is not a nascent concept. Ghani and Khan (2015) designed an ESP writing course for bankers so that they can improve their written expression. Documentation in the sector of finance demands maintenance of meticulous records, drafts, and deposits. So, according to their study, there was a dire need of making bankers skilled in their written expressions to ensure accuracy. The researchers collected needs analysis data from five different banks of district Bahawalpur by following the pattern of IELTS test. After gathering the data of needs analysis, the researchers designed an ESP (in-service and pre-service) extensive writing course for bankers. Likewise, Khan and Khan (2015) designed an ESP (pre-service) extensive writing course for Pakistani youth who intend to opt banking as a career.

Similarly, there is a dire need to design an EAP course for ESL learners to make them skilful in their written expressions. Nowadays, students are cognitively deficient to produce creative, analytical, or formal write-ups. They are overly reliant on digital resources to an extent that they simply choose to copy paste the written matter without giving a second thought about including or excluding some content. They have become so lax that sometimes they do not even bother to visit multiple web links. Rather, they blindly copy from one source. Creating awareness among ESL learners about web content is indispensable and English teachers can play a pivotal role in imparting a know-how of writing skills (Hussain et al., 2022). Students are in dire need of academic instruction not only in subjects like arithmetic, language, reading etc. but also in basic life skills, such as: digital writing, E-learning, browsing, and surfing etc. (Richardson, 2006). This study, specifically, aims to inform policymakers and practitioners to incorporate the suggested EAP course on analytical writing in ESL classrooms at graduate level.

Material and Methods

The study follows an explanatory sequential mixed method design. The main objective of the study is to design an EAP course to improve analytical writing proficiency of digital natives studying at graduate level. The first and foremost step to design any EAP course is to conduct a needs analysis (Klimova, 2015). There are multifarious methods of conducting needs analysis, for instance: interviews, questionnaires, and observations etc (Hyland, 2006). This study employed a closed-ended questionnaire consisting of 15 items

designed on 5-point Likert scale. The items of the questionnaire were verified by panel of subject specialists while the Cronbach Alpha value turned out to be 0.905. Out of the 8 constructs of needs analysis process provided by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), the following two constructs were incorporated in the survey items:

1. Present situation analysis
2. Deficiency analysis

However, the 8 constructs in totality are illustrated in the following figure.



Figure 1: Needs Analysis, Retrieved from Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998)

The population of the study consisted of ESL learners of Bahawalpur district while the sample of the study comprised of graduate level ESL learners of the Department of English Linguistics, the Islamia University of Bahawalpur. The sampling strategy of convenience sampling was used. Sample size of the study was 100. After the successful administration of questionnaire and obtaining the data from needs analysis, the quantitative phase of the study concluded. This phase provided data for the subsequent qualitative phase of the study.

In the second phase of the study (the qualitative phase), the researchers applied the postulates of “Curriculum Design Model” by Brown (1995) to design the EAP course.

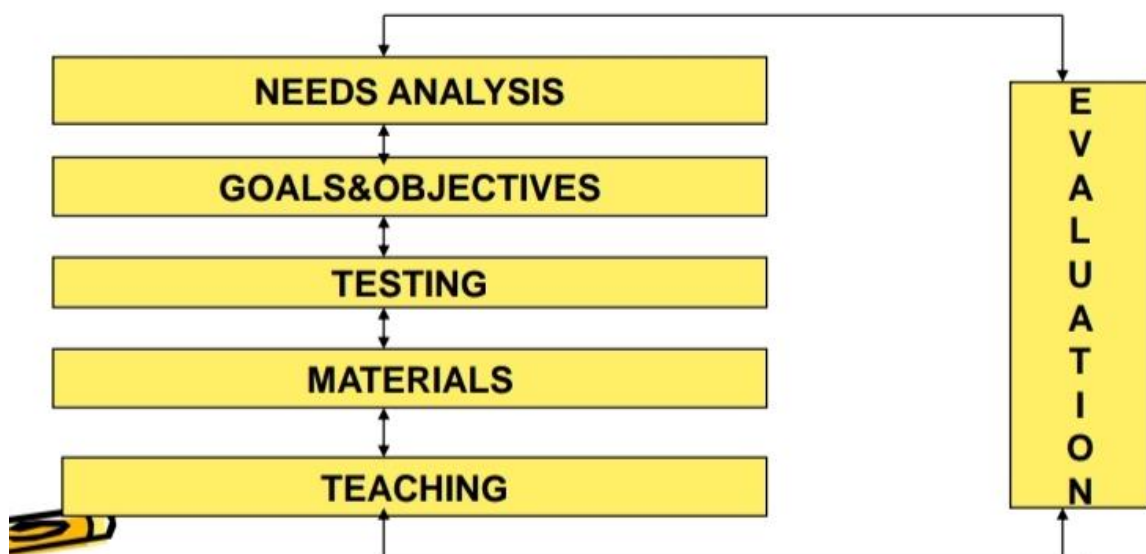


Figure 2: Curriculum Design Model, Retrieved from Brown (1995)

The researchers followed all these step by beginning from needs analysis and then specifying goals and objectives of the study. Moreover, various techniques of testing and assessment are presented. Additionally, the researchers designed syllabus and materials as well. The course duration consists of 16 weeks which is in conformity with the length of the semester. The principal stages provided by Klimova (2015) were kept under consideration for the course design:

1. Needs analysis
2. Setting objectives of the course
3. Syllabus designing
4. Specification of tasks
5. Course delivery
6. Assessment and evaluation

Theoretical Frameworks

This study involves theory triangulation which pertains to the integration of several theoretical frameworks or models within the context of a single study in order to obtain the study's goals (Thurmond, 2001). The foundational insights of the study are borrowed from an article on "A Test of the Shallowing Hypothesis" by Annisette and Lafreniere (2017). They assumed that individuals, while interacting in digital media contexts, transfer a superficial way of interaction as compared to paper-based text interactions that demand deeper and thorough processing of information. This notion is termed as the shallowing hypothesis. However, this hypothesis proposes that excessive use of digital media and internet delimits an individual's ability of processing and comprehending the information generally. Moreover, individuals showcase better analytical ability when they try to construct coherent mental representations in paper-based contexts as compared to the digital contexts with exactly the same content to complete. By keeping in mind the main principles presented by Annisette and Lafreniere (2017), the researchers have tried to adapt these principles as per the needs of the study and have come up with a schematic representation illustrated in the following figure.

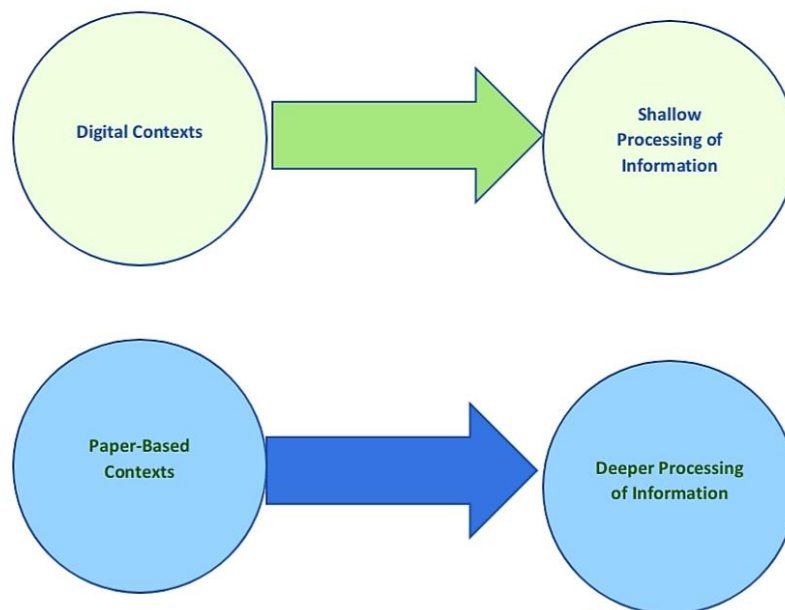


Figure 3: Digital versus Paper-Based Contexts

Furthermore, some supplementary theoretical frameworks have also been used at various stages of the study. For instance:

- a) The constructs in the needs analysis questionnaire were incorporated by keeping in mind the theoretical positions of Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998).
- b) Postulates of “Curriculum Design Model” by Brown (1995) were applied to design the EAP course.
- c) The stages provided by Klimova (2015) were followed for the analytical writing course design.

Results and Discussions

The data for needs analysis has been collected by a closed-ended survey questionnaire from 100 ESL learners. Then, based on this data, the syllabus is designed. Objectives, tasks, assessment, and evaluation methods are elucidated.

Needs Analysis

Below are mentioned the 15 items that target population was supposed to respond. Data has been analysed by SPSS version 25. Frequency, percent, valid percent, and cumulative percent are mentioned beneath each item in tabular form.

Table 1
Using Digital Devices for Academic Assignments

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	8	8.0	8.0
	Disagree	2	2.0	10.0
	Neutral	3	3.0	13.0
	Agree	51	51.0	64.0
	Strongly Agree	36	36.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0

Table 2
Using Internet Sources for Critical Analysis Assignments

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	3	3.0	3.0
	Disagree	3	3.0	6.0
	Neutral	5	5.0	11.0
	Agree	53	53.0	64.0
	Strongly Agree	36	36.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0

Table 3
Copying Content from Internet During Analytical Writing Tasks

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	3	3.0	3.0
	Disagree	11	11.0	14.0
	Neutral	25	25.0	39.0
	Agree	44	44.0	83.0
	Strongly Agree	17	17.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0

Table 4
Need for Proper Guidance in Analytical Writing Tasks

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	4.0	4.0
	Disagree	2	2.0	6.0
	Neutral	16	16.0	22.0
	Agree	47	47.0	69.0
	Strongly Agree	31	31.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0

Table 5
Ability to Do Critical Analysis in Unavailability of Internet

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	5	5.0	5.0
	Disagree	7	7.0	12.0
	Neutral	12	12.0	24.0
	Agree	47	47.0	71.0
	Strongly Agree	29	29.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0

Table 6
Confidence to Do Critical Analysis Independently

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	13	13.0	13.0
	Disagree	17	17.0	30.0
	Neutral	15	15.0	45.0
	Agree	37	37.0	82.0
	Strongly Agree	18	18.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0

Table 7
Need for Teachers' Support During Critical Thinking

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	4.0	4.0
	Disagree	12	12.0	16.0
	Neutral	12	12.0	28.0
	Agree	48	48.0	76.0
	Strongly Agree	24	24.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0

Table 8
Need to Learn Analytical Writing Approaches

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	5	5.0	5.0
	Disagree	6	6.0	11.0
	Neutral	21	21.0	32.0
	Agree	46	46.0	78.0
	Strongly Agree	22	22.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0

Total	100	100.0	100.0
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Table 9
Guidance on Online Research and Academic Integrity

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	2	2.0	2.0
	Disagree	7	7.0	9.0
	Neutral	17	17.0	26.0
	Agree	49	49.0	75.0
	Strongly Agree	25	25.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0

Table 10
Learning New Techniques to Become Proficient Analytical Writer

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	3	3.0	3.0
	Disagree	1	1.0	4.0
	Neutral	10	10.0	14.0
	Agree	37	37.0	51.0
	Strongly Agree	49	49.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0

Table 11
Willingness to Invest Time in Learning Analytical Writing Skills

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	4.0	4.0
	Disagree	2	2.0	6.0
	Neutral	8	8.0	14.0
	Agree	50	50.0	64.0
	Strongly Agree	36	36.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0

Table 12
Need to Learn Digital Tools' Effective Usage

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	2	2.0	2.0
	Disagree	2	2.0	4.0
	Neutral	6	6.0	10.0
	Agree	56	56.0	66.0
	Strongly Agree	34	34.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0

Table 13
Incorporating Analytical Writing in ESL Curriculum

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	4.0	4.0
	Neutral	16	16.0	20.0

Agree	50	50.0	50.0	70.0
Strongly Agree	30	30.0	30.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 14
Willingness to Take Lectures on Critical and Creative Writing

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	3	3.0	3.0
	Disagree	4	4.0	7.0
	Neutral	10	10.0	17.0
	Agree	45	45.0	62.0
	Strongly Agree	38	38.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0

Table 15
Significance of Analytical Writing in Academic And Professional Success

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	3	3.0	3.0
	Neutral	9	9.0	12.0
	Agree	46	46.0	58.0
	Strongly Agree	42	42.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0

Hence, from the above statistical data, it has been concluded that ESL learners intend to develop strong analytical writing skills because they can assist the learners in their academic and professional settings. They showed their willingness to take classes in which instructors will guide them about analysis-based tasks. ESL learners approved that courses on analytical writing proficiency should be a part of curriculum and they must be taught the right usage of internet sources and digital writing platform so that they can prevent themselves from academic misconduct.

Setting Objectives of the Course

- Assist students to identify the message and purpose of writing
- Practise critical thinking skills
- Enable ESL learners to express themselves in a variety of writing styles
- Help ESL learners write well-organized academic texts
- Make students write critical essays and assignments
- Use different mechanics of writing to produce compositions
- Prevent students from academic misconduct
- Enable ESL learners to become autonomous writers
- Enhance creativity among ESL learners

Syllabus Designing

Table 16
Course Contents of Analytical Writing Instruction

Week	Course Contents
One	Introducing and understanding analytical writing

Two	Difference between critical, argumentative, descriptive, expository, and analytical writing
Three	Reflection and development of analytical writing
Four	Mind mapping and brainstorming exercises
Five	Structure of analytical texts (instructing about thesis statement, introductory remarks, topic sentences, evidences, assumptions, concluding remarks)
Six	Approaches to critical thinking skills
Seven	Application of critical thinking skills to generate creative write-ups
Eight	Differentiating between trustworthy and untrustworthy online resources
Nine	Evaluating the credibility of information present on digital forums
Ten	Scholarly databases and resources
Eleven	Mechanics of online research
Twelve	Plagiarism and citation guidelines
Thirteen	Information and digital literacy
Fourteen	Revising and editing strategies
Fifteen	Peer review of analytical write-ups and provision of constructive feedback
Sixteen	Presenting analytical essays in front of class

Specification of Tasks

- Creating an essay from provided outline
- Analysing the provided text
- Critically evaluating online articles
- Summarising the provided texts
- Analysing a situation
- Collaborative writing tasks
- Peer review of classroom tasks on analytical writing
- Researching relevant material online for the assigned topic

Course Delivery

At this stage, objectives, syllabus, and tasks are already designed. So, EAP teachers need to practice and incorporate all the planned contents and materials in ESL classrooms.

Assessment and Evaluation

The last step of EAP course design is specifying assessment and evaluation criteria. There must be formative assessments throughout the semester in the form of reflective assignments, quizzes, and essay writing. Students should be graded by following standardised rubrics for these tasks. Digital tools and technologies should be utilised for assessment purposes, such as: online writing platforms and plagiarism detection softwares so students will be cautious about academic misconduct. ESL teachers should provide timely, constructive feedback on students' writing tasks throughout the course by focusing on both strengths and areas of improvement.

However, the effectiveness of the course can be measured by incorporating a pretest and post-test. ESL learners' analytical writing proficiency can be measured before the start of the course and by the end of the course and then the results of both the pretest and post-test can be compared to evaluate the productivity of the designed course.

Conclusion

Hence, this study highlights the necessity of developing an EAP analytical writing course to meet the specific needs of ESL learners in the digital age. This study identifies the

detrimental effects of blind reliance on internet material including the decline of critical thinking skills and analytical writing proficiency. This research offers valuable insights for the design and implementation of an effective course through a comprehensive needs analysis, informed by theoretical frameworks proposed by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) and guided by the frameworks of EAP course design by Brown (1995) and Klimova (2015). The recommended course syllabus and materials presented in this study provide a framework for improving ESL learners' analytical writing skills in the digital era.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and discussions presented in this study, the researchers recommend the implementation of the proposed EAP course for the enhancement of analytical writing proficiency of ESL learners in digital age. The course aims to address the specific challenges faced by ESL learners in developing analytical writing proficiency by simultaneously inculcating them on the misuse of digital writing platforms. The recommended course intends to motivate students to become proficient analytical writers who can critically analyse information, construct coherent arguments, and communicate effectively in academic and professional settings. Furthermore, the significance of this study extends beyond the recommendations for course development as it elucidates the importance of addressing the evolving needs of ESL learners in today's digital age. Hence, the study recommends the incorporation of this EAP course within ESL settings and curriculum.

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