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A Case for Research Writing

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ABSTRACT

In an age where existing boundaries of knowledge are constantly challenged by the culture of creativity, English Language Teaching has travelled far from being just a skill-based pedagogy and presented its audience with micro specializations among these skills. With the spread of English as the language of international research and publication, Research Writing as a genre has begun to assume enormous importance. Awareness of its generic features plays a vital role among non-native writers of English since their knowledge of writing in general does not grant them with the ability to handle requirements of research writing genre such as persuasion, argumentation, negotiation, discussion, presentation, etc...The present paper is an attempt to understand the global currency that Research Writing has gained.

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Introduction

From Language to Needs or Needs to Language?

The increasing applicability of English language in a wide range of contexts and its adaptability have almost made the 'language' part of English merge with or disappear into the needs of the user population. This has given rise to English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Legal Purposes (ELP), English for Science & Technology (EST), English for Business Purposes (EBP), etc.... Unlike in General English programmes, the focus in such courses has no longer been *language* but the *needs* of learners. Let us concern ourselves with EAP as it holds enormous space for research possibilities.

What is English for Academic Purposes (EAP)?

Any teaching/course of communicative skills in English that relates itself to a study purpose can be categorized as English for Academic Purposes. The importance of developing study skills in English among overseas students was echoed in the ELT works of early 1970's. The term English for Academic Purposes (EAP) seems to have been used or coined roughly around 1974. (Johns, T.F. 1981 quoted in Jordan, R R 1997) A recent offshoot of English Language teaching (ELT), EAP has tried to provide a more communicative basis for teaching and learning of English in a given context.

Focused studies on register analysis and needs analysis (John Munby 1978) paved the way for branching of ESP from ELT in the early 80's. This was followed by further branching of ESP into EAP and EOP where the former dealt mainly with the felt academic needs of learners and future professionals ambitious of seeking a career in an academic environment. The pedagogic approaches in EAP rely more on the explicit needs of learners. The texts, for this purpose, are drawn from a specific context and the instructional aim is to develop the ability of learners to read and produce discipline-specific texts, attempt specific assignments in their field such as presenting papers, writing project reports, summaries, abstracts, proposals, etc...

Who needs EAP?

This dedicated discipline of EAP is necessitated not only for non-native speakers owing to their difficulties in comprehending the peculiarities of English language, but also for native speakers since these abilities cannot be taken for granted to be inherent among them. Students of EAP, who are non-native speakers, need help with both the language of academic disciplines and the specific study skills required of them in the course being pursued. Their English requirements till the tertiary level would usually have been met by General English courses mainly focusing on literary texts which are unlikely to provide the transition needed. Since the teachers in such contexts are non-native speakers of English themselves, examinations and assignments/tasks do not actually make large linguistic demands on learners which accounts for the perceived gap in their performance levels.

Also, dispensing with English in the final year undergraduate programme in many universities and cutting down on the learners' 'stay' with English language do not prepare the learners adequately to undertake the tasks of the field (Rajashekar et al/ *Elixir Literature* 56-2013). Extension of learners' engagement with English in the final year (Semester 5 and 6), on the other hand, paves the way for teaching of 'research English' to them.

This is imperative as well considering the quality of academic writing being evidenced by the students and the challenges being faced by the Third World scholars in publishing their writings in some reputed journals of the West.

Why do we need a separate genre called Research English/Research Writing?

Research Writing has gained predominant significance in the wake of the importance being attached to research globally. Academic writing for research publication takes place around the globe, involving, according to a recent account, 5.5 million scholars, 2,000 publishers and 17,500 research/higher education institutions (Lillis & Curry 2010: quoted in John Flowerdew: 2011). Because so many scholars, whose first language is not

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English, are now using English for publication purposes and because of the research interest that has developed in the field, a specialist term has been coined, English for Research Publication Purposes (ERPP).

Do we really need to compartmentalize Research English/Writing as a separate genre? Can't this be addressed under general writing skills?

Research has been rightly labeled as the future of all universities by many thinkers and educationists. Since we live in a knowledge economy, the original knowledge of a doctoral thesis is a rich resource and hence many governments are encouraging more and more doctoral completions by promising attractive incentives.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the strength of any developed country will be measured by its 'thesis reserve'[®] in future and this awareness led to the emergence of research writing groups in the North American universities in the late eighteenth century (*Claire Aitchison and Alison Lee: 2007*) to strengthen the doctoral writing production. Writing in the area of doctoral theses has begun to be viewed as a point of tension, problematic, construed as a site of deficit or disruption to the normal completion of doctorate. The problem is intensified when writing is *not* regarded as central to the real work of research but viewed as a separate entity leading to the 'writing up' of research.

This projects writing as something that happens after the completion of research. This 'writing up' of research obscures the fact that writing is thinking (*Kamler and Thomson 2006, 11 quoted in Moragh Paxton 2011*). Research evolves through writing and writing attains its refinement through constant research.

There is always a tendency to isolate writing from researching and to view writing as subordinate to 'thinking' and 'knowledge production' in research. Adherence to the general writing skills and failure to recognize the point of deviation that writing takes in order to become 'research writing' renders one incapable of 'writerly engagement' with the research texts. Hirvela (2004) discusses the symbiotic relationship between reading and writing through his concept of a 'writerly reader' who constantly considers the writers' perspectives at various points, predicting what rhetorical choices the writer will make and comparing the actual development of the text with his/her own envisioning of it.

Challenges are more for the non-native speaker-students who are researching and writing in a language which presents a completely different structure from their native language. They have just crossed the threshold of general writing skills to conquer the specificities of writing that are characteristic of 'research'. Unless they establish familiarity with the genre-specific peculiarities of research writing, they can't achieve the desired results in the field and perform to the benefit of the stakeholders of the system and the society. It is only a confluence of the identities of researcher and writer that result in the creation of an effective research writing.

What are the extrinsic incentives for the research writers?

In addition to being driven by an intrinsic passion for presenting their research to the outside world, research writers are motivated by certain external factors that play a significant role in elevating their professional status in the academia. Pressure to publish is one such dimension that adds currency to research writing. Set number of research publications in peer reviewed/refereed/indexed/open access journals confers

professorship/title on the aspirants. This is exemplified in the following extract of Suresh Canagarajah's blog titled *Pressure on Chinese Scholars to Publish* quoted in John Flowerdew (2011).

Almost all universities in Mainland China set down a specified number of publications as a precondition for promotion to an associate professorship or full professorship. I learned from a student of mine in China that at his university, the required number for promotion to associate professorship is 10 journal papers. In addition to quantity, there are also requirements about the quality of publications. One of my colleagues told me that his former university in China gives 5 times more reward points to a paper published in a high-impact overseas journal than one published in a 'national-level' domestic journal. I have also heard unverified stories that some Chinese universities give 10,000 Yuan per article to their faculty who publish in SCI and SSCI journals. The deputy dean of the English Language and Literature College of another Chinese university told me that the rate at his university is 3,000 Yuan per article. Given such financial rewards, it is little wonder submissions from China to international journals have greatly increased in recent years.

This has also led to an increase, rather unhealthy mushrooming of research journals over a period of time.

What about the Indian academia?

The case is no different in our country at present considering the weightage given to the quantum of research publication in the recruitment of teachers to universities by the University Grants Commission (UGC). The UGC in its second amendment (*yet to be published in the Official Gazette of India*) to its Regulation 2010- UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION (MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS FOR APPOINTMENT OF TEACHERS AND OTHER ACADEMIC STAFF IN UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES AND MEASURES FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF STANDARDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION) (2ND AMENDMENT), REGULATIONS, 2013- has earmarked nearly 55% for research publication (both journals and books) as evidenced from the table below:

Sub-Category	Cap as % of API cumulative score in Application
III (A): Research papers (Journals, etc...)	30%
III (B): Research publications (Books, etc...)	25%
III (C): Research Projects	20%
III (D): Research Guidance	10%
III (E): Training Courses and Conference/Seminar, etc...	15%

Karnataka State Higher Education Council (KSHEC) Bengaluru in its *Vision 2020* (2012) has recommended that the work of building research capabilities in universities should begin at the undergraduate level through integration of research curriculum.

The Council further believes in orienting teachers to various dimensions of research lest it should lead to spiraling down of research quality. The Council envisages establishing Interdisciplinary Research Centers in all the universities in the

state in order to achieve a substantial growth in cutting edge research in universities.

Further, the popularity of writing research is also echoed in the conferences/seminars/workshops being organized throughout the world by some institutes/universities like University of Amsterdam and Utrecht, the Cedars University of Reading, UK, Bombay Teachers' Training College, Mumbai, the University of Pennsylvania, etc. in order to address various issues related to research writing.

Given the prominence being enjoyed by research writing across the globe and also the pressure to publish among the academia, the need for training the young scholars in research writing is imperative. The issue of how far is this addressed in the curricula of undergraduate & postgraduate courses in our universities will be discussed in the next paper.

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