

Understanding the Lived Experiences of Tunisian Undergraduate Students in EAP Writing Courses: Students Voicing their Stories

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ABSTRACT

Studies that have investigated students' perceptions of EGAP and ESAP instructions have generally focused on students' perceived learning of the features of academic discourse that they can transfer to their subject-specific courses. Examining the processes that students go through when trying to adjust to EAP instruction has received little attention. The present study aimed to explore the challenges that Tunisian students faced when trying to adjust to the requirements of an ESAP course to which they had been introduced for the first time. Understanding these challenges can lead to a better understanding of the processes by which students move from the initial learning context to the transfer contexts (Lobato, 2003). The study was conducted over a period of two years and involved two student cohorts. A student cohort of 21 students participated during the academic year 2014-2015 and another cohort of 36 students participated during the academic year 2015-2016. The research consisted of a diary study, in that data were collected solely from the learner diaries that students were asked to keep as part of the learning activities. Results showed that ESAP instruction presented considerable challenges to students during the first semester of the course. These challenges often caused feelings of anger, disappointment, demotivation, and resistance. Despite these challenges, students' adjustment to the course was clearly observed in the second semester. The findings also revealed that all participants developed a very positive attitude towards the ESAP model at the end of instruction. The findings suggest that ESAP instruction has a greater potential to promote learning transfer because it provides students with a more authentic learning environment. However, the implementation and success of this model in the various Tunisian academic settings depends, on the one hand, on the EAP teachers' willingness to change their teaching beliefs and practices and, on the other hand, on their preparations to meet the challenges that such a teaching model can pose to teachers.

1. Introduction

The main role of EAP instruction is to facilitate students' induction into academic discourse. Duff (2010) defines academic discourse as "forms of oral and written language communication [...] that are privileged, expected, cultivated, conventionalized, or ritualized, and, therefore, usually evaluated by instructors, institutions, editors, and others in educational and professional contexts" (p. 175). This implies that students' academic success totally depends on their ability to accommodate to the demands and the preferred practices of their academic communities. In other words, once students enter a new academic community, they engage in what is referred to as academic discourse socialization (ADS). Kobayashi et al. (2017) refer to ADS as "the means by which newcomers [students] and those they interact with learn to participate in various kinds of academic discourse in their communities and other social networks" (p. 239). To date, there exists an important body of research that has investigated students' academic discourse socialization. Most of this research has been conducted in mainstream academic contexts and in

English-speaking contexts (Cheng et al., 2004; Campbell & Li, 2008; Cheng & Fox, 2008; Evans & Morrison, 2011; Wette & Furneaux, 2018; Jabeen et al., 2019). These studies focused on the challenges that international students experience when they try to adjust to their new academic environments. Some of the issues that have been reported related to academic literacy skills, language proficiency, coping strategies, student agency, and resisting teachers' demands, among others.

Other studies have focused on whether EAP programs can concretely facilitate students' navigation in their academic communities (Fox et al., 2014). While research tends to mostly justify the provision of EAP programs, the debate is still centered around whether students' academic socialization can be best facilitated by following a generic approach – English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) – or a disciplinary approach – English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). Many studies have investigated students' learning experiences within both EGAP and ESAP contexts. However, most of these studies were mostly conducted in English-speaking contexts like the USA, Canada, and Australia. The impact of these approaches on students' academic socialization is still underexplored in North African contexts. In Tunisia, English is used as the medium of instruction in all the public universities that offer degrees in English. This means that students' academic qualifications primarily depend on their ability to write in English. For this reason, English writing courses are an integral part of the curriculum in the English departments. In the university where the present study was conducted, writing instruction is still heavily influenced by the generic model. Too little is known about the extent to which ESAP instruction can better prepare students for the kind of writing that they need in their subject-specific courses. The present study aimed to investigate third year students' learning experiences with an ESAP course to which they had been introduced for the first time. The study aimed to answer two research questions:

1. What challenges did Tunisian undergraduate students face when introduced to ESAP writing instruction for the first time?
2. How did students try to adjust to the course and what were their perceptions of ESAP instruction in comparison to the EGAP instruction that they had previously received?

The literature review section provides a brief discussion of the main theoretical and pedagogical principles on which the EGAP and ESAP models are based. Then, it reviews the major studies that have explored students' learning experiences in EGAP and ESAP writing contexts. The methods section provides a description of the research context, the participants, the research tools, and the data analysis process. The results and discussion section presents the major findings and discusses them in relation to the existing research. The paper concludes with a summary of the major findings, the pedagogical implications of these results to EAP writing instruction, and the limitations of the study.

2. Literature Review

The EGAP model of EAP instruction is based on the theory that there is an identifiable set of linguistic forms and skills that are commonly found in all academic disciplines (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Jordan, 1997). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argued that there were little variations in the grammar, vocabulary, and discourse structures in the academic disciplines to justify a disciplinary approach to EAP instruction. According to them, Students first need to master these basic common features of academic discourse before they start their academic content courses. Jordan (1997) justified a generic model for EAP instruction on the ground that EAP is too hard for students with low English proficiency. Therefore, in order to cope with the requirements of their academic disciplines, students first need to master the generic skills and linguistic forms through remedial courses (Jordan, 1997). EGAP instruction is still the predominant approach in many EAP contexts (Basturkemen & Wette, 2016). This is also reflected in the countless EAP textbooks that continue to be published for worldwide use. Notwithstanding, the effectiveness of EGAP has been questioned on both theoretical and practical grounds. Bhatia (2002) related the popularity of EGAP to its pedagogic convenience rather than to its convincing theoretical base. To Bhatia, EGAP courses are not really based on a clear understanding of academic discourse. They are simply easy to design, not time-consuming, and cost-effective as they are targeted for large audiences. In fact, recent research on academic discourse has demonstrated considerable variations in language use in the academic disciplines (Aull & Lancaster, 2014; Jiang & Hyland, 2015; Hyland & Jiang, 2016; Bruce, 2009). The other argument against EGAP is related to students' learning needs. Some argued that a generic model of EAP can create a significant mismatch between what is taught in the EAP course and what is really needed in the academic disciplines (Dudley-Evans, 1988; Hyland, 2007; Basturkmen & Wette, 2016). For example, Dudley-Evans argued that such a mismatch could be a serious problem as there would be very little chance for the new learning to transfer from the EAP course to subject-specific courses.

Generally, EGAP writing courses are based on two popular instructional models: the product approach and the process approach. The product approach emphasizes the teaching of rhetorical modes, such as cause-effect, comparison-contrast, explanation, and argumentation, among others, that are thought to be commonly found in American academic writing (Spack, 1988). Instruction is primarily based on the teaching of the organizational features that differentiate one essay pattern from another (see Silva, 1990). Students write on general topics, relying on their personal experiences and background knowledge to generate ideas. On

the other hand, process writing pedagogy centers around the teaching of writing strategies, such as planning, drafting, revising, and editing (see Seow, 2002). These strategies are also thought to be transferable across different academic writing situations. Similar to the product approach, process writing pedagogy encourages students to write from personal experiences. From a learning transfer perspective, what is expected from EGAP instruction is that learning will transfer to very different tasks and contexts, that is, across different academic disciplines. In other words, EGAP instruction will lead to what is referred to in educational psychology as *far transfer*. However, more than a century of research on learning transfer in educational psychology has demonstrated that *far transfer* is still an elusive phenomenon that is very difficult to prove (Detterman, 1993; Haskell, 2001).

Unlike EGAP, the ESAP model adopts a more complex role in that it sees learning as a process of disciplinary socialization. This process is viewed as induction or acculturation into a new culture (Hyland, 2002). In other words, students are expected to learn the specificities of their chosen academic discipline and to fully adopt the privileged practices of their discourse community in order for them to succeed. Specificity is deeply rooted in the concept of discourse community. According to Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002), understanding the complexity of EAP cannot be achieved outside the notion of discourse community. The authors argued that this concept helps clarify how academic discourse differs from one academic discipline to another. The concept of discourse community also helps explain how people learn the specialized discourse of a group in order to become successful members of that group. At the same time, Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002) cautioned that discourse communities are not static and autonomous and that variation in practice can also be found within the discipline itself. The view of disciplinary socialization is also rooted in Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated learning, namely in their notion of legitimate peripheral participation. This notion is based on the idea that learners necessarily participate in communities of practitioners and that the acquisition of knowledge requires them to become full participants in the socio-cultural practices of the specific community (Lave & Wenger's, 1991). Another feature of disciplinary socialization is that learning the valued discourse forms of a particular discourse community is seen to take place through apprenticeship. It is a guided process that helps students move from peripheral participation to full members of their community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The ESAP model appears to be based on a more convincing theoretical ground, which might explain its growing popularity.

Accordingly, the main goal of ESAP instruction is to induct students into the specific practices of the academic discipline that they have chosen to enter (Hyland, 2002). Two instructional approaches characterize ESAP: Genre-Based Writing Instruction (GBWI) and Content-Based Instruction (CBI). GBWI emerged as a reaction to the process movement which has been criticized for failing to cater for the real writing needs of L2 students (Hyland, 2007). A central aim of genre-based instruction is to facilitate students' induction into their disciplinary community by teaching them the privileged written genres of the academic discipline in question (Hyland, 2007). Numerous studies have shown the effectiveness of this writing approach in both ESL contexts (e.g., Cheng, 2006, 2007, 2008; Tardy, 2005, 2006) and EFL contexts (e.g., Yasuda, 2011; Yayli, 2011; Negretti & Kuteeva, 2011). CBI as a teaching approach has also gained ground in many EAP contexts, and its effectiveness has been reported in many studies (Spender & Wesely, 2020; Fenton-Smith & Humphreys, 2015; James, 2006; Kasper, 1997). CBI comes in many forms such as the theme-based model and the adjunct model. The model that is mostly related to ESAP is the adjunct model. It links an EAP course with a concurrent content course and is usually co-taught by the EAP instructor and a content subject lecturer. It can also be taught by the same instructor who has expertise in both the subject matter and EAP (Wingate, 2018). The main goal of the adjunct model is to help students with the skills and strategies required of them in the content subject in question. Thus, with the ESAP model, learning transfer is more likely to occur because it will occur in situations that look very similar. In other words, ESAP instruction leads to *near transfer* which is the type of transfer that is rather easy to obtain in comparison to *far transfer* (Perkins & Salomon, 1992).

Several studies have investigated the impact of EAP instruction – EGAP, ESAP, or a mixture of both– on students' perceived learning as well as the impact of these courses on students' ability to transfer their learning to their discipline-specific courses. Leki and Carson (1994) surveyed 77 ESL students in a US university to determine the extent to which the EAP courses had prepared them for the academic skills that were required of them in their academic subjects. The authors found that most students were satisfied with their EAP courses. Among the skills that they reported using from their EAP courses included writing strategies (planning, drafting, and revising) and writing skills such as summarizing, synthesizing, and using quotes. On the other hand, most of the surveyed students found the writing tasks that focused on personal writing unchallenging and not sophisticated enough for university-level studies. Other studies reported rather negative results on students' perceptions of the usefulness of the generic model of EAP instruction to their other courses. In a study that involved five ESL students in another US university, Leki (1995) reported that when she asked the students to describe strategies that helped them complete writing tasks in their content subjects, none of them referred to the EAP courses that they had previously taken. According to Leki (1995), the fact that these students could not make any link between the writing that they had done in their EAP courses and the writing they were required to do in their subject-specific courses was "potentially worrisome" (p. 255). Similar findings were reported in a study conducted by Counsell (2011) in an Australian university. In a survey study, students were asked to identify from their past EGAP course some effective writing strategies that they could use in their content courses successfully. Students' responses were

mostly in the neutral or negative, leading Counsell (2011) to conclude that the EAP generic skills-based course had not had any positive impact on the students' ability to recognize effective writing strategies that they can fully transfer to their discipline-specific courses. Among the few studies that were conducted in EFL contexts was Kirkgoz's (2009) study that surveyed 220 students and 15 content lecturers in a Turkish university. The study aimed to determine the extent to which the foundation EGAP program had prepared students for their subject-specific academic courses. Results revealed that students were largely dissatisfied with the EAP training that they had received prior to their disciplinary courses. Students perceived a big gap between the requirements of their disciplinary courses and what they had been taught in the EAP course. The students also found the writing tasks in the EAP course too general and academically unstimulating. In his study on learning transfer climate, James (2010) also found that among the negative factors that affected transfer climate were students' attitudes to their EAP courses. Many of his case studies subjects found their EAP courses (EGAP courses) generally boring, useless, and a waste of time.

On the other hand, studies that investigated students' perceptions of ESAP instruction mostly reported positive results. In an action research study conducted in a university in Canada, Currie (1999) showed how the use of academic journalogs can help bridge the gap between her EAP course and her students' diverse disciplinary courses. Currie's (1999) advanced writing course consisted of a content-based section that focused on five thematic units and an academic journalog consisting of six assignments. One of the assignments that students were asked to complete was to investigate the kind of academic writing required of them in their disciplinary courses by interviewing their professors. Currie (1999) reported that most of her students found the journalog activity beneficial as it helped them increase their understanding of the nature and importance of academic writing in their disciplinary courses. Other studies focused on the role of CBI in helping students transfer their learning to their content courses. For example, in James' (2006) study, the student participants reported transferring many learning outcomes from their theme-based course to their content courses. These learning outcomes included paraphrasing, synthesizing, guessing meaning of unknown words, organizing ideas, developing topics, establishing coherence, and using appropriate vocabulary, among others. Similarly, Terraschke and Wahid (2011) found that a ten-week discipline-specific EAP course had a positive impact on students' learning experiences. The students reported using study skills that they had learned in the ESAP course in order to cope with the requirements of their content course. These study skills included skim reading, summarizing, speed writing, the use of linking words, and the use of a clear essay structure. Baik and Greig (2009) also found that a content-based EAP program had a positive impact not only on students' perceived learning but also on their writing performance.

What can be said about the EGAP and ESAP studies in general is that they tended to focus more on students' general perceived learning of the features of academic discourse that they can transfer to their other courses and less on the challenges that these students face during the learning process. As stated earlier, students' learning experiences have been investigated particularly in mainstream academic courses. Examining students' learning experiences within EAP courses is also important because as Campbell and Le (2008) put it, "students' voices, narratives, or stories are lenses through which we view and review our teaching practices as well as students' learning experiences, levels of satisfaction, perceptions, intentionality, values, beliefs, desires, feelings, and aspirations" (p. 376). This is also true for EAP courses that have the primary goal to induct students into academic discourse and to promote transfer of learning. Indeed, examining students' perceptions of their EAP courses as well as the challenges that they face during instruction can help EAP teachers gain a deeper insight as to how learners move from the initial learning context to the transfer contexts (Lobato, 2003, 2012). Understanding these processes can definitely help EAP teachers design better courses and create better learning environments. Studies on students' learning experiences are generally self-report studies (Kobayashi et al., 2017) that are based on students' narratives using semi-structured interviews. Diary studies are not very common in EAP contexts. In a few studies, learner diaries have been generally used to investigate the influence of students' English proficiency on peer assessment (Zhao, 2011), students' use of learning strategies (Graham, 2011; Rao & Liu 2011), learner autonomy (Burkert, 2011), and students' reading practices (Kuzborska, 2015). In a more recent study, Cowley-Haselden's (2020) used learner diaries in an EGAP context. However, the study was not focused on students' development of language skills; it rather aimed to demonstrate how learner diaries can make knowledge visible to learners. The present study used learner diaries to examine the challenges that Tunisian students faced when introduced to ESAP instruction for the first time. The study also aimed to explore students' perceptions of ESAP instruction in comparison to the EGAP instruction that they had previously received.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research context

The study was conducted in a Tunisian university and focused on students' learning experiences in ESAP writing instruction during two academic years, 2015-2015 and 2015-2016. Two different cohorts of students participated in the research with 21 students in the first academic year and 36 students in the second academic year. Thus, a total of 57 students' diaries were collected for analysis. All the participants were third-year students who were at their final year of their BA in English. In their first year, the students had studied a core language module for two semesters. The module included a one-hour grammar session, a two-hour run-on session for reading and another two-hour run-on session for writing. Instruction was based on the EGAP

model. The reading skills that were emphasized included skimming, scanning, reading for details, guessing meaning from context, summarizing, and paraphrasing, among others. As for writing, students were first introduced to paragraph patterns with a great emphasis on organization (topic sentences, supporting details, and concluding sentences). Short essay writing was usually introduced in the second semester. The essay patterns that were frequently taught were cause-effect, comparison-contrast, and argument essays in which students had to defend a position. The writing process (planning, drafting, revising, and editing) was also emphasized each time students were introduced to a new writing pattern. In the second year, reading and writing were integrated and taught in a weekly run-on session of two hours. The course was a one-semester course that was also based on the EGAP model. It aimed to consolidate the reading and writing skills introduced in the first year, with the addition of some other skills such as hedging, quoting, and citing without necessarily focusing on a specific style guide for in-text citations. Essay writing was also focused on some rhetorical patterns. In the third year, students had a two-semester advanced writing course taught in a weekly run-on session of two hours. In the years that had preceded this study, the third-year advanced writing course also used to follow the EGAP model but emphasized the reading/writing relationship by engaging students in what Leki and Carson (1997) referred to as text-responsible writing that emphasizes content.

As a teacher-researcher, I taught the three levels for many years. Starting from the academic year 2014-2015, I decided to try the ESAP model with third-year students to whom I taught both the EAP course and a content course (TEFL) concurrently. The first semester course was based on the theme-based version of CBI and genre-based instruction that derived from the SFL genre school (Rose & Martin, 2012). The theme-based part consisted of two thematic units. The first unit addressed social problems and family issues such as divorce. The second unit was on science and technology. The reading skills and strategies (skimming, scanning, reading for details, summarizing, and paraphrasing) taught in the previous levels were consolidated. The skills that were introduced for the first time were writing from sources, synthesizing sources, expressing criticality through discourse markers, and using the APA style for in-text citations. As for essay writing, students practiced writing the argument and discussion genres based on Web sources. The differences and similarities between these two genres were highlighted in terms of their generic and linguistic features (Rose & Martin, 2012). Students practiced the argument essay on the topic of divorce and the discussion genre on social media. To emphasize the link between the EAP course and the TEFL course, students were constantly reminded that all the reading skills and strategies that they were practicing in the EAP writing class were required in the TEFL course. They were told, for example, that they needed to rely on paraphrasing, summarizing, synthesizing, and citing sources when preparing their oral presentations or when revising for their final TEFL exams. They were also told that they could be asked to write either an argument or a discussion essay for the end-of term TEFL exam.

In the second semester, the EAP writing course was slightly changed by linking it entirely to the TEFL course. Students practiced the complex skills summarizing, paraphrasing, synthesizing, and in-text citations using exclusively TEFL content. As for essay writing, the discussion and argument genres were consolidated. All students were encouraged to keep a learner diary to reflect on their learning experiences on a weekly basis. The primary aim of using learner diaries as part of the course was to help students develop their metacognition (Anderson, 2002) and, in turn, to promote the transfer of learning to other courses (Bransford & Schwartz, 1999). It was introduced as part of the oral mark which carried 20% of the overall mark. However, given the time-consuming nature of this task, the learner diary was not considered as a mandatory task, and thus students who were not able to submit their diaries at the end of each semester were not penalized on that. However, students were constantly encouraged to write diary entries on a regular basis if they wanted to enhance their oral marks. In order to reach a better understanding of students' learning experiences with ESAP instruction, the ESAP model was tried with another group of third-year students the following academic year, 2015-2016. This time, the two-semester reading/writing course was mostly linked to the TEFL course. The same reading skills and strategies taught in previous levels were consolidated. The new writing skills synthesizing sources, expressing criticality through discourse markers, and using APA in-text citations were introduced and practiced throughout the two semesters. The learner diary also constituted an important part of the learning process during instruction.

3.2 Research design: A diary study

Bailey (1990) defines a diary study as "a first-person account of a language learning or teaching experience, documented through regular, candid entries in a personal journal and then analyzed for recurring patterns or salient events" (p. 215). Diary studies have been used to investigate issues related to language learning and teacher education (Dornyei, 2007). Despite their time-consuming nature, learner diaries can provide important data that can clarify processes that would not be possible to reach through other means (Hyland, 2016). Similarly, Mackey and Gass (2005) noted that learner diaries could yield valuable data on individual learners' experiences and on individual learners' perceptions of the course content and activities. More importantly, because of their longitudinal nature, diary studies "can illuminate how perceptions develop overtime" (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 204). Finally, as summarized by Dornyei (2007), "the multiple benefits of diary studies would warrant in many cases at least an attempt to implement a diary study" (p. 159). Conducting a diary study was deemed appropriate for the present research.

As mentioned earlier, learner diaries in the present study were used primarily as a pedagogical tool, the aim of which was to enhance students' metacognition. Students were introduced to diary writing in the first week of the course. The rationale and the benefits of diary writing were first explained, and then all students were encouraged to write a diary entry on a weekly basis. To enhance the quality of their entries, students were provided with some guidelines (Mackey & Gass, 2005) on a weekly basis, depending on the kind of activities that were done during a particular session. For example, for week 1, students were encouraged to reflect on their prior writing experiences and state their expectations of their new course. Later, they were asked to describe their difficulties with the assigned readings and writing tasks, evaluate the classroom activities, describe the aspects that they liked most or liked least in each session, and explain the extent to which the course helped them develop their academic writing skills in general. To encourage students to continue writing their journal entries, the students were asked to share parts of their reflections with their teacher. Near the end of each semester, they were asked to collect all their journal entries in one Word document and send it to the teacher as an email attachment. Not all students could write journal entries on a weekly basis because of time constraints. Some students wrote rather superficial reflections that could not be included in this study. Nevertheless, most of the diaries that were collected provided enough information to be used in the present research. At the end of instruction, the researcher asked students whether their diaries could be used for research purposes in the future. All of them gave their consent.

3.3 Analysis of students' diaries

The analysis of the students' diaries drew on suggestions for the analysis of qualitative data as presented in the literature (Curtis & Bailey, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2007). During the academic year 2014-2015, learner diaries were collected from 21 students. The length of these diaries per student ranged from 1,968 words to 441 words. In total, there were 28,857 words of diary entries to be used for analysis for that academic year. As for the second academic year 2015-2016, diaries were collected from 36 students. The length of each student's diary ranged from 2,427 words to 448 words with a total of 32,584 words of diary entries. Thus, there was a total of 61,441 words of diary entries to be used for analysis. To protect the students' identities, the students' names were changed into numbers. The numbers from 1 to 21 referred to the students who submitted diaries during the academic year 2014-2015, and the numbers from 22 to 57 referred to the students who submitted diaries during the academic year 2015-2016. In the first stage, all the diary entries were read from beginning to end without taking any notes. This first reading was helpful because it allowed the researcher to enter into the lives of the participants by feeling and reliving their experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). The next step consisted of re-reading the diary entries many times to look for the salient themes and patterns that can be representative of the students or that can be unique to individual ones (Curtis & Bailey, 2009). The coding process was conducted in two stages. First, the diary entries were coded for students' learning experiences with ESAP instruction. This stage aimed to answer the first research question. The second stage aimed to answer the second research question and consisted of coding the diary entries for students' adjustment to the course and for their general perceptions at the end of instruction. Whenever deemed necessary, the students' quotes that were used in the results section were slightly edited for clarity, but mostly were kept unchanged.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Challenges faced by students with ESAP instruction

The analysis of the students' diaries showed that students experienced many challenges that can be grouped into three major points:

- Students' perceptions of their writing abilities
- Coping with the ESAP course requirements and activities
- Coping with teacher feedback

4.1.1 Students' perceptions of their writing abilities

Students' perceptions of their own writing abilities before ESAP instruction began seemed to have an impact on the ways students reacted to the ESAP writing course later. Some students came with rather positive perceptions of their writing skills. One student was quite confident that her writing skills were at the required level, but she also recognized that she had some weaknesses:

After two years specializing in English language, literature and civilization, writing emerges as one of the basics of our training. At this level, lots of questions come to one's mind concerning how long have we gone so far. Being a third-year English student, I shall admit from an objective perspective that my academic writing at this stage is neither excellent nor awful, but rather at the required level [...]. However, everyone has some weaknesses. (Student 1 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 1)

This student also seemed to be aware that the third-year writing course would be different from the courses that she had taken in her first and second year, in terms of expectations and requirements:

After spending two years acquiring the basics of writing, here we are today moving to the next step which is advanced writing. At this level, the course, I think, will be mainly devoted for going beyond what we were taught previously. (Student 1 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 1)

Interestingly, several students mentioned that they considered writing for subject-specific courses (literature and cultural studies) less challenging than writing on general topics in the writing course because they did not have to worry about content. For example, one student ranked the writing course, literature, and cultural studies in terms of writing difficulty as follows:

My academic writing is average. Indeed, I have some spelling mistakes and structure problems. I feel that writing in literature or cultural studies is easier than writing on general topics because I already have the ideas and I just need to select and organize them. However, in writing course, the topic is unpredictable. In addition, I think that writing in literature is easier than writing in cultural studies. The first is more flexible. One can interpret a literary work and give his point of view. However, in cultural studies there are many historical events to memorize. (Student 2 –Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 1)

This student perceived her writing difficulties in these three subjects namely in relation to content. In the writing course, she had to generate ideas for a general topic relying entirely on her background knowledge, which may not be sufficient and helpful for her. As for cultural studies, writing a good exam seemed to depend on her ability to memorize historical facts. Another student thought that her writing was good simply because she could get good marks in literature and cultural studies exams in the previous years. At the same time, she admitted that she had problems with organization:

No one can easily evaluate his or her writing. All that I know is that I'm good at writing since I get good marks in my literature and civilization exams [...]. Still, in writing in general we can come across many difficulties. Sometimes I find it hard to link my ideas and move from one point to another. (Student 3 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 1)

Many other students related their writing problems to their language proficiency. For example, student 22 described her writing as poor because of her language problems. She hoped that the third-year writing course would help her overcome these problems:

I find that my academic writing in general is poor. I have many difficulties especially in language. This is really my problem. I expect from this reading/writing course to help me to improve my language and write correctly without any problem. If it will help me to improve my language of course it will affect my writing not only on the reading/writing course but also on the other courses as well. (Student 22 – Academic year 2015-2016, Semester 1)

In a study that investigated the learning experiences of Asian students at a New Zealand university, Campbell and Li (2008) noted that the length of university study did not really help these students acquire the basics of academic writing. Similarly, after two years of university study, the students in the present study reached their final year of their academic studies while still presenting different types of problems. Although some students came with a kind of confidence about their writing abilities, most students reported having various writing problems. They came with the expectations that their third-year writing course would help them overcome their writing difficulties and become better writers not only in the reading/writing course but also in their content subjects. However, as will be demonstrated later, the new EAP writing course added more challenges to their existing writing problems.

4.1.2 Coping with the ESAP course requirements and activities

The analysis of the diary entries revealed that the challenges that the students experienced during the course were very similar to those reported in many studies such as Evans and Morrison's (2011) study. These challenges included understanding disciplinary texts, understanding technical terms, writing the required disciplinary genres, mastering citing conventions, and synthesizing information from multiple sources. As mentioned earlier, students in the present study had been introduced to writing from sources for the first time at third-year level. This factor, indeed, caused them to experience many difficulties, specifically during the first semester of the course. Concerning the first student cohort, the analysis of the diary entries showed that most students appeared to have found the assigned source materials for the theme-based part (divorce and social media) quite manageable. No student mentioned that the texts were difficult to understand neither in terms of content nor in terms of vocabulary. This can be explained by the fact that the texts were rather short and non-academic. However, this did not mean that the students could easily select, paraphrase, summarize, and synthesize the ideas that they needed for the argument and discussion essays on divorce and social media. These problems were mostly noticeable in the students' inability to incorporate ideas from the source texts using in-text citations. The following diary extracts illustrate how a student struggled with in-text citations when writing essays and doing presentations:

Week 6: Using a projector, the teacher explained to us more deeply how to use APA style with many examples [...]. The teacher presented different reporting verbs we can use when referring to an author. We wrote a long list of these verbs. For me it was a successful session. I was so enthusiastic about learning the APA style. I thought that I finally mastered it, but I discover later that I did not. But I learned a variety of reporting verbs. (Student 4 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 1)

Week 8: This week the teacher devoted the session to correct our essays. I was quite confident of how I used the APA style. However, while correcting my essay I discovered that I did not master anything about APA style. [...] But I decided to be more careful while using APA style. I succeeded to use it quite properly in my oral presentation because I focused a lot, so I did not make any mistake. (Student 4 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 1)

Another student described more explicitly how the use of in-text citations was a complex process for her because it involves complex skills such as paraphrasing:

I had a problem using the APA in-text-citation. I felt confused when paraphrasing the arguments, when to add the source and when not to add it. I felt confused with the step of paraphrasing itself. (Student 5 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 1)

Apart from the reading materials, students also found it difficult to learn the organizational features of the argument and discussion genres. The most common problems that emerged from the analysis of the diary entries of this student cohort related to organization and paragraph development. The following excerpts show how some students struggled with the organization and the development of ideas in the essay body paragraphs:

The part of the essay that I find difficult is the body. To reach a coherent, persuasive and well-organized body is not easy at all. In fact, to do all of these you have to use in-text citations effectively to make your work convincing. (Student 6 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 1)

I have a problem in thinking and concentrating [...]. I find a lot of difficulties selecting the appropriate arguments I am going to use in my essay. In addition to that, I face a lot of problems moving smoothly from one idea to another. (Student 7 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 1)

Another student felt frustrated because she could not follow the organizational features of the argument genre presented in class. She found the argument genre very different from the argument essays that she had practiced in the previous years:

We were exposed to the argumentative essay and how to write it, the structure and the stages. The session was too long, and it was too difficult for me to write an essay according to the stages of an argument essay. I felt exhausted because it was totally different from what I learned the previous year. (Student 4 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 1)

Interestingly, students reported less frustration when they were challenged by more complex specialized academic texts (research articles related to TEFL) and more complex writing tasks (synthesizing research findings) during the second semester. Indeed, what worried students most was how to manage their time between reading, summarizing, and synthesizing such long articles for the ESAP course and working for the other subjects. Nevertheless, this did not discourage some students from accepting the new challenges as illustrated in the following diary excerpts:

I think the hardest thing was when we were asked to read the TEFL chapters and synthesize them because we were already busy with exams and presentations during that week, but we accepted the challenge and we made it. (Student 1 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 2)

Reading all those articles, evaluating, and synthesizing them were things to which I didn't pay enough attention before. It is true that sometimes I reached a point where I wanted to surrender. Yes, it was a battle for me. How should I read them? How should I manage my time between reading/writing and the other subjects we were studying? But I took the challenge. (Student 8 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 2)

The same difficulties were experienced by the second student cohort who participated in the study the following academic year, 2015-2016. The analysis of their diary entries revealed that as students were introduced to the TEFL content starting from the first semester, all students found it extremely difficult to comprehend, summarize, and synthesize specialized content, and to

write argumentative genres based on TEFL content. This student cohort provided a more detailed description of the kind of frustration that they experienced. The following excerpt from a student's diary illustrates the kind of struggle that most students faced during the first semester course:

Of course, I had no idea about TEFL or even what it is. When I had a look to the TEFL booklet I didn't understand anything from it [...]. My friends started to do the presentation and before each session I tried to read the chapter, but I was facing huge difficulties of understanding it. When my turn came to present one of the chapters, I was still facing problems with understanding the content because it was very academic and there were many technical words, and since I couldn't understand those words, I automatically fell into misunderstanding of the text. However, I tried all my best to understand and to make a good presentation, but I couldn't because I wasn't able to summarize the main ideas in the chapter. I only focused on minor details and missed the major ones. (Student 23– Academic year 2015-2016, Semester 1)

Another student described how she found it extremely difficult to understand technical vocabulary and to paraphrase the authors' ideas without distorting meaning:

While reading the chapters concerning ALM [The Audio-Lingual Method] and CLT [Communicative Language Teaching], I faced some difficulties. First there are many new words for the first time I see. Also, they are very complicated. They include many details and I try to read many times the chapters in order to understand them. Sometimes the important idea can be found in one or two words. But the challenging task for me is how to paraphrase the ideas without changing their meaning. (Student 24 – Academic year 2015-2016, Semester 1)

As can be seen, one major barrier for students to understand the disciplinary content was understanding specialized vocabulary. Evans and Morrison's (2011) subjects also reported great difficulty adjusting to the requirements of university-level reading because of their limited repertoire of technical vocabulary. Concerning writing the argumentative genres, many students in the present study reported having difficulty writing an appropriate introduction, relevant topic sentences for the body paragraphs, and an appropriate conclusion. For example, in her diary entry for week 7 of semester 1, one student explained how she found these essay parts challenging to write:

Week 7: I found that that the most difficult parts of the essay are first the introduction. I found it difficult to think of the general statements that will introduce the topic. I also found it difficult to write an appropriate thesis statement. It always takes me a lot of time. Another part that I found it difficult is writing an appropriate topic sentence that supports the thesis. Also, the conclusion which is an important part of the essay. I found myself repeating the same ideas of the introduction and I didn't know how to give my point of view at the end. (Student 22 – Academic year 2015-2016, Semester 1)

Coping with the teacher's feedback was another important factor that greatly impacted students' learning experiences with ESAP instruction. In a study that investigated students' socialization to and from English genre knowledge development, Goodman and Montgomery (2020) found that teacher's feedback had a strong impact on students' motivation. While some students valued detailed feedback on their writing, others felt extremely demotivated by fully negative feedback. Similarly, teacher's feedback had a significant impact on students' motivation in the present study. However, the two student cohorts did not react to it in the same way. Concerning the first group, students' strong resistance to the teacher's feedback started surprisingly at a rather early stage of the ESAP course. That is, most students reported feeling extremely disappointed when they received the detailed feedback on the very first draft that they had attempted to write for the argument essay. This detailed feedback was primarily meant to help students understand the specificities and complexities of writing from sources and, thus, to enable them to write a better draft. However, students saw a completely different story with the first written feedback that they had received from the teacher. For example, some students reported in their diaries that this feedback had caused them to lose confidence in themselves and in their ability to succeed in exams as illustrated in the following diary excerpt:

I felt disappointed when I found that all what I did was not enough. I felt that the teacher would not be happy of any effort. I was almost sure that I would not reach the average in the writing and TEFL exams. The idea of successful writing was presented to us as a ghost. (Student 8 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 1)

Other students considered the teacher's feedback as a kind of appropriation of their own writing, which made them feel disappointed and demotivated. For example, one student described how the course made her lose confidence in her writing ability, how she no longer knew what to do to please the teacher, and how she felt almost stripped of her writing identity:

I do not know what to do to show my teacher who I really am and what I can do. For instance, concerning the discussion essay, on which we worked in groups, I really tried to put so much effort in it especially with all the exams we had, but then we were totally disappointed. And when the teacher tells me don't do this and don't do that or do not use this word, get rid of this style, etc., it seems like taking me out of who I really am! (Student 1 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 1)

Some other students resisted teacher's feedback because they were still extremely influenced by their past and current writing experiences. Interestingly, no one referred to successful past writing experiences in previous writing courses (first year and second-year writing courses) in the diaries. These students referred only to their content subjects (literature and cultural studies). One student felt terribly bad when she saw many negative comments on her first draft of the argument essay because she was not used to receiving negative comments even on first drafts. Reminiscing about her successful writing experiences seemed to offer her a kind of comfort as well as a means by which she could reassert that her writing was good:

You know [addressing the teacher], whenever I felt frustrated [with the teacher's feedback], I remembered my first-year literature teacher. I could never forget how she encouraged me. She was surprisingly fond of my way of writing. (Student 9 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 1)

The following excerpt from her diary shows how competitive this student was although she claimed that she was not the kind of students who do not accept failure or negative feedback:

If I go further to talk about last year [her second year], my first semester average shocked me (12/20). If I didn't really accept failure, I'd have felt depressed, but the truth is something totally different. I worked hard and got 14/20 as average in the second semester. Also, I recently [talking about her third year] e-mailed my Anglophone civilization teacher to ask about my exam. I got a mark that I've never got. I mean never but I didn't feel uncomfortable at all. Instead, the encouraging words gave me the incentive to work harder. I received feedback from my teacher about an excellent language but off-topic content. (Student 9 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 1)

These two extracts clearly show how competitive this student was. She got used to receiving only good marks and only positive feedback on her writing from her content teachers. She also appeared to have developed a kind of over-confidence in her writing ability to the extent that she could be shocked by a mark like 12/20, even though such a score generally reflects somehow good performance for most content teachers in the English department. This student was, indeed, the one who showed the greatest resistance not only to the teacher's feedback but also to the new requirements of her third year EAP writing course:

Whenever I am overwhelmed with criticism, I wish I could say loudly that it is not my fault. I am trying. Some writing habits have become a part of me, and the other some is already a part of my personality. Sometimes I wish I could tell my teacher that that is the way I used to write, I don't know if I can call it personal style. I don't know. Sometimes I feel I can't abide by the tips I get because I can't see myself anymore in what I write. (Student 9 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 1)

Leki (1995) also found that some students tended to rely a lot on their past writing experiences when attempting to accomplish writing tasks for their academic subjects. Leki noted that while this strategy worked in favor of some students, it worked both in favor and against other students. In the case of the above-mentioned student in the present study, relying totally on past writing experiences to accomplish a complex writing task worked totally against her as she mostly failed to meet the new demands of the writing tasks. Worse than that, she demonstrated considerable resistance to these new requirements because, as she said, she was not ready to abandon her writing habits which she thought allowed her to succeed in her literature and cultural studies courses and to adopt new rules that did not reflect her writing identity.

On the other hand, the analysis of the diary entries showed that many students gradually became more aware of the specificities of their advanced writing course and became more receptive to the teacher's feedback. For example, in her final diary entry of semester 1, one student described how her perception of academic writing changed over time despite the resistance that she had shown to the teacher's feedback at the beginning of the course:

At the very beginning of the year, I thought that academically speaking my writing is good especially if I relate it to subjects other than writing courses [...]. Talking about this year's writing course, after several weeks of practice, I honestly felt like I'm learning how to write again. I think this is good especially when talking about the organization of the argument and discussion essays [...]. Honestly, I was not very interested in writing courses till this year. Actually, I

was thinking that I'm doing well in essays in content subjects. But I realized that we are doing something different this year [...]. I learnt how to deal with in-text citations which is a new thing. In the previous years, I used to quote when adding information that is not mine without mentioning the source or the writer's name. (Student 10 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 1)

As can be seen, the student did not find her previous writing courses useful and did not care much about them. She rather considered the writing that she did in her content courses (literature and cultural studies) quite sufficient for her because it allowed her to succeed in the final exams. At third-year level, she was faced with two new courses (EAP and TEFL) that required her to learn and apply more sophisticated academic skills and, especially, to respect the rules and conventions of academic writing if she wanted to succeed in these two subjects. This student as well as other students needed several weeks to accept the requirements of these new courses. Students' initial resistance to the requirements of the ESAP course can also be related to the other content teachers' expectations in timed-written examinations which are the sole means of evaluation at under-graduate levels. In the present study, students were told to apply all the academic conventions that they learned in both the reading-writing and TEFL final exams. Some studies reported that subject-specific lecturers in English-speaking contexts tended to attach less importance to grammatical accuracy with ESL learners (e.g., Evans & Morrison, 2011). In contrast, some content teachers, in the context of the present study, tended to be more lenient with some important academic writing conventions, such as the appropriate use of quoting and citing techniques in timed-written exams at all levels, as indicated in the student's diary extract above.

Coping with teacher's feedback for the second student cohort of the academic year 2015-2016 was also an important recurrent theme that emerged from the analysis of the students' diary entries. This was particularly reflected in the students' reactions to the marks and comments that they had received on their final reading-writing and TEFL exams of semester 1. Although the students felt greatly frustrated and disappointed, many of them did not attempt to relate their failure, at least explicitly, to what they generally called the teacher's rigid and tough requirements. Some students related their failure to achieve good results to some factors that seemed to have affected their performances during the exams. Time management was one of those factors for many students. One student reported being unable to write a complete essay because she did not use effective reading and writing strategies that she had learned during the course and that could have spared her a lot of time:

In the reading-writing exam, I did the same mistake that I had done before. I read the extracts word by word without using the reading strategies (although we went through them during the reading-writing classes). So, I spent one hour reading and planning, and the other hour I wrote the first and second paragraphs. As usual I didn't finish the essay and I faced a big problem when organizing my ideas. (Student 23– Academic year 2015-2016, Semester 1)

Another student attributed her inability to manage her time during the reading/writing exam to over-thinking and over-planning although she appeared to have used some reading strategies effectively. Her inability to finish the exam on time left her extremely disappointed:

I felt really disappointed of the reading and writing exam. Nothing went as it was planned! I thought that I'm going to excel in this exam particularly; however, all the circumstances gathered against me. I tried to apply reading strategies like skimming and scanning so that I can gain some time and I succeeded in that since I have understood the articles and what I'm required to do in the essay. However, I struggled with time management and over-thinking. I spent a lot of time processing the steps of my work in my mind at the expense of the two hours. Finally, I find myself writing half of the exam. I felt very angry and frustrated because I know that I could have done much better. (Student 25 – Academic year 2015-2016, Semester 1)

Other students related their failure in the reading-writing and TEFL exams to some psychological factors. The following diary extracts show how stress, anxiety, and overwork can considerably affect students' performances in exams. For example, one student described how stress that she experienced during the exams was the main cause of the low marks she had received, and she was quite aware that these marks did not accurately reflect what she could do:

It's been a tough term for me especially that I had the lowest marks that I've ever had. I know these grades don't reflect my levels as I've been through a hard time during these exams. At the same time, I am fully aware of my responsibility and I'm willing to work more on my weaknesses to improve my grades. One of the elements that made me ruin the writing exam is stress. I wasn't thinking clearly, and I was almost shaking out of stress. (Student 26 – Academic year 2015-2016, Semester 1)

Another student described how stress and exhaustion caused by overwork had a serious impact on her ability to concentrate during the exams. Her unsatisfactory exam performance made her feel even worse and considered herself fully responsible for her failure:

I want to tell you sorry [addressing the teacher] because I did not do well in my TEFL and writing exams. I am the one to blame. I killed myself revising and as a result the day of the exam I was so tired and exhausted. I attended class, did homework, and for the most part I revised. But during the day of the exam, I could not write down any word. I was unable to write an essay and I felt so depressed. I was physically there but mentally absent. I was so disappointed; it is my own mistake. (Student 27 – Academic year 2015-2016, Semester 1)

As can be seen, some students seemed to be aware of some of the factors that contributed to their unsatisfactory exam performances, and thus, they could in a sense justify and accept the teacher's marks and comments on their writings. On the other hand, other students found it difficult to link their unsatisfactory performance to any possible factor. For example, one student was shocked by the marks that she received in both the reading-writing and the TEFL exams because she simply thought she had met all the requirements, especially in terms of summarizing and synthesizing:

I was really shocked by the marks I have got in both reading writing and TEFL exams. I expected more but I got bad marks in both subjects. I revised better. I did summarizing and synthesizing. I did really my best, but at the end I was very disappointed. In the TEFL exam, I thought that I understood better the organization of the essay. I was happily thinking that I will get a good mark, but I was wrong. (Student 28 – Academic year 2015-2016, Semester 1)

In this example, the student's deep frustration stemmed from her initial conviction that she had complied to the exams' requirements and not from her rejection of those requirements. In other words, she did her best to apply what she had learned during the course; however, all the effort she made proved to be insufficient to help her reach pass marks. This was, in fact, the case of many students.

In sum, the analysis of the students' diary entries of semester 1 provided useful insight into the kind of challenges that students faced with ESAP instruction. The first semester proved to be extremely difficult for all students. The kind of frustrations that the students experienced were quite similar to those reported in many studies that were conducted in mainstream academic contexts (Campbell & Li, 2008; Cheng et al., 2004). Results in the present study also showed that one semester was not sufficient to help students accommodate to the demands of the course. As will be demonstrated in the following section, students' adjustment to the course was mostly observed in the diary entries of the second semester of both academic years, 2014-2015 and 2015-2016.

4.2 Students' adjustment to the ESAP course

Results from the analysis of the diaries showed that most students from both cohorts felt much more confident with the ESAP course during the second semester. This was basically reflected in (1) the coping strategies that they used to adjust to the demands of the final ESAP exams as well as of the other content subject exams and (2) in their perceptions of the ESAP instruction compared to the EGAP instruction that they had received in previous years. In her study on ESL students' coping strategies of five ESL students in writing tasks across academic subjects, Leki (1995) found that no student ever mentioned using skills or strategies from their past or current writing courses when doing writing tasks in other subjects, which raised concerns about the usefulness of these writing courses in preparing students to the demands of their academic subjects. These findings stood in stark contrast to the results of the present study. All students reported in their diary entries that they had used skills and strategies from the reading-writing course when doing writing tasks not only for the reading-writing and TEFL exams but also for the literature and cultural studies exams. For example, some students mentioned that they were able to solve the problem of time management in the second semester reading-writing exam thanks to the strategies that they had learned in class. One student provided a detailed description of the strategies that helped her feel better about her exam performance:

All that I tried to do during the exam is to follow the tips of the teacher. First, I read the question carefully and wrote a brief pre-reading plan. Then, I read the titles of each extract and wrote next to each one if it is for or against. After that, I started skimming and scanning the extracts, and each time I highlighted the ideas that I will use in my essay. Then, I went back to the plan that I wrote before reading the extracts and reorganized it with more details. I spent the first half of the hour reading, planning, and writing the introduction. Then, I spent the rest of the time writing the rest of the essay [...]. It was the first time that I finish an essay exam before time. I was satisfied with myself because I tried to improve myself and I sensed it through the exam, and I said to myself whatever the mark will be I won't be upset because I managed to overcome problems that I used to have before. (Student 23 – Academic year 2015-2016, Semester 2)

To another participant, learning how to manage her time more effectively during the reading/writing exam allowed her to revise her exam before the allocated time, something that she had never been able to do before. This was a big achievement for her, regardless of the marks that she would have received. What mattered most to her was that she attempted to apply what she had learned in the course and to follow the instructions of the teacher:

Another aspect of my academic development that actually surprised me is that I had the chance to review my essay two times before time ending. Before that and in the first semester, I never had the chance to have a second look on my writing which really bothered me [...]. At the end of that exam [reading/writing exam], I remember feeling relieved. I remember saying to myself that no matter how much I will get on it, I should be proud of myself because I followed the rules and it did me good, at least with time management. (Student 29 – Academic year 2015-2016, Semester 2)

Not only were students able to transfer their learning to their writing across the reading/writing course but also to their content subjects. Many students reported using skills from the reading/writing course when doing the second semester TEFL exam. This was rather expected because the two courses were linked during instruction, and students were constantly reminded that these two courses had the same expectations in terms of skills, strategies, and writing genres. For example, one student described how the reading/writing course helped her do well in the TEFL exam:

I really enjoyed the TEFL exam. It was the first time I knew how to argue by linking my arguments with what research suggests. I tried to apply what we practiced in writing. I tried to write a clear thesis statement in the introduction and topic sentences for each paragraph that reflect the thesis. (Student 11 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 2)

Another student described how summarizing helped him improve his learning strategies when working on the TEFL course:

The mixture between the TEFL content and the writing course was really helpful. It was very effective because I was obliged to revise before coming to class. This strategy helped me because every week I had to write at least a summary of a TEFL chapter. (Student 30 – Academic year 2015-2016, Semester 2)

Many students reported using skills from the reading/writing course in the literature and cultural studies subjects. They used these skills not only during exams but also during their exam preparations. One student mentioned how she kept thinking of what she had learned about essay organization in the reading/writing course during her cultural studies exam:

I can feel that that I've done a really good job in the cultural studies exam. [...]. I tried to focus on organization. I remembered every single word the teacher said [in the reading/writing class]. I respected the steps of the introduction of course and tried to make the general statements in the introduction not too vague. I also remembered that there should be a smooth transition between these steps and did apply it. I was for the first time so confident when writing an exam because I felt that I'm more or less well-equipped, and I can make it. (Student 1 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 2)

The other skills that many students found useful for their literature and cultural studies were paraphrasing, summarizing, and synthesizing. One student reported stopping relying on memorizing lectures and using instead summarizing and synthesizing when preparing for her classroom test:

Compared to the first semester I sensed an improvement in my writings especially when citing, quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing, and synthesizing. These strategies helped me not only in the reading-writing and TEFL exams but also in other subjects. For example, when revising for the civilization test, I summarized the lecture using my own words and tried to link between the chapters by synthesizing them. Whereas, in the first semester I only memorized the lecture and reproduced what was in the lecture. (Student 23 – Academic year 2015-2016)

Similarly, another student seemed to have developed a strong awareness of the important role that these skills played in ensuring her academic success:

I am grateful for the fact that we had the opportunity to practice these important skills [paraphrasing, summarizing, synthesizing] because we will need them for the other subjects. In fact, the reading and writing techniques helped me a lot in my literature and civilization exams. We were told many times by our teachers to never copy and paste what we are given in class, and I have seen them giving low marks because of this. So, I began to paraphrase everything and to try to synthesize articles. (Student 31 – Academic year 2015-2016, Semester 2)

As can be seen, students' adjustment to the demands of the ESAP course and of the other courses was observed in the strategies that they had learned in the reading/writing course. This adjustment was also reflected in students' general perceptions of the ESAP model. Despite all the challenges and all the frustrations that they had experienced during the first semester, the students eventually managed to adjust well enough to the demands of the course by the end of instruction, regardless of the exam results that they had achieved. Equally important, they ended up developing a very positive attitude towards the ESAP course. This positive attitude was identified in all the diary entries and can be summarized in a few major points. Thanks to the ESAP course, students were able to understand the purpose of having EAP writing courses whose main aim was to help them understand the specificities of academic writing and, especially, to help them cope with these specificities in their academic courses. In other words, the ESAP course helped students make the link between writing in EAP writing classes and writing in content subjects as illustrated in the following diary excerpt:

I finally saw the link between what we should do in writing and how we can apply it in writing in a content subject. I mean, in the past, reading and writing were as if separate subjects. I remember in first year, my literature teacher used to make us practice writing paragraphs [...] because she found us unable even to write a paragraph. But because this was done in the literature sessions, I didn't know that the writing [course] has anything to do with content subjects. (Student 11 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 2)

This student was able to see the link between the writing courses and the content subjects in terms of writing skills only in her third-year writing course. In her first year, she found herself unable to write a paragraph for her literature class although she normally spent a whole semester practicing all sorts of paragraph patterns in her reading/writing class. However, as she put it, she used to see the reading/writing courses as completely dissociated from the other content subjects or as Leki and Carson (1997) put it as "completely different worlds" (p 39). Many students referred to similar problems in their diary entries as shown in the following diary excerpt.

I learned many basic techniques that I should have known in the beginning of college years. In fact, before this academic year, my writings in general were a lot worse than now. I did not know anything about the writing process. I had no organization and I used to write any idea that comes to my mind without even making an outline. But now, I learned that making an outline can be very helpful. I can now organize my writing better so the teacher can understand my essays better. (Student 32 – Academic year 2015-2016, Semester 2)

In fact, the first-year and second-year writing courses focused particularly on the organizational features of both paragraphs and essays. The writing process was also emphasized by making students write multiple drafts whether for paragraphs or for essays. However, as can be seen from the students' comments, two years of EGAP instruction helped students neither to master these skills nor to see their relevance to their content courses. In this study, students had the opportunity to understand the importance of organization and the writing process through a genre-based model that emphasized not only the generic and linguistic features of the argumentative genres but also the writing process. In addition, content appeared to have played a fundamental role in helping students value their third year EAP writing course. Despite all the difficulties that they faced with the TEFL content, all students found it more useful to practice writing argumentative essays that were based on their TEFL content than on the readings that dealt with general topics such as divorce or social media. For example, the first student cohort, who first practiced writing the argument genre on the theme of divorce in semester 1, found the topic divorce unstimulating and boring. Many students from this group could not relate to such general topics although they were helped by source texts. One student suggested that the whole course be based only on TEFL. To her, the thematic units on divorce and social media that were used in the first semester were useless:

Another suggestion is why we didn't work on TEFL for writing topics from the first semester till the end of the year. [...]. I deem it will be more beneficial and helpful for us instead of talking about not only boring but also dull and lifeless topics such as divorce. (Student 33 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 2)

As mentioned earlier, the rationale of using thematic units that did not relate to any content course in the first semester of the academic year 2014-2015, was to introduce students to ESAP instruction gradually. However, as can be seen, students' reactions to the thematic units were in great part negative. Indeed, most students found the idea of TEFL content as the basis for the reading/writing course much more engaging because it provided them with the opportunity to hone their academic writing skills in more authentic situations and to cope with the complexity of their TEFL course in terms of content, skills, and writing genres. Some students even suggested that ESAP instruction be introduced starting from first year.

Imagine if writing courses, starting from first year, use content subjects to teach writing. That would be really great. At least we will be able to write coherently in content subjects. (Student 11 – Academic year 2014-2015, Semester 2).

In sum, the study of the students' diaries showed that students experienced quite similar challenges to those reported in studies conducted in mainstream academic courses (Cheng et al., 2004; Campbell & Li, 2008; Cheng & Fox, 2008; Evans & Morrison, 2011; Leki, 1995). At the first stage, results showed that students experienced great difficulty coping with the demands of the ESAP course that linked an EAP writing course to a subject-specific course. These difficulties engendered quite often feelings of anger, disappointment, demotivation, and even resistance to the course demands during the learning process. As noted by Campbell and Le (2008), understanding such experiences from students' voices and stories can help teachers re-examine their teaching practices and create learning environments that can cater better for students' learning needs, aspirations, and even learning preferences. Concerning learning preferences, one of the important issues that emerged from the analysis of students' diaries was students' reactions to the teacher's feedback which played a central role in students' learning processes. In the present study, the teacher's feedback clearly had a negative impact on students' motivation although some students tried to cope with it as much as they could. In the context of the present study, balancing positive and negative feedback was quite often a difficult task for the teacher. However, teachers should make effort to find other ways that can help students be more receptive to the teacher's feedback. Teacher-student writing conferencing is one possible solution (Hamloui & Fellahi, 2017). It consists of a meeting between a teacher and an individual student to provide interactive oral feedback on a first draft or on a written exam. While this form of feedback may not be feasible with large classes, it can be provided at least to the students who demonstrate strong resistance to the teacher's feedback as was the case with student 9 in the present study.

From a different perspective and more specifically from a learning transfer perspective, students' accounts on their learning experiences in the present study shed some light on the process by which students moved from the initial learning context to the transfer contexts (Lobato, 2003, 2012). The students' accounts showed that this process was indeed very complex and fraught with difficulty. As can be seen from the results, after one semester of ESAP instruction most students were still unable to cope with the demands of the ESAP course. Their adjustment to the course and their positive perceptions of learning were essentially observed in the second semester. This supports the view that learning transfer is not instantaneous but rather takes time to occur (Haskell, 2001). Nevertheless, although students reported much greater adjustment to the ESAP course in the second semester, many students acknowledged that they still faced challenges related to some complex skills such as summarizing, paraphrasing, synthesizing, and using in-text citations as illustrated in the following diary excerpt.

This year, I have learned in-text citations, though I still haven't learned it 100% correctly. I also learned more about summarizing and paraphrasing. I still haven't mastered the skills of summarizing and paraphrasing. When paraphrasing, I tend to repeat most of the words and just replace some of them with their synonyms. (Student 34 – Academic year 2015-2016, Semester 2)

Summary writing, paraphrasing, reading strategies, writing strategies, paragraph structure, and essay structure were skills that formed the backbone of first year and second-year reading-writing courses. However, most students hardly mentioned having remembered learning any of these skills in their previous courses, which raises more concerns about the value of EGAP instruction that is still the dominant approach in the context of the present study. Nevertheless, students' perceptions of EGAP instruction still needs further investigation. As for ESAP instruction, students' accounts of a one-year experience with this EAP model added support to the studies that demonstrated the positive impact of such a model on students' perceived learning (James, 2006; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011; Baik & Greig, 2009). Finally, ESAP instruction in this study seemed to have provided students with a more positive learning transfer climate (James, 2010).

5. Conclusion

Using learner diaries, the present study explored the learning experiences of Tunisian third-year undergraduate students with ESAP writing instruction to which they had been introduced for the first time during their final year of their English BA. The study was conducted over a period of two years and involved two student cohorts. A student cohort of 21 students participated during the academic year 2014-2015 and another cohort of 36 students participated during the academic year 2015-2016. The study aimed particularly to investigate the challenges that each student cohort faced over the two-semester course, the coping strategies that the students used in order to meet the demands of the ESAP course, and the students' general perceptions of the ESAP model in comparison to their previous writing courses which were based on the EGAP model. Results showed that ESAP instruction proved to be extremely challenging for all students during the first semester. These challenges were in part affected by the students' perceived writing abilities and by their prior writing experiences in their content subjects. These factors made it more difficult for students to cope with the new demands of the course that required them to comprehend specialized academic texts, write text-responsible argumentative essays, and meet the teacher's expectations in terms of feedback. These difficulties engendered quite often feelings of anger, disappointment, demotivation, and even resistance. However, students reacted in a much more positive way to the ESAP course during the second semester. The fact that students

showed more receptivity to the ESAP course during the second term indicated that they needed more time to adjust, though partially, to the requirements of the course. This adjustment was also reflected in the students' other academic subjects.

The results obtained from the analysis of the students' diaries have important implications for EAP writing pedagogy in the context of the present study. Reading/writing instruction in the English department has always been based on the EGAP model. EAP instructors still depend too much on published EGAP textbooks that clearly failed to help students see the link between the writing that they do in their writing courses and the writing they need to do in their content courses. Many teachers tend to believe that they are teaching the right skills and strategies that will enable students to improve their academic writing skills across all subjects. However, the idea that students can automatically or unconsciously make the link between the reading-writing courses and their other courses through EGAP courses is a flawed assumption, as can be concluded from the students' narrative accounts. Students need to learn the specificities of academic writing discourse in more authentic situations. It is true that the ESAP model may pose greater challenges to Tunisian students, especially to low-ability students; nevertheless, these challenges could be overcome if students were given more time and more opportunities for practice.

Finally, the present study had some limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, the ESAP course was taught by the researcher who happened to have the necessary expertise to teach EAP and a subject-specific course, which greatly facilitated the implementation of the ESAP course as well as the data collection process. While this trend is, nowadays, encouraged (Wingate, 2018), it is still quite uncommon in many EAP contexts. As mentioned earlier, the adjunct model generally involves an EAP teacher and a content teacher working together in the design and implementation of the course. This kind of collaboration hardly occurs in the English department. It will be useful to explore the level of collaboration that can take place between the EAP instructors and the subject-specific lecturers as well as the role they can play in promoting transfer of learning. A second limitation of the present research is that students' learning experiences with ESAP instruction were explored with students who were at their final year of their English BA. Seeing how this model would work with lower levels, particularly the first-year level, will provide more insights into its feasibility in the Tunisian context. Finally, it will be useful to explore EAP teachers' perceptions of implementing a new approach that differs in many ways from the skills-based approach to which they have been accustomed for many years. This is an important issue to consider because the success of the ESAP model depends in great part on the extent to which EAP teachers are willing to change their teaching beliefs and practices.

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