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## Source Use by EFL Undergraduate Students: Challenges and Success in Process-based Writing

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### Abstract

Proper use of source material in second language writing is an essential skill in the academic writing process. The present study investigates source use and plagiarism level in the essay writing process by the English as a foreign language (EFL) student in one of the international universities in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Thirteen first-year students who failed and then retook the language program were chosen for the purpose of the study. A mixed-methods research design was used to collect the data (i.e., language programs over two subsequent academic years were analyzed for their relevance to the process-based writing). To evaluate the students' opinions on both programs and correct academic citation, a paper-based questionnaire was circulated. The data analysis revealed a positive influence of program two on organizing ideas, incorporating source-text ideas, and using more academic and error-free sentences. A comparative analysis of the plagiarism level and writing performance in students' papers in both programs was performed using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, which showed a positive difference in the overall writing scores but an insignificant difference in the level of plagiarism. Findings of the study identified that the engagement of the EFL undergraduate students in process-based writing made a positive impact on writing from sources and overall performance.

**Keywords:** process writing, plagiarism level, source use, EFL undergraduate students, program, feedback

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## 1. Introduction

The first-year study in an English-medium instruction (EMI) institution might be demanding for many students whose first language is not English. The transition to the EMI institution system might cause personal and academic development difficulties for some students. Some challenging areas might be reflected in writing essays, reports, reviews, reflection, and other English written tasks. Academic writing requires knowing the language structure and grammar and includes content, logical flow of ideas, and integrating sources (De Chazal, 2014). Thus, it is not an easy process for students of English as a foreign language (EFL) as it requires them to work a lot on the content and structure. Silva's (1993) careful analysis of the second language (L2) writers' work proves that they have difficulty in completing a writing task. Such a challenge occurs because they should pay simultaneous attention to the content, structure, vocabulary, and grammar. So, when they consider writing error-free sentences, they might fail to answer the actual task. Not all these issues seem essential to the first-year students, and they may ignore some crucial assignments set in the language program. Based on research findings, Bilikozen (2018) explains that most first-year students lacked experience in completing written tasks. Limited exposure to writing tasks and the inability to deal with challenges can result in students' failure and require them to repeat the module during the next academic year.

In addition to the challenges related to tasks and the lack of writing experience (Akhmedjanova & Jeffery, 2021; Benson & Heidish, 1995; Hyland, 2003), the students might have unintentional/intentional plagiarism of ideas. One of the causes of plagiarism is the availability of information on the Internet, allowing students to access any related online sources more efficiently compared to the past when there were a limited number of references to use (Graham-Matheson & Starr, 2013). Another reason for plagiarizing can be related to cultural norms because in some societies copying from sources is considered an acceptable way of learning (Hayes & Inrona, 2005). It has been explored in a western context in several research studies among international students from the Middle East and South Asia, which describe students' challenges adhering to new writing norms which are opposite to their own (Briggs, 2003; Leask, 2006; Tran, 2012). In those Asian cultures, complimenting the sources is a sign of respect towards the author, which restrains them from being judgmental.

In Uzbekistan, one of the countries in Central Asia, instruction in educational

institutions is either Uzbek or Russian. English was studied as a subject throughout compulsory school education from the fifth to eleventh grade for two hours per week until 2012. Since then, English has been introduced from the first to the eleventh grade for three hours per week (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2012). During this stage of the study, schoolchildren start learning about basic writing techniques in English followed by more advanced ones (Hasanova, 2007). Also, although students in secondary and high schools are required to produce different genres of writing such as writing emails, short simple essays, and reports, and filling out applications, very little formal training/teaching to schoolchildren is provided by teachers (Akhmedjanova & Jeffery, 2021).

Another decree on foreign language education requires applicants of higher educational (HE) institutions to certify their English either by the national exam mapped to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) or by the international exams such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) (Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2013). Later, depending on their degree program, the learners usually study either more advanced General English or English for Specific/Academic Purposes at the tertiary level. In these language courses students are introduced to more advanced writing (e.g., a five-paragraph essay, reflection, summary-response, and research paper) taught by university language teachers.

Being one of the English-medium universities in the capital city (Tashkent), the HE institution under the current study offers several bachelor's degree courses, such as business administration, economics and finance, information technology, and commercial law. However, all students must take a foundation year in the Certificate of International Foundation Studies Course (CIFS) as a prerequisite before starting their undergraduate studies. One of the core modules taught at CIFS is Academic English (AE), a year-long course spread over two semesters. It focuses on improving students' four language skills and helps them learn basic research concepts, give an oral presentation, use sources, and reference them correctly. The module has been challenging for most students at the university foundation year because they are new to the fundamental principles of academic writing, such as paraphrasing, quoting, referencing the sources, analyzing, summarizing, providing argumentation, and other aspects. Alexander et al. (2008, p. 192) clarify that it is difficult for novice writers to write successfully from sources. This skill does not

mean “quoting sources in a superficial way”, but intellectual engagement with the reading material. For instance, one of the most challenging aspects of academic writing for CIFS students has been understanding academic integrity. As secondary-school students do not have enough experience with appropriate acknowledgement of the authors, they may copy and paste from sources unintentionally. Hence, once they start studying at the tertiary level, they often face difficulty in understanding the notion of citations and academic conventions (i.e., using the source material and acknowledging the sources properly). The focus of this paper is to provide a comparative analysis of two programs in terms of students’ struggles writing from sources over two subsequent academic years in the Academic English course. The repeaters’ (students who fail and retake the Academic English module) opinions and performance were considered as they experienced both programs. In line with the aim stated, the following research questions were investigated: (a) What is the students’ opinion about the essay writing process introduced in the Academic English classes? (b) Does process writing affect the first-year students’ level of plagiarism and use of sources? (c) What influence does feedback have on the students’ integration of sources?

## 2. Literature Review

A growing body of research studies have focused on the positive influence of the writing process on the students’ performance (Ataie-Tabar et al., 2019; Hu & Kuh, 2002; Nia & Shahsavari, 2019; Romova & Andrew, 2011), highlighting the importance of feedback and avoiding plagiarism in L2 writing (Hu & Lei, 2016; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Neumann et al., 2019; Poverjuc, 2010; Seviour, 2015; Wette, 2018).

### 2.1. Feedback in Process Writing

Providing feedback is one of the critical features of process writing, which plays a vital role in developing students’ L2 writing and can be one of the best encouragement tools for writing quality. Ma (2018) and Poverjuc (2010) highlight that feedback and its implementation make a significant difference. Therefore, language programs should include several feedback types such as writing conferences (short one-on-one meetings of a learner and a teacher), electronic feedback through different online platforms and peer feedback (Rahimi & Fathi, 2021).

Several studies identified that a writing conference (i.e., a progress meeting) between a student and a teacher is a useful tool (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Goldstein & Conrad, 1990). This face-to-face conversation allows bonding to make the learning process more beneficial in understanding course requirements or those parts of writing that the written or e-feedback cannot reflect on (Poverjuc, 2010). Based on an investigation, Shvidko (2018) suggests creating a positive atmosphere when providing feedback during the writing conferences, leading to further revisions of EFL students' work. However, Hyland and Hyland (2006) highlight that most studies on writing conferences are based on small-scale research. Therefore, more investigation into the influence of one-on-one interaction between the teachers and students is required.

While oral feedback can be easily forgotten and takes some time to work on (Ferris, 2010), electronic feedback is easy to follow. It is recorded, time-effective, and gives more opportunity to learn from the provided links. Turnitin is not only an online platform for checking similarity (plagiarism) level, but it also offers online feedback, making it useful for L2 writers to improve their paraphrasing skills, writing from sources, grammar, structure, and content of their work (Bailey & Challen, 2014). Kostka and Maliborska (2016) emphasize that Turnitin is a valuable program that should be examined by the language teachers and explained to the L2 students before being used in the academic writing instructions. Ene and Upton (2018) explored the electronic feedback provided on L2 writing and found that in process-based writing, teachers' e-feedback given on multiple drafts promoted revisions and enhanced students' performance in L2 writing. Based on a research study, Zareekbatani (2015) concluded that L2 writers' perceptions of electronic feedback varied and suggested supporting learners in realizing their strengths and weaknesses in writing and using less judgmental but contextualized online comments to help students improve their writing.

Finally, peer feedback is about students' interaction with each other in a friendly environment (Birhan, 2018; Seviour, 2015), and if practiced only once, students might feel unwilling to work with each other. Therefore, introducing peer feedback from the beginning of the semester could build more trust in peers' opinions, and students can learn from each other's experiences. Although students might rely on and value teachers' feedback more useful (Saeli & Cheng, 2021), this process also decreases the instructors' responsibility to be the only person to provide feedback in the classroom (Gibbs, 2010).

## 2.2. Plagiarism and Writing from Sources

Numerous studies have focused on exploring the perception of plagiarism and writing from sources by EFL students and teachers (Hu & Lei, 2016; Neumann et al., 2019; Wette, 2018) and the analysis of source use in L2 writing (Bikowski & Gui, 2018; Cumming et al., 2018; Keck, 2014; Neumann et al., 2019; Wette, 2017). Based on their investigation, Hu and Lei (2016, p.114) identified that more than half of Chinese students in their research study did not perceive “unacknowledged copying as plagiarism”, which was explained by the influence of culture and educational context. Bikowski and Gui (2018) observed a similar trend when comparing source texts in L2 writing among Chinese students based in China and the USA. They noticed that EFL students might avoid using quotation marks and cite the author and year when referencing a source.

Several reasons for unintentional plagiarism have been identified in the research studies. Li and Casanave (2012) found that although novice L2 writers were aware of the plagiarism policies introduced at the HE institutions, they tended to patch-write or inaccurately reference the source material. Wette (2017) identified that patch-writing and inappropriate citing might also be found in the L2 writing of more experienced learners. The research by Cumming et al. (2018) shows that Chinese students tended to patch-writing in case they produced a reading-writing assignment under the time constraint and were limited to the information given in the sources. However, the students were more successful in acknowledging the source texts in the second year of studies, as they showed better knowledge and application of written academic conventions. Another critical finding was observed by Keck (2014), whose investigation revealed that novice writers relied on the sources more frequently than more experienced writers. Based on their review of numerous research studies, Cumming et al. (2016) concluded that it might be challenging to distinguish between first language and foreign-language writers’ strategies in using the source material as the research participants and writing tasks of the studies are limited.

The literature review has revealed the importance of feedback in the writing process and students’ awareness of source use and academic integrity to improve their L2 writing skills. In addition, most studies have explored source text use based on L2 writers’ opinions (Li & Casanave, 2012; Shi, 2012; Thompson et al., 2013; Wette, 2018) and their paper analysis (Cumming et al., 2018; Keck, 2014; Uludag et al., 2019; Wette, 2017) at the tertiary level in a semester-long course. The focus



of this paper is to provide a comparative analysis of two programs in terms of students' struggles writing from sources over two subsequent academic years in the Academic English course. The repeaters' (students who fail and retake the Academic English module) opinions and performance were considered as they experienced both programs.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Participants

The convenience sampling procedure was chosen because the researchers, as the Academic English module lecturers, had access to prospective participants. The study initially included seventeen repeaters who failed the Academic English module in the first program (P1) and retook it the following academic year. The main purpose for choosing these participants for the study was to find out the ways to decrease students' failure in terms of plagiarism and use of sources as these were the main reason for their failure in the module. Later four students were excluded from the study because they did not fit the research purpose. These students took an academic leave (the module had a different type of assessment), and they repeated the module in a year. The remaining thirteen students participated in the study (see Table 1). Out of these students, only three were female. The age range of the participants was from 18 to 20. The first language of all the participants was Uzbek, but they also spoke Russian as their second language, so English was a foreign language for **all** of them. According to the university entry requirements, all the students should have a minimum of 5.5 band scores in IELTS with a minimum of 5.0 in the writing section. The participants of the current study had an average of 5.5 in IELTS including the writing section.

**Table 1**  
*Participants of the Study*

Gender		Age			IELTS score
Male	Female	18	19	20	
10	3	5	5	3	5.5

#### 3.2. Research Instruments

A mixed-methods research design was implemented to collect the data.

Specifically, the study data were collected using several research tools: document analysis (i.e., the two programs (P1 and P2)), students' writing tasks, and a paper-based questionnaire.

The programs were analyzed based on the content, structure, and sequence of lesson topics. The programs in the Academic English module are designed to develop students' language and transferable skills (see Table 2). In both programs, the students could choose one out of broad topics (e.g., Education, Success, Environment, Media, Art, Health, and Leadership) for their writing assignments.

**Table 2**  
*Overview of the Language Programs*

Program (P1)	Program (P2)	Weeks
	Argumentation and evidence Evaluation of sources	Week 1
Introducing the essay types and structures: persuasive compare/contrast problem/solution cause/effect	Introducing the structure of a compare/contrast essay Peer Review Submitting Essay 1 via Turnitin Receiving electronic feedback	Week 2 Week 3
Working with sources Receiving feedback	Introducing the structure of a problem/solution essay Peer Review Submitting Essay 2 via Turnitin Receiving electronic feedback	Week 4 Week 5
Preparing the essay outline for final submission	Introducing the structure of a persuasive essay Peer Review	Week 6
Participation in PM1 Receiving oral feedback	Submitting Essay 3 via Turnitin Receiving electronic feedback	Week 7
Working on the introduction and conclusion of the essay for final submission Participation in PM2 Receiving oral feedback	Working on the language, argumentation, and referencing	Week 8 Week 9
Working on the language and referencing	Preparing the essay outline for final submission Participation in the Progress Meeting Receiving oral feedback	Week 10
	Working on the final essay Editing and peer review Final essay submission	Weeks 11-12 Week 13



In P1, the participants practiced referencing sources, paraphrasing, sentence structure, and in-class writing of different types of paragraphs, such as persuasion, comparison/contrast, problem/solution, and cause/effect. The students also outlined an essay by providing information about the essay, such as a full introduction, topic sentences for each body paragraph, evidential support, and a full conclusion. They participated in two 10–15-minute Progress Meetings (i.e., a one-on-one feedback session) to discuss their writing with their Academic English instructors. The first discussion focused on the relevance and reliability of the sources that students integrated to support ideas in their essays. The second discussion was devoted to the essay type, organization of ideas, and source texts. Both PMs were part of a formative assessment, and only the outline contributed to the final mark. At the end of the semester, students were required to submit their final argumentative essays through Turnitin.

In P2, three essay types were chosen to be taught (i.e., persuasive, compare/contrast, and problem/solution). Students were required to submit 500-word argumentative essays of different styles and received electronic feedback through Turnitin every other week, starting from the third teaching week. The Turnitin Feedback Studio functions were shown and explained to the students before receiving the electronic comments on their first short essay. P2 focused on developing students' understanding of academic citation practices and included activities on summarizing, paraphrasing, and citing the source texts. The essay submission was part of the formative and summative assessment. Action upon feedback helped students improve their writing, and it was reflected in the mark of their final essay. After receiving feedback on their last short paper, students were asked to outline their final essay, i.e., to submit an essay plan with a full introduction, topic sentences for each body paragraph and evidential support, and participate in the progress meeting. The PM focused on the more extended final essay, i.e., an essay type, organization of ideas, relevance of the sources incorporated, and structure. At the end of the semester, students were to submit their final essay, either an improved version of a short essay or a completely new essay, through Turnitin.

The second research tool employed in the study was to analyze students' written papers submitted for both course programs (P1 and P2). The focus was placed on the students' past and current writing experience from sources, plagiarism level, and overall performance. Learners' performance and plagiarism level in L2 writing were compared and then analyzed statistically.

Finally, the study investigated the students' opinions on the writing process and source integration through a paper-based questionnaire. The researchers of the study designed the research tool. It consisted of twenty questions focused on collecting participants' demographic data (e.g., age, gender, and native language) and their opinions. Specifically, the inquiry focused on the essay writing process, the importance of progress meetings and submission of drafts, and the use of sources in their written assignment using a 4-point Likert scale (1=not necessary to 4=very necessary). To ensure the questionnaire's reliability and validity, it was piloted among students of the same module and discussed with colleagues who have extensive research experience in this area of study. After these procedures, it was disseminated among the students when the semester was over.

### 3.3. Data Analysis Procedure

The study aimed to identify the impact of changes on the students' plagiarism level and overall writing performance in the programs. The analysis of the students' plagiarism level (i.e., the percent identified by Turnitin - an online platform for detecting plagiarism level in submitted files) and performance in writing (i.e., overall essay score given by AE teachers) was conducted at the end of the semester as the results of both P1 and P2 were required for the study. The researchers collected participants' scripts and kept the data (i.e., a percentage of plagiarism in each paper and an overall score for the essays) in the Excel spreadsheet. The plagiarism level was automatically detected by Turnitin, as the students were required to submit the soft copy of their written papers via this electronic system, which reports on the similarity level between the students' essay and source text, and shows the percentage of plagiarism (i.e., plagiarism level). The overall scores for the students' papers for both P1 and P2 were available to the researchers being part of the Academic English **module** team. Two Academic English teachers, who have had more than seven-year experience in teaching this module and being involved in the assessment process, checked the students' papers, and the final agreed score (i.e., minimum 0% to maximum 100%, with a pass mark of 40%) was published in the university internal electronic system. To assess the inter-rater reliability Cohen's Kappa statistic was run for the results obtained in both language programs (P1 and P2). The analysis identified that the inter-rater reliability for the raters in P1 was  $Kappa = 0.72$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), and for the assessors in P2 was  $Kappa = 0.75$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), which showed a substantial agreement among the raters in both programs. Each paper was assessed

against a set of criteria (i.e., content and structure, language use, style of writing, use of sources, and formatting) developed by the module team members.

All the collected data (i.e., the plagiarism level, the overall score for the students' papers, and questionnaire results) were transferred into the Excel spreadsheet to be used for the statistical analysis. Due to the non-parametric nature of the data, the statistical analysis was done through the Wilcoxon signed-rank test (non-parametric statistical hypothesis test). Specifically, the students' performance and level of plagiarism were analyzed through Wilcoxon to show whether there was any level of significant difference (i.e., statistical significance identified at  $p \leq 0.05$ ) for both academic years. The questionnaire results were analyzed by running cross-tabulation in SPSS, version 23.0, to determine the importance of the progress meetings for the EFL learners.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Program Analysis

The document analysis of P1 and P2 shows that both programs have some similarities. For instance, both programs allowed participants to practice fill-in the gap, sentence completion, and short writing activities. It is important to note that in both, the university plagiarism policies and the referencing conventions were introduced to the students. The learners were also taught the difference between reliable and unreliable sources and discouraged from using Wikipedia in L2 writing. In P1, source integration and referencing conventions were introduced only in two seminars at the beginning of the semester. In P2, an explicit explanation of how to avoid plagiarism was presented at the beginning of the semester and later each lesson covered different paraphrasing exercises, use of direct quotes, and proper referencing of the sources. Moreover, several differences in their content and structure were identified through the investigation.

On the one hand, the analysis of P1 shows that it was focused more on the teacher's input rather than students' output, which means P1 could be more overwhelming for students because students were more responsible for their writing with limited support from the instructor. Nevertheless, it should be noted that students had a chance to submit parts of their essays for feedback. Still, they mostly ignored this opportunity because it was not an essential part of the formative assessment and did not contribute to the final mark. Students could also discuss their ideas for their

essay during the PMs and submit an outline for feedback, which was part of formative feedback weighing 10% of their overall mark, and the final academic essay with the word limit of 1200-1500 weighed at 90%. When students know their work is valued and can contribute to their final mark, they act on the task; otherwise, several studies show that they do not take it seriously (Gibbs, 2010; Seviour, 2015). Thus, some students fail because they start writing their work closer to the deadline, rushing through finding reliable sources and spending less time reading them and failing to paraphrase and cite the sources (i.e., plagiarizing unintentionally).

On the other hand, the analysis of P2 represents that its emphasis was on balancing teacher's input and students' output. P2 also included a PM, but it was not assessed as it was in P1; however, learners still gained the opportunity to work with their language instructor one on one. Since P2 included the submission of three short essays which were assessed, PM was excluded from being part of the formal assessment. Reducing the number of PMs in the study shows that verbal corrective feedback is less useful than written feedback, and oral comments are fast and hard to remember while implementing (Ferris, 2010). Most importantly, P2 enabled students to take small steps towards preparing the final academic essay as it involved different pre-writing activities such as brainstorming, mapping, pre-discussions, and freewriting activities at the beginning of each class. The assumption was that such warm-up exercises could help students generate ideas without worrying about grammar, structure, spelling, and style (Nia & Shahsavar, 2019). Students might also feel more support or shared responsibility during the semester when they are asked to submit short academic essays, which are part of the final assessment. It encourages students to work harder, which can work as an extrinsic motivation for drawing students' attention to the writing and awarding them for their hard work with a mark, which usually has a positive outcome (Hu & Kuh, 2002).

Another essential aspect of P2 was for the students to receive feedback on each short essay. The comments were provided on using source material (paraphrasing or quoting directly), following the referencing conventions, such as using quotation marks, indicating the author and year, providing a reference list, logical flow of ideas, and language use. Each short academic essay with a word limit of 500 was valued at 10%; acting upon feedback to all short papers also showed 10%, and the final one with a word limit of 1200-1500 weighed 60%. This division of percentages can give more opportunities for students to receive higher marks and certainly learn during the process. Such an approach can be associated with being

“learning-friendly” in terms of strategy and assessment because students are aware of the process requirements and can monitor themselves throughout the semester (Seviour, 2015, p. 85).

Thus, if P1 was highly focused on the product with little chance for students’ engagement in the writing process through only face-to-face discussions, P2 was designed to consider the students’ involvement in the writing process from the beginning of the semester through several writing stages until the end of the semester. The instruction of P2 was based on pre-while-post writing stages to make the writing process easier for students to follow and practice regularly. Galbraith and Rijlaarsdam (1999, p. 94) also emphasize the importance of such a process approach to writing, stating that “learning to write involves learning about the different processes involved in writing, and how to coordinate these to satisfy goals which vary as a function of context, task and audience”. Therefore, the changes made throughout the assessment in the language program made the writing process more concentrated on students’ gains rather than studying only for getting marks.

#### 4.2. Students’ Opinions

To identify students’ opinions on both programs and writing from sources, they were provided with a paper-based questionnaire. The cross-tabulation analysis of the findings shows that the participants do not consider the first progress meeting (PM1) necessary for the essay writing process in P1 (see Table 3) because most of them did not participate in it. That is, seven out of thirteen participants took part in PM1, six out of them indicated the importance of PM1 and one found it unnecessary. Interestingly, two students who did not participate in PM1 believe that it might be useful to do so.

**Table 3**  
*Importance of Progress Meeting 1*

Participation in PM 1	Very necessary	Necessary	Relatively necessary	Not necessary	Total
Yes, I participated because...	1	3	2	1	7
No, I did not participate because...	0	1	1	4	6

Nonetheless, the cross-tabulation analysis of the importance of the second progress meeting (PM2) shows that the participants believe that PM2 was more critical in the essay writing process as ten out of thirteen students participated and eight indicated that it was necessary (see Table 4).

**Table 4**  
*Importance of Progress Meeting 2*

Participation in PM 2	Very necessary	Necessary	Relatively necessary	Not necessary	Total
Yes, I participated because...	1	7	2	0	10
No, I did not participate because...	0	0	1	2	3

One respondent who did not take part in PM2 thinks that it might have been useful for the essay writing process. This significance might be explained by the fact that the students were provided with the teachers' feedback on the essay type, organization of ideas, giving relevant ideas from the sources, citing, and referencing correctly. Therefore, the PM as a way of providing oral comments on the students' writing tasks should be considered for future programs. It allows the students to interact face-to-face with their teacher, receive feedback on their work and track their writing progress (Seviour, 2015). Additionally, based on research findings, Birhan (2018) explains that learners could enhance their writing skills when they were actively involved in peer and teacher feedback. In this case, to ensure students' L2 writing quality, it is vital to implement face-to-face discussions between students and teachers on a regular basis.

The cross-tabulation analysis was used to identify the degree of necessity of essay submission in P2 (see Table 5). The findings indicate that most participants of the current study submitted three short essays, and some students did not submit either first, second or third short essays. Each time the students were provided with the teacher's comments on argumentation, integration of the source texts, language, organization of ideas, and proper referencing. It means they regard the submission of three short essays as necessary because it was part of the formative assessment and significantly contributed to their final mark. Seviour (2015) also emphasizes the importance of process writing which puts students in charge of their progress.



Furthermore, most of those who submitted short essays also considered the PM necessary for their essay writing. The students could discuss their choice of sources for the final submission, clarify the lecturer's feedback on their essays about direct and indirect quotes, and ask questions about their drafts to improve the quality of their writing. Goldstein and Conrad (1990) support a similar idea that participation in writing conferences (i.e., progress meetings) can help students clarify their composition and contribute to a better revision of their drafts. Besides, based on the research, Ma (2018) found that students consider teacher feedback positive as it helped them improve their academic writing and encouraged them to write better.

**Table 5**  
*Importance of a short essay submission*

Short Essay Submission	Very necessary	Necessary	Relatively necessary	Not necessary	Total
Essay 1	7	4	1	1	13
Essay 2	7	4	1	1	13
Essay 3	6	4	2	1	13

To identify the participants' opinions about the most effective language program and their perceptions of writing from sources, open-ended questions about students' preferences and reasons for their choice were asked in the questionnaire. The findings reveal twelve participants out of thirteen regard short essay submission in P2 to be more relevant for better L2 writing.<sup>1</sup> Only one student was in favor of the effectiveness of P1. Specifically, she notes,

“It was more effective because tutors could give anything in their classes and check us in progress meetings, instead of submission of three essays”.

In contrast, another student believes that having two PMs is not worthwhile. He explains,

“I think one progress meeting is enough, if the teacher gives good feedback which is understandable for students. Two progress meetings are time-consuming for students because student has another module out there”.

<sup>1</sup> No grammatical or lexical changes have been made to the students' comments.

Other participants of the questionnaire found P2 more effective in improving structure, proper use of source material in the essay, correcting language mistakes, and having more writing practice. Some of the comments are the following:

“Three short essays help to choose the most suitable and get structure for final essay. Regarding previous year this year I tries to get more feedback so it allowed me to change lots of mistakes language vise and with using sources”.

“By submitting short essays I improved in-text referencing”.

“In this year, three short essays and progress meetings gave useful things. After writing these essays the final was not difficult because we already prepared how to write by writing three essays”.

“I think this year is most effective because I saw my mistakes in short essays and tried to improve my academic English”.

“I liked it. Three short essays are easier to make a choice towards one big essay because student then has better option”.

“I understood better how to incorporate sources in essay, coz I always do these mistakes”.

“Source usage in the essays was a challenging part of writing, but understanding the difference between reliable and unreliable articles, direct and indirect quotations, I could improve my essays considerably.”

As the results reveal, most participants perceived process writing positively because they had an opportunity to organize the ideas logically, correct the mistakes, and incorporate the source material correctly, which shows their awareness of avoiding plagiarism in L2 writing. The findings of the current study are closely related to the questionnaire results conducted by Cumming et al. (2018), whose participants found themselves successful in planning, analyzing, quoting, summarizing, and editing when writing papers at the university. Based on an investigation, Wette (2018) identified that most L2 students regard using source texts and following referencing conventions as essential for improving academic writing. It should be mentioned that several studies support the process writing approach for enhancing students' writing performance and using sources properly. For instance, Galbraith and Rijlaarsdam (1999) highlight that successful writing depends not only on the involvement of the process but also on the students' ability to focus on the process elements. Hyland and Hyland (2006) also explain that L2

learners need some time and repetitive activities to realize and learn from their mistakes. Such exercises may clarify students' reasons for improving different aspects of academic writing and participants' preference for P2 (i.e., focused on process writing and source use).

### 4.3. Students' Writing

The students' essays were analyzed to identify the relationship between the students' opinions on the programs and their performance and source integration in the papers. The examination of performance and plagiarism level in students' writing was based on thirteen repeaters' essays.

#### 4.3.1. Plagiarism Level

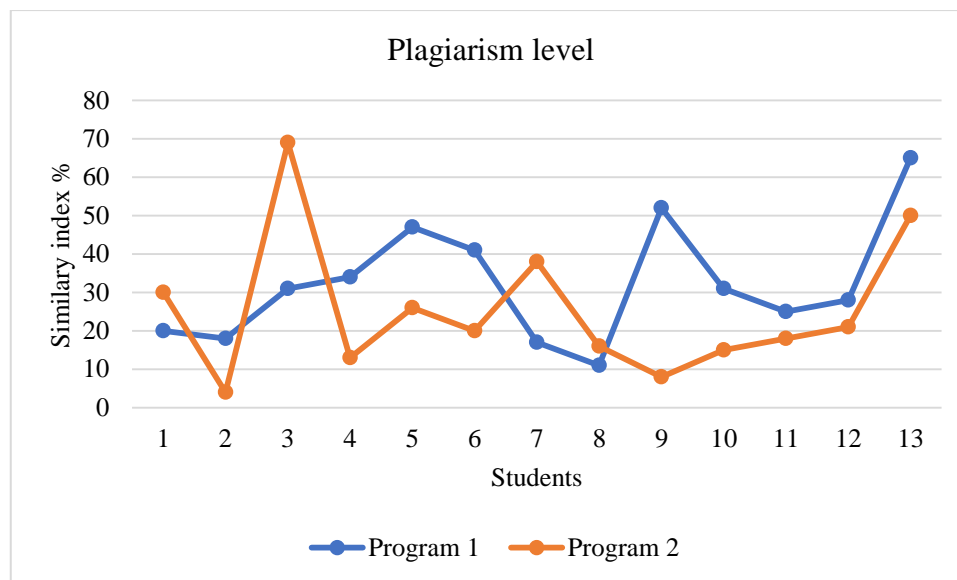
The comparative analysis of plagiarism level (i.e., the percentage identified by the Turnitin) in repeaters' papers overall did not show a significant reduction (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**  
*Descriptive Statistics of Plagiarism Level*

	Program 1	Program 2
Valid	13	13
Mean	32.308	25.231
Std. Deviation	15.467	18.028
Minimum	11	4
Maximum	65	69

The findings show that the mean score for plagiarism level went down from 32.31 in P1 to 25.23 in P2. The minimum score decreased significantly (from 11 to 4), whereas the maximum score differed slightly, 65 and 69 respectively. However, on an individual basis, different trends can be observed (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2**  
*Plagiarism Level in Students' Essays*



For example, the plagiarism level in one student's paper was 52% in P1, and it significantly dropped to 8% in P2 (see Student 9 in Figure 2). A detailed analysis of the student's paper and engagement in the writing process showed that the participant took part in the progress meeting and submitted all three short essays. Two other students could also show their knowledge of the proper use of sources in L2 writing as the level of plagiarism dropped significantly, from 34% to 13% (see Student 4 in Figure 2) and from 47% to 26% (see Student 5 in Figure 2) respectively. The findings reveal that these learners participated in the progress meeting and submitted two short essays. Thus, the students received the teacher's feedback on the organization of ideas, grammar, choice of words, and proper use of sources in writing, which helped them avoid plagiarism. These results are in line with Wette (2017) whose research study identified that most international undergraduate students with English as L2 were able to use the source texts effectively as the importance of academic integrity of writing from sources was explained to the students appropriately.

A different trend can be observed in another student's paper, in which plagiarism level increased more than twofold, 31% and 69%, respectively (see Student 3 in Figure 2). The analysis of the participant's essays showed that most of the ideas in the second essay (submitted in P2) are either copied and pasted or not properly

referenced and were identified as being plagiarized by the Turnitin system. Another participant in the study did not show much progress in avoiding plagiarism and writing from sources (see Student 13 in Figure 2). Specifically, the level of similarity in the student's essays identified by Turnitin was 65% (submitted in P1) and 50% (submitted in P2). The analysis revealed that both papers contained ideas from sources, which were not properly paraphrased and incorporated into the student's work. These results contribute to the findings by Keck (2014), who found that L2 students tend to copy or have close paraphrases to the original academic discourse in their first year in the HE institution. Based on their investigation, Neumann et al. (2019) clarify that most EAP students found it challenging to understand the meaning of the source text and might not be able to paraphrase it appropriately. Similar patterns were observed in the students' papers in the current study. The parts copied and pasted from the source text were quite complicated in terms of vocabulary and grammar structures used, which might result in an inappropriate paraphrase and failure to acknowledge correctly.

In two of the students' papers, the plagiarism level remained on the same level throughout both academic years (see Students 8 and 12 in Figure 2). The analysis of students' papers revealed that Student 8 mostly relied on secondary sources and did not refer to them appropriately in the written pieces. In contrast, the essay submitted by Student 12 contained some plagiarized parts taken from two or three sources (i.e., patchwork). Similar findings were observed in the research study by Li and Casanave (2012). They identified that novice L2 writers might face difficulties in differentiating between the primary and secondary sources and might not realize that patch-writing is considered unacceptable. Li and Casanave (2012) suggest paying more attention to explaining the meaning of patch-writing in L2 writing classes.

When analyzing the data, the result of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test identifies a negative difference between the plagiarism level in students' papers across both academic years (P1 and P2) as the *p-value* of .183 is greater than  $p \leq 0.05$ , and thus it is considered statistically insignificant. Thus, although several students commented in the survey that they improved in employing the evidence and effectively used sources in their essays, the statistical analysis shows minor improvement during these two academic years. This difference in the level of plagiarism might be explained in terms of mentality and inexperienced L2 writers. Hayes and Inrona (2005) support these views as their study also confirmed the

influence of having a different culture and being a novice writer on the plagiarism level in the coursework writing. A similar trend is observed in the current study, as plagiarism can result from the students' educational background and views on copying and pasting from the source, laziness in acting on the teacher's feedback and low attendance.

#### 4.3.2. Overall Performance

Plagiarism level aside, the comparative analysis of the marks of students' final papers shows a substantial improvement. It should be noted that the learners' essays were marked holistically on the content, organization and relevance of ideas, use of language (grammar, vocabulary, style, spelling, and punctuation), use of sources, following referencing conventions, and text formatting (appropriate font, line spacing, and page numbering). The scoring system applied at the university ranges from 0-39% (fail), 40-59% (pass), 60-69% (merit), to 70-100% (distinction). The findings reveal a significant difference in the mean score of the final marks in P1 and P2 (see Figure 3). A considerable difference was also observed in the maximum score as the highest final mark was 36 in P1 while in P2, the highest mark was 55. The minimum score did not differ greatly being 20 in P1 and 27 in P2.

**Figure 3**  
*Descriptive statistics for final marks*

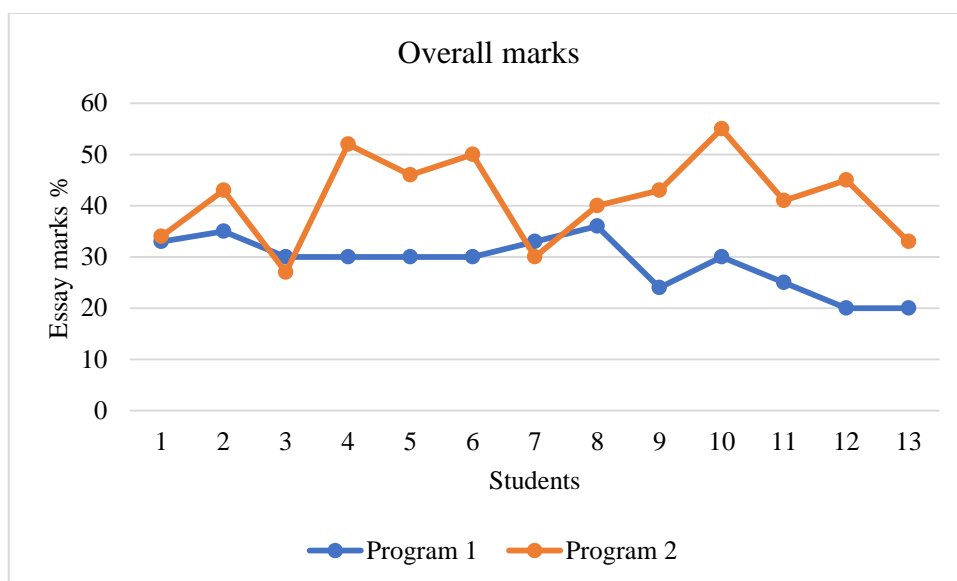
	Program 1	Program 2
Valid	13	13
Mean	28.923	41.462
Std. Deviation	5.204	8.54
Minimum	20	27
Maximum	36	55

On an individual basis, different trends can be observed (see Figure 4). One student in the study did not show any improvement in his performance; conversely, his mark went down from band 30 to band 20 (see Student 3 in Figure 4). Two students had little progress in their writing as their marks remained similar; Student 1 scored 33% (P1) and 34% (P2), and Student 7 scored 33% (P1) and 30% (P2) (see Figure 4). Three other students increased their marks from 30-39% to 40-49% (see



Students 2, 5, and 8 in Figure 4). Other repeaters had considerable progress in their overall score, both from 20% to 45% and 30% to 55% (see Students 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 in Figure 4).

**Figure 4**  
Marks for the Students' Essays



The analysis of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test demonstrated a positive difference between the overall marks of students' papers in P1 and P2 as a statistical significance was found at  $p \leq 0.05$ . Thus, the findings show that the overall mark for the participants' writing performance improved significantly.

The analysis of overall performance and plagiarism level indicates that the students, who received lower marks, had a higher level of plagiarism, and did not correctly use sources in their work. For instance, Student 3 submitted two short essays and a final longer essay; however, one of these short essays was 100% plagiarized, and the final one had a similarity index of 69% (see Figures 2 and 4). In contrast, the students who received higher marks submitted two or three short essays and had a lower level of plagiarism for their final paper (see Students 4, 6, and 10 in Figures 2 and 4). A similar case was analyzed in the research by Romova and Andrew (2011) who explain that process writing makes students realize their mistakes through stages and help them to improve their paraphrasing and

referencing skills. Accordingly, those successful students who submitted short essays and improved their writing by paying attention to the style of writing, proper incorporation of the source material, argumentation, and language, learned from their mistakes through the process of writing (three 500-word short academic essays of different types and one extended essay) and received higher marks. Such learners realize the need for improvement in their writing, which is similar to the findings of Marina et al. (2019). They investigated the perceptions of the students and graduates of foreign language need for academic and special purposes and found that the first-year students understood the need for enhancing their writing skills. The current study also revealed that those who submitted short essays only to meet the program requirements and ignored practicing essay writing and working upon teacher's feedback, either received lower marks or failed the assessment task because they had a higher level of plagiarism.

Finally, the analysis of programs and students' ability to write from sources identified a positive relationship between students' involvement in the process of L2 writing and their performance. That is, providing an essay outline, doing practical activities, and responding to the teacher's comments make students dive into writing and learn to use sources and proper reference L2 essays through their engagement in this writing practice. This formula improves the learning process in L2 writing classes and helps avoid inappropriate acknowledgement of source material and failures in the module. Although three failures were observed in the P2 implementation, it was mainly due to the students' indifference (not submitting short essays for feedback, patch-writing and inaccurate integration of sources) towards the writing task. Based on their findings, Ataie-Tabar et al. (2019, p. 397) also emphasize that "more emphasis could be placed on process writing, drafting, and making revisions rather than the product" to reinforce acceptable writing assessment practices in the university settings. Thus, better practices might lead to good writing from sources and improved writing performance.

## **5. Conclusion**

Based on the analysis of two language programs, students' opinions, use of source material, and their writing performance, it can be concluded that the engagement of students in the process of writing has made a positive impact on writing from sources and overall performance of most students. The comparative analysis of the

two programs shows that P1 is more product-oriented and does not allow the students to experience the writing process. P1 mainly involves delivering information, such as explaining the structures of different essay types, the essence of argumentation, paraphrasing, referencing, evaluation of sources, essay language, etc. It also contains outlining (the plan of their essay) and teacher-student discussion (two progress meetings) without requiring much writing practice but submitting only the final paper. Even though P2 is focused on giving similar instructions, students' output is organized differently because it includes various process writing components such as submitting three short essays via Turnitin, essay outlining and a teacher-student discussion (one PM) before the final submission.

Although the analysis of both programs shows some positive changes, there has still been minor improvement in the plagiarism level and use of source texts. Specifically, a small number of participants did not show appropriate writing from sources and used patch-writing in their papers. These results are similar to other research studies conducted among Chinese L2 writers. More specifically, the investigation revealed that EFL undergraduate students struggled when writing from sources, but some of them could successfully overcome these challenges and succeeded in L2 writing. The learners have had problems identifying the reliable/unreliable sources, direct/indirect citations, and quotation marks, or have overused quotes. However, students who succeeded in the final essays paraphrased and quoted correctly, referenced the sources accurately as they participated in the class activities and the progress meeting, and responded to the teacher's comments which were provided online and offline.

The current study contributes to the under-researched area in students' writing struggles from sources among undergraduate students at higher educational institutions. It should be emphasized that a similar survey conducted in a different context may provide different results. For example, students who were taught in a learning environment with strict requirements about plagiarism and writing from sources might have better outcomes. The findings revealed that L2 learners positively perceived a process-writing approach introduced in the second program and believed that teachers' e-feedback on the organization of ideas and the use of sources in the essays improved their performance in L2 writing. The study results also demonstrated that the teacher's input and practical activities such as short essay submissions and face-to-face discussions of the essay topics and the use of source texts are essential in the process of L2 writing. However, several students have not

shown much improvement in writing from sources. Therefore, we have made some changes in the assessment components by upgrading to a summary-response essay, which involves paraphrasing, integrating sources, and referencing. It might be useful because students will have a text to base their ideas on, which will make the process of writing from sources easier. Such a framework might be recommended to be used in similar contexts to improve citation practices, writing from sources, and the quality of writing and to avoid the failure rate in L2 writing among EFL students at the HE institutions.

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