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Paraphrase or plagiarism? Exploring EAP students' use of source material in a transnational university context

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Abstract

The relationship between paraphrase and plagiarism is complex and has been the subject of multiple research studies. However, recent advances in Generative AI (GenAI) have disrupted the standard practices of academic writing and established a renewed focus on how learners acquire skills in English writing in a higher education context. To understand the future of academic writing in the technological era, further investigation of how and why students choose to paraphrase and engage with source material is needed to guide best practices in instruction, policy, and research. This exploratory study seeks to fill this gap and provide insight into the choices English as a Second Language (ESL) student writers make in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) context. Using a text-based interview method and custom-designed academic writing task, we examine how students engage with and make decisions about using source material. Results reveal that participants focus more on sentence-level approaches to paraphrasing and mechanistic methods of language transformation. This is partly motivated by prior learning experiences but may also be related to adopting a risk-averse approach to language use to avoid accusations of plagiarism. Furthermore, our participants expressed a low level of confidence in the ability of new technological tools to help learners acquire skills in English writing. These findings suggest that there is a need for further research exploring policies to enable experimentation in EAP programs, as well as exploring acceptance and belief in new technologies' ability to support paraphrasing and source use.

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Introduction

In this article, we report on a study of how international students in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program engage with source use and paraphrase using a text-based interview method. EAP programs are a useful site of study for writing development, as they are designed to give students the tools they need to participate in academic contexts and complete academic activities undertaken in English medium environments (Maniati et al., 2023). Academic writing and the use of source material is one of these key academic challenges, as this highly important skill (Du, 2019) allows students to develop persuasive arguments (Coffin, 2009), infer meaning, synthesize ideas, and avoid accusations of plagiarism or misrepresentation of authorship.

It is a pivotal time to further the current knowledge on academic writing and paraphrasing, as recent advents in GenAI technology have led to a renewed focus on the role of writing instruction. Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT enable students to generate original written content for assessments (Perkins, 2023), which cannot reliably be detected by existing tools (Chaka, 2023; Perkins et al., 2023), while other writing tools including Digital Writing Assistants (DWAs) and Automated Paraphrasing Tools (APTs) (Roe et al., 2023) now increasingly assist with core writing activities.

New technologies which support these activities are appealing, as source use constitutes a vital area for academic success in the university context (Hirvela & Du, 2013), yet inappropriate source use among students is common (Pecorari, 2003). Inappropriate source use can result in the unaltered reproduction of source material (Lee et al., 2018) which may lead to accusations of plagiarism (Du, 2019). Limited research has shown that new technologies may help students learn to paraphrase; ChatGPT has been researched as a potential 'paraphrasing tutor' with some beneficial effects. However, at the same time, the limitations of these tools are many, including the potential of creating monocultures of knowledge (Messeri & Crockett, 2024) and producing Eurocentric worldviews (Roe, 2024). Consequently, this means that it is still essential to have the expertise and insight of a human teacher (Chui, 2023), as paraphrasing effectively requires subject-specific knowledge (Shi, 2012).

The challenge of paraphrasing and source use may be more difficult for international students and English as a Second Language (ESL) students. EAP Programs often cater to these students, who face a unique set of challenges due to academic, cultural, and linguistic differences (Hussein & Schifflbein, 2020). To participate in the Western cultural tradition of academic writing successfully, it is essential to be able to use source material while being capable of paraphrasing without breaching the normative academic conventions of plagiarism. This includes not only direct duplication of the lexis used in the original source but also the ownership of ideas as belonging to an individual as intellectual property (Mott-Smith et al., 2017). Such norms of knowledge construction are not universal but contrast to other systems of learning and knowing, and equally, research has shown there is wide individual variation in what constitutes plagiarism for both students and teachers

in different contexts (Chandrasegaran, 2000; Currie, 1998; Deckert, 1993; Pennycook, 1996; Roig, 2001; Shi, 2012; Sutherland-Smith, 2005; Thompson et al., 2013).

Complicating matters further, multiple definitions of paraphrasing exist, which may complicate instruction. Shi et al. (2018, p.1) define paraphrase as recontextualizing source information in one's own writing with a credit to the original author, although a 'good' paraphrase has been described as including an element of inference and creative thinking, in this sense, adding to the original text (Yamada, 2003). Paraphrasing is not a simple skill and, also requires contextual and subject-specific knowledge (Shi, 2012). Furthermore, evidence suggests that students who learn English as their second language find paraphrasing comparatively more difficult than native English speakers (Hirvela & Du, 2013; Keck, 2014; Keck 2006). Such is the challenge of paraphrasing that prior to the advent of GenAI tools, Automated Paraphrasing Tools (APTs) have been used by students to smoothen the process (Prentice & Kinden, 2018; Roe & Perkins, 2022).

In order to contribute to filling a gap in the literature and generate further insight into students' personal and subjective experience of paraphrasing and source use, in this research we sought to understand how international students in a pre-session English for Academic Purposes course (EAP) course at an Australian university branch campus in Singapore choose to paraphrase and engage with source material, as well as how they view the relationships between paraphrase, plagiarism, and source use. To achieve this aim, we recruited participants to compose a written response to a specially constructed prompt based on source material from an English-language scholarly journal. The inspiration for this project is based on the sixth task described in Pecorari's (2022) research agenda for plagiarism in EAP, which comprises asking student participants to read the same piece of source text, and then compose a written response. We prompted reflections by using text-based interviews to understand how writers engaged with the task, and our analytic approach uses hybrid thematic analysis, which incorporates a deductive and inductive dimension.

We chose Mott-Smith et al.'s (2017) categorization of four aspects of source use: the concept, sentence, discourse, and process dimensions, as a guiding reference for our deductive analysis. This is deductive as we aimed to categorize participants' understanding under an existing framework. For the inductive analysis, we used data immersion to thoroughly understand participants' responses and their interaction with source material and identify themes that helped illuminate their understanding and experience of the task. To ensure reliability, we employed a multi-coder approach, where team members independently analysed and compared interpretations, resolving any discrepancies through consensus-building. By combining deductive and inductive elements, we aimed for a comprehensive understanding of paraphrasing and source use among our participants and to develop a greater understanding of the implications of cultural, educational background on experience in learning the traditions of source use, paraphrasing and plagiarism.

Existing studies on student paraphrasing

There are multiple studies on paraphrasing with English as a Second Language (ESL) students, with most of them focusing on students from East and Southeast Asian contexts, reflecting past trends in international student enrolment. Khismawan and Widiati (2013) conducted a qualitative study to investigate Indonesian graduate students' paraphrasing practices, finding that participants used 21 cognitive and 7 metacognitive strategies. Wette (2017) examined six L2 writers in their third year of undergraduate study and found that patchwriting - where the author combines ideas and content from different sources without proper crediting and with minimal changes - and copying featured in up to three quarters of the student's results. Hirvela and Du (2013) researched undergraduate paraphrasing practice with two L2 students from mainland China, finding that both tended towards a more simplistic 'knowledge-telling' rather than 'knowledge-transforming' understanding of paraphrasing.

In this vein, Keck (2006) has written extensively on the practice of student paraphrasing, creating a framework of paraphrasing consisting of four conditions: Near Copy, Minimal Revision, Moderate Revision, and Substantial Revision. By applying this framework, Keck found that students who fell into the L2 category made greater use of Near Copies, and students who fell into the L1 (i.e., students who learn English as their first language) category made greater use of Moderate and Substantial Revisions. Following this, Keck (2014) found that novice writers leaned more heavily on parts of source material when writing than writers who had a greater amount of familiarity with academic writing. The use of such reliance on near copies may have a relationship to the expression of linguistic and phraseological complexity, as it has been demonstrated that writers develop more complex systems of multi-word combinations as they progress in their study (Esfandiari & Ahmadi, 2022). In contrast to Keck's (2006) framework, a relatively large study by Shi et al. (2018) used text-based interviews to understand the paraphrase processes of 18 graduate students and 192 discrete instances of paraphrase and found that although the participants had a shared understanding of paraphrasing, their perceptions of their own paraphrase covered many differing strategies on a spectrum from direct copy to total restructure, suggesting a wider range of paraphrase types.

Authorial stance in paraphrasing and source use, which refers to writers including their own perspective or position when paraphrasing from a source, is also a point of interest in the literature. L2 writers were found by Lee et al. (2018) to write in a non-committal way and defer to the authority of source material. As a result, it has been suggested that some students may reach a point where they are able to paraphrase linguistically in a knowledge-telling process, but cannot progress to the more challenging, additive paraphrasing process of transforming knowledge in their own words (Storch, 2012), thus failing to create what Yamada (2003) defines as a good paraphrase due to their inability to inject their own personal voice in paraphrasing.

In relation to another aspect of source use, citation practices, Mansourizadeh and Ahmad (2011) found that novice writers were less likely to use citation practice strategically to embolden their arguments but would more frequently use citation to attribute information, while McCulloch (2012) found that inappropriate use of source material can be related to a weak authorial stance. As a result, Hyland (2009) contends that assessment developers must identify better rating scales for assessing student citation practice, rather than creating an inappropriate/appropriate dichotomy of source use.

Dimensions of cultural practice have also been explored in relation to L2 students and inappropriate paraphrases. Beginning from Pennycook (1996), who asserted that notions of ownership are culturally determined, other key works include Keck (2014) stated that cultural dimensions relating to traditional strategies of memorization are one common explanation for inappropriate textual borrowing. Lin and Wen (2007) suggested that a focus on the group rather than individualism may promote social pressure as motivating academic misconduct in Taiwan, and Tuy  t (2013) suggests that perceived passivity among Vietnamese students is a feature of Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) nations. This area is contentious as Martin (2012) found that writers who are attitudinally and behaviourally individualists plagiarize more than collectivists, regardless of background culture, while others have contested the stereotypical image of L2 students from varying backgrounds in CHC nations (Le Ha, 2004, 2006; Li & Flowerdew, 2018; Roe & Perkins, 2020). Furthermore, Gu and Brooks (2008) contend that focusing too much on culture might lead to dismissive attitudes toward learning practices among Chinese students.

Similarly, in the Japanese context, Wheeler (2009) found that Japanese students are not as accepting of plagiarism as has been suggested, and lack of understanding plays a role while cultural values do not. Yang and Lin (2009) found that Western academics may hold misconceptions about CHC educational practices, and Maxwell et al. (2008) found no relationship between local Australian and Asian international students' understanding of plagiarism or perception of how serious plagiarism was. O'Dwyer (2017) suggests that the 'CHC thesis' is limited and reductive, while Li and Flowerdew (2018) have shown through analysis of data from the 1950s to 1960s that plagiarism has not traditionally been accepted in China, while O'Dwyer (2017) points out that collectivist approaches to education are not likely to be historically grounded in Confucianism, but relate to more recent developments in industrializing East Asian nations. As such, these findings provide a tapestry of results on how notions of ownership of ideas and other related factors influence plagiarism behaviours across cultures and demonstrate the need for Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) (Meihami, 2023).

There is a significant body of research which has established that paraphrasing is challenging, especially so for those who are learning to do so in English as a Second Language, and that multiple processes and types of paraphrases exist. Furthermore, the relationship between paraphrase and plagiarism may be related to cultures of prior learning, but this is not necessarily the case, and caution should be used

when applying cultural explanations to learner behaviour. In identifying a gap in the literature, it can be argued that these studies have broadly examined undergraduate and graduate students, and yet there are no studies which explore how students who are currently focused on developing paraphrasing skills in an EAP course, when learners are first developing and acquiring knowledge about paraphrase. In other words, our exploratory study fills this gap by generating insights into students' experience as they undergo their initial training in how to paraphrase effectively, rather than when they have already met the prerequisite requirements for undergraduate and postgraduate study and embarked on a degree in higher education.

The relationship between academic integrity, textual borrowing, and paraphrase in source use

To situate our research in the broader body of literature regarding the relationship between paraphrase and plagiarism, a brief discussion of academic integrity is warranted. In the Western tradition, academic integrity requires dedication of oneself to the values of fairness, trust, respect, and responsibility (International Center for Academic Integrity, 2022), while Academic Dishonesty (AD) refers to the violation of these values. There are a great many reasons why students commit acts of AD, and much has been written about causative and affecting factors (Bennett, 2005; Roe, 2022). When paraphrasing and inappropriate source use are involved, it is not always clear that intentional AD has occurred, and a complicating factor is the inability of an assessor to understand whether such values have been wilfully violated, given that only the writer can truly know their intention (Pecorari, 2003). Even the modern use of GenAI tools to compose written work equally does not necessarily lead to a de facto violation of academic integrity values, if it is transparent and within the policies of the institution (Perkins, 2023). Therefore, there is a complex relationship between understanding at what point textual borrowing and paraphrasing become violations of academic values.

It has been recognized in the literature since the early 1990s that inappropriate textual borrowing is often a developmental issue that requires instruction (Deckert, 1993) and research has shown that only a minority of students are able to recognize all forms of plagiarism in their work (Hu & Lei, 2012). This is corroborated by the fact that high-achieving students in high school education can equally struggle with the demands of paraphrasing in post-secondary EAP programs (Yung & Fong, 2019). As a result, university English instructors may choose to treat instances of plagiarism as 'teachable moments' (Briggs & Kim, 2020). Compounding the issue further, there is often little differentiation between different types of plagiarism, with large quantities of direct copying being judged as equal to a missing citation (Evering & Moorman, 2012). Patchwriting, in which the deletion of individual terms or direct substitutions of synonyms is used, has also historically been considered plagiarism (Howard, 1995), despite arguments that it is an essential phase in students' development to becoming academic writers (Pecorari, 2003). This shows that there is a significant need to understand how and why students

choose whether to paraphrase (or not) and their decision-making process in doing so, especially at the earliest stages of skill acquisition as in an EAP program, as the severe consequences of plagiarism accusations, can affect students' future study and career prospects (Dawson & Overfield, 2006), while simultaneously causing embarrassment, potential exclusion from their program of study, and feelings of disgrace (Pecorari, 2003). Thus, the stakes are high for ensuring student success, and exploring students' choice-making and experiences when first attempting paraphrasing skills can contribute to clarifying this issue.

Empirical research on instruction and textual borrowing

As a result of the high stakes of plagiarism accusations, many studies have described techniques and instruments to reduce incidents of unintentional and intentional plagiarism, often through direct instruction. Barry (2006) found that students were likely to add detail to their definitions of plagiarism after engaging in practice. Landau et al. (2002) found that training helped participants identify plagiarism, and Schuetze (2004) observed that relevant homework assignments aided students in encountering fewer issues with citation and enhanced their understanding of what constituted plagiarism. Wette (2010) found that through an action research approach (N=78) students showed an improvement in several aspects of plagiarism avoidance after eight hours of instruction. Du (2019) researched the effectiveness of a unit of EAP instruction on EFL students' abilities in using source material and found an improvement which demonstrates that source use can effectively be taught, and Elander et al. (2010) found that a pedagogical intervention helped students to avoid committing acts of plagiarism accidentally by taking an approach to developing authorial identity while Perkins et al. (2020) implemented a targeted intervention to develop academic skills of students to reduce intentional and unintentional cases of academic misconduct, demonstrating a decrease of 37% in cases of detected misconduct. These studies demonstrate that training consisting of direct instruction and practice can reduce incidences of plagiarism, including unintentional plagiarism, which can be caused by inappropriate paraphrasing, regardless of whether the case is caused by past educational experience, culture of learning, or deficit in skills and knowledge regarding norms of plagiarism and integrity. However, more exploration of how learners view these relationships and experience paraphrasing and source use is required to develop a greater mutual understanding between instructor and student. The results of this could lead to more thoughtfully designed, inclusive, and effective curricula.

In brief, there has long since been a recognition that when learners paraphrase inappropriately, it is often part of a learning process, which is at odds with the common punitive approach many institutions adopt concerning plagiarism standards. Much of the research demonstrates that further, targeted instruction can help learners to avoid inappropriate paraphrase and commit fewer academic integrity violations, but little is known about how those learning to paraphrase engage with a text early in their acquisition of this skill. At the same time, new technologies such as ChatGPT offer

the potential to help with teaching certain aspects of paraphrasing, yet the teacher's role remains essential (Chui, 2023). As a result, our study contributes to generating new insights into a body of knowledge regarding paraphrasing choices in an EAP program with international, ESL students, which can help teachers to work with new technologies from a position of understanding and insight to develop students' paraphrasing skills.

Materials and methods

The research question we seek to address in this article is "How do students in an EAP preparatory course choose what to paraphrase in a writing task?" The overall aim is to holistically explore the choices that go into whether to paraphrase, the extent of the paraphrase chosen, and the process by which paraphrasing is undertaken among these students, in their own words. By achieving this aim, we contribute to filling a gap in the literature for such small-scale, in-depth and text-based studies on paraphrasing among EAP students and providing insight for future instruction, policies, and research in an era in which new technologies continue to disrupt traditional notions of writing.

With this aim in mind of a holistic, exploratory project, the study does not aim to specifically analyse the effectiveness of the EAP program that the participants are enrolled in, nor does it seek to typify the paraphrasing strategies chosen but does allow students to draw on aspects of that knowledge in explaining their own understanding of source use when completing a task. After obtaining ethical approval from our institution, we recruited five students to participate through self-selection sampling. While this is a small number of participants, thus making the results hard to generalize, the in-depth, resource-intensive nature of the task-based interviews meant that the five participants gave enough data to approach thematic saturation (Lowe et al., 2018). All participants were over 18 years' old and enrolled in the EAP program with the intention of joining a university degree program at the bachelor's level upon completion. All students had significant previous experience in academic writing and learning English in diverse contexts.

Students were recruited in the first week of a 12-week trimester. To avoid interrupting students' study, the timed writing task and text-based interview session were arranged in a study break week when five weeks' instruction had already taken place. The participants all had experience of studying EAP both at the institution and in their home countries.

Sample and participants

The five participants were assigned pseudonyms: Jane, Alice, Trudy, Bob, and John. The participants' first languages included Japanese, Korean, Thai, and Chinese, and the ages of participants ranged from 18 – 36. A summary of the participants' profiles is visible in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Participants in the study.

Participants	First Language	Self-reported English Proficiency (CEFR)
Jane	Japanese	B1
Alice	Korean	B1
Trudy	Thai	B1
Bob	Chinese	B1
John	Chinese	B1

Data collection

A writing task was custom created for the research project, and participants took part outside of regular class hours. In line with Pecorari's (2022) research agenda, the researchers began by selecting a source around which a writing task was created. We drew on Shabitha and Mekala's (2023) assertion that integrated writing tasks which are relatable and stimulate learner interest are more effective for developing positive affect toward the task. For this reason, we chose a common, popular topic that often appears in classroom debates: the role of smartphone use among children. The article chosen came from the Public Library of Science journal PLOS One and was an empirical article describing smartphone use among children in The Republic of Korea, published in English. We selected this article as it exemplified a typical research article in a high-profile, peer-reviewed journal in the social sciences, was available for adaptation under the Creative Commons License, and discussed a general topic (smartphone use among children) which did not require additional specialist knowledge in a subject field. Following this, we created a writing 45-minute writing task in response to a prompt regarding the text. We selected this time frame as it was used successfully in Wette (2018) and Jin et al. (2022)'s research study. We also selected a timed, written task to closely mimic the procedure of assessment commonly used in EAP courses and standardized English tests. Participants were asked to read the article for 15 minutes and then spend 30 minutes composing a response to the prompt "*Should Children Be Allowed to Use Smartphones?*" Participants were asked to use the source material where appropriate in their response. Following the completion of the task, semi-structured text-based interviews were conducted. Interviews were scheduled immediately after task completion, while participants were still able to recall how they engaged with the task. Table 2 provides a step-by-step outline of the research procedure.

Table 2: Research procedure.

Research Procedure Steps
1. Adaptation of academic text from PLoS One Journal and creation of a writing task and prompt.
2. Recruitment of participants via email through self-selection sampling.
3. Participants engage in a 45-minute reading into writing task.
4. Following completion, participants engage in textual interviews to investigate choices made in paraphrasing and source use.
5. Thematic analysis of interview data and cross-reference with written texts, followed by interpretation of results.

We developed a question list based on our research aim of exploring participants' processes in using source material, and their understanding of paraphrasing and plagiarism in academic writing, which is visible in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Text-based interview core question list.

Question List	Rationale
Did you know anything about this topic before you started the task?	To establish participants' familiarity with the subject matter.
Did you find it easy or difficult to complete the task? Why?	To contextualize the challenges the participants faced.
Can you tell me which information in the original text is <u>similar to</u> what you wrote? Can you show me/us where this information is in the original text?	To identify specific passages where source use had been incorporated into the written response, and whether such use constituted paraphrase or direct quotation.
Did you change the information in any way? How?	To explore how participants understood the process of source use and paraphrasing and applied it in real time.
What paraphrasing strategies have you learnt in your EAP course?	To understand participants' knowledge of paraphrasing techniques and strategies and their appropriacy.
Were any of these useful in the task?	To understand how participants viewed and understood paraphrasing techniques.

Data analysis

Once interviews were completed, transcripts were created and refined. The interview data was analysed using a hybrid approach to thematic analysis following the framework of Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) by way of QDAMiner software. Thematic analysis was selected as prior research has shown its efficacy in ELT contexts (Scheffler & Domińska, 2018; Waddington & Charikova, 2022). The hybrid approach seeks a balance between deductive coding, derived from an existing framework, and inductive coding, in which themes that emerge from participants' discussions are identified (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). For inductive coding, we began by reading through the transcripts and identifying initial themes, applying codes which were derived from the process of 'seeing something' and covered the 'qualitative richness of the phenomenon' (Boyatzis, 1998, p.1) and then iteratively and reflexively refining them following the procedure described by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). For the deductive aspect of our analysis, we aimed to identify whether aspects of the participants' understanding of paraphrasing and the way in which they applied knowledge of source use belonged to one or more of Mott-Smith et al.'s (2017) dimensions of source use, as demonstrated in Table 4. We combined the inductive and deductive analysis

with close reading of the written responses and cross-referenced them to the interview transcripts. Throughout the interviews, participants were directed to passages of 'importance' as identified by the researchers and asked for their thoughts on how they had conducted paraphrasing or integrated source use into their answers.

Table 4: Mott-Smith et al.'s (2017) dimensions of source use.

Dimension	Elaboration
Concept	Deals with the underlying principles of source use in the Western academic context. This includes the individualistic approach to the ownership of ideas and knowledge and the value that violation of such principles constitutes plagiarism.
Sentence	Relates to the techniques of using sources in paraphrasing, creating written summaries of key points or ideas, and the use of quotations to communicate the work of others.
Discourse	How specific uses of source material take place inside a discourse community.
Process	The methods and techniques that can be used during the entire process of developing writing from source material, including reading and thinking.

Results

In this section, we report on the findings from the inductive and deductive analysis of the text-based interviews in conjunction with our analysis of the written response texts. The inductive analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that participants' understanding of paraphrase and application during the task tended to focus firstly, and primarily, on transforming the linguistic structure of the source material and implanting it within the text to demonstrate a point. This was corroborated by close reading and examination of the written responses. Secondly, all participants had an underdeveloped understanding of the relationship between paraphrasing and plagiarism, an observation also made by Liao and Tseng (2010) in a similar study. Thirdly, from the interview data, we found that while participants were keen to engage in paraphrasing, they lacked the ability to do so as effectively as they wished or were concerned about accidentally violating the rules of plagiarism. Fourthly, participants doubted the efficacy of technology for assisting with paraphrasing.

For the deductive part of the analysis, and in relation to Mott-Smith et al.'s (2017) framework, the results of close reading of the written response, along with the analysis of interview transcripts, demonstrated that four of the five participants focused mainly on the sentence dimension and understood this to be at the core of source use and paraphrasing, and there was little understanding of the concept and discourse aspects of source use. The results of the analysis can be seen below in Table 5, and the examples are discussed along with additional excerpts and development of the themes below.

Table 5: Results table of themes and relation to Mott-Smith's Framework.

Theme	Framework Dimension	Example
Paraphrase is only a structural transformation	Sentence Dimension	Trudy: Keep some keywords if you want to paraphrase something and don't change the keywords, but you can change the other thing and mix in a new sentence.
Uncertain Interpretation of the Relationship Between Paraphrasing and Plagiarism	Sentence Dimension	Interviewer: Why do we talk about plagiarism and avoiding copying others' work? Jane: I don't really know.
Knowledge Constraints Limiting Ability to Paraphrase	Sentence Dimension	Interviewer: What do you know about plagiarism? Alice: I think also from translating too much? It can be also from reading.
Attitudes on using technology for paraphrasing	Process Dimension	Alice: Some paste it and just write it. It is not really effective to learn.

Theme 1: Paraphrase is only a structural transformation

For four of the five participants, the idea of paraphrasing referred mainly to a set of explicit techniques in manipulating language to express the same idea with or without attribution through an in-text citation. This represents a surface-level approach in which the goal of paraphrasing is broadly about changing the structure, grammar, or vocabulary while leaving the 'idea' intact. Deductively, this relates to the 'sentence' dimension of source use as identified by Mott-Smith et al. (2017). Conceptually, four of the participants did not seem to engage with the idea of altering, adding to, or using the idea in the source text to embolden or advance an argument, suggesting a reluctance to expand paraphrasing practice beyond the sentence dimension for concern about making mistakes. One participant, Jane was discussing how she had paraphrased a sentence and described her knowledge of how to paraphrase as follows:

Jane: Change the verb to a noun phrase and make the sentence active to passive. I think it's useful to do this in the citation (referring to a piece of directly reproduced text). But I didn't use it because I'm still confused with the in-text citation.

While Alice, Trudy, and Bob gave similar responses at differing points in their interviews, when asked how to paraphrase:

Alice: Changing some sentence structure and the phrasing. Using other words.

Bob: First of all I have to use - I can use synonyms, and then there are also - change the structure, order and change the word format.

Trudy: Keep some keywords if you want to paraphrase something and don't change the keywords, but you can change the other thing and mix in a new sentence.

This essentially related to a mechanistic understanding of 'converting' the language into another format while leaving the 'idea' unaltered and seemed to indicate that paraphrasing was only engaged with as an 'expectation' to avoid plagiarism but without a clear understanding of the 'concept dimension' relating to idea ownership. This however, contrasted with John, who saw paraphrasing as keeping core aspects of an idea, also using different words, but equally simplifying some aspects of 'the idea' and extending or elaborating on it with his own views, indicating a more complete understanding of the concept dimension of source use and an ability to embed authorial voice in his work. John also was able to take advanced approaches to summary writing, of which paraphrasing is a key part (Yeh et al., 2020):

Interviewer: And how did you paraphrase this section?

John: Simplified and elaborated.

Interviewer: Can you tell me how you've elaborated it?

John: Over here (*points to text*) I've just given like a little idea that smartphones help people maintain relationships, and then I've elaborated it by saying that it can be distracting and that's the reason why children should not have a smartphone.

John's response, which seems to draw on Yamada's (2003) idea of an additive paraphrase as a 'good' paraphrase, focuses on the idea of the sentence rather than the way in which it is communicated. When describing the strategy used to paraphrase a sentence about children from the source material, Alice's response demonstrates this contrast clearly:

Alice: Kind of sentence structure changing. Changing the word with a similar meaning. I tried to (change) these "children", to "young age people".

Overall, this theme suggests that when exploring the participants' understanding of paraphrase, it is strongly rooted in the sentence dimension of discourse, rather than an overall synthesis of source use. To some extent, this presents a risk when learners may be able to leverage new technologies which are effective for paraphrasing (Roe & Perkins, 2022) but do not allow for the analysis of a paraphrase from a position of subject-level knowledge, which is required for effective paraphrasing (Shi et al., 2012).

Theme 2: Uncertain interpretation of the relationship between paraphrasing and plagiarism

The second theme refers to that of uncertainty, which is somewhat to be expected at an early stage in acquiring skills in paraphrasing. However, this theme may more accurately characterize the fact that there are no clear guidelines as to what may or may not be an acceptable paraphrase, and that there is a degree of subjectivity which is difficult for learners to navigate. All participants felt a variable degree of uncertainty or confusion over what constituted an appropriate paraphrase and the role of citations and referencing, and this impacted their willingness to engage with the source text. In this sense, it can be argued that the general haziness of academic guidelines with regard to plagiarism (Abasi & Graves, 2008) contributes to student anxiety when faced with such tasks. When cross-referencing with her written response, Jane had mainly relied on direct quotations from the text. On the other hand, Jane especially understood that paraphrasing was an essential skill to avoid verbatim reproduction of others' ideas but was not sure why exactly this was an issue. This resulted in her sticking to a 'safe path' by directly quoting, regardless of the impact on style and argument in her writing. This finding suggests that an element of risk aversion plays a role in the decision not to engage in additive paraphrasing, rather than a lack of ability to do so.

Jane: (*explaining the relationship between paraphrase and plagiarism*) I think we need to (use in-text citations) to avoid academic plagiarism.

Interviewer: What's your understanding of academic plagiarism?

Jane: To copy their work.

Interviewer: Why do we talk about plagiarism and avoiding copying others' work?

Jane: I don't really know.

Similarly, Alice and Trudy demonstrated that they understood that plagiarism could result from translation, or from verbatim copying of others' work – but neither of the participants referred to the reproduction of ideas without giving due credit, again demonstrating a reliance more on the sentence dimension of source use as opposed to the concept dimension. In their written responses, this explained several paraphrased ideas which were not given in-text citations.

Interviewer: What do you know about plagiarism?

Alice: I think also from translating too much? It can be also from reading.

Trudy: It's like...copy something. To copy others - others - results? Or some other sentence. Just copy and don't use your own words.

Both Alice and Trudy felt that there was a great deal of uncertainty and ambiguity as to what characterized plagiarism and that the only way to avoid it was to rely on direct quotation or structural transformation of language. In-text citations were seen as less of a firm requirement, although the principle of 'copying' was brought up explicitly by Trudy and implicitly referenced by Alice. John was the only participant who took a values-based approach in explaining why plagiarism was unacceptable in his view and was the only participant to identify explicitly that plagiarism was based on a deceptive practice or presenting another's ideas as one's own.

John: I feel that it's really wrong to plagiarize and plagiarism can be leading to a lot of trouble. Plagiarism is when you're copying someone else's work, but you're not giving them credit and you're not informing that you've used the source. By lying that this is your own and this isn't your own, can be a form of plagiarism. And that's pretty much it.

This indicated that John had developed an understanding of paraphrasing based on general principles of academic integrity relating to the concept dimension, rather than the sentence or process dimension. In relation to cultures of previous educational experience, several participants expressed that they had been taught to paraphrase in English and in their L1 during their primary and high school education. However, this took a more codified, scientific approach which focused more on the sentence and process dimension, and teaching focused on a set of strict, mechanical techniques (e.g., if A is a noun, change it to a verb by engaging in process X, while if B is in the active voice, change it to the passive voice by engaging in process Y). In terms of contribution to the literature, this limited and mechanistic view of paraphrasing contrasts with the large variety of paraphrasing approaches and shared understanding of paraphrase identified by Shi et al. (2018), suggesting further research is needed to chart the process by which beginner students' understandings of paraphrase may develop and change as they become undergraduate and graduate students.

Theme 3: Knowledge constraints limiting the ability to paraphrase

All of the participants demonstrated an awareness that copying verbatim from the source text in the task was unacceptable. However, some indicated that they continued to employ practices they strongly doubted were correct because there were no other options available to them. In relation to the idea of patchwriting being a developmental phase (Pecorari, 2003), this finding supports the idea that students will engage in paraphrasing practices that they know are likely to violate the rules they are aware of but are yet to fully internalize. Furthermore, this may demonstrate that to avoid the potentially serious consequences of plagiarism accusations (Dawson & Overfield, 2006), beginning student-writers may recognize their lack of ability to paraphrase or cite source material correctly, and defer to strategies that they feel more confident in. This was clear when passages were highlighted for the attention of the participant, as in the following extract from Alice's interview:

Alice: Yeah, I think it's useful to use this in the citation. But I didn't use it because I'm still confused with the in-text citation.

In discussing more general reasons why paraphrasing is an obstacle for EAP learners, teaching and learning strategies frequently came up, as did past experience. Bob and Trudy referred to their peers' motivation and autonomy, and for Trudy, the teaching style of her previous learning experience in Korea played a role:

Bob: In my opinion, first of all, lack of vocabulary. Some people or some students who want to study English enthusiastically, but about 50% don't want to study English. That's why they I think they don't memorize English vocabulary.

Trudy: In Korea, teachers only follow the answer, do not do critical thinking and most people aren't interested in it. There are many methods to change it (the sentence) and change some more. In Korea, they would only say something like 'change this part from passive to active' or 'change this word like this'.

Bob identified that a lack of autonomy or determination in English is specifically related to a deficiency in vocabulary, thus leading to the idea that a greater vocabulary renders a greater ability in paraphrasing. This adds credence to the idea that GenAI tools and Automated Paraphrasing Tools (APTs) may offer a way for writers to avoid a cognitively challenging task (paraphrasing) and simply offload it to a technological tool, in the same way that a calculator may be used for a difficult calculation. This is an interesting area that warrants further study and exploration, as such an approach overlooked the inferential reasoning that a good paraphrase requires (Yamada, 2003).

Theme 4: Attitudes on using technology for paraphrasing

The final theme that was captured from the interview was more related to the process dimension, and the use of technology as an overall strategy for helping with not only paraphrasing but engaging with source use and comprehension. Interestingly, few of the students believed in the ability of technological tools to assist with writing. While all participants expressed their concern that other students on their course used technology to help them illegitimately achieve an 'acceptable' paraphrase with a minimum of effort, they doubted the ability of these tools to actually aid in language comprehension:

Jane: I think it (translation apps) is not helpful because we just put our mother language there and it cannot improve our skill. At the last time we still don't know how to paraphrase.

Alice: Some paste it and just write it. It is not really effective to learn.

Implicitly, this indicated some understanding of the concept dimension of source use and the expectations of the discourse and process aspects of source use, as participants were aware that the use of source material must be completed by themselves rather than by a third party, and

the avoidance of engaging in processes of reading, thinking, and finally writing, would not lead to success in their writing tasks.

Discussion

The development of these themes and analysis of them in relation to an established framework offers several unique findings which have relevance for EAP programs, policy, and instructors who are engaged in teaching paraphrasing and source use. Firstly, there is corroboration of the tendency for ESL students (at an early stage, at least) to rely more on knowledge-telling than knowledge-transforming paraphrases (Hirvela & Du, 2013). By this, we refer to the process by which learners choose to apply a formulaic system to paraphrase, by changing word classes (e.g. nominalization) which retains the exact same content of the original source, rather than drawing on the first source to retain some characteristics, but add to or transform some aspect of the source material's content.

Interestingly, our study demonstrates that for these participants, despite knowing some basic premises regarding academic integrity and plagiarism avoidance, the knowledge-telling approach may be a deliberate, risk-averse strategy to attempt to avoid the heavy tolls that come with a plagiarism accusation. As a result, to encourage learners to experiment with paraphrasing in EAP programs and develop an authorial voice, it may be necessary to adopt policies which recognize that these are appropriate stages of learner development (Pecorari, 2003) and view inappropriate episodes of paraphrase as 'teachable moments' (Briggs & Kim, 2020). By doing this, it is possible to help learners develop the skill of transforming source material rather than simply using mechanistic paraphrase strategies to retell the same information.

Furthermore, some evidence emerged that tendencies for previous educational experiences in participants' home cultures tended to focus on a more mechanistic approach to the teaching of paraphrasing. On the other hand, an alternative explanation for this may be the tacit dominance of structuralist or skills-based approaches to the teaching and learning of paraphrasing within EAP programs. This suggests that there should be an educational focus on ensuring curricular and pedagogic practices that explicitly target the development of students' understanding of broader concepts of why sources are used, instead of how. Further to this, our results support Sun and Soden (2021)'s recommendations to improve source use include using exemplars, providing opportunities to practice, providing scaffolding, and offering detailed feedback for tasks which vary in length and style, while we also encourage educators to explore new opportunities to engage in techniques such as Written Languageing (WL) (Keshanchi et al., 2022) to support the development of paraphrasing and source-use skills.

Finally, our participants' hesitance in using technology to assist in paraphrasing, and their belief in technological tools' lack of ability to provide effective guidance in paraphrasing and source use is a point that warrants further investigation.

Research has shown that technological tools may be effective for supporting paraphrasing tuition (Chui, 2023). Yet, acceptance of these tools and attitudes towards these tools among EAP students has not yet been explored. As a result, research studies should be geared towards not only understanding the potential benefits of using tools such as ChatGPT as personal tutors (Chui, 2023) but also investigating whether students truly believe that they may be effective in educating them about how to paraphrase and engage with source material.

Implications

Overall, the findings of this study have implications for curriculum development and the teaching of source use in EAP programs and open up important areas for furthering this aspect of writing as educators and institutions continue to grapple with new technological developments. The results of our study rely on a small number of participants (five), yet the discussions and analysis of the tasks that participants engaged in provided rich insights into their experience of paraphrasing. Given that our research question was "How do students in an EAP preparatory course choose what to paraphrase in a writing task?" we may answer that in this case, participants tended towards choosing aspects of the text which did not necessarily support their arguments, but that they could modify using their existing repertoire of techniques comfortably and without fear of having violated any institutional or cultural norms of academic integrity. This suggests that there is a disconnect between common university-level policies on academic integrity and text modification and the recognition that in EAP specifically, for learners to learn to paraphrase effectively, they must transition through a patchwork phase. Similarly, although our participants were sceptical of technology, we propose that they may have a place in the classroom teaching of paraphrase, if they are introduced critically and in line with the values of the institution. Indeed, research has shown that the consensus among universities and publishers now accepts the use of GenAI tools specifically in the creation of text, as long as it adheres to certain guidelines and values (Perkins & Roe, 2023a, 2023b).

Limitations

The limitations of this study relate to the fact that it is a small-scale analysis of five international students' experiences in an EAP program. Furthermore, the task that we used, although carefully designed, does not necessarily allow for the space, time, and reflection that is often required in writing academic essays, nor did it enable participants to experiment with supportive tools, writing assistants, or GenAI tools in composing their responses. In that sense, there is a question of whether the text produced can be considered a representative or authentic method of assessment. On the other hand, by tackling an established task outlined in Pecorari's (2022) research agenda, we contribute to filling this gap in the literature and call for other studies to help develop further insight into source use and paraphrase among other cultural and educational contexts.

Conclusion

In an era of rapid technological growth, internationalization, and massification of higher education, we do not expect that skills like paraphrasing will become redundant or obsolete. While technologies such as GenAI may assist and complement these fundamental skills, there is a requirement for the expertise of teachers and a 'human in the loop'. To this end, by understanding the strategies that EAP learners want to adopt when paraphrasing without the use of advanced technologies, as in this study, teachers as experts can be responsive to learners' concerns and enable them to develop. This research has demonstrated some key considerations regarding the choices made when paraphrasing or engaging with source material among international students enrolled on an EAP program, namely that even at this early stage, students may default to safe, known strategies (often typified by a mechanistic approach to paraphrasing) despite knowing it will not fulfil the criteria of a 'good' paraphrase, and learners may be hesitant or sceptical to engage in the use of technology to aid paraphrasing and source use in language learning. Our results suggest that further specific research is needed in diverse contexts to investigate how current disruptions in the teaching of writing affect students, and how educators and institutions can provide supportive policies to aid learners' ability to engage with source material.

Declaration of Interest Statement

None.

Declarations

Ethical Approval

Ethical Approval was granted by James Cook University Australia, Reference H8944.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Authors' contributions

Jasper Roe contributed to ideation, data analysis and writing up of the manuscript. Daniel O'Sullivan contributed to ideation, interviews, data analysis, and writing up. Pamela Arumynathan and Boby Kappen contributed to data analysis and writing up of results. All authors contributed to development of the structure and interview materials.

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