

Recontextualizing Web-Based Sources in Report Writing: Exploring Students' Meaning-Making Practices

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines how third-semester EFL students at UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon engage with web-based sources in academic report writing. Drawing on theories of intertextuality, genre-based pedagogy, and digital literacy, the research investigates students' strategies in selecting, interpreting, and integrating online information when composing a report on Cirebon wedding traditions. Data from student texts and semi-structured interviews were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's framework. Findings show that students employed targeted keyword searches and demonstrated awareness of genre structure, but tended to rely on top-ranked institutional sources and simplified conflicting information. While they displayed emerging control over paraphrasing and citation, their critical evaluation of digital content, especially in relation to algorithmic bias and underrepresented perspectives, remained limited. The study underscores the need to expand writing instruction beyond functional skills to include ethical source use, algorithmic awareness, and critical authorship, especially in contexts where AI-assisted tools are increasingly accessible. It recommends further research into how intertextual practices evolve across genres, disciplines, and technological environments. This study positions EFL learners as developing digital authors who require pedagogical support to write with critical awareness in a digitally saturated world.

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INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, academic writing has evolved beyond merely reproducing authoritative texts into a complex meaning-making process that requires students to navigate intricate networks of information. Particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, learners are expected not only to retrieve content from web-based sources but also

to interpret, revoice, and ethically integrate such content within genre-based academic tasks. As digital platforms increasingly shape how knowledge is accessed and produced, writing instruction must shift from product-oriented models toward pedagogies that foster rhetorical awareness, critical literacy, and intertextual agency (Hyland, 2004; Canagarajah, 2015; Bruce & Bishop, 2014). From this perspective,

academic writing becomes a dialogic act in which students actively negotiate language, source positioning, and authorial identity in relation to audience and genre expectations (Kristeva, 1980 in Allen, 2011).

A growing body of scholarship supports genre-based pedagogy as an effective framework to help students manage rhetorical purpose, textual staging, and linguistic cohesion (Martin & Rose, 2008; Tardy, 2009). Concurrently, researchers emphasize the importance of intertextual competence, which refers to the capacity to incorporate external voices without erasing one's own (Thompson & Tribble, 2001; Hirvela & Du, 2013). Kristeva's semiotic theory highlights how all texts are constructed through the absorption and transformation of prior texts, while Fairclough's critical discourse analysis underscores how power and ideology circulate through intertextual choices. These dynamics are further amplified in digital contexts, where students often rely on heuristics such as institutional credibility, search engine ranking, or visual layout when selecting sources (McGrew et al., 2018; Metzger & Flanagan, 2013). Moreover, algorithmic systems subtly influence what information is seen and trusted (Noble 2018).

Despite these insights, notable gaps remain. Much of the research on digital academic writing has concentrated on argumentative and research-based genres, leaving descriptive report writing, especially on cultural topics, relatively underexplored (Johns, 2008; Nesi & Gardner, 2012). Furthermore, while digital literacy studies examine how students search for and evaluate sources, few investigate how learners interpret and revoice online content within genre-specific structures. Parallel to this, the rise of AI-assisted tools such as Grammarly, QuillBot, and ChatGPT introduces new complexities regarding authorship, voice, and originality (Godwin-Jones, 2025; Bhatia, 2023). These platforms have become embedded in students' writing processes, influencing not only surface-level grammar but also idea development and citation practices (Warschauer et al. 2023). Yet empirical

research rarely addresses how EFL learners in developing contexts engage with such tools, especially in genre-based assignments.

This study addresses these intersections by examining how third-semester EFL students (estimated CEFR A2–B2 level) at *UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon* select, interpret, and integrate web-based sources while composing report texts on traditional wedding ceremonies. Conducted within a fully online Writing for Academic Purposes course, the assignment required students to locate open web content, assess its credibility, paraphrase or quote appropriately, and structure their texts according to genre conventions. Although students were not formally instructed in the use of AI writing tools, their usage was not explicitly restricted, which raises important questions about the often-invisible mediation of AI in academic writing. By analysing student texts alongside interview reflections, this study draws on genre theory (Martin and Rose 2008), intertextuality (Kristeva, 1980 in Allen, 2011); Fairclough, 1992), and digital literacy frameworks (Hobbs 2010) (Alexander, Adams, and Cummins 2016) to examine how students make rhetorical and epistemic decisions when composing academic texts using digital resources.

This research investigates the strategies students employ to select, interpret, and integrate online sources into their report writing. It contributes to ongoing discourse on critical digital authorship, genre-informed pedagogy, and AI-aware academic writing in EFL higher education (Carless & Boud, 2018; Gozali et al., 2024 Ludvigsen et al., 2019). The study argues that with genre scaffolding and reflective support, EFL students can become critical participants in the dialogic construction of knowledge, balancing textual fidelity, cultural voice, and the integration of emerging technologies in their writing practices.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore how students select, interpret, and integrate web-based sources into report writing. The research was situated in a genre-based writing pedagogy framework and informed by theories of intertextuality (Kristeva, 1980 in Allen, 2011), digital literacy (Hobbs 2010), and feedback literacy (Carless and Boud 2018). The focus was on meaning-making practices in context, rather than outcome evaluation.

Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted at *UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon*, involving third-semester students from the English Language Teaching (ELT) department. All participants were enrolled in the Writing for Academic Purposes course during the 2024/2025 academic year. The course was fully online, and students were assigned a genre-based task: to write a report text on traditional wedding ceremonies in Cirebon using web-based sources.

Three students (coded D01–D03) were selected for document analysis, and three students (W01–W03) participated in follow-up semi-structured interviews. Participants were purposively selected based on task completion, consent to participate, and diversity of writing performance. All participants were intermediate to upper-intermediate EFL learners with basic training in academic writing, including paraphrasing and citation, but without formal instruction in digital or algorithmic literacy.

Data Collection Techniques

Two primary methods were employed for data collection. First, document analysis was conducted by gathering student report texts to examine how learners sourced, interpreted, and integrated digital information. Particular attention was given to aspects of genre structure, citation practices, paraphrasing strategies, and intertextual features. Second, semi-structured interviews were carried out with student writers to explore their online search behaviours, criteria for evaluating sources, strategies for constructing meaning, and rhetorical decision-making processes. The interview protocols were carefully aligned with the research questions and piloted to ensure clarity and coherence. All interviews were conducted online, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized using pseudonyms to protect participant identities.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data were analysed thematically using Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, definition, and reporting. Three major analytical themes, namely selection, interpretation, and integration, were established deductively from the research questions and refined inductively during data immersion.

The coding was conducted manually using a collaboratively developed rubric. To enhance analytical rigor, a second coder reviewed the codes. The two coders reached a high level of consistency, and any discrepancies were discussed and resolved through joint reflection and negotiated agreement.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Credibility was strengthened through triangulation across data types, member checking, and thick description of data. Dependability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail of analytic decisions. Ethical clearance was granted by the university research board, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Researcher Reflexivity

The researcher maintained a reflexive journal to monitor positionality, particularly in interpreting students' digital behaviors and intertextual strategies. As a teacher-researcher, the dual role was acknowledged and managed by separating instructional responsibilities from data analysis. To sum up, this methodology provided a robust framework for analyzing how novice academic writers navigate digital landscapes to recontextualize information into structured, culturally responsive report texts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this study, a total of three student reports (D01–D03) and three student interviews (W01–W03) were selected for in-depth analysis based on relevance, completeness, and participant consent. Thematic coding followed Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach, focusing on emergent categories related to selecting, interpreting, and integrating web-based information.

Coding was conducted manually by the researcher using a collaboratively developed rubric. To enhance analytical rigor, a second

coder who was familiar with genre-based writing pedagogy independently reviewed the codes. The two coders demonstrated a high level of agreement, and any differences in interpretation were addressed through negotiated discussion and reflective consensus. This approach ensured consistency without relying on automated coding tools.

Participants had not received formal digital literacy training prior to this assignment but had been exposed to basic search strategies and citation practices through earlier writing modules. This limited but foundational experience may explain their intuitive use of keyword refinement and credibility heuristics, while also revealing gaps in deeper critical evaluation and cross-source triangulation, issues that are examined in the subsequent sections.

1) Selecting Web-Based Sources in the Space Between Search Literacy and Cultural Filters

Students' search behaviors demonstrated strategic and culturally situated literacy practices. W02 stated, *"I used Google and typed 'Cirebon wedding tradition' and then tried using 'siraman Jawa' to get more specific results,"* indicating not just keyword fluency but awareness of culturally embedded terms. This aligns with Lankshear and Knobel's (2008) notion of new literacies as socially embedded and context-responsive. Similarly, W01 used translanguaging strategies, saying, *"I added 'Islamic ceremony' in English so I could get results in bilingual pages,"* reflecting García's et al. (2014) concept of cross-linguistic navigation.

Despite these strengths, students rarely questioned the structure of search results or the cultural perspectives represented. Most relied on top-ranking pages, typically from government or tourism sites, without exploring marginal or localized narratives. As Noble (2018) argues, algorithmic bias in search engines privileges dominant voices, potentially excluding counter-narratives. None of the participants mentioned intentionally seeking underrepresented perspectives. This omission signals a gap in students' critical digital literacy, particularly in recognizing how search tools shape epistemic access (de Oliveira Andreotti 2014).

2) Interpreting Content through Revoicing, Simplifying, and Negotiating Cultural Knowledge

Students engaged in meaning-making practices that went beyond surface-level understanding. D02 wrote, *"This ceremony often happen in the night before the akad nikah. It is believed the bride will look like a goddess,"* paraphrasing a cultural belief not directly quoted from sources. This reformulation reflects Kristeva's (1980 in Allen, 2011) concept of intertextuality, which involves rewriting the voice of others within a new rhetorical context. It also signals an emergent feedback literacy (Carless and Boud 2018), where learners reflectively adapt source content to genre and audience.

However, this interpretive process was not always critically grounded. W01 noted, *"Some websites said midodareni is one night, others say it takes two. I just wrote the common one, so it's not confusing."* This indicates a tendency toward simplifying conflicting information, a form of interpretive compromise that prioritizes textual clarity over cultural nuance. While practical, such simplification risks erasing complexity and may limit the depth of representation. As McGrew et al. (2018) suggest, web-based civic reasoning requires learners to reconcile discordant perspectives, not just average them.

3) Integrating Information through Structuring, Revoicing, and Appropriating Authority

Integration strategies ranged from paraphrasing and citation to structural staging. D03 wrote, *"Throwing betel leaves is part of the ceremony, symbolizing love and understanding (Cirebonkota.go.id, 2021),"* demonstrating recontextualization with attribution. D01 embedded a direct quotation: *"According to budaya-indonesia.org, 'siraman is meant to clean the soul before marriage',"* showing syntactic control and genre awareness (Hyland 2004).

Interview data further revealed genre-informed positioning. W03 said, *"I placed midodareni in the 'before wedding' part, because that is the order of the event,"* indicating alignment between cultural sequence and genre structure. D02's use of transitions, as in *"After the Islamic ceremony, the couple also follow local customs like throwing betel leaves,"* demonstrates textual cohesion (Halliday & Hasan, 1976 in Aghaei & Rajabi, 2019). These moves show students engaging with the genre not just as a template but as a communicative scaffold, confirming Martin & Rose's (2008) theory of staged genre construction.

However, some integration choices suggest reliance on surface coherence. Students favoured institutionally vetted sources and often avoided intertextual tension. While this supports rhetorical

clarity, it limits the potential for dialogic richness, which is a hallmark of critical genre pedagogy (Gozali et al. 2024).

Although AI-assisted tools such as ChatGPT or Grammarly were not explicitly cited by participants, their use is increasingly likely in digital academic writing. Given the polished sentence structure and controlled register observed, it is plausible that such tools influenced textual production. This aligns with Godwin-Jones's (2025) notion of post-digital authorship, where writing involves human-machine collaboration. Future pedagogies should address this reality by reframing AI as a dialogic partner rather than a threat, teaching students to critically revise and revoice AI outputs.

Moreover, while the present study focused on a cultural topic, these strategies may evolve in disciplines where epistemic demands are stricter. In STEM or social science genres, the simplification of conflicting evidence, as evident in W01's quote, could lead to factual inaccuracies. Disciplinary writing, especially in fields with rigid evidence hierarchies, requires heightened criticality and source triangulation (Schleppegrell 2004). Thus, writing instruction must be adapted to emphasize disciplinary conventions alongside digital and rhetorical literacies.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the capacity of third-semester EFL students to engage with web-based sources in genre-based writing, revealing their emerging ability to make rhetorical, cultural, and structural decisions in a digitally mediated academic context. While the findings affirm that students demonstrate growing control over search, interpretation, and integration strategies, they also reveal limitations in critical evaluation, particularly in navigating algorithmic bias and addressing conflicting or underrepresented perspectives. These insights underscore the need for pedagogies that extend beyond functional literacy toward critical digital authorship.

Future research should explore how these intertextual practices evolve across disciplines and genres that demand greater epistemic rigor, such as argumentative or scientific writing. Additionally, the increasing use of AI-assisted tools invites further inquiry into how students

negotiate authorship, originality, and citation ethics in digitally mediated composition. A longitudinal and comparative approach may illuminate how learners' digital and rhetorical literacies mature over time, offering a stronger foundation for designing responsive, future-proof academic writing instruction.

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