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Intertextual Awareness in EFL Report Writing: A Comparison of Field- and Web-Based Source Use

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores how EFL students interactively work with field- and web-based sources in academic report writing through processes of selection, interpretation, and integration. Data were collected through semi-structured reflective questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and student report texts involving 32 third-semester students. Grounded in Bazerman's intertextual typology and Canagarajah's translingual framework, thematic analysis identified two overlapping intertextual repertoires that reflected distinct patterns of meaning-making. Field-based engagement encouraged experiential curiosity, dialogic interpretation, and narrative integration, in which students drew on cultural immediacy and personal experience to construct a stronger authorial voice and epistemic agency. In contrast, web-based engagement was more strongly associated with algorithmic search behaviour, multimodal decoding, and citation-oriented structuring. Although both source types supported strategic meaning-making, field-based practices demonstrated deeper interpretive engagement and more independent knowledge construction. The findings indicate that pedagogical support should integrate embodied inquiry and digital literacy to strengthen students' critical intertextual competence in academic writing. The study also suggests incorporating hybrid source use into EFL writing instruction to support more balanced and adaptive academic authorship.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Beyond the simple fight over syntax, in EFL settings where students are still learning a language, academic writing requires more than just being grammatically correct. It is also a mentally taxing process that requires the ability to engage critically with a variety of sources, meet genre expectations, and assert an authorial voice, which is the most important sign of intellectual survival. Entering the modern maze, these demands are even harder to

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meet in the digital age, as we must contend with both real-world cultural data and algorithmically curated online content. This creates a conflict between organic truth and synthetic logic, altering the way we ask questions. If we look deeper, learners are no longer just passive readers of authoritative texts; they are now meaning-makers who must filter, interpret, and revoice information in different ways to make a space that is truly their own. In this web of connections. In this way, academic writing becomes a dialogic and intertextual act in which students negotiate language, epistemic position, and genre constraints in relation to audience, task, and knowledge systems [1], [2]. It is a delicate dance of identity and expectation, where every word has a hidden history. What is often left unsaid is that this negotiation is especially strong when field-based research and digital resources are both present. This is a silent battle for cognitive dominance that is often unfairly divided in terms of power, visibility, and perceived credibility.

Increasingly, scholars have argued for implementing genre-based pedagogy as a framework that offers scaffolding to bring together rhetorical purpose, textual staging, and linguistic cohesion [3], [4]. This may come as no surprise, though the development of intertextual competence (the ability to incorporate external voices while maintaining an original voice) in academic writing has become a main focus of pedagogy for second- and foreign-language scholars [5], [6]. In the context of EFL academic writing, intertextual awareness refers to students' ability to consciously select, evaluate, interpret, and integrate multiple external voices while maintaining coherence, authorial positioning, and contextual relevance within their texts. This awareness involves not only the technical use of citation and source incorporation, but also the ability to negotiate meaning, represent knowledge ethically, and position oneself dialogically in relation to other texts and perspectives. Typologization delineates intertextuality from manifest (overt citation) to constitutive (transformative integration), whilst power relations and ideational positioning govern intertextual choices, leaving the real labor of writing between the two [7], [8], [9]. In digital contexts, these dynamics are exacerbated, as students' selection processes tend to be driven by visual heuristics, institutional signals or search engine rankings [10], [11]. Students may not know it yet, but algorithms are co-authoring their bibliographies. At the same time, field-based practices like interviews and ethnographic note-taking provide students' intimate access to meaning that is not merely observed but lived: immediate, embodied, culturally situated. Nevertheless, such practices tend to receive little emphasis in writing pedagogy, a curious blind spot in an age fixated on the digital. However, despite all the discussion, less than 5% of EFL writing studies examining learners' integration of field and web sources in descriptive genres (i.e., where evidence is not open to manipulation) have been found in a 10-year review at an undergraduate level in developing contexts.

Additionally, the recent proliferation of AI-assisted writing tools, like Grammarly, Quillbot and ChatGPT, adds a whole new layer of complexity. These tools more than correct structure; they mediate, often invisibly and sometimes unintentionally, how students position themselves in relation to sources, genre conventions and academic expectations. It would be easy to settle for these more surface-level effects. While research has paid attention to their surface-level effects on grammar and fluency [12], [13], [14], we must increasingly move to how such technologies realign or shape student genre-based writing and intertextual choices,

particularly in descriptive genres where narrative meets culture meets structure, and it is exactly at this messy intersection that students sink or swim. This genre-AI intersection deserves more exploration, particularly in EFL classrooms, where access to models and mentorship may be limited—a fact that requires us to broaden our gaze beyond the screen.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating how third-semester EFL students at UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon select, interpret, and integrate both field-based (e.g., interviews, observations) and web-based (e.g., articles, institutional websites) sources while composing genre-specific reports on Cirebonese wedding traditions, a cultural domain where the stakes of representation feel particularly high. To accomplish this effectively, executed within a Writing for Academic Purposes course, the study examined student reports, reflective questionnaires, and interviews, three perspectives on the same intricate process. The study specifically forbade the use of AI tools; this was a deliberate choice, not an accident. In line with this policy, the data showed no signs of students using these technologies, which, looking back, helps us better understand what students do when left to their own devices. The analysis examined how students navigate diverse knowledge systems and engage in composition with varying levels of epistemic agency—this combination is significant because it encapsulates both structure and fluidity within a single framework [2], [7].

This study offers four main forms of novelty. Contextually, it examines source integration practices within Indonesian EFL undergraduate writing on local cultural topics, an area still underrepresented in intertextual writing research. Theoretically, it integrates Bazerman's intertextual typology with Canagarajah's translingual perspective to analyze both textual integration and epistemic positioning. Methodologically, it combines textual analysis with reflective questionnaires and interviews to capture students' intertextual decision-making processes beyond final written products. Pedagogically, the study highlights the importance of balancing embodied field inquiry and digital literacy in source-based writing instruction.

This research makes several contributions, each of which fills a different hole in our current understanding of writing in EFL contexts. I will show you how they work. In theory, it combines intertextual, genre-based, and translingual perspectives to offer a more nuanced view of academic authorship. This is where things start to make sense, because these frameworks do not usually talk to each other. Methodologically, it broadens data sources beyond texts to encompass reflection and narration of student decision-making; it appears that students possess more insights than their final drafts indicate. From a pedagogical standpoint, it emphasizes the necessity of crafting writing instruction that is not only genre-conscious and digitally proficient but also ethically informed and contextually relevant—how can we instruct writing without diminishing the writer's identity? In this way, the study fits with new calls for decolonial pedagogies in EFL education. There is a bigger worry behind all of this: that writing instruction can become another place where students learn to stay quiet if it is not carefully thought out.

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2. METHOD

Research design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design with a comparative orientation to investigate how EFL students selected, interpreted, and integrated field-based and web-based sources in academic report writing [15]. The design enabled an in-depth examination of students' intertextual practices across different source environments, particularly regarding how they negotiated meaning, constructed authorial positioning, and incorporated external information into their writing. The study was conducted within a Writing for Academic Purposes course focusing on report writing about Cirebonese wedding traditions.

Participants of the Study

The participants consisted of 32 third-semester EFL students enrolled in a Writing for Academic Purposes course at a state Islamic university in Indonesia. All students completed reflective questionnaires and submitted report-writing assignments as part of the study data. In addition, eight students were purposively selected as focal participants for semi-structured interviews based on variations in their reported source-use practices and writing performance. The selection aimed to capture diverse intertextual strategies, including students who relied predominantly on field-based sources, web-based sources, or a combination of both. One course instructor was also interviewed to provide contextual information regarding instructional expectations and classroom writing practices.

Data Collection

The study collected four types of qualitative data:

Table 1. Data Collection Technique

Data Type	Quantity	Purpose
Reflective open-ended questionnaires	32	To elicit students' source-use strategies and perceptions
Semi-structured interviews (students)	8	To probe decision-making and intertextual awareness
Instructor interview	1	To contextualize instructional expectations and writing practices
Student report drafts	32	To provide textual evidence of source integration

The reflective questionnaires focused on students' experiences in selecting, evaluating, and integrating sources during the writing process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into students' reasoning, interpretive strategies, and perceptions of field-based and web-based source use. Student report texts served as the primary textual data for examining patterns of intertextual integration within their academic writing.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through thematic coding and textual interpretation guided by Bazerman's intertextual typology and Canagarajah's translingual framework. The analysis followed three stages. First, all interview transcripts, reflective questionnaires, and student texts were read repeatedly to develop familiarity with the data. Second, deductive coding was conducted using categories derived from Bazerman's intertextual typology, including citation practices, source attribution, and forms of textual integration. Third, inductive coding was applied to identify emerging themes related to students' interpretive strategies, authorial positioning, and negotiation of meaning across different source environments.

Codes were subsequently grouped into broader thematic categories through constant comparison across data sources. Particular attention was given to language choices, rhetorical transitions, and expressions of authorial stance within students' writing. Analytic memoing was employed throughout the process to document interpretive reflections and category development.

ChatGPT was used only as a supplementary language support and reflective tool during the analytic writing process, particularly to refine thematic articulation and improve clarity of interpretation. All coding decisions, thematic categorizations, and interpretive conclusions remained fully under the researchers' control and were continuously verified against the original data.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, participants were informed of the study's purpose and voluntarily agreed to participate. Participants were assured that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without academic consequences. To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms and participant codes were used throughout the analysis and reporting process. Institutional permission to conduct the study was obtained from the department responsible for the Writing for Academic Purposes course.

Trustworthiness Procedures

Several strategies were employed to enhance the study's trustworthiness. Data triangulation was conducted by comparing findings across questionnaires, interviews, student texts, and instructor perspectives. Member checking was carried out by inviting selected participants to review summaries of interpreted interview responses for accuracy. Peer debriefing with academic colleagues was also undertaken to discuss coding decisions and thematic interpretations. In addition, an audit trail consisting of coding notes, analytic memos, and category development records was maintained throughout the research process to ensure transparency and consistency.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section contains the results and discussion of the findings, which answer how EFL students selected, interpreted, and collated field-based and web-based sources in their academic writing reports. Based on 32 reflective questionnaire responses, eight student

interviews, and students' writing samples, the design-case study traces how learners mediated intertextual processes across dimensions of source engagement. Three overarching themes emerged that shaped the analysis: (1) Students' Strategies for Selecting Information Sources, (2) Students' Strategies for Interpreting Information, and (3) Students' Strategies for Integrating Sources into Academic Writing. In this case, each of these themes captures distinct but interrelated practices shaped by the nature of the sources: whether experiential (interviews and observations) or digital (online articles, institutional websites).

1) Selecting Information Sources from the Field and the Web (Experiential Curiosity versus Algorithmic Search)

Students' choice of sources reflected two contrasting but complementary intertextual logics, one based on experience in real time and the other conditioned by algorithmic access and institutional trust, an axial split deeper than it at first looks. Twenty-one students predominantly used field-based selection strategies, while eleven relied more on web-based searching and institutional online sources.

Those who did enlist field-based sources were more likely to pick content based on emotional resonance and cultural distinctiveness; they did not choose from a checklist, but from their gut. One wrote, for example, about the siraman ritual because it was "*one of the things that brightened and piqued my attention because it is different and foreign from my own culture*" (W02). The difference appears to be compelling. Another elaborated that they "*took notes during the procession,*" especially seeing things that were strange to them (W01). These responses indicate that students selected field-based information through direct observation, cultural relevance, and personal engagement with the event. Of the 32 questionnaire responses, 21 students reported relying primarily on observation notes and interpersonal interaction when deciding which aspects of the wedding tradition to describe. This is in keeping with what Bazerman refers to as constitutive intertextuality: the source is recognized as something that contributes to a writer's ever-developing understanding of writing in an aesthetic tradition; rather than existing merely outside of it as a point of reference, it mingles rather than settles [7]. It also resonates with Lesley & Matthews embodied literacy model in which learning occurs through involvement and noticing lived phenomena [16].

In contrast, where the logic flip-flops, students using web-based sources relied on targeted keyword search terms, such as "*Cirebon traditional wedding,*" and assessed site trustworthiness based on whether the source was somehow official or came from a trusted institution (W02, W03), authority, for them at least, has domain names. It reveals an instrumental and procedural logic in which the authority of information determines the visibility of the search mechanism. How certain algorithmic filtering mechanisms, like search rankings and domain reputation, determine what students are exposed to as they search the Internet, thereby determining their awareness of legitimate or valuable ideas, in this way, the algorithm writes the syllabus [10], [17]. These are examples of "manifest intertextuality" to use Bazerman's terms, where the source–use boundary is maintained in an explicit and citation-driven manner, clean, visible, safe.

Table 2. Comparative analysis of the source selection phase

Theme	Field-Based Source Use	Web-Based Source Use	Comparison Insight	Comparative Coded Theme
1. Select	Students chose events that had emotional resonance and were culturally unique (for example, siraman) based on what they saw live and their own curiosity.	Students used specific keywords, search algorithms, and checked the site's credibility.	Field-based selection was embodied and experiential; web-based selection was algorithmically filtered and institutionally trusted.	Experiential Curiosity vs. Algorithmic Search

2) *Interpreting Information from the Field and the Web (Dialogic Engagement versus Multimodal Decoding)*

When data worked in the media of the field, interpretation emerged through dialogic engagement and cultural framing; we understood this through face-to-face negotiations. One learner inquired of a family member about the seven kinds of flowers used for siraman (W03); another noted that the ritual “symbolizes physical and spiritual cleansing” (D02), and that the body has a memory, as does the text. As these moments indicate, they embodied constitutive intertextuality [7], [18], in which understanding is co-constructed through conversation and then embedded back into the text. Students then deepened their understanding further by comparing local practices to their own cultural background, as noted in one student’s comment: “This tradition is very different from weddings in my hometown” (W02), which highlights a reflective, cross-cultural consciousness; difference proves its own kind of teacher. Dialogic interpretation appeared consistently in six of the eight interviewed students, particularly among those who conducted direct observation or interviews.

The twist, by contrast, was that web-based interpretation depended on multimodal triangulation. To fill the gap, a student who was confused about *midodareni* consulted two articles and looked at some images (W01). They constructed understanding by putting different pieces together. Here, the mechanisms supporting comprehension are cross-textual comparison, visual tracking and contradiction resolution; a mode consistent with what Bazerman calls manifest intertextuality, where meaning is stabilized by explicit reference to multiple times. Such strategies are often used by L2 writers with relatively little cultural access in the immediate context; the screen becomes a substitute for experience, as they make sense of things by piecing together and working back from conflictual online sources [19].

In short, when you zoom out to consider both together, field-based interpretation led to empathetic, dialogic insight, while web-based interpretation emphasized textual decoding and triangulation. Seen through the translingual lens, both approaches illustrate students’ ability to work toward meaning across social and semiotic fields, whether in face-to-face dialogue or via multimodal bricolage, different paths, same objective: to decode a world not fully their own [2], [20]. Pedagogically, this contrast implies advantages for tasks that pair interpersonal inquiries with guided online triangulation, prompting students to knit together

questions of deep cultural framing with critical skills in digital reading. The insight is into the challenge of designing towards both ways of knowing.

The following table shows different approaches to source interpretation in each modality. While both groups were meaning-making, the nature of their interpretive practices diverged according to how they accessed information and where it was situated, a reminder that how we find knowledge informs how we act on it. Field-based learners made meaning via social dialogues and cultural frames, but web-based learners used text triangulation and multimodal navigation.

Table 3. Comparative analysis of source interpretation

Theme	Field-Based Source Use	Web-Based Source Use	Comparison Insight	Comparative Coded Theme
2. Interpret	Meaning-making developed through dialogic engagement (e.g., inquiring with locals), cultural framing, and cross-cultural understanding.	Interpretation required triangulating online texts, visual cues, and independently reconciling contradictions.	Field-based interpretation promoted empathetic comprehension, while web-based interpretation emphasized textual triangulation and decryption.	Dialogic Interpretation vs. Multimodal Decoding

3) Integrating Information from the Field and the Web (Narrative Embedding versus Textual Grafting)

Those engaged with field-based material tended to construct chronological narratives that embedded personal observation and cultural significance; they were writing from within the experience, rather than about it distantly. One report, for example, opened this way: *“After the siraman, the prospective bride’s female relatives lined up and took turns to give their advice”* (D03), placing the event in a temporal and social continuum; time here is not simply sequenced; it is sensate. Reflective commentary also emerged: *“To me, this ritual reinforces the closeness of the family”* (D02), the “I” comes in unapologetically. Another described how they had organized their report into before, during, and after sections (W03), which was an intuitive awareness of a genre derived from lived experience, structure in this case came from having been there. The clause “reinforces the closeness of the family” demonstrates evaluative positioning and indicates the student’s attempt to move beyond factual description toward interpretive commentary. The use of the first-person expression “to me” also reflects an emerging authorial stance within the report text. These are examples of what Bazerman refers to as constitutive intertextuality, wherein outside texts (or experiences) are transformed, and we revoice those outside conversations as part of the writer’s epistemic position, making the source the writer’s own [7], [21]. This integration is dialogic, agentive, and coherent, features that are frequently ascribed to academic voice [22], [23].

In contrast, and the contrast is striking, students who were using web-based sources integrated information more conservatively. Their reports included paraphrases or direct quotations, like *“Throwing betel leaves is part of the ceremony...”* (D03) or *“According to*

budaya-indonesia.org ...” (D01). The reader remains in the dark; the author remains outside. While these citations were formally fitting, they were rarely transformed or met with any reflective input, slathered on the report structure, grafted rather than grown. Even when chronological framing was employed, “*I put the midodareni part in the ‘before the wedding’ section*” (W03), it was generally extrapolated from textual signals rather than experiential sequencing, a timeline learned through reading, not life. This is emblematic describes as source-dominant writing, in which student voice is diminished, and intertextual presence remains predominantly referential. The writer, in this sense, is a channel rather than a force [24].

In short, to name what we are seeing, the difference between narrative embedding and textual grafting represents different degrees of epistemic agency, how much of themselves students were permitted, or permitted themselves, to bring. Field-based integration invited students to assume the role of the writer in constructing meaning from telling, commentary, and structural choices. In contrast, web-based integration oriented them toward behavioral conformity to citation standards and imitative structural behavior; one invites presence, the other insists on absence. Reflective authorial integration was identified in 18 student texts, whereas source-dependent paraphrasing was more frequent in reports that relied primarily on online materials. From a translingual perspective [2], [25], this contrast illustrates the imperative for pedagogies that scaffold students toward responsible citation practices within critical uptake of source material: we want students not simply to give credit where it is due but also to re-shape, re-frame, and re-contextualize sources within their own rhetorical purposes, to make the borrowed their own.

In the stages of selection, interpretation, and integration, students exhibited two overlapping intertextual repertoires: one informed by embodied participation, dialogic engagement, and reflective authorship; another shaped by algorithmic navigation, multimodal decoding, and data-dependent structuring. Two toolkits carried by the same students. The contrast, articulated in this work as Experiential Curiosity vs. Algorithmic Search, Dialogic Interpretation vs. Multimodal Decoding, Narrative Embedding vs. Textual Grafting, is not a binary opposition but a spectrum of intertextual practices negotiated through modalities and constraints; students move along it depending on what the task demands of them.

Bazerman’s typology helps clarify what these shifts from implicit/constitutive intertextuality to explicit/manifest intertextuality look like for students, depending on the relations in which they encounter and re-contextualize sources, the same student, different moves. Noting that these divergences are not deficits, it positions them instead as fluid, adaptive navigations across semiotic, cultural and technological terrains; difference, here, is a resource rather than a lack [2], [26]. Be it local informants or digital worlds, **students were not passive consumers of information but** active curators and situated meaning-makers; they selected, filtered and shaped, even when the sources were screen-based.

Pedagogically, these findings suggest that scaffolded instruction will be necessary to support both cultural embeddedness and digital literacy; we must teach to both epistemes. That might involve hybrid source synthesis templates, voice-positioning prompts, intertextual competence rubrics and tools that help name what is at stake, all of which are

designed not just to get students to cite their sources correctly but also to re-frame and revoice them within their own rhetorical agendas (citation as transformation, rather than citation as acknowledgment). By intentionally developing both repertoires, educators can empower students to integrate a wider variety of source types into academic writing with greater confidence, agency, and nuance, engaging along that continuum as needed (and with deliberation).

Moreover, the last comparison is in how students integrated information into their texts. Field-based participants tended to interweave source material into reflective, culturally grounded narratives, often with greater authorial control and epistemic presence; they wrote as participant-observers rather than merely as reporters. By contrast, for the web-based participants, direct paraphrase or quotation reigned, and the degree of revoicing was minimal: the sources spoke; students listened. These diverging patterns of integration are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Comparative analysis of source integration

Theme	Field-Based Source Use	Web-Based Source Use	Comparison Insight	Comparative Coded Theme
3. Integrate	Students wrote stories in chronological order, added their own thoughts, and talked about why events were important to their culture.	Students paraphrased or quoted sources with less of an author's point of view, and they often copied the structure of the sources.	Field-based integration stressed authorial coherence and epistemic agency, while web-based integration showed source dominance.	Narrative Embedding vs. Textual Grafting

4. CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that the process of EFL students' intertextuality in report writing is inextricably tied to the types and forms of texts they interact with, a result that seems so obvious after the fact but whose implications are myriad. Field-based inquiry also encouraged embodied and dialogic strategies, as students chose emotionally salient content; made meaning through interpersonal dialogue; and consolidated information into reflective, narrative forms, writing from within, not just about. By contrast, web-based inquiry afforded algorithmically guided selection, multimodally triangulated, structurally imitative integration; the screen kept them at arm's length despite its reach. These parallel paths exhibit two legitimate but different repertoires: one featuring cultural immediacy and epistemic agency, the other search literacy and genre comity; one addresses the essence of writing, the other its mechanics. These findings suggest that source-based writing is not just a technical skill but an adaptive negotiation across cultural and technological contexts; students are not only learning to write, but also to navigate.

Future research might delve deeper into these dynamics in more varied settings and modalities; this study, after all, is just one slice. Longitudinal studies might track the development of intertextual competence over time, particularly if scaffolded by intentional interventions such as source synthesis workshops or dialogic genre modelling. What is more

able to synthesize when we consciously teach what this study observed? Researchers could also combine textual analysis with digital tracing methods (e.g., clickstream or keystroke data) to make visible how students move between digital and experiential sources in real time, showing where they linger, where they turn and where they choose. Comparative studies across institutional types, such as traditional and online universities, or across urban and rural contexts, would further deepen understanding of how the environment frames intertextual behavior. It seems that context is never merely background. Finally, studying how AI tools like ChatGPT affect students' voice, citation practices and critical synthesis **is an important direction for the future in an era of hybrid authorship.**

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