



**ISSN 2185-3762**

## **Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal**

<http://sisaljournal.org>

## **English for Academic Study: An Open Access Academic English Course. Review of FutureLearn**

Nashid Nigar, University of Melbourne, Australia

Corresponding author: [Nashid.Nigar@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:Nashid.Nigar@unimelb.edu.au)

Publication date: March, 2020.

### **To cite this article**

Nigar, N. (2019). English for Academic Study: An Open Access Academic English Course. Review of FutureLearn. *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal*, 11(1), 48-52.  
doi:10.37237/110105

### **To link to this article**

<http://sisaljournal.org/archives/mar20/nigar>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Please contact the author for permission to re-print elsewhere.

Scroll down for article.

## **English for Academic Study: An Open Access Academic English Course Review of a FutureLearn Course**

Nashid Nigar, University of Melbourne, Australia

A recent global trend in the domain of self-access learning has been MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), enabling flexible participation and open access to online learning resources via the web. Educational institutes and universities across the world now offer MOOCs, including the self-accessed English language courses. FutureLearn a digital education platform—offers a handful of English language courses created by reputed universities in the United Kingdom, and also the British Council.

The courses (<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/english-academic-study>) range across diverse topic areas such as IELTS, English for academic purposes, basic conversational English, English language and culture, workplace English, etc. The courses are mostly free to access for a limited period. For my professional development, I have completed teaching and learning, research and learning design MOOC courses on FutureLearn and am now implementing those in my teaching, research and learning design practices.

Both English language teachers and students can use the courses for their teaching and learning needs. Teachers can either replicate or modify most courses for face-to-face or blended deliveries, whereas students can undertake the courses fully online. Certificates are issued by partner universities or institutes after completion. Below, one of the English languages courses—English for Academic Study (EFAS)—is reviewed relating to its audience, objectives, topics, components, structures, and the learning and assessment tools. I was motivated to review the course because many of my undergraduate and post-graduate students—both native and non-native English speakers—often find the development of English for academic purposes a challenge.

### **English For Academic Study (EFAS)**

Designed and taught by a team of experienced English teachers at Coventry University in the UK, EFAS is a two-week course with a three-hour weekly commitment. The course can be completed intensively. Like other FutureLearn courses, EFAS runs multiple times a year. Despite having a set commencement dates students can join and complete the course after it starts. Although intended for English as a second language

speaking students, the course can be of benefit to a wide range of students intending to study at an English medium university including first-in-the-family at university students, mature aged students, and students resuming university study after a long layoff (Wingate, 2015). By completing this course, they will be able to refresh, further develop or develop their academic study skills. This will prepare students for study in online, blended and face-to-face modes. According to the FutureLearn website, the key topics for EFAS are:

- Learning the key vocabulary and concepts for the UK university context;
- Exploring the approach to teaching and learning in UK universities;
- Developing dictionary skills;
- Analysing word forms and word families;
- Accessing and writing definitions;
- Introducing the phonemic chart and how to use it to support learning and pronunciation skills.

### **Week One: English for Academic Study**

Week one focuses on developing dictionary skills required for academic contexts. The first topic, *Getting Started*, introduces students to the lead educators as well as and their fellow participants. In the topic ‘What does a successful student look like?’ students get acquainted with qualities, skills or behaviours that will make them successful at university. They also have the opportunity to participate in a discussion about these concepts with their peers and three English educators.

The next topic is *Expanding Your Vocabulary Using a Dictionary*. A key skill for success at university is expanding academic vocabulary range and being able to deal with new words; therefore, it is vital that students can choose the right dictionary and know how to use it effectively. The next topic covers how to say new words. As English spelling often does not indicate how a word should be pronounced, learner dictionaries include this information using the phonemic alphabet. Recognising this can help students improve their pronunciation skills. Activities in this topic include pronunciation help in dictionaries, knowing and using phoneme chart, word stress, and how to practise pronunciation. At the end of week one, students get to recap and reflect with three activities: quizzes; answering questions; and reading an article and participating in a discussion forum. Other than these

learning and formative assessment tools, videos, polls, visual aids are also used in the activities.

### **Week Two: English for Academic Study**

Week two introduces four key terms for studying at a university, and explores what they mean in the academic context and how to record them. A video shows what might be expected from lectures, seminars, tutorials and independent learning. This is followed by activities centred around seminars and tutorials. Students also compare universities in their home and host countries. In the next topic, *Using and Writing Definitions*, students look at how lecturers define key terms at universities and think about how they can record these to increase their vocabulary range.

Students then reflect on and discuss what they have learnt in the course: what it means for them to be successful students in an English medium university and if they have had their ideas changed from when they started the course. Finally, students are prompted to ask questions in a video, quizzed to check their understanding, followed by a wrap-up video.

### **Evaluation: English for Academic Study**

EFAS is a pedagogically driven online English language course underpinned by several learning theories such as behaviourism (i.e. recapping and reflecting with quizzes), cognitivism (asking and answering questions), and social constructivism (reading an article and participating in a discussion forum) (Picciano, 2017). Online education learning theories are also embedded in the course: Community of Inquiry (CoI) (Harasim, 2017) is demonstrated through three presences – cognitive, social, and teaching. The English skills for academic study are acquired based on the principles of online learning education theories such as Connectivism and Online Collaborative Learning (OCL) (Harasim, 2017). Here knowledge creation and skill building are fostered through the power of collaboration and networks. As the students participate in group discussions and share their experiences with peers and educators, their English skills for academic study are developed; and hence, they take part in new knowledge creation.

In line with current university teaching practices, the course involves multi-modal learning activities (Molle & Prior, 2008) such as discussions, reflection, dialectics, practising, participating, connecting, etc. It also caters for the social and emotional aspects of learning by engagement with peers and educators. Learning design tools are used visually, auditorily, virtually and graphically, which help motivate students to learn. The gamification tools, such as quizzes, enhance students' learning anticipation, motivation and aptitude (Buckley &

Doyle, 2016). The formative assessment model also ensures students' learning of academic English as it does not necessitate any real time pressure of formal assessment. Although students can participate in discussions with their peers, other learning enhancement strategies, such as pre-lesson activities and post lesson reflections, could be adopted in the course. Further hands-on activities, assessments and feedback for their performances could have been incorporated to make the online learning more engaging and meaningful. English being the global language now, more inter/trans-cultural aspects could also be included by addressing the trans-cultural aspects of using all features of English in academic contexts so that students had the opportunity to evaluate the new skills with those previously practised.

Overall, EFAS is an example of an open access approach to English language learning in the MOOC environment. It is a parallel mode to the traditional mode of language learning. The course incorporates most basic components of academic writing underpinned by multimodal learning theories and pedagogical strategies, and attempts to cater for the social and emotional aspect of learning satisfaction by including interactions in discussion forums; however, students feedback about course components and activities may be useful to evaluate the course effectively. This course can undoubtedly benefit academic English language learners across the world.

### **Conclusion**

Overall EFAS is an effective and innovative way to learn English for academic study purposes on the MOOC platform FutureLearn. It is a parallel way to the traditional mode of language learning and education system because attendance is not subject to any geographical or institutional location. The course demonstrates the key principles of learning theories and online educational theories. This course attempts to cater for the social and emotional aspect of learning satisfaction by including interactions in discussion forums; however, student feedback may be useful to evaluate the course effectively. This course can benefit academic English language learners from diverse backgrounds across the world. It is a great resource for English language teachers too and can be adopted in blended or face-to-face deliveries.

### **Notes on the Contributor**

Nashid Nigar is an academic skills adviser at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Her academic and work experience range across multiple disciplines and skills areas. Nashid is

currently undertaking her doctoral studies in English language teacher education at the Faculty of Education, Monash University, Australia.

### References

- Buckley, P., & Doyle, E. (2016). *Gamification and student motivation. Interactive learning environments*, 24(6), 1162-1175. doi:10.1080/10494820.2014.964263
- Harasim, L. (2017). *Learning theory and online technologies*. New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis. doi.org/10.4324/9780203846933
- Molle, D., & Prior, P. (2008). Multimodal genre systems in EAP writing pedagogy: Reflecting on a needs analysis. *TESOL Quarterly*, 42(4), 541-566. doi:10.1002/j.1545-7249.2008.tb00148.x
- Picciano, A. G. (2017). Theories and frameworks for online education: Seeking an integrated model. *Online Learning*, 21(3), 166-190. doi:10.24059/olj.v21i3.1225
- Wingate, U. (2015). *Academic literacy and student diversity: The case for inclusive practice*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual matters.