

Analysis of Academic Gaps Between LPBA And Non-LPBA in the English Department Higher Education

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify the academic gap between students in the English Department who graduated from LPBA and those who did not. Differences in previous English learning experiences may influence students' academic readiness, particularly in speaking, academic reading, and academic writing. This study employed a qualitative comparative design involving six actively enrolled students selected through purposive sampling, consisting of three LPBA graduates and three non-LPBA students. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires distributed using Google Forms. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis through data reduction, theme identification, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that the academic gap was shaped by both internal and external factors. Internal factors included self-confidence, learning habits, and academic adaptation, while external factors comprised previous educational background, learning environment, language exposure, and institutional support. LPBA students generally demonstrated greater confidence and stronger communicative competence, whereas non-LPBA students showed better familiarity with text-based academic tasks. Overall, the academic gap reflects the influence of different educational backgrounds and learning experiences on students' academic readiness.

Keywords: *Academic gap, LPBA and EFL students.*

INTRODUCTION

Students enrolled in English Departments often come from different educational backgrounds that shape their English proficiency and academic readiness. Some students graduated from intensive English preparatory programs such as LPBA, while others entered university through regular secondary education without attending such programs. These different learning experiences may influence students' readiness to perform various academic tasks, particularly in speaking, academic reading, and academic writing. Since university learning requires students to communicate effectively, comprehend academic texts critically, and produce structured academic writing, differences in previous English learning experiences may contribute to academic gaps during their transition to higher education.

LPBA is an intensive language preparation program designed to develop students' communicative competence through continuous language exposure and interactive learning activities. Unlike formal educational settings that frequently emphasize theoretical knowledge and grammatical instruction, LPBA focuses on practical language use through discussions, role plays, presentations, and daily communication. This learning approach is closely related to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which considers language as a means of communication rather than merely a system of grammatical rules. According to Leong & Ahmadi,

(2017), meaningful interaction and frequent opportunities to communicate significantly improve learners' speaking ability. Likewise, intensive language exposure enables learners to internalize vocabulary, improve pronunciation, and develop speaking fluency through authentic communicative practice. Consequently, students who graduate from LPBA generally possess greater confidence and familiarity with oral communication when entering university.

Despite these advantages, communicative-oriented learning environments may provide limited opportunities to develop academic literacy skills. Academic literacy involves the ability to comprehend scholarly texts, evaluate information critically, construct logical arguments, and produce academic writing that follows disciplinary conventions. Since LPBA primarily emphasizes communicative competence, students may have less experience reading academic journal articles, analyzing complex texts, and writing structured academic papers. As a result, some LPBA graduates may experience difficulties adapting to university courses that require extensive academic reading and writing.

In contrast, students without LPBA experience generally acquire English through formal education in schools, where learning commonly focuses on grammar, reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and writing exercises. Such learning environments provide students with greater exposure to text-based learning activities, enabling them to become more familiar with essay organization, paragraph development, and reading comprehension strategies. Previous studies have shown that regular exposure to reading and writing activities contributes to stronger academic literacy skills because students become accustomed to analyzing written texts and organizing ideas systematically. However, limited opportunities for communicative practice often reduce students' confidence in speaking English. Fear of making grammatical or pronunciation mistakes and insufficient speaking practice frequently become obstacles to active classroom participation. Consequently, non-LPBA students may demonstrate stronger academic reading and writing abilities while encountering greater challenges in oral communication.

The differences between LPBA and non-LPBA learning experiences indicate that students may enter higher education with different academic strengths and weaknesses. Rather than reflecting differences in overall English proficiency, these educational backgrounds influence students' learning habits, confidence, academic adaptation, and readiness to perform various academic tasks. Therefore, academic gaps should be understood as the result of multiple interacting factors rather than differences in language ability alone.

Several previous studies have investigated English language learning in higher education. Aini (2025) found that intensive English courses significantly improved students' speaking fluency and confidence through continuous communicative practice. Similarly, Merbawani & Hartono, (2024) reported that communicative learning environments positively affected university students' oral communication strategies and classroom interaction. Aziez et al. (2024) also demonstrated that intensive speaking practice enhanced students' speaking fluency and spontaneous communication. Meanwhile, Hyland (2022) emphasized the importance of academic literacy, particularly academic writing, as a fundamental component of higher education. In addition, Mendoza et al. (2022) revealed that students' self-efficacy played an important role in academic writing performance within English-medium instruction contexts.

Although previous studies have contributed to understanding English language learning in higher education, several important gaps remain. Existing research has predominantly focused on individual language skills, such as speaking fluency, academic writing, or the effectiveness of intensive English programs. While these studies explain specific aspects of English learning, they provide limited understanding of how different educational backgrounds shape students' overall

academic readiness upon entering university. Moreover, studies comparing students from intensive preparatory programs such as LPBA with those from regular educational backgrounds remain scarce, particularly within English Departments. Existing research has also tended to examine either internal factor or external factors separately, without exploring how these factors interact in creating academic gaps. Consequently, there is still insufficient evidence explaining why students with different English learning experiences demonstrate different strengths and challenges in speaking, academic reading, and academic writing. Addressing this gap is important because understanding these differences may help higher education institutions design more appropriate academic support programs for students from diverse educational backgrounds.

Therefore, this study aims to compare the academic experiences of LPBA and non-LPBA students by examining how internal factors (self-confidence, learning habits, and academic adaptation) and external factors (previous educational background, learning environment, language exposure, and institutional support) collectively shape academic gaps. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on a single language skill, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of academic readiness by integrating speaking, academic reading, and academic writing within one qualitative comparative investigation.

Based on the reviewed literature, previous studies have mainly focused on individual aspects of English language learning, such as speaking performance, academic writing, or the effectiveness of intensive English programs. However, limited research has comparatively examined LPBA and non-LPBA students by simultaneously considering both internal factors (self-confidence, learning habits, and academic adaptation) and external factors (previous educational background, learning environment, language exposure, and institutional support) that shape their academic readiness. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to explore and compare the academic experiences of LPBA and non-LPBA students in the English Department through a qualitative comparative approach. The novelty of this study lies in its holistic examination of academic gaps by integrating speaking, academic reading, and academic writing while also explaining how internal and external factors interact to influence students' academic readiness. It is expected that the findings will contribute to the development of more appropriate academic support and bridging programs for students with diverse educational backgrounds.

Unlike previous studies that primarily examined individual language skills or compared learning outcomes, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the academic gap by examining the interaction between internal and external factors influencing the academic readiness of LPBA and non-LPBA students.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative comparative research design because the main purpose of the study was to compare and interpret the academic experiences of LPBA and non-LPBA students by exploring their perspectives and learning experiences in depth. Qualitative research focuses on understanding how individuals interpret and experience social or educational phenomena through descriptive data rather than numerical measurement (Creswell et al., 2007). Through this design, the researcher identified similarities and differences between LPBA and non-LPBA students regarding their academic reading and writing skills, speaking competence, learning habits, and academic challenges. Therefore, the qualitative comparative approach was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to explore how different English learning backgrounds influenced students' academic development.

The participants in this study were six active students from the English Education Study Program, consisting of three LPBA students and three non-LPBA students. The participants were selected using purposive sampling. It is commonly used in qualitative research because it allows researchers to select

participants who are considered information-rich and relevant to the objectives of the study (Tajik et al., 2024).

The criteria for participant selection required students to have completed several core courses, particularly Academic Reading and Academic Writing courses. These criteria ensured that the participants had sufficient academic experience related to English academic literacy activities during their studies. Consequently, the participants were expected to provide meaningful and relevant information regarding their learning experiences, academic achievements, and challenges.

The data in this study were collected through open-ended questionnaires distributed using Google Forms. Open-ended questionnaires were used because they enable participants to provide detailed responses regarding their experiences, perceptions, and opinions in their own words. (Bryman, 2016). The questionnaire was distributed to six participants, consisting of three LPBA students and three non-LPBA students from the English Education Study Program. The questions focused on several aspects, including academic reading and writing experiences, speaking competence, learning difficulties, study habits, and perceptions regarding the influence of the LPBA program on academic development. Since the questionnaire was provided in the form of google forms, its records were automatically saved on a Google spreadsheet with all the questions and answers displayed accordingly. This way, it was easier for the researcher to fragment and analyze the data.

The data obtained from the open-ended questionnaires were analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques proposed by Miles et al. (2014), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification.

In this stage, the researcher selected, organized, and simplified the data collected from participants' responses in Google Forms. The researcher focused on information relevant to the objectives of the study, particularly students' academic reading and writing skills, speaking competence, learning challenges, and perceptions regarding the LPBA program.

After the data were reduced, the researcher organized and presented the data in the form of descriptive explanations and thematic categorizations. The data were grouped into several themes, such as students' learning experiences, differences between LPBA and non-LPBA students, academic difficulties, and perceptions toward English learning. Presenting the data systematically helped the researcher identify patterns, similarities, and differences among participants' responses.

In the final stage, the researcher interpreted the findings by identifying relationships, patterns, similarities, and differences found in the participants' responses. The conclusions were drawn based on the comparison between LPBA and non-LPBA students regarding their academic experiences and English learning development. The conclusions were continuously verified throughout the analysis process to ensure the consistency and validity of the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This part presents the findings of the study regarding the academic gaps between LPBA and non-LPBA students in the English Department. The data were collected through open-ended questionnaires distributed to six participants consisting of three LPBA students (P1, P2, and P3) and three non-LPBA students (NP1, NP2, and NP3). The questionnaire was designed to explore students' experiences and perceptions regarding academic gaps and the factors contributing to those gaps.

1. Self-Confidence as a Factor Influencing Academic Participation

The findings indicate that self-confidence was one of the main internal factors contributing to the academic gaps between LPBA and non-LPBA students. Students with LPBA backgrounds generally demonstrated greater confidence in classroom discussions, presentations, and other

communicative activities because they had become accustomed to using English during the LPBA program. One participant stated:

“When it comes to speaking, I’m pretty confident; presentations or class discussions aren’t really a problem because I’m used to them from LPBA.” (P2)

This response suggests that frequent communicative practice fostered students' confidence in expressing ideas and participating in classroom interaction. Rather than relying solely on linguistic knowledge, repeated exposure to English communication enabled LPBA students to engage more actively in academic activities.

In contrast, non-LPBA students reported lower confidence when communicating in English. One participant explained:

“I often feel insecure when I have to speak in class. I’m afraid of making grammar and pronunciation mistakes, so sometimes I’d rather stay silent.” (NP1)

The participant's response indicates that fear of making grammatical and pronunciation errors reduced willingness to participate in classroom discussions despite adequate understanding of the learning materials. This finding implies that confidence affects not only speaking performance but also students' overall academic engagement.

Overall, the findings indicate that self-confidence played an important role in students' academic participation. Students with LPBA backgrounds generally demonstrated greater confidence in speaking and classroom interaction, whereas non-LPBA students tended to hesitate because of concerns about making grammatical and pronunciation errors. These differences suggest that previous learning experiences influenced students' confidence in using English in academic settings.

2. Learning Habits and Academic Readiness

The findings revealed that LPBA and non-LPBA students entered university with different learning habits, which influenced their academic readiness. LPBA students generally demonstrated stronger readiness for communicative activities but encountered difficulties in academic literacy, particularly when dealing with scholarly texts and academic vocabulary. One participant stated:

“I find academic reading quite difficult because at LPBA we rarely read journals or academic texts, and there’s still a lot of academic vocabulary I’m not familiar with.” (P2)

This response suggests that LPBA students had limited exposure to academic reading prior to university. Their previous learning experiences emphasized communicative competence rather than academic literacy, making the transition to university-level reading more demanding.

In contrast, non-LPBA students reported greater familiarity with reading and writing tasks. One participant explained:

“Even though my speaking skills aren’t great, I feel more comfortable with reading because I’m used to reading long texts and analyzing what I read.” (NP3)

This finding indicates that non-LPBA students were academically better prepared for reading and writing tasks due to their previous experience with text-based learning. Although they still encountered challenges in academic writing, their familiarity with essay structure and reading comprehension supported their transition to higher education.

In summary, the findings suggest that different learning habits shaped students' academic readiness. LPBA students were generally more prepared for communicative activities but experienced difficulties with academic reading and writing, whereas non-LPBA students demonstrated greater familiarity with text-based academic tasks. These findings indicate that students' previous learning habits influenced their readiness to meet the academic demands of higher education.

3. Academic Adaptation

The findings indicate that LPBA and non-LPBA students experienced different challenges when adapting to university learning. LPBA students generally struggled with academic literacy tasks, particularly academic writing, argument development, and the use of citations. One participant stated:

“Academic writing is difficult, especially developing an argument and using citations. I often have trouble knowing how to start a paragraph.” (P1)

This response reflects that LPBA students required additional adjustment when dealing with university assignments demanding critical thinking and academic writing conventions. Although they were confident in oral communication, they were less familiar with academic literacy practices.

Conversely, non-LPBA students experienced greater difficulty in communicative academic activities. One participant reported:

“The main challenge is speaking fluently.” (NP1)

The response indicates that limited speaking practice before entering university affected students' confidence and fluency during presentations and classroom discussions. Despite having adequate academic literacy skills, spontaneous oral communication remained a significant challenge.

Collectively, the findings expose that LPBA and non-LPBA students experienced different patterns of academic adaptation. LPBA students mainly encountered challenges in academic literacy, while non-LPBA students experienced greater difficulty in oral communication. These findings demonstrate that students adapted to university learning according to the strengths and challenges developed through their previous educational experiences.

4. Previous Educational Background

The findings revealed that previous educational background significantly influenced students' academic readiness and learning experiences. LPBA students generally came from learning environments emphasizing communicative English through daily interaction and speaking practice. One participant explained:

“I used to study at LPBA, where we were required to use English every day.” (P1)

This response indicates that continuous communicative practice helped LPBA students develop confidence and oral proficiency before entering university. However, their previous learning experiences provided limited exposure to academic literacy, particularly reading scholarly texts and producing academic writing.

Conversely, non-LPBA students described educational experiences that emphasized grammar instruction, reading comprehension, and writing exercises. One participant stated:

“In high school, I focused more on grammar and reading.” (NP1)

This finding suggests that non-LPBA students entered university with stronger preparation for academic reading and writing despite having less confidence in spoken English. These differences demonstrate that prior educational experiences shaped distinct academic strengths rather than determining overall academic ability.

In summary, the findings show that previous educational background contributed to differences in students' academic readiness. LPBA students developed stronger communicative competence through intensive language exposure, while non-LPBA students entered university with greater familiarity with grammar, reading, and writing activities. These different educational experiences resulted in distinct academic strengths among the participants

5. Learning Environment and Language Exposure

The findings indicate that learning environment and language exposure contributed to the different academic profiles of LPBA and non-LPBA students. LPBA students experienced intensive English communication through classroom interaction and daily language use. One participant stated:

“In high school, I focused more on grammar and reading” (P1)

Frequent exposure to communicative activities enabled LPBA students to develop greater confidence and fluency in speaking. Nevertheless, limited exposure to academic reading and writing reduced their readiness for university-level literacy tasks.

In contrast, non-LPBA students experienced learning environments that emphasized reading, grammar, and written exercises but provided fewer opportunities for communicative practice. One participant explained:

“The main challenge is speaking fluently.” (NP1)

This response indicates that limited communicative exposure affected students' confidence during presentations and classroom discussions, although they generally felt more prepared for academic reading and writing.

On the whole, the findings indicate that differences in learning environment and language exposure influenced students' academic profiles. Intensive communicative practice supported LPBA students' speaking confidence, whereas greater exposure to reading and writing activities helped non-LPBA students become more familiar with academic literacy tasks. These findings indicate that the nature of students' learning environments contributed to the academic gap identified in this study.

6. Institutional Support

The findings identified institutional support as an important external factor in reducing academic gaps between LPBA and non-LPBA students. Participants emphasized the need for academic support programs that address both communicative competence and academic literacy. One LPBA participant suggested:

“The LPBA program needs to include more instruction in academic skills.” (P1)

Similarly, another participant recommended:

“A bridging course in academic English is required.” (P3)

These responses indicate that students perceived a mismatch between communicative competence developed in LPBA and the academic literacy demands encountered in higher education. They believed that additional academic writing instruction and transitional programs could facilitate adaptation to university learning.

Non-LPBA students also emphasized the importance of balanced language instruction. One participant stated:

“Academic skills and speaking skills should be integrated.” (NP2)

This finding suggests that institutional support should address both communicative competence and academic literacy rather than focusing on a single language skill.

In summary, the findings show that institutional support was considered an important factor in addressing academic gaps. Participants believed that academic support programs, bridging courses, and integrated language instruction could help students adapt more effectively to university learning. These responses suggest that academic gaps are not solely individual challenges but can also be addressed through appropriate educational support and institutional initiatives.

Discussion

1. Internal Factors Shaping the Academic Gap

The findings expose that internal factors significantly contributed to the academic gap between LPBA and non-LPBA students. Self-confidence, learning habits, and academic adaptation emerged as interconnected factors that influenced students' readiness to engage in

university learning. Although both groups pursued the same academic program, differences in their previous learning experiences shaped how they participated in classroom interaction, approached academic tasks, and adjusted to the academic expectations of higher education.

Self-confidence emerged as one of the most influential internal factors affecting students' academic participation. LPBA students generally demonstrated greater confidence in speaking and participating in classroom discussions because they had experienced intensive communicative learning before entering university. In contrast, non-LPBA students tended to hesitate when expressing their ideas orally due to concerns about grammatical and pronunciation errors. This finding is consistent with Arifin et al. (2025), who emphasize that self-confidence encourages learners to communicate more actively in English, and Ambawani et al. (2025), who highlight the importance of affective factors in promoting students' classroom participation. These findings suggest that confidence is developed not only through language proficiency but also through continuous opportunities to use English in meaningful communication.

The findings also demonstrate that students' learning habits influenced their academic readiness. LPBA participants were accustomed to communicative learning activities that strengthened their oral communication skills, whereas non-LPBA participants were more familiar with grammar-focused instruction, reading, and writing activities. As a result, LPBA students adapted more easily to communicative classroom tasks but encountered greater challenges in academic literacy, while non-LPBA students experienced the opposite pattern. This finding supports Hyland & Richards, (2010), who argues that academic literacy requires learners to master not only language knowledge but also the conventions of academic discourse. Therefore, different learning habits contributed to different patterns of academic preparedness rather than indicating differences in students' overall academic ability.

Academic adaptation further explains how these internal factors influenced students' learning experiences in higher education. Participants adapted to university learning by relying on the strengths developed through their previous educational experiences while gradually improving areas in which they experienced limitations. These findings indicate that academic adaptation is a continuous process influenced by students' confidence, learning habits, and readiness to respond to new academic demands. Rather than functioning as separate variables, these internal factors interacted to shape students' participation and performance throughout their learning process.

On the whole, the present study demonstrates that self-confidence, learning habits, and academic adaptation collectively explain the internal dimensions of the academic gap between LPBA and non-LPBA students. These findings reinforce previous research emphasizing the importance of affective and learning-related factors in English language education while extending the discussion by showing that internal factors are closely connected to students' previous educational experiences. Consequently, the academic gap identified in this study reflects differences in learning preparation and adaptation rather than differences in students' overall English proficiency.

2. External Factors Shaping the Academic Gap

The findings indicate that external factors significantly contributed to the academic gap between LPBA and non-LPBA students. Previous educational background, learning environment and language exposure, and institutional support influenced students' academic readiness by shaping the knowledge, learning habits, and language competencies they developed before entering university. These factors created different academic strengths and challenges, which continued to affect students' participation and adjustment in higher education.

Previous educational background emerged as one of the most influential external factors. LPBA students generally entered university with stronger communicative competence because their prior learning emphasized interaction and active language use. In contrast, non-LPBA students demonstrated greater familiarity with grammar, reading, and writing activities as a result of more text-oriented learning experiences. These findings suggest that the academic gap observed in this study reflects differences in educational preparation rather than differences in students' overall abilities. Instead of indicating the superiority of one group over another, each educational background contributed to different competencies that became advantageous in particular academic contexts.

The findings also highlight the importance of learning environment and language exposure in shaping students' academic readiness. Participants who experienced frequent English communication reported greater confidence in oral interaction, whereas those with extensive exposure to reading and writing activities demonstrated stronger academic literacy skills. This finding is consistent with Arifin et al. (2025b), who argue that meaningful language exposure enhances learners' communicative competence through continuous opportunities for authentic language use. Likewise, Taye & Teshome, (2025) emphasize that sustained engagement with reading activities contributes to the development of academic literacy and critical reading skills. Together, these studies reinforce the present finding that differences in language exposure influence the areas in which students feel academically prepared.

Institutional support also emerged as an essential factor in minimizing academic disparities. Participants emphasized the importance of academic support programs that help students strengthen both communicative competence and academic literacy. This finding is supported by Olmos & Andrés, (2023), who argue that language skills should be developed in an integrated manner rather than taught separately, and by Booton et al., (2025), who highlight the importance of balanced instructional practices in supporting students with diverse learning needs. Therefore, institutional support should not only address students' academic weaknesses but also provide opportunities for them to build complementary language skills through targeted academic programs.

Collectively, the present study demonstrates that external factors interact with internal factors in shaping students' academic readiness. Previous educational experiences provide the foundation upon which students develop language competence, while learning environments and institutional support determine how these competencies continue to develop in higher education. Consequently, reducing academic gaps requires educational strategies that recognize students' diverse backgrounds and provide balanced opportunities for developing both communicative competence and academic literacy.

3. Educational Implications

The findings of this study have several implications for English language education, particularly for institutions that admit students from diverse educational backgrounds. The identified academic gap should not be interpreted as an indication that one educational background is superior to another. Instead, the findings suggest that LPBA and non-LPBA students possess Olmos & Andrés, (2023b), complementary strengths that require balanced instructional support. LPBA students generally demonstrate stronger communicative competence, whereas non-LPBA students show greater familiarity with academic literacy. Therefore, instructional practices should be designed to strengthen students' weaker areas while maintaining their existing competencies.

The findings also highlight the importance of institutional initiatives that facilitate students' transition to higher education. Universities may consider providing bridging programs, academic writing workshops, speaking support sessions, and integrated language development activities that combine communicative competence with academic literacy. Such initiatives are consistent with the recommendations of Olmos & Andrés, (2023), who emphasize the importance of integrating language skills in English language instruction, rather than teaching them separately. By recognizing students' diverse educational experiences and providing targeted academic support, higher education institutions can create more equitable learning opportunities and reduce academic disparities among English Department students.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the academic gap between LPBA and non-LPBA students in the English Department by examining the internal and external factors that influenced their academic readiness. The findings revealed that the academic gap was shaped by the interaction of internal factors, including self-confidence, learning habits, and academic adaptation, as well as external factors, namely previous educational background, learning environment and language exposure, and institutional support. LPBA students generally demonstrated greater confidence and communicative competence, whereas non-LPBA students showed stronger academic literacy skills, particularly in reading and writing. These findings indicate that the observed academic gap reflects differences in educational preparation rather than differences in students' overall English proficiency. Each educational background contributed distinct strengths that influenced students' participation and adjustment to higher education.

The study contributes to English language education by providing a more comprehensive understanding of academic gaps through the integration of internal and external factors, rather than examining individual language skills in isolation. The findings suggest that universities should recognize students' diverse educational backgrounds and provide balanced academic support that strengthens both communicative competence and academic literacy. However, this study was limited by the small number of participants and its focus on a single English Department, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other contexts. Future research is recommended to involve a larger and more diverse group of participants across different institutions and to explore additional factors, such as learning motivation, self-regulated learning, and academic resilience, that may influence students' academic readiness in higher education.

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